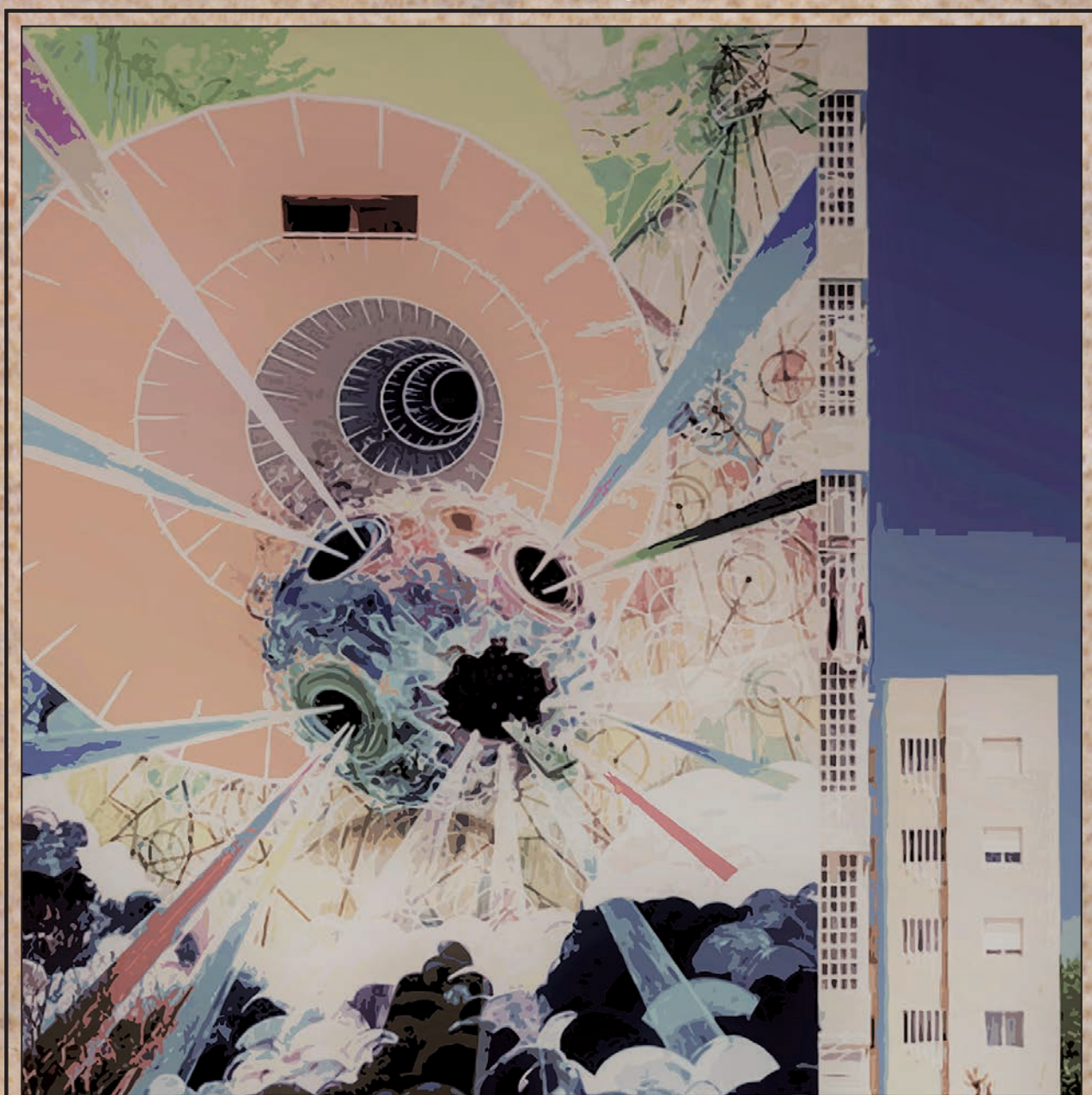


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DEFINING PLACES: THE ROLE OF CREATIVE PRACTICES IN URBAN PLACEMAKING

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses a recurrent discourse surrounding the concepts of space and place, emphasising their intra- and inter-relationships and how creative placemaking practices shape and define them. It argues that “place” encompasses multiple meanings, extending beyond tangible and visible dimensions to include emotional, learning, memory, and creative spaces. Through a comparative analysis of two platforms, A-Place and KÉK (Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre), the study examines their creative placemaking approaches across various European cities. By contextualising their practices through four key concepts, this paper highlights the practical application of abstract placemaking ideas in diverse urban settings.

Keywords: placemaking, creative practices, artistic practices, urban places, A-Place, KÉK

DEFINIRE I LUOGHI: IL RUOLO DELLE PRATICHE CREATIVE NELLA PROGETTAZIONE DI LUOGHI URBANI

SINTESI

Il presente articolo affronta una tematica ricorrente sui concetti di spazio e luogo, enfatizzando le loro relazioni intra- e inter- dimensionali e in che modo le pratiche di “creative placemaking” li plasmino e li definiscano. Sostiene che il “luogo” comprende molteplici significati, estendendosi oltre le dimensioni tangibili e visibili per includere spazi emotivi, di apprendimento, di memoria e creativi. Attraverso un’analisi comparativa di due piattaforme, A-Place e KÉK (Centro Ungherese di Architettura Contemporanea), lo studio esamina i loro approcci di “creative placemaking” in diverse città europee. Contestualizzando le loro pratiche attraverso quattro concetti chiave, l’articolo mette in evidenza l’applicazione pratica delle idee astratte di “placemaking” in diversi contesti urbani.

Parole chiave: creazione di luoghi, pratiche creative, pratiche artistiche, luoghi urbani, A-Place, KÉK

INTRODUCTION¹

In our everyday lives, we often use the terms *space* and *place* interchangeably to refer to locations and areas. However, in the realms of geography, sociology, urban studies, and many other disciplines, these concepts take on nuanced meanings that reflect their broader implications for understanding human experience and relationships with environments.

Space, in its basic sense, refers to the abstract and geometric dimensions of the environment – areas that can be measured and mapped. It represents the multidimensional expanse in which objects and events occur, often associated with the physical and mathematical aspects of location. From a scientific viewpoint, space is infinite and serves as the backdrop against which all events unfold. Yet, space is imbued with meanings through human interactions and perceptions, shaping how we perceive and use spaces and leading to ever-evolving interpretations and experiences. Conversely, place transcends these physical boundaries, encompassing the meanings and values that people attribute to spaces, transforming them into meaningful locations. Place is a space imbued with significance through human experiences and connections, becoming sites of interactions, memories, narratives, and identities. In this regard, place is not only defined by physical attributes but also by the relationships and emotions that individuals or communities associate with it. This association alters the sense of belonging and familiarity cultivated over time through exposure to the surroundings. As Tuan (2002, 6) aptly put, “if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.” This leads us to consider the relationship between space and place as an ongoing and dynamic process, where spaces transition into places as they acquire personal or collective meanings, and conversely, lose these meanings to revert to mere spaces. This transformation can be driven by historical events, cultural practices, or individual experiences, highlighting that places are not stagnant entities but are continually shaped and redefined over time.

In the contextualisation of space and place, the practice of placemaking emerges as a vital endeavour, acknowledging the nature of space and place as well as their transitory relationship. It involves intentional efforts to enhance the unique identity and characteristics of a place through community engagement, design interventions, and cultural activities. By fostering connections and interactions, placemaking endeavours to imbue spaces with new meanings and values, thereby

transforming them into places that resonate with communities, rather than speaking on an individual scale. In this way, it focuses on animating spaces with activities and events that reflect and celebrate the unique and social fabric of a place. This process not only enriches the physical environment but also strengthens social bonds and fosters collective ownership and stewardship of the place. This allows placemaking to serve as a catalyst for reimagining and revitalizing urban areas, encouraging inclusive and participatory approaches that empower communities to shape the places they inhabit. In this regard, placemaking is an interdisciplinary practice that bridges theoretical understandings of space and place with practical interventions aimed at transforming spaces into meaningful and inclusive places that enrich human experiences and foster a sense of belonging and community.

Building upon these foundational understandings of space, place, and placemaking, creative placemaking emerges as a dynamic approach that infuses art, culture, and creativity into the process of transforming spaces into vibrant places. Creative placemaking leverages artistic and cultural interventions to reimagine and activate underutilised spaces, breathing new life into urban landscapes and community environments. By integrating artistic practices such as public art installations, performances, festivals, and community workshops it fosters engagement and dialogue among residents, artists, and stakeholders. One key aspect of creative placemaking is its ability to effectively activate *meanwhile spaces* or transitional areas within the urban fabric. Although it achieves these through temporary activations, it facilitates long-lasting impacts of cultural activity and community engagement, which also leaves positive impacts on future collective memories. In this way, creative placemaking emphasises the importance of co-creation and participatory endeavours to ensure resulting spaces authentically reflect local values and aspirations.

As comprehensive engagement and professional interest in creative placemaking practices require critical reflections on *space* and *place*, several current placemaking initiatives propose establishing a network of placemaking knowledge that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. Their objective is to foster communities through innovative practices, enhancing the way we perceive and experience different locations. This cohesive effort unites creators under the common banner of the relationship between individuals and their surroundings by integrating artistic approaches into its methodologies and forging connections through diverse actions.

¹ This publication partly builds upon the results of the activities in the European project “A-Place. Linking places through networked artistic practices” co-funded by the Creative Europe programme 2019–23, with Project Agreement number 607457-CREA-1-2019-1-ES-CULT-COOP2. The first author of this publication (İlter, Ö.) is an independent researcher, not affiliated with the A-place project. The publication has also received support from the Research Programme J5-1798, co-financed by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARIS).

In this study, we compare the practical manifestations of creative placemaking through the activities of two prominent initiatives: the A-Place platform and KÉK (Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre). By examining the approaches taken by these organisations across various European cities, the study aims to explore how they redefine and enrich our understanding of place and its significance in the modern world. Through this comparative analysis, we seek to identify both the commonalities and unique contributions of each initiative to the evolving discourse of placemaking.

THE DUAL NATURE OF SPACE AND PLACE

In his book, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, Neil MacGregor explores world history through his analysis of one hundred selected objects from the British Museum. Beyond the fascinating stories of these objects, MacGregor poses a simple yet profound question: *What makes humans human?* His answer is unique among many possible responses. He suggests that it is not merely our brain evolution that defines our humanity, but rather our intrinsic need to gather knowledge and pass it on through generations, setting us apart from other species on Earth. We rely on both evolutionary knowledge (such as learning to walk upright) and acquired knowledge. This process of generating and transmitting knowledge is significantly influenced by our living environments, where we live, work, travel, build networks, learn, and perceive (Relph, 1976). Our spatial wonder about our surroundings drives us to delineate and define the spaces encircling us, and enhance our human presence.

This ever-changing narrative, inherent in the essence of place, arises from our efforts to comprehend our surroundings through experience, experimentation, knowledge, and conceptual thought responding to our existence within a specific space and time – an innate endeavour to explore and reveal our capabilities as we interact with our environment (Golledge, 1979).

Therefore, these interactions continually evolve within socio-cultural dynamics, providing essential insights into our understanding of the world. This exploration also guides endeavours to perceive and narrate place as a unique way of seeing (Cresswell, 2011). Acknowledging these perspectives as intertwined with cultural contexts underscores the significance of belonging and individual or communal ownership within spatial contexts. As places accumulate personal and social meanings, they become focal points for identity and a sense of belonging (Caruso & Palm, 1973).

Anthropologists have long been interested in the spatial dimensions of cultural practices and their theoretical implications. They examine and describe the material conditions of daily life to support various theories. The idea that all activities are embedded in and composed of space has gained importance as anthropologists have

shifted their focus, emphasising the spatial components of culture rather than treating them as mere background (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). When *space* is considered within an infinite emptiness, it lacks emotional interaction and remains unexperienced and unexplored. While space can be understood as physical dimensions or the vastness of the universe, the meaning of place arises from human experiences and cultural significance. The interactions and norms created within and about space transform it into a place (Malpas, 1999). A place is a location where individuals specifically interact. The more familiar an area becomes, the more it transforms into a place. Ratcliffe and Korpela (2018) emphasize how personal memories influence the creation of a place identity. Place extends into our behaviours, memories, and existences, and is, in return, shaped, personalised, and communed through us. Space outside us impacts our very being and, in turn, becomes a place (Tuan, 2002). A place can encompass multiple spaces, just as a single space can give rise to diverse potential places, blurring the distinction between them. As we come to know a *place*, we also come to understand the *unknown* within it.

Environmental anthropologist Eric Hirsch (1995) proposes that spaces have the potential to transform into places, contrasting them as *background* and *foreground* symbols in our visual history. Foreground space symbolises potential and change, where transformations can occur, while background space represents actuality – established, recognizable places with distinct identities and functions. Together, these concepts contribute to our understanding of how spaces evolve into significant locations. Hirsch suggests that if a place can be likened to an image, then space serves as its representation. Between the undulation of known and unknown, space and place exist, taking us out of the binary by smudging the concrete lines between the two. Tuan (2002, 3) captures this relationship by stating, “place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other”. Space represents the unexplored territory awaiting individual exploration, the frontier yet to be traversed.

Lefebvre and Gardiner underline the dynamic nature of space from distinct standpoints. Both discuss space as a medium of social relations and as a material entity influenced by and influencing social interactions. Known for his politically informed philosophy, Lefebvre (1991) explores how spaces are utilized by dominant powers to establish institutions that influence societal structures. According to him, these created spaces are not devoid of contradictions and highlight the fluid and evolving nature of social dynamics, rejecting the notion of society as a static entity solely shaped by hegemonic relations.

On the other hand, Gardiner (2000) focuses on everyday life patterns and practices, introducing the concept of selfhood to describe how individuals envision themselves as coherent and meaningful entities.

Drawing on Bakhtin's ideas, Gardiner critiques detached contemplation from a distant perspective. He argues for active participation within shared frameworks of value and meaning in ethical relations with others, rejecting a neutral, objectifying gaze detached from everyday existence and advocating for an engaged and empathetic consciousness in interpersonal interactions. Gardiner's idea of coherent entities and Lefebvre's contradictory space complement each other. Coherent entities, extending beyond their individual selves, inhabit a space that is continually evolving. In doing so, they contribute to transforming this space into a meaningful place, which may still retain elements influenced by dominant systems, revealing aspects of distance and the *unknown*. Gardiner's work enriches our exploration of the unknown within the fabric of existence. Over time, temporal dimensions gradually dissolve layers of uncertainty for observers of these spaces. People connect to both visible and invisible dimensions of physical spaces through memory, stories, daily routines, experiences, artistic expression, or intuition. This process shapes and creates deeper connection with spaces, evolving into a profound sense of place and fostering greater willingness for co-participation and engagement in placemaking initiatives.

Spaces present us with the challenge of unfamiliarity, prompting efforts to convert them into the comforting familiarity of place. However, this transformation sometimes results in the creation of what cultural anthropologist Marc Augé (1995) terms non-places—environments characterized by a sense of disconnected familiarity. Augé defines non-places transient, anonymous spaces lacking meaningful social interactions and personal connections. These spaces often include modern transit areas such as airports, shopping malls, and highways, where individuals pass through without establishing a sense of belonging or attachment. Non-places exemplify the influence of globalization and the standardisation of urban environments, where uniform structures and commodified experiences dominate. In contrast to the rich significance of places, non-places, thereby evoke feelings of detachment, alienation, and loss of personal identity.

PLACEMAKING PRACTICE: THE CATCHER OF SPACE

Within the triad of space, place, and non-place, placemaking occupies a crucial middle ground, striving to capture and promote evocative connections between the various spaces and their users, while also addressing the growing prevalence of non-places. Urban design plays a pivotal role in this endeavour, influencing not only physical layouts but also planned public areas that foster diverse social interactions, thereby strengthening the social fabric of communities. By integrating artistic approaches into its methodologies, placemaking seeks to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, aiming

to enrich our perception and experience of different locations by fostering connections through diverse activities. Through these efforts, creative placemaking practices manifest their goals through a variety of initiatives, all aimed at nurturing creativity and uniting creators with a cohesive relationship between individuals and their surroundings.

In the practice of placemaking, neither social nor spatial elements stand alone; they exist in a symbiotic, multifaceted relationship. This relationship shapes not only the physical aspects of a place but also nurtures a collective consciousness – a shared narrative that intertwines the individual stories of its inhabitants (Mateo-Babiano & Lee, 2020). Recognising that placemaking, including creative placemaking, is not a formulaic process underscores the importance of cross-sector alliances and coalitions that can profoundly influence a region's cultural and economic future. Furthermore, installations by architects serve as a platform for both pedagogy and practice, encircling this art-making process (Ishida, 2023). Active listening and engagement become paramount in this process. Successful creative placemaking is inherently distinctive; it responds to and reflects the cultural heritage and values that are meaningful to a community and its residents (Cook, 2021).

Placemaking initiatives, such as Linking places through networked artistic practices (A-Place, 2023), PlaceCity (EUTROPIAN, 2024) and programs of the Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre (KÉK, 2024)² among many others aim to raise awareness about the risks posed by the growing prevalence of non-places and the potential erosion of our innate sense of wonder. As our understanding of the world expands through maps, geographical literature, and stories, we face a surplus of spaces. The challenge within this surplus lies in establishing meaningful connections. Paradoxically, despite living in an era of unprecedented mobility, detachment becomes more pronounced. The world we inhabit, which we are expected to comprehend, often renders us anonymous and less inclined to feel a sense of belonging (Buchanan, 1999).

Delving into the realms of belonging and place identity, placemaking practices seek to move beyond abstract concepts and focus on tangible human experiences. They draw inspiration from thinkers who explore questions about human existence. Both place and identity are shaped by ongoing cognitive experiences, yet their interconnection remains steadfast. This interdependence requires re-articulation across different contexts. Placemaking practices thus emerge as dynamic and organic responses to these complex challenges, offering a framework to understand the intricate relationship, characterised by bonds woven into convoluted socio-political and economic discourses.

2 Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre (KÉK) is the organisation behind initiatives such as Budapest100 and Nyitva Festival (KÉK, 2024).

Placemaking emerges in dialogues that serve as guiding markers. These dialogues facilitate the identification of places, illuminate the potential outcomes of social interactions, and explore ways to transform ambiguous spaces into meaningful locations. A comprehensive grasp of their social impact necessitates an exploration of how diverse users perceive and experience these revitalised places (Carmona et al., 2003). The essence of place and identity unfolds within the chemistry of social and individual dynamics, involving culture and collective memory. Within this foundational framework lies a multitude of invisible elements and spaces – linguistic, cultural, and beyond – that collectively constitute the very fabric of place (Paulsen, 2004). Contemplating whether a particular locale can maintain its identity as a place when moved into a vastly different cultural or linguistic setting challenges us to consider the fluidity of place identity. It also underscores our role as active shapers of spatial perception, emphasizing our responsibility as stewards of the spaces we occupy.

The Overarching Themes Revolving Around Quality Places and Fair Communities

The comparison of placemaking concepts in this discussion draws upon ideas that gained traction decades ago when authors, architects, and urban planners like Jane Jacobs, Gordon Cullen, Christopher Alexander, and William Whyte, among many others, introduced pioneering ideas about designing cities for people. These foundational ideas have been integral to contemporary placemaking initiatives, including those of KÉK and A-Place, both of which have built their activities around these principles. In the following sections, we provide a detailed description of how KÉK and A-Place integrate these concepts into their respective frameworks, highlighting their unique approaches and contributions to creating quality places and fair communities. This comparison will explore how both platforms adapt these time-honoured ideas to modern contexts, ensuring their relevance and impact in contemporary urban settings.

In today's modern urban development, the creation of quality places and the integration of ideas and ideals from the past are nowadays widely promoted by initiatives such as the Project for Public Spaces (PPS, 2024)³ and the forward-thinking New European Bauhaus initiative (NEB, 2021) that create compelling placemaking principles. Both PPS and NEB, with their shared focus on human-centred design, sustainability, cultural context, collaboration, accessibility, and innovation, are forging a powerful alliance that aligns with European Urban Initiative objectives as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

(UN SDGs, 2015). This convergence beckons policy-makers and urban planners to align their strategies, channelling resources, and expertise into the creation of inclusive, aesthetically inspiring, and sustainable urban environments, as well as to facilitate the transfer and integration of knowledge.

To support these practices, A-Place and KÉK stand out for their unique approaches and contributions to embracing connections between people and places. While both initiatives share a common goal of enhancing urban spaces and promoting a sense of belonging, they differ in their methodologies, focus areas, scale, and overall impact on the communities they serve.

A-Place is both a platform and organisation that operates on a transnational level, spanning six European cities, bringing together a network of artists, architects, urban planners, and community members to explore and reimagine the concept of place. Its mission is thereby to create a collaborative environment with a strong emphasis on community engagement and participation. Recognising the importance of local input, the platform ensures that the needs and preferences of the communities are reflected in their activities. Furthermore, A-Place is committed to experimentation within its placemaking strategies. This focus is evident in the various hands-on events (public interventions, exhibitions, workshops, contests, etc.) that A-Place organises, which facilitate knowledge and exchange, and promote awareness of placemaking strategies, encouraging active participation and collaboration. Through these efforts, A-Place effectively strengthens the social fabric of communities across different spatial-cultural contexts. The ideals are determined by A-Place, through eight cross-cutting thematic lines which represent the essential qualities that creative placemaking commonly challenges. These themes include: a) *vitality of places*, encompassing notions of vividness, safety, lingerability, and the capacity to raise curiosity and playfulness; b) *engaged communities*, embracing notions of togetherness, commitment, care, and solidarity; c) *a strong sense of place and belonging*, emphasising collective memory and local pride; d) *sustainability awareness*, focusing on responsibility and respecting the environmental limits of our places; e) *sensory engagement*, encompassing the soundscapes, scent-scapes, and other visible and invisible sensory layers that trigger our perceptions; f) *fostering creativity*, expressing collective creativity through street art, participatory performances, and imagination-boosting activities; g) *diversity and inclusivity*, encompassing coexistence, tolerance, design justice, and shared visions; and h) *creating learning spaces*, realising the benefits of shared learning environments and experiences.

³ The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) is a non-profit organization funded in 1975 by Fred Kent dedicated to public participation in planning urban spaces in cities (PPS, 2024).

On the other hand, KÉK, an independent professional institution based in Hungary, operates with a more localised focus on architecture, the built environment, urban development, and their relation to communities, emphasising the importance of architectural heritage and contemporary design in shaping sustainable, liveable urban spaces. KÉK's approach is deeply rooted in education, research, and long-term programs while engaging the public and foster an appreciation for the architectural characteristics and texture of Hungary, along with its historical background. This mission is further supported by KÉK's commitment to research and documentation, conducting scholarly endeavours, highly informing its public programs and workshops, which allows KÉK to effectively act as a bridge between practitioners and the public. In this context, within its methodological thematization, KÉK mostly prioritises: a) *new methods in urban regeneration*, examining the latest methods, formats and possibilities in rethinking urban neighbourhoods; b) *innovation for sustainable society*, planning and integrating spatial practice to contribute a sustainable and resilient society and environment; c) *transparency in architectural affairs*, implementing wider decision-making practice related to architecture and planning to articulate opinions and participating at debates about the city; d) *architectural culture and community*, planning and designing accessible and comprehensible to the broader public, and promoting a community-based approach in urban policies.

While each of these thematic focuses of both platforms has its own unique traits and emphasis, they are not independent entities; instead, they exist in a state of interconnectedness. The placemaking activities undertaken effectively blend these themes, highlighting their synergistic potential and flexibility. Through these efforts, sustainability practices are promoted to enhance environmental consciousness, forge connections among residents, and bolster community bonds. In the following section, we present a curated selection of four themes derived from the extensive placemaking practices of A-Place and KÉK, further delineating and contextualising contemporary endeavours within place-related domains.

FROM CONCEPTS TO TANGIBLE REALITIES

Urban initiatives and practitioners engage in dynamic efforts to navigate the relationship between personal experiences and the distinctive characteristics of place, focusing on concepts such as belonging and identity. Through these endeavours, they target collective creativity and activate communities, placing these elements at the forefront of their activities.

This interaction recognises the inherent dynamism of places and their ongoing evolution within diverse cultural landscapes and perceptions. These initiatives and projects aim to transform spaces into meaningful places, addressing emerging complexities not only to deepen understanding but also to confront spatial production and development that have resulted in the emergence of non-places – spaces where meaningful connections struggle to take root. These endeavours aim to review and reconsider accomplishments through interconnected evaluations, starting with an array of experiment case studies. They advocate for multisensory, creative experiences that nurture personal and communal growth, encouraging the establishment of higher-quality public spaces. Placemaking activities, thereby translate lived experiences into well-defined, tangible actions.

In the following section, practical applications of four selected overarching concepts are analysed through the placemaking activities of both A-Place and KÉK: *urban vibrancy*, *urban sensory engagement*, *urban sustainability*, and *urban creative dynamics*. Each concept underscores strategic approaches that challenge and re-evaluate conventional spatial practices conducted by both platforms, facilitating interactions through active engagement. While each concept maintains distinct focal points, their interconnectedness uniquely responds to placemaking efforts, collectively advancing environmental consciousness, personal and communal development, and innovative community-building. These initiatives embrace a hands-on learning approach within a backdrop of *togetherness*, aiming to claim more liveable spaces and forge connections among individuals.

Urban Vibrancy

Social space is composed of interconnected locations organised through communication networks, rather than simply being objectively homogenous areas. Therefore, social consciousness advances through communication (Claval, 1984). Public space serves as a platform for communication, where interrelated elements convey messages. The concepts of *public* and *publicity* are closely connected, as activities within public spaces are widely known and shared (Madrado et al., 2022). As communities collectively *take up* and imbue spaces with their own significance, these spaces evolve into meaningful places that embody a sense of solidarity and community identity (Walsh & High, 1999).

Placemaking celebrates local culture, heritage, and artistic expression, providing platforms for artists, performers, and creatives to showcase their talents and engage with the public in collaborative efforts to rejuvenate spaces. In this context, placemaking involves community members actively participating in the



Figure 1: Low-cost pocket placemaking action in Bologna: the creation of a small parklet placed in the space of three parking lots connected the interior of the placemaking NGO's office with an expanded sidewalk, featuring an artistic program catering to all generations (Source: City Space Architecture).

design, activation, and upkeep of public spaces. This encourages a vibrant atmosphere where people are highly committed to the well-being and of their surroundings. This approach often centres on designing physical spaces to further facilitate people's interactions and opportunities for lingering. As such, placemaking interventions assist cities in transforming their public spaces into vital, functional areas, commonly beginning with short-term, low-cost experiments. This involves analysing how people interact with a specific space and implementing changes to enhance its usability. Moreover, by embracing community engagement through art-making and *artivism*, creativity, or play-making, these spaces gain opportunities to transform, offering greater prospects for lasting impact.

Figure 1 demonstrates a temporary placemaking action implemented in Bologna under the A-Place initiative framework. The concept of the pocket action in a residential neighbourhood aimed at reclaiming three parking lots by expanding the sidewalk, creating more space for social interaction in front of the City Space Architecture NGO headquarters. The parklet connected the street with the community office entrance and the indoor space, which was frequently used for social events, lectures, and courses. Despite being a modest use of space, the street parklet expansion and program integration provided a compelling reason for people

to linger and return regularly. The Bologna parklet hosted various activities, including performances by young artists, musical events, courses and workshops, efficiently bridging the indoor headquarters with the outdoor parklet.

Urban spaces are not merely physical environments; they are shaped by the collective memories, experiences, and interactions of the communities that inhabit them. Urban historian Dolores Hayden emphasises the concept of *place memory*, which refers to the identities (Hayden, 1995). In this context, the act of placemaking is not just about altering physical space, but also about nurturing a sense of belonging and continuity within the community. Placemaking activities help reconnect people with their urban environment, creating spaces that reflect the unique character and history of the local community.

Budapest100, an annual event organised by KÉK in collaboration with OSA Archivum, exemplifies this approach by celebrating the centenary buildings in Budapest, transforming them into focal points for community engagement and historical reflection. The event opens the doors of these century-old buildings to the public, allowing residents and visitors alike to explore, learn, and share stories that highlight the architectural and cultural heritage of the city. By doing so, Budapest100 transforms these buildings from mere structures into living spaces

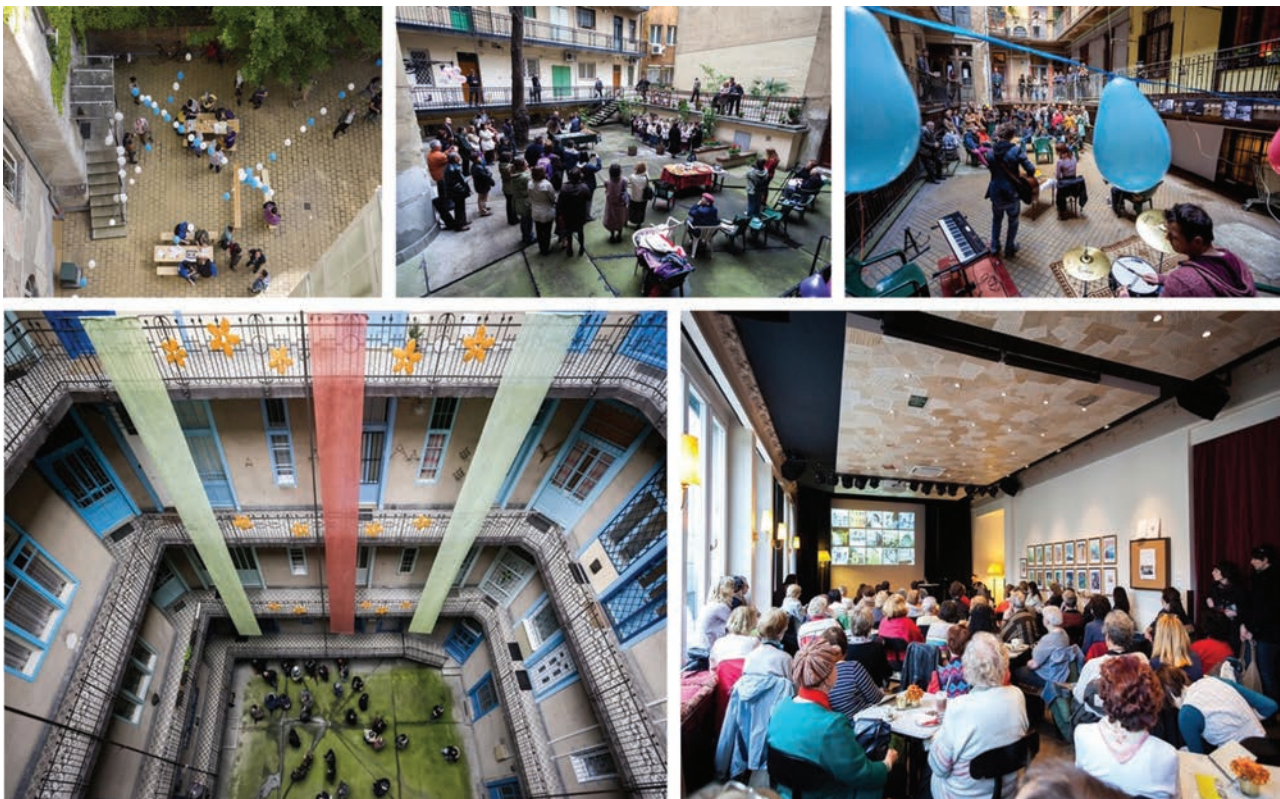


Figure 2: Scenes from the Budapest100 event, where historic buildings were opened to the public, blending architectural exploration with community engagement through various events, including outdoor courtyard gatherings and indoor sessions where residents shared personal and communal histories (Source: Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre).

that embody the collective memory and identity of their neighbourhoods. The event's success lies in its ability to foster a sense of ownership and pride among participants. By inviting the public to contribute their memories and narratives, Budapest100 becomes a platform for inter-generational dialogue, where older residents share their stories with younger generations, creating a living history that enriches the community's connection to its surroundings. Additionally, the event incorporates guided tours, exhibitions, concerts, and performances that further engage participants, transforming the act of visiting these buildings into a multifaceted cultural experience. Figure 2 depicts scenes from a recent Budapest100 event, where to the interiors of several historic buildings were opened to the public. The event not only showcased the architectural beauty of these structures but also highlighted the personal and communal histories associated with them. Participants engaged in in-house history exhibitions, where they could share their own experiences related to the buildings, thus contributing to the collective narrative of the city. Through these activities, Budapest100 encourages residents to view their urban environment not just as a backdrop for everyday life, but as an active participant in the ongoing story of their community.

Urban Sensory Engagement

Evoking sensory awareness in urban spaces relates to the concept of sensory urbanism, which investigates how non-visual information defines a city's character and influences its liveability. As Howes (2022) describes, this involves exploring diverse ways humans perceive and interpret the world around them. Howes primarily uses an ethnographic approach, employing observation and interviews to establish best practices for effective sensory design in public spaces. Effective sensory design integrates elements such as sound, smell, touch, and sight into the overall experience and functionality of a space. The sensory experience of a place also plays a crucial role in shaping its identity. When communities actively engage with and attribute meaning to places through sensory design, they collectively enrich their experiences and collective memory. Placemaking initiatives honour collective memory and place identity to reinforce a community's sense of belonging (Lak & Hakimian, 2019). The incorporation of elements like soundwalks or other multisensory experiences adds a new dimension to placemaking, enriching our sensory experiences and deepening our



Figure 3: A collective recording of the unique sounds of the Bairro do Rego neighbourhood, serving as the foundation for a soundwalk itinerary. The soundwalk aimed to explore and highlight the auditory identity of the neighbourhood incorporating both the original recorded sounds and amplified through post-production (Source: Marta Fiolic).

emotional connection to place (Glover, 2023). Sound, often overlooked in traditional urban planning, has the potential to evoke memories, create ambiance, and shape our perception of space. By integrating sound as a design element, pacemakers can evoke specific moods, encourage contemplation, or promote a sense of place through shared auditory experiences.

One of the sensory-focusing initiatives was implemented in Lisbon's Bairro do Rego neighbourhood. It revolved around reigniting communal bounds and revitalizing urban areas through the recognition of a distinctive auditory landscape. Recording collective urban sounds and subsequently creating a soundwalk itinerary with neighbourhood youth was a crucial tool for enhancing spatial perception and fostering emotional connections to places (Figure 3). This process created multi-sensory environments that enriched the placemaking experience, inviting residents or visitors to engage.

Urban spaces are experienced through a multitude of senses, and the way these senses interact with the environment shapes our perception of place. Sensory urbanism expands the focus beyond visual stimuli to consider how sounds, smells, and textures contribute to the overall experience of a space (Howes, 2022). This approach underscores the importance of engaging all senses to create a more immersive and meaningful approach by offering participants a curated experience that highlights the sensory dimensions of Budapest's urban landscape.

Urban Walks Series is one of the events organised by KÉK, which invites participants to explore the city's neighbourhoods through guided tours that emphasise not only the visual but also the auditory, tactile, and olfactory elements of the urban environment. These walks are designed to deepen participants' sensory engagement with their surroundings, encouraging them to notice details often overlooked in the hustle and bustle of daily life. With a focus on the sensory experiences that define different neighbourhoods, Urban Walks Series aims to foster a greater appreciation for the diverse sensory landscapes of Budapest and strengthen the connection between people and their environment. Figure 4 illustrates moments from KÉK's urban walks, where participants were encouraged to experience the city through all their senses. The walks included pauses in quiet parks to listen to the subtle sounds of nature, strolls through bustling markets where the smells and textures of local produce were highlighted, and tactile engagements with the varying materials of historic buildings. These multisensory experiences not only provided a richer understanding of the city's urban fabric but also contributed to a stronger emotional connection to the places explored. By integrating sensory awareness into urban exploration, KÉK's Urban Walks Series reinforces the idea that placemaking is not just about physical design but also about creating experiences that resonate on a deeper, more sensory level.



Figure 4: KÉK's Urban Walks Series, highlighting participants' sensory engagement with the city. The walks involved listening to the environment and exploring historic buildings through tactile interactions, emphasising how sensory experiences enhance understanding and connection to urban spaces (Source: Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre).

Urban Sustainability

The practice of placemaking involves more than just shaping physical spaces; it extends into the realm of *world-making* – creating new realms and embodying societal visions. Each placemaking endeavour represents our collective aspirations and societal values (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995). Recognising the role and impacts of placemaking in this regard aims to elevate awareness of nature and sustainability, fostering more responsible societies built on shared interests, values, and mutual responsibilities. By attending to the needs of non-human entities, sustainability is redefined as a community-led endeavour, acknowledging all contributors to the character of space (Miles, 1997). Activities undertaken within this perspective navigate urban complexities through a variety of approaches, providing fresh and applicable solutions to sustainability. Instead of seeing sustainability as a human-imposed obligation, they adopt participatory methodologies that prioritise environmental resources. This includes integrating sustainable practices into daily routines, respecting spatial constraints, and collaboratively progressing

with eco-friendly behaviours. Emphasising shared responsibility promotes a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to placemaking, establishing a harmonious relationship between constructed and natural environments to ensure a legacy for future generations. Moreover, placemaking initiatives that prioritise sustainability concerns can serve as catalysts for broader social change. By involving communities in co-designing their local environments, these initiatives encourage individuals to recognize and take responsibility for the impact of their actions, thereby promoting a collective move towards more sustainable practices. Thus, the integration of *green* practices not only enhances the ecological resilience of urban areas, improves access to green spaces, and reduces the urban heat island effect, but also raises awareness and promotes behavioural change among people.

The placemaking initiative in Ljubljana demonstrated circular design and the reuse of materials in urban design workshop, that move beyond the traditional take-make-waste extractive model. The activity was implemented through a learn-by-design process with a dual objective: firstly, to



Figure 5: Placemaking experiment with urban reuse. Object repurposing has long served an entry point into sustainable design at a micro-scale. It also embodies a broader concept that includes circular design and creative practices, providing individuals to express their innovative ideas and apply them in local environments (Source: Žiga Gorišek).

gain a deeper understanding of the site's physical surroundings, inventory existing materials available for reuse, and insight into the dynamics of the location, including its social context and requirements. Secondly, it aimed to apply the principles of a circular design at a grassroots level, while also raising awareness and offering educational instants about sustainable practices. The workshop acted as a central hub for dialogue, merging professional, experiential, and tacit knowledge, facilitating discussions with experts on architectural reuse, place transformation, and recycling artistry (Figure 5). This initiative prompted critical inquiries into how reuse and recycling can enhance the practice of creative placemaking.

In parallel, KÉK's Community Gardens project in Budapest reflects a similar commitment to sustainability, focusing on the cultivation of green spaces within the urban infrastructure. Community gardens offer an accessible, participatory approach to enhancing urban sustainability, directly involving residents in the care and cultivation of shared green spaces. These gardens serve multiple purposes, including food production, environmental education, and the creation of communal spaces that strengthen social bonds and enhance the quality of urban life.

The initiative goes beyond mere provision of green spaces; it embodies a holistic approach to urban sustainability that integrates ecological awareness with community-building efforts. By

encouraging residents to take an active role in gardening, the project fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for the environment. It also provides opportunities for learning about sustainable agricultural practices, composting, and biodiversity, making it an educational platform for environmental stewardship. Figure 6 depicts various community gardens across Budapest, illustrating how these spaces have become vital hubs of social interaction and environmental learning. Residents from diverse backgrounds come together to cultivate these gardens, sharing knowledge and resources in a way that strengthens community ties while promoting sustainable living. Through these activities, the project has become a model for how urban sustainability can be achieved through grassroots, community-driven efforts.

Both the Ljubljana initiative by A-Place and KÉK's Community Gardens project thereby highlight the importance of integrating sustainability into the practice of placemaking. While A-Place focuses on the reuse of materials and circular design in urban environments, KÉK emphasises the role of green spaces in fostering environmental awareness and community resilience. Together, these projects illustrate the diverse approaches to sustainable placemaking, showing that sustainability can be achieved through a variety of means, whether through innovative design practices or the cultivation of communal green spaces.



Figure 6: KÉK's Community Gardens project, showcasing various gardens that act as centres for social interaction and environmental education. The initiative promotes urban sustainability by engaging residents in gardening and encouraging ecological awareness and sustainable practices (Source: Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre).

Urban Creative Dynamics

As placemaking incorporates creative expressions, art-making becomes a key driver for innovative ideas through hands-on learning. Art conveys ideas and emotions that shape our perspectives; when included in public spaces, it adds meaning, aesthetic value, cultural significance, and emotional impact to the built environment (Nursey-Bray, 2020). Integrating public art thoughtfully can foster a strong sense of place, reflecting the character, context, and history of a location, and enhancing its identity as a visual or cultural landmark (Deutsche, 1998). Meaningful public art not only initiates dialogue, provokes thought, and stimulates emotional response, but also engages the public in discussions about shared values, which are the foundations of communities (Bingham-Hall, 2016). Public art can define a neighbourhood, activate specific areas, rejuvenate neglected or forgotten spaces, and capture

attention and imagination by engaging with culture, history, and societal aspirations. As a place's identity evolves, so too does the community, as different people assign diverse meanings and uses to the same space. Public space becomes a critical medium for this transformation, shaped not only by territorial boundaries but by the collective actions and discourse that occur within it. This dynamic relationship between space and community is reinforced by placemaking initiatives, where the more actively the community participates, the more deeply it shapes its future identity (Rapanta et al., 2021). This approach makes future placemaking more promising, with the potential to repeatedly remake, renew, and reform shared environments.

An interesting example of an artistic placemaking initiative was established in Lisbon's Padre Cruz neighbourhood, showcasing collective artistic production through a prose and poetry contest titled *My neighbourhood, my place*. This contest became



Figure 7: A-Place's placemaking initiative in Lisbon's Bairro Padre Cruz features the "My Neighbourhood, My Place" contest, showcasing community creativity through poetry, writing, and workshops that reflect the unique characteristics of public spaces and strengthen connections among residents (Source: Marta Fiollić).

a central feature in boosting community creativity and engagement through thematic categories such as *Memories of the neighborhood*, *Living in the neighborhood*, *Creating in the neighborhood*, *Being together in the neighborhood*, etc. As a result, Padre Cruz transformed into a vibrant hub of artistic activity, featuring writing, drawing, photography, and recitals. These efforts culminated in a main recital event, creating a lively community atmosphere in a previously neglected square within the neighbourhood. The initiative successfully activated a public space, with residents' involvement bringing them closer to creative processes, reflecting on their daily lives, and civic experiences, and sharing their memories and views (Figure 7). *A Future Place*, one of the umbrella initiatives within Lisbon's Bairro Padre Cruz neighbourhood was born out of the aspirations of Amigos da Luz, a sports community association primarily centred around football. However, beyond the sports engagements, this association evolved into a cohesive community. Shared interests turned into a sense of *home*. This larger, fluid, newly familiar *place* led to a very different kind of expression – through poetry and stories. Drawing and writing are essential tools for accessing, understanding, and materializing mental space (Lagrange et al., 2021). These creative expressions, parallel to the sports practice itself, naturally became a medium for exchanging their collective viewpoints and personal memories. A-Place

seamlessly integrated into this naturally evolving initiative, also collaborating with diverse range of partners. Within the confines of Bairro Padre Cruz, a sequence of events generated, aimed at reaffirming a sense of place identity.

Alternatively, KÉK's Nyitva Festival serves as a vibrant celebration of creativity and community engagement in Budapest, transforming public spaces into dynamic platforms for artistic expression. This festival invites artists, art collectives, architects, and performers to collaborate and showcase their work for richer and deeper cultural dialogues that resonate throughout the city. Nyitva Festival emphasises inclusivity by creating opportunities for local residents in various artistic activities, thereby strengthening community ties and fostering a sense of belonging. The festival embodies the idea that art is a powerful tool for connection, reflection, and cultural identity, similar to the objectives of A-Place's initiatives. Throughout the festival, KÉK funds a moderate amount of the maintenance and repair of abandoned or not-in-use shops and residential areas in the city to temporarily turn them into public spaces which are activated through a range of events, including live performances, art installations, and workshops. These activities encourage interaction and engagement among community members, creating a shared experience that enriches the urban fabric. Given the unconventional spatial



Figure 8: Nyitva Festival, including artistic workshops, cultural dancing, linoleum printing, film screening, and concerts, engages in placemaking efforts by activating underutilised spaces, and transforming these spaces into creative hubs (Source: Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre).

settings, artists are invited to present their works, challenging the boundaries of traditional art spaces and bringing creativity directly into the heart of the community. This approach not only showcases artistic talent but also highlights the importance of public participation in shaping cultural narratives and community identity. Figure 8 illustrates the diverse range of activities that took place during the Nyitva Festival. By activating underutilised spaces, the festival transforms the discoloured areas into creative and connecting hubs. The collaborative nature of the festival encourages residents to engage with their environment actively, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in their community. Through workshops and interactive art experiences, participants gain new skills and insights, reinforcing the festival's role as a catalyst for community engagement and creative expression.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study highlights the transformative qualities of placemaking initiatives exemplified by the platforms A-Place and KÉK in their respective urban contexts. The analysis of these initiatives underscores the impact of collaborative, community-driven efforts in revitalis-

ing urban spaces and turning them into vibrant, meaningful places. These endeavours stand in stark contrast to the growth of underutilised spaces, which detract from the distinctive character of both the urban environments and the individuals who inhabit them.

In exploring placemaking practices through four underlying concepts – urban vibrancy, urban sensory engagement, urban sustainability, and urban creative dynamic – this study explains the diverse strategies employed by A-Place and KÉK within their conceptual frameworks. Despite operating within different cultural settings, both platforms share a common goal: to activate urban spaces by engaging communities in the design and implementation of placemaking activities. Their initiatives illustrate how such collaborative efforts can foster a sense of belonging, identity, and ownership among community members.

On one hand, A-Place is a time-bound initiative that operated from 2019 to 2023 and was co-funded by the Creative Europe Program. It now functions as both a platform and community, focusing on interventions across six European cities. This approach allows A-Place to implement experimental placemaking activities tailored to the unique identities and characteristics of various communities and

cultures. On the other hand, KÉK, an independent professional institution, primarily operates in Hungary, particularly in Budapest, concentrating on initiatives that predominantly reflect the city's cultural and historical context. This focus enables KÉK to develop methodologies with a consistent, repeatable structure for its activities, conducted through various annual settings. While these operational features distinguish the two platforms, their shared objective of redefining urban spaces through placemaking underscores their commitment to enhancing the connection between people and places, serving as a counterbalance to the rapid changes and challenges faced in contemporary urban environments.

Both A-Place and KÉK employ dynamic and hands-on approaches that foster collective learning and facilitate interactions between personal experiences and the unique characteristics of urban settings. These platforms challenge conventional spatial practices by promoting the activation of public spaces, transforming non-places into vital areas where authentic connections can succeed. The case studies presented throughout this study reveal how collaborative creativity can effectively navigate the complexities of urban environments, showcasing the potential of placemaking initiatives to enrich community life and enhance urban spaces.

Both initiatives leverage community engagement and place attachment as central in fostering the social inclusiveness and intergenerational dialogue. In this regard, the efforts of A-Place and KÉK highlight the importance of cultural heritage and collective memory in shaping place identity. By focusing

on sensory experiences, these initiatives deepen emotional connections to the urban environment, thus promoting a more inclusive and immersive experience for all residents.

Furthermore, the commitment to sustainability within the placemaking efforts of both platforms reflects an increasing awareness of environmental responsibilities achieved through collective learning and hands-on methodologies. By integrating sustainable practices, A-Place and KÉK demonstrate that grassroots, community-led actions can efficiently address environmental challenges. These initiatives underscore the potential to create a more resilient urban future, where community engagement not only transforms physical spaces but also cultivates environmental stewardship. In doing so, they reinforce the essential connection between sustainable practices and the revitalisation of urban areas, contributing to the broader understanding of placemaking as a vital tool for social, cultural, and environmental enhancement.

This study supports further investigation and application of placemaking strategies that emphasize community involvement, creativity, and sustainability. As urban environments develop, insights from the A-Place and KÉK initiatives can inform future efforts to create liveable spaces. The methodology employed in these initiatives is a transferable component that can be applied with modifications in other cities facing similar challenges. By further exploring these principles, cities can efficiently address the challenges, related to diminished inclusiveness or lack of collective care for the local urban environments.

O PROSTORU: VLOGA KREATIVNIH PRAKS PRI USTVARJANJU URBANIH PROSTOROV

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POVZETEK

Članek obravnava ponavljajočo se razpravo o konceptih prostora, fizičnega in zaznavnega, pri čemer poudarja njihove notranje in medsebojne odnose ter raziskuje, kako ustvarjalne prakse oblikovanja urbanih prostorov vplivajo na razumevanje, konceptualizacijo ter preoblikovanje teh pojmov. Prostor kot posoda fizičnega vključuje številne neotipljive vidike, kot so emocionalni, spominski, učni ali kreativni prostori, ki so ključni za razumevanje njegovega celovitega pomena in vloge za doživljanje s strani uporabnika ali obiskovalca. S primerjalno analizo dveh platform, A-Place (Krepitev vezi med prostori in ljudmi s pomočjo kreativnih praks) in KÉK (Sodobni arhitekturni center Madžarske) študija preučuje, kako dani iniciativi pristopata k ustvarjanju prostorov v različnih evropskih mestih s prepletanjem umetniških in kulturnih praks. Članek skozi prizmo štirih ključnih konceptov dojemanja prostora podaja primerjalni vpogled, ki pomaga razumeti vlogo kreativnih praks v ustvarjanju urbanih prostorov v različnih družbeno-kulturnih in geografskih kontekstih. S preučevanjem primerov iz več evropskih mest študija razkriva prispevek danih praks k socialni in kulturni dinamiki skupnosti ter njihovega vpliva na dožemanje prostora, njegovo identiteto ter trajnostne vidike, ki zaznamujejo kakovost bivanja.

Ključne besede: ustvarjanje prostorov, kreativne prakse, umetniške prakse, urbani prostori, A-Place, KÉK

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