# The city as an organism: *Systemic Placemaking* as a bridge between communities

## Methodology applied to the challenges of the binational San Diego-Tijuana World Design Capital 2024

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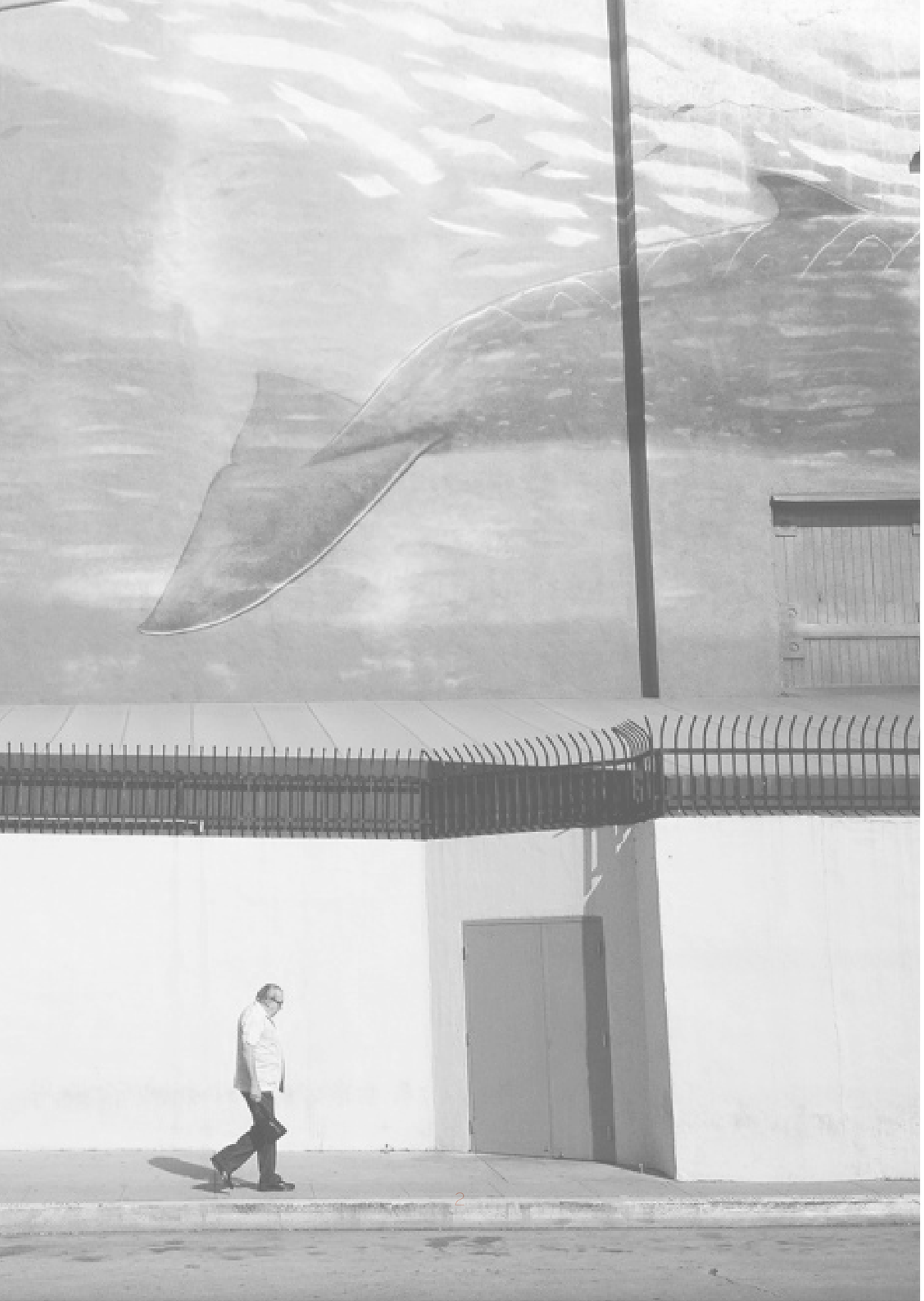



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# Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to investigate and implement **systemic tools** to address the challenges of the current urban system so as to transform public spaces into ***bridges*** to connect citizens and shape healthier, livable and shared public environments through sustainable and participatory urban practices. The theoretical foundations, methodologies investigated and their application focused on the challenges faced by the binational **San Diego-Tijuana World Design Capital,** carried out during an international mobility project in San Diego from April 18th to May 29th in collaboration with the Organization..

The first phase of research, inspired during the "Theory and History of Systemic Design" course, focused on a general study of the **urban system** through the **systems perspective**, thus identifying the main challenges and opportunities that caracterize city life and its shared spaces, and the methodologies to implement them and make them usable and inclusive. This study was approached through **academic literature research** flanked by: participation in **workshops** and **conferences** on the urban theme (in the context of International Festival of City Imaging ***Utopian Hours,*** by TorinoStrtosferica), and participation in **EIT and RMIT University** online courses.

The themes that emerged in the first phase of research will be laid out in the first 6 chapters of our thesis and start with a **historical overview** of urban design over time, and the shift from a top-dow to a bottom-up approach, going through the main stages and the main actors that determined its evolution. Subsequently the second chapter continues with a **critical systemic analysis of the urban system** and the impacts it generates globally, evolving toward a socio-anthropological approach in the third chapter in which the **urban habitat** is explored and the consequences of its planning on individuals and communities who live it. The fourth collects the legacy demonstrated in the previous chapters to affirm the importance of the designer's role in converting under-performing urban spaces into **meaningful places** at the service of the citizens according to a bottom-up approach that enhances the urban, social and environmental capital of a city. In the fifth chapter, therefore, the methodology of ***Systemic Placemaking*** is proposed for the concrete implementation of Placemaking strategies that take into consideration the urban substrate in a holistic way. Finally, Chapter 6 provides a categorization of a number of **case studies** and best practices in Placemaking.

To assimilate the concepts more closely and apply the methodologies firsthand, we took part in two placemaking projects held in the city of Turin. The first, **Corso Farini Park,** was carried out in collaboration with **Cultural Association Torino Stratosferica**, enrolled in their "Design Unit" for the co-design of self-built street furniture; the project aimed to redevelop a linear park located in a suburban area of Turin, so as to represent a link between different neighborhoods, and make it an inclusive lived and participated space. The second one, **Molo'61,** is a Placemaking project born during a Hackathon at the **SAA School of Management**, that aims at the redevelopment of a degraded park in Turin, "**Giardino Corpo Italiano di Liberazione**", through the aesthetic suistanable and inclusive re-qualification of the space and the engagement of different stakeholders. With this project our team won a competition for the **New European Bauhaus** - EIT, receiving €10,000 in funding for its development, which we are still carrying out.

Finally, the work focused on applying the concepts learned during all the previous phases to the context of the **World Design Capital San Diego-Tijuana**, a year-long celebration of the cross-border region. After an initial desk analysis carried out in contact with **Carlos de la Mora** (CEO of the Wolrd Design Capital) and **Elena Pacenti** (professor of Design at the New School of Architecture and design), we traveled to San Diego to carry out the field analysis and identify the main challenges related to the cities of **San Diego** and **Tijuana** and in particular to the peculiar relationship between the two, the main focus of the WDC, focusing our work on a border area: the neighborhood of San Ysidro. For it, a specific **Systemic Placemaking project** was identified, a solution that aims to enhance its uniqueness allowing inhabitants to ***tell their story*** and create a sense of community and belonging within first the neighborhood, then the entire region.



*A Eudossia, che si estende in alto e in basso, con vicoli tortuosi, scale, angiporti, catapecchie, si conserva un tappeto in cui puoi contemplare la vera forma della città. A prima vista nulla sembra assomigliare meno a Eudossia che il disegno del tappeto , ordinato in figure simmetriche che ripetono i loro motivi lungo linee rette e circolari, intessuto di gugliate dai colori splendenti, l'alternarsi delle cui trame puoi seguire lungo tutto l'ordito. Ma se ti fermi a osservarlo con attenzione, ti persuadi che a ogni luogo del tappeto corrisponde un luogo della città e che tutte le cose contenute nella città sono comprese nel disegno, disposte secondo i loro veri rapporti, quali sfuggono al tuo occhio distratto dall'andirivieni dal brulichio dal pigia-pigia. [...] Ogni abitante di Eudossia confronta all'ordine immobile del tappeto una sua immagine della città , una sua angoscia, e ognuno può trovare nascosta tra gli arabeschi una risposta, il racconto della sua vita, le svolte del destino.*

*Sul rapporto misterioso di due oggetti così diversi come il tappeto e la città fu interrogato un oracolo. Uno dei due oggetti,- fu il responso -, ha la forma che gli dei diedero al cielo stellato e alle orbite su cui ruotano i mondi; l'altro ne è un approssimativo riflesso, come ogni opera umana.*

*Gli àuguri già da tempo erano certi che l'armonico disegno del tappeto fosse di fattura divina; in questo senso fu interpretato l'oracolo, senza dar luogo a controversie. Ma allo stesso modo tu puoi trarne la conclusione opposta : che la vera mappa dell'universo sia la città d 'Eudossia così com'è, una macchia che dilaga senza forma, con vie tutte a zig-zag, case che franano una sull'altra nel polverone, incendi, urla nel buio.*

*-Italo Calvino, Le città invisibili*



# 01 History and evolution of urban systems

*From top-down to bottom-up approach: historical analysis of the paradigm shift*

# 1.1 The “compact” city

The organization of cities and their design concept has undergone numerous changes over time, related to technological innovations on the one hand, and cultural shifts on the other, witnessing an incredible acceleration since the **industrial revolution.** With them, **public space** has also changed, as perceived by both designers and citizens, changing the way they live and socialize.
What we want to focus on is precisely how different design approaches over time have affected the very essence of the city: its **citizens,** their quality of life, and the possibility of living in an environment tailored to them.
This chapter’s investigation focuses on how and when the design of the urban built approach, and particularly the design of public spaces, has fostered (or not) the social aspects of quality of life, sense of community, possibility of dialogue, and the environmental and social sustainability aspects of living in a welcoming and serene environment.
Within the book “Urban sustainability through Environmental Design” (*Greaves et al., 2007*) a brief historical overview is given of how cities have evolved since the **pre-industrial era**, in relation to the concept of “**compactness**” of the urban built environment, an element that fosters the creation of a sense of community within cities.
As argued by the authors, originally in pre-industrial cities, the aforementioned aspects of sociability, possibility of dialogue and “slow living,” albeit unconsciously, were in their own way respected. The reason why this was the case was that they were compact settlements, in which public spaces were experienced, in much the same way as they had been for 7,000 years, articulated **autonomously** as an **extension of human experience**.
Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the so-called “bourgeois city,” shaped a new kind of urban form, and social, environmental and economic characteristics: the big city of the new **industrial age**.
The “compact city” represented a viable urban form with fundamental characteristics for the future of large cities, but it had to be adapted in line with the changes of the time to meet new and emerging challenges such as the **increasing population** of urban settings (that we will deepen in the next chapter) and the many innovations that changed the appearance and life of cities.



Indeed, with the industrial revolution, cities witnessed numerous technological, social, and urban planning changes that aimed to make it possible for large numbers of people to live together.
New devices such as household toilets and siphons, gas and electricity, street sidewalks and public transportation, public lighting, hospitals, elevators, and so on, contributed to the development of new and innovative cities.
However, despite these novelty, the basic spatial structure of the pre-industrial city in Europe was kept largely intact at the beginning: streets were still the focus of social life, buildings overlooked them, and the city was generally mixed in the type of activities and people.
The physical and social organization of the city community was centered on centers and **subcenters**, often connected by public transportation. Pre-industrial cities and the “bourgeois” cities of the new industrial age, despite their several differences, thus shared the same spatial substrate, which in fact formed a line of continuity, across centuries and millennia, of city and community life.

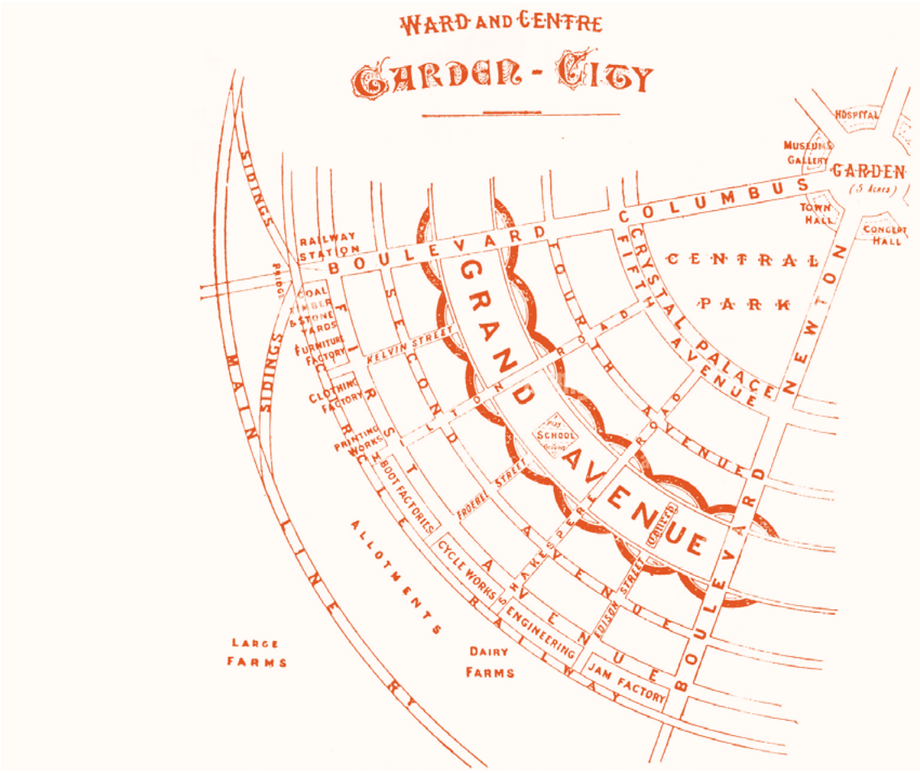
Much of this can be said to be found in the **organization of public spaces**, and particularly community, social gathering spaces, which identify the concept of the “square” as their major form of expression.
Within the article “Public Space and the Contemporary City. A narrative between places, time, relationships” *(Faroldi, 2020)*, the concept of public space and in particular the square is described in its origins as a place of convergence in the urban context of emotional and relational tensions, beyond its physical connotation. It arises precisely because of the need to provide opportunities, for exchange, meeting, experiences, knowledge etc..
In short, it represents a kind of “**mirror**” of a community’s own culture, like a living organism, since it “welcomes before other urban places the innovations related to the spirit of an era” *(Pisani, 1990),* a concept that with later evolutions will be completely obscured.

# 1.2 The modern city

The line of continuity of city life and public space was interrupted in the first decades of the twentieth century, when the modern movement decided to respond to the new problems related to the evolution of chaotic, overpopulated and polluted **post-industrial cities,** yet eradicating the intrinsic nature of the city, due to the desire to totally **rethink them in every aspect**.
This radical change was brought about by two main factors according to the authors of the article: the **technological innovation** represented by the introduction of the **automobile** as a means of mass transportation in the United States in the early 1920s and in Europe immediately after World War II, and the emergence of modernism as the dominant attitude in the field of urbanism and design between the first and third decades of the century.
The combination of these factors caused a real reversal of the previously known urban fabric.
Urban activities and uses have been divided into specialized "functional" neighborhoods, the street has been separated from the city, and urbanization has been spread without regard to limits on pedestrian coverage or organization of public transportation. In addition, pre-existing and existing public transportation facilities were demolished, drastically reducing the density of urban agglomerations and increasing the need to own and use automobiles. This has led to the creation of the so-called "**automobile-dependent city"** *(Newman & Kenworthy, 1998)*

Even before the introduction of the automobile, this "**diffuse**" model of the city was anticipated by some thinkers, forerunners of the discipline of urban planning in the late nineteenth century, who rethought cities from a **utopian** perspective, seeking radical inventions to give rise to new cities that would allow them to align with the new image of society, as an alternative to traditional ones *(Sharifi, 2016)*.
In particular, the model that had the most cultural repercussions was the **Garden City**, an urban planning concept developed in the late 19th century by English historian Sir Ebenezer Howard.
According to this vision, the ideal city was to have a **balance** between city life and rural life, with the goal in theory of ensuring a healthier,






more sustainable and harmonious city experience for its inhabitants.
The Garden City envisioned a **large central green area** surrounded by low-cost housing and factories. The goal was to create a city that could provide its inhabitants with jobs and green space by dividing it into function-specific zones separated from each other (as an anticipation of the "zoning" we will explore later, later consolidated by the modern movement), increasing a dispersed **urban sprawl.** This, which in the initial conception was supposed to be a strength, actually underlies numerous problems such as social exclusion, alienation from the human context, difficulty in accessing services and moving from one place to another, and social injustice due to the segregation of certain segments of the population.
In fact, there are a number of attempts to implement this model, but they have proved unsuccessful. **Letchworth**, for example, founded in 1903 about 30 miles from London, was conceived with the aim of creating a green belt around the town while providing all the services necessary for residents to survive. Although the original idea was replicated in other cities, the results achieved did not live up to expectations. In many cases, urban sprawl in the surrounding large cities encompassed

*Spatial layout of Howard's Garden City (Howard, 1985)*

the Garden City, turning it into a **dormitory neighborhood** or simple township, highlighting the early problems of urban sprawl and zoning.

The Garden City model was an inspiration to the "diffuse city" envisioned by the **modern movement.** The city is conceived here as a machine, efficient, and rational, in which each component must have its specific function.
The cultural impact of this radical change on the way cities were built in the 20th century was enormous. The "masters" of urban planning, surprised by the spectacle of the massive urbanization of the West at the time, felt that the 20th century city had to be completely new and, therefore, needed completely new ideas.
Radical conceptions were introduced that were based on geometric rigor against what they regarded as "chaos," mechanical and impeccable order against the supposed disorder of an organic system, the functional specialization of streets and public spaces as opposed to their multifunctionality, adapting to the age of the automobile.
The basic idea was to start from zero, defining the European urban heritage (called by Le Corbusier the "donkey city") as **obsolete** and advocating the **demolition of the old city** to make way for a new city with fixed, loosely connected and well-defined features in an immutable plan by a small number of "experts," i.e., adopting a **"top-down"** approach.
In this way, however, many of the most influential architects and urban planners of the modern period contributed to the creation of inhumane and antisocial urban places, justifying their large-scale design and construction.
The main features of the modern ideal city, of which Les Corbusier's "Ville Radieuse," represents the greatest expression, will be described in the following paragraph, based on Jan Woudstra's article "The Corbusian Landscape: Arcadia or No Man's Land?" *(Woudstra, 2000)*

The first principle on which the Ville Radieuse is based is **zoning**. Since the city is conceived as a **mechanism**, each neighborhood corresponds to a **specific function**. This is done in order to increase the precision of the design of each part, ensuring that it functions properly and meets the specific needs associated with its function. This concept, however, goes to detract from the very many facets and **complexities** of the city elements, which cannot be taken into account as **individual entities** in their own right, like, precisely, gears in a car, because they are constantly evolving, and therefore setting functional areas prevents one from "enhancing as much as possible in each case the capacity of the urban environment to foster a mix of uses and users." *(Greaves et al., 2007*).
Streets and community spaces are thought of far apart, so that there are pedestrian environments without **any exchange with traffic**.

Buildings are also designed to be **independent** of the streets, so as



to break any possible closure of the streetscape and to encourage the creation of healthier residential spaces, away from city traffic and preventing activities on the ground floor of the buildings from overlapping with what was happening in the streets. Every open area and especially all streets where designed for only **one type of user**, losing the enrichment that is brought by mixed-use elements and risking leading to **social exclusion**.
Moreover, the isolation of public areas from the rest of the activities goes against the concept of **compact, balanced and mixed communities** with possibilities for dialogue and social encounters.

The arrangement of buildings in the ville Radieuse is open to parks by forming "**superisolates**." The **green areas** were intended to surround the buildings, thinking of them as a defensive structure against problems from the streets (noise, danger, pollution). The green area accordingly according to these premises should be designed as wide as possible, so as to form a pedestrian superisolate bordered by parking areas and arterial roads and equipped with basic facilities and services in the center of it. Special attention is paid to parks, which according to the modernist conception are the opposite of cities. The latter, according to this conception, is understood as "bad" even if necessary, and city parks are used as a means of "saving" citizens from their own city.
These measures thus had the function of allowing nature to enter the city, saving it from its "**evil character**." According to later theories, closer to a sustainable approach, and according to several authors to whom we will refer later (such as J.Jacobs), the city is instead seen as an important achievement of human civilization, in which the specific natural resources available to each city must obviously be preserved but carefully **connected** and integrated into city life. If poorly designed, nature in the city can act to the detriment of the environment and urban life, fostering anti-social behavior, enlarging the urban fabric, creating physical barriers to the collective use of spaces, or adding abandoned land spaces.
A key element is that of the **top-down approach**, i.e., a decision-making process completely managed "from above" that is, by one or more planners, without any kind of feedback from the real users of the process.
The city, seen as a machine, is designed once and according to this conception remains virtually unchanging, entrusting the effectiveness of the project to a small number of experienced people. Design is something "pure," unchanging, and unchallengeable according to the modernist conception, yet it is not possible in a single project to take into account the needs of all categories of citizens, and especially their continuous evolution over time, which is why there is a need for constant dialogue with the end users of the project.
The simplification of the city promoted by modernism proved to be perfectly in line with the new processes of massive land development, which aspired to an increase in the real estate trade, although from a

social, environmental and economic point of view for citizens it turned out to be a huge undoing, representing a gradual distancing of the culture of urban planning and design from real life.
This is not due to bad intentions, but rather to a total paradigm shift, coinciding precisely with the "modernism" movement, which was intrinsically rooted in urban planning culture and still represents its foundation.
The great paradox lies in the fact that the city envisioned by the great "masters" of modernism never really worked in the large cities for which it was conceived. When it did work, it was only in small rural villages where low population density and sprawl was certainly not a problem, or in districts inhabited by affluent people who did not seek any kind of complexity.
In the article "Plot-based urbanism: toward time-consciousness in place-making" *(Porta & Romice, 2010),* the authors argue for the establishment of the two models of "Garden City" and "Radiant City" as **foundational** to the **entire urban planning disicipline** from their origins. However, they argue that after so long and so many achievements, and especially after the many environmental challenges posed by global warming and the countless social challenges posed by global urbanization, the problems with these two foundational models are obvious to all: they are simply no longer sustainable.
The article cites the **Levittown case** and the **Pruitt-Igoe case** as examples, as emblems of urban planning solutions, unfortunately extremely common in different parts of the world, that have failed.
Levittown, created by developer William Levitt in 1948 in New York City, represents the model of low-density suburban development that gave rise to the phenomenon of "**sprawl**" (which we will elaborate on in later chapters) - a form of single-family residential commercial development aimed at the lower-middle class.
Pruitt-Igoe, on the other hand, was an (award-winning) social housing project located in St. Louis, Missouri, USA, built in 1955 by architect Minoru Yamasaki. The project, based on Le Corbusier's Radian City principles, consisted of 33 apartment buildings of 11 stories in height located in a large open "green" area. Despite the high-rise building type, the project did not exceed a gross land density of 50 units per acre. However, since its completion, Pruitt-Igoe suffered all kinds of social problems and was eventually completely demolished in 1972. The demolition, broadcast live across the United States, raised a wide debate about the role that spatial setting plays in shaping social behavior and created an early popular awareness of the shortcomings of the modern city. Today, Pruitt-Igoe is still considered a symbol of the failures of modern city planning.
Moreover, the arguments based on social hygiene and public health that supported the "dispersed city" in the past have largely been superseded, thanks to new technologies and scientific knowledge that enable these issues to be addressed more effectively.
Public space and the consequent possibility of a sense of community



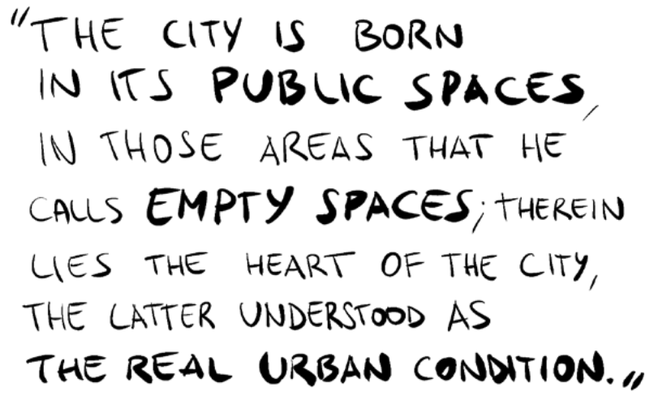


and social dialogue (and its highest expression, the "square") are the elements that have been most affected by the introduction of this approach.
The Modern Movement as reiterated by Faroldi *(Emilio Faroldi, 2020)*, manifests a clear indifference towards the design of **public spaces**.
The square as a spatial element is completely questioned as lacking a productive, identifying function in line with modern dogmas of **mechanism** and **functionalism.**
The urban void, which used to be formed by the volumes of buildings, in shared streets and squares, now becomes subject also to **zoning**, of modernist functional masses, thought a priori in relation to each other, or in relation to a distant landscape, far from the human dimensions of shared spaces.
The Modern Movement as a result has been the subject of much academic criticism for its negative impacts on both citizens and the environment, even defined as an "**anti-urbanist**" movement *(Talen, 2005).*

*Top: Le Corbusier, Radiant City (1930)*

# 1.3 Paradigm shift context

During the 1950s there was a revisiting of modernist dogmas that, on an urban scale, particularly in Italy, also led to a gradual recovery of the concept of the square and its historical memory as a central element in the design of new cities and redevelopment of existing ones *(Emilio Faroldi, 2020)*.
These years were characterized by the reconstruction and necessary management of **urban voids**, which, even within historic cities, reveals a cultural crossroads on the urban theme.
In 1951, in fact, the **VIII CIAM Congres**s , which deals with the problem of the urban core, takes place. Here urban space is defined by J L Sert as follows:




*-Sert, 1952*

Open-air plazas and amphitheaters reassume their importance, as autonomous and separately built places from the rest, in response to the complete dispersion and total isolation brought forward by **modernist dogmas**.
However, the most impactful and radical turn in response to the top-down and mechanistic approach of traditional urbanism, comes from the United States in the early 1960s, in favor of the recovery of **real human values and needs**, through innovators who brought about a total paradigm shift in the conception of the city and who made an enormous contribution in the theories developed in the following years, toward a more humane and less dogmatic approach.
The **cultural rethinking** against the dominant urban planning approach that occurred in Italy and other European countries, in fact, occurred quite naturally, considering the firm **historical roots** of European cities.

What happened in the **U.S.**, where the context in which these new ideas began to creep in, turned out to be much more hostile and complex from this point of view, and thus represented a radical change of course, which introduced the concept of "**bottom up**" design, to give voice to the real needs of citizens.
This new approach originated thanks to several figures such as **Jane Jacobs, William H Whyte, Gordon Cullen , Christopher Alexander, Oscar Newman, Kevin Lynch**, and thanks to the contribution of the Rockefeller Foundation.
The "bottom up" approach was translated in the 1970s, by **Fred Kent** and the nonprofit "**Project for Public Spaces**" he founded, into the concept of "**Placemaking,**" identified in this thesis as a response to some of the problems analyzed in this and subsequent chapters.
This practice, which has successively involved more than 50 countries around the world, invites inhabitants to **re-imagine** and reconfigure, in a **collective form**, the city starting from the public space, read as the beating heart of the city and delegated to formulate the identity of the place for the benefit of an entire community.
In the following pages we will attempt to explain the role of the main actors in this revolutionary **shift** from a **top-down** to a **bottom-up** approach within urban design.

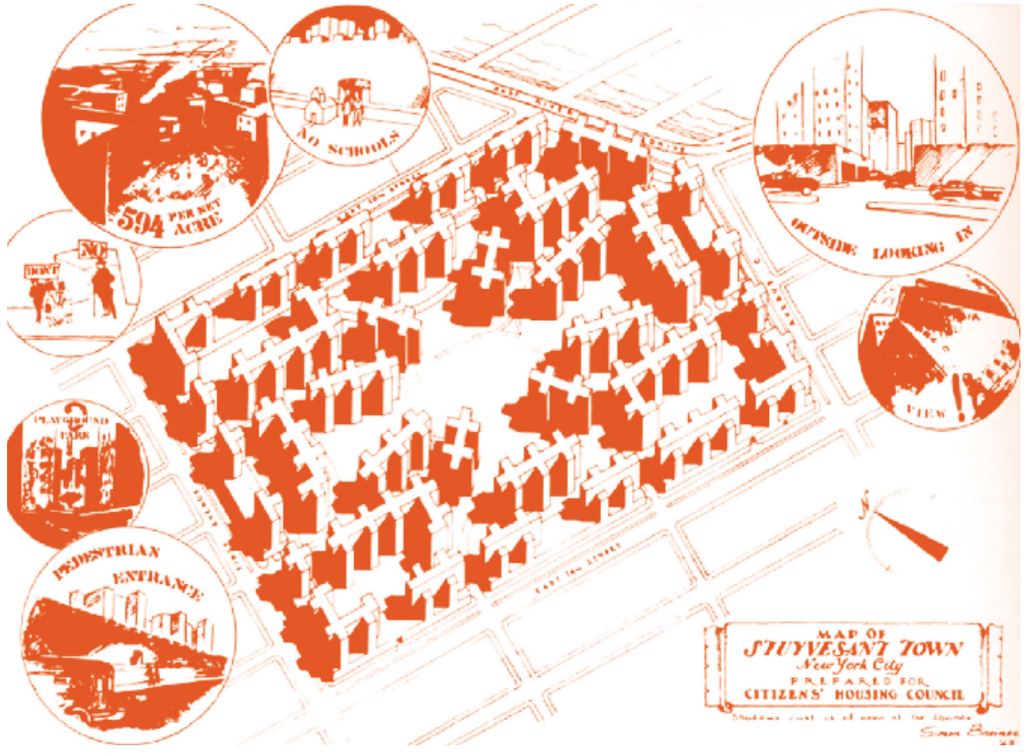
The starting context from which these revolutionary ideas emerged is that of **1950s U.S.**, in response to urban practices put in place in response to the housing shortage following World War II and the Great Depression, developed according to urban practices very close to the critical points of modern urbanism explained in the preceding paragraphs.
The context in which these innovations fit is explored by Peter L. Laurence in the article "The Death and Life of Urban Design: Jane Jacobs, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the New Urbanism Research, 1955-1965." *(Peter L. Laurence, 2006)*
By the end of World War II, the **lack of housing** in American cities was a known fact. This problem was exacerbated when some 20 million servicemen and women returned from military service overseas, but the first signs of **"No Vacancy"** dated back to the period even before the war.
During the Great Depression, increasingly extreme legislative measures

were taken to deal with the crisis. Under the New Deal, the **Housing Act of 1934** sought to incentivize private housing construction through mortgage guarantees while the Public Works Administration built public housing.
The Federal Housing Authority was created by the Housing Act of 1934, and local institutions such as the New York Housing Authority collaborated with the Public Works Administration on New York's first housing projects-First Houses on the Lower East Side, Harlem River Houses in Harlem, and Williamsburg Houses in Brooklyn.
By 1938, most states had established local housing authorities, which managed nearly 50 public housing projects *(Architectural Forum, 1938)*.
In New York City, the New York City Housing Authority had already demolished vast tracts of buildings by the end of 1938, following a "**creative destruction**" perspective, leading to the "largest elimination of Old Law housing in the city's history" *(Schwartz, 1993)*.
The sheer magnitude of the housing problem, together with the ever-expanding means to address it, made housing the main challenge of urban design both before and after the war.
Indeed, even during the war years, despite the slowdown in work on non-military buildings, demolitions of areas considered 'blighted' continued to make way for new housing developments, and in some cases condominium housing was built to house the military.

The first major public housing project in New York State, was **Fort Greene Houses** in Brooklyn, opened in May 1941 and designed by a team consisting of Henry Churchill, Wallace K. Harrison, Ely Jacques Kahn, Albert Mayer and Clarence Stein.
The structure housed 13,000 Brooklyn Navy Yard soldiers and workers before returning to a public housing project, becoming an emblem of failed housing projects, and a sign of broader urban problems.
Despite the qualitative paucity of the Fort Greene project, it represented a model for later projects including notably **Stuyvesant Town**, a private housing project on Manhattan's Lower East Side designed for the middle class.

Stuyvesant Town, was actually planned before the war but construction began later. Given the problem of the tremendous need for new housing and the associated costs, the project was entrusted to **Metropolitan Life** (a large insurance company), which guided all aspects of the project, from site selection to a **discriminatory rental policy.**
The main promoter of this project was **Robert Moses**, the then commissioner of the "New York City Department of Parks and Recreation," with whom Metropolitan pursued the Stuyvesant Town project in 1942.
The state legislature passed a bill to initiate the project, amending urban redevelopment laws that placed a limit on insurance companies' control over real estate developments. *(Moses, 1943)*.
Stuyvesant Town took the place of 18 blocks of the Lower East Side, replacing what were once its public streets and areas of individual






*Right from the top: . Fort Greene Houses, Brooklyn Source From NYCHA e The La Guardia and Wagner Archives in Laurence P. L., (June 2006) "The Death and Life of Urban Design: Jane Jacobs, The Rockefeller Foundation and the New Research in Urbanism, 1955-1965", Journal of Urban Design*

*Stuyvesant Town, 1943 architect Simon Breines, drawing summarizing the criticisms of Stuyvesant's urban plan Source: Brienes (1943)*

private property, which thus became a new property of the "Metropolitan Life Insurance Company."
This razed 600 buildings over the next two years, containing 500 factories and small businesses, three churches, three schools, two theaters, several private homes and even fairly new apartment buildings.
Numerous lawsuits and appeals, led Stuyvesant Town to present huge problems such as **racial segregation** and too much use of eminent domain in addition to the **total lack of public participation** in the planning process.
The neighborhood on which it was built, the **Gashouse District**, was indeed characterized by many internal inconveniences, (such as lack of space in housing, poor hot water supply, inadequate neighborhood services etc...) but rather than attempt to solve them on time, the choice was made to **raze everything** and build from 0, replacing yes, the former gas tanks, old industrial yards and abandoned lots, but also a working and inhabited neighborhood with its own intrinsic life.

The demolition of the Gashouse District caused what the New York Times in 1945 described as *"the largest and most significant **mass movement** of families in New York City history" (Cooper, 1945).* About 3,000 families, and eleven thousand people found themselves **homeless**.

The housing shortage that kicked off Stuyvesant Town in the beginning, and the fact that more housing was being destroyed during and immediately after the war than the amount of new housing being built, many residents of the Gashouse district were **displaced** *(Farrell, 1947)*.
Thus, we witnessed a scenario in which the housing shortage completely obscured untested urban design limitations (such as the transformation of the diversified structure of the original town into **monolithic and homogeneous super-isolates,** and the conversion of public space into private space).

Examples such as Stuyvesant town and Fort Greene were put forward as exemplars (due to their success on a **quantitative level**) for what came to be called the "**McGoldrick Plan**," a plan to purchase "slums," and resell them by public auction divided into **super blocks** containing 50,000 to 300,000 square feet each.
Prior to the auction, the plan called for specific **zoning** for different uses to encourage the construction of apartment buildings and a variety of other new structures.
To support such a plan, in his November 1944 article "'The Super-Block Instead of Slums," *(McGoldrick, 1944)* McGoldrick effectively argued that the **city itself was obsolete** and that the old tenements and their blocks were one piece to be demolished.
McGoldrick's main interest, as it was for Moses, was to seek means for **large-scale reconstruction.**

Rebuilding the city, however, was much more complicated than



demolishing it, and although postwar optimism and hopes for better cities and housing initially favored slum destruction and modernization, urban planners and architects had little experience with large-scale reconstruction or the ramifications of their untested urban development. Moreover, while European urban centers destroyed by wartime bombing were often rebuilt on **historic plans** or models, in America the quest for modernity allowed some of the more **theoretical, though dated**, **urban planning concepts** to be put into practice.




*The Gashouse District before Stuyvesant Town, 15th Street and Avenue B, in February 1941.*
*Source: Percy Loomis Sperr, da New York Public Library in Laurence P. L., (June 2006) "The Death and Life of Urban Design: Jane Jacobs, The Rockefeller Foundation and the New Research in Urbanism, 1955-1965", Journal of Urban Design*

## 1.4 The beginning of change

However, these major urban interventions were not welcomed by all. In 1952 for example, architect **Charles Platt,** former president of the Municipal Art Society of New York, argued that the total destruction of urban blocks was wrong since many of the buildings slated for demolition could still be made habitable *(Grutzner, 1952)*. He argued that the problem with **slums** was **overcrowding**, not the quality of the **buildings**.
The clearing of the slums was gradually being seen more and more not as improving the cities but destroying them.

**Shirley Hayes**, a committee member of the new local Community Planning Board set up by Manhattan Borough President Robert F. Wagner Jr, founded the Washington Square Park Committee and for seven years fought Robert Moses' various plans to, among others, extend **Fifth Avenue** and bisect **Washington Square** in the **Greenwich Village** neighborhood with a freeway.
This is where a key player in the cultural shift that occurred in these years comes in: **Jane Jacobs**, a Greenwich Village resident at the time and very concerned about the situation.
Jane Jacobs was a writer and activist who advocated new approaches to **community-based urban planning** for more than 40 years. Jacobs had no professional training in the field of urban planning or architecture, but through her observations and communication skills, she was able, better than many urban planners, to understand the inherent workings of cities, about what their basic characteristics are and its true needs.
Jane Jacobs joined the cause of the Washington Square Park Committee founded by Shirley Hayes, helping in the **letter-writing** campaign to **Mayor Wagner** and the new borough president.
Increasingly interested in urban planning issues, Jane Jacobs, familiar with the struggles of Greenwich Village, also took an interest in the case of **East Harlem**, overwhelmed by renewal plans and housing projects that made her neighborhood's problems seem trivial by comparison.
While Greenwich Village was poised to get its first Moses housing project in the mid-1950s, East Harlem was home to more than a dozen housing projects, with a total of about **14,000 housing units**.
The shock and experience of East Harlem inspired one of Jacobs' first articles for **Architectural Forum**, which he presented as a paper at the First Harvard Urban Design Conference in April 1956.



While the theoretical reasons were not yet clear, those at the forefront of urban renewal already felt that the new contemporary urban design models were fundamentally **anti-city**, at odds with the essential multilayered and multifaceted nature of the city.
Even **McGoldrick,** as early as 1944, stated that slum clearance projects were not doing what was expected of them. In the same article in which he promoted them he wrote that:
"Such projects have had no regenerative effect on the areas in which they are located" *(McGoldrick, 1944, p. 35)*.

This context of reconstruction, confusion, and protest underscored the need to better understand cities and led to the creation of the **Rockefeller Foundation**'s program for urban design research.
The Foundation's first grant in the field, was awarded in April 1954 to **Gyorgy Kepes** and **Kevin Lynch** of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) School of Architecture and Planning. It was a research project to study the foundations of human **perception** and understanding of the **urban environment** and was among the first research in that field. Emerging from an era when planning was dominated by the **technical and financial efficiency** of postwar functionalism, it later led to what may be considered the first text in the postwar context on these contemporary issues, Lynch's book "The Image of the City" *(Lynch, 1960)*.
As an alternative to what would later be described as "naive functionalism," Lynch and Kepes' broader project emphasized the **human and social side of urbanism.** It was a study that, despite its limitations at the methodological level (based on subjective impressions of a statistically small sample) provided a "historical approach, examining in detail the origin, development and peculiar problems of individual cities" *(D'Arms, 1954)*.

Later it was **Chadbourne Gilpatric**, of the **Rockefeller Foundation,** who identified **Jane Jacobs** another excellent candidate to pursue new studies in urbanism, after reading a draft of Jacobs' "Downtown is for People" *(Jacobs, 1958)*, later published in **Fortune magazine**.
When Jacobs described the draft of his book on cities to Gilpatric, he was very pleased with her work and, with the recommendation of prominent authors including **Lewis Mumford**, in September 1958 J. Jacobs was awarded the first of three grants to write it.

In those years a climate of change was beginningclimate of change was beginning: at Gilpatric's suggestion, University of Pennsylvania professors **David Crane** and **William Wheaton** organized a "Conference on Urban Design Criticism" for October 1958, funded by a substantial grant from the Foundation, bringing together some of the best thinkers

in the field including, for example, **Mumford, Lynch, McHarg, JB Jackson** and many others, as well as **J. Jacobs** herself. The conference allowed an interesting exchange of information and views on the subject causing a ripple effect.
These kind of contacts led to important contaminations in the work of Jacobs.
In particular, "**Science and Complexity**" by Dr. Warren Weaver (one of the most distinguished scientists of the time) totally changed her view of the city:,
This text was very important to Jacobs because it allowed her to pave the way toward a **systemic approach**, which was fundamental to her theories.
In his essay "Science and Complexity," Weaver, analyzes problems of varying **complexity from** a scientific point of view (dividing them into simple, of organized complexity, of disorganized complexity), arguing that these "involve the analysis of systems that are organic wholes, with their parts in close interrelation." *(Weaver, 1948)*

This essay galvanized Jacobs' thoughts on the complexity of the city and provided the theoretical conclusion for the observations Jacobs described.
Applying Weaver's concepts, Jacobs argued that the **city was like other living things**, a system of "organized complexity," of interrelated and interdependent variables.
By making this leap, Jacobs became one of the first promulgators of **complexity science outside the scientific disciplines** and the first person to apply these concepts to **urban dynamics**.
In his later books, moreover, such as "The Nature of Economies" *(Jacobs, 2000)*, Jacobs discussed nonlinear dynamics and chaos theory, and the application of **complexity theory** to human and natural systems.
With the Foundation's support and Weaver's influence, then, Jacobs wrote a seminal work, not only because it was sorely needed at the time but also because it largely preserves the immutability and freshness of





the scientific principles from which it draws its inspiration, becoming one of the most important books on the urban subject.

Analyzing "**The Death and Life of Great American Cities**" *(Jacobs, 1961)* in more detail provides several useful insights into how a totally **top-down** approach, so much discussed within this chapter, fails in the interpretation and design of sustainable cities.
The book is divided into five parts, and begins precisely with Jacobs' attack on the **modernist urban planning practices** of the time.
As explained in "Contemporary Perspectives on Jane Jacobs" *(Dirk Schubert, 2014)* she not only criticizes the main methods and ideas that planners use in their urban interventions, but also questions their very foundation. What he argues against are "modern, orthodox urbanism and reconstruction," placed on the same plane, thus also understood by contemporaries as a further expression of the concepts that, in the early nineteenth century, gave birth to urbanism.
*"practically all modern urban planning has been adapted and embroidered on this silly substance" (Jacobs, 1961, p.26).*

Thus, there would be no difference, according to Jacobs, between Ebenezer Howard's garden city and Le Corbusier's modernist city; at the level of substance, they would both be equally "stupid."
The history of urbanism is seen by Jacobs as a series of **models** that **impose** and **justify** an order alienated from existing cities, with varying degrees of technical development or utopianism. It is in her view a set of abstract ideals that cannot be reconciled with real city life.
The book suggests that cities should be diverse and **multifunctional,** with a mix of activities and people living and working closely together. She also criticizes the separation of land uses and reliance on automobile transportation that was prevalent at the time, arguing that these approaches were destroying the fabric of urban life and leading to **urban decay**.
Jacobs' ideas, as mentioned earlier, are based on her **observations** of the streets and neighborhoods of **New York City,** where she lived and worked. She draws on examples from various neighborhoods, such as **Greenwich Village**, to illustrate how diverse and vibrant neighborhoods can thrive when they are designed to support the needs of the people who live there, while also emphasizing the importance of **small-scale, mixed-use developments** that allow for easy **interaction** between people and places.
Throughout the book, Jacobs argues that a city's success depends on creating **vibrant, socially engaged neighborhoods** shaped by the people who live there, thus advocating an approach to urban planning based on people's needs, rather than the demands of the real estate industry or government officials.

Mary Rowe in her contribution for the book "Contemporary Perspectives on Jane Jacobs" *(Dirk Schubert, 2014)* explains that what is really behind

*Participants in the October 1958 conference on the critique of urban design. From left to right: William LC Wheaton, Lewis Mumford, Ian McHarg, JB Jackson, David Crane, Louis Kahn, G. Holmes Perkins, Arthur Holden, segretario di Perkins, Catherine Bauer Wurster, Leslie Cheek, la signora Eric Larrabee, Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, Gordon Stephenson, la signora Grady Clay e IM Pei. Source: Peter L. Laurence, (June 2006) "The Death and Life of Urban Design: Jane Jacobs, The Rockefeller Foundation and the New Research in Urbanism, 1955–1965", Journal of Urban Design*

J.Jacobs work is her **systemic conception** of the city, as anticipated in reference to the influence of Dr. Warren Weaver's work on her writings.
As the article suggests, Jane was one of the first observers to write about "**self-organization**," what is now a very common term in the life sciences, organizational developments, social network analysis, computer software design, theoretical physics and quantum mechanics, social welfare, public health, and much more.

Bianca Tavolari in the article "Jane Jacobs: contradictions and tensions" *(Tavolari, 2019)* talks about the images used by Jacobs to explain her concepts, underlining how these have determined its effectiveness. For example, to explain the concept of system, Jacobs uses the image of an ***intricate ballet*** *(Jacobs, 1961),* which takes place on the sidewalk of her street in Greenwich Village. Dance is chosen as an imagery to describe the movement of the many people who pass by during the day:
The children who "walk by the center of the stage" towards their school, the taxi's "morning ritual", workers that take the same path every day, "character dancers" such as bearded men in motor scooters, hatted drunks or skating teens – till nightfall, when

"THE BALLET GOES ON UNDER LIGHTS,
EDDYING BACK AND FORTH BUT
INTENSIFYING AT THE BRIGHT SPOTLIGHTS
POOLS OF JOE'S SIDEWALK PIZZA
DISPENSARY, THE BARS, THE DELICATESSEN,
THE RESTAURANT AND THE DRUG STORE"

*-Jacobs, 1961*

The strength of this passage lies in its ability to synthesize a series of ***crucial arguments*** for the entire book, caoncep that lead the main themes of this thesis and will be deepen in the next chapters. We can see for examples the element of the need for streets to accommodate multiple functions (contrary to what was claimed by the modern movement) in order for it to actually happen. The ballet would certainly not have been born - or at least not with the same diversity - if Jacobs' street were **strictly residential.** With a combination of various types and sizes of residences and commercial establishments, the street attracts a **heterogeneous group** of people who "make their entrance."
The second argument concerns the spontaneous nature associated with this ballet. According to the author, this dance is not interesting because it has been previously tried and meticulously planned, like a



"simple-minded precision dance with everyone kicking up at the same time, twirling in union and bowing o en masse" but because it is a collection of paths and roles that are never repeated in the same way, an ensemble that "is always replete with new improvisations" *(Jacobs, 2011 p.65).*
The third argument pertains to a careful way of looking at the mundane social relationships that develop in the public space of the street. One of Jacobs' main criticisms of modern urban planning is its **detachment from society**, an abstraction that distances it from "common, ordinary things."
The fourth argument, directly connected to the third, concerns the need for **careful and prolonged observation** to understand the dynamics of cities or even a particular street. For example, observing a street in the morning will yield substantially different results compared to observing it at night. Since the street presents a complex set of social relationships, it is crucial to consider them as a process that **unfolds over time**, rather than as a still image.
The fifth argument is that the street - or rather, the sidewalk - is effectively the **public space**. Jacobs' focus is not on public squares or parks, but on pedestrians on public walkways.
And finally, the sixth argument: the observation would have been completely different if Jacobs had looked at Broadway in Times Square instead of a neighborhood street. In other words, there is clearly a question of **scale**. It is not about the individual in the midst of a crowd on a grand avenue, but rather the spontaneous ballet of sidewalks in smaller streets, where people are distinguishable and identifiable.

Jane presented her observations within the context of a deeply and widely held misanthropic worldview that considered cities - where a large number of people worked, lived, and visited - inherently **bad, even evil.** Instead, with her fresh, fundamentally positive, and hopeful observations about how people make their neighborhoods work and how the city actually functions, she proposed an **alternative view.**
The brilliant chapter of "Death and Life," for example, titled "The Need for Old Buildings," is used as a critique of historical preservationists which, it is argued, hinder the **new skyscrapers** that a city needs to be fully accessible. Jane was not against tall buildings but simply argued that they should be placed where appropriate. Everything should be designed in line with the true needs of the neighborhood, fully understanding the city and how it is used over time by its citizens, wandering the streets and observing its true essence. This is an opposite view to that used by urban planners of the time, which Jane referred to as a **bird's-eye view**, from above without appreciating the details of city life and without understanding its connections.

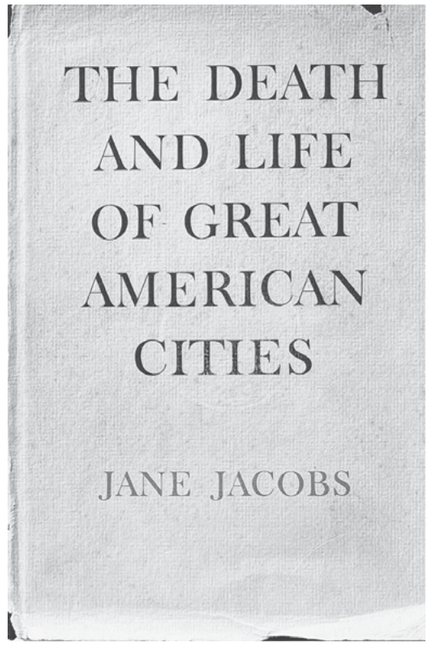
As highlighted in the article "Contemporary Perspectives on Jane Jacobs" *(Schubert, 2014)*, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" *(Jacobs, 1961)* had a tremendous impact on urban planning and urban

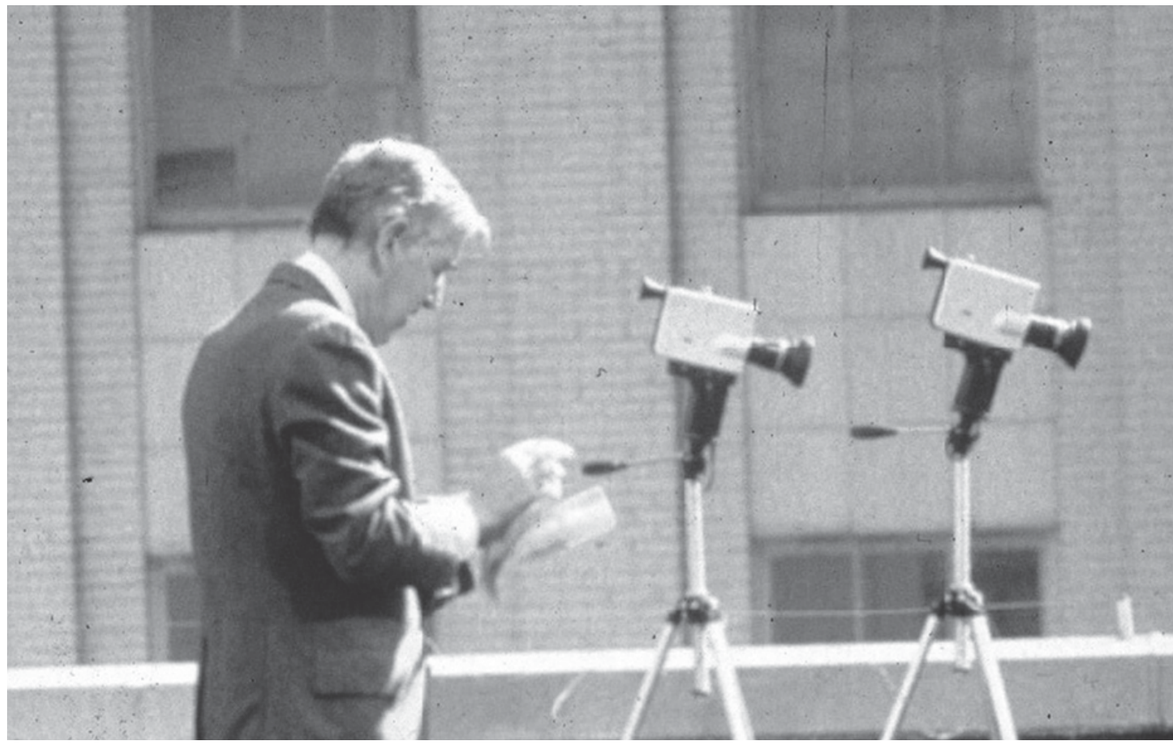
renewal both in North America and Europe.
It was received and commented upon in various ways by her contemporaries and in the years that followed. Jane Jacobs' approach was unconventional: she didn't work with maps and statistics but focused solely on seeking the truth from facts, without mincing words and without sparing any criticism when necessary. For this reason, Jacobs had many enemies, most notably **Robert Moses**, who even refused to look at her book. Initially, she had the support of the famous writer and urbanist **Lewis Mumford**, but they became antagonists after she criticized his theories based on the Garden City Movement. Mumford later published an article titled "Mother Jacobs's Home Remedies" which criticized Jacobs' book.
Until the publication of Jane Jacobs' "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," Lewis Mumford was the urban critic everyone turned to, considered the primary American commentator on urban planning and everything related to the city. Initially, Mumford supported her, but then a debate opened up between the two due to theoretical differences concerning planning, density, decentralization, and mixed-use developments. What was most controversial were the long-term effects of design and the interpretation of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City, which Jacobs saw as one of those projects that destroy the city.

Jane's contribution, despite her antagonists, was positively received by many people, increasingly so over the years. Within about a decade of the publication of her book, most of her theories had been generally accepted. In 1968, as the approach to urban renewal was slowly beginning to change in New York City, she and her family moved to Toronto to avoid her two sons being drafted into the Vietnam War. Upon her arrival in Canada, she was celebrated as "**our Jane**" and quickly accepted as an expert in urban issues and urban renewal.
Over time, Jane Jacobs became increasingly recognized as an innovator who laid the foundation for numerous advancements in urban planning and beyond.
It was she, along with her contemporary American urbanist **William H. Whyte**, who laid the groundwork for a type of design that is more attentive to **caring for people**, the dimension of neighborhood quality of life, and the importance of public spaces.

In the early 1970s, **William Whyte's "Street Life" project** paved the way for new tools to observe and analyze public spaces and their associated levels of comfort and sociability.
Whyte conducted **film-based observations** and analyses of corporate plazas, urban streets, parks, and other open spaces in **New York City**.
The research resulted in a highly influential book for studying this subject titled **"The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces"** *(W. H. White, 1980)*, which presented conclusions based on decades of meticulous observation and documentation of human behavior in the urban environment.



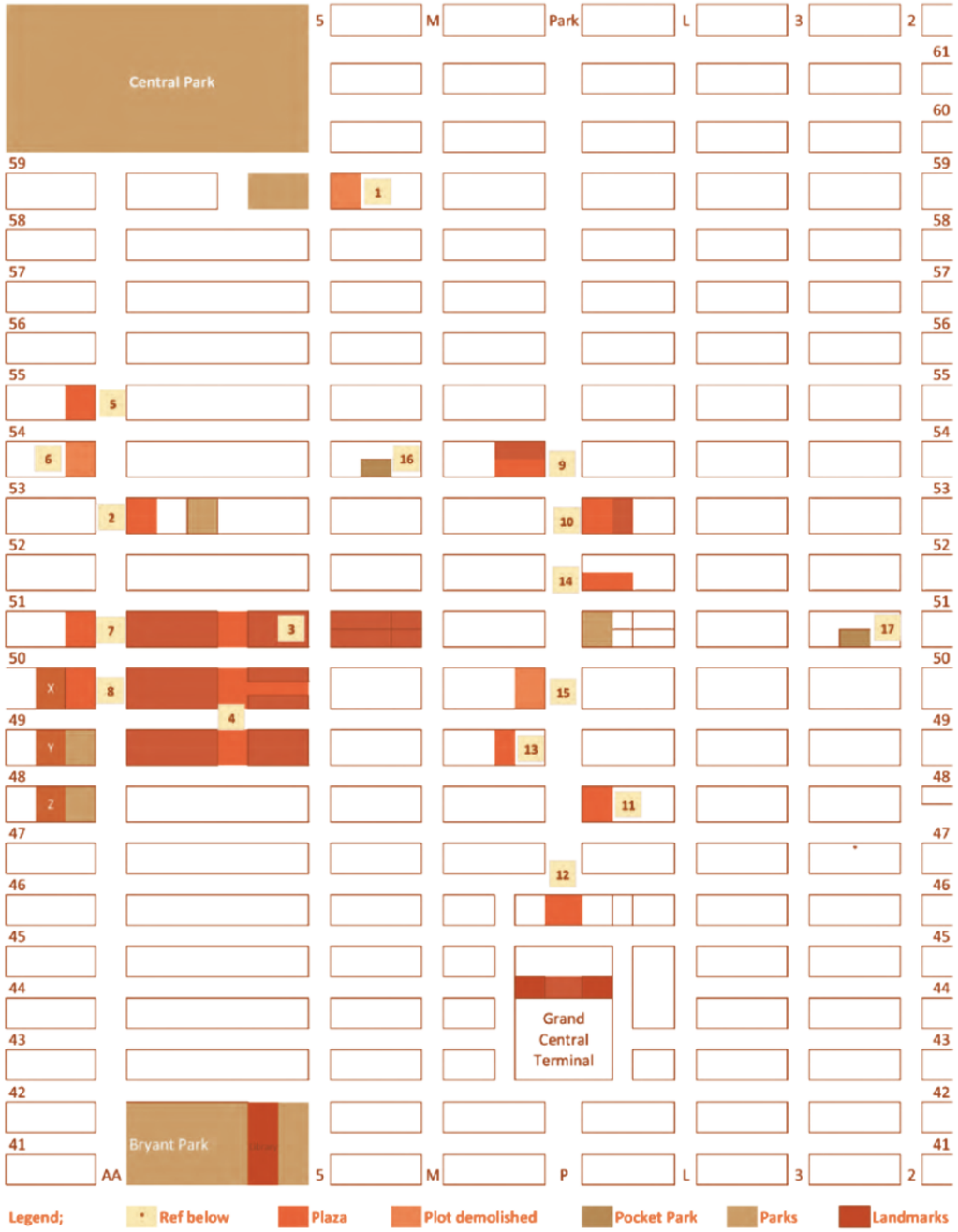



*From the top: Jane Jacobs, The death and life of great American cities, original version*

*Jane Jacobs at a rally speaking against the expansion in Greenwich Village (1966). Photo courtesy of the Burns Library at Boston College*

*W. H. White Whyte working on "Street Life Project", 1980 Source: Project for Public Spaces*




Map of seventeen of the eighteeen spaces analysed by the Street Life Project (the final, Water Street was downtown)

1 *GM- (demolished; now Apple)*
2 CBS Plaza
3 630 5th Ave, Rockefeller Center
4 Exxon Minipark at Rockefeller Center
5 Burlington Plaza
7 Time-Life- 6th Ave (Ave of Am)
8 Exxon - Chase- 1251 6th Ave
9 Lever House
10 Seagram Plaza
11 277 Park Avenue
13 280 Park Avenue
14 345 Park Avenue
15 *ITT (Demolished)*
16 Paley Park- a Pocket Park
17 Greenacre Park- a Pocket Park



The figure of Whyte and his Street Life project are further explored in "For a more livable city, it all comes down to the micro-details: W. H. Whyte and the Street Life Project" (*Miriam Fitzpatrick, 2019*). Following the new urban plans for New York City in 1961, Whyte commented, "There is nothing in the city's procedures to induce it to consider the social uses of design... and once a project is built, there is no check to see if it works well for people. So the world's most expensive open space is wasted for want of look" *(Whyte, 1972)*.

He substained thet for the first fourteen years, the New York City Department of Buildings approved projects solely **based on calculations** without any qualitative evaluation based on **orientation, adjacency**, or **location** of **open space**. In response to this, Whyte carried out the Street Life project, investigating and documenting numerous ***micro-details*** of these new spaces, noting how factors such as the sex and age of occupants, climate and temperature, time of day and year, gestures, interactions, mimetic behavior, urban furniture, water, stair dimensions, railing shape, signage, and bench height, among others, influence human behavior of all kinds.
The figure depicts a **map of the final dataset** from the Street Life project, comprising eighteen spaces in the eastern Midtown area, which formed the core of the team's comparative analysis for the documentary "The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces" *(Whyte, 1980)*.

In 1975, Whyte wrote a more comprehensive guide specifying a series of **design parameters,** including the ratio between the plaza and the street, linear seating length and active storefronts in relation to space, the level of space in relation to the street, size specifications, as well as the inclusion of food vending, water features, and trees.
These specifications became the basis for what would later be the rules for "small urban spaces."
This approach based on **observation** and **taking into account all the details** is extremely in line with the **systemic design theories** that we will explain in the following chapters.

*To the left: Location analysis of Whyte's Project Street Life in East Midtown, New York*
*Source: For a more liveable city, it all comes down to the micro-details: W. H. Whyte and the Street Life Project*

# 1.5 Towards participatory public design

It is based on Whyte's theories that in 1975, **Fred Kent**, after working with **Whyte** on the ***Street Life project***, founded the organization "Project for Public Spaces" and spread the theme of the importance of ***participatory design*** of public spaces.
Project for Public Spaces is the first organization to introduce the concept of "placemaking," which is the creation of public spaces that promote and give voice to communities. Over time, this discipline has spread worldwide and has increasingly become an alternative approach to urban planning, especially in recent years.
Placemaking is increasingly associated with **community involvement** rather than relying solely on the design of a single designer. Its goal is to integrate **social, environmental, and economic sustainability** within contemporary cities, as defined by the Project for Public Spaces on its official website:

*"Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. By strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process through which we can shape our public realm to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution."*
*(Project for Public Spaces)*

Another influential quote related to the new approach to **public spaces**, and illustrative of the concept advocated by the organization, is: "First life, then space, then buildings. The other way around never works." This concept was developed by **Jan Gehl**, a Danish architect and urbanist who, like Jacobs, sought to reinterpret how we perceive urban spaces. Our public spaces should be personalized by the stories of those who inhabit them. **Social exchange** through various types of activities can significantly enrich the places we experience every day.
***The Journal of Public Space*** (a research project developed by City Space Architecture in collaboration with UN-Habitat) contains numerous sources on placemaking and other cutting-edge urban practices.



For example, the article "Leading urban change with people-powered public spaces. The history, and new directions, of the Placemaking movement" *(Ethan Kent, 2019)* provides an overview of how the placemaking movement has evolved and gained momentum in America and around the world.
The article explains that the founding of Project for Public Spaces (PPS) by Fred Kent and his collaborators was once again funded by a grant from the **Rockefeller Foundation** to disseminate **William Whyte's ideas** about urban space and put his proposed tools into practice.
During the first two decades, PPS focused on the revitalization of dysfunctional or degraded public spaces and the development of new place management plans, opposing the prevalent ***hostile architecture*** in American city centers.
Iconic projects like **Bryant Park** (which will be discussed later in Chapter 6 dedicated to case studies), Rockefeller Center, and Chapel Street in New Haven helped define new standards for the management and design of downtown public spaces.
Building on the success of these approaches, PPS directed the concept of placemaking toward increasingly involving communities in every phase of the planning process during the 1990s with a **participatory approach**.
PPS increasingly emphasized this process, as evidenced by projects such as the transformation of New York City streets, Houston's Discovery Green, Detroit's Campus Martius, and the broader downtown area.
In 1997, PPS coined the term "**placemaking**" to give a name to this new approach. At its core is the idea that effectively designing public spaces should go beyond simply doing something for future users of the project but should actively and concretely **involve them throughout the process**.
The guiding principle behind the approach is that "The Community is the Expert" (Kent, 2019) on the places they experience every day and understand the dynamics of perfectly.
In 2003, PPS began to talk about **community-led place creation** as a real movement, which led to several placemaking meetings in the Pacific Northwest to explore various possibilities. By 2006, the word "placemaking" was spreading in popular language, and the idea of placemaking as a movement was finally starting to spread globally.
A fundamental element of placemaking (which will be further explored in subsequent chapters) is to always start with **short-term and low-cost experiments** in both design and programming and management.
In 2010, PPS also launched a campaign aimed at all people interested in the topic, even those not specialized in the field of design and urban planning, to integrate this focus, calling it ***Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper.***
The campaign brought forth numerous projects such as DIY street makeovers or temporary development markets, with strategies and databases from around the world.
With growing global interest in the topic, placemaking has emerged in the last decade as a true **global movement**. To support and give voice

to the movement, PPS launched the Placemaking Leadership Council at a Placemaking Leadership Forum in 2013 in Detroit.
This ***silent movement*** (Kent, 2019) quickly began to take root worldwide. In 2016, the placemaking movement went truly global with the first **International Placemaking Week** in Vancouver, BC, Canada, and the movement's participation in the United Nations Habitat III Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito, Ecuador.
2018 was the year when the placemaking movement began to self-organize, with global networks growing organically around regional leaders and locally defined sub-networks.
2019 started with the first World Urban Forum (**WUF9** in Kuala Lumpur); the **United Nations Habitat III Conference** placed the principles of public space and placemaking at the center of the goals of the New Urban Agenda. Placemaking was presented at WUF9 as an organizational principle to facilitate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.
The founders of PPS now work to support the broader placemaking movement and the network of placemaking organizations that are leading the movement, through the creation of **The Placemaking Fund** and its **PlacemakingX program**, a network to accelerate placemaking for global impact.
With increasing organizational capacity, interest, and support, Project for Public Spaces and the numerous leaders and organizations that make up the placemaking movement continue to grow more solidly. Theories, practices, and models of urbanization have shifted significantly, from a focus on housing units, buildings, and blocks, to more recently, streets and public spaces.

The movement is demonstrating how to flip the structure of cities **starting from places** and, in the process, inventing new **scalable models** crucial for governing, financing, and designing our cities. As leadership towards this goal emerges globally, Project for Public Spaces and PlacemakingX will work together to highlight, connect, and support these people, their ideas, and their projects. The actors of this movement are concretely preparing to define, defend, and further amplify the cause of public spaces and placemaking.
Through the study of what makes great places, they have observed that many of the best public spaces have a **self-organized and self-managed quality**: the people who gather there unconsciously contribute to the experience of everyone else.
Achieving this level of **interaction** often requires carefully coordinated **organization** and management behind the scenes, in other words, ***proactive placemaking***.
In conclusion, in light of the evolutions illustrated in this chapter, it becomes evident how the most substantial changes in the urban context start with a shift in how the city itself is conceived, whether as a **cold machine** designed once to be as efficient as possible, or as an **autopoietic organism**, with its numerous facets, various actors, and continuous and unstoppable small evolutions over time. This is






precisely the element that the modernists - and those who, like them, have used a top-down approach - did not consider: the factor of time, of continuous **evolution,** and the impossibility of having a city always the same from one day to another.
We once again quote Thwaites, Porta, Romice, & Greaves, who speak in their book about the need for a ***time-conscious* approach** *(Greaves et al., 2007).* This means recognizing **change** as an essential dynamic in the evolution of the urban environment, and it is in this light that the concepts of **control, community participation, and self-organization** must be reevaluated.
Once attention is focused on time and change, design disciplines and their tools reveal their weaknesses and require increasingly attentive approaches to all these aspects, which inevitably demand the **participation** of those who experience them firsthand.
This thesis aims to analyze the complex, multifaceted, and continuously changing elements of urban living as such, using a systemic approach that takes into consideration all aspects, including those mentioned above. In the following chapters, the importance of bringing models like placemaking into our cities from a systemic perspective will be examined in more detail, in order to promote more sustainable urban practices and public spaces.

*Placemaking conferences around the world driving the global movement and individual regional networks.; Source: The Journal of Public Space*

*“Se volete credermi bene. Ora dirò come è fatta Ottavia, città-ragnatela. C’è un precipizio in mezzo a due montagne scoscese: la città è sul vuoto, legata alle due creste con funi e catene e passerelle. Si cammina sulle traversine di legno, attenti a non mettere il piede negli intervalli, o ci si aggrappa alle maglie di canapa. Sotto non c’è niente per centinaia e centinaia di metri: qualche nuvola scorre; s’intravede più in basso il fondo del burrone. Questa è la base della città: una rete che serve da passaggio e da sostegno. Tutto il resto, invece d’elevarsi sopra, sta appeso sotto: scale di corda, amache, case fatte a sacco, attaccapanni, terrazzi come navicelle, otri d’acqua, becchi del gas, girarrosti, cesti appesi a spaghi, montacarichi, docce, trapezi e anelli per i giochi, teleferiche, lampadari, vasi con piante dal fogliame pendulo. Sospesa sull’abisso, la vita degli abitanti d’Ottavia è meno incerta che in altre città. Sanno che più di tanto la rete non regge“*

*-Italo Calvino, Le città invisibili*

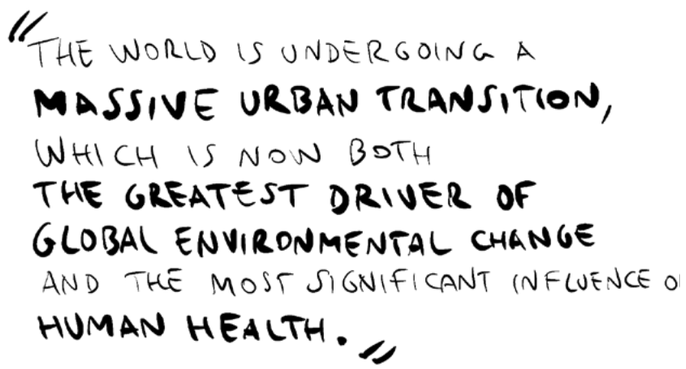


# 02 Urban transition: the limits to growth

*A systemic perspective on urban transition and its global impact*

## 2.1 **Cities as a world driver**

In this historical period the world is subject to **continuous evolutions** and changes on an exponential scale; at the climatic level many upheavals are irreversible and their effects have repercussions on all living beings, modifying their habitats and everyday life. The steps of this dangerous dance are marked by innumerable, slow and imperceptible microactions that, subject to the butterfly effect, have already marked the beginning of catastrophic consequences.
At the urban level, these changes have visible and quantifiable consequences: we are experiencing a massive **urban transition**.




*-Siri, 2016*

Jose Siri, Independent Consultant in Urban Health for the WHO, in 2016 argues that cities are able to offer multiple opportunities to rethink ur modus vivendi and, therefore, can be the springboard
to regenerate the planet and our impact on it.
According to Siri, the current urbanization process is unprecedented in human history: in the last century there was a dramatic shift of people towards urban settlements, determining an economic, social, cultural and ecological transition such as to represent the largest radical change of habitat experienced by man. In fact, most of the current generations who still live in the city are not native, and their great-grandparents faced dilemmas and pleasures of rural life before deciding to move. As Siri points out, these ancient generations have experienced first-hand the **great differences** that exist **between city and countryside**, which are multiple and perceptible on several levels: sensory, aesthetic, physical and cognitive. In particular, the disparity from the point of view of the quality of health is significant, as it has led to a drastic change in human daily life.
Sometimes, this has had a positive knock-on effect on urban life: greater health protection is a factor that allows access to a wider range of opportunities, and this implies a decrease in poverty
and crime rates, a condition that allows people to live more serenely. This enticing prospect has pushed millions of people to move to cities, thus abandoning suburbs and small towns. This **mass migration** is still ongoing, since urban settlements offer opportunities for work, study and training that do not compare with the small ones present in small rural towns.
Today's young people, in particular, decide to try their hand at new challenges by venturing to places different from their childhood horizons, often choosing to move to places that are **more stimulating for their personal maturation**. Tendentially, the new generations are characterized by a remarkable open-mindedness and a strong propensity to self-expression, elements that can find fertile ground in the possibilities offered by large metropolises, while they would be more limited in small realities of origin. The same pattern occurs at the level of **professional growth**: the exponential speed to which the evolution of science and knowledge is subjected, in fact, also involves the use of new professional figures and their consequent insertion into the world of work, increasingly multifaceted and complex compared to the past.
In fact, cities generate more than 80% of global economic output, and innovations in different fields of human knowledge (such as medicine, technology, art, science and culture in general) originated in the womb of a big city *(Siri, 2016)*. Worldwide, more than 90% of patent-protected projects are born in a metropolitan urban context, which however represents only 23% of the total urban population *(Rothwell et. al, 2013)*.
The channeling of an exorbitant number of people to a particular city, however, comes **at the expense of rural areas** and small villages in the rest of the territory. The following Data Visualization maps created by designer Terence Fosstodon with the software "Rayshader"
(published on Twitter with the profile @researchremora) offer a visual overview of population density in different countries around the world: it is interesting to note that the phenomenon occurs both in the richest countries (such as Italy, France, England and the United States of America), as well as in poorer or developing countries (such as Mexico, Bangladesh, India and Kenya).
Having ascertained these data, critical questions arise regarding the consequences deriving from **the centralization of the population in urban** settlements, to which all territories in every part of the globe are obviously subject: what does this disproportionate increase in the number of inhabitants in urban areas entail? What are the consequences for the vast and degraded surrounding suburban areas? And what happens in the small countries of origin as a result of

the emigration of human capital?
The answers can be written within two phenomena: **gentrification** and **shrinkage**. The first, being closely related to the urban context, will be presented in the next paragraphs; once the critical arguments following it have been concluded, the second oncept will be reintroduced and explained, instead relating to the current condition of rural villages and suburbs.







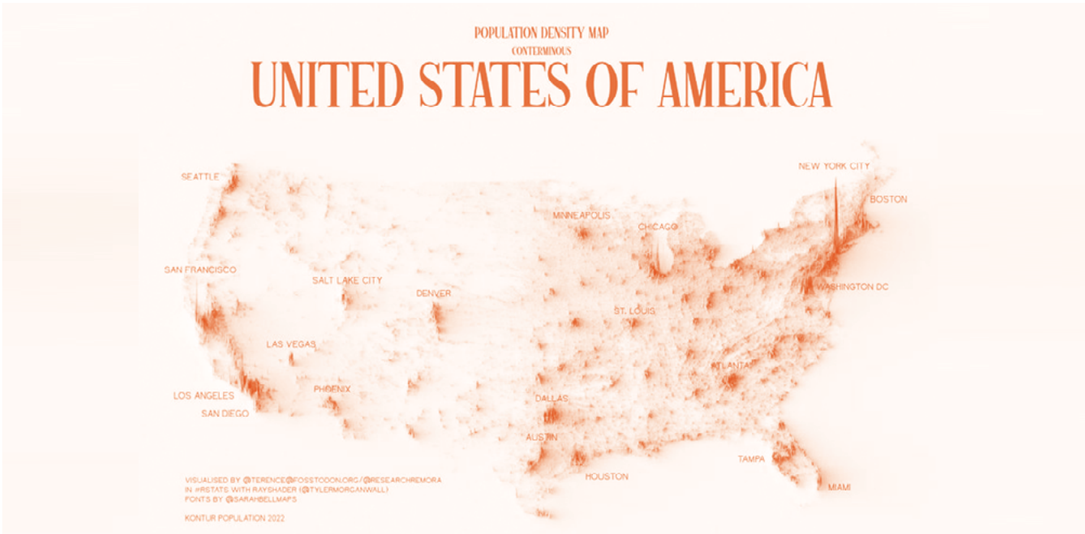


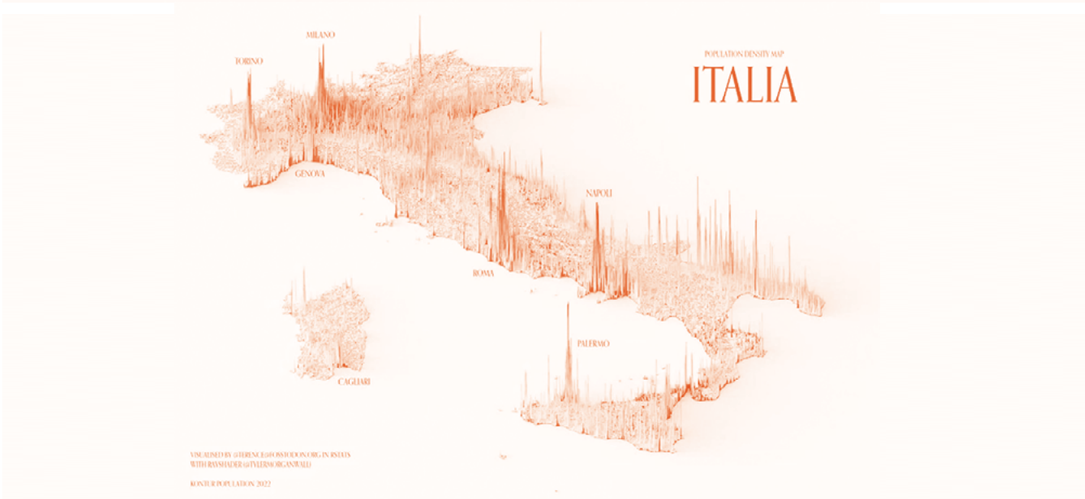




*Data Visualization - population density maps*
*Source: Terence Fosstodon Twitter Profile*



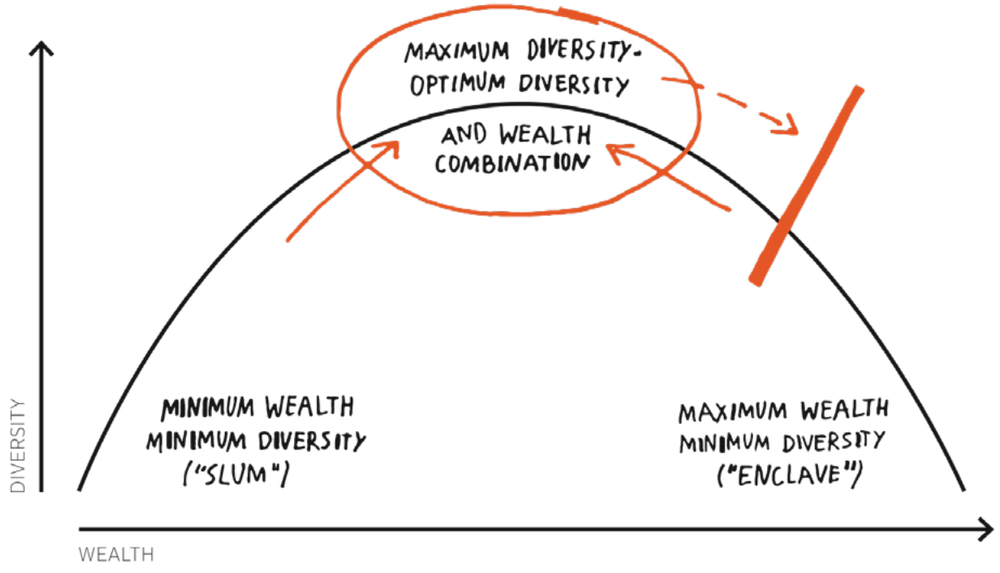
## 2.2 The risk of monocolture in gentrification

According to the *Treccani* vocabulary, gentrification consists of actions of redevelopment of neighborhoods of a given city that lead to a renewal such as to trigger an increase in the value of the properties and, consequently, in the average rental price; the original inhabitants, therefore, decide to move to other areas of the city because they are unable to maintain that particular lifestyle.
In 2017 Peter Moskowitz argues that these events occur because **the urban system prioritizes economic and capital interests at the expense of real human needs**; therefore, the allocation of the urban budget is assisted by a privileged few in order to satisfy their desires; these people are the only ones who can afford to live in places characterized by high standards and standards of living, benefiting from the high quality of the services that derive from it.
The author Michael W. Mehaffy in his 2020 article discusses the problem of gentrification by reviving the thought of Jane Jacobs.
The anthropologist argues that, in itself, neither the tendency of a large number of rich people to move to a particular neighborhood nor the increase in investment in it is a problem; this picture takes on a negative meaning only if it involves an **involuntary removal of the original residents** of the area in question (who lived there before urban renewal actions occurred): in this case, the territory experiences a "self-destruction of diversity" which, to adopt Jacobs' terminology, risks being characterized as a **"monoculture" at the urban level** because it becomes the cause of the loss of diversity and opportunities offered by the variety of a community.
This event **destroys the urban vitality** that, at one time, attracted the original people to that particular area; gentrification, therefore, forces the less well-off to emigrate elsewhere, surreptitiously letting the richest take over.

Mehaffy represented this condition through a graph he called ***"Jacobs curve"***, placing on the axis of the ordinates the factor "diversity", namely the urban diversity, while on the abscissa axis the "wealth", the well-being of the resident population. The values of the curve are represented by a parabola with concavity downwards, whose **vertex coincides with a combination of high diversity and good degree of well-being**, while its extremes identify respectively two opposite situations:

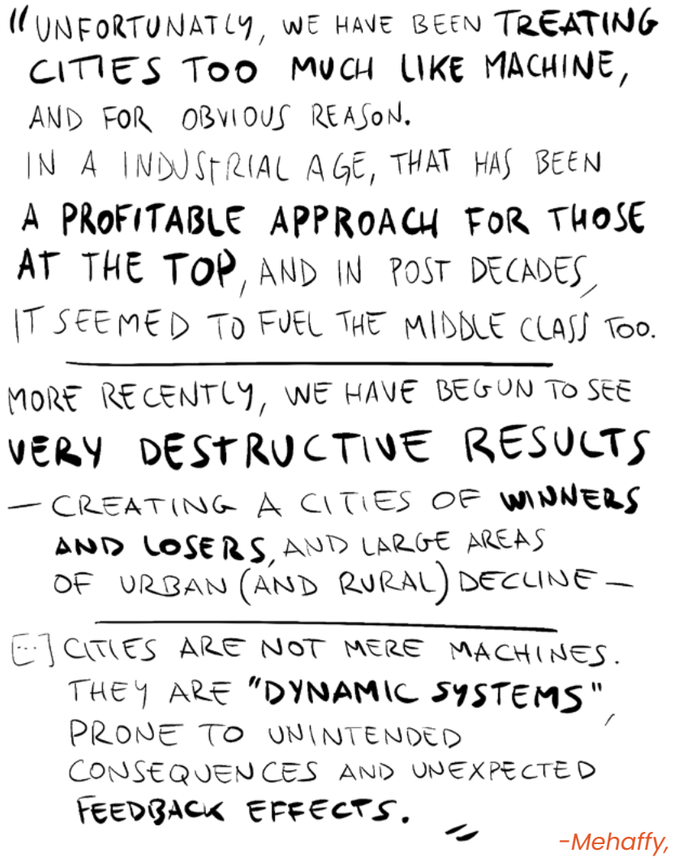


the first is characterized by both poor well-being and low diversity (the so-called "**slums"**), while the second by a high degree of well-being, but little diversity (nicknamed by the author "**enclave**").
The objective of the Jacobs Curve is to make it clear that the best equilibrium is located in its summit, baptized with the name "Goldilocks Zone": **different segments of the population, diverse both in terms of perceived income and cultural diversity, should coexist in an urban area**; Wealth, therefore, must be neither too high nor too low so as not to run the risk of tending towards the extremes of the curve: these conditions would not guarantee such diversity as to allow the area not to be labeled in favor of one or the other social class, triggering mechanisms of gentrification.
Mehaffy, finally, warns planners: at the neighborhood level, problems do not arise only because of low wealth in monetary terms, but are due to a lack of social diversity; therefore during urban planning it would be necessary to set as a priority the maintenance of the **dynamic balance of the population** in a given area, preventing it from destabilizing and leaning towards one of the extremes of the curve.
In this regard, **Jane Jacobs' method of "chess pieces"** is cited, or a strategy that allows to mitigate the exclusive and punctiform evolution of an area to the detriment of the surrounding ones: when an urban nucleus is about to overheat and grow disproportionately, it is necessary to act to migrate its catalytic power to other areas (such as those in




*Jacobs's curve*
*Source: Mehaffy, M. W. (2020). The gentrification challenge: Placemaking as the problem, or placemaking as the solution?.*

a state of degradation or those inactive at a social level) and **prevent to the core of the city to overheat**.
But, as Mehaffy denounces, often the efforts of the city leadership do not seem to work, especially if the real estate market is allowed to self-regulate over time in a liberal perspective (according to the economic mechanism that more supply implies more satisfaction of demand, therefore a subsequent fall in the prices of rent and sale of houses). The **limit** of this vision is in the premises: in fact this condition can be sustained only **if the city is identified as a linear mechanism** on which certain variables act in a cause-effect logic (as in the previous example, reasoning in terms of supply-demand).




*-Mehaffy, 2020*

This statement is extremely relevant, and will be deepened in the following paragraphs; but first, it is necessary to rewind the threads of urban history to contextualize how this result was achieved, reasoning on the origin of the urban transition and the phenomena of centralization



that it entailed, recognizing the events that led to the construction of **machine-centered cities**, **rather than human-centered cities** (*Friedmann, 2010*).
John Friedmann, Professor Emeritus of Urban Planning and founder of the Urban Planning Program at UCLA School of Architecture in Los Angeles, in a 2010 essay defines urban transition as the process that first occurred about three centuries ago and is expected to be completed by the twenty-first century. The author describes how the global dimension of the urban began after the Second World War; in the following decades, there has been an increase in the urban population in the less developed regions of the world of about 8 times greater than in the past: in numerical terms, the population of these regions increased **from 310 million recorded in 1950 to 2.4 billion in 2007**, so from 18% to 44% (*United Nations, 2009)*. For the first time in history, in demographic terms, the rural majority was supplanted by the urban one; in 2009, the point where **most human beings are "urban beings"** was crossed to adopt a term coined by the United Nations in the 2014 review of World Urbanization Prospects *(Friedmann, 2010).*

Initially, this prospectus occurred at the turn of the period of industrialization of the major European cities, which took place between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: i**n reaction to the squalid and inhuman living conditions** in which the workers were forced to live (moved to the city from suburbs and countryside), the institutions tried to apply a top-down approach to superimpose control and order in expanding urban realities, which have already been discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis.
In this regard, in 2016 Margo Huxley proposed the definition of "**governable spaces**" to indicate places created in order to satisfy multiple purposes, such as being able to discipline people's minds and bodies, rationalize their conscience and infuse them with higher ethical and moral principles; the ultimate goal is to shape the prototype of a good citizen, appeasing his instincts.
Mehaffy argues the situation by exposing the dynamics that occurred in the United States of America in the 50s and 60s: the result of this indoctrination, he explains, generated an unrelated cramming of **poor workers in urban areas subject to degradation and decline;** this condition was in stark contrast to the pleasant tranquility that characterized the welcoming estates in the **urban suburbs of the American middle-class**, called "Suburbia", born to feed the aspirations of well-being of the bourgeoisie (mostly white Caucasians).

The situation was reversed when, over the decades and thanks to economic development, the miserable conditions of migrant citizens and workers evolved and allowed **culture and art to flourish** (in support of the argument presented through the Jacobs curve: wealth and well-being are searchable in diversity); this attracted more and more people to the cities given the prosperous prospects for life. On the other hand, suburban belts and small industrialized urban centers were relegated

to hosting the lower end social classes, constituting the first **abysmal gaps between different areas of the same urban reality.**

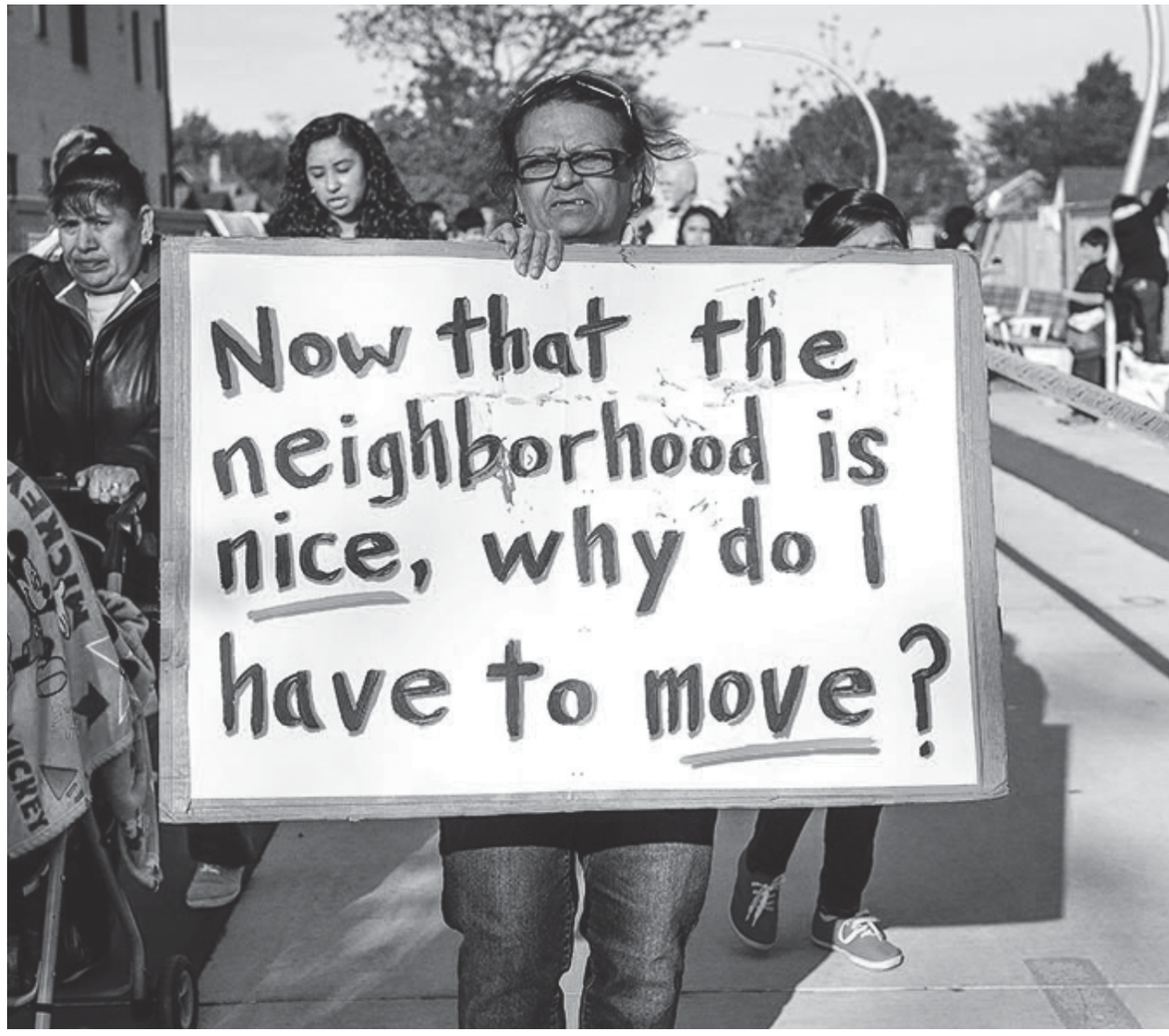
According to Mehaffy, this model of gentrification was based on a geographical inequality and was not intentionally achieved; in fact, the political decisions that led to this result were conscious: the goal was to **achieve the benefits deriving from the development of research and technological innovations**, being the seat of the creative and economic development of each nation.
However, cities became attractive not only because they represented the guarantee of obtaining a good job (being a seat of research and development), but also because they managed to become **bearers of more sought-after and deeper values:** cities are holders of the hidden desires of the human soul, they are organisms in continuous change, they constantly evolve in harmony with the vibrations of the people who live there, shaping themselves on the basis of their passions, their commitments, their fragility and their fears.

This aspect will be explored in the following chapters; for the moment, it is necessary to emphasize **the catalytic role possessed by cities**: their power to favor the incubation of certain processes and manifestations makes them magnetic and attractive in the eyes of those who want to find their place in the world, or pursue a dream on the path of ambition or who, simply, need to understand each other in comparison with the lives of others; these conditions are possible in a context that manages to **welcome the varied and unexpected stimuli for which the city acts as guardian**. In particular, this last concept is the basis of one of the pillars of Jane Jacobs' thought, *"serendipity"*: we will talk about it in more detail in the next chapter.

The analysis of these aspects is essential to proceed in the study of the urban environment; the city is not only an inert and sterile collector, but it is the fertile ground that allows the flourishing of entire communities; in turn, they present facets that (unfortunately sometimes) label not only the people who constitute them, but also the identities, characteristics and problems attached to them. **This scenario is characterized by specific complexities and dynamisms that, however, are neither recognized nor addressed as such**.

Usually, institutions and private individuals who deal with urban planning tend to focus on solving or experimenting with one or a few problems at a time, abstracting them from their context which, instead of remaining a simple background to human actions, should be selected as the keystone both to face the challenges it entails and to seize the shoots of opportunities that emerge. The elements of this scenario can be understood as **parts of a system:** they are closely interconnected with each other forming an inextricable network of relationships, a plot characterized by countless variables. Within a city, people live and act in relation to each other and their surroundings, and each of their






actions weaves a cause-and-effect relationship with the variables with which it interacts. As in a vicious circle subject to continuous feedback cycles, the action of each variable constantly modifies the system in an **autopoietic logic of continuous regeneration based on the stimuli received.** To analyze a system, is possible to use the systemic approach explained below.

*Activists block Chicago's The 606 trail in 2016 to protest gentrification and displacement. Photo by Tyler Lariviere. Source: American Planning Association web site*

# 2.3 The city as a system

Returning to Siri's biliography, he supports the validity of the **systemic approach** both to be able to holistically evaluate the causes and effects of urban transition, and to be able to act with concrete design interventions in order to optimize its flows and address complexity on multiple scales and sectors.
We believe that it is appropriate to quote directly his words:




*-Siri, 2016*



As expressed in the previous paragraph, our assumptions are perfectly in line with these statements; systemic thinking, in fact, allows us to adopt **analytical methods to identify, address and manage the variables** of a system that are inseparable from each other, being involved in complex feedback cycles and networks of relationships which act according to their own model of behavior over time based on a certain **pattern of organization.**

As an epidemiologist specializing in urban and planetary health, Jose Siri focuses his argument on health-related challenges, including those arising from aspects related to the **environmental and social unsustainability of cities** (mental health problems, problems following exposure to harmful agents or pathogens, crime and problems caused by exposure to risk factors from the point of view of climate change such as pollution). According to him, **these variables are now intractable if we do not take into account the entire framework of complexity to which they belong, namely the urban context**; reiterates that it is necessary to recognise the "crucial role that cities play in human activities", and underlines its relevance also given the international adoption of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) in which, specifically, the number 11 appears: "Sustainable cities and communities". Finally, the author concludes by admonishing to "seize the **unique opportunity represented by the urban transition to push towards a sustainable and healthy planet**, full of equally sustainable and healthy cities".
According to this perspective, the urban context is extremely complex, but, at the same time, quite interesting from a design point of view.
These arguments fit perfectly with Mehaffy's thought discussed above that defines cities as "**dynamic systems**" (Mehaffy, 2020). It should be emphasized that a dynamic system, as such, absorbs certain **inputs** and generates a certain amount of **output**; in the case of cities, the resources necessary for its sustenance and the impacts it generates as a result of their transformations are exaggeratedly large. To explain the extent of this framework, it is necessary to analyze the objective **data concerning the urban transition** and its consequences on the planet.

Based on the forecast of urban population growth by 2050, about two-thirds of all humanity will live in an urban context, estimating **an increase in global urban extensions of 185%.** *(Allender et. al., 2010).* This figure indicates that, in a single generational span, the urban area accumulated in over 7000 years of civilizational growth will triple *(Seto et. al., 2012).*
These predictions are worrying if they are crossed with other data, namely those relating to environmental impact: **currently cities contribute 70% of total GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions, despite covering only 2% of the earth's surface** *(Wei et. al., 2021).* In addition, cities are responsible for producing half of all waste and three-quarters of natural resource consumption globally *(Siri, 2016).* The exorbitant disproportion in the

*To the left: "Living entity", artwork by Giulio di Sturco, a group of people seen as a living organism. Source: IGNANT website*

ratio between the land consumption of urban settlements and their emissions generated, compared to the rest of the planet, is staggering. The consequences are the cause of **direct and indirect problems both on the health of living beings and on the climate.** The European Environment Agency estimates that air pollution is one of the most prevalent causes of premature deaths among humans and that both short-term and long-term exposure can give rise to diseases and cancers of the respiratory tract (EEA, 2022). A further report by the same agency underlines that both **air pollution, noise pollution, and volatile harmful substances** affect the health of citizens, who are also subject to symptomatic and sudden manifestations of climate change such as the **transmission of viruses,** strong heat waves and **abnormal temperature changes**.

In a knock-on effect, these variables affect additional environmental factors, **affecting the distribution of primary services**: problems arise, for example, regarding access to fresh and drinking water, which in turn cause repercussions both on the food industry and on the supply of goods (EEA,2023) . Water use has dramatically increased by about twice the rate of population growth: at this rate, about 1.8 billion people will suffer consequences due to **water scarcity** by 2025, while as many as two-thirds of humans will live in areas subject to water stress (National Geographic 2020).

This small portion of the **chain of events** is only the tip of the iceberg of a much more urgent and rooted problem in the world, a threat that has long been about to hit the planet, of which (only now) the so-called late majority of the population begins to become aware: **climate change**. As specified above, according to the systemic approach these factors are part of an enormously vast network that inexorably connects them to each other, a physical-cybernetic space that allows each element to unleash its effects on the variables connected to it.

**Cities, as the engine of the world, with their disproportionate demand for energy supplies and resources are destroying the delicate Earth's balance.**



*Smoke from Canada wildfires, causing hazy skies in New York City on June 7, 2023 (unedited images) Source: CNN website*



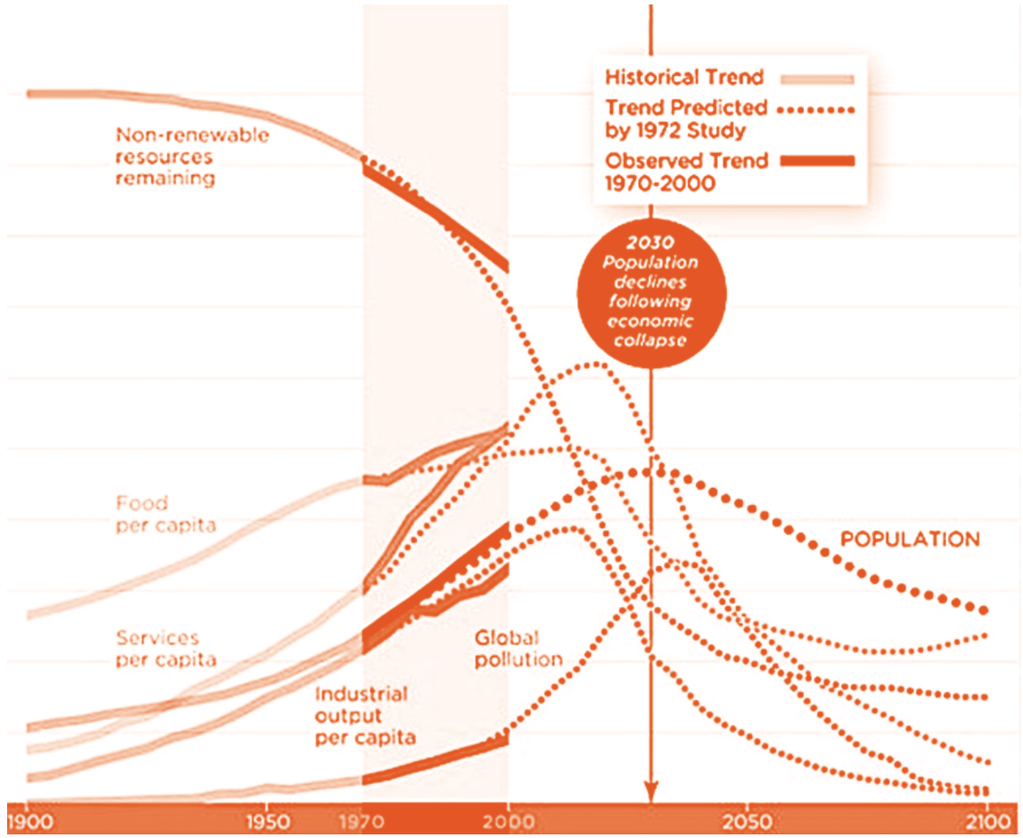
# 2.4 The fail of linear approach

Why does the world continue to evolve in this direction? Did no one foresee and disclose in time the risks faced by past generations? Or did their voice resound in a dull echo?
**The first visionaries of the consequences of climate upheavals** were a MIT researchers who, through the methods of Systemic Dynamic, analyzed the interactions between certain parameters in a time range that covered two centuries, from 1900 to 2100. The report in question is **"Limits to growth"**, published in 1972; below will be told his story, exposed in the 2013 document by Roberto Peccei. Initially, the luminaries of the Club of Rome commissioned Jay Forrester (professor at MIT and expert in forecasting studies and methods of dynamical systems applied to industrial and urban dynamics) a model that simplified and simulated the network of relationships between the variables of planet Earth, which he baptized "World 1". The success of the project led to the extension of the study, which passed into the hands of Dennis and Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William Behrens III, his colleagues, who were the authors of the report. The parameters of the Earth system taken into account were 5: **population growth, availability of non-renewable resources, global pollution, food consumption and consumption of industrial outputs per capita.**
Aurelio Peccei, founder of the Club of Rome, personally supervised the drafting of the report because he was firmly interested in ensuring that it was not just a mere academic exercise, but that it was placed as a concrete and demonstrable basis, useful for addressing and making public the complexity and consequences of global problems through the adaptation of **systemic models.**
The results **were shocking,** so shocking that they became the target of fierce international debate. The main conclusions of the report were 3:

- If the parameters taken into consideration continue to increase at the rate of the current unit of magnitude, the limits of its growth will be touched which, if exceeded, will determine **the collapse of global production capacity** and consequently of the world population.

- **There is currently still time to reverse course** and change the growth of parameters; this would allow us to define more sustainable balances at the ecological and economic level of the world.

- If we set ourselves the goal of accomplishing the task proposed in point 2, it would be advisable **to start the process immediately** in order to have a better chance of success.




*Scientific Diagram of the original projections of the Limits to Growth Source: Peccei, R. (2013). Aurelio Peccei e il Club di Roma: Gli studi sul futuro. Comitato scientifico della Fondazione per lo Sviluppo sostenibile.*

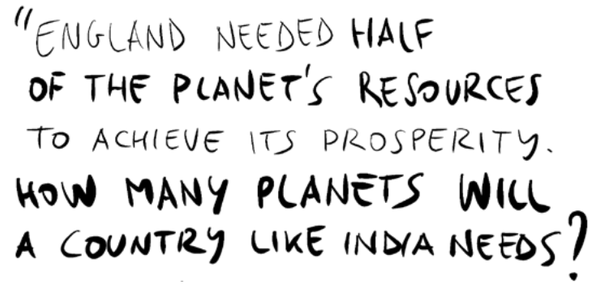
Many critics and journalists, from the New York Times to the Washington Post, discussed and focused only on the first conclusion presented, **labeling it as a policy of "zero growth"**, questionable and controversial given the implicit warning to put a limit on economic development, which was going to demolish the spasmodic myth of growth perpetuated until then. Because of this, **the fundamental message advocated by MIT scientists took a back seat:** the word "limit" referred to the ecological limits of the planet, inevitable since non-renewable resources are not infinite (as the name itself says); the further thesis supported and little considered was related to the aggravation given by the inability of the biosphere to absorb and cushion the impacts

caused by human activities.
Despite the media scandal generated and the visibility it obtained, ***Limits to growth*** **did not undermine the economic and political objectives of the time** and did not induce a change of course in the way of life and in the mode of industrial production.
In Europe there were feeble attempts to propose political measures that could push the continent towards zero economic growth: in this regard, a letter was presented to the European Commission by Sicco Mansholt (about to become its president) but aroused a negative reaction from colleagues. As a result, the rest of Europe also spread the same name with which America also branded Limits to growth, which since then has been inextricably linked to the concept of anti-capitalist "zero growth".
**Aurelio Peccei tried to convert the opinion on the report** by moving the Club of Rome away from Mansholt's positions, but with poor results; Alexander King, scientist and co-founder of the Club, in his autobiography argued the contents of their letter to the European Commission and the details of their point of view. He explained that the world needed to solve more pressing problems (socially, culturally and politically) before it could act to confront the physical limits of the Earth, again arguing the need to treat this complexity of areas as part of a single system and stressing that the consequences dictated by the impacts of global economic growth were only part of a much more difficult situation to manage *(Peccei, 2013)*.

The aforementioned document by Roberto Peccei also reports the criticism made against Limits to growth, classifying it into three categories. As far as the first two are concerned, they correspond to the positions of both political parties who made accusations of different kinds.
The left defended the interests of the middle class, declaring that ideas in defense of **environmental issues were a "luxury of the wealthy class"**, while the people would have more interest in finding answers to more practical and pressing questions (for example, who holds the power of the production and distribution of goods in society).
The criticism advanced by the right, however, focused on the report's failure to consider the role of technological progress and the market. Reiterating Adam Smith's theory of the invisible hand, they justified the growing trend of production by arguing that, in the future, **the intrinsic mechanisms of the economy will make the price of non-renewable resources fairer** and that new technologies will constitute a valid alternative to them.
Finally, the third critical category identified by Roberto Peccei was moved by the less developed countries, which interpreted the report of the Club of Rome as a support for the status quo, a manifesto that would have **prevented the Third World from advancing** its economy adequately (as the European and American powers had done in the past before reaching their level of development).



In this regard, it is remarkable to open a parenthesis and quote the words expressed by Mahatma Gandhi after he was asked if India, following the war of independence, would have reached the same standards of living as its former colonial power:



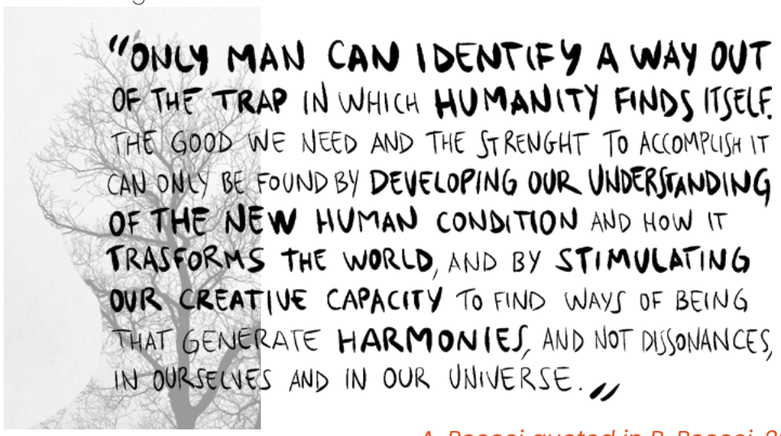

*-Gandhi, quoted in EEA, 1999*

This famous statement sadly frames **the fate of developing countries.** Unfortunately, it is technically impossible for them to achieve the same living standards as Western countries: the unbridled consumption of resources operated by these territories, in fact, would not be sustainable if operated by the rest of the world, given their finite nature.
It is impossible for Western cities to spread the world with its habits and comforts, let alone to endure, since **access to resources worldwide is not equally uniform across countries** (EEA, 1999).
The 1999 report of the European Environment Agency mentioned above estimates that the imbalance has increased in particular in the last 40 years: currently, the richest areas of the world consume 80% of the world's resources, which benefit only 20% of the inhabitants on the planet living in these territories; moreover, they benefit from 58% of the total availability of energy and 45% of the food quantities of meat and fish, compared to 4% and 5% respectively consumed for the same resources by the 20% of the poorest people in the world.
The famous Brundtland Report of 1987 points out that:

"*As a system approaches ecological limits, inequalities sharpen. […] When urban air quality deteriorates, the poor, in their more vulnerable areas, suffer more health damage than the rich, who usually live in more pristine neighbourhoods. When mineral resources become depleted, late-comers to the industrialization process lose the benefits of low-cost supplies. Globally, wealthier nations are better placed financially and technologically to cope with the effects of possible climatic change.*" *(Brundtland Report, 1987)*

The report goes on to argue that it should be the **richest countries that shoulder the burden and act immediately** (both financially and technologically) to deal with the consequences of climate change.
Roberto Peccei's document continues its narrative by documenting

the steps following the publication of the report: as the author claims, **Aurelio Peccei's goal was to open a dialogue with political forces** to "impress on the minds of political leaders the idea that they, more than anyone else, had a global collective responsibility". Following the oil crisis of '73, Club members discussed issues related to future global ecological perspectives with leading statesmen from all over the world in Salzburg. The subsequent publications of the Club of Rome focused precisely on these themes: **changing the mentality of both institutions and population** to intervene and act in time to restore the world balance. Peccei argues that in 1976 the Nobel Prize winner for economics Jan Tinbergen in "Reshaping the international order (RIO)" highlighted the importance both of changing the priorities of governance at the planetary level (so as to cushion social and economic inequalities) and of pushing for a **change in the collective mindset.**
In the following year, the cybernetic philosopher Ervin László in "Goals for mankind" emphasizes this last point: **man must become aware of his impact on the Earth** and the role he can play in improving the living conditions of future generations, feeling as a "responsible global actor". Peccei, in his essay "Human Quality" of 1976, follows his ideals by maintaining that




*-A. Peccei quoted in R. Peccei, 2013*

The mission of the luminary was precisely this: to **make society realize that we must change course to improve the fate of the planet.** This is also the focal point of one of his 1974 writings, "Verso l'abisso", in which he stresses that it is essential to change ways of acting, to redirect human action in order not to go towards the abyss; To do this, we need a change in the value system, **re-educating humanity to "be human".** The tireless work of Peccei was commendable, but his firm will to make known that the responsibilities for the future of the world were in the hands of its inhabitants did not get the hoped-for resonance. In the following decades, the longed-for global consciousness on the fate of humanity never fully developed, on the contrary: **the situation regressed** between wars, conflicts of independence, energy crises and environmental disasters.
The rumor has only been ringing faintly in recent years: in 2014 the Guardian published the article "Limits to growth was right, we are close to collapse" in which Graham Turner shows that **the report's predictions coincide with the real events.**
In recent times, partly as a result of the manifestations of **environmental activism** under the banner of Greta Thunberg, global consciousness is undergoing a rapid change, but not yet unanimously shared: it is immature.
To answer the question posed earlier about why there was no action in time to change the situation of the impact of human activities on Earth, we think it was interesting to report the criticisms and reactions that have occurred over the years against the activities of the Club of Rome. In fact, they paint a clear picture of the Western mentality of the time regarding issues related to environmental sustainability: on the one hand, the **unsuspecting indifference is projected** that underestimates signs and symptoms of dramatic future scenarios; on the other, there is a subtle and **conscious stance in favor of the interests of the market** and its evolution to the detriment of the consequences. Broadly speaking, these are the ridiculous motivations that led previous generations not to consider the extent and severity of the problems related to a probable and future collapse of the planet and its resources, which is why today its fate and that of humans are hanging by a thread. The dilemma is still relevant today, given the

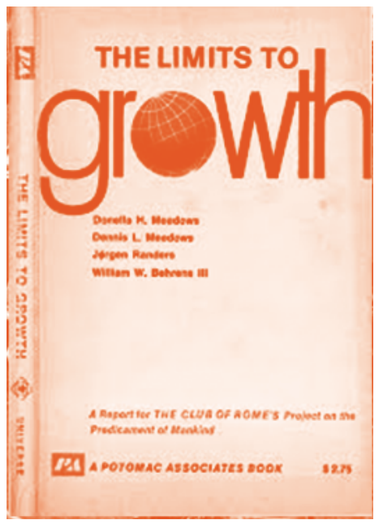


*To the right: The Limits to Growth's authors (from left to right: Jørgen Randers, Jay Forrester, Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, William Behrens)*

*To the left: Living in harmony with nature. Artwork by Andreas Lie from a series of portraits about his hometown in Norway Source: IGNANT website*

resistance operated by **powerful economic interests that oppose the voice of global consciousness that has gradually begun to rise.**
**As pointed out in Limits to Growth, if we had started acting much** earlier we would have been able to reverse course. **We have already fallen into the precipice.**

The most disruptive factor weighing on this situation is **the type of growth to which the system is subjected: it is not linear, but exponential.** Limits to growth's research revolved around this observation and its effects; for example, one of the 5 variables taken into account by the study (the population) has undergone a non-linear increase over time (we went from being 2 billion people on Earth at the beginning of the twentieth century, and now we have reached 8 billion). This disproportionate growth portends a very dramatic condition, as its future increase **cannot be controlled** if action is taken only at the end of the process to mitigate it.
In this regard, Lester Brown (one of the few voices out of the chorus who judged Limits to growth positively) wrote the article **"The twenty-nine day**", a name inherited from the quote to the riddle French adopted by the author to explain the outcomes of exponential growth: it is supposed to look at a lake on which water lilies grow; if each of them increases every day by twice its size, letting them proliferate would completely cover the surface of the lake in 30 days (in this case, no other life form could survive). The question posed by the riddle is: "on what day of the month will the lake be half covered?". The answer is the twenty-ninth day. **We are only just beginning to worry about the situation now that we have experienced the first setbacks from the exponential growth,** but it is only a short time before the lake surface no longer sees the lights of the day: we are on the twenty-ninth day.











In the 2013 documentary film Last Call, director Enrico Cerasuolo interviews Peccei and the authors of Limits to growth decades after the publication of the report, giving voice to their reflections and their unequivocal warnings.
Peccei examines his reasoning inscribed in the **neologism of "problematic"**, which underlies that tangle of problems of different nature (economic, ecological, psychological, political, etc.) that apparently seem inextricable from each other, but which actually have "an interconnected side with each other's that generates explosive interactions". The luminary exposes the key dilemma of our age: if this tangle is a **complex system of interconnected problems**, why do we insist on treating them as such, but as problems in their own right? If every interaction involves a reaction on the elements linked to it, why is this network not taken into account when trying to solve a single problem? If the perspective of analysis adopted to "read" the systems is counterintuitive, why do we insist on treating individual problems in a simple and linear way, even if they are anything but? Why do you abstract them from context, if they are closely connected to it? The question that was posed by the Club of Rome to the MIT scientists who were commissioned the report was precisely this: "Can existing mechanisms adapt to today's world?".
The answer, of course, is in the report's conclusions. **Currently, growth is colliding with the limits of the planet, then with the resource scarcity triggered by irresponsible human.** The scant vision of man due to the pursuit of blind individual interests has (consciously) neglected the consequences on these variables that will inevitably have to be affronted by economic development.
The results? **Delays in making decisions have made us exceed the limits of sustainability,** and now nature has already begun to take over to bring us back strictly below its limits; in the docufilm was used

*Top: Aurelio Peccei and Nobel Prize winner Jan Tinbergen, in Rotterdam, 1976, (Source: ©Collectie / Archief)*

*To the left: The limits to growth (Randers, Forrester, Meadows, Meadows, Behrens, 1972)*

*The Twenty Ninth Day, Lester R. Brown, 1979*

this expression: "*Let's play hide and seek with the ecological system [...] if anyone deceives the Earth, the Earth will deceive man.*"
The ecological problems have been ignored for decades, while they are now at the top of society's political agendas. At the time of Limits to Growth, forecasts were optimistic, since human action would be enough to solve the problems.
Instead now, in Last Call, scientists emphasize **that we cannot be reduced to the last to act** since, having to deal with **dynamic systems**, it will be necessary to face the threat due to the **exponential evolution** to which the growth of variables is subject.
In this regard, the interviewees give the example of braking a car before a collision: the driver must start braking long before the accident, otherwise the car will not be able to stop in time. The behavior mankind is engaging in, however, goes against this logic: we are waiting to violently hit an obstacle before acting because, being an **almost intangible problem** and not being able to immediately "feel" its consequences, we do not adequately realize its gravity.

The vicissitudes that revolve around the study and dissemination of information on the theme of our impact on the planet make it known how we have reached this **point of no return.** As specified in the previous pages, the reason why this parenthesis was opened on the effects of human activities was the desire to make explicit the framework in which cities stand out.
In fact cities constitute the major cause of environmental impact being, as mentioned above, a **dynamic system characterized by inputs (acquired resources) and outputs (waste produced**) acting on it. Taking into consideration the parameters used by Limits to growth (i.e. population growth, availability of non-renewable resources, global pollution, food consumption and consumption of industrial outputs per person), we can look at the data reported at the beginning of this chapter under a different lens: cities, with the same land consumption in relation to their emissions, constitute the cradle of the activities with the greatest negative influence on the environment (as mentioned above in Wei et. al., 2021, the land consumption of urban settlements is equal to 2% of the entire surface of the planet and contribute to 70% of total global emissions). These data will only worsen in the future due to **the exponential growth to which the five parameters are subject** which, obviously, determine the increase in the amount of inputs and outputs of the city system.
In addition, a further critical look at the city frames the "problematica" exposed by Peccei as an element that particularly distinguishes human activities and that, consequently, is the cause of non-negligible reactions within the urban context. As pointed out by the founder of the Club of Rome, these aspects define **the "tangle" of complex systems** that must be treated as such, therefore in a systemic perspective that can take into consideration these different areas without neglecting the network of relationships that binds them together.
To close the circle and sum up the latest reflections, we quote again the words of Jose Siri exposed at the beginning of this chapter: **cities are the engine of the world, they are the driving force behind the planet's environmental changes and impacts on human health.**
The five factors taken into consideration by Limits to growth are perfectly inscribable in this context of urban system, represented as a miniature of the "Earth system" analyzed by the Meadows, Randers and Behrens; in fact, as announced by their forecasts, there has been an **unprecedented urban transition in history,** also accompanied by a **disproportionate exponential growth** in population and quantities of food, non-renewable resources and industrial products that inevitably generate an equally spasmodic increase in environmental pollution. Declining this prospectus in the urban context, it is deducible that every new citizen will need to have more resources and generate more waste products. **The city can therefore be considered as a dynamic system** that, for its subsistence, needs both to absorb inputs and to release outputs to the outside.
Another fundamental detail concerns the emphasis on timing: humanity has begun to act to stem the problem too late and too slowly, **but nature will not wait to act to restore the Earth's balance.**
Following these considerations, we can appreciate the reasons that have stimulated us to build this thesis on the basis of the analysis of the city as an urban system: the primary objective is to propose and support the **implementation of concrete and sustainable practices** to improve the flow of resources in and out of the urban system, in order to optimize its impacts at a global level. A framework of analysis of the city is therefore provided in a systemic perspective: this allows to identify the interconnections between the elements of the "problematica" (i.e. the tangle of problems of different nature identified by Peccei) and, subsequently, to propose a holistic and transdisciplinary reading of the challenges and opportunities of a certain territory. In the next chapters, methods and tools will be detailed that can allow the replicability and declination of certain actions according to each context, in order to optimize their design and management. Finally, the use of **immediate, simple, but extremely effective solutions i**s envisaged which, with minimum effort and maximum yield, allow to improve the urban structure without implying an unbridled consumption of resources.
The design response to these needs has been identified in the context of Placemaking, a practical and theoretical approach to the design of public spaces introduced in chapter 1.

# 2.5 **Shrinkage and how to fight it smart**

The initial prolusion on urban transition and its impacts arouses further critical reflection on the solutions that could be taken to face the current situation: to improve the condition of man on Earth and mitigate the effects of his actions, it is possible to **deflect the centralization towards cities, making the life prospects of a smaller country more attractive?** Would it be possible to limit the emigration of human capital, forced to move to the big cities to pursue a better future? In fact, **the rural lifestyle has fewer environmental impacts.**
First of all, it is essential to provide the definition of "rurality", in order to avoid misunderstandings in the adoption of this term: according to the OECD, "the rurality of a territory is expressed by the share of residents in municipalities with low population density" (*Trapasso, 2009).*
The research of the agronomists Emanuele Blasi and Nicolò Passeri in 2009 empirically demonstrates that local systems characterized by a high degree of rurality offer conditions that favor the establishment of **more sustainable activities than larger urban systems.** In fact, the low density of the number of inhabitants in a territory and the high degree of housing dispersion would allow residents to have a greater number of resources per capita. To these factors it is possible to correlate two further ones, namely a greater average sobriety of lifestyles (compared to the consumption of resources) and a tendency to consume locally sourced products (the short supply chain is less impactful than the long one used in urban contexts).
With a view to sustainability, it is also remarkable to underline the **greater degree of self-sufficiency** that characterizes rural housing systems, thanks to a more immediate and direct collaboration between the actors of the **short supply chain** and the **flourishing relational network that identifies its community**. Finally, the authors conclude, this set of variables allows rural systems to benefit from greater resilience to economic shocks than urban systems.
Nevertheless, as already expressed and announced in the previous paragraphs, the urban transition has led to the evolution of a particular phenomenon that unfortunately characterizes rural settlement contexts: **shrinkage**. This concept indicates the condition relative to the decline of the population of an urban settlement; literally, it refers to a **"contraction" of both the population and the economic wealth of a country or city**. This situation generates the onset of difficult challenges



from a socio-economic point of view: it impoverishes the territory and its inhabitants by disintegrating and fragmenting the social fabric, a condition that originates the inhibition of the dynamism of the community that suffers it (Costa, 2019).
In the last 50 years, the emptying taking place in shrinking cities has characterized in particular European, Asian and North American territories; this variable has a direct correlation with the data relating to the demographic decline or stagnation that is tending to occur in the richest countries of the world.
Shrinkage marks a turning point in today's urban era, as it undermines the **myth-model of growth** (note the affinity with the assertions of Limits to growth) endured over the last two centuries: it marked a turning point in the culture of urban evolution, refuting its ideals as a result of their ineffectiveness in relation to the current context.
The critical issues resulting from the sprawling action of the phenomenon originated from a **mismatch between the planning objectives** (oriented and based on continuous growth scenarios) **and the reality represented by rural settlements**, often subject to demographic decline and disinvestment or deindustrialization works *(Costa, 2019)*.
The urban architect Philipp Oswalt, in his essay "Shrinking cities" of 2005, defines the phenomenon as:

"AN UNPLANNED PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESULT OF **ECONOMIC AND POLICY DECISIONS** THAT RESULT IN A **EXCESS OF OBSOLESCENCE** OF URBAN SPACE, BUILDINGS AND REAL ESTATE."

*-Oswalt, 2005*

Therefore, this process is unintentional and subject to multidimensionality: social aspects are sometimes flanked by historical-cultural legacies, in turn influenced by the (in)**action of political-economic interests** that trigger such consequences as to trigger the backwardness of places, structures and spaces. This entails a serious loss of both material resources and financial and human resources (such as loss of human capital or inaccessibility to public or private funding funds).
As the author argues, this series of systemically interrelated factors act on each other by defining a network such that **strong urban decline**, identified by the manifestation of social and cultural crises resulting from the economic and u rban contraction. The profound evolution that the urban process is undergoing and the consequences suffered by rural settlements can be condensed into four categories, defined on the basis of the main causes of shrinkage. The first, called "Destruction", arises as a result of the occurrence of environmental cataclysms (such as earthquakes, epidemics and floods) or destructive events generated

by human action such as wars and pollution. The second, "Loss", implies causes related to the scarcity of resources and primary goods such as water, but also to the **lack of human and social capital.** The third and fourth categories, respectively "Shifting" and "Change", refer to less critical but more common matrices such as suburbanization (growth of suburbs at the expense of the city core), migration and demographic, economic or political changes.

Regarding the latter category, Urban Planning experts Justin Hollander and Jeremy Németh (professors respectively at Rutgers University and the University of Colorado) argued in 2011 that it is possible to implement a solution to safeguard territories from shrinkage, i.e. the **start of inclusive and participatory processes adopted through a bottom-up** approach (enrollable in the Placemaking activities that will be proposed by this thesis). Indeed, shrinkage can be combated through "**Smart shrinkage**", a trend that pursues the goal of studying the phenomenon from a more optimistic perspective, pursuing the regeneration of pre-existing public spaces from the opportunities in the area; for example, you can limit traffic and pollution, decrease land consumption by providing more green spaces for residents and improve their quality of life by containing the ecological footprint of the community.
A further point of contact between Placemaking and Smart shrinkage is the moral principle on which they are based, or **"Think small"**, which incorporates ideals that aim to combat the myth of exasperated growth and the tendency to perfection embodied by today's society. The key concept that undermines these assumptions is "growth can also occur in degrowth", implying the latter term not with a negative meaning (of decline), but as **an opportunity to be seized to aim to achieve a more human**, lighter, more serene pace of life, which allows to create healthier and more livable cities for the people who live there, also encouraging the launch of socially and environmentally sustainable actions. These notions are part of the theory of "**Smart decline**" developed by the spouses Frank Popper and Deborah Popper, professors engaged in the research "Environmental Studies Program" at Princeton University. In 2002 they argued that recognizing and accepting population decline would allow urban planners to intelligently and creatively optimize the development of a city. Through the **redevelopment of abandoned areas** it is possible to create spaces that benefit the community without the need for impacting design interventions which, for example, would imply greater land consumption or huge investments at an economic level (purchase and supply of raw materials, transformation, etc.). To carry out sustainable planning, the authors argue, it is necessary to carry out field assessments both to define the types and status of buildings or other pre-existing structures, and to obtain a detailed analysis of the stakeholders and people living in that particular rural or urban context. Indeed **community involvement** is essential to ensure a socially relevant benefit; the authors propose that this can be done by adopting a **communicative-narrative approach** that emotionally



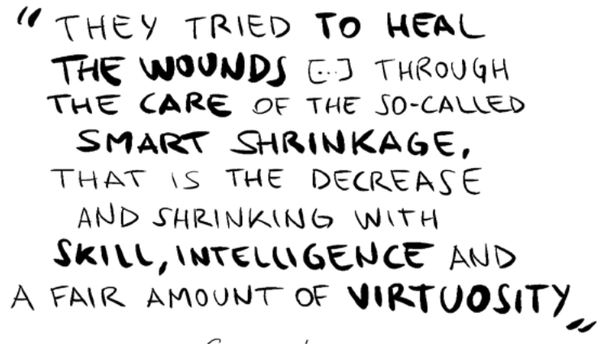
*Photography by Andrew Moore, Birches growing in decayed books, Detroit Public Schools Book Depository, 2009 Source: afasiaarchzine website*







involves the residents, also seeking to emphasize the strengths of the context or neighborhood to which they belong. This approach in itself is not new: as the authors argue, a **number of applications combined can create innovation** when they succeed in directing the planning process towards **improving the quality of life of residents**, mitigating social inequalities through targeted public benefit actions, allowing anyone to enjoy it by taking advantage of the shrinkage phenomenon (which, otherwise, would be considered only under the negative perspective of urban degrowth).
An urban experiment implemented in Youngstown (Ohio) in 2010 launched a Strategic Plan concretizing the theories presented by the Popper spouses. In this case study, instead of aspiring to urban expansion, planners decided to focus on improving the quality of life of residents, **activating abandoned spaces through the involvement of the local community**.

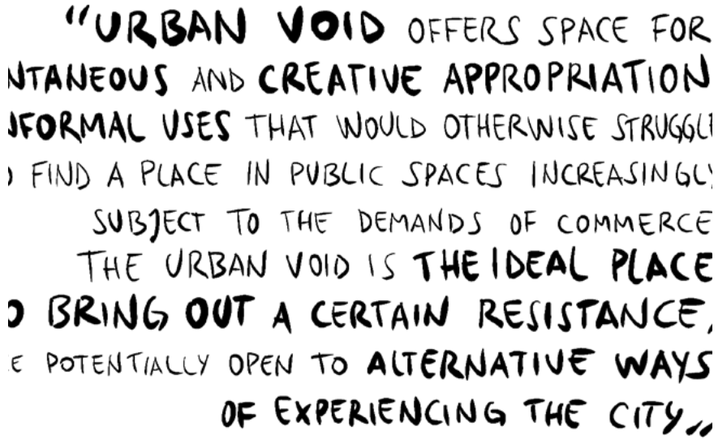



*-Coppola, 2015*

The purpose of the Youngstown Plan was to encourage the repopulation of former industrial areas (formerly there was a steel mill) through the help of re-greening operations of abandoned areas.
A peculiarity of the project was the adoption of a **Participatory Design approach**. The participation of people and the involvement of the media, however, are not only a way to **increase recognition and affection** for the project, but also a necessary consequence of the lack of adequate urban policies on the territory (a lack that, moreover, has favored the occurrence of shrinkage). Despite this, it is remarkable to highlight how the effectiveness of planning was achieved through urban governance's acceptance of the state of shrinkage the city was in and, above all, through the revolutionary impact generated by the capacity for collective action and the synergistic effort among the community of citizens, organizations and cultural associations that, over time, managed to **subvert the top-down vision of urban planning**.
The thesis elaborated by Deborah and Frank Popper is also underpinned by a dramatic phenomenon that is taking place in many areas subject to shrinkage: the so-called "urban void", i.e. areas without purpose or

*Shrinkage in Detroit*
*Photography by Camilo José Vergara*
*Source: The New York Times*

function that sometimes have obsolete infrastructures or housing structures abandoned by their residents.
This manifestation occurs as a result of urban processes that alternate periods of growth with those of urban contraction; it consists of vast areas in which there are buildings in a state of decay and abandonment, shrouded in a mix of wild plants that are appropriated by various kinds of waste and drains. This condition underlies a problem linked to the economic waste of resources, **fragmentation of spaces and environmental problems** (land consumption, uncontrolled pollution, risk of disruption and collapse, irrational overbuilding, etc.). Moreover, the overall perception of this picture breaks the ideals of prosperity, order and beauty that should characterize an urban space, destroying the image of the city (*Hollander et al. 2009).*
However, as also argued by the Popper article cited above, the urban void represents an opportunity to be seized:




*-Hollander et al. 2009.*

This phenomenon triggers a number of different repercussions.
At the economic level, **the inability to manage shrinkage** generates demographic decline and the consequent abandonment of public or private facilities, decreasing the revenues of municipalities due to tax levy. This leads to cuts in the various sectors given the scarce availability of resources to deal with the problem, which should be contained with the help of resources from supra-municipal entities; this operation, however, does not always achieve the desired results, since financial support must be accompanied by additional local co-financing which, often, cannot be found. Thus, it **z** the decline of the city or country in a vicious circle of urban and economic contraction.
At the social level this situation **exacerbates community dynamics**, giving rise to spontaneous practices deriving from the perception of abandonment by institutions such as the increase in crime, vandalism,






unemployment and, consequently, emigration by citizens who do not share the resulting sense of insecurity. There is also a loss of human capital, which exacerbates the economic problems of local businesses. Finally, the lack of consideration for older people weakens the social fabric. These conditions result in an increase in the poverty rate, an increase in social vulnerability (due to the scarcity of relationships and loneliness), a loss of local identity and a decrease in the investment and purchasing power of residents *(Heeringa, 2020).*
**Urban voids are widespread all over the world.** In Italy, for example, it has been documented by Openpolis on the basis of Istat data from 2019 that 29.73% of domestic dwellings are not permanently occupied, for a total of 10 million structures, mainly located in suburban areas and in small municipalities. In particular, areas adjacent to large cities are less prone to the phenomenon while, for example, mountain areas are

*To the right: "Sono oltre 10 milioni le case inabitate in Italia". Source: laborazione Openpolis 2023 su base dati Istat]. Openpolis. (2023). Retrieved February 24, 2023, from https://www.openpolis.it/sono-oltre-10-milioni-le-case-inabitate-in-italia/*

the most affected: cataloged by the name of "inland areas", peripheral and ultra-peripheral locations (i.e. more than 40 and 70 minutes away respectively from the nearest urban pole) are more at risk of abandonment due to their limited access to essential services such as adequate mobility, health and education infrastructure. Indeed, the former have a rate of uninhabited houses equal to 49.9%, a percentage that rises to 58.1% for the latter. In these areas are expected to see a drastic population decline of -9.1% between 2021 and 2031 while, overall, rural areas will experiece -5.5%.
In the figure shown it is possible to appreciate the percentage of housing structures not used for continuous use: the darker backgrounds indicate the amount of uninhabited houses.

IJsbrand Heeringa, an architect at Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands mentioned in the last paragraphs, in 2020 argues and analyzes the shrinkage case that took place in the Spanish region of Asturias, focusing in particular on how it acts on the minds of the people who inhabit the territory and how it represents a serious **threat to society:** the substantial demographic decline experienced by Asturian villages and towns has in fact decreed strong consequences on local social networks, outlining an urban landscape characterized by gloomy **"ghost towns",** as the author defines them. Asturias has more than 600 abandoned vilages, which have entered the vicious circle described above: low tax revenues and government impasse lead to a lack of service supplies; poor care for the degradation of the environment and infrastructure give rise to more serious consequences, such as fires and soil contamination; the vulnerability of the social fabric causes both the neglect of the fragility of the elderly and the emigration of young people to more attractive cities.
Heeringa documents how **the projects carried out by local planners were initiated, but did not take root adequately, since they were based on the same logic that led to the defeat of the territory, namely on economic growth**. The failure of numerous projects has disenchanted residents and the government itself, which has not updated its regional strategy since 1991.
Therefore, the author stresses the indisputable **need to change the mentality of design and planning action** on shrinkage-prone areas. The goal to be set upstream of planning should not be economic growth (since it generates an unsuccessful and unaffordable scenario), but to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants: the absence of demand, but the abundance of resources such as vacant and available land provide an opportunity to target the redevelopment of greenery and natural systems in shrinking countries. Indeed the academic article provides two excellent **strategies for activating** spaces in shrinkage cities, namely the reuse of empty spaces (giving them a new purpose compared to the past) and the empowerment of local communities.
Through a solid systemic design, brownfields can be redeveloped by **redesigning the flows between the community's network of stakeholders**, i.e. young and old people: the former can offer their efforts




*Percentage of permanently unoccupied houses in Italian municipalities (2019) Source: Openpolis 2023 processing based on Istat data*







and performance skills, while the latter would have access to a social connection network to offer their knowledge for the benefit of the new generations. Access to regional funding for s**mall-scale programmes** such as horticulture and reuse of disused former industrial spaces can be examples of first milestones useful for starting the process.
Two case studies reported by Heeringa that have adopted this approach are the "Parkstad Limburg" and "IBA Thueringen" initiatives, former industrial zones that have supported urban redevelopment by moving away from the traditional planning mentality that, as explained, would aim primarily at mere economic development of the area. This criticism will be analyzed in the next chapter.
To conclude, the negative effects of shrinkage could be seen in a more optimistic and purposeful light. An area subjected to this phenomenon should not be a defeat, but an opportunity, a springboard to head towards a new society that does not aim at its own indiscriminate growth (regardless of the proliferation of inequalities, paradoxes and injustices) and that does not want to erect a castle in the air of fallacious prosperity due to the exponential increase in economic wealth. The new society unanimously advocated by the latest authors would be based on the adoption of a new point of view, namely **degrowth understood as a necessity** and the **awareness of the vacuous spasmodic nature of economic growth.**

"A SOCIETY BASED ON **QUALITY** RATHER THAN QUANTITY, ON **COOPERATION** RATHER THAN COMPETITION. [...] TO A **HUMANITY FREED FROM ECONOMY THAT SETS ITSELF THE GOAL OF SOCIAL JUSTICE.**"

*-Latouche, 2010*

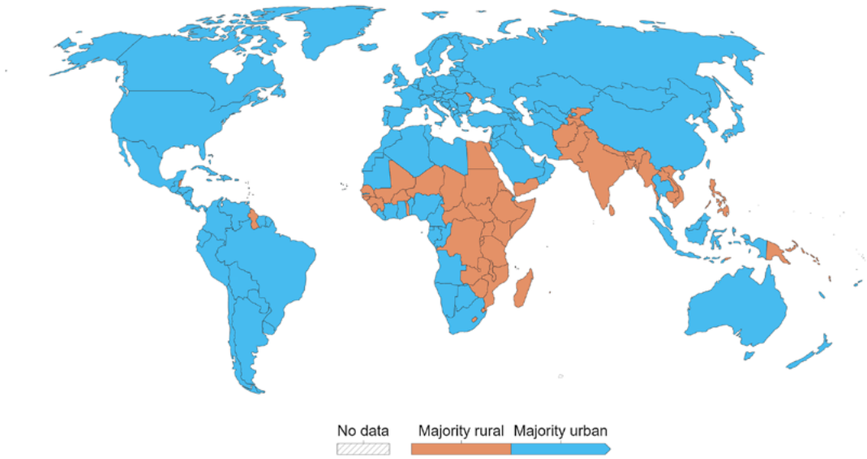
These words are by Serge Latouche, a well-known economist and philosopher French who in his 2010 essay argues about **the urgency of a new economic strategy based on degrowth**, which would contrast with the basic economic assumption according to which the increase in the well-being of a people derives from its economic growth. Latouche proposes a new economic model **based on the "8Rs"**, (Revaluation, Reconceptualization, Restructuring, Redistribution, Relocation, Reduce, Reuse and Recycling) that would allow us to turn towards a sustainable economic degrowth: by **maximizing the resources owned by a territory** (both tangible and intangible), it would be possible to reduce the consumption of finite resources, such as soil, redeveloping abandoned areas and defining a new functional purpose  for the benefit and use

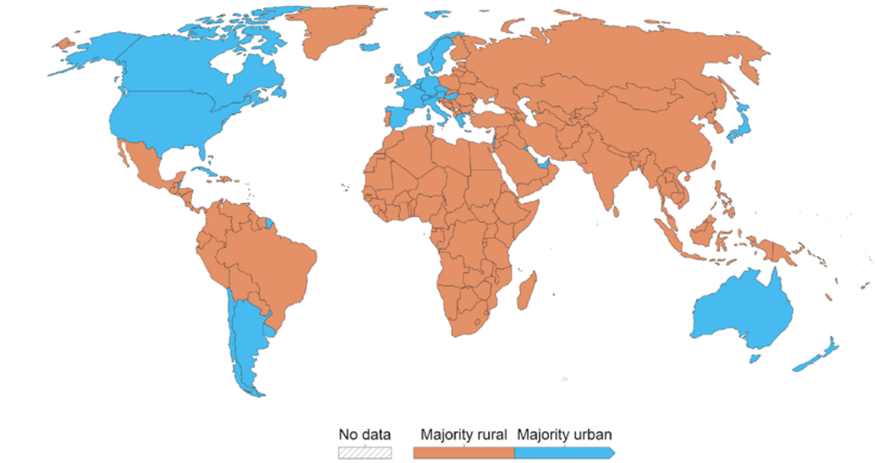
*To the left: Croto, a ghost town in Basilicata, Italy.*

of the community.
Even at an economic level, the author advocates **the identification of urban voids** because, even through temporary expedients such as bottom-up community engagement interventions, it is possible to envision alternative scenarios and approaches to an area that would otherwise be destined to perish due to the effects of shrinkage, such as the area's lack of vitality and subsequent abandonment by the original residents. Thus, one of the causes that give rise to the shrinkage is the **dispersion of residents** who, tendentially, decide to emigrate from their country of origin to larger cities: this phenomenon is called "urban diffusion". At the beginning of the nineteenth century, data show that 98% of the world's entire population lived in rural contexts, but (as a result of the economic transformations and industrial revolutions outlined at the beginning of the chapter) this percentage suffered a considerable decline, decreasing to 71% in 1950; currently, the figure is around 46% *(Costa, 2019)*.
The interactive maps on the "Our World in Data" website graphically clarify the **drastic changes** that have occurred over the years and future outlook (*to 2050)* based on current data. The online software takes into account data from the national statistical offices of all the countries of the world until 2016: in the first world plan the majority of people living in rural areas or urban areas for each nation are reported in different colors; from the figures you can appreciate the **considerable evolution that took place between 1950 and 2023**.

As already argued several times in the pages of this chapter, the percentage of inhabitants in rural contexts is preparing to decrease further to the benefit of urban contexts until it reaches, according to future projections of the United Nations, 30% by 2050; on average, every day the number of residents in cities undergoes an average increase of 180,000 people *(Friedmann, 2010)*. Generally, many people choose to move from rural areas to settle in cities and, for economic reason, settle in the **peripheral areas that over time expand to define new suburban neighborhoods** close to the city center.
Urbanist Francesco Indovina argues the dynamics in his 2009 essay: this mode of growth is called **"centrifugal"**, as it incorporates external settlements (originally autonomous, such as neighboring towns and rural areas) within the largest urban core according to a process of agglomeration that eventually verges towards conurbation (i.e. politically approved merger), going to constitute a single urban center. Urban transition, to the detriment of rural towns, thus incorporates these phenomena as well, generating **spotty anarchic expansion in rural peri-urban areas**. However, compared to the main urban center, these contexts are subject to lower productivity and gain margins, which negatively label these areas according to the polarization process that defines them, generating "bubbles" of incommunicability between the different social strata and fueling dynamics of professional and labor disparities between inhabitants of the same city but residing in different neighborhoods or belts *(Indovina, 2009)*.





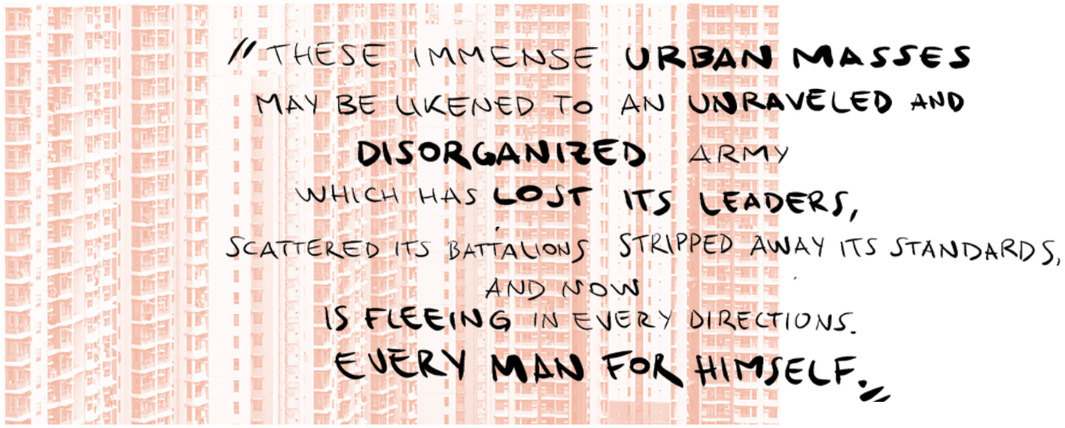

*Map of regions where the majority of people live in the countryside or in the cities. Comparison between the year 1950 and 2023. Source: OWID based on UN World Urbanization Prospects (2018)*

In particular, **urban sprawl generates a number of environmental, social and spatial repercussions**. Regarding the first point, environmental consequences include land consumption, increased individual mobility and aggravation due to increased land sealing. On the social level, there is serious damage and situations such as anomie and a growing sense of poor social cohesion, loneliness and a tendency toward individualism. On the other hand, regarding the spatial factor, the layout of the city undergoes insulting redefinitions of historical centralities and public spaces, partly due to centrifugal centralization *(Costa, 2019)*.

A further concept that it is essential to define as it stands out in the context of this framework is the **"megalopolis"** In fact, this disproportionate growth of large urban hubs has generated the emergence of "urban macrocephies" *(Gottmann, 1970),* or the **uncontrolled hyperurbanization of certain metropolises.** Examples include Tokyo, New York, and Mexico City; currently, the world's 21 largest cities accommodate 9,4 percent of the entire global population and one in twenty people reside in a megacity, which are mostly located in Asia *(Governa, 2015).* In particular **extreme suffocating living conditions bordering on human depersonalization and Hegelian alienation** are located on this continent: a striking example are the "coffin cubicles" in Hong Kong, which are spaces consisting of a single bed protected by a grating 190 centimeters long; if one also wants to have a shared bathroom and electricity, the monthly rent is around HK$2000 (€230). Another questionable housing model relates to "partitioned houses," or a subdivision of a single room into spaces for several families/singles, whose rental price is around HK$5,000 (€580) per month.
Megacities, then, paint a dystopian and dramatic picture that is likely to weigh on the health and degree of sustainability of cities.

To provide a further global twist to the synoptic picture presented so far, keep in mind that in recent decades we are witnessing an explosion of urban settlements particularly in developing countries: as a result of their industrial expansion, health, physical and social conditions in urban areas are being exacerbated for new inhabitants (originally from rural areas) who choose to move to live in **Fordist-style urban agglomerations** or attempt to adapt in **sprawling cities** (i.e. slums or illegitimate housing with poor sanitation). This situation radically changes the city's layout both physically and socio-economically *(Governa, 2015).*
In contrast, in very poor **Third World** contexts such as sub-Saharan Africa, there is an increase in urban population that is not accompanied by an equal amount of economic growth: this is causing a serious **impoverishment of agriculture** in rural areas and **serious environmental consequences** due to activities such as deforestation, desertification and the consequent occurrence of extreme drought episodes.
Thus, urban sprawl is not an immediate process and is not the result of a stable and continuous escalation; rather, it is the complex result that has matured over the years as the outcome of the summation and succession of individual choices and personal ambitions that have contributed to its manifestation. Seeking specific advantages, **each newly acquired citizen has shaped the definition of the new urban layout** by contributing to the decentralization or centralization of a given urban settlement. Therefore, this silent approach determined the location of houses, services, green spaces and industries and, consequently, of the road network connecting each of them. Lewis Mumford argues for this condition in his book Cities in History published in 1981 by Bompiani:






*-Mumford, 1961*

The city born or shaped on these assumptions presents a **diffuse, fragmented, broken morphology.** Although it allows access to the multitude of opportunities offered by the urban hub, this situation has induced the **genesis of diseconomies** due to natural and landscape degradation, longer travel times due to the increased amount of traffic, the consequent pollution generated, and the rising inflation and cost of living.
This scenario does not define a compact and optimized urban system, but rather **an agglomeration of elements characterized by mute incommunicability, blind disorder and a selfish pursuit of self-interest.**
Thus, purely industrial cities reject the exaggerated rigor of the Fordist model, older urban settlements open their doors to the most radical innovations, spectacular seaside or mountain villages turn into debased skeletons, and immense expanses of sand turn into cathedrals in the desert contrary to all logic.
Currently, one element that unites cities is their **lack of clearly delineated boundaries**, a condition that in turn defines the unraveling of the city itself as it is subject to continuous fluctuations between urban growth (flowing into gentrification) and urban decline (stagnating in shrinkage). Moreover, this situation generates the hybridization of landscapes depending on human actions and their connections with the land.
**"The city is everywhere, but it is nowhere":** these words, reported by Gigliotti in 2020, were uttered by critic Marc Augé to describe the artistic work of the distinguished contemporary architect and photographer Gabriele Basilico who, throughout his career, has constantly investigated the urban landscape and its impetuous becoming. The critic recognizes how urban transition has acted on the transformation of historic city centers into elite sectors, or the change taking place in recent decades on the suburbs where a jumble of shopping malls and industrial enterprises coexist, in turn flanked by deteriorating

*"Urban Barcode " by Manuel Irritier, 2013 Source: IGNANT website*

neighborhoods in uncultivated or rural areas. Basilico crystallizes these images with his lens, which make vivid and tangible the **polymorphous and diffuse reality of the city.**
The world is on the verge of fulfilling **Mumford's prediction of urban evolution:** the transition from city to metropolis, megalopolis and, finally, necropolis *(Mumford, 1981).*

"THE CITY AND THE MORE DENSELY URBANIZED TERRITORIES NOW APPEAR TO BE CHARACTERIZED BY POROSITY RATHER THAN JUST BY DISPERSION. FIGURE, THAT OF POROSITY, [...] FOR WHICH EMPTY AND FULL, BUILT AND UNBUILT SPACES OPPOSE EACH OTHER LIKE CITY AND COUNTRYSIDE [...] BUT INTERPENETRATE, FADE INTO EACH OTHER, BUILDING A SINGLE SYSTEM OF SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS.

*-Secchi, 2008,*











*Photographies by Gabriele Basilico. Source: "Istanti digitali" website*



*A Olinda, chi ci va con una lente e cerca con attenzione può trovare da qualche parte un punto non più grande d'una capocchia di spillo che a guardarlo un po' ingrandito ci si vede dentro i tetti le antenne i lucernari i giardini le vasche, gli striscioni attraverso le vie, i chioschi nelle piazze, il campo per le corse dei cavalli. Quel punto non resta lì: dopo un anno lo si trova grande come un mezzo limone, poi come un fungo porcinio, poi come un piatto da minestra. Ed ecco che diventa una città a grandezza naturale, racchiusa dentro la città di prima: una nuova città che si fa largo in mezzo alla città di prima e la spinge verso il fuori. Olinda non è certo la sola città a crescere in cerchi concentrici, come i tronchi degli alberi che ogni anno aumentano d'un giro. Ma alle altre città resta nel mezzo la vecchia cerchia delle mura stretta stretta, da cui spuntano rinsecchiti i campanili le torri i tetti d'embrici le cupole, mentre i quartieri nuovi si spanciano intorno come da una cintura che si slaccia. A Olinda no: le vecchie mura si dilatano portandosi con sé i quartieri antichi, ingranditi mantenendo le proporzioni su un più largo orizzionte ai confini della città; essi circondano i quartieri un po' meno vecchi, pure cresciuti di perimetro e assottigliati per far posto a quelli più recenti che premono da dentro; e così via fino al cuore della città: un'Olinda tutta nuova che nelle sue dimensioni ridotte conserva i tratti e il flusso di linfa della prima Olinda e di tutte le Olinde che sono spuntate una dall'altra; e dentro a questo cerchio più interno già spuntano - ma è difficile distinguerle - l'Olinda ventura e quelle che cresceranno in seguito.*

*-Italo Calvino, Le città invisibili*





# 03 A framework for urban public spaces

*Socio-anthropological perspective on urban-habitat and on the role of institutions*

## 3.1 The frenzy of eccess

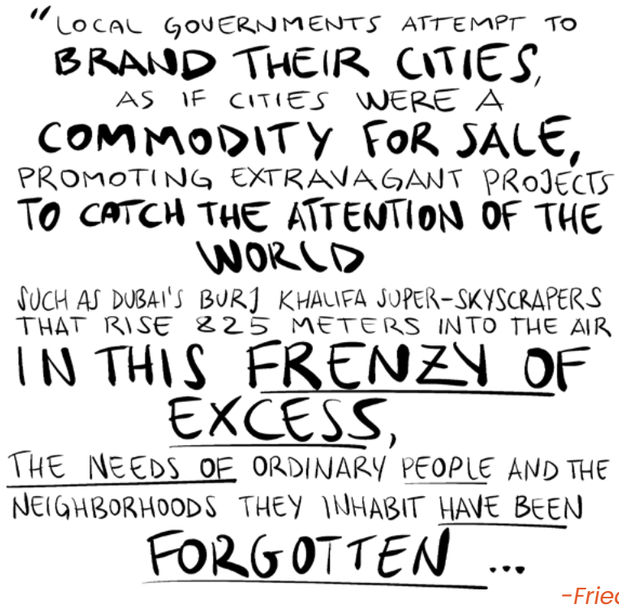
In the previous chapter, the limits and impacts of urban transition were ascertained through a harsh critique of current planning methods, impregnated with mere forgetfulness towards rural places or small city spaces. Indeed, their design focus is mostly directed towards "**megastructures**": the most prosperous metropolises, being able to dispose of huge financial investments, orient the design of infrastructure works towards high standards of recognizability; this action triggers mechanisms of competition between the different urban centers given the resulting economic profit.

According to John Friedmann, Professor Emeritus of Urban Planning and founder of the Urban Planning Program at the UCLA School of Architecture in Los Angeles (previously introduced in chapter 2), this modus operandi generates "**landscapes and urban systems that lack soul**" (*Friedmann, 2010)*, or hybrid landscapes with blurred and widespread contours in which the inhabitants risk getting lost given the extreme changeability of the territories and the absence of stable and uncorrupt landmarks that characterizes them.

In his 2010 essay, Friedmann provides essential insights for thought by analyzing the contributions of different authors on the theme of "place", probing and investigating literature in search of socio-philosophical perspectives through which to read and interpret the current urban system. The essay illustrates an approach to planning for Placemaking (i.e. the creation of places) aimed at combating the strenuous and vain **competition between cities**; thus, a critical vision of the problems and vicissitudes affecting both the physical environment and the feelings of the inhabitants suffering the consequences of urban transition is outlined.

Friedmann examines the intense competition between cities, arguing that it is due to the "hunger for capital" of local governments. To achieve success, institutions act as entrepreneurs to attempt to attract potential investors in hopes of achieving high standards of **city recognition** and high global ratings. The need to brand, sell out and expose oneself that miserably characterize today's system have therefore also clawed at the ideology behind urban planning, which sets an inane objective:






*-Friedmann, 2002*

The author continues his narration by premising that it derives from a personal vision that draws inspiration not only from reading the contributions of other authors and colleagues, but also from empirical observation of the city. This statement establishes a strong point of contact with the ideas of Jane Jacobs, who argued that it was essential to explore city life from a "**city walker" perspective**. According to Jacobs, it is necessary to directly observe a place firsthand in order to stimulate an urban education based on a "human measure", therefore able to grasp the real needs of the community that inhabits it. This topic will be explored in the following paragraphs. From the **frenzy of excess** that characterizes urban design, a "**placeless" scenario** emerges: these terms are adopted by Friedmann to identify the condition of desolate lack of place that hovers in the soul of people who feel they do not belong anywhere. **Being rootless** and unable to identify with any model to follow, the inhabitants are at the mercy of uncertainties and fears. The drama of the placeless subsist in its repercussions: those who do not have access to the well-being deriving from having a solid bond with their land tend not to show respect for their surroundings them, risking failure to establish healthy and appropriate social contact with people who share their same context. vIn his 2002 essay, Friedmann argues that this condition is due to the *"forces of contemporary life that constantly corrode our senses of being everywhere, erasing our entropic sense of place" (Friedmann 2002)*. According to the Treccani dictionary, the term "**entropy**" can be adopted by translating its original meaning from molecular physics to systems physics, thus to be understood as a measure of the disorder of a system.




*-Friedmann, 2002*

According to the author, the entropy of a place is nurtured within the "**labyrinthine web of power and disempowerment**" *(Friedmann, 2002)*, a double-edged sword that, on the one hand, does not allow citizens to actively to shape their spaces because of the limits imposed by governance and, on the other hand, leaves the green light to the minds of planners who aspire to satisfy primarily economic interests and secondly those of the community.
Urban entropy expands following the rhythms of the evolution of the city which, as explained in the previous chapter, is subject to mechanisms of diffusion and contraction that fade its boundaries to the point of consequently blurring the ability to shape, act and control a given place. This condition gives rise to an exponential increase in the number of random events, which in turn induce the dissolution of settlements due to the resulting disorder. The increase in the entropy of a place also generates the spread of a "**mentality of fortitude and fearful isolation**" in those who suffer the results and repercussions (*Friedmann, 2010*) or a process of closure on a mental and physical level towards the "other" that is activated in the resident population of a given urban space subject to rampant entropy.
In this regard, to concretize this theory, the story "Ariadne" told in 2002 by the Nobel laureate J.M.G. Le Clézio is proposed, which exposes causes and effects of urban entropy and demonstrates how it acts by feeding the feeling of placeless in the inhabitants. In "Ariadne", the protagonist is raped by a motorcycle gang in a desolate social housing apartment on the outskirts of a French metropolis, the so-called "banlieue". The story describes the sense of desolation that characterizes the place, the lack of empathy and human connection that snakes between the walls of the dilapidated buildings, the boastful attitude of the people who wander through its alleys: the perception of insecurity is palpable, and makes the Friedmanian "**fortress mentality**" expand like wildfire. The story's characters are entangled and subjected to a rampant entropy, an unsettling deterioration of space and community that gives rise to **random acts of violence**, such as rape. The young men roam the streets of the neighborhood in search of something that can allow them to pettily define their own boundaries, that would give them a way to "**temporarily vent their anger at a system that excludes them**" (*Friedmann, 2010*), as Friedmann points out by also coining the term "**horror of placeless**" to indicate the unconscious terror resulting from the absence of a fixed point to which they can cling and in which they can be reflected.
In 2004 AbdouMaliq Simone, professor at the Sheffield's Urban Institute, defines as "**ghostly cities**" the urban places that are subject to repeated episodes of crime, violence and anger that degenerate into the attribution of pernicious labels either to the neighborhood itself or to the inhabitants or people who frequent it *(Simone, 2004)*.
In these areas are perpetrated acts such as drug dealing, rape, terrorism, or entropic forces that cause a sinister sense of malaise that can only continue to degenerate, given the immobility of the aforementioned "labyrinthine web of power and powerlessness" *(Friedmann, 2002)* that afflicts the cities.

*Frame from AUJIK's video "Spatial Bodies" (2016). Source: IGNANT website*



The analysis of perceptions about the urban system is, therefore, essential to define holistically the framework to which they belong. Indeed the inhabitants are affected by the context in which they live and experience on their skin the daily routine of the urban life in a given city, whether it is auspicious or nefarious.
In particular, the focus on the degeneration caused by the breakdown, corruption and disregard of institutions in the complexity of the urban network is, according to Friedmann, an extreme but illustrative case of the **dystopian drift** towards which we are headed, given the exorbitant increase in young people declared redundant and, consequently, relegated to the margins of society. To combat this prevailing condition, Friedmann's response as an urban planner is to become aware of the inadequacy of the design methods adopted so far. Below, the author urges toward a **change of course** that equally involves today's mindset and approach to planning, suggesting the adoption of such a strategy:

RECOVERING THE
**FRAGMENTS OF**
**HUMAN HABITAT**
THAT HAVE BEEN OFFERED US
AS A CITY RESIDENTS,
**RECONNECTING OUR LIVES**
**TO THE LIVES OF OTHERS**
IN WAY THAT ARE INHERENTLY
**MEANINGFUL.**

*-Friedmann, 2010*

In fact it would be possible **to revitalize places and spaces that can be rehumanized to revive the city,** gradually freeing it from the grip of negative entropy and economic impositions (which, otherwise, would continue to direct and orient urban design towards profit maximization and the vain branding of spaces, buildings and infrastructures). As stated by the author, it would be preferable to focus on creating small **spaces that can be lived and loved for the value they represent** in the soul of the people who frequent them.

To achieve this result, the approach to **collaborative and participatory planning** involving the redevelopment of small places on a neighborhood scale is recommended, and specifically admonished to the need to focus efforts towards actually meeting the needs of residents. These concepts will be addressed and deepened in the next





chapter: they are the cornerstones of this thesis work, perfectly aligned with the thoughts of the authors exposed in the previous chapters, such as Jane Jacobs, Jose Siri, Michael Mehaffy, Aurelio Peccei and the Popper spouses.
Initiating a **Participatory Design** project would therefore **allow the inhabitants to feel part of the process**, establishing a solid bond with the place and giving life to an **active community.** These initiatives make it possible to combat the malaise deriving from the feeling of placeless and dismantle the "labyrinthine web of power and disempowerment" (Friedmann, 2002) that paralyzes the entire system, thus preventing the proliferation of disorder caused by negative entropic action.

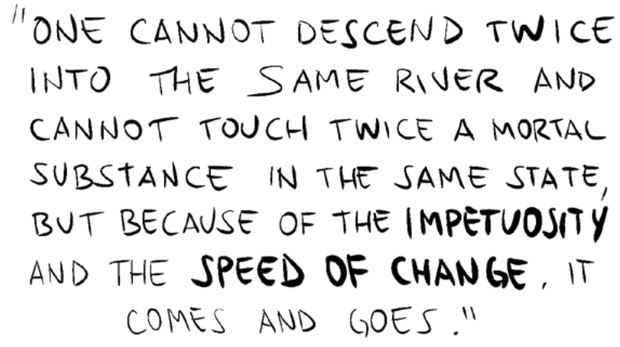
*Photography by Alexandre Souêtre. Source: IGNANT website*

## 3.2 Recovering fragment of human habitat

Below will be proposed a further reading of human perceptions in the urban context, reflections on the way of living the city and ethno-sociographic frameworks useful to lay the groundwork for the adoption of a **Human-Centered Design** (whose pillars will be erected in the next chapters). In Friedmann's words, to "recover the fragments of the human habitat" it is essential to pause to persecrate the soul of people and the way in which a place is lived, forged and transformed by those who inhabit it. "***Neighborhood places are dynamic***, *and every snapshot is nothing more than a moment in the flow of life. […]. The neighborhood is cherished for very different reasons: because it has places of encounter where people reaffirm each other as who they are, or comment on the day's events; because life has a certain rhythm with which all are familiar and to which all expectantly look forward; because there are* ***places that are "sacred" to the people****; and because there are special places of gathering where events important to the community transpire." (Friedmann, 2010).*
In this regard, it is interesting to analyze Tim resswell's 2004 contribution regarding the creation of places and his definition of **place as an "event"**.

Cresswell, Professor in Social and Cultural Geography at the University of Wales, investigates the place on a local scale through the so-called "inside out perspective", i.e. investigating how the inhabitants act intrinsically with respect to the urban context by triggering real change on the physiognomy of the city.
Following the study of the research of famous authors such as the English geographer and sociologist Nigel Thrift and the anthropologist French Michel de Certeau, Cresswell highlights how the place is constituted through the "**iterative social practice**": this term identifies the plasticity of urban spaces, whose shape derives from the perpetuation of actions and changes implemented by the people who live there. City spaces thus constitute an "**unstable stage for performance**" *(Cresswell, 2004).*
In this perspective, places are **subject to an Heraclitian flow where everything flows.**






*-Theory of Becoming of Heraclitus quoted in Castronuovo, 1998*

This peculiarity prevents crystallizing the essence of places, which would otherwise mistakenly fossilize the mutability of their being.
**A place is lived, reiterated, decomposed and recomposed** to adapt to what it welcomes or to what, forcibly, is relegated and forced to remain within it; this latter condition, in particular, can give rise to the random acts of violence mentioned above as a result of the dissatisfaction of the inhabitants' needs, or their ineducation.
From our point of view, shedding light on these issues is fundamental to orient the design towards effective practices for Placemaking that educate the community to implement an iterative social practice that concretely stimulates their capacity for action in the Cresswellian "stage". To foster openness towards a more socially sustainable urban design, it is almost essential **to make residents aware of the intrinsic dynamism of each urban space** and of the crucial role they play in its shape.

In the academic excerpt of his 2007 bibliography, Friedmann offers a tangible example to concretize and demonstrate Cresswell's theories regarding the place as an "event" by reporting the activities recorded in the area surrounding the Tsu-Sze temple in Taiwan, located in the city of Shan-Hsia.
The urban planner paints a picture of the **intimacy of the neighborhood** which, although located in a semi-peripheral area, is characterized by a daily, deep and placid social encounter between the inhabitants: in front of the temple, there are numerous market stalls, where people are going to buy fresh local products such as fish, meat, fruit and vegetables, but also cooked foods of the local tradition; a small square with irregular contours is crowded with children and young people intent on playing under the shady branches of the trees; strong smells of spices and incense rise through the crowd, intoxicating the cheerful shouting that dominates the buzzing of

mopeds, the most popular means of transport among residents. The author continues his **narration as a "walker in the city"** offering the sketch of the crowd that disperses in the temple and prays admiring the statues of the deities; the setting up of a stage beyond a pedestrian bridge for an outdoor show, whose speakers offer a Taiwanese version of hard rock; not far away, a recorded mechanical voice is heard from a truck inviting people to vote "Wu" for the city council. In this ethnographic story, modernity and tradition meet and contaminate each other without affecting each other, but mutually accepting their similarities and dissonances; in this way, **both souls of the community can coexist in the same space** without one of the two annulling the other.

In modern Western contexts, it is possible to appreciate the same frantic rhythm in market contexts, festivals, festivals, culinary tastings and social meetings carried out both in large urban contexts, as well as in small towns; the rituality and cadence that characterize them make them loved by the community and attract visitors and tourists, favoring the prosperity of the local economy and the recognizability of small sellers. In these events, **the actors of the territory act by shaping the environment *ad hoc***, sometimes through the use of temporary and removable structures, they succeed in imparting an atmosphere that feeds the affection for the place and the temporary activities it welcomes. Another exemplary model of meeting place for the community is the urban nightlife that pours into the city's main squares; in this case, the rhythms of the meetings are marked weekly, notifying a considerable influx of young people on weekends who, given the obvious need to search for recreational ways to have fun, provide delicious opportunities for economic revenue for the businesses located near these places which, in turn, shape them to make the most of their potential use. The spaces thus become the Cresswellian stage on which people scramble to express themselves and be attractive in the eyes of their peers and, consequently, arrange situations and **patterns of behavior that, over time, cement the ways of using the place.**
The "iterative social practice" *(Cresswell, 2004)* consists in this continuous action and recreation of a place where the inhabitants give shape to it in a more or less conscious way: without smudges and without forcing, **the community sets up its own living spaces** which, to use Cresswell's terminology, are configured as an event whose spatial arrangement is functional to the activities carried out, marked by the dynamic rhythms of social interaction that occurs within it. Being inclined to open up to new changes, the quality of space improves as it is able to include and **satisfy the fickle needs of the society that inhabits it.**











"EACH TAKES MATTER INTO **PIECES**
EVEN SMALLER THAN ITS PREDECESSOR,
**BUT EACH GETS A RICHER**
**FLOWERING** WITHIN THIS DELIMITED
AND FENCED GARDEN HEDGE //

*-Nietzsche quoted in Castronuovo, 1998*

*Project "Bodies in urban spaces".*
*Concept by Willi Dorner and photography by Lisa Rastl.*
*Performed in 110 cities around world with local performers.*
*Source: IGNANT website*

Cresswell condenses the findings on urban aspects by providing a list of the **requirements that he says should characterize places.** According to the author, they should be characterized by:

- Iterative social practices
- Inclusion
- Performability
- Dynamic quality *(Cresswell, 2004)*

To connect the threads of the previous discourse regarding the strategy proposed by Friedmann on the recovery of fragments of human habitat and to the ethnographic account of Shan-Hsia, the urban planner points out that the Tsu-Sze temple has been destroyed and rebuilt three times, given the value it represents for the community (that is, being "**intrinsically significant**" for the inhabitants). Following this observation, Friedmann adds three other characteristics to those provided by Cresswell, which specifically argue that a place must be:

- A small area (limited to a pedestrian staircase)
- Inhabited and lived
- Loved by the resident population because it represents or means something important to them *(Friedmann, 2010)*

Regarding the first criterion, it is deepened by emphasizing that the pedestrian staircase allows a **direct and real interaction between the inhabitants**; in fact, a small place is characterized by "serendipity", a peculiarity that allows people to interface in sudden and unplanned ways with space and with other human beings (this concept will be deepened in the next paragraphs). "Small-scale area" refers to a neighborhood space (or a square or a park or other similar environments) that are **recognized by the community as one's own "home"**, being habitual meeting places where ritually usual human activities take place. Sociologists call this type of place "**primary space of social reproduction**".

As for the second criterion, Friedmann compares it with so-called "non-places", i.e. neutral spaces such as shopping malls, department stores, hotels, banks, airports, bus stops or office buildings. This concept was analyzed by the anthropologist Marc Augè in his 1995 bibliography: Augé argues that because they are inhabited, primary spaces of social reproduction are subjected to actions of modification and transformation by the simple natural prerogative of being inhabited, a condition that generates **spatial patterns of social interaction that are forged over time**.



For example, they may be subject to the elements of socio-demographic changes such as the arrival of tourists or new residents, or the abandonment of old inhabitants (conditions that, taken to extremes, degenerate into gentrification or shrinkage, topics covered in the previous chapter).
In contrast to these spatial models, **"non-places have no soul"** *(Friedmann, 2010)* and cannot be counted among the "inhabited and lived" urban spaces that, instead, are characterized by a high degree of plasticity and, over time, manage to acquire a particular meaning for the community; sometimes they even take on a name or identifying trait that is widely accepted and shared by the target group of people who frequent it.

The third criterion presented by Friedmann refers to **community's fondness for place**, which can be inscribed in the strategy promoted by the author concerning the "recovery of fragments of the human habitat" discussed above. This condition is discernible in the way residents of a city mobilize to improve the physical condition of a neighborhood, by the variety of local associations and organizations that act to provide non-ordinary spaces for citizens (sometimes to respond to the failure of institutions to meet their needs) or still discernible in the way residents react to welcome newcomers and by the proactivity of local voluntary actions.
Affection for the place, although it seems an invisible and intangible attribute because it is subjective, **can occasionally manifest itself in a concrete way**: for example, when a space or a neighborhood is threatened with demolition works, it witness the emergence of groups, associations or communities that fight for its survival.




*Artwork from the series "Jamestown Knockout" by photograper Andreas Jakwerth. The inhabitants carry out an iterative social practice (boxing matches) in the alleys of a village in Ghana.*

## 3.3 Fighting for a place: urban activism

About the latter theme of the previous paragraph it is interesting to report the **case study of Comala**, a cultural association in Turin that, through urban regeneration and placemaking actions, has redeveloped a public space targeting it for youth aggregation. Comala consists of an evening and daytime meeting area, rehearsal rooms for music, theater and dancing, outdoor areas set up as study rooms with free sockets and wi-fi; It organizes events such as concerts of emerging artists, outdoor cinema screenings and much more. Having had the opportunity to personally experience this place and having taken part in various activities proposed by the association, we can confirm that **the multifaceted nature of the space** is extremely loved and appreciated by young students and workers who attend it; the bohemian and nonconformist atmosphere make it unique, singular and eccentric, making inroads into the hearts of those who seek their own place in the world. From the result of perceptions on the ground, it is self-evident that the mindset on which the creation of the space is based is extremely **open and inclusive**, inciting acceptance of disparities and heterogeneity of personalities and styles.
Comala meets the list of requirements that, according to Cresswell and Friedmann, should characterize a place; it is therefore an **exemplary model of Placemaking**. Indeed, the polyfunctionality that identifies it makes it a primary space of social reproduction, since **it allows itself to be continuously shaped by the community** that lives it through iterative social practices.
The visceral dynamism that specifies it guarantees the quality of the services it offered: indeed Comala welcomes the needs of young people who genuinely desire to have access to a space to express their passions, to cultivate their aspirations and to have an identity meeting point in which to place trust.
Having such a place allows to **fortify the soul of a community,** which takes action to forge a small space on a local scale because it means and represents something important to it.
Comala has a considerable importance also given its **historical value**: as a Placemaking project, it recovers spaces the abandoned urban spaces of the former La Marmora barracks dating back to the 1800s, which in turn was born on a land that saw the succession of vicissitudes such as the maxi-trial of the Red Brigades, was home to the artillery cavalry troops in war and hosted daily events such as the cattle market. **The reactivation of an urban void through a communicative-narrative approach** such as to involve a specific target of the community is also in line with the strategies set out in the previous chapter regarding the theory of "Smart decline" developed in 2002 by the Popper spouses.

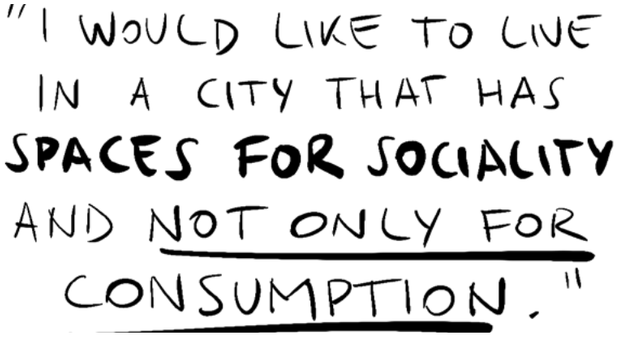
Despite the rich legacy of the experience of this space and the effectiveness of the self-built project, **Comala risks being demolished** to make room for the new urban planning proposed by the Municipality of Turin, which involves the construction of a large conference center, a hotel and an Esselunga hypermarket in the spaces where the cultural center stands, or in the former Westinghouse area (in particular, Comala's entrance courtyard will be replaced by the mall's service road to bring in the supply trucks). In addition to the social damage, the new urban project involves the destruction of one of the few green areas in the neighborhood which, having to cut down tall trees, is also environmentally unsustainable.

Opting for a redevelopment plan for the district is a choice arising from the need to make up for the consequences deriving from the **heavy economic debt that hangs over the city** for having hosted the 2006 Olympics, now equal to 2.6 billion euros. Although the assets have been invested to build essential infrastructures such as the metro and the railway link, the capital also includes the **dilapidation of 2 million euros** for the construction of structures and buildings built specifically for the event (moreover currently in a state of decay or totally demolished, as in the case of the Atrium pavilions). A further huge expense borne by taxpayers is related to the remuneration of the Archistar Mario Bellini who, despite the 16 million euros invested in commissioning his project for an immense cultural center (six floors, with theaters and reading rooms and conferences), has never been realized. It should have been built in the former Westinghouse area, which also includes part of the Comala's headquarters.

Indeed, at the beginning of the millennium, the planners decided **to entrust the design of this megastructure to a star architect,** hypothesizing the construction of a new central civic library of Turin that would appear as a symbol of the progress of the city, wanting to emphasize its evolution from industrial center to seat of cultural development based on the improvement of the tertiary sector starting in the last decades of the last century. These circumstances refer to the discourse addressed at the beginning of this chapter about the "**frenzy of excess**" *(Friedmann, 2002)* and the vapid will of cities to carry out infrastructure works of disproportionate size but devoid of soul (as they are focused on emerging on the world scene, **rather than satisfying the real needs of citizens**).
However, following the shelving of Bellini's project, in 2012 the area was banned, won by the Esselunga group-listed company. However the new design has suffered huge slowdowns, due in part

to **activism and protests of citizens**, outraged by the provision of privatization and overbuilding of the area and the consequent future loss of one of the rare green areas of the neighborhood. The community has mobilized in unison, setting up committees such as "EsseNon" which includes collectives of environmentalists and university students. Comala has also launched a petition openly asking for the revision of the project which, expected to devastate a fundamental meeting point, could cause a colossal **fracture in the dialogue between institutions and citizenship.**

In Giorgio Ghiglione's 2022 article, these aspects are explored by interviewing the sociologist of the University of Turin Giovanni Semi, who confirms **the lability of the urban development model based on the construction of venues and infrastructures for large events,** given that these plans have only generated deficits without benefiting the community. In the particular case of Turin, the city aims to compete with attractive poles such as Venice, whose recognizability is known worldwide, or Milan (which has much larger and more organized accommodation facilities and airport) and, to compensate for losses, begs funds by privatizing urban areas without restraint, as in the case of the sale to the Esselunga group. Turin, despite being undergoing a huge demographic decline and one-tenth of its inhabitants is below the poverty line, in 2022 has planned the construction of six more supermarkets.




-Margherita, activist of EsseNon
cited in Ghiglione, 2022







*From the top:*

*"Downtown Corrida" series by photographer Alban Lécuyer. Source: IGNANT website*

*Photo of Comala Cultural Association.*

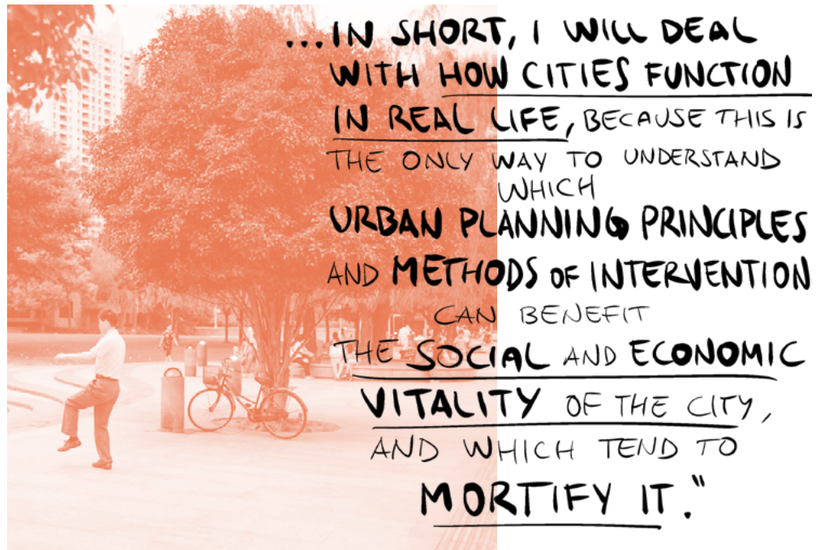


# 3.4 How to size the serendipity

Regarding the theme of **urban activism**, it is inevitable to mention again the work of Jane Jacobs, who once again counts herself among her pioneers. In the fifties, during the period in which he worked for the magazine "Architectural Forum", he was able to investigate urban planning and harshly criticized the radicality of future projects that foresaw a fierce change in the American city landscape. The activist started a strenuous struggle for the defense of his neighborhood (Greenwich Village in New York), threatened with demolition to make way for the construction of a highway; his goal was not only to preserve the pre-existing landscape and the history it preserved, but also **to oppose the megalomaniac amorality of the projects** of the most famous urban planners, including the "master builder" of the metropolis Robert Moses.

Friedmann in 2010 summarizes their comparison reported in Peter Hall's 1988 essay; the **debate** between the two urban planners was the culmination of the struggle between the top-down (applied to Moses' design) and bottom-up approach (whose forerunner Jacobs stands for) discussed at length in Chapter 2. The distance between the two points of view is evident in the ways in which the city is analyzed before proceeding with the design: while Moses relies on the so-called "**birds-eye city perspective**", Jacobs leans towards a walking citizen perspective, the "**city-walker perspective at street level**", cited at the beginning of this chapter because it was also adopted by Friedmann in his socio-ethnographic analysis. Indeed Jacobs' approach is ethnographic because it derives from the direct observation of urban life and the investigation of the reasons that emerged in the course of his reflections. In this way it is possible to **define a systemic framework of the challenges and opportunities of an area** by simply questioning ordinary questions such as: "*Which kinds of urban roads are safe and which are not; why some parks are wonderful, while others may be morally - and sometimes mortally - dangerous; why certain slums remain such, while others manage to renew themselves spontaneously, overcoming the hostility of financiers and bureaucrats; what is the reason why the city center shifts; what an urban neighborhood is (if it exists) and what functions it performs in a large city....*






*-Jacobs, 1961*

Following the dissemination of his ideas, her character has become so popular that in many cities around the world "**Jane's walks**" are organized, free walks in which participants explore their neighborhoods and discuss their opinions to improve their urban education and establish a link with the community in the conversion of ideas. From this follows the assertion that the birds-eye perspective, or **looking at a city from above, implies flying over and neglecting the humanity that transpires from the urban space**. In fact, it is revealed only when the gaze of the inhabitants meets, in a fleeting attempt to grasp their trepidation, their calm serenity or their passive resignation, or when one tries to feel the tranquility or tension that exudes from the streets and alleys traveled; these subtleties are perceptible only by those who, precisely, investigate the city at walking pace.

It is necessary to open a parenthesis on the results of the city-walker perspective applied to design: this vision allows us to grasp a further facet that distinguishes the urban environment, namely the pleasant unexpected chaotic that Jane Jacobs identifies with the term "**serendipity**". The Treccani dictionary defines it as *"the ability or luck to make unexpected and happy discoveries by chance while you are looking for something else"*. The city is an impeccable incubator of serendipity: the chaos of urban life that characterizes it is the fertile ground for the proliferation of ideas and hopes in the human soul. **In comparison with others and with the world, each person questions himself by scrutinizing his surroundings** to find answers to his own questions and solutions to his own problems; sometimes in his spasmodic search we come across by chance new, amazing revelations that can open a new world of awareness.

*Photography from "Elimination Method" series by Mankichi Shinshi. Source: IGNANT website*

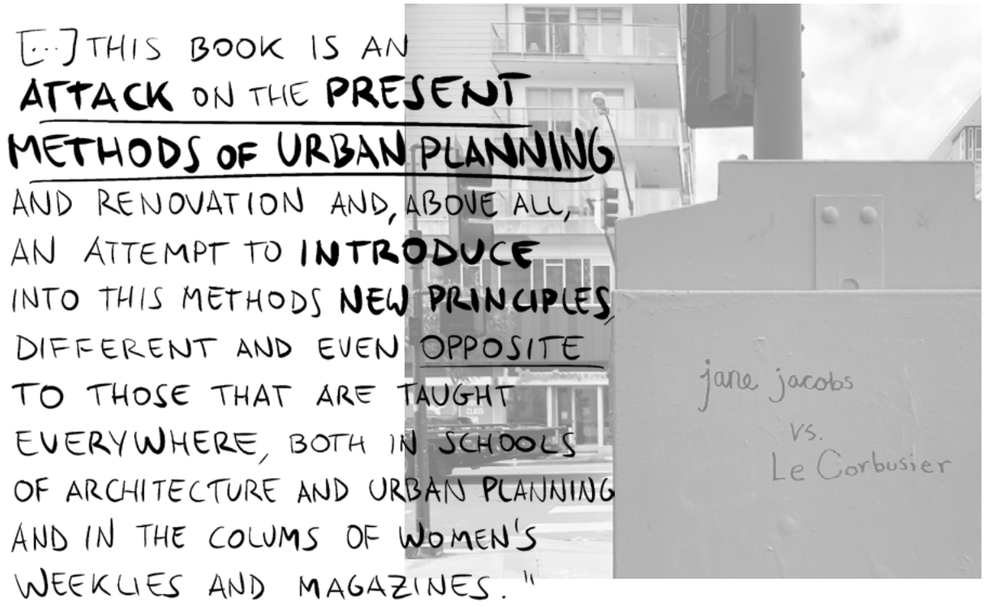
Therefore, urban dynamism is the ideal background to allow every man to build himself and his future, constituting a fertile "**humus for creativity**" *(De Lange, 2019)*.
According to this vision, chaos should not be curbed but accepted; welcoming the intrinsic vitality of urban space is extremely advantageous because, if it acts in respect of people and the environment, it is an indispensable prerequisite for the flowering of creativity through fortuitous encounters and exchanges.
As already argued in the previous chapter, **the lack of serendipity generates an urban monoculture** that, given the monotony and flattening of unexpected stimuli that characterizes it, would degenerate by annihilating the vitality of a city.
A rationalized place designed for an extremely functional use of its spaces implies the mummification of its essence, since it does not admit posthumous actions of modification and personalization by those who come into contact with it.
The top-down design, in fact, in its eagerness to manage and control the dynamic flow of actions perpetrated by citizens, tightens the noose around their necks even tighter, having the opposite effect of that hoped for: as pointed out earlier, excluding dialogue with the interiority of inhabitants' needs runs the risk of thickening the labyrinthine network of power and impotence and widening the rift between institutions and citizenship, **increasing urban entropy that degenerates into the explosion of random acts of violence as a result of people's inability to identify with a place.**
Conversely, a space left free to evolve manages to self-control according to an **autopoietic logic** since, as part of the urban system, it is subject to the feedback mechanisms of open dynamical systems (Chapter 2). As emphasized by the analysis of the criteria for the creation of places bestowed by Creswell and revised by Friedmann, only small, inhabited and inclusive places are able to host iterative social practices characterized by **performability and dynamic quality such as to make these spaces truly meaningful and loved by people**. Adding reflections related to serendipity, according to this criterion, disorder and unpredictability would be able to self-organize and emerge in unexpected forms such as to stimulate new feelings of affection towards the place, as well as increase the socio-economic prosperity of cities (Lange, 2019) given the generative potential of human creativity.




*-Oldenburg 1989, quoted in Lange, 2019*



To close this parenthesis, from the seeds launched by Jane Jacobs sprouts were born that allowed, over time, to make her legacy flourish. Around the second half of the nineties, the supporters of his ideas coined the paradigm of the "**Creative city**" to condense these reflections on serendipity and its potential creative contribution to human life; in particular, these concepts fit perfectly into the scenario that was emerging following the rise of the information economy and its rhetoric linked to disruptive innovations, such as they overturn the status quo constituting a sudden change from the habit of business-as-usual *(De Lange, 2019)*. Therefore, Jacobs' reflections were once again extremely visionary.
Returning to the diatribe between the two divergent approaches to planning, Jane Jacobs' famous 1961 book "Death and Life of Great American Cities" is introduced; she defines it in this way:




*-Jacobs, 1961*

Her contribution launches a bold **criticism of the design principles of the time** that fueled the spread of gentrification and the destruction of the soul of small places in the city and the spread of suburbs and rural centers, conditions that led to the genesis of the impacts and dramatic consequences discussed in chapter 2.
The vicissitudes of the struggle between the two approaches are reported in the 2016 article by Anthony Paletta, which tells how Moses' work lavished himself in numerous positions (he was also commissioner for parks in New York) whereby **he acted subtly by investing and looking after the interests of politically influential economic forces** such as banks, contractors, bond subscribers or real estate manipulators.

*"Jane Jacobs vs Le Corbusier" written outside New School of Architecture and Design, in San Diego. Picture took by us during our international mobility period.*

Initially, Moses' design focused on Long Island, whose landscape was disrupted by the construction of roads that jutted towards the center of the city, demolishing the original urban fabric; he then shifted his attention to the heart of Greenwich Village, where Jacobs lived, planning to raze 10 acres of green land to make way for a four-lane road. When the citizens were informed of the plan, Jane Jacobs wrote a letter to the mayor: *"It's very discouraging to do our best to make the city more habitable and then learn that the city is devising plans to make it uninhabitable. [...] Why haven't cities long since been identified, understood and treated as problems of organized complexity?" (statement by Jane Jacobs quoted by Paletta, 2016)*
Her pen repeatedly punished the rationalism of the top-down approach, denouncing its **narrowness and limitation of ideological assumptions.**
Later, the activist continued her struggle by getting in touch with the media




*Jane Jacobs during urban protests (1964). Photography by Fred W. McDarrah. Source: MUUS Collection via Getty Images)*

and setting up a committee to spread the word among the community and seek the support of prominent figures, such as Eleanor Roosevelt. Moses and his collaborators worked to circumvent the problem of popular reaction by **classifying the area as a "slums"** in a state of decay in order to justify its demolition, but Jacobs' committee reacted again by undermining the theory with extensive documentation following it.

Despite this, the institutions devised new strategies to carry out their plans, but this had a bitter negative effect linked to considerable damage to the image: there was a growing disgust on the part of citizens towards the **hypocrisy shown by the planners**, a reaction that led to their abandonment of the battlefield, but not of the redevelopment objectives that were directed towards other victims.
Thus was born the project of the Lower Manhattan Expressway, which would destroy the teeming vitality that characterized the varied multi-ethnicity of neighborhoods such as SoHo and Little Italy, providing for the demolition of 426 buildings, or the displacement of over two thousand families. As political officials reacted with increasing Phariseeism, Jacobs commented: "*The city is like an asylum run by the most extravagant inmates*" *(statement by Jane Jacobs quoted by Paletta, 2016).*

It was decided to bring back the ordeals of the conflict between Jacobs and Moses because the two characters embody **the two opposing factions that still coexist in the urban system**; respectively, one represents the cohesive and proactive city community, the other the institutions that promote top-down urban planning.
Jacobs' activism, however, has opened a window to rethink urban design by questioning its principles based on mere speculative ideals of profit and production of economic value, proposing a more human and empathetic vision of the design approach. By opting for an analysis of the city based on "human measurement" rather than the cold detachment of building calculation, it has provided an essential contribution to the creation of spaces and **cities "on a human scale"**, configuring itself as a forerunner to a new, revolutionary vision of urban design.
Indeed, his thought lays the foundations for the realization of the bottom-up and Human-Centered approach that we intend to adopt in the projects that will be presented in this thesis in the next chapters.

A further critical look that can be superimposed on Jacobian thought humanizes the analysis of urban spaces through the help of the concept of "**centering of places**", elaborated in the 2004 essay by the German anthropologist Stephan Feuchtwang following the conduct of field research in Chinese rural areas.

"A PLACE IS A GATHERING AND AGGREGATION SPACE FOR THE COMMUNITY THAT, REITERATING A CONTINUOUS SERIES OF ACTIONS, TACITLY ALLOWS ENCOUNTER, CENTERING AND CONNECTION BETWEEN PEOPLE."

*-Feuchtwang, 2004*

The boundaries of a place are dynamic and not delimited because they are subject to a Jacobian serendipity generated by the random events it welcomes and **not only offers a space for socializing, but also for the establishment of bonds**: his thought therefore weaves threads in common with Creswell and Friedmann, arguing that from the centering of the places derives the attachment of its inhabitants.
Nevertheless, Feuchtwang proposes a categorization following the differences between urban and rural areas. He contrasts, in fact, the "chaos of ordinary life" with the placid lifestyle of rural Chinese villages, which tend to embody the ideal of centering (and the affection for the place that derives from it) given the flourishing networks of familiarity and trust that characterize them. This kind of place requires residents to gather for a unanimously shared purpose reasoning that, according to the author, **a place must effectively communicate the purpose that identifies it**. For example, if a place is designated as conducive to sociability, the focus of the centering process will be communication between people; moreover, even the morphology of the place implicitly communicates its function: a closed space whose boundaries are marked and emphasized requires that its use is mediated by its organizers or managers, while an open space without walls will be more likely to accommodate a greater variety of interactions and activities. The author continues the elaboration of his theory by adopting the term coined in 2018 by sociologist Eric Klinenberg who calls this type of place "social infrastructure"; he argues how **the drive for social interaction promoted by a space has an extraordinary effect on the collective well-being of a community**, helping it to be more resilient or to thrive over time. Therefore, spaces that adequately communicate their purpose are able to **stimulate the creation of human connections** and the weaving of social relationships (including networks of mutual benefit for initiatives in public spaces such as keeping the elderly company or promoting charitable relief interventions to help people victims of disasters and accidents).
Following these observations, Feuchtwang proposes the notion of



**"interiority" to indicate the essence of a place**, or indicate what are the elements that identify it as such and how they communicate it to the world. A very similar concept is the idea of "**sacred spaces**" promoted in 2006 by landscape architect Randolph Hester, which enriches the definition of "interiority" with another nuance:

"THEY ARE **PLACES SO ESSENTIAL** TO THE LIFE OF RESIDENTS THAT, THROUGH THE **USE OF SYMBOLISM**, THEY ALLOW THE COMMUNITY TO IDENTIFY COLLECTIVELY WITH THEM. THE PLACES ARE SYNONYMOUS WITH THE CONCEPTS AND USES OF THE CITY BY THE RESIDENTS.
THE LOSS OF SUCH PLACES WOULD REORDER OR DESTROY SOMETHING OR SOME SOCIAL PROCESS ESSENTIAL TO THE COLLECTIVE BEING OF THE COMMUNITY."

*-Hester, 2006*

Sacred spaces would be, therefore, places that "should be left intact" because **they give voice and communicate the interiority of a place**, exemplifying and reinforcing the rituals of the "iterative social practices" that welcome; destroying them would mean annihilating the fabric of the community. This last point can be inscribed in the theme of activism exposed above: "**the erasure of places is a violent act, as the consolidated models of human relations and livelihoods of people who have settle there are destroyed**" says Hester, raging against institutions that, in their haste to satisfy the demands of profitable companies or the whims of rich and influential people, are unable to grasp the sacrilege committed against the population. The reflections on the centering of places and on sacred spaces implicitly support, once again, the strong validity and the bold need to investigate the city from a city-walker perspective through a **human and empathetic measurement of the inhabitants' experience**, so that these otherwise invisible facets can be grasped and the irremediable consequences of the dislocation of places can be avoided.

## 3.5 The *in-between world* of a city

As explained In the previous paragraph, **the lack of communication** in the dialogue between institutions and citizens and the inability (or conscious unwillingness) of decision-makers to understand which are the "sacred places" loved by residents open a lacerating wound in the relationship of trust between the two factions; moreover, the top-down approach adopted in planning activities threaten the survival and perpetuation of the Feuchtwangian interiority of many urban spaces. In addiction, particularly in recent decades, there has been a further upheaval in the way of living and internalizing places. In 1994 the well-known British geographer and sociologist Nigel Thrift exposes and addresses the question renamed "**in-between world**", relating to the current condition of places; indeed, they are intended as **spaces suspended at an intermediate point between the real and virtual worlds**. This condition annihilates the space of connection between human beings, undeniably placing a solid wall to interpersonal and interspatial communication. This is exacerbated by the speed at which the world is subject, in which space is reduced to constituting a "*framework for variable practices of space, time, and velocity*" (*Thrift, 1994).*

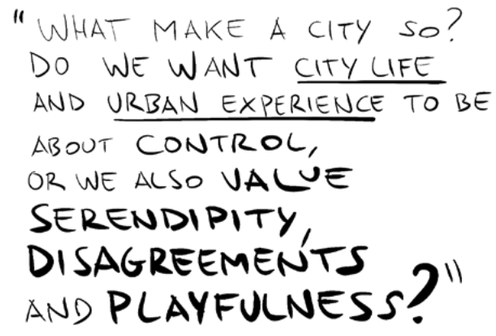
Although it was established in the nineties, the author's thought is still dramatically current: the flows of images and videos that constantly bombard our mind are **simulacra of pseudo-places that annihilate the Feuchtwangian interiority of real spaces**, unmooring us from them. If you experience a space in a condition that involves the occlusion of perception to one or more of the five senses, you run the risk of not adequately grasping the communicative potential of urban spaces and the serendipity that invades them, losing the possibility of exploiting their creative potential.

Although necessary, this reflection would open a passage to a long-winded chain of reflections that would not be consistent with the present thesis paper; however, **the role of technology in the field of communication** is extremely relevant in the panorama of the creation of places, since in the current scenario it would be impossible to foresee solutions totally detached from the adoption of these tools.

In particular, it is right to emphasize the literature that harshly criticizes the role of technology in one of the most cutting-edge solutions of the urban landscape, or the **Smart City**: this term refers to the implementation of



ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) for the optimization of urban processes through data collection and the exchange of information in real time in order to make decisions automated. The academic paper of the philosopher, anthropologist and urban culture expert Michiel de Lange of 2019 analyzes a series of bibliographic contributions and identifies the **three main critical strands**, summarized below. We believe it is important to deal briefly with this discourse because, beyond the topicality that characterizes it, justifies the validity of the choice of Placemaking as a sustainable urban practice for improving the quality of life; indeed, as De Lange argues in 2019, *"it leaves more room for civic action and community action"* compared to processes related to the Smart City. Placemaking activities generate primary spaces for social reproduction both by exploiting the intrinsic dynamism of the places, and by giving voice to their Feuchtwanghian interiority, which instead in the context of the Smart City is trampled on by the virtual superstructures it proposes. In fact, one of the critical strands identified by Lange argues about the **lack of agency** of the citizens of a Smart City, who become mute and passive data collectors. The second strand criticizes the adoption of the term "smart", since it mistakenly defines as "intelligent" an **extreme simplification of the complexity of urban problems** that it tries to solve through conversion in the form of data. Finally, the third strand (consequential with respect to the previous one) leverages this **simplistic vision** that derives from it, arguing that the complexity of reality should be accepted as a challenge for the community and not masked by virtuality.




*-De Lange, 2019*

Another nuance that can be counted in this last critical strand was exposed in 2019 by Urban Economist Ramon Marrades and engineer Dima Yankova. The authors object to the principles of the Smart City arguing that **technology can be adopted as a strategic choice only if understood as a means and not as an end** for the optimization of the decision-making process. In fact, the authors argue, the virtual algorithm must not completely replace the human mind in order not to run the risk of perfecting useless or senseless services. **The authors**

**participated in a workshop with the local community** of Toronto organized by Sidewalks Labs, Google's urban innovation unit and leader in the design of Smart Cities, from which the following considerations emerged: "*The promise of smart cities is a kind of ultra-efficient urban environment, which increases the quality of life through cutting-edge technological innovations. However,* ***what residents really want to see is a more human-centric design that creates spaces for spontaneous human interaction***." *(Marrades & Yankova, 2019)*
Once again we find the concept of serendipity and the sincere need on the part of people to have the opportunity to **naturally experience a city space** and to connect spontaneously with the people who live it.
Overall, therefore, the criticisms against the Smart City refer to the limitation of its approach since it would not favor the motu proprio of the actors on the territory given the adoption of purely technical tools for the management of processes involving the urban system which, as reiterated several times during this thesis, aims as **a complex dynamic system** subject to feedback mechanisms and autopoietic evolutions **that cannot be fully shaped by technology.**

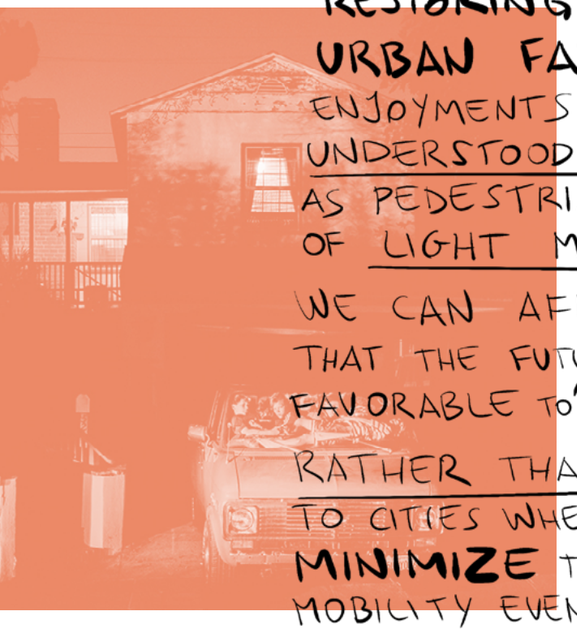
To support the thesis of Marrades and Yankova regarding the adoption of data processing technologies and systems, the following is proposed **the set of services provided by a Smart City** and the related critical issues. Currently a Smart City enables the optimization of urban transport networks, waste disposal management and more efficient water supply and management for heating and urban lighting *(Maci, 2023)*. For these macro-areas it is possible to facilitate the methods of managing and improving their functioning, since they are intended as urban elements at the service of citizens and are disconnected from social or human implications. Instead, the **forecasts on the future evolution of the Smart City are considered too ambitious**, aiming to set itself as a sustainable solution for mobility, for the reduction of pollution and for the improvement of citizens' well-being. For example, regarding these first two points, it would be **more effective to propose a gradual change in citizens' habits**, encouraging them to adopt a different behaviour through awareness and incentives for soft mobility (therefore investing in the creation of adequate routes and cycle paths) rather than investing considerable capital in trying to cushion the exorbitant impacts of an **unsustainable way of life that legitimizes the excessive use of private vehicles** such as cars.
In the case of the city of Turin, these statements are confirmed by the statements of Diego Vezza (president of the Turin City Council of bicycle mobility and traffic moderation in the city) reported in the 2023 article by journalist Turi. Vezza aims to achieve the high standards in support of soft mobility in large northern European cities: however, it announces that, despite the funding of about 5 million euros for projects in progress, the current Turin tracks are not suitable to guarantee the safety of travel because they are excessively narrow, not uniform and are also "broken" by numerous large intersections that do not protect the viability of cyclists (so-called "split bikeways"). Vezza denounces that



**the problem originates upstream of urban design**, having to reach compromises with his colleagues since, to create or widen the scope of the slopes, car parking should be reduced, a condition little tolerated by citizens *(Turi, 2023)*.
However, encouraging the development of cycling services would guarantee safety standards such as to encourage their use by residents who, consequently, would limit the adoption of private vehicles. Therefore, institutions and planners should break the chain of the status quo and initiate courageous works to raise awareness among citizens and offer them adequate sustainable alternatives (solutions that would partially stem the problems of mobility and pollution) instead of aiming at limiting environmental impacts with very expensive technologies. The latter aspect, once again, demonstrates how **institutions choose to chase trends and sophisticated manifestations of urban progress**, such as the Smart City, with the mellow purpose of blabbing in the eyes of the world that the city they administer is capable of achieving daring and wasteful levels of welfare and status deriving from the implementation of ICT which, however, turn out to be concretely ineffective.
According to the startup Skopìa of the University of Trento, which deals with strategic consulting, change analysis and applied research for public administration based on the Sciences of Anticipation, it would in fact be essential to pursue the paradigm changes that are emerging in the urban landscape, which tend towards a radicalization of the current idea of the city; ultimately, this would allow us to turn towards the possibility of **objectify the actions of citizens.**



*Artwork by photographer Kamil Kotarba from series "Hide and Seek": a sociological analysis of the dichotomous relationship between technology and real world.*
*Source: IGNANT website*



"RESTORING THE ORIGINAL URBAN FABRIC TO THE ENJOYMENTS OF CITIZENS, UNDERSTOOD FIRST OF ALL AS PEDESTRIANS AND USERS OF LIGHT MOBILITY. [...]
WE CAN AFFORD TO SAY THAT THE FUTURE IS MUCH MORE FAVORABLE TO "HAPPY CITIES" RATHER THAN SMART, AND TO CITIES WHERE THE AIM IS TO MINIMIZE THE NECESSARY MOBILITY EVEN BEFORE MAKING IT NECESSARILY SUSTAINABLE."

*-Furlanetto, CEO of Skopìa, in Maci, 2023*

The company ARUP, an international leader in engineering, planning and design design that operates in EU and non-EU contexts, proposes **the application of Circular Economy concepts** to implement the effectiveness of the Smart City, arguing that the adoption of ICT that it foresees should be treated as a means and not as an end for the optimization of urban processes (condition in line with one of the critical strands exposed above). In detail, in the 2023 Maci article, Guglielmo Carra (ARUP's Material Consulting Lead Europe) explains the strategies for planning the city around which ARUP's projects revolve, essential to optimize the yield of the smart city. Carra therefore discusses the need to flexibly design the urban environment by **aiming at a regeneration of natural capital** (according to a cradle-to-cradle logic, or regenerating existing resources to combat today's cradle-to-grave one, which instead aims at design from scratch by facogitating raw materials) and the promotion and activation of shared and open processes that allow local actors to collaborate with each other *(Maci, 2023)*.
The aforementioned design solutions present strong points of contact with the principles of Systemic Design and Placemaking that this thesis aims to approach and merge for the development of sustainable urban processes; the first point perfectly follows the ideals of **Eco-Design** (discipline in which Systemic Design has its deep roots) and the second can be inscribed in the ideals promulgated by **Participatory Design**, a pillar for the realization of Placemaking projects.
Therefore, the most sustainable future developments of Smart Cities could coincide with the adoption of the Placemaking solutions supported in this thesis. It is self-evident how these strategies disregard making new technologies protagonists in favor of a more humane approach to space, the environment and the community, concretely placing themselves as **a driving force for a more sustainable urban transition** that detaches itself from the purposes of megalomania that grip modern planning, aiming at the regeneration of pre-existing places and the strengthening of the community of residents who frequent them or them. He would attend if given a concrete opportunity to shape them according to their own needs while respecting their nature.



*Project "Cars and Bodies" by photographer Yann Rabanier, architect Thomas Cestia and videographer director Romain Dussalux. Source: IGNANT website*

# 3.6 The right to urban life

Friedmann, in his 2010 academic contribution explain the multifaceted vision of urban space of essayist philosopher, sociologist, geographer and urban planner Henri Lefebvre: he proposes the definition of *espace vécu*, litterally "**lived spaces**", to emphasize the fact that places have their own historical past and that planners, during redevelopment projects, have the moral obligation to respect it in order to recover their precious heritage.
According to Lefebvre, **the daily life of citizens is inextricably linked to urban reality** and what it provides them, drastically influencing the reproduction of social and production relations; knowing and dissecting them would make it possible to identify the "point of no return" after which the reproduction of current production relations would be interrupted in favor of the establishment of new exchanges *(Frémont et al., 2008)*. Contaminated by Marxist thought, Lefebvre proposes a vision that highlights the modes of supremacy and exploitation that dominate urban space with the aim of combating them; indeed he argues that **the senseless destruction and dislocation of places favors capitalist economic interests constituting a profound spatial contradiction** which weighs on society and the city; the blame is placed on the institutions and urban planning models adopted:






-Lefebvre, 1972 quoted in Frémont et al., 2008

The author goes on to assert that, instead of uprooting traditional planning strategies upstream and attempting to downsize them, it would be sufficient **to involve residents directly in urban design in order to establish a moral relationship that makes citizens aware of their "right to the city"**, Lefebvre's neologism from which his own 1968 essay *(Frémont et al., 2008)*.
This bibliographic contribution is articulated through the proposition of concrete questions on the implementation of more sustainable urban processes, in particular focusing on tactics to "convince and enlighten" political institutions and urban professionals to renew their design approach.
Lefebvre is optimistic about the outcomes of a possible **progression towards a future that values the quality of life and creativity** proper to human beings, a condition possible at a time when the **contradictions of capitalism will continue to be increasingly prevalent and unsustainable.**
Lefebvre goes on to ensure that the time is ripe to accept these changes willingly, given the level of development of technological and scientific inventions, the trend towards evolution in consumption and trade patterns, and the intellectualization of ongoing work.

*To the left:*
*Photo by Aliocha BoiSource: IGNANT website*

*On the top:*
*Photo by Fikri Rayisd*
*Source: IGNANT website*

"THE RIGHT TO URBAN LIFE,
TO THE RENEWED CENTRALITY,
TO PLACE OF MEETING AND EXCHANGE,
TO THE RHYTHMS OF LIFE
AND TIMES THAT ALLOWS THE FULL AND COMPLETE
ENJOYMENT OF THESE MOMENTS AND PLACES,
[THIS RIGHT] CAN INTERVENE IN AN OPERATIONAL WAY AND
STIMULATE RESEARCH. [...]
STATE CONTROL GIVES DISASTROUS RESULTS,
[...] IT TRANSFERS TO THE STATE THE ABSOLUTE RIGHTS OF THE OWNER [...],
THE MUNICIPALIZATION OF THE LAND HAS REVEALED ITS DISADVANTAGES,
ITS LIMITATIONS. "

*-Lefebvre, 1968 quoted in Frémont et al., 2008*

In conclusion, this chapter has explored "the labyrinthine network of power and disempowerment" that silently subjects urban planning and changes the requests for help or the cries of **protest of a community that, increasingly subject to the spread of places and the fragmentation of their identity, reflects the cracks resulting equally split and disintegrated**.
In fact, the sterility deriving from the creation of sumptuous but soulless urban landscapes has been demonstrated, being a mirror of the vulgar objectives of international prevail that grip the minds of the institutions. As already explained in the previous chapter on the theme of urban transition and its impacts on man and the environment, a change of course would be necessary for the **protection of the human habitat** which, to be such, requires that the **intrinsic dynamism** of its nature be welcomed and defended at the urban level both by governance and by citizens. To do this, it is essential to act at the level of urban planning to instill in the community the awareness of the **crucial role in giving voice to the interiority of a place**, allowing its revitalization and the creation of value thanks to the bond that would be established between people and the space they shape.
The next chapters will therefore address the issues related to the evolution of the design of places and the new trends that are emerging in the urban landscape for the **creation of spaces** (that is, Placemaking) **more sustainable at a social and environmental level**, followed by proposals for the implementation of design principles based on a human-centered approach in the light of the criticisms highlighted in these chapters.




*"A rant stream of consciousness". Artwork made by us (2023).*



*“Non è felice, la vita a Raissa. Per le strade la gente cammina torcendosi le mani, impreca ai bambini che piangono, s’appoggia ai parapetti del fiume con le tempie tra i pugni, alla mattina si sveglia da un brutto sogno e ne comincia un altro. Tra i banconi dove ci si schiaccia tutti i momenti le dita col martello o ci si punge con l’ago, o sulle colonne di numeri tutti storti nei registri dei negozianti e dei banchieri, o davanti alle file di bicchieri vuoti sullo zinco delle bettole, meno male che le teste chine ti risparmiano dagli sguardi torvi. Dentro le case è peggio, e non occorre entrarci per saperlo: d’estate le finestre rintronano di litigi e piatti rotti.*

*Eppure, a Raissa, a ogni momento c’è un bambino che da una finestra ride a un cane che è saltato su una tettoia per mordere un pezzo di polenta caduto a un muratore che dall’alto dell’impalcatura ha esclamato: – Gioia mia, lasciami intingere! – a una giovane ostessa che solleva un piatto di ragù sotto la pergola, contenta di servirlo all’ombrellaio che festeggia un buon affare, un parasole di pizzo bianco comprato da una gran dama per pavoneggiarsi alle corse, innamorata d’un ufficiale che le ha sorriso nel saltare l’ultima siepe, felice lui ma più felice ancora il suo cavallo che volava sugli ostacoli vedendo volare in cielo un francolino, felice uccello liberato dalla gabbia da un pittore felice d’averlo dipinto piuma per piuma picchiettato di rosso e di giallo nella miniatura di quella pagina del libro in cui il filosofo dice: “Anche a Raissa, città triste, corre un filo invisibile che allaccia un essere vivente a un altro per un attimo e si disfa, poi torna a tendersi tra punti in movimento disegnando nuove rapide figure cosicché a ogni secondo la città infelice contiene una città felice che nemmeno sa d’esistere”.*

*-Italo Calvino, Le città invisibili*



# 04 Turning spaces into places

*Converting under-performing spaces into meaningful places for the community*

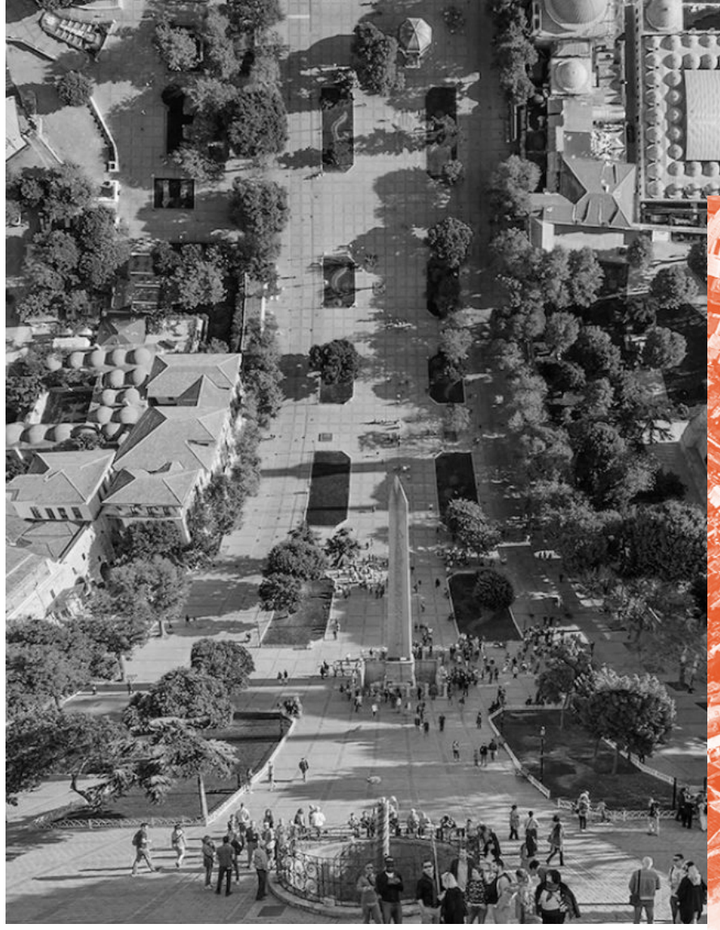
# 4.1 **City as an organism**

The city is an organism. Its complex structure consists of a systemic network within which each element acts and shapes the components linked to it, and each is essential for the survival of the entire system as are the organs of a human body. In her biography, Jane Jacobs constantly refers to the field of biology and ecology to strengthen the elaboration of her concepts and analyses of the urban environment. The metaphor of the city as a living organism is the common thread that unfolds through her famous 1961 book "Death and Life of Great American Cities": according to the author, the different aspects of the urban system (economic, social, cultural, political, etc.) are subject to the **principles of "complementarity" and "self-regulation"** that guarantee continuous interaction between the parts, characterized in turn by certain levels of diversity and interdependence. Respect for their **interconnected nature** allows the system to be dynamically active and to self-regenerate according to an autopoietic logic; however, interfering in this process could lead to a progressive disintegration of the entire organism *(Turchi, 2015)*.

Jane Jacobs therefore argues that the city is an organism and, as such, experiences birth, growth, maturation and, sometimes, death; interceding for its salvation would be possible only through an "**interactive planning**" (*Turchi, 2015*), which allows to grasp and respect the dynamism and multiformity that characterizes urban settlements. Jane Jacobs therefore proposes that the study of the organism-city must consider the totality of **its transformations** in an evolutionary sense, which **cannot be crystallized or programmed** on paper, much less understand through a *bird-eye perspective* (*chapter 3*). It therefore suggests overcoming the formalities and principles of traditional design and legislation by prioritizing field analysis, the only one that allows us to approach the reality of the common daily problems that grip human settlements. In this regard, the author introduces the concept of "**multifunctionality**" to define the versatility of use of urban spaces: every street, neighborhood, public park and any other **place considered significant** for residents would allow, in place or potential, to activate the process of "centering" (*Feuchtwang, 2004, chapter 3*), thus offering a suitable space for the establishment of social bonds.

According to Jacobs, **directly investigating the real world** would allow to obtain a preliminary framework for the collection of ideas,







principles and guidelines on which to base the urban planning of a given neighborhood or city space. This path would be divided into three interconnected phases to be carried out in the field:

- Direct observation of residents' social behavior
- Analysis of the most common activities and events
- Identification of the general functioning of the place and the connotations that identify its peculiarities.

They would be followed by a survey of the needs related to **diversity of use** and the consequent repercussions in the various areas of the entire urban landscape (social, economic, cultural, etc.). Indeed, the author argues that the **levels of dynamic vitality** of an urban space are directly proportional to the degree of diversity that it

*Artworks from the series "Flatland" by photographer Aydin Buyuktas.*

accommodates *(Mehaffy, 2020,* chapter 2).
Therefore, a more varied scenario would offer residents a wider range of possibilities for action and initiative (for example, regarding the regeneration and reactivation of places in a state of degradation). These conditions have a strong impact on the interactions between man and the environment, or between the anthropic and non-anthropic spheres, and underline the **close interdependence between the parts of the same system.** Given this (and for the reasons already stated in the previous chapters) it is essential to bypass the approach to planning that tends to categorize the functions of urban spaces according to a top-down approach, since it does not adequately take into account the **systemic variety that results from the diversity** that characterizes a given settlement.

"THE **DIVERSITY** THAT IDENTIFIES AN URBAN CONTEXT MAKE IT **IMPOSSIBLE TO CATEGORIZE INTO FUNCTIONS**: THEREFORE, SUBJECTING THE "**CITY**" **ORGANISM** TO A SEPARATION OF PLACES ON THE BASIS OF A **LABEL** IS A **MERE** EXPRESSION OF A "**RAMPANT INDIVIDUALISM**" IN URBAN PLANNING PRACTICE. IN FACT, IN ORDER TO BE **ACTIVE** AND **SELF-REGENERATING**, THE CITY NEEDS **CONTINUOUS INTERACTION** BETWEEN THE MULTIPLE FUNCTIONS AND A CERTAIN LEVEL OF **DIVERSITY** AND **INTERDEPENDENCE** (BOTH ECONOMICAL AND SOCIAL); IT COULD FACE A PROGRESSIVE **DISINTEGRATION** WHERE THESE ASPECTS ARE NOT FOUND. "

*-Turchi, 2015*

Due to the importance of the versatility of urban space, it is appropriate to proceed by **investigating its "mixed-use"** (i.e. the mixture and combination of uses and the various iterative social practices that characterize them) since, as Jane Jacobs states, they favor the origin of new unexpected interactions. Each person generates shades of diversity according to their tastes, abilities, needs and wills that, expressing and manifesting themselves concretely in mutual contact, generate and perpetuate actions and activities that shape the space they live in (according to the primary function of the place or not).
Therefore, **human behaviors** trigger consequences in the way people themselves experience the city: for example, they determine the overall perception of a hotspot, hierarchize spaces and paths, increase or decrease the frequency with one stays in a place, favor or not its attractiveness, etc.
As reported in the conclusions of the previous chapter, the **community is reflected in the identity of the places** of the city and, from a design point of view, making it assume this awareness is fundamental so that it is able to **give voice to its interiority** in a direct, conscious and truthful way.
However, as detailed in the previous chapters, at the level of management and planning the city has been treated in an extremely deterministic and mechanistic way: instead of molding itself on the model of the community, it has been forged according to the logic of the liberal market for the maximization of profits, creating factions of winners and losers according to the economic resources possessed by each individual. Over time, this approach has proved destructive for the flowering of the urban fabric: social differentiation has been matched by spatial and geographical differentiation that has constituted forms of concentrated "monoculture" *(Jacobs, 1961)* opposed to the idea of ***polycentric city***, an expression coined by Jane Jacobs to identify her ideal urban representation; polycentric cities, unlike monocultures, welcome the diversity and mixed-use that, inevitably, are generated as a result of the action of human behavior; they are in fact made up of neighborhoods or urban districts designed to function autonomously and provide citizens with everything they need in the same space according to a logic of "overlapping functions" *(Jacobs, 1969).* In this perspective, the various spaces of the city are not hierarchically marked by a center and a periphery, thus **offering a more equitable urban life** providing multiple opportunities for serendipity in each neighborhood. This last aspect, however, needs to be supported and reiterated while **respecting the differences of the inhabitants**, guaranteeing them equal opportunities in the use of the places.




*Photography of Capitale Pride Des Moines, Iowa (2023).*

# 4.2 **Feel at home in your city**

The e-book "Our City?" published in 2019 by the open source site Placemaking Europe finely investigates the mechanisms underlying the creation of places (i.e. Placemaking) within the urban landscape and, thanks to the collaboration between planners, architects, designers and other professionals, collects theories, demonstrations and useful food for thought for understanding the city-system and its inhabitants. The key points of the bibliography revolve around the concept of **inclusiveness**, the role of public space and its importance for the society that lives it:

CITIES CATER EVERYONE, REGARDLESS OF LIFESTYLE, RELIGION, CULTURE, WALLET SIZE, AGE, SEXUAL PREFERENCES OR DEMAND FOR THEATER, FOOD, SPORTS OR GREENERY.
THEY ABSORB NEWCOMERS, NEGOTIATE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OPPOSITES AND CREATE NARRATIVES FOR EVERYONE TO RELATE TO.
[...] BUT AT THE SAME TIME, WE MUST ASK OURSELVES, "DO THE RESIDENTS OF OUR EVER-POPULAR CITIES CONTINUE TO FEEL AT HOME IN THEM?
AND "ARE THERE PUBLIC SPACES WITHIN A CITY REALLY EVEN OURS?

*-Besters, 2019*

These questions are answered extremely similar to Jacob's thought: the need is supported to implement suitable strategies for the understanding of the city-system that can nourish and perpetuate the vitality that they preserve and orient designers towards **a design that allows the inhabitants to really "feel at home".**
Following a critical analysis on the current state of urban settlements





and on the dramatic implications related to gentrification and shrinkage (also discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis), the aforementioned bibliography continues its investigation by emphasizing the exhausting **gap that coexists between different inhabitants of the same city** regarding the variability of perception and individual experientiality that derives from the use of its spaces.
In this regard, two rather common examples are reported useful to familiarize yourself with the widespread dissemination of the problem at urban level.
The first concerns a young girl who fears facing the darkness of a metropolis in solitude, or going to the park to perform physical activity without feeling watched by prying eyes; the second recounts the difficulties encountered by an elderly person who would like to take part in the city's public life, but does not feel confident enough to move freely through the streets in the event that he is unable to find a place to rest, or if he cannot access certain facilities due to the absence of sidewalk paths, stairs or ramps appropriate to your physical state. In addition to the issue of the limited mobility suffered by some social categories, the feeling of not belonging to a place also manifests itself when a **city defines "invisible" boundaries** that push people to feel legitimized or not to take part in the activities proposed by the community: actions such as **displacement or the diffusion of places** discussed extensively in the previous chapters of this thesis constitute, in fact, a striking example of how community-significant urban spaces are sucked up by institutions to assign them a new direction of use that, sometimes, does **not consider the multifaceted soul of the community** and their real needs.
The urban fabric therefore needs to be diversified so that it can be

*Frame by "In the Heights", Warner Bros Broadway musical movie (2021)*

truly inclusive and accessible for everyone; fight the frenzy of excess *(Friedmann, 2010)* of modern planning is essential to restore life, value, identity and sacredness to places *(Hester, 2006),* action possible through the implementation of conscious **strategies of Placemaking and Smart decline** *(Popper & Popper, 2002)* both for the activation of spaces in disuse or in a state of decay, and for the direct involvement of the community and respect for the differences that characterize the uniqueness of each person.

Minouche Besters, one of the editorial director of 2019 "Our City?" bibliography, argues these issues by coupling the primary purpose of the book (i.e. "taking action", i.e. intervene to make the inhabitants "feel at home") with the need to understand how the community can **reclaim the right to live in the city**. In fact, continues Besters, to address the elitist drift towards which the city is moving to accommodate the "white adult male perspective" *(Besters, 2019),* it would be necessary to design creative, simple and effective solutions that can increase the sense of belonging to a place, offering each inhabitant **the opportunity to act** on the territory in a more direct and controlled way in order to promote a more sustainable development.
Therefore, Placemaking is an excellent strategy for the pursuit of these objectives, given its profound influence on the public sphere and its premise linked to the activation of urban spaces and the enhancement of the heterogeneity of its community. In its introduction the book "Our City?" stresses the validity of the Placemaking approach in order to be able to actively work with the local community, especially if the participation of voices that would otherwise remain unheard and silent is reached and stimulated. In particular, from a design point of view, the bibliography encourages towards a **holistic understanding of the territory**, inviting designers to deeply understand the diverse soul of a community, departing from the **traditional dominant perspective of the *white adult male*** *(Besters, 2019)*. Going beyond this approach would in fact allow to direct the design towards a sensitivity and a predisposition such as to favor the ability to grasp the versatility and the complex stratification of the needs of society.

IF WE STRIVE TO CREATE A PLACE
WHERE **EVERYONE FEELS AT HOME,**
WE MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT IS IT
THAT **MAKES SOMEONE FEEL EXCLUDED,**
HOW THEY **PERCEIVE** THE SPACE
AROUND THEM AND WHAT ARE
**THEIR NEEDS AND WISHES.**

*-Besters, 2019*



However, stimulating a sense of belonging can be a challenge, as **our social structures are built to embody power differences**.
The Future Learn online course run by RMIT University that we followed in 2022 argues that to remedy this situation it is possible to adopt an "intersectional approach" to design, which considers the multiplicity and facets of individuals' identities to analyze how they intertwine with each other, **generating situations of disadvantage or privilege** within the social context. In fact, certain aspects that characterize a person (such as ethnic origin, gender identity, disability, social status, migratory status, socio-economic status, etc.) influence his identity and, by extension, also that of the community to which he belongs. The intersectional approach investigates how **these variables interact with current power systems** (such as capitalism, patriarchy, neocolonialism and globalization) and how **places create or hinder social and cultural engagement**; the set of these conditions defines a complex scenario from which a different access to resources, self-determination, opportunities and human rights by each individual is determined, influencing his sense of belonging to the place.
Therefore the academic course argues that including an intersectional approach during the planning and design of places, urban spaces, buildings and cities is an effective way to **address social justice issues through design methods.**
Given the holistic assumption on which it is based, the intersectional approach is similar to the systemic methodology (chapter 2) that will be adopted by the present thesis work, which proposes a review of the Placemaking strategy taking into account the theories exposed following the Literature review carried out.

The academic course continues its narrative by arguing that "**belonging is a way in which identity, space and place come together**", and it is an extremely qualitative factor since it is the product of the stories we build and the ways in which we orient ourselves socially.
Involving social interactions and the evolution of the different habits and perspectives that characterize a certain community, belonging is a condition that each person perceives in a different and personal way. Despite the difficulty of defining the term, the qualitative **Field Analysis** allows to detect whether the sense of belonging of a given context is strong or labile. A place is in fact a treasure chest of quality and visual, cultural, social and environmental characteristics that identify it as such, and communicating with the people who live daily in that area is an excellent starting point to carry out an effective Field Analysis from which to obtain a qualitative picture of the territory.
The academic course argues that **creating a sense of belonging** is possible if you design **meaningful places** for people, since they are not just simple "positions" on a map: for people, a place is also a symbol of the stories that happened within them and therefore of human attachment to it. This condition is called "**sense of place**", a term that means "what identifies and makes unique a physical space and makes it worthy of attention".

The sense of place is important because **it can help people connect with their surroundings,** to establish knowledge and **appreciation** for the place itself by feeding feelings of affection, empathy and increasing the sense of belonging which, consequently, improves its management (since people feel entitled to take care of it as "their property").
The academic course reports the testimony of Dr. Alana Brekelmens, anthropologist at the University of Queensland, who describes how indigenous Australians share belonging to a place with other non-native inhabitants: despite the linguistic and cultural barriers, in fact, the doctor has shown how **within certain experiences of involvement** (such as playful activities), those same people who show that they want to raise a wall against diversity end up reaching towards a rapprochement with the other, managing to communicate and interface positively; for example, **in sharing stories and memories about places**, it is possible to break into the soul of others and look for common points.
However, in order to reinforce the sense of place and adopt an intersectional approach, it is necessary to move away from and overcome the traditional dominant perspective of the white adult male *(Besters, 2019)*. The "**Feminist City**" movement starts from this premise: it will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Returning to Besters' article, the author concludes by highlighting the importance of not reducing people to a mere target group and **not labeling the places of the city** according to a single categorization; consistent with Jacobes' thought, emphasis is in fact placed on the evolution that individuals undergo in the course of life and the consequent change in their needs. For example, a child grows up becoming a young adolescent, an adult and finally an elderly; that same person, however, could attend the same park or the same square, but it will be a space that will take on different values and meanings as they experience it, welcoming the diversity of the *mixed-used (Jacobs, 1961)* to which they will undergo.

As explained above, between the pages of 2019 "Our City?", academic articles and essays by experts alternate with extremely interesting for understanding the urban system and the challenges and opportunities it entails. For example, Fenneke Wekker's essay investigates the importance of feeling at home and **integrated into one's community**; this condition is fundamental not only for individual well-being but also for public health and social status. The literature recognizes that urban life, characterized by the succession of the permanence of foreigners and temporary inhabitants, can produce in the original residents feelings of anxiety, estrangement, discomfort and uprooting; this condition can generate **tensions and polarizations** between social groups that lead to the **fragmentation of the sense of cohesion** of the community, preventing both original residents and people in transit from being able to experience a sense of "home" such as to feel worthily and serenely welcomed by the urban public space. Based on an ethnographic study conducted between 2010 and 2018, the essay highlights how **the concept of "home" is unique for each individual**, referring to an intimate sensory, physical and social situation that, in turn, is based on previous and incorruptible cultural, normative and educational elements.
Therefore, the text explores the **difficulties** that designers and social organizations encounter in improving feelings of home and belonging in overtly inclusive urban environments; in conclusion, it suggests that instead of creating cities that allow everyone to feel comfortable, it is more feasible to fight for inclusive cities in which each individual is aware that no one can recreate their own personal ideas of "home" for as many people as possible.
From our critical point of view, Wekker's thought could be refuted by taking into account a simple, primordial assumption: **every person feels at home when they are loved and welcomed**. We believe that it is possible to consider the idea of being able to create a space that openly declares its purpose, which is to be willing to accept free personal expressions so that everyone can feel at home.
**By sharing their humanity and weaknesses**, in fact, each person could expose himself in front of others to make known his personal point of view. Empathetically, "the other" would approach the individual who expresses his difficulties, possibly helping and supporting him in his struggle. We are of the opinion that this idea is not one of arduous feasibility: we believe in humanity and its ability to forge bonds, especially in moments of fragility.

*"A day in Chongqing, China". Photography by Lu Gen*





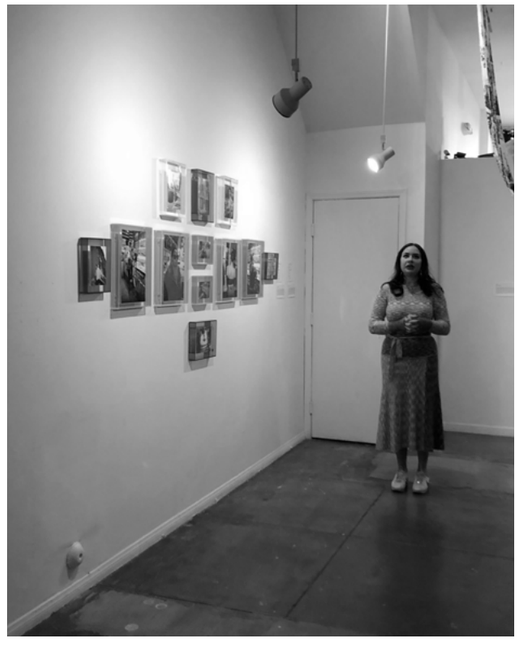


A tangible example of this theory can be found in the atmosphere of contemporary art exhibitions, where artists sometimes present and exhibit their works by laying bare the hidden meanders of their minds and emotions. Despite being unknown, the audience is able to be moved and **emotionally linked to the narrative perpetuated by the artist**.

In our humble opinion, art is an inexhaustible source of beauty capable of touching the heartstrings of anyone who is able to grasp the humanity it conceals. During our period of international mobility in San Diego (CA, USA) **we attended the art exhibition "Women, Words & Weaving"** organized by The Front, Casa Familiar and City of San Diego in San Ysidro, a neighborhood on the border between the United States and Mexico. The exhibition gave voice to female artists, mostly Mexican or of Mexican origin (called "Chicano"), who through their works and their femininity explore issues related to gender discrimination, ethnicity and sexism; each artist had time to tell their artworks, arguing their **personal daily struggles or social dramas** experienced in the first person. This experience proved to be extremely formative: it allowed us to touch the interiority of the artists, **empathizing with their stories**. Our emotions were enveloped by those of the audience, equally in rapture for the depth of the narration of the artists.

We have therefore become aware of the power of **art as a communication tool in the San Diego area** and the importance of the **role it plays for its community.**





*On the left:*

*Artists explainging their art during the Front's Exhibition "Women, Words & Weaving" in San Ysidro (San Diego).*

*On the bottom:*

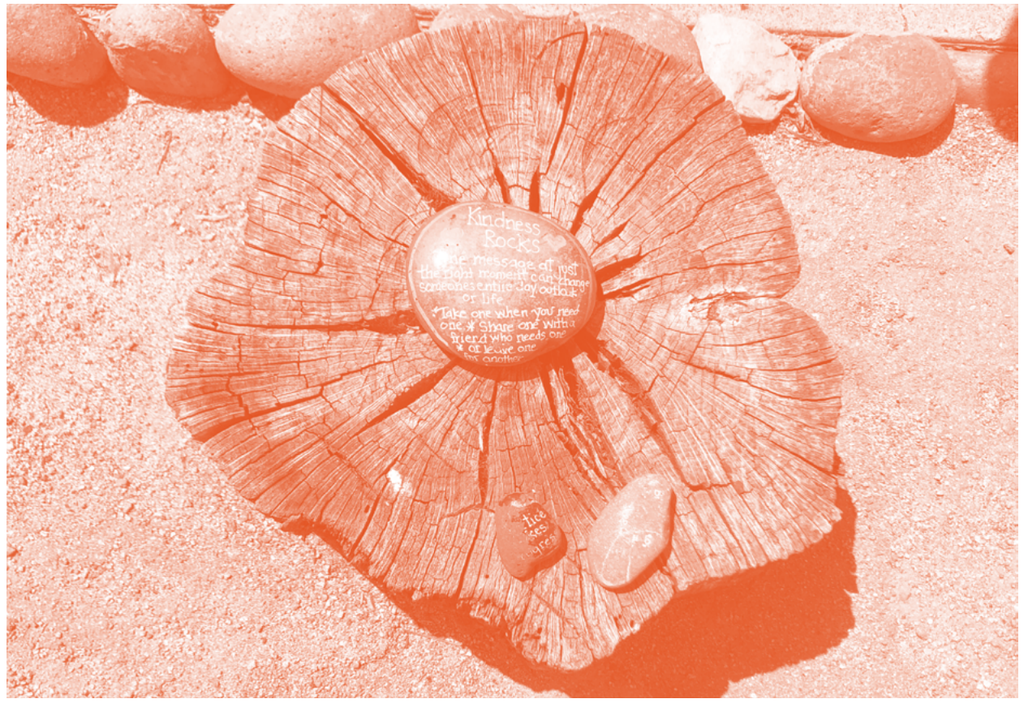
*Artworks by one of the Front's artist. She investigated the drama of having a fragmented identity being a Chicano (U.S. woman of Mexican descent)*

*Both pictures were taken by us during our international mobility period in San Diego (CA, USA)*



In addition, the Field Analysis carried out in the American continent has prompted us to rework the concepts of this chapter, reinforcing the buds of our ideas that have blossomed as a result of the study of literature. In fact, we have noticed that in the areas of California visited there is a more concrete and strenuous defense of their ideals, needs and ideas; for example, **many residents display their thoughts in their driveway through handmade artistic creations**, signs with writings in support of cultural or social movements.
They also used to put in their frontyard small art objects **inviting neighbors to take part in small gentle actions** (such as the "Kindness rock" shown in the photo: placed on a stump of trunk, invite passers-by who need a "kind thought" to pick up a stone on which the message is written, and leave new ones to iterate the practice).

Especially in the city of San Diego, this peculiarity particularly struck us as it shows a **very different attitude from what we are used to in Italy** (where instead we often tend to confine ourselves behind the walls of our home without leaving any "message" outside).




*"Kindness rock" in a frontyard in San Diego. Picture took by us during our international mobility period.*







Moreover, from the testimonies we have accumulated during our stay, it emerged how this "**artistic sharing of thought**" is possible because each neighborhood has its own community soul, very strong in particular in quieter residential areas (such as North Park, where we stayed). Indeed in this area the key concept **"eyes-on-the-street" by Jane Jacobs** is realized, according to which the presence of active and vigilant people in the streets is fundamental for the safety of a neighborhood, since the presence of "eyes on the street" helps to deter crimes and suspicious activities. The concept is not foreign to the community: the sign portrayed in the photo next to it demonstrates the awareness of this condition of "surveillance" to which the area is subjected, called **"Neighborhood Watch: we look out for each other!".**
Other neighborhoods of the city also report declinations of the same concept but graphically expressed in a different way; deepening the situation, we found that the presence of Neighborhood Watch signs is common in many affluent neighborhoods of US cities.
Jacobs argued that busiest neighborhoods where people interact most with their surroundings are generally safer than those with few people around. According to the author, those who live and work in a neighborhood become the "**informal guardians**" of public space:

*On the left: Climate activist murales in San Diego. Picture took by us during our international mobility period.*

*On the right: Neighborhood Watch sign in North Park (San Diego). Picture took by us during our international mobility period.*

constantly observing the environment around them, they become aware of what is happening, recognize familiar faces and can quickly detect unusual or dangerous situations. This active presence of people in the streets creates a **sense of community and collective responsibility** for the well-being of the neighborhood. According to this logic, an urban context that enhances human interaction and the vitality of neighborhoods is safe, favors the creation of new bonds and **strengthens the sense of belonging** to a place. These aspects could be inscribed in the context of Placemaking: in fact, in their own way, the residents of North Park have **"created a place" by shaping their neighborhood through the sharing of their ideals** which, as emerges from the photos taken during our Field Analysis, are linked to the themes of kindness, hospitality and welcome. The mood of extreme tranquility that hovers over the large avenues that cross the area, therefore, is the result of this peaceful coexistence and openness to the other. Even t**he architecture of the houses** is consistent with this narrative of the space: many villas do not have fences (or at least they are not fences aimed at domestic protection, since they could be climbed over without problems) and are often characterized by large gardens with outdoor seats, large porches, paths and pots of plants meticulously cared for.







*San Diego artworks and signs hang on the fence of houses. Pictures took by us during our international mobility period.*










*North Park (San Diego) houses. Pictures took by us during our international mobility period.*

## 4.3 The power of meaningful spaces

In Philippa Collin's 2019 essay, she argues that the ability to **shape a place according to one's personal sense of belonging** and connection is, by its very nature, a prerequisite that **makes a city healthier and safer** (as also argued by Friedmann and reported in the previous chapter in *Friedmann, 2010*).
Otherwise, limiting the freedom and flexibility of customization of a place feeds the sense of alienation, leading residents to disregard the space they live; consequently, believing that it does not belong to them, they do not care about it or care about its destiny, not having become fond of it. Collin discusses that the **bottom-up experiences** that characterize Placemaking activities constitute a fertile ground for the birth of the seeds of change, since in its assumptions there is its changing character that, welcoming serendipity and unpredictability, **allows the place to evolve** and **take on different meanings for people based on the use they make of it**.

"**Turning spaces into places**": this concept is used in the context of Placemaking to indicate how spaces are transformed into places when they take on meaning for the people who live there, becoming **meaningful places**. As explained in the introduction, the objective of this thesis is to provide sustainable practices for the creation of urban places where citizens can feel at home. Through the improvement of iterative social practices *(Cresswell, 2004),* it is possible to create meaningful places that espect the real needs of the community, regenerating urban spaces otherwise poor in vitality.
The concept of "meaningful places" is similar to that of "**Seductive City**" proposed by Luigi Prestinenza Puglisi in the *International Festival of City Imaging "Utopian Hours"* (held in Turin in the days between 14 and 16 October 2022) that we attended. Puglisi is an authoritative critic and historian of Italian architecture, who argues that the current modern era involves a "**de-drawer" from the narrow boundaries within which he has always been forced to act**. To explain this statement, Puglisi compares the choice of studying or working in an open park surrounded by green spaces or in a dark and cramped room if placed in the condition of being able to do it independently (as happens for example in the case of smart working): by custom, you would choose to stay in front of the computer on a desk in a closed place, but if you could choose and have facilities available that allow you to have the same comforts even outdoors (such as available electrical outlets), you would probably prefer to go to a park; this happens because **people choose spaces based on their "capacity for seduction"**, hence the name "Seductive City" with which this philosophy is defined.

"THE PLACE TODAY NO LONGER SELECTS SPECIALIZED FUNCTIONS BUT **FREE IMAGINATION.** SMART WORKING SHOWS THAT YOU CAN WORK IN A PARK, OR IN A GLOOMY APARTMENT, AND THE CHOICE COMES FROM THE IMAGINARY. AN **INSTAGRAMMABLE PLACE** IS A PLACE THAT WORKS ON THE IMAGINARY.
**A PLACE THAT IS SEDUCTIVE**, AND THEREFORE **WORKS, TRIGGERS METAPHORICAL SEQUENCES.** IT DOES NOT STATE BUT **SUGGEST**: THAT IS, **IT GENERATE POETRY** (GOOD BUT ALSO BAD POETRY.) IN THE 90s ALL THIS WAS UNDERSTOOD BY ARCHITECTS AND IN PARTICULAR BY GEHRY, HADID, NOUVEL. BUT WITH IMAGES THAT DIRECTED THE USER INTO UNIVERSES THAT CLAIMED MORE THAN SUGGESTED. THE UNIVERSE THAT FREES THE IMAGINATION OF THE USER, NOT ONLY OF THE ARCHITECT. THE PLACE NO LONGER HAS A CONCRETE *RAISON D'ÊTRE*. IT BECOMES TERRITORY AGAIN, **LANDSCAPE.**
AND ONE OF OUR FANTASIES THAT WE LOOK FOR TODAY IN THE PLACE IS THE **INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE, OUR AGREEMENT WITH THE EARTH.**

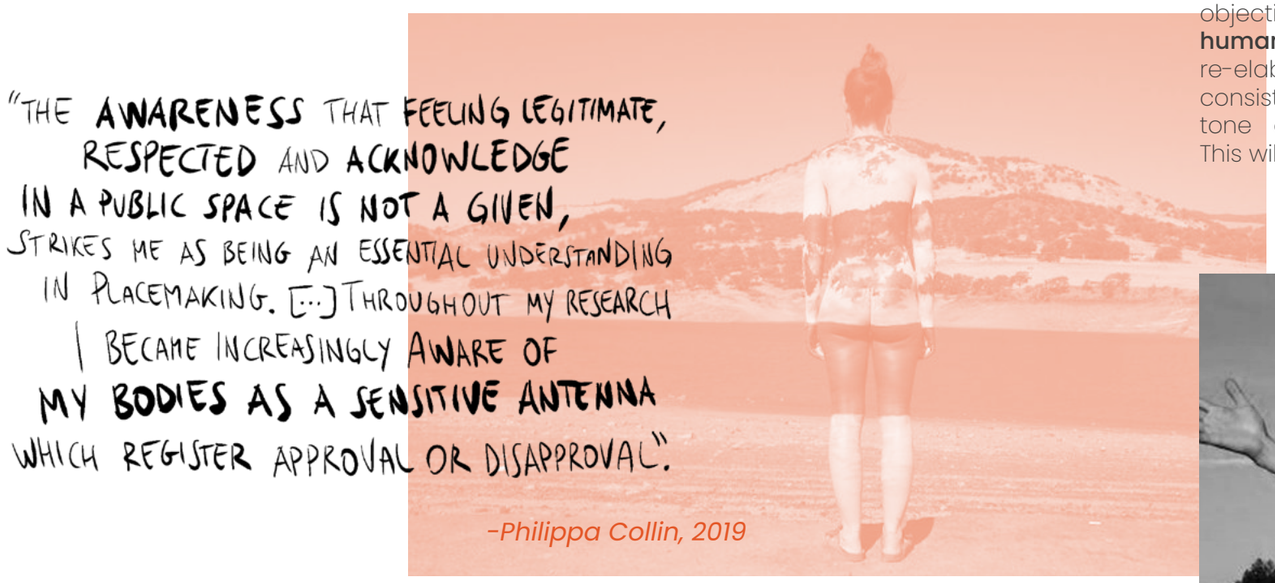
*-Luigi Prestinenza Puglisi for TorinoStratosferica, 2022*
*(Utopian Hours International Festival of City Imaging)*



*International Festival of City Imaging "Utopian Hours". Held in Turin on 14th-16th OCtober 2022.*

In the words of the critic emerges his stance **against the traditional top-down approach** (which defines space according to certain pre-established functions, see chapters 1 and 2 for further information) in favor of an approach in which spaces are not defined, but flexible and overlapping. In particular, Puglisi states that the **place**, instead of suggesting functions, **projects in the user a series of "metaphorical chains of poetry"**; In fact, the place would trigger certain mechanisms of seduction in the human soul that come into contact with it such as to emotionally involve people (positively or negatively). Ultimately, Puglisi argues that **places are not just physical structures, but an overlap of the "urban spirit" and "urban form,**" respectively the "software" (people) and "hardware" (spaces) that define the city. In the next chapter the same correspondence will be repeated also with regard to the pillars of Placemaking.

Returning to deepen the concept of "feel at home", it is necessary to underline the problems related to the **social vulnerability** to which the community is subjected. In this regard, Philippa Collin argues the **process of exclusion of individuals based on social groups**, arguing that this condition feeds the vulnerability of residents and the places they frequent. Collin's essay cited above gives the example of an anthropological research conducted in Amsterdam by an author who analyzes the experience of social exclusion suffered by his Turkish partner who, feeling at fault for the furtive glances directed at him while he was in a shop, decided to buy an unnecessary object to justify his presence and not be treated like a thief. This testimony is followed by a series of testimonies in which emerges the **fragility and humiliation** of people who cannot feel accepted by the community, let alone to be part of it.




Finally, the author declares that there is no scientific methodology capable of creating or guaranteeing the inclusiveness of a place because, being a reflective process, it requires a deep knowledge of the social dynamics of the territory and a strong civic commitment both at the legislative and human level. However, Collin suggests that **designers can carry out concrete and direct actions to empathize with the different social groups** that populate a place. For example, it is urged to experience exclusion in first person (taking part in activities in which one is in the "minority" compared to the totality of the group), **to interact with local inhabitants** and note their reactions, **to listen carefully** to the context and investigate their behaviors to understand what affects their lives and how; it is advisable **to create spaces that invite openness** to the other and, without asking for money or other resources, it is proposed to cross as many groups as possible to avoid monocultures and feed the fluid and varied exchange between cultures (with a view to serendipity); it is proposed, therefore, to "**use one's body as a research tool**" *(Pink, 2008 quoted in Collin, 2019)*.
If **empathy** is used as a means of analysis for design, any risks encountered during the creation of spaces can be addressed. However, it is necessary not to dwell only on the majority groups that populate a space; the essay gives the example of the design of a public library of a community center that invites visitors to borrow books: for some people the intervention is a cheerful symbol of domesticity, but for others (eg an illiterate or a foreigner who does not know the language) it could embody the affirmation of non-belonging to the place and trigger a consequent self-exclusion from space by the person who, in this case, she would feel humiliated.
The author also emphasizes the **power of symbolic representations** (such as images, words and graphics) to express the narrative objectives that a space aims to achieve: **being aware of human interpretations** and the relative intangible processes of re-elaboration that they involve is useful to make style choices consistent with the context, to choose the most appropriate tone of voice or to attract and adequately welcome users. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.



*Artworks from the series "100 Bodies across America" by Natalie Fletcher . The artist uses bodies of people as a canvas, so they mimic natures landscapes, becoming a part of it.*

## 4.4 **When the system acts as an oppressor**

Collin continues his 2019 essay by pointing out that understanding if and how people are subject to **social vulnerability** is essential to avoid feelings of estrangement caused by subtle micro-violence imperceptible by the "majority" of the group. Effectively **communicating the intangible processes** and codes of conduct that characterize a space is in fact fundamental at the design level in order to avoid misunderstandings caused by potential indirect micro-aggressions towards users.
The author argues this condition of social exclusion by opening a critical parenthesis to underline the historical continuum that unfolds from this theme, citing the 2004 academic contribution of Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois. These **structural violence** are in fact the legacy of violent impositions manifested directly and indirectly against the inhabitants of a city; an example can be found in the so-called "**hostile architecture**" typical of the apartheid period or in the pro-Nazi one, or in the design solutions still adopted to prevent the clochard from resting on benches, ledges, canopies or other urban elements. Another iconic and representative design choice of this attitude of repression is the "**Trump Wall**", the informal name used to identify the operation to strengthen the border between the USA and Mexico to prevent illegal migration with which the homonymous ex-US president fed his far-right **political propaganda**. Lapalysingly, these design choices annihilate the heterogeneity of a community and constitute a **symbol of oppression and supercherie** given the legitimization to dehumanization and social exclusion that they imply.
In this regard, the 2019 academic contribution by Stephan De Beer and Mark Oranje (professors at the University of Pretoria specialized in Urban Development) argues that **the role of designers** operating in conditions of dubious moral ethics can lean towards two diametrically opposed choices, namely to **be complicit in the marginalization of vulnerable groups or to choose to oppose to facilitate their inclusion in society**. In addition, it emphasizes how fear and individualism have eroded the sense of community that should characterize a city, fragmenting it (note the similarity with the concepts set out in the previous chapter in *Friedmann, 2010*).
Indeed the authors argue that designers should take on the political responsibilities involved in their planning, "ceasing to legitimize the






oppressor" and committing to carry out a **critical examination of the status quo** to become **supporters of unrepresented interests**.
*"Urban spaces, in which such movements [Placemaking] function, will be less privatized, enabling individuals to interact in the open, expressing both their differences and their commonalities.*
*These spaces will not be delimited by boundaries or borders creating spaces of exclusion and inclusion - they will be spaces without walls" (Watson & Gibson, 1995, quoted in De Beer & Oranje, 2019).*
De Beer and Oranje's bibliography also discusses the current "**lack of interest in emotions on the part of designers**" *(Baum 2015)* in urban design and the excessive rationality that distinguishes it. In fact, according to the authors, subjective feelings are left out for fear of facing the emotionality of others and, by extension, also their own. To reconnect the threads of discourse also with the thought of Jane Jacobs, emotional reactions involve **disorder, unpredictability and complexity** that cannot be managed by mere rationalized planning, so we try to avoid them. However, not taking these elements into account means contributing to the birth of cities and communities that are **modeled on the image of dominant social groups,** therefore rigid and aseptic and designed to respond (unconsciously) to the fears and concerns of this single social class. As a result, the fractures inherent in the city-system are increasingly exacerbated and tear the social fabric.
During our period of international mobility we were also in Los Angeles, where we visited the MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art) **exhibition "Henry Taylor: B Side"**. Henry Taylor is an activist painter and his art focuses mainly on portraits of African Americans, but he is also a genre painter and outsider. His works are characterized by deep humility and vulnerability: the African-American artist feels the need to paint his hometown and the dramas of his people through a strong **denunciation** explicitly directed **against a system that tends to exclude, label and denigrate ethnic minorities**. In particular, one of his installations that we admired consists of a series

*MOCA, Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles). Exhibition "Henry Taylor: B Side" Picture took by us during our international mobility period in Los Angeles (CA)*

of mannequins configured as if it were a gathering of Black Panthers in front of which were hung printed photos with faces and looks of people murdered by the police, also affixed to buttons and pins attached to the jackets of the uniforms; on the walls adjacent to the installation stand powerful messages against war and racial injustice.
Henry Taylor is a local artist who therefore deals with the themes of human and social vulnerability, empathetically painting the implications of the **dramatic pressure of the ruling classes to the detriment of minorities**.

We have found confirmation of the theory previously exposed about cities and **communities modeled on the image of the dominant social groups also in Italy**, although it is widespread in a more subtle way. During the **Field Analysis conducted in Turin** for our Placemaking project "Molo'61" (which will be illustrated in chapter 8 of this thesis), we carried out a survey to interview the residents of the neighborhood where the park that Molo'61 proposes to redevelop is located. In particular, one of the most substantial testimonies was obtained by interviewing Mr. G., a Caucasian of about 60 years who resides in one of the most elegant buildings in the neighborhood. His main comments about the state of the park concerned "the lack of security, order and control" that prevents him and his family from benefiting from it. As analyzed in the previous chapters, these three key words are the pillars on which the **obsolescence of top-down planning** is based, such as it does not heterogeneously satisfy the interests of the community, but only those of the **dominant social group, or the "white adult male perspective"** *(Besters, 2019)*, mentioned in the previous paragraphs about Feminist City. On the part of Mr. G., in fact, there is no strong desire to take an interest in the redevelopment of the park according to an inclusive and bottom-up approach, as it would result in a state of disorder and unpredictability (attributable to Jacob's serendipity) that he does not fully share; Its interests are limited to satisfying its own needs and concerns. Otherwise, most of the young people interviewed would believe that the park would be exploited more if it welcomed a redevelopment project with a substantial social aspect that included the most marginalized categories (for example, the neighborhood is teeming with immigrants from African countries looking for work who, in order to feel welcomed into society, try to keep a stretch of sidewalk clean or beg in the Carrefour supermarket located a few meters away from the park). Our project advisors (university professors and experts in sustainability and circular economy such as Paola de Bernardi and Canio Forliano) believe that the social aspect included in the project is an essential pillar on which to erect the Placemaking model proposed by *Molo'61*. The project, in fact, fully satisfying the principles of the *New European Bauhaus* (or Sustainability, Aesthetic and Inclusivity) **fights the top-down design mentality that focuses on satisfying only the needs of dominant social groups.** For its commitment, the project won first prize for the *NEB4Cities Hackathon - Designing regenerative, circular and irresistible Cities!* (on November 2022) and subsequently won the category



"Regaining a sense of community and belonging" in the *New European Bauhaus Hackathon Winners Contest* (on December 2022). The New European Bauhaus is an important initiative included in the European Green Deal program launched in 2020; it aims to support and promote innovative and sustainable projects from an environmental, social and economic point of view to advance the Member States of Europe. Currently, our Molo'61 project is under development thanks to the winning of the prize of ten thousand euros. The New European Bauhaus testifies to **the commitment of the European Community to combat the *business as usual* of design**, encouraging dialogue between disciplines in an extremely systemic perspective. The pursuit of social and environmental objectives therefore indicates a **newborn concrete political and administrative actions to combat social exclusion and stem environmental damage**; by extension, we want to address the widespread capillarity of mental limitation derived from the imperance of the perspectives of the "white adult male perspective" *(Besters, 2019)* or the dominant social group.

Regarding this last concept, as previously announced it is interesting to report the thought of **Katrina Johnston-Zimmerman**, urban ethnographer who calls herself "professional people-watcher", co-founder of the Women Led Cities Initiative and counted in the BBC's 100 Women List.
During the period of writing this thesis, we attended the sixth edition of the *International Festival of City Imaging "Utopian Hours"* mentioned earlier in which Johnston-Zimmerman presented and discussed his ideas about the "**Feminist City**". Her speech traces the role of women in city making over time; her vision of design and urban planning has a strongly humanist, anti-patriarchal slant, based on an idea of gender-equality:
"***Look around: most spaces are created by men. [...] Cities reflect the power and strength of male dominance, placing the white man in a privileged position"***
*(Katrina Johnston-Zimmerman for TorinoStratosferica, 2022 Utopian Hours International Festival)*

According to the ethnographer, for millennia we have been wrapped up in an "**urban machismo**" that has prevented women, in over ten thousand years of urbanism, from changing the shape of our cities. "What we see was literally created by half the species", denounces Johnston-Zimmerman, who traces the history of urban planning following the red thread of the "stratification of buildings": since the time of the first great ancient civilizations, **the "megastructures" built reflect the power achieved by man**, his social status or his willingness to challenge the gods by creating mammoth structures that stand out towards the sky; since the creation of the first immense structures such as ziqqurat and pyramids, man has always tried to physically represent cultural hierarchies or his own social status, scrambling to communicate to the world the imperiousness




achieved according to a sinister mentality of **toxic masculinity.** Even now, the huge skyscrapers of the metropolis are built for the same reason: they are deliberately intimidating and, as Johnston-Zimmerman argues: *"Giants architecture structure **want to communicate that** [the man who owns them] **is able to afford anything and control it.** Owning a taller skyscraper means being hierarchically positioned higher up the social ladder [...] cities are sexist, taking the form of the dreams and desires of the male".*

The ethnographer also discusses the role of "**control structures**", similar to the already presented examples of hostile architecture that force people to behave in a certain way, that is, as the white adult male pleases; control, order and security are therefore the watchwords that crystallize the physical structures of public spaces, preventing people from using them freely and flexibly according to their needs.

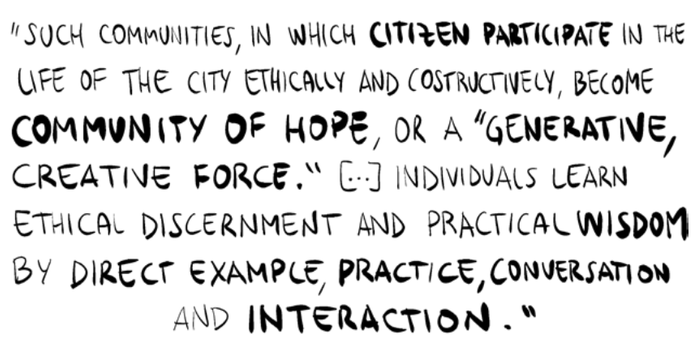
The imperance of the dominant male perspective thus causes the ***frenzy of excess*** *(Friedmann, 2010)* of which is amply discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis, demonstrating the vanity of this approach; according to this logic **the city is reduced to a "commodity for sale"** (to use Johnston-Zimmerman's words); the dominant perspective of the adult white male, therefore, **legitimizes the oppressor, creates iniquity** between the citizens of the same city and places insurmountable distances between residents and immigrants, placing an insurmountable wall to communication, comparison and acceptance.

As argued above, social inequality tears the social fabric by not offering everyone the opportunity to really feel at home; the ethnologist Johnston-Zimmerman, in this regard, expresses herself in these terms: *"It is necessary to **change the role of "second-class" citizens** and make them the protagonists of urban processes. [...] The city is our home, our habitat, improving it is a collective exercise that everyone should be called to carry out; we need to **understand the city through the lens of compassion**, co-create together, love each other." (Katrina Johnston-Zimmerman for TorinoStratosferica, 2022 Utopian Hours International Festival of City Imaging).*

*Katrina Johnston-Zimmerman speaking at International Festival of City Imaging "Utopian Hours". Held in Turin on 14th-16th OCtober 2022.*

These severe criticisms are also confirmed in the article by De Beer and Oranje introduced in the previous paragraphs, in which the authors explain how fear and individualism have seriously eroded the sense of community; consequently, the interconnected and interdependent parts that make up **the organism-city are torn and fragmented due to the lack of communication and sharing of ideals among residents**. According to the authors, a community, to be such, needs to identify itself in a tangible element such as an urban space; the latter should **allow individuals to interact outdoors** and express their differences and points in common without erecting walls, but **offering bridges to communicate**, understand and respect each other.

An urban space in which a community identifies and feels welcomed becomes a place of affection; by shaping and molding its "place in the world", in fact, the community creates and **builds a meaningful place based on the new experiences and interactions that take place within it** (hence the literal meaning of "Placemaking", creation of places). It's interesting to notice how these words are extremely similar to Cresswell's thought (chapter 3) that identifies the place as an "unstable stage for performance" *(Cresswell, 2004)* subject to dynamic flows of exchanges between **people who, acting, shape the surrounding environment and themselves**. Finally, the authors De Beer and Oranje cite the work of Mike Greenberg, author of the 1995 book "The Poetics of Cities":




*(Greenberg, 1995, quoted in De Beer & Oranje, 2019)*

# 4.5 Cities are habitat to be cared for

Another essay written by Urban Psychologist Sander Van der Ham and expounded in the 2019 book "Our City?" explores the role that collectively shared spaces can play both in creating **inclusive networks in neighbourhoods,** and in stimulating residents to become more active in their community. An example of shared spaces are gardens, parks, courtyards, porches and common entrances.

*"These **collectively shared spaces** [gardens, parks, courtyards, etc.] can be a buffer to the outside world. **A safe haven** where neighbors can meet, get to know each other and familiarize themselves with the habits, beliefs and values of others. These places provide the **opportunity for casual social interaction** and through it the development of public familiarity. This means that people have the opportunity to get in touch with people different from them, which allows them to change their opinions and expectations towards each other."*
*(Blokland, 2008, quoted in der Ham, 2019).*

Also in Van der Ham's work emerge Jacobsian principles regarding the **serendipity** of chance and accidental encounters as opportunities for bonding and community flourishing; in particular, the author dwells on the sense of trust that is created in interaction with others and the consequent sense of control that derives from it; in fact he argues that *"The greater the control, the more a person feels they can belong to a place."* The aforementioned bibliography "Our City?" dedicates a section to "**curated sociability**", a neologism that intends the act of establishing social connections and networking through the sharing of the same spaces and activities; in particular among these are emphasized the benefits deriving from **living outdoor spaces, like public parks:** these spaces have **great potential as "places" suitable for the creation of communities,** being public and accessible to anyone, rich in vegetation and suitable for both leisure and relaxation activities; their versatility of use and widespread diffusion in most cities worldwide makes them, potentially, a suitable space to be converted into a place (especially in a Smart Decline perspective explained in *Popper & Popper, 2002*).
To create a place that is truly meaningful, it is necessary to carefully study not only urban spaces, but also the way people live them.
Katrina Johnston-Zimmerman, ethnologist introduced in the previous paragraphs, focuses on **field investigation and spatial ethnography** with the aim of identifying and deciphering social behaviors in cities. It invites city makers to follow in the footsteps of Jane Jacobs who, as has also been argued in the previous pages of this thesis, has always supported the importance of observing the city space and the role of empathy of the designer.

During her speech at the International festival Utopian Hours in 2022, the ethnographer explained how **cities have the extraordinary power to "self-narrate"**: elements such as writings on walls, signs, tickets, stickers, strange "works of art" tell the life enclosed by the city; the degree of happiness, anger, serenity of the people who live it emerges from small or large tangible signs abandoned consciously or not on its streets (for example, Johnston-Zimmerman points out that even trash on the ground communicates what kind of human behavior populates a city.) Even what she calls "**emotional experiences" leave their mark in an urban place**, like drawings made on asphalt by children with chalk.

"**Cities are a habitat**," says Johnston-Zimmerman, and direct and empathetic observation allows us to grasp its otherwise invisible nuances. To carry out our project "Molo'61" for the city of Turin and during our period of international mobility in San Diego (CA, USA) we put these theories into practice, investigating the neighborhoods of the metropolis through a **Field Analysis** based on the main concepts exposed so far, summarized below:

- **Direct observation** of residents' social behavior (via Jacobs' city-walker perspective)

- Analysis of the **activities and mixed-used** of a place

- Identification of the general functioning of the place and the **connotations** that identify it *(Jacobs quoted in Turks, 2015)*

- Analysis of the **self-narration** of the city *(Johnston-Zimmerman, 2022)*

- Identification of the **level of social cohesion** of the resident community through direct interviews

- Analysis of **general perceptions** and individual experientiality that derives from the use of public spaces through the direct testimonies of a varied target (through **direct interviews**)

- Hypothesis and **proposal to residents of Smart decline strategies** to be applied to public places known to the community *(Popper & Popper, 2002)*.

In the next chapters the project details and the related Field Analysis carried out will be explained which, together with the Desk Analysis, constitute the **Holistic Diagnosis** of the territory, circumscribable in the city-system and adaptable on one or **more scales** (region, metropolis, neighborhood). Next step consists in identifying the **Challenges and Opportunities** present in the territory that allow to identify its strengths and weaknesses in order to optimize the system through a redesign of the flows and activities of the stakeholders (taking into account mainly the interests and needs of the resident community) according to the systemic approach. Finally, the output consists of a redevelopment of the urban space which, converted into a "place", constitutes a **Placemaking project** that aims to improve the current urban system. With a view to environmental, social and economic sustainability, Placemaking projects offer a **simple, immediate, economical and efficient alternative to evolve towards a sustainable and autopoietic urban ecosystem.**
"*The term "Placemaking" generally refers to the activity of turning a "space" into a "place", through giving meaning to the people who use it." (Dovey 1991; Winikoff 1995 both cited in Dupre, 2018).*

Karine Dupre's 2018 academic paper from which this quote was taken provides an overview of the literature of the last 25 years, gaps and current trends regarding the topic of Placemaking. Following Dupre's arguments, we believe it is important to condense the **key points of Placemaking** addressed in the chapters of this thesis to provide a framework of the advantages offered by the adaptation of his **strategies for the optimization of the city-system**:

- To offer a **social lens** to unify communities and stakeholders and defuse conflicts and power relations harmful to the city-system *(Jacobs 1961; Friedmann, 2002)*

- Revitalizing landscapes and urban systems that "lack soul" through the "**recovery of fragments of human habitat**", i.e . re-humanizing places otherwise subject to negative entropy *(Friedmann, 2010)*

- Propose itself as an "**unstable stage for performance**" in which people can carry out iterative social practices such as to dynamically shape a place over time according to their needs, setting up their living spaces based on patterns of behavior that cement the ways of using the place *(Cresswell, 2004)*

- Representing a primary space of social reproduction to which the community tends to become attached and, consequently, spontaneously heal; this strengthens the soul of a community, which considers it as a "**meaningful place**" *(Jacobs, 1961; Friedmann, 2010)*



- Offering a "**fertile humus for creativity**" by letting **serendipity** flow, a condition that undermines urban monoculture *(Jacobs, 1961; Lange, 2019)*

- Giving a purpose to a space that makes the community identify with it; **communicating the "interiority" of a place** (or its essence) that allows to activate shared and open processes that allow the actors of the territory to collaborate with each other in a systemic and autopoietic perspective *(Feuchtwang, 2004; Hester, 2006; Maci, 2023)*

- Through **Participatory Design**, involve users in processes of creating places, integrating into it the **cultural and historical identity of local traditions**; preserving and iterating them, in fact, increases the sense of identity and belonging of a community to a place *(Choi and Reeve, 2015, cited in Dupre, 2018)*

Regarding this last point, Dupre's 2018 bibliography underlines the importance of the **role of Placemaking in the era of globalization for multicultural contexts** in which a large number of immigrants and ethnic minorities live. Their commitment to assert their rights and improve their sense of belonging is essential to nurture the dynamism of a place: in fact, by **letting them express their cultural heritage,** the empowerment of the community itself is increased which, to increase its local identity, will shape and revitalize the environment. In this case, institutions should encourage a positive development of the creation of places **in order not to incur a situation of negative entropy increase** (which would fuel random acts of violence by those who feel excluded from the system, *Friedmann, 2010*), as explained in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Another significant concept analyzed by Dupre and cited in the 2018 contribution is "**Slow City**", a movement that refers to a bottom-up reaction to the consequences of globalization and the "fast world". **To combat the modern frenetic pace**, the movement advocates the preservation of traditional local cultures, act according to a relaxed and convivial rhythm of life and create social places based on intersubjectivity. Slow City also focuses on the concept of "**dwelling**" that identifies a spiritual state suspended between the human and material worlds.

A further facet is therefore proposed to the concept of "feel at home" explained above. Thus, the Slow City movement is **opposed to the machine age and the explosive growth of cities** characterized by a "frenzy of excess" of design (*Friedmann, 2010*), while the Feminist City movement mentioned in the previous paragraphs aims to combat social inequalities. proposing a more democratic design that favors the inclusiveness and agency of all citizens or those who live in a given place.






A vision that condenses these points is related to the concept of "**Playful City**"; in contrast to the Smart City (whose limits have been illustrated in the previous chapter), it aims to propose a **civic agency that exploits the creativity, participation and smartness of citizens** to experiment with possible urban futures for the creation of more "alive and livable" cities, as argued by de Lange in his 2019 academic article. According to the author, the **community has a creative and democratizing potential** that even non-professionals can take action **to shape their city**; an example that de Lange provides concerns the possibility, by a non-expert community, to independently create DIY elements such as street furniture for their public spaces. De Lange's academic contribution traces the evolution of urban design and the struggle between the top-down and bottom-up approach (also exposed in chapter 1 and 2 of this thesis) and the evolution of cities since the times of the ancient Greeks and Romans; then he proposes the **5 topics** that characterize the Playful City, of which the list is reported and a summary of each entry because we believe that they provide interesting ideas for the creation of places:

- The city as a center of entertainment
- The city as everyday theater
- The city as civic learning space
- The city as a subversive playground
- City as urban simulation

The first term refers to the Roman *pane et circenses* concept , similar to a modern user experience design that sees cities as an entertainment center that **offers fun and interactive experiences.** The second term connotes the city as a theater, where people interact according to **role-plays and theatrical metaphors** and use props to deal with "life among strangers". The third term, "the city as civic learning space", combines play with learning, and it's particularly suitable for young users, given its intrinsic **pedagogical purpose**; moreover, the act of play allows to open up space for creativity and the strengthening of social ties. The city as a "subversive playground" means the **subversive action** carried out, for example, in defense of common ideals (as in the case of activism promoted for the defense of public spaces argued in chapter 3) or in the case of **subcultural or countercultural urban practices** (for example skateboarding or parkour); this vision understands play as a tactic to counter the dominant structures that oppress the city, **claiming their right to act** and, by extension, the agency of the entire community to combat misguided top-down urban practices.
Finally, the last term proposes to **represent the city with digital tools** that, by means of cybernetics, would allow to simulate and "play" with

*To the left: "Vita Lenta", an instagram page project that shows "slow life" stolen shot from city, town and natural landscapes*



its different combinations to experiment with alternative scenarios.
These activities are "urban play activities" that would help, according to the author, **to develop community problem-solving skills by promoting creative and original shared and local experiences** since they are based on the Feuchtwangian interiority of places *(Feuchtwang, 2004)*.

De Lange, citing the famous Caillois' *Game Theory*, points out that the type of interaction in the Playful City is based on **free, improvised, spontaneous and intrinsically motivated play** (whose translation coincides with the Latin term "paidia"); on the contrary, the interaction in the Smart City would be aimed at rationalized efficiency (with the Latin term "ludus", which means rules-based and goal-oriented play). This difference indicates that the purpose of Playful City is extremely akin to the Jacobian concept of **serendipity** and the idea of "**meaningful places**" promoted by Friedmann and Puglisi. In particular, in the Playful City "the joy of the activity itself constitutes the major reason for engaging":
"*The game is a precious opportunity for embracing and anticipating radical aleatory uncertainty, engaging in creative and cooperative make-belief, or seeking pleasurable experiences and deeply valuable "occasion of pure waste" or "meaningful inefficiencies"*
*(Caillois 1958 quoted in de Lange, 2019)*

A place that includes various game activities (intended as fun, interactive, pedagogical, subversive or simulation experiences, to follow the categories proposed by De Lange) offers different opportunities to the people involved, such as **building trust** and **fostering bonds**, create a safe and comfortable environment where real desires and emotions emerge and catalyzing emotions that feed the sense of empathy among participants.
Indeed, by inviting participants to temporarily put themselves in the shoes of others within the "**protected" schemes of the game**, they are

*Kids at acting class: Theater and acting are powerful means of self-narrative and listening, giving space to anybody to express themselves. Theater fits into the categories of play expressed by De Lange (2019).*



allowed to refine their ability to understand different points of view, make new experiences and start constructive and effective discussions. Having fun lightly, we are willing to welcome the diversity of the other and take responsibility for realizing problems that would otherwise be distant and abstract.

"THE **GAME** MECHANISM AND DYNAMICS ARE DELIBERATELY AIMED AT **STIMULATING SOCIAL INTERACTIONS** AND **EXPERIMENTATION** THROUGH **COLLECTIVE ACTIONS.** [...] **PLAYING MEANS ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE WORLD** AND THE **CAPACITY TO ACT IN IT.**
[...] PLAYING AND GAMES THEMSELVES ARE **NOT** SOLUTIONS FOR URBAN PROBLEMS.
THEY DO HOWEVER **CHANGE THE WAYS WE ADDRESS COMPLEX URBAN ISSUES** THROUGH MORE INCLUSIVE, **PARTICIPATORY** (AND ALSO MORE "MESSY") APPROACHES."

*-de Lange, 2019*

Thus, **games are an important Placemaking tool,** given its intrinsic "fictional" nature that throws a safety net at the feet of the participants: in the game, failure has no consequences, there are no wrong or definitive actions; by experimenting with new ideas and identities, it is possible **to expose oneself with curiosity and creativity**, letting one's nature and culture emerge.
In such manner there is room for unexpected serendipity action *(Jacobs, 1961)* guided by the smartness of the participants who, **involved through interpersonal interaction with the surrounding world, communicate and question the otherwise crystallized reality of their "ego"**. In this way, they are offered the opportunity to redefine their mental horizons, open up and react more empathically to the needs of others. In our opinion, the Playful City approach is therefore extremely effective in providing users with **an innovative way of interacting**, able to overcome the barriers related to the cultural diversity of people who share the same environment. Therefore it is a valid strategy to be used for the creation of spaces in **multi-ethnic contexts** in which it is difficult to identify a precise idea of "home" that is valid for everyone. Moreover, given its changing and **dynamic nature** according to the agency operated by the participants, the principles of the Playful City fit perfectly into the desired scenario of **sustainable** and **autopoietic** urban ecosystem.
To conclude this chapter, it is our desire to open a parenthesis on an urban planning methodology that we consider extremely interesting: **15-minutes City.**

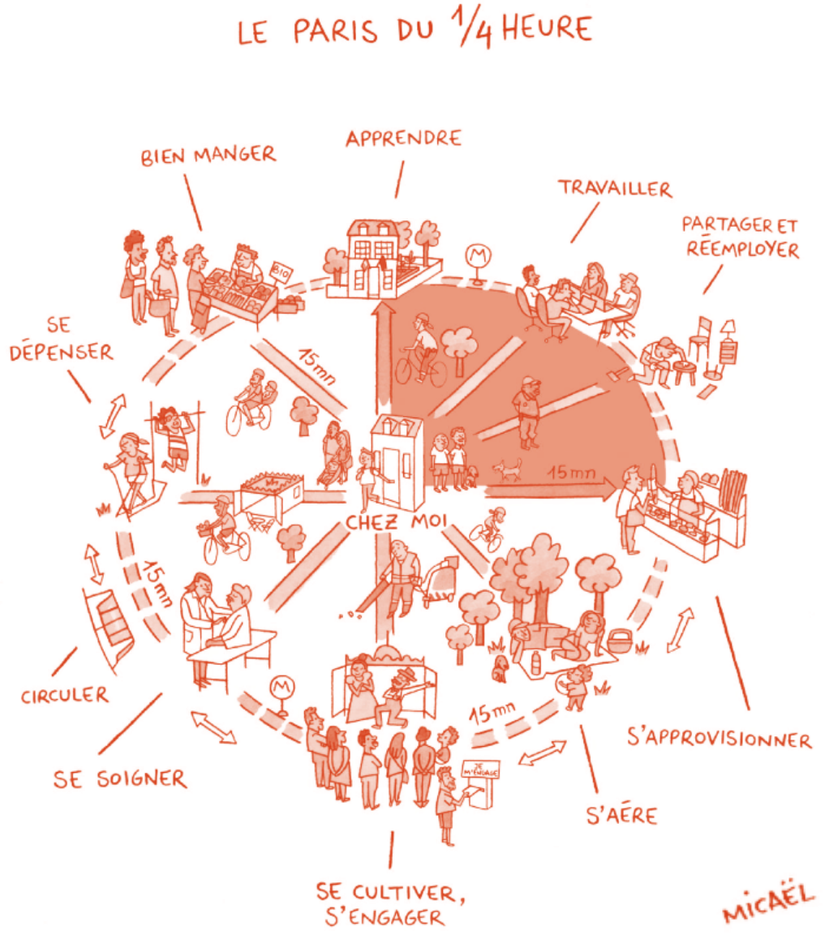



At the base of this approach there is an extremely simple idea: all places of interest for a citizen (services, shops, parks, work buildings, sports facilities, cultural spaces, meeting places, etc.) should be **reachable within fifteen minutes of time from your home** without using a personal motor means of transport such as the car. The goal is to plan a city in which **each neighborhood is self-sufficient** and reduce the gap between the efficiency of the city center and the inefficiencies of the suburbs, as well as reducing the use of motor vehicles.
This idea was first proposed by **Jane Jacobs** who, as explained at the beginning of this chapter, called for the creation of multifunctional and mixed-used neighborhoods.
Although the visionary nature of the urban planner dates back to several decades ago, currently most cities provide a different building approach: as argued in the previous chapters, following the building boom of the 60s the uncontrolled explosion of the urban suburbs has been favored, a condition that has increasingly removed the possibility of starting initiatives such as the 15-minutes City.

However, in recent years, especially following the r**epercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the need to give value to one's time has increased exponentially**; the concept behind 15-minutes City is to give back time to citizens and therefore, to meet the needs of the post-Covid era, it has become a very current trend. As reported in an ANSA article in 2021, **Paris** was the first city that tried to shape its urban layout based on the principles of the 15-minutes City, revisited by the French-Colombian urban planner **Carlos Moreno** and included in the electoral program of Mayor **Anne Hidalgo**.
The proposal was supported by evidence of the profound ecological and environmental impacts caused by metropolise. Therefore, **cities may be seen as one of the world's most damaging factors to the environment, but they can also be part of its solution if they are revisited and redesigned according to a sustainable perspective**, which therefore takes into consideration the needs of humans as creatures living in harmony with their environment, and not trying to dominate it (note the parallel with Feminist City concepts and the overpowering perspective of the "white adult male" *(Johnston-Zimmerman, 2022, Besters, 2019)*.
In the case of the Parisian project, they started from the observation that schools are the engine of cities and dictate their rhythms (their morning opening is linked to the start of offices, shops and services); therefore, by locating a school about every 300 meters and pedestrianizing the road on which they stand, it was possible to attract neighboring shops and services to the same place, thus making the neighborhood itself multifunctional; by **limiting the use of cars** and reducing the **speed limit under 30 km/h** and consequently their harmful emissions, the quality of life is improved.

*On top: "The Spiel Mobile", an interactive consultation area for community engagement to make Dublin a playful city, by "A Playful City" association.*

*On the right: "Le Paris du 1/4 heure" by artist Micaël*

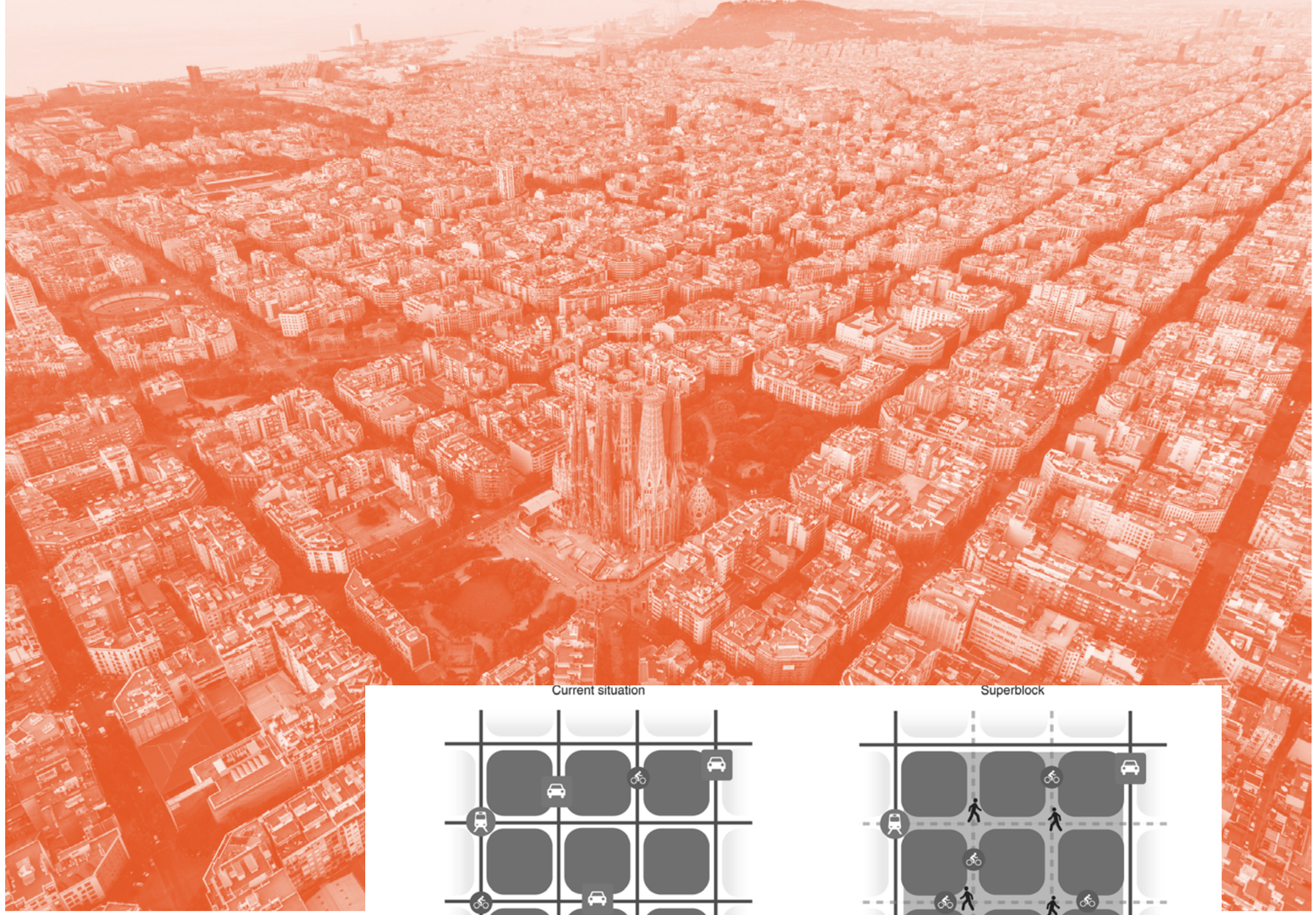


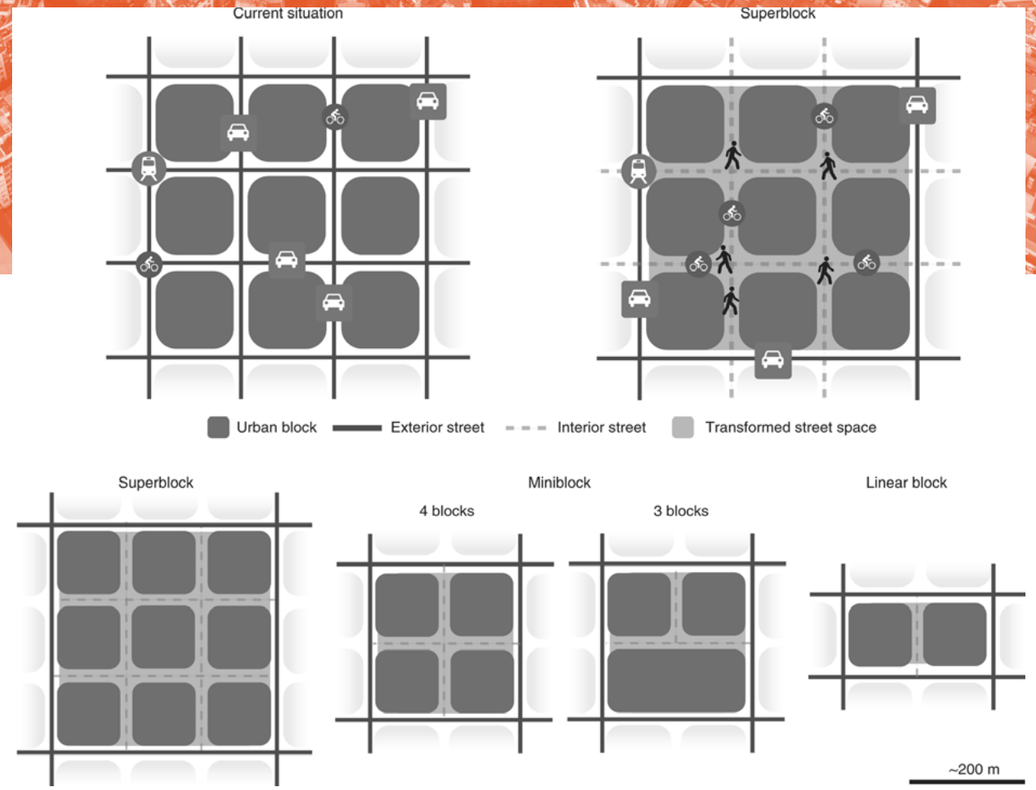
A further nuance of the 15-minutes City model is offered by the example of **Barcelona**, consisting of the so-called "Superilles", or square "**Superblocks**" of about four hundred meters per side within which only residents' vehicles can access, also subject to a **limit of 10 km/h** and characterized by various pedestrian areas.
**Ada Colau Ballano**, mayor of Barcelona, also aims to implement cycling infrastructure and strengthen public transport to improve traffic between blocks without using a personal motor vehicle.

Many other metropolises such as London, New York, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Rome, Milan and Seoul have set themselves the same goal, and 97 cities worldwide are part of the "**Cities Climate Leadership Group**", a network born in 2005 that meets once a year in the so-called C40 Summit to discuss the direction taken **to fight climate change** in progress. Although it is a strictly urban topic and not related to the scope of Placemaking, we believe it is important to conclude this chapter by highlighting the revolution underway worldwide.
In fact, the **institutions' awareness of the heavy environmental impact generated by cities** is a huge step forward in terms of making the urban system more efficient and sustainable from an environmental and social point of view.
Despite this, the doubts and criticisms that are made to the model of the 15-minutes City are related to the fact that such **a change is very slow and difficult to achieve in the short term**.

**Placemaking**, in this sense, helps to offer a valid and much more **immediate alternative** for the creation of an aggregation space that helps to redevelop and revitalize any urban area and, in particular, the neighborhood in which it is located; increasing the services offered and variegating the functional offer of a space through the creation of places, it is therefore possible to drastically improve the quality of life of the resident community; moreover, as discussed in this chapter, the activities proposed by a possible Placemaking project can **increase the sense of social cohesion,** help to create a **bridge between cultural groups** sometimes clearly separated and strengthen the sense of belonging to one's neighborhood, region or city, offering a wider number of people to "feel at home" in a place that they consider significant.

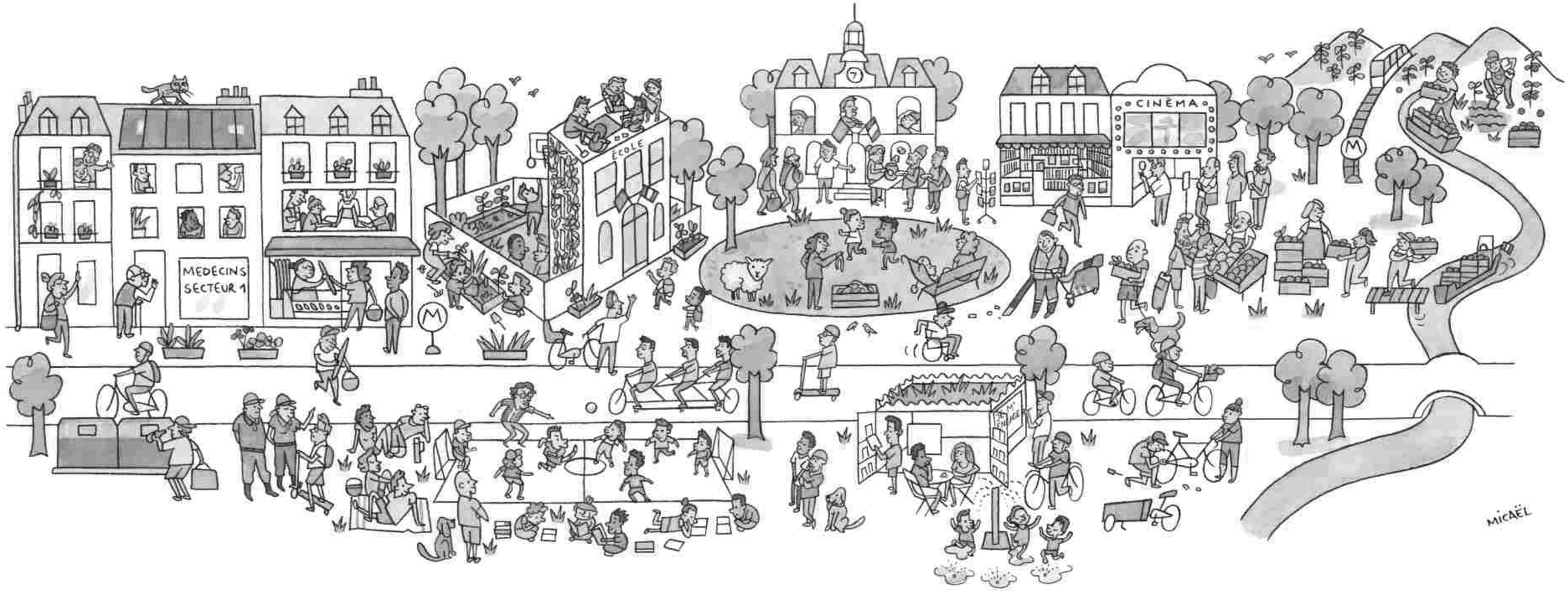
Placemaking can thus be conisdered as a **first "fast" strategy** to be implemented in order to pursue a more radical and slower change such as that proposed by the 15-minutes City model; given the assumptions and the degree of awareness gained, it is possible to say that **we are in a phase of radical shift of paradigm** and that any sustainable activity, whether small or large, helps to make a difference in **combating the threats of climate change.**






*From the top: Planimetry of Barcelona City.*

*A scheme of Superblocks concept*




*"The 15 minutes city, Paris" by artist Micaël*



*Con tale arte fu costruita Andria, che ogni sua via corre seguendo l'orbita di un pianeta e gli edifici e i luoghi della vita in comune ripetono l'ordine della costellazione e la posizione degli astri più luminosi: Antares, Alpheratz, Capella, le Cefeidi. Il calendario della città è regolato in modo che lavori e uffici e cerimonie si dispongono in una mappa che corrisponde al firmamento in quella data: così i giorni in terra e le notti in cielo si rispecchiano. Pur attraverso una regolamentazione minuziosa, la vita della città scorre calma come il moto dei corpi celesti e acquista la necessità dei fenomeni non sottoposti all'arbitrio umano. Ai cittadini d'Andria, lodandone le produzioni industriose e l'agio dello spirito, m'indussi a dichiarare: "Bene comprendo come voi, sentendovi parte d'un cielo immutabile, ingranaggi d'una meticolosa orologeria, vi guardiate dall'apportare alla vostra città e ai vostri costumi il più lieve cambiamento. Andria è l'unica città che io conosca cui convenga restare immobile nel tempo". Si guardano interdetti: "Ma perché mai? E chi l'ha detto?". E mi condussero a visitare una via pensile aperta di recente sopra un bosco di bambù, un teatro delle ombre in costruzione al posto del canile municipale, ora traslocato nei padiglioni dell'antico lazzaretto, abolito per la guarigione degli ultimi appestati, e un porto fluviale, una statua di Talete, una toboga. "E queste innovazioni non turbano il ritmo astrale della vostra città?" domandai. "Così perfetta è la corrispondenza tra la nostra città e il cielo," risposero "che ogni cambiamento d'Andria comporta qualche novità tra le stelle". Gli astronomi scrutano coi telescopi dopo ogni mutamento che ha luogo in Andria, e segnalano l'esplosione di una nuova, o il passare dall'arancione al giallo d'un remoto punto del firmamento, l'espandersi d'una nebulosa, il curvarsi di una spira della via Lattea. "Ogni cambiamento implica una catena d'altri cambiamenti, in Andria come nelle altre stelleri, a luogo in Andria, tra città e il cielo: la città e il cielo non restano mai uguali. Del carattere degli abitanti di Andria meritano di essere ricordate due virtù: la sicurezza in se stessi e la prudenza. Convinti che ogni innovazione nella città influisca sul disegno del cielo, prima di ogni decisione calcolano i rischi e i vantaggi per loro e per l'insieme della città e dei mondi."*

*-Italo Calvino, Le città invisibili*



# 05 A Systemic Placemaking approach

*Towards a sustainable urban system through Systemic Design methodology and Placemaking strategies*

# 5.1 The Systemic Placemaking

Cities are **habitats.**
Cities are **dynamic, mutable, heterogeneous**.
Cities are the treasure chest of human activities, and through them they narrate themselves.
Cities represent **one of the most impactful factors of the human footprint worldwide**, but they could be re-designed, re-visited and re-delineated to limit their environmental and social damage.

**Cities are complex systems** and as such can be analyzed and studied in order to optimize their networks of relationships and their material and immaterial flows.

However, given this exorbitant complexity of the urban system, this thesis does not want to set itself the ambitious goal of defining a methodology that transforms it into a sustainable urban ecosystem, but aims to propose a contribution so that strategies can be implemented that help the stakeholders of the system itself to become more **aware of its immense untapped potential** (as urban spaces not lived and communities torn or non-existent) and act spontaneously to enhance it and recognize its preciousness.

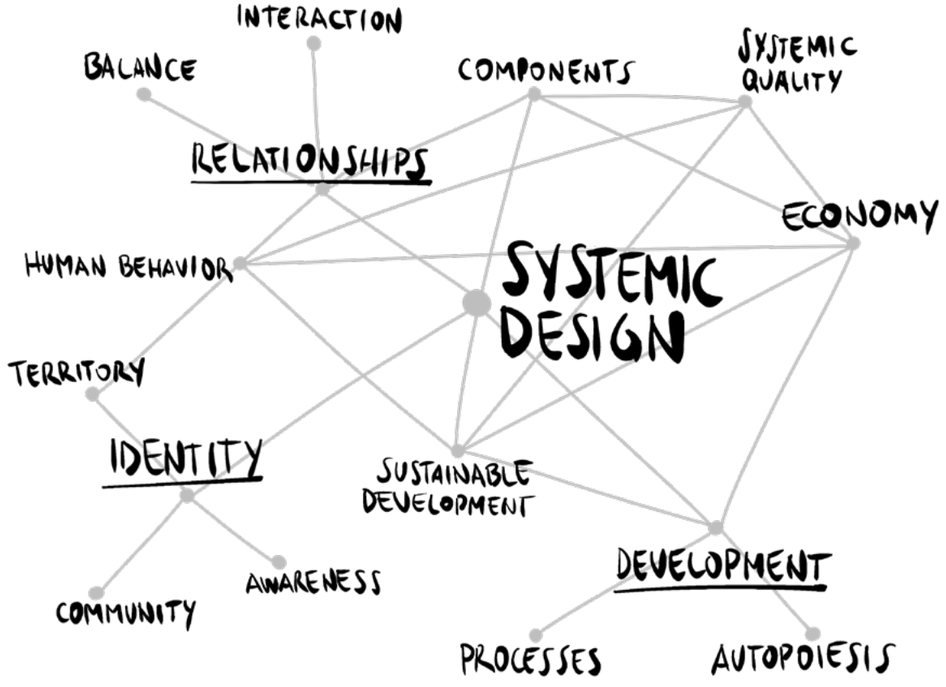
Following the study of the **Literature review** and the carrying out of a series of Field Analysis in EU and non-EU territory, as well as the participation in Design Units and competitions related to circularity for the city, the present thesis work has **selected the Placemaking strategy as a sustainable outcome at a systemic level** to redevelop an urban space in the short term.

As discussed in the previous chapter, converting a space into a ***meaningful place*** allows the local population to benefit from a series of important advantages (creation of communities, having a multifunctional and malleable aggregation space over time, etc.) that contribute to **enhancing the resources, identities and cultural characteristics of the territory** and reducing the problems that afflict it. This chapter is therefore aimed at exposing the strategy and tools of Placemaking from a systemic perspective as our study background: **Systemic Design**. As a **multidisciplinary** and **transdisciplinary** discipline, Systemic

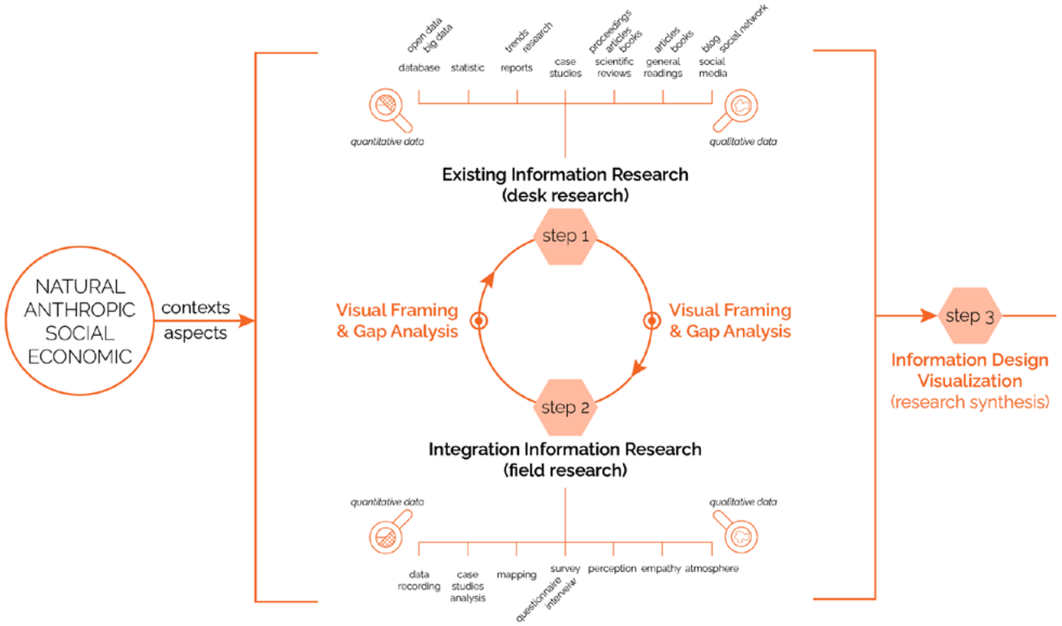


Design allows to consider the elements of a system in a holistic way to grasp and identify the network of social, economic and environmental relationship its complexity.
Through a **Human-centered approach**, it places human needs at the center of the project with the aim of finding solutions that satisfy all interested parties and let them be able to improve and optimize their flows over time according to an autopoietic logic.
The systemic approach is divided into **4 methodological phases**:

- Holistic Diagnosis (HD)
- Challenges & Opportunities (C&O)
- Systemic Project (SP)
- Analysis of the outcomes




*Illustriation made by us about the Systemic Design scheme from Lanzavecchia's bibliography "Il fare ecologico" (2000) book cover.*




The first step (HD) consists of a **holistic analysis** of the territory for the delineation of its state of the art; it includes **Desk Analysis** (data founded on reports, statistics, database open data, scientific reviews, general readings, social media) and **Field Analysis** (quantitative data as data recording, case studies analysis, mapping, interviews, and qualitative data as empathy, perception and atmosphere) of the area.
The second phase (**C&O**) groups the data sought according to the macro-categories of the economic, environmental and social areas to identify the relationships, causes and effects between the various challenges and opportunities present in the territory.
The third step (**SP**), following a Multicriteria Analysis, allows to study the C&O through 5 guidelines (3 from Systemic Design and 2 from HD) to select the opportunities to be seized and the challenges to be faced for the design of a new system.
Finally, the last phase studies and organizes the **design steps to be started in the short, medium and long term on different scales** so that the actions to be carried out for the reorganization of the flows of the system according to their technical-logistical and economic feasibility can be realized.

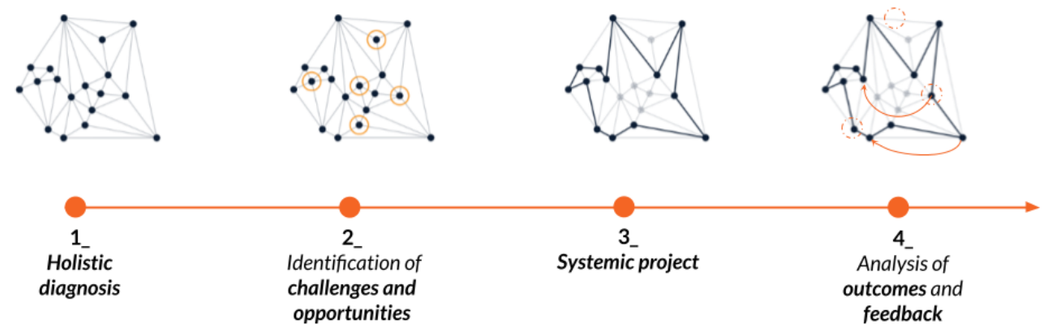
**Placemaking**'s urban regeneration strategy **is an example of an outcome** that in the **short term** allows to reorganize a part of the flows of an urban system on a micro scale of neighborhood or public area (such as squares and streets); **its principles are in line with Systemic**

*On the top: Holistic Diagnosis scheme.*

*On the right: Systemic Design methodology and Systemic Placemaking methodology.*



**Design** since it is also a project carried out in a **Human-centered perspective**, since it places the needs of the urban community at the center of the project.
In addition, both approaches pursue objectives related to the **social** and **environmental** spheres of the project.
In this thesis we have decided to focus on the proposal of outcomes that can be achieved in the **short term** with a low economic impact, so that the community can immediately benefit from the advantages offered.




MOLO '61

## Our case study: Molo '61

Example of **systemic design methodology** applied to **placemaking**



**1_ Holistic diagnosis**

*Through desk analysis and field analysis, useful data are collected to understand all the focal aspects of the analyzed territory.*

**2_ Identification of challenges and opportunities**

*The findings are cross-referenced and the different main problems and opportunities to work on are identified.*

**3_ Systemic project**

*A system of solutions is found that goes to benefit of all the stakeholders involved.*

**4_ Outcomes**

*Development of Placemaking strategies. The timing and impacts for each action are defined.*

However, from a systemic point of view, **the Placemaking project can be expanded if future developments** are foreseen such as to be sustainable primarily at an economic level and secondly, if the temporary low-impact phase is effective and therefore the space and the community are correctly activated. Therefore it is possible to foresee further improvements **in the medium and long term** that benefit the network of stakeholders and tangible and intangible flows related to the environmental and social macro-areas.

From this observation derives the neologism "**Systemic Placemaking**", a methodology that involves the realization of a systemic project for a given territory (to be carried out on several scales: micro, which we will understand as a neighborhood scale; meso, city scale; macro, i.e. regional scale) whose outcome consists in the implementation of a Placemaking project structured on several scales and in different time frames (short, mid and long terms).

To implement the Systemic Placemaking it is appropriate to take into consideration the **theoretical tools that have been exposed in the previous chapters** selected by the Literature Review, as necessary to lay the conceptual and ideological bases of the project and purely deriving from a critical and systemic analysis of the urban system and its evolutions over time; this chapter, instead, It will focus on the research and identification of principles, tools and **concrete methodologies** necessary for its practical implementation.

To carry out this chapter of the thesis, the use of the bibliographies proposed by "Project for Public Spaces" in 2022, by "UN-Habitat" in 2013 and by "Neighbourhood Project" in 2019 and the toolkit created by the expert in urban planning and public participation Anna Tehlova (et al.) in 2019 proved to be of fundamental importance.
The following paragraphs therefore constitute an interpretation of the main key elements, techniques and concepts found which, from our point of view, are the most interesting to be counted during the design of an effective Systemic Placemaking.

First of all, it is necessary to take a step back and **explain what a public space is** and why it is important: as a space accessible to everyone in a free way, it contributes to the quality and pleasantness of urban life; it is therefore essential to guarantee citizens the presence of public spaces that are safe, inclusive and sustainable economically and environmentally.

However, not all public spaces meet these standards and often the **city is dotted with empty, inert and abandoned spaces** that the community considers neutral or even avoids frequenting out of fear or disinterest.

*To the left and next page: Practical examples of Placemaking provided by The Neighbourhood Project*






**Planting and greening**

Transform underutilised parks or streets with trees and planting.




**Events in public spaces**

From yoga to picnics in the park, local events are critical to shaping vibrant places.



**Community art**

Enable the community to put their fingerprints on new and existing places through local art.



**Outdoor cinema**

Quickly transform an open or underutilised space with outdoor cinema events.



**Dog parks**

Caring for four legged friends can also be a great way to build community.




**Signage and way-finding**

Personalised way-finding creates a specific identity and points out what locals know. This could help children walk to school, discover local shops or just encourage people to walk more.




**Main street activation**

Breathing new life into local retail areas with new signage, art and creative projects.



**Play streets**

Reprogram streets into spaces for play and healthy activity through temporary closures.



**Verge greening**

Transform local nature strips into flourishing gardens.




**Pop-up parks**

Temporary transformation of streets and underutilised spaces. This could mean closing a street, or transforming an underutilised space.



**Parklets**

Micro-parks, often no bigger than a car parking space, that create new green spaces and make neighbourhoods friendlier for local residents.



**Markets**

Local markets are an important part of public spaces and an opportunity to showcase local talent and produce.

As said in last chapters, Placemaking is a strategy that allows to activate **collaborative processes** to shape public spaces and "create a place" (from which the term Placemaking itself takes its name) at the service of the community; by exploiting public goods, ideas and potential of a local community it is in fact possible to redevelop spaces that promote the health, happiness and well-being of the people themselves (Tehlova et al., 2019).

In particular, as explained above, Placemaking has been chosen as a sustainable outcome to improve the urban system because it stands as a means to transform spaces in a short time and with **affordable costs through simple, light, economic and fast solutions** summarized by the acronym LQC, or "Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper":

"LQC, i.e. LIGHTER, QUICKER, CHEAPER
IS A **LOW-COST, HIGH-IMPACT** INCREMENTAL FRAMEWORK
FOR IMPROVING PUBLIC SPACES **IN SHORT ORDER**
THAT CAPITALIZES ON THE **CREATIVE ENERGY OF**
**THE COMMUNITY** TO EFFICIENTLY GENERATE
**NEW USES** AND **REVENUE** FOR PLACES
IN TRANSITION."

*- Project for Public Spaces, 2022*

A series of **practical examples** consists of cleaning streets or natural places involving the community, limiting areas for cars and making them walkable, embellishing with artistic elements or murals, organizing events; further elements that can be used are street furniture, pop-up structures, gardens or urban gardens, children's playgrounds, stages, outdoor sports equipment and outdoor cinema.

**Based on the needs that emerge from the field analysis** of a territory, it is possible to choose one or more activities to be started in a place with the dual purpose of redeveloping it and offering a spot for aggregation for the community and for the stakeholders of the area.

# 5.2 The 3 pillars of Placemaking

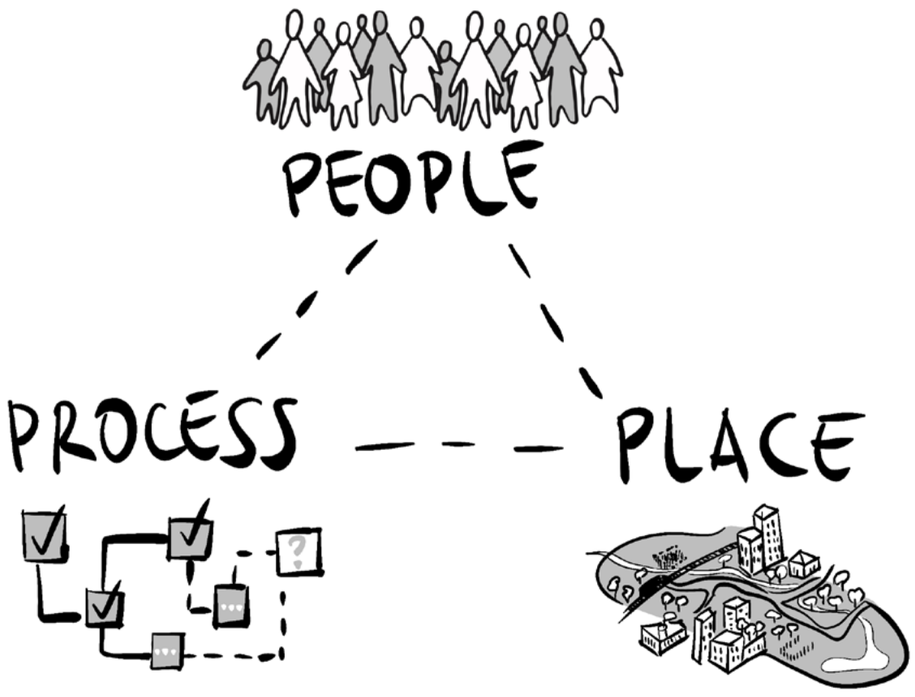
Placemaking is  based on three principles *(CoDesign Studio, 2019)*:

- **People,** which concerns the role of social capital in the project.
- **Place**, which includes the physical attributes of the place where the project is carried out.
- **Process**, which includes the management, trust and risk systems inherent in the project implementation process.

The first principle "People" implies the need to **guide local citizenship** to offer them the opportunity to shape a space according to their **local identity** to strengthen their **sense of belonging**; encouraging the **agency of the people** involved establishes connections and strengthens their ability to connect with others and with the surrounding physical environment. Examples and useful tips regarding this principle concern the possibility of making the initial project flexible based on what emerges from the research of Holistic Diagnosis in the field (therefore taking into account the proposals and ideas put forward by the citizens), but also starting the project around **an initially smaller community** (early adopters) and then **expanding it later.** Moreover, involving **local leaders** to give momentum to the project is a useful strategy to drag the late majority, and sometimes reinforce the relationship between administration and urban community.

This principle is also based on the creation or **strengthening of human relationships**. In this regard, the non-profit cross-disciplinary organization "Project for Public Spaces" mentioned in chapter 1 proposes the strategy called "**triangulation**": *"Triangulation is the process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other" (William Whyte, mentor of Project for Public Spaces).*

In a public space, the study of the spatial arrangement of the elements is important to make the most of its potential: by combining a series of installations or street furniture in the same place, in fact, it is possible to **weave relationships and connections that otherwise would not be born**.






*Guide and activate the agency of citizens*



*Shaping place according to local identity*



*"Triangulation" principle: external stimuli incentivize new relationship*



*Engaging local leaders to strenghthen P.A./community relationship*

For example, if you place yourself near the seats, a drink stand and a stage you can activate the space to provide evening recreational activities for young people (such as concerts); or if you approach a playground, a food kiosk and relaxation areas you allow children and guardians to spend an afternoon in the area satisfying the needs of several different generations.
The second pillar "**Place**" places at the center of the project the respect of the place in its state of affairs: the project proposal must **not be disconnected from the surrounding context** and must not lose its historical and cultural identity, but rather enhance it.

"CULTURAL HERITAGE PROVIDES A STIMULATING FRAMEWORK FOR **SOCIAL COHESION** THAT CONTRIBUTES TO THE **WELL-BEING** OF CITIZEN AND THEIR COMMUNITY. HISTORIC SPACES AND BUILDINGS AND THE LANDSCAPE THAT SURROUNDS THEM **SHAPE** AND **NURTURE** **OUR FEELING OF "HOME"** AND THE MAINTENANCE OF THESE BUILDINGS AND LANDSCAPES IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF **RESPECTING THE LEGACY** OF A PLACE."

*- Future Learn online course by RMIT University, 2022*

To carry out a project respectful of the pre-existing place, it is necessary **to act step by step** and not be ambitious: testing **prototypes on a small scale** will make it easier to make the community and the administration accept the implementation of simple, fast and light practices. With a **learning-by-doing** approach, it will be possible to expand the project by adapting it to the context and redefining the initial idea based on the results experienced. It is therefore essential to enhance local resources already available in the area to strengthen its strengths and limit those of weakness, sometimes **focusing on the uniqueness** that characterize it and on the historical authenticity of the place; this increases the sense of belonging and claims **local pride** in the project *(de Kort, 2019)*.
Importantly, "local resource" also means **social capital** that could be included in the project (such as people who have just moved to the neighbourhood, marginalised or isolated) giving them the opportunity to share their time and expertise with the community to help them create connections with their neighbours. Finally, to choose a suitable place for a Systemic Placemaking intervention, it is useful to **consider its surrounding context** (what is it close or connected to?), how it is currently used, what are the methods of use and the **flows** of people to which it is subject (where do people walk? How long do they stop? How long do they interact with each other and in which spot?) and above





*Enhancing the perception and atmosphere*



*Consider the flows and mode of use of the place*



*Give value to local resources and the uniqueness of the place*




*Respect the context and pre-existing environmental and cultural heritage*

all understand the perception of the place by the locals (what is the degree of pleasantness, care, safety, comfort that is perceived? What sensations does it evoke?). The third and last principle is related to the "**Process**", or the importance of facilitating the process of starting the Systemic Placemaking project; in fact, the choice of design space must preferably fall on underused areas of the city, but it is important to ensure that the social substrate is willing **to accept the kind of implementations that you intend to start** in order not to risk being a victim of vandalism or environmental degradation. In addition, an environment must be favorable to installations also from an **administrative** and **legal** point of view, or provide for more steps such as to make it less **risky** at an economic and managerial level. In case of rejection of the project by the institutions, the bibliography suggests **not to surrender to the "no"** and continue to act to raise awareness of the potential of change that can be implemented with a Placemaking project, or try to compromise by resizing the idea so that it can be lighter in terms of **economic feasibility** (for example, providing for the installation of removable structures and not impacting on the landscape). The Process pillar also implies the need to **clarify the boundaries** of the creative process both to the community and to the administrations, so that the latter can accept it more easily and the former can correctly understand that it is possible to shape spaces and define how they can do it; in this regard, in the following paragraphs it will be explained how to carry out effective communication for design storytelling.



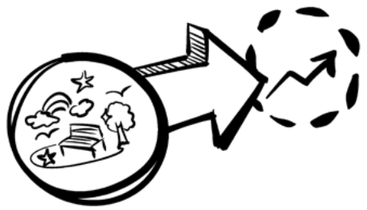
*Create a “yes” culture within council*



*Learning-by-doing approach*

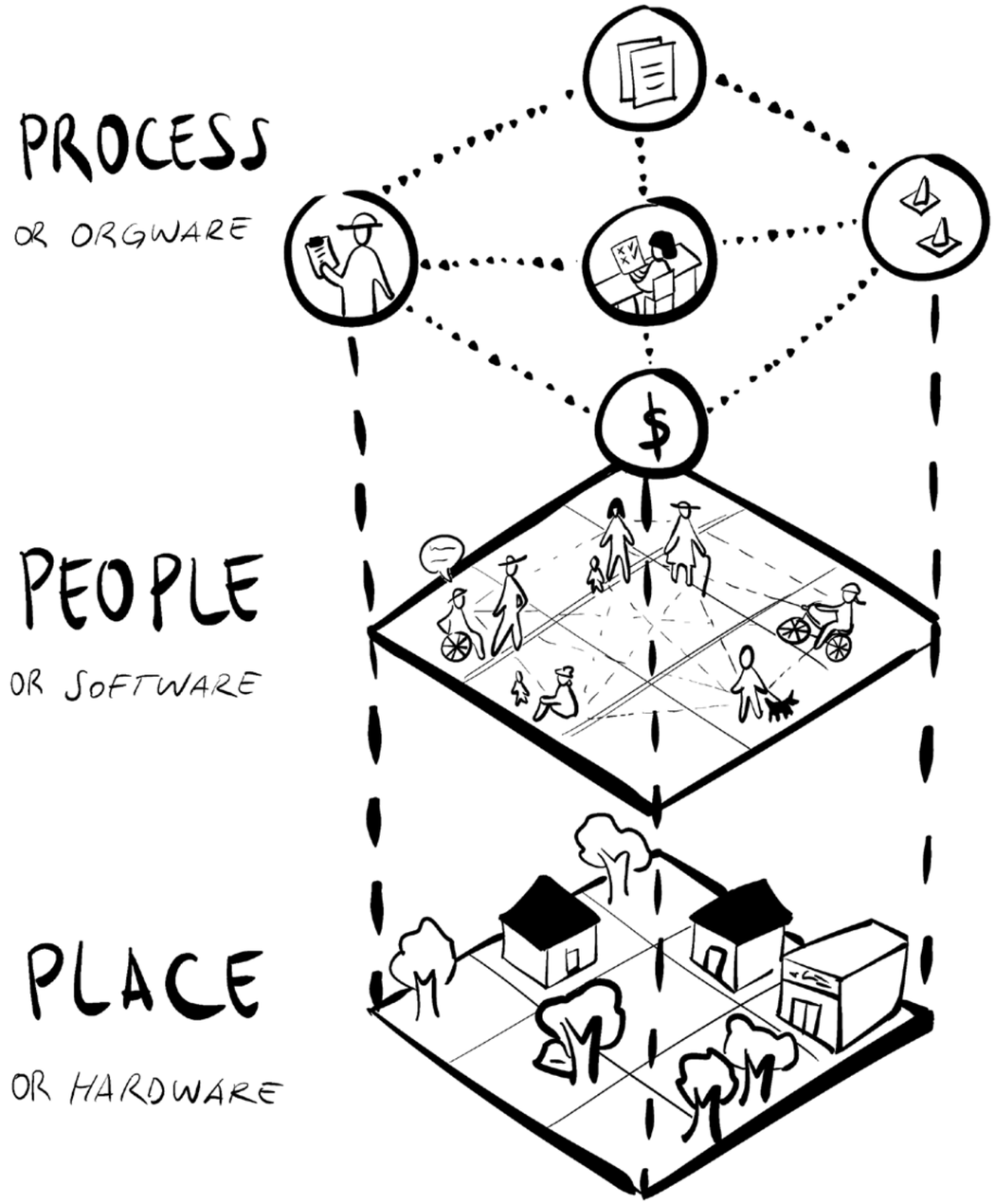



*Clarify the boundaries of the creative process*



*Start by testing small-scale prototypes (economically less risky)*

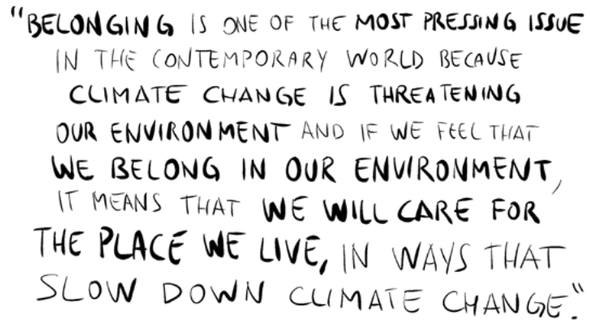
As these interpretations demonstrate, **the three pillars** do not represent entities in their own right, but areas of project that **intersect and merge with each other.** These three pillars have been identified in a series of bibliographies and sometimes understood with different terminology: for example, see the previous chapter on the theme of “Seductive City”, or see how the previously mentioned E-book “Our City?” of 2019 published by “Placemaking Europe” call them “**Software**”, “**Hardware**” and “**Orgware**” respectively. In particular, the notion of “Hardware” is the same (i.e. it identifies the physical attributes of a place such as streets, parks, buildings, etc.), while the term “Software” extends to the intangibility of human perception, including the atmosphere, identity, personality and liveliness of a place (or its absence); it also includes relationships between people and social and trust connections. The international organization Placemaking Europe collaborates with the platform “Placemaking Education” (promoted by “Town Team Movement” and “PlacemakingX”), which has published on its official website the difference between “Software” and “Hardware”, however highlighting how these souls that characterize a place are closely related and interconnected. In fact, proposing a similarity between Placemaking and an electronic device, it is argued that both need appropriate updates both in terms of software and hardware. Therefore, places, i.e. **urban “hardware”, must not be static, but must be constantly updated following the evolution of urban “software**”.




*A schematic rapresentation of the interconnections between the three Placemaking pillars People, Place and Process.*

# 5.3 The role of citizen engagement

Returning to the first pillar of Placemaking "**People**", therefore also identified as the "Software" of a place, it is important to open a parenthesis to emphasize the role of **citizen engagement**, or
*"The ability and incentive for ordinary people to come together, deliberate, and take action on problems or issues that they themselves have defined as important and in ways they deem appropriate" (Gibson, 2006).*
Unlike the design methods linked to a top-down approach, Placemaking projects guided by citizen engagement are an excellent example of application of the **bottom-up approach** which, by exploiting the involvement of the community and its initiatives, increases the strengths of its local resources and limits its weaknesses so that the final project is not disconnected from the context (as instead It happens in the context of top-down planning, see previous chapters), but perfectly reflects the needs and requirements of the people who will live in that space, becoming a **mirror of their local identity**. Indeed, only people who have lived for years in the same place are able to know in detail the soul of that area and, if you leave them room to act, they are able to highlight its beauty and potential since they inevitably have an interest in **co-design and taking care of their living space** *(Slingerland et al., 2020).*




*- Prof Anna Hickey-Moody, Professor in Media and Communication at RMIT University in Future Learn online course by RMIT University, 2022*



The Future Learn online course run by RMIT University that we took in 2022 explains that carrying out projects that increase the sense of belonging is essential to stimulate inclusion and social cohesion and, consequently, create healthy neighborhoods and revitalize the sense of community connection. In fact, **belonging is a fundamental human motivation**, and includes the need for social connections with people, places, experiences and ways of being. The university course analyzes a 2020 research that shows how a **community that possesses a strong sense of community belonging positively influences people's physical and mental health**: indeed, through belonging and commitment, a greater sense of identity and trust is experienced that improves the quality of life, because it opposes anonymity and loneliness that inevitably lead to negative health outcomes.
The study highlights how a significant number of people suffer from **social isolation,** loneliness and lack of connection with others (especially as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic); this condition feeds the sense of **social disconnection**, due for example to **mobility** and **migration** (removal from countries of origin), cultural and linguistic obstacles, cultural divisions between ethnic groups, speed of modern life and too sudden technological changes, deterioration of cultural heritage, limitations of social contacts for reasons of health security (Covid-19). Finally, the research investigates the impacts of the pandemic on the social sphere and mental health, highlighting how the **increase in loneliness and mental distress** (especially among vulnerable populations) **was caused in part by long periods of isolation and social distancing**. Therefore it is important to build spaces of belonging in our communities, helping places to grow, change and adapt to new people, new environments and new cultural and social developments. Involving citizens in the creative process i**ncreases social cohesion by motivating people to collectively participate in the formation of their environments** and creatively explore alternative designs of the physical space they experience.
To activate these processes, **physical and/or digital tools** can be integrated and sometimes a **playful, interactive** and open **participatory** approach can be proposed. In addition, the co-creation process can take place not only by proposing the practical realization of tangible elements (such as co-design workshops), but also by installing tools for collecting data and inputs about the area that can be useful for designers for defining scenarios to solve peculiar problems of the urban system of reference; it is also possible to use them as a tool for conversation and discussion between the urban planning administration, citizens and stakeholders, encouraging mutual trust between the actors of the city (also increasing the degree of transparency and mutual influence). These modalities have more possibilities to **adapt to the local context** and respond optimally to needs and requirements that emerge. *(Slingerland et al. 2020).*
To conclude, Placemaking (and therefore Systemic Placemaking) is intrinsically effective because it is based on the **concretization of the**

**bottom-up approach**, which allows to grasp the real needs of people since they themselves become **spokesmen** in the design phase (and in the subsequent ones, being a dynamic project that evolves over time in an autopoietic logic).
In fact, the **community created would be involved in activities that it considers interesting and useful** and would benefit from a multifunctional space of which it understands its value and which it would shape over time to ensure that it adapts to the continuous evolution of the community itself.

Moreover, i**f threatened, the community would mobilize to preserve it** (chapter 3): this soul of Placemaking derives from its past history which, as argued in the previous chapters, was born around the sixties, a decade in which activism for the defense of ideals, lifestyles and human rights spreads. Sinking its roots in the environmental philosophy of the time and pursuing ideals related to Human-centered Design, Placemaking has turned into a real movement of which (only in the last decade) a series of methods, best-practices and on-the-ground actions have been developed that have favored the realization of the projects and the recognition of the activities carried out.

Citizen engagement involves the so-called **empowering of the community**, or the act of giving permission to people to create and shape public places; given the bond and connection that is established during the creative process that activates the place itself, the people involved will love it and become attached to it (Tehlova et al., 2019). Furthermore, transforming a space creates living and authentic places that strengthen the capacity to build and **make social capital resilient** as human interactions between stakeholders are stimulated:

"**EMPOWERING** IS THE PROCESS BY WHICH A PLACE IS DESIGNED, BUILT, ACTIVATED OR MANAGED FOR EFFECTIVE POSITIVE RESULTS ON THE **SOCIAL, CULTURAL, ENVIRONMENTAL** AND **ECONOMIC VALUE** FOR THAT PLACE."

*- CoDesign Studio, 2019*

Activating a space therefore allows you to build more connected and **resilient neighborhoods:** by unlocking social capital from its immobility, a sense of connection is established between people of the same community that increases the sense of involvement of people, who will **feel more motivated** to carry out sustainable projects in the long term from which they can benefit.
Moreover, if a place is loved and protected by the community, in the long run **institutions are pushed to review their priorities** and respect the place itself, and sometimes invest in its improvement to be aligned with the interests of the citizens who defend them.

These types of interventions are **born as temporary projects** because they allow to circumvent any bureaucratic or procedural limits; however, if they are successful, the institutions can welcome them and use them as effective tools to obtain **long-term benefits** for the community itself. The "temporary" phase of the project is a **low-risk version**, often proposed in the form of pop-ups, tactical urbanism or prototypes that act as initial tools for the activation of a space in a limited, controlled and low cost time.
"**Tactical urbanism**" in particular is a design approach that involves the realization of simple, light, fast and cheap temporary projects (**LQC projects**) to test new ideas before committing to long-term projects; in addition to risk reduction, they allow to increase the amenity of a space that needs to be redeveloped, reducing resistance to change and **encouraging "buy-in**" (i.e. the willingness, on the part of other stakeholders, to take part in an innovative project). In addition, the low-risk versions, being monitored by those who propose the project, also allow to carry out a **data collection** of feedback received from the community in response to the project proposal and intervene on any subsequent changes.



*A photograph from TorinoStratosferica "Corso Farini" Placemaking project. It was built by a community of young people in Turin. It's an example of Participatory Design approach.*

## 5.4 The benefits of Systemic Placemaking

**Systemic Placemaking** involves a series of **benefits** that can be registered in 6 macro-areas, such as:

### *1. "Do more with less"*

By exploiting the **available local resources** (especially those not valued, abandoned or in disuse) sustainable places can be redeveloped through **circular design** approaches such as upcycling, reuse, recycling and sharing. It is therefore proposed the creation of structures, pop-ups, paths and other urban or interactive elements created with **eco-sustainable materials** and sometimes **economic production techniques** such as DIY; in particular the latter are useful because, by organizing co-design workshops in which the community takes part, they allow to activate talents, ideas and skills of the inhabitants themselves and increase their degree of involvement.
A further positive aspect of co-design activities concerns the learning and **development of new skills** and competences by the subjects involved *(Slingerland et al., 2020)*.
By filtering the project with a view to **environmental and economic sustainability**, it is also possible to have access to funds allocated by municipalities, states and other institutional bodies for the promotion of projects related to these issues.

### *2. "Creating human connections"*

Through a participatory approach of **co-design** between designers and communities (**Participatory Design**) people are invited to take part in a collective project for the redevelopment of a space that, once realized, will become a place of aggregation accessible and shareable by all.
By using the same places, the community strengthens its social connections (which **improve people's quality of life** and degree of happiness; conversely, social isolation represents a serious health risk sometimes worse than smoking and alcohol consumption *(Kelly 2014 cited in CoDesign Studio, 2019)*.
This peculiarity makes the Placemaking strategy particularly suitable for **dealing with the post-pandemic phase** that distinguishes the current era: many people have in fact rediscovered the value of time and the benefits deriving from contact with nature, as well as having the tendency and the need to share significant experiences with other people.

### *3. "Places that reflect the local identity of the community"*

If it is the community that creates a place itself, it can only r**eflect their needs, needs, lifestyles and values:**
*"The greatest benchmark of placemaking success: local people can see their fingerprints all over it." (Valli Morphett, CEO CoDesign Studio)*
The community can be guided in a more or less direct way in the community creation phase and, consequently, would be stimulated to manage and carry out programs in collaboration with any **local stakeholders** such as schools, commercial activities, recreational centers and more (which would obtain benefits in terms of **visibility**, **recognition** and **branding** and image return in the civic and environmental commitment placed in the project, as well as stimulating corporate social responsibility *(Hart & Milstein, 2003)*.
The Placemaking strategy therefore allows to facilitate the local economy of the territory, with consequent positive repercussions on public safety and the level of **attractiveness of the area** *(Tehlova et al., 2019)*.
The holistic analysis that precedes the design of the outcome of Systemic Placemaking, therefore, increases the possibility of improving relations with the territory through the **optimization of its network of stakeholders.**

### *4. "Build the resilience and the meaningfulness"*

Having the power to shape and shape their own spaces **increases the willpower of people** who, aware of being able to leave a mark, feel more stimulated to take part in the creative process:
*"Having the power to shape one's own spaces means feeling that you have more voice, influence and stronger interactions; therefore a sense of uniqueness of the place is generated that inspires others to join,* ***spreading the reputation from mouth to mouth****" (CoDesign Studio, 2019)*
Any events and activities to be carried out in the place contribute to making the community more open and willing to manage any stress and novelties that it may encounter over time, thus becoming more **resilient** thanks to the strengthening of its ability to react to the unexpected (also being accustomed to the concept of serendipity that characterizes a bottom-up project; for further analysis see chapters 3 and 4).
Finally, as discussed extensively in the previous chapters, the creation

of "meaningful places" is a fundamental pillar on which the Systemic Placemaking strategy is based, also entailing a series of benefits for the community:
*"The **sharing of meaning**, the actively being involved with contributing to this meaning of and in a neighborhood, **enhances the sense of social cohesion** and the sense of social safety as result." (Slingerland et al., 2020)*

## *5. "Leave a legacy"*

Socially, environmentally and economically sustainable actions generate value because they guarantee l**ong-term benefits for both people and the planet**, promoting sustainable development as a legacy for current and future generations *(Perrini et al. 2010)*.
Placemaking is a strategy that integrates the social, environmental and economic dimensions in order to l**eave a legacy that can evolve** over time based on the changes undergone by the territory and the community: for example, the active participation of people promotes **social inclusion** and improves the network of interpersonal relationships that characterizes it; the circular approach on which the design is based reduces the negative impact of human activities on the environment *(Clarkson et al., 2008)*.
The ultimate goal of Placemaking is to leave a legacy that, over time, will be **self-sufficient** *(CoDesign Studio, 2019)*, therefore **autopoietic** (using a systemic terminology; for further details see chapter 2).
Examples of legacy include the creation of new social relationships, new skills unlocked by people, increasing the sustainability of the neighborhood and the communicative-collaborative culture among stakeholders and, in the best case, adjusting administrative policies to favor bottom-up projects.

## *6. "Towards a more sustainable urban system"*

As explained above, **testing ideas on a small scale** with low-risk projects sometimes characterized by temporariness is a useful strategy to test the degree of acceptance and integration of the project within the urban system.
At the systemic level, in fact, it reacts in a **cybernetic way** through feedback loops such as to perpetuate a positive state for the system or fight it if not consistent with its structure *(de Lange, 2019)*.
**Step by step**, by incorporating the various interventions and replacing what does not respond effectively to the intended purpose, local administrations and businesses will be able to accept the proposed changes with more flexibility and react in response to them with more ease and agility *(CoDesign Studio, 2019)*.
The 2023 **study conducted by Toronto Metropolitan University and Canedian Architect** in collaboration with several organizations analyzes the benefits of implementing Placemaking projects.
The research involved **586 participants** and examined different types of sites (such as office spaces, public squares, retail stores, transit stations and condominium buildings), presenting them with two versions of each site (de facto status and project status).

The results of the study demonstrated an increase in:

- **Positive perceptions** of redeveloped environments +53%
- Positive feelings and feelings towards places as they are **considered more inviting, attractive**, beautiful, stimulating and comfortable: +63%
- Probability of **recommending** the site to other people: +77%
- **Increase in time spent** in redeveloped places with Placemaking (and consequent increase in sales of adjacent shops and socio-environmental benefits for the community) +50%
- Propensity to **share information** about Placemaking: +74%
- "**Self-congruence**", or "ability of an individual to link his identity to that of a physical element" (such as a place) (with consequent loyalty mechanisms, increase in the attractiveness and frequency of use of the space and more significant interactions with the environment) +53%

**The conclusion** of the study states that Placemaking interventions positively influence communities and strengthen the perception of the entire surrounding area, leading to the creation of **stronger connections between the actors of the territory** (given the mutual benefit deriving from its implementations) and an **increase in awareness** of the importance of carrying out sustainable projects at an environmental and social level *(Canadian Architect, 2023)*.

Therefore, to start a Systemic Placemaking project it is essential to **take into account the social substrate** of the community residing near the area selected for redevelopment and the stakeholders who could be involved to also derive economic benefit.
To explore the design space it is therefore necessary to carry out **Field Analysis** and **Desk Analysis** (as said before, they are useful tools to carry out systemic Holistic Diagnosis) that take into account the social and physical structure and networks within an area, becoming familiar with the local context to identify the possible partnerships available and their degree of interest and willingness to involve.

"YOU CAN SEE A LOT JUST **BY OBSERVING.** THROUGH THESE OBSERVATIONS, IT BECOMES CLEAR **WHAT KIND OF ACTIVITIES** ARE MISSING, AND WHAT MIGHT **BE INCORPORATE.** AND WHEN THE SPACE ARE BUILT, **CONTINUING TO OBSERVE** THEM WILL TEACH US EVEN MORE ABOUT HOW THEY **EVOLVE** AND CAN BE **MANAGED** OVER TIME."

*-Project for Public Spaces, 2022*

Designers should therefore **carry out direct observations in the field,** collect interviews, walk around the surroundings according to the Jacobesian perspective of "city-walker at street level" *(chapter 3)* so taking a "**Jane's walk**".
Collecting ideas, reflections, perceptions and discussions of the people who live daily the environment selected for a Placemaking intervention is in fact extremely useful, since it **allows designers to create their own network of relationships with stakeholders** and, possibly, contact them in later phases of the project or to build a flourishing participatory process *(Slingerland et al., 2020)*.
For the Desk Analysis you can rely on both official municipal or regional documentation and territorial reports, while for the Field Analysis it is possible to range and carry out analyzes such as neighborhood mapping, direct interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, installations for collecting information and workshops.

*"Jane 's Walk", international festival that promotes community-led walking conversation inspired by Jane Jacobs and her bottom-up approach based on direct observation of city from a city-walker perspective.*








# 5.5 Tools for Systemic Placemaking

Another tool for collecting information on the place is the "**YUTPA framework**", an acronym that stands for "*being with You in Unity of Time, Place and Action*".
It is a **visual architectural analysis methodology** that focuses on understanding social interaction and building community in a neighborhood.
Taking into consideration documentation, audiovisual material, photographs and testimonies of the **temporal evolution of the place and the actions perpetrated** in space itself over time, the framework aims to acquire a holistic view of the physical and social structure of the place and the type of relationship between stakeholders involved (*Slingerland et al., 2020*).
In fact, based on the four dimensions of time, place, action and relationship (the first two referring to the physical structure and the second to the social structure of the place) it is possible to analyze **how the environment has or has not supported in the past the social interaction** and the construction of the community in a neighborhood; therefore designers should identify the modalities of participation that highlight the **possible continuity or fracture with the past**, and declare it in the draft.
The YUTPA framework also allows you to structure the analysis of "**city-walker**" observations, interpret the livability of the place and the evolution of the degree of connection between residents and space over the years (and, if there were, define the reasons that led them not to consider it as a significant place).
These methods also allow to create an **iterative cycle between designers and stakeholders** such as to strengthen relationships of trust and become more familiar with the intervention of Systemic Placemaking, in particular if it involves an evolution over time of the proposed activities or physical structures.
**Investing in social relationships** is therefore essential for a city-maker in order to strengthen an ongoing project and stimulates research participants to foster a more open and exploratory mentality about the surrounding environment.

One way to connect with the community is the **gamification approach**, which allows you to mobilize a large number of people around the



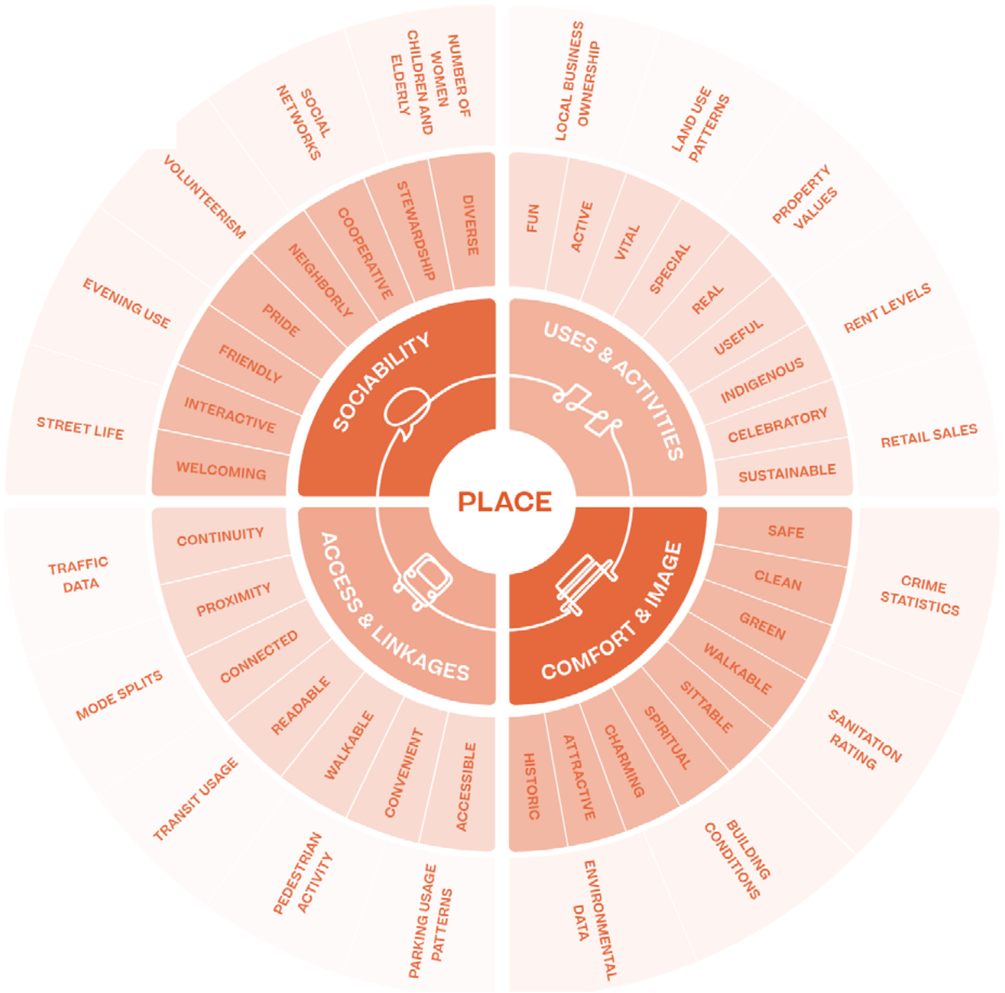
transformation of an urban space or the collection of information about the context. In fact, the **community tends to make efforts if it perceives it as a fun and playful activity rather than an obligatory commitment** (*CoDesign Studio, 2019*).
In addition, gamification has a number of advantages (*Tehlova et al., 2019*), such as:

- Transform public spaces into a meaningful place at a **limited cost** and in a short time
- Raise **awareness** about the importance of public places for the community
- Promote policies or habits that **help in the management** of public space and that include their correct maintenance among urban priorities
- Create a **resilient community** as it encourages people to take part in alternative, fun and useful activities.

As explained in the previous chapter, gamification is part of the theoretical approach of the Playful City (for further details, see chapter 4), therefore inscribable in its vision that includes activities such as **playful, theatrical, pedagogical, entertainment and subversive interaction.**
Another detail to take into consideration is the singular peculiarity that characterizes our historical era: the **playful media culture** in which we are immersed daily has such a power to continuously stimulate users with a multitude of technologies.
This condition allows people to constantly have heterogeneous virtual spaces for playful experimentation (*Frissen et al. 2015*), and this determines a greater predisposition to **understand the surrounding world through a playful approach.**
Therefore, given the **familiarity** it arouses in people, this mode of interaction is easily acceptable and appreciated as a means of communication between designers, communities and stakeholders of an area.

**To carry out a Placemaking project there is no specific methodology,** since its final form consists of the result of the bottom-up fusion between a first project proposal by a team that has analyzed and identified the characteristics of an urban area and consequent actions of shaping the place by the resident community.
However, the "**Project for Public Spaces" organization** mentioned above and introduced in chapter 1 provides its knowledge and expertise to provide **strategies and advice** for the realization of an effective Placemaking project.
In particular, we consider it of fundamental importance to report and

interpret the keypoints contained in its 2022 publication reported in the bibliography in which the "**Place Diagram**" is exposed and explained, an infographic that **contains the attributes that a space should possess to be considered a Great Place** or meaningful place (as defined by this thesis in the previous chapters). This diagram is quite famous in the Placemaking sector, having also been disseminated by other specialized organizations such as the aforementioned Placemaking Europe.






According to Public for Public Space bibliography (2022), a "Great Place" should satisfy **4 main attributes**, namely

- **Access & Linkages**
- **Comfort & Image**
- **Uses & Activities**
- **Sociability**

An interpretation and integration of the explanation of these principles will be proposed below.
The first refers to the fact that the place is well connected and accessible to other places of significance for the community. An accessible place means that, for users, it is **easy to access** (both to reach it and to access it from the entrance) and **easy to navigate.**
It should be organized so that the **spatial arrangement** of its structures allows users to understand its peculiarities: in this regard, the **boundaries and edges** of space should be exploited for communication so that they are easily identifiable and recognizable.
The authors highlight that it is possible to judge the accessibility of a place by identifying its **connections with the surrounding context** and analyzing the **flows of movement** of the people who frequent it. So a place has a good level of Access & Linkages if is visible and recognizable from the outside, encourages users to enter and follow it, is frequented by locals and can be traveled on foot without interruptions or security threats (eg passing cars, desolate roads etc.);
furthermore, is necessary to be accessible by people with disabilities or special needs, to propose coherent paths with the wishes of users. It should be also easily accessible by various transport options (public transport, train, car, bicycle, walking)

The second attribute requires the place to be comfortable and demonstrate a good self-image through a r**ecognizable and pleasant aesthetic**. This means that the overall perception of the place must stimulate a sense of **security, cleanliness and care**. A factor not to be underestimated is the **availability of seats and their location in heterogeneous areas** (so that users have more variety of choice: for example, in the warm seasons they look for places in the shade while in the warmer months they prefer heated and sunlit areas). An area is adequately characterized by Comfort & Image if gives a **good overall first impression,** so it is a safe and well managed place, the elements of street furniture and services are functional and well designed (e.g. trash cans, water fountains, public toilets etc.) and has a refined aesthetic and is "**instagrammable**", that is, if there are photo opportunities available for people to enjoy sharing their experience and **increasing the visibility of the place** Increases people's aesthetic sensitivity by promoting beauty, good taste and historical or cultural

*To the left: Diagram "What makes a Great Place? by Project for Public Spaces (2022)*

authenticity of the place; it also have to offers **meaningful sensory or emotional experiences** for users (scent and sounds of nature, graphically appealing interactive activities, etc.) and should be open to **welcome artistic interventions** to increase the sense of connection and belonging to the place

The third concept defines that the place is able to attract people and entice them to take part in the activities it offers. Obviously offering one or more interesting reasons to attend a certain place determines its success; if people know they have something to do, they are willing to go there. If a carefully **chosen range of activities** is proposed, the place will attract a variety of people at different times of the day (seniors in the morning, children after school hours, young people in the evening, families on weekends, etc.).
Finally, it is essential to take into account the "**principle of triangulation**" discussed in the previous paragraphs, which allows people to interact effectively with their surroundings, allowing them to strengthen social interactions and offer a more varied mix of uses.
Overall, an area offers a range of activities and uses that are appreciable if: the place is frequented and **is not empty and desolate**, attracts people of different ages, diversifies the uses and activities it proposes (allows you to walk, relax, play, eat, read, converse, have fun, etc.) and denotes that someone manages and cares for the space.

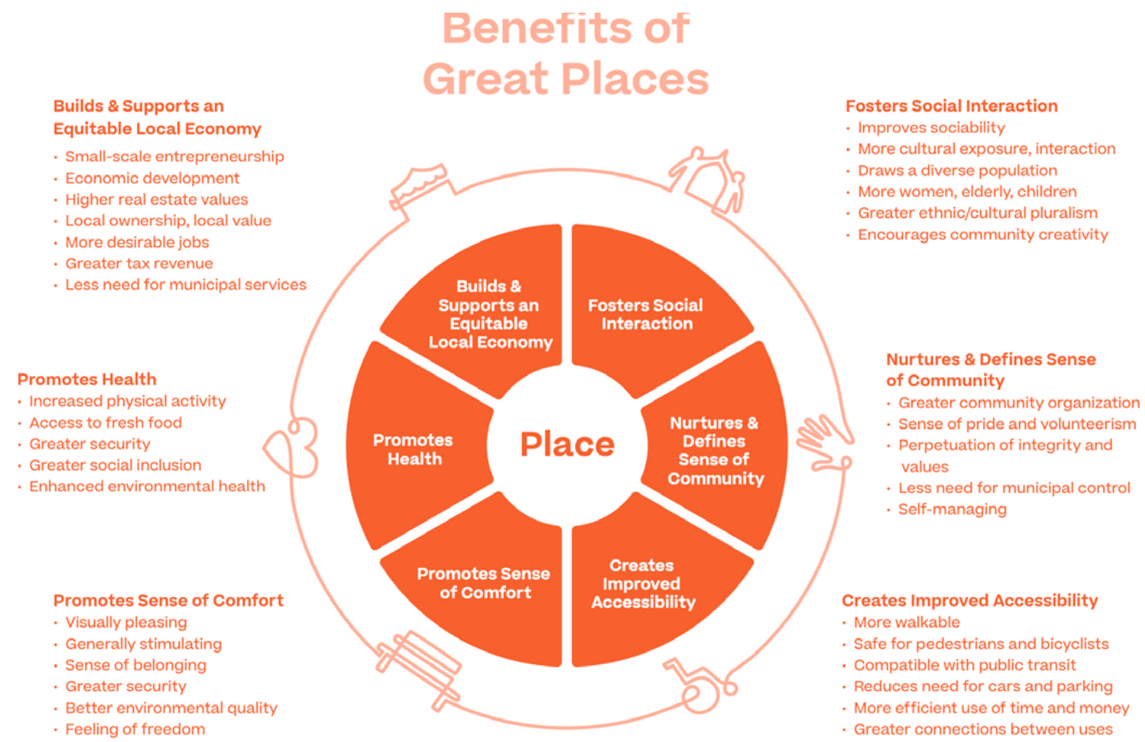
The fourth attribute identifies the place as a sociable environment in which **people feel inclined to weave relationships with others**. This pillar is the most complex and difficult to implement, and determines the degree of success of a place and is the measure of its quality level. In fact, if a place becomes the "**favorite destination**" of the community, it will be a chosen place where most people will have the certainty of always being able to find someone to meet or something to do, since it welcomes a variety of planned and unplanned uses. A place characterized by **good sociability** is such if people feel excited to go there to meet with friends and if they feel comfortable meeting new people and interacting with them.

"WHAT ATTRACTS PEOPLE MOST,
IT WOULD APPEAR, IS OTHER PEOPLE."

*-William H. Whyte, mentor of Project for Public Spaces*

Finally, the Project for Public Spaces bibliography contains an infographic that **summarizes the benefits of a Great Places** or meaningful places.






*Infographic summarizing the benefits of a Great Place or meaningful place by Project for Public Spaces (2022).*

# 5.6 **Best Practices for Systemic Placemaking**

To conclude this chapter, it is interesting to provide **a series of practical ideas** for the realization and concretization of the key principles and methodologies of Systemic Placemaking exposed so far, interpreting and revisiting advice and key concepts mainly exposed in the bibliography created by "UN-Habitat" in 2013 previously mentioned and integrating them with additional knowledge gathered during the research, design and field analysis work carried out so far.

## *Create an inviting and welcoming environment*

• Define an effective **storytelling** that defines the primary purpose of the place (aggregation space for the community) and invites people to access it or shape its available elements

• Adopt signage and visual elements that we have a graphic consistency such as to strengthen the **corporate image** to the place

• Take into account the **principles of the "Great Place"** set out above

• Emphasize the **artistry** of the place and its predisposition to welcome its nuances and its diversity

• Consider **visual panning** from different angles (avoiding blind, dark, desolate spaces)

• Use **lighting to give character to the environment** (light flags, chains of light, lighting upwards or downwards, etc.) and consider the play of light (e.g. reflections in bodies of water, etc.).

• Enhance **waterfront** (permanent or temporary water bodies) to reflect light and characterize the space



• **Consider the visual task of users** (e.g. identify obstacles, exits, entrances, etc.) possibly using surfaces with light and / or reflective colors

• Prefer **warm and bright colors** to improve the perception of space (especially on cloudy days or in the winter months)

• Take advantage of blind walls to create **murals, art installations** or grow climbing **plants**

• Create **pleasing visual compositions** at "pause areas" such as artistic elements, public art, flower beds, and natural landscapes

• Use **sensory elements** to characterize the space and improve the visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile perception of the place (e.g. with typical elements of sensory gardens such as flags, bells, dream catchers, sensory paths, etc.)

## *Integrating natural elements into design*

• Exploiting **waterfronts as a sensory tool** (highlighting the smells, sounds and visual light effects that are created in the presence of water mirrors)

• Create **suggestive shaded areas** (e.g. structures with climbing plants to obtain cool areas in summer and sheltered in winter)

• Planting **local flowers** to attract pollinating insects and thus increase urban biodiversity

• Insert elements that **attract wildlife** such as birds, butterflies, bees, insects and small mammals (such as birdhouses, peanut dispensers for squirrels etc.)

• Propose the creation of a **community garden** in which to plant and grow flowers or aromatic plants for the community

## *Optimize internal and external path*

• Define and **make visible the edges** of the place, highlighting the access thresholds (also essential to give **identity** to the place and start storytelling) with distinctive elements

• Create a **dynamic path** that offers variations in the lived

experience (not monotonous) and clearly indicates the possibilities present in the place (even and above all those potential or not yet existing!)

• **Facilitate access** and **pedestrian** mobility through recognizable, legible and functional **signs**, which are attractive but also consistent with the surrounding context (exploiting any recognizable elements or "magnet" buildings to promote the **memorability** of the place)

• Take advantage of the **pre-existing "magnet" buildings** to increase the recognizability of the place: they can be both permanent (such as commercial buildings, offices, schools, etc.) and temporary (such as events, festivals, markets, etc.).

• Design the **interaction** between the space and the surrounding environment, orienting "magnet" elements or other buildings towards the space (e.g. using urban elements such as parklets, seats, etc.)

• Make the destination visible and also plan the eventual journey to the place so that it seems safe, interesting and comfortable. Create an alternating path between recreational points of interest and **"pause areas" about every 500 meters**; the latter can be compositions of seats, artistic elements, expanses of lawns, etc. and must allow individual or group use

• Pay attention to **pre-existing high-profile elements** (such as monuments, statues, art installations, etc.) by highlighting them (e.g. by installing elements that "frame" the heritage component); in particular, highlight the community values that they express through effective storytelling.

• Consider the **perceived distance** (i.e. take into account the visibility of the space from the outside: pedestrians, unconsciously, could avoid reaching what seems prohibitively far away). Make the destination visible and also plan the eventual journey to the place so that it seems safe, interesting and comfortable.

• Take into account the **hours of operation** of the place according to the surrounding context (whether it is necessary to respect moments of silence or to take advantage, for example, of exit times from "magnet" structures such as schools)

• Provide urban areas or elements for **parking soft mobility vehicles** (e.g. bicycles)



## *Increase the sense of security*

• Provide adequate **lighting**

• Provide **active uses** that overlook the space (e.g. outdoor seating and tables of a bar, parklet, etc.)

• Protect the **privacy** of adjacent properties

• **Redevelop unused spaces** of the place giving them a new purpose

• **Reduce conflict between uses** (e.g. pedestrian area or place of break away from play areas)

• Create **buffer areas** especially if you have children's play areas

• Eliminate or **minimize the impact and presence of vehicles** (e.g. cars, motorcycles, etc.) and mitigate their speed with bollards, narrowings, signs, speed bumps and changes of direction (which can also act as planters, signs, etc.)

• **Avoid places of entrapment** to reduce the risk of negative actions by malicious people (eg avoid hollows or closed ways, install trees with clean trunks, ie that do not branch exceeding two meters in height, etc.)

• Use materials that **reduce the risk of slipping** (prefer coarse or natural textures)

## *Maximize usage capabilities*

• Create the feeling that the place offers more possibilities than the surrounding environment, adopting techniques such as the **diversification of materials and colors**, or making level changes with structures such as mezzanines or bleachers.

• **Group uses with common characteristics together** (for example, contemplative and relaxation spaces must be guaranteed their own sphere of quiet, diversifying them from more playful and interactive spaces)

• Provide multifunctional and comfortable **street furniture** that can be created by community with DYI techniques; taking into account basic needs for its design (e.g. reading, studying, working, eating, drinking, etc.)

• Consider (subject to space availability) to facilitate the opening of **kiosks, bars or restaurants** that offer an additional reason for users to reach the place and satisfy their basic physiological needs.

• Opt for **unconventional seats** (e.g. steps, swings, flower beds, etc.) to increase the recognizability and attractiveness of the place

• Install **waste bins** next to "pause areas"

• For large places (about 500,000 ft²) consider installing or renovate **public toilets**

• Provide **maps** and **signage** that communicate effectively with users to make known the possibilities of use (emphasizing that alternative uses can also be experimented with in compliance with the principles of Placemaking; using principle of **semeiotics** explained at the end of this chapter)

• Vary the **functionality of use according to the social attitude** of people (offering spaces to carry out both collective and individual activities). Take into account these primary activities: eating, drinking, relaxing, socializing, playing, learning or teaching, walking, enjoying artistic and natural beauties.

### *Limit physical discomfort due to adverse weather events*

• Consider the **drainage** of the area by designing materials and surfaces of the designed elements (and, if intended to modify it, also of the topography of the terrain) and to avoid stagnation of water or maximize the potential of any basins

• Create **cool shaded areas** for summer months and sheltered areas for winter months

• Design **shading structures** to provide shelter

• Ensure **sunny places** during the winter months (e.g. planting deciduous trees that shield the light only in summer; or giving the possibility to shield sun, wind and rain with curtains or panels)

• Provide for the sustenance of plants by designing **rain gardens** (gardens drained by means of a drainage system or water infiltration given by natural irrigation) or **resistant plants with only**



**natural irrigation**

• If present, **mitigate the wind tunnel effect** between buildings (e.g. planting windbreak trees or installing windbreaks)

• Design spaces taking into account any shadow areas that create **cold spaces** (mitigate the effects or exploit them in favor)

• Design new elements taking into account their **outdoor location**

### *Stimulate community engagement with Participatory Design techniques*

• **Provide users with the opportunity to express themselves** by communicating the participatory approach with effective storytelling (with signage, totems, QR codes, etc.)

• Offer **spaces for interaction** to stimulate the creation of social relationships, providing spaces and seating with kiosks and bars, spaces to allow artists to perform or to carry out sports activities etc.

• Involve **local stakeholders** (such as schools, social organizations, recreational centers for young or old, etc.) to propose activities to be carried out in the place or stimulate its members to attend it

• Propose activities for **interaction with nature** (e.g. community gardens to be cared for together)

• Propose collective **sports activities** (e.g. yoga, pilates etc.) or, if possible, prepare the space so that team games can be played (e.g. basketball, volleyball, etc.)

• Organize **public meetings** to encourage community discussion (or propose yourself as a suitable place)

### *Characterizing the place with artistic elements*

• Design **artistic** and/or **interactive elements** that people can connect with

• Provide **performance opportunities to local artists**

• Maximize the range of opportunities and experiences through

simple artistic interventions that **enhance the attractiveness of the place**

• Propose **collective artistic activities** involving especially local artists

• Organize **artistic exhibitions** that are in line with the storytelling proposed by the Placemaking project; it is recommended that the artistic piece is related to the chosen physical position (e.g. that expresses something of the place itself, such as its history); allow artists to record their interpretations to increase the visibility of the place.

• Set up the space by **creating a path** that convoys people by means of iterative artistic elements that increase the recognizability of the place

• Set up the space using the **empty walls to create murals** (involving local artists) and thus avoid the creation of uncontrolled vandalism graffiti

• Consider **any element as if it were an "art canvas"** for artists and non-artists, or a "blank page" to write and express themselves.

### *Strengthening the "sense of place" **

• Provide elements that **make the place unique** by emphasizing its physical location and its past history

• Emphasize the link with the community by proposing narratives with the **artistic-cultural and landscape heritage** of the neighborhood / city / State in which it stands

• Give the opportunity to carry out **paid work activities** to people in the community who need it (e.g. immigrants who want to integrate into society, students, unemployed etc.)

• Give the opportunity to **volunteer activities** to interested people from the community (but also consider welcoming people in transit or outside the community)

• Offer **opportunities to customize** the elements installed to allow people to **leave a mark** on the place, promoting the culture of the place (this also limits the energies of those who would otherwise express themselves with acts of vandalism)



• Prefer the adoption of **locally sourced materials** by declaring it through storytelling (e.g. wood, stones, pebbles, etc.)

• Prefer the planting of **local native plants** so as not to impact on the local ecosystem and increase the chances of survival (local plants are more suitable to withstand the local climate).

For the success of a Systemic Placemaking project, it is also necessary to take into account the **principles of Eco-Design** (Lanzavecchia, 2000) on which sustainable design is based from an environmental, social and economic point of view. A summary of some key principles is as follows:

• Choice of **materials with low environmental impact**

• **Reduction** of the quantity of resources (at the level of materials, elements and components)

• Reduction of the environmental footprint by choosing **local resources** (prefer to come from a short supply chain)

• Limit the generation of waste and pollution and **reduce** any environmental impacts of disposal

• Prefer **pre-consumer** and **post-consumer** materials

• Facilitating material **reuse** and **recycling**

• Opt for **non-industrial** productions

• Provide for the possibility of **repair** and **disassembly** of elements and components

** Sense of place from Chapter 4:*

*"the sense of place is what identifies and makes unique a physical space and makes it worthy of attention". The sense of place is important because it can help people connect with the surrounding environment, to establish knowledge and appreciation for the place itself by feeding feelings of affection, empathy and increasing the sense of belonging which, consequently, improves its management (since people feel entitled to take care of it as "their property").*

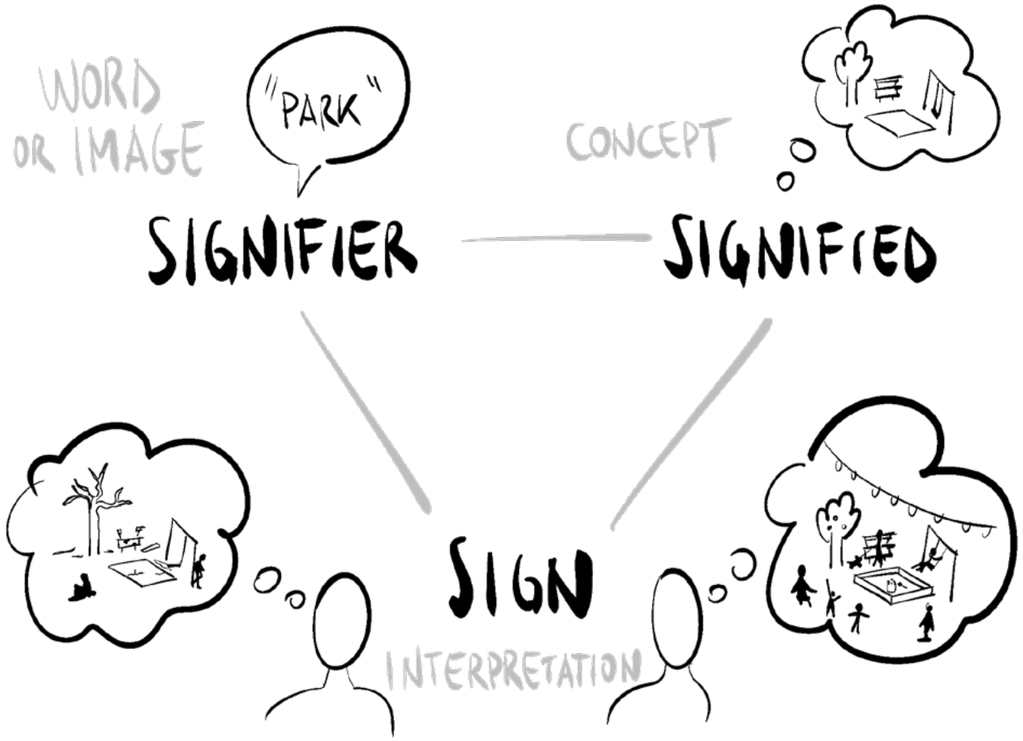
*(Future Learn online course by RMIT University, 2022)*

# 5.7 The role of communication

Finally, we want to open a parenthesis about the role of communication in the project : as pointed out several times, **the role of storytelling** is essential for the success of a Systemic Placemaking project. In fact, it is important to effectively communicate your purpose, the conditions of use and the possibilities that the space offers and that can be seized for its redevelopment in order not to incur risks such as the lack of matching between the objectives of the project and those of the users. As argued in the previous chapters, urban planning is a tool that can be used both as a tool of repression (to feed practices of exclusion or feed social hierarchies) but also act as a strong tool for social inclusion, proposing to the community alternative and **unconventional ways to claim their sense of belonging, their identity and their ideals.**

López Reyes and Mulder's 2021 academic contribution recommends adopting a **friendly**, **open** and **reassuring tone of voice**, to clarify expectations and expected results; it also suggests exploiting the **communication channels** most used by users (especially social media) and expressing oneself clearly, flexibility, transparency to contextualize the project; finally, in order to achieve more meaningful outcomes, it is advisable to provide a space for the **collection of feedback** and leave an opening window for intra-community communication of users. To enclose meanings in design experiences, it is possible to adopt a **semeiotic language:**
*"Semeiotics is the investigation of how meaning is created and communicated, how visual and linguistic signs and symbols create meaning, and how they shape our perceptions of the world around us. Places communicate through sign, signifier and signified" (Prof Anna Hickey-Moody, Professor in Media and Communication at RMIT University; Future Learn online course by RMIT University, 2022)*

The Future Learn online course managed by RMIT University that we followed in 2022 mentioned above proposes to include the semeiotic survey to carry out an environmentally sustainable, aesthetically welcoming and socially inclusive project. Semiotics is the **investigation of how meaning is created and communicated**.
Therefore, by combining its main element with spaces, images, graphics and drawings it is in fact possible to **"read" the nuances of the "sense of place"** and make them known to citizens. Its origins lie in the study of how visual and linguistic signs and symbols create meaning and **how they shape our perceptions** of the world around us. As reported in the previous chapter, we must consider **the power of symbolic representations** to express the narrative objectives that a place sets itself to propose, sometimes taking into account possible interpretations. As explained before, at the semeiotic level a message consists of three elements: "sign", "signifier" and "signified".
The latter means the **abstract concept** that identifies the message, while the "signifier" is the **form or tangible material** that conveys it and the "sign" represents their sum; indeed, citing the work of the famous French essayist Roland Barthes, the academic course explains that signs can be both a signifier (being the physical form of the sign as we perceive it through our senses) and the signified that is **interpreted. For example, the image of a park** could be a signifier that implies a signified related to the mental idea of a place that presents games, benches and flower beds. However, at the sign level, a certain person may interpret it as a meaningful place available to the community, welcoming and relaxing, while another person might imagine it as a desolate, dirty and vandalized place.



The "**sign**" is therefore a **personal interpretation** of the concept or physical support with which a user comes into contact and designers have the duty to pay attention to how the community or a part of it could understand the words and graphics used in their project.
A significant example of the value of semeiotics in Placemaking projects is included in the "**Superblocks**" program, the urban redevelopment carried out in Barcelona (also mentioned in chapter 4 of this thesis) that aims to transform the in places more livable by pedestrians and the community according to the theory of the **15-minutes City.**
In particular, in the district of **Sant Antoni** a **horizontal signage** has been adopted to partially prohibit the passage of cars: through a simple and **schematic visual-communicative language** (using symbols such as bicycles for the cycle path and triangles for the pedestrian one) the areas have been marked according to the new intended uses.
In particular, the use of **yellow triangular** symbols is not only a simple correlation between "signified" and "signifier" (triangle = pedestrian crossing), but also means **a deeper "sign", or a political choice: the community wants to convert public spaces into places available for people, not simple transit areas for motor vehicles**.

In fact, through a bottom-up approach, the community has become aware of their environment, the quality of life offered by their city and have expressed their **sense of belonging** and attachment to the place they live.
After the implementation of the "Superblocks" program, there has been a drastic **reduction in noise and air pollution** in the area and the degree of **well-being** and **positive perception** of the place by residents has increased *(Future Learn online course by RMIT University, 2022)*.
The analysis of semiotics therefore plans to analyze the possible interpretations of the "sign" by the community and users in order to understand how effective messages can be transmitted and consistent with their design purpose, as well as **conveying interpretations of an important message for the community itself at a social or political level,** for example for the claim of human rights, or of the desire for change of a community towards a more sustainable urban ecosystem.

A **Systemic Placemaking** project therefore stands as a **blank canvas** on which the community can act to express its ideals and values and communicate them both within its own network and to the outside, so that their message also permeates the minds of institutions or other superstructures of society and induces them to accept and welcome any necessary **changes to improve the quality of life** and increase the degree of **respect** that (should) coexist among all individuals who live on the same planet and share the same land, the same city, the same neighborhood.





*Superblocks of Sant Antoni district in Barcelona. An example of semeiotic languages applied to Placemaking.*



*“A Ersilia, per stabilire i rapporti che reggono la vita della città, gli abitanti tendono dei fili tra gli spigoli delle case, bianchi o neri o grigi o bianco-e-neri a seconda se segnano relazioni di parentela, scambio, autorità, rappresentanza. Quando i fili sono tanti che non si può più passare in mezzo, gli abitanti vanno via: le case vengono smontate; restano solo i fili e i sostegni dei fili.*
*Dalla costa d’un monte, accampati con le masserizie, i profughi di Ersilia guardano l’intrico di fili tesi e pali che s’innalza nella pianura. E’ quello ancora la città di Ersilia, e loro sono niente.*
*Riedificano Ersilia altrove. Tessono con i fili una figura simile che vorrebbero più complicata e insieme più regolare dell’altra. Poi l’abbandonano e trasportano ancora più lontano sé e le case.*
*Così viaggiando nel territorio di Ersilia incontri le rovine delle città abbandonate, senza le mura che non durano, senza le ossa dei morti che il vento fa rotolare: ragnatele di rapporti intricati che cercano una forma. “*

*-Italo Calvino, Le città invisibili*



# 06 Case study

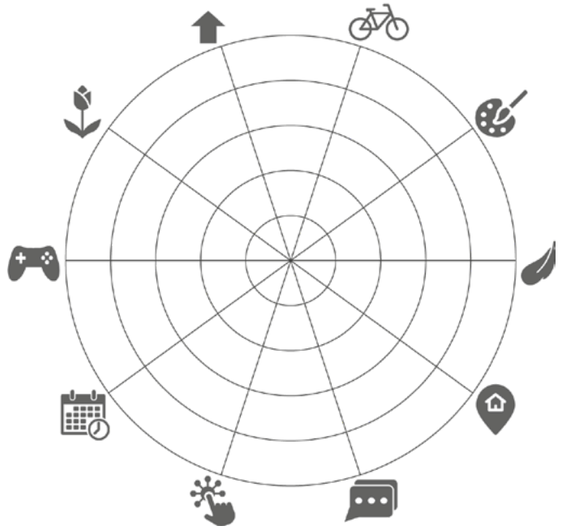
*Critical analysis of sustainable urban practices and placemaking actions*

# Introduction

Based on the literature review, two types of **analysis criteria** were identified, classifying each of them on the basis of a scale from **1 to 5,** as shown in the graphs. **The first criteria** concern the **type of placemaking intervention** implemented by the case study used.
These include for example specific strategies used as a means of engagement and transmission of messages (such as ***gamification, semiotics, local identity enhancement*** and ***public art***), or actions that refer to the concept of temporality (such as the ***lightness*** criterion, understood as the feasibility of simple cheap and fast project, or temporary projects which in a limited time have managed to trigger major changes).
There are then some strategies to interact with community like ***digital interaction*** and ***programming*** (of events workshop and activities).
The ***bottom up*** criterion has also been included, to identify the level of community involvement, both in the design and implementation phases.
***Reclaim the street*** refers to the "anti car-centred" projects that aim to give back to the community urban spaces.
Finally, the ***urban Ecology*** criterion refers to the level of how to preserve biodiversity, enhance or create green spaces, urban gardening, etc...
**The second criteria** refers to the type of impact that the analyzed case study had on the community. Thus including factors such as ***community building***; ***inclusiveness*** of all kind of people; ***safety*** (both from accidents and ill-intentions); ***aesthetic improvement*** of the space; creation of ***sense of responsibility*** towards spaces and people; collection of useful ***information*** for future site implementations; and ***environmental sustainability*** in the cities.



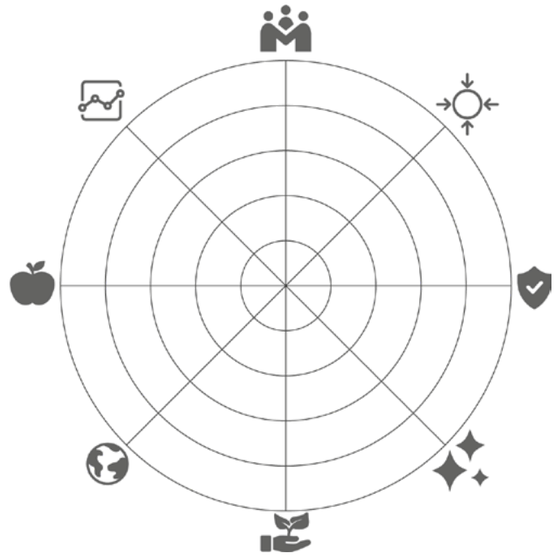
## Interventions



Gamification
Urban ecology
Bottom up
Reclaim the street
Public Art
Lightness
Local Identity Enhancement
Semeiotics
Digital interaction
Programming

Community building
Inclusivity
Safety
Aesthetic Improvement
Community sense of responsibility
Environmental Sustainability
Heathy habits
Info collection

## Impacts



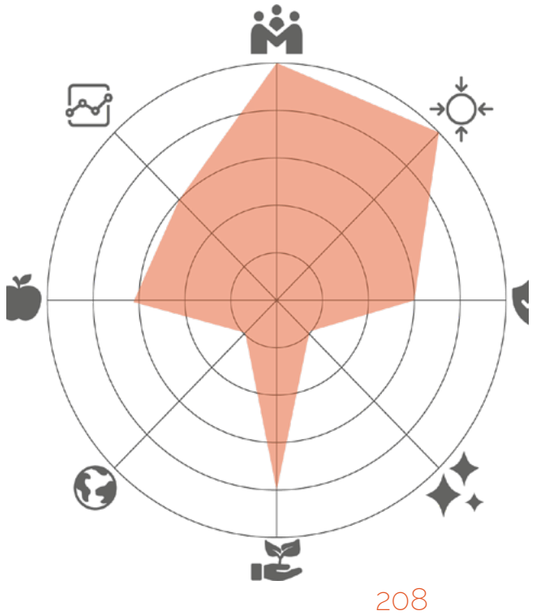
# 2 San Jose Guerrero Park

**Location:** *San Francisco (CA)*
**Design**: *GroundPlay*
**Year:** *2009*

Interventions



Impacts





Interventions

- Lightness
- Local Identity Enhancement
- Semeiotics
- Digital interaction
- Programming
- Gamification
- Urban ecology
- Bottom up
- Reclaim the street
- Public Art

Impacts

- Community building
- Inclusivity
- Safety
- Aesthetic Improvement
- Community sense
- Community sense of responsibility
- Environmental Sustainability
- Heathy habits
- Info collection

## 6.1.1 **The project**

This public square forms a section of a series of "Pavement to Parks" (P2P) initiatives situated all over the urban area. The objective is to repurpose surplus road space into **human-centric areas**. This particular location was previously impacted by fast-moving vehicles on San Jose Avenue and a hazardous intersection at 28th Street, which often saw unauthorized parking on the traffic islands.

San Jose Avenue, formerly a one-way street heading north, has now been **permanently closed** at its junction with Guerrero Street. It has been transformed into a two-way **"cue street,"** providing local access solely to residents along the block.
Approximately 8,000 square feet of superfluous street area has been converted into a **plaza** featuring **public gardens.** Although the original plan was for a **temporary installation** lasting three years, the project has successfully remained in place for eight years, and it has **now permanently** replaced excessive pavement on sidewalks and medians.
Due to budget constraints, the project necessitated the use of **materials already owned by the City**. Inspiration for replacing the "**sea of concrete**" was drawn from engineer William Hammond Hall's account of transforming Golden Gate Park from a barren "sea of sand." The spilled barley used to feed the work **horses** provided a foundation for the growth of various perennial plants, grasses, shrubs, and trees. Interestingly, the **trees from the initial planting of Golden Gate Park** (which reached the end of their lifespan) were **repurposed as planters for Guerrero Park.**
The project required straightforward designs that could be executed by city workers within a short timeframe, while ensuring the autonomy of city agencies. Plantings were carried out with the help of **volunteers, friends, neighbors**, and a workday involving Planning Department staff.
**Local residents actively participated i**n the park's grand opening. The inclusion of a horse sculpture pays homage to the saddle horse mentioned in William Hammond Hall's writings and has quickly become a beloved and frequently visited part of the park.
The plantings were arranged in three **color groups, using native** and **climate-adapted plants** sourced from the Golden Gate Park nursery. A species list was provided to enhance botanical appreciation and serve as a guide for residents in their own garden endeavors.
All **materials** utilized in the project were salvaged from **scrap yards**. Stainless steel planters were repurposed from ducts found at a public swimming pool.

*Source: Groundplay official site*

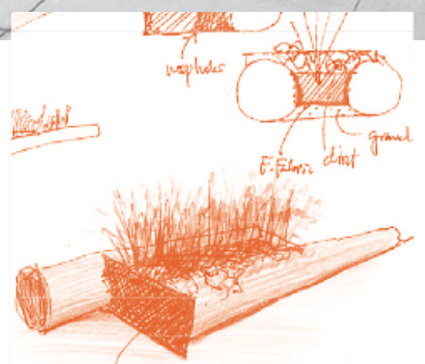


## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

This case study was chosen for the effectiveness with which **simple and light actions** have led to **significant changes** in the way of life of citizens.
To ensure alignment with the temporary nature of the P2P initiative, the project operated within three primary guidelines: **no extraction of asphalt** was permitted**,** utilization of **materials already owned by the city was** prioritized, and the **construction had to be feasible** for **city laborers**. The financial backing for this cost-effective endeavor was secured through private contributions.
Furthermore, we were fascinated by the choice of **materials used**, entirely **upcycled**, which gave the project added value, such as for example the use of trunks also linked to the **history and identity** of the place (as the statue of the horse testifies).







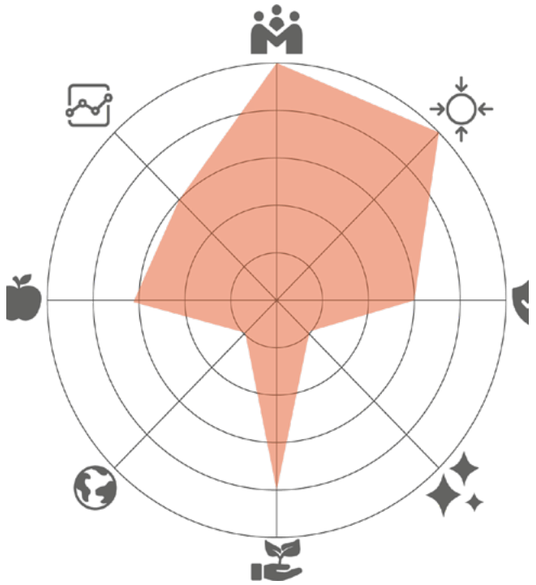



# 2 The Human Library

**Location:** *Copenhagen (DK)*
**Design**: *Ronni and Dany Abergel*
**Year:** *2000*



Interventions



Impacts





## 6.2.1 **The project**

The ‘Human Library’, known as ‘Menneskebiblioteket’ in Danish, is a **non-profit organization** aiming to offer visitors and readers an opportunity to gain knowledge about fellow human beings, with the goal of **reducing discrimination** and social stereotypes. This establishment serves as a place where individuals can explore a diverse range of resources to **learn and grow.** Instead of traditional printed biographies, the human library presents **books in the form of actual people**. Through this artistic initiative, **volunteers share their personal stories** with those who are willing to listen. The concept of the human library originated in **Copenhagen** in the spring of **2000**, initiated by Ronni and Dany Abergel. Over four consecutive days, more than 50 individuals, who are the “titles” of the books, offer their narratives to interested participants. These volunteers often represent **marginalized or stigmatized groups**, challenging preconceived stereotypes. The event attracted over a thousand attendees and laid the foundation for the **Human Library Organization**, which later became a permanent institution.
The organizers of the Human Library express their mission as promoting inclusive and harmonious communities, transcending cultural, religious, social, and ethnic differences. In a **safe and supportive environment**, volunteers, referred to as “books,” share their stories with interested visitors, or “readers.”

The titles of the books are straightforward and direct.. Examples include “Individual with Alcoholism,” “Survivor of Human Trafficking,” and “Person with Schizophrenia.” Although these titles may seem blunt and oversimplified, the intention is to help readers **select topics of interest** while recognizing that the books encompass **much more than their initial labels.**
Visitors have the opportunity to ***check out*** a book for thirty minutes at a time, with the expectation of returning it promptly. They are encouraged to ask questions that are typically considered **taboo** or explore topics that they may not usually approach in regular conversations. Bill Carney, also known as the book “Black Activist,” explains: “It’s easy to hate a group of people, but it’s harder to hate an individual.” This sentiment holds true, especially when individuals are approachable, friendly, and non-threatening. The human library facilitates a **space for dialogue** that benefits both readers, who gain knowledge about subjects they may have been curious about, and volunteers, who find **therapeutic value in sharing** their experiences, as demonstrated by research on talk therapies.
The organization hopes that these conversations will combat discrimination, preventing conflicts and contributing to greater human unity.
This establishment provides a platform for individuals who would **typically not engage in conversation to find a space** where they can share their stories and experiences, thereby fostering greater understanding and empathy.






*Source: Human Library official site*

## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

This case study does not specifically represent a place-making project, but it was useful for deepening an extremely **innovative community interaction system**, which allows to **create relationships** and **break down prejudices.**
The project was analyzed as it can be used in other contexts, and **declined in different ways,** given the effectiveness and versatility of its nature.



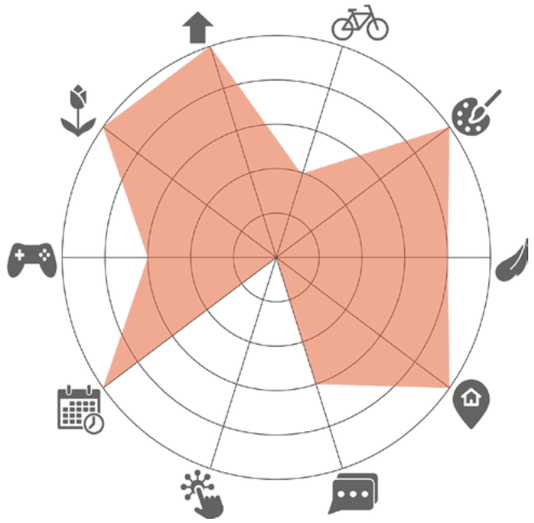





# 3 Rambla Papireto

**Location:** *Palermo (IT)*
**Design**: *Ronni and Dany Abergel*
**Year:** *2017*

## Interventions



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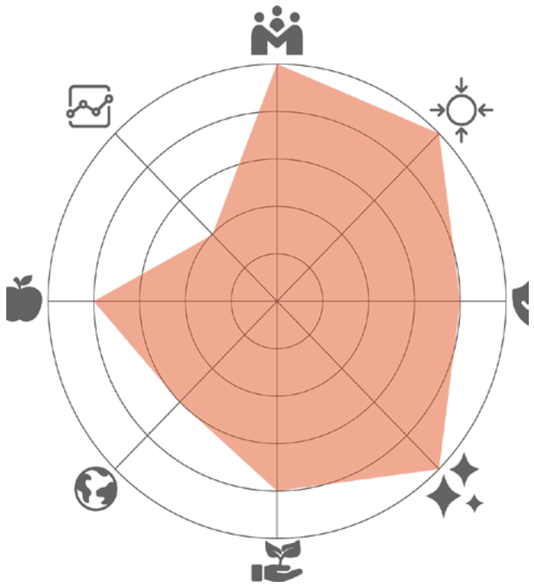






## 6.3.1 **The project**

Rambla Papireto is a urban regeneration project that took place in 2017 within the historic **district of Danisinni** in Palermo.
This project evolved from the earlier **Danisinni Lab**, which originated in 2015 through the collaboration of Valentina Console, a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Palermo, the Santa Agnese Parish, and the associations Insieme per Danisinni and Centro Tau. The Danisinni Lab successfully **reclaimed ten hectares of illegally occupied land**, generously donated to the Parish by Angela La Ciura, an art historian and professor at the Academy, on a temporary basis. This previously **waste-filled area** has now been transformed into the **Parco Sant'Agnese, featuring an educational farm** and a **self-sustained communal garden.**
Within a mere two years, the Rambla Papireto project breathed new life into the neighborhood, employing **art and culture as catalysts** for regeneration, effectively turning it into an **open-air art gallery**. The project encompassed **diverse stages**, including workshops focused on **street art, social circus**, and **communication**. It also entailed the establishment of an open-air art gallery, **artist residencies**, and a **tourist-artistic itinerary** that highlights the **historical Arab-Norman connection** between the Royal Palace and the Zisa Castle, with the Danisinni Cave serving as a focal point.

The primary objective was to foster **social inclusion through art**, actively **engaging residents**, especially children and young people, in order to cultivate a **sense of belonging** within their community. This objective was of particular significance considering the neighborhood's significant social and economic challenges, such as **limited access to education** and high **unemployment rates.**



Today, the square of Danisinni is no longer abandoned, but has been transformed into a **vibrant space** that hosts an educational farm, a communal garden, and a circus tent. The Parish and the participating associations continue to organize various activities in the area, including photographic exhibitions and alternative urban tours that allow individuals to immerse themselves in the neighborhood's winding alleys. Additionally, **educational workshops** are conducted for school children. Despite the lack of infrastructure, the Danisinni district has gained recognition as a **model community**.

*Source: Museo sociale Danisinni official site*





## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

The Rambla Papireto was choosen because it serves as a noteworthy illustration of **art-based revitalization in economically disadvantaged areas**. It represents a concrete example of how art can benefit cities and be a real means of creating communities and transmitting messages.
**Numerous stakeholders** at various levels have played a crucial role in the project's success.
One innovative aspect of this endeavor is the utilization of a **crowdfunding campaign** to garner support from citizens and ensure its self-sustainability.
Moreover, the decision to entrust external parties with content creation and campaign management highlights the project's commitment to fostering collaboration and **knowledge transfer**. Recently, the Danisinni project was recognized as a commendable model of economic collaboration and citizen engagement during an international gathering organized by Airbnb on the subjects of social and experiential tourism and partnerships with institutions in Barcelona.





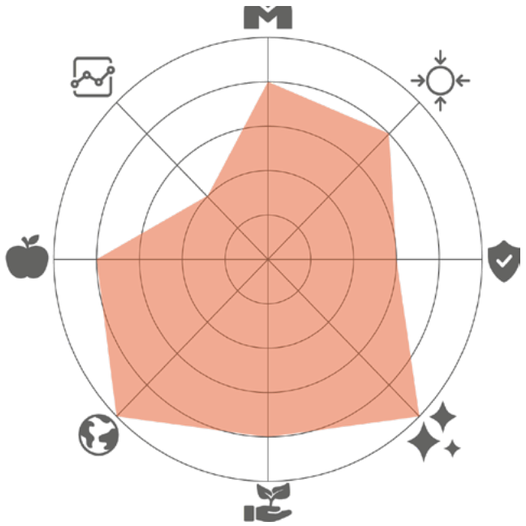




# 4 High Line

**Location:** *New York (NY)*
**Design**: *Joshua David and Robert Hammond*
**Year:** *2*

Interventions



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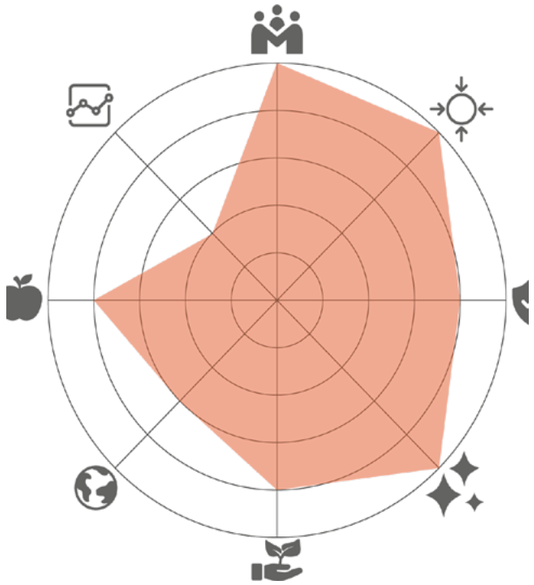




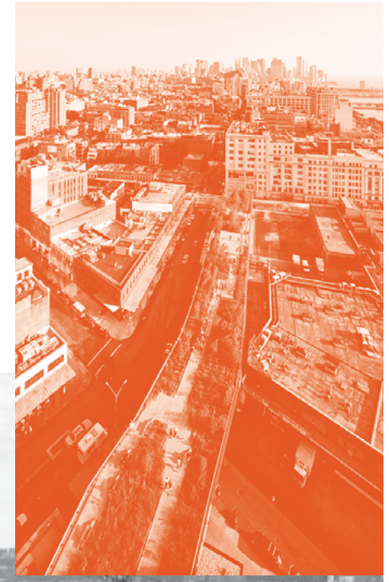


# The project

The High Line **one of the most famous redevelopment projects** for unused public spaces, becoming one of the most popular public spaces in New York City.
During **Utopian Hours** events (Held is Torino in 2022) we assisted to a speech about this project, held by **Amanda Burden,** (who was Planning Commissioner and director of the New York City Department of City Planning from 2002 to 2013, leading one of the largest planning operations in the city, and supporting the introduction of green areas and accesible waterfront).
The High Line is an **elevated park** built into the **abandoned tracks** of a freight train path along Manhattan's West side adjacent to the Hudson River, stretching across 23 city blocks.
It encompasses three distinct neighborhoods: The Meatpacking District, West Chelsea, and Hell's Kitchen/ Clinton. Originally built in 1934 to address the unsafe and inefficient conditions on the avenues, which featured a mix of trains, trucks, and pedestrians, the railway became obsolete by 1980 due to the rise of interstate trucking. By the late 1990s, the High Line was considered a **blight on the neighborhood**, leading to the demolition of its southern portion and the looming threat of complete destruction.

In 1999, two concerned New Yorkers established the **nonprofit organization *Friends of the High Line*** to rescue the historic structure and envision it as a **public park.** The transformation of the High Line took place in three phases, with the second segment of Phase 3 still undergoing construction. The design of the park showcases an intimate choreography of movement, offering a series of **alternating views and experiences** along its 1.45-mile length. The integration of **plantings, furnishings, paving, lighting, and utilities** within the limited dimensions of the structure itself was meticulously planned and executed as a unified system.

Throughout the park, distinct "rooms" have been created, utilizing unique plantings and specially designed social spaces to highlight **site-specific characteristics** and foster connections among visitors, nature, and the surrounding city. Given the 30-foot height of the structure, frequent stairs and elevators have been strategically placed to ensure convenient access and wayfinding from street level. Since its opening in 2009, the High Line has emerged as a symbol of innovative design, a catalyst for urban investment, and a source of inspiration for cities around the globe.



*Source: The High Line Official Site*



## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

The High Line is a special case study because it has re-envisioned antiquated infrastructure for new and innovative recreational purposes, **inspiring a lot of similar projects** around the world.
The choise to **enhance the greenery** in the city of New York in such a peculiar place was an emblematic case that **aroused a lot of curiosity** both from the city and its citizens and from the rest of the world.
In this case it is evident how a **bottom-up vision** about a place can become something extremely **powerful** and have extremely positive knock-on future consequences.
The High Line is also an icon of the power of **well-designed public space** to **attract visitor**. And while tourists are generally drawn to the High Line, it also offers locals an opportunity to gaze out at their city, and use an **healty and accesible public green space**.
There is a very good accessibility and it is incredibly well-maintained by Friends of the High Line.







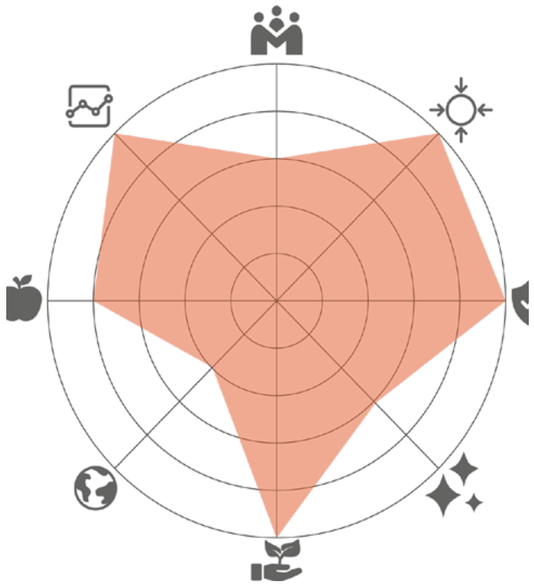
# 5 Stanford Healthy Neighborhood Discovery

**Location:** *Stanford, (CA)*
**Design**: *Stanford University*
**Year:** *20*

## Interventions



## Impacts







## 6.5.1 The project

**Stanford University** has developed an innovative community-based research tool called the **Healthy Neighborhood Discovery Tool.**
This technology-driven initiative empowers marginalized communities by involving residents in identifying and addressing neighborhood challenges. Researchers from **Stanford's Prevention Research Center**, specifically the Healthy Aging Research and Technology Solutions Laboratory, have created a **participatory software application** accessible via computer, tablet, or smartphone. This tool enables *citizen scientists* to document barriers to walkability, safety, and access to healthy food in their communities.

The Discovery Tool tracks **users' walking routes** and allows residents to **geographically tag hazardous locations**, supplementing them with audio narratives and photographs. Once data is collected, the Stanford team provides training to help residents advocate for necessary improvements in the built environment by engaging with policy officials and community leaders.
Users also have the option to **share the data** collected through the Discovery Tool with local policymakers during community stakeholder meetings.
Relevant agencies, including law enforcement, public works, transportation, planning, and public health departments, can benefit from this informations.
Stanford's interdisciplinary experts in community health, design, policy, medicine, and psychology are actively exploring ways to utilize mobile device data to **empower communities globally and inform policy decisions** that foster healthier, safer, and more equitable built environments.
The Discovery Tool has already been implemented in low-income communities across the California Bay Area, as well as in Delaware, New York, and Arizona. Internationally, it has been used in Mexico and Israel, with ongoing projects in progress worldwide.

Kris Newby, Communications Manager and Science Writer at Stanford Medical School, highlights the importance of **reevaluating car-centric urban** landscapes and finding innovative solutions to control rising healthcare costs. In this context, harnessing the collective power of citizen-scientists to advocate for the creation of **more attractive, walkable neighborhoods** becomes a valuable approach to address these challenges.

*Source: The Case for Healthy Places, Project for Public Spaces*



## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

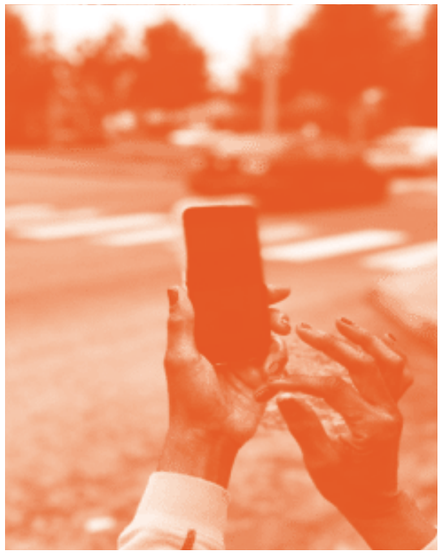
What is important to underline about this process is its extremely **bottom-up** nature, which allows citizens themselves to be **protagonists of change.** The interaction method is totally **digital**, but it can also be a very useful starting point for other types of interaction, given the quality of the data collected. The impacts that this project has or could potentially have in the future are very significant in the **quality of life of citizens**.

By concretely visualizing the ***informal*** informations and mapping them, cross-referencing the data, would allows for a **new type of approach** to research, also useful for carrying out field analyzes from a **systemic perspective**. The final objective of this project, among others, is to improve **urban spaces** and city life and to re-estabilish a **human-centred approch** to design.
This is in line with the principles set out in this thesis, and therefore represents a very useful case to investigate for the objectives set.





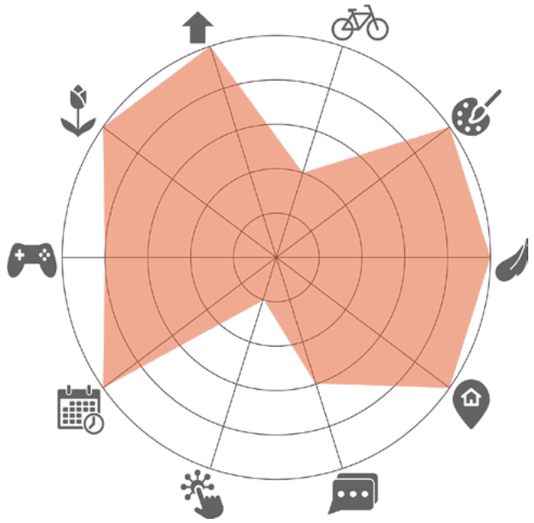


# 6 Giardini Venerdì

**Location:** *Matera (IT)*
**Design**: *Architecture of Shame*
**Year:** *2019*

## Interventions



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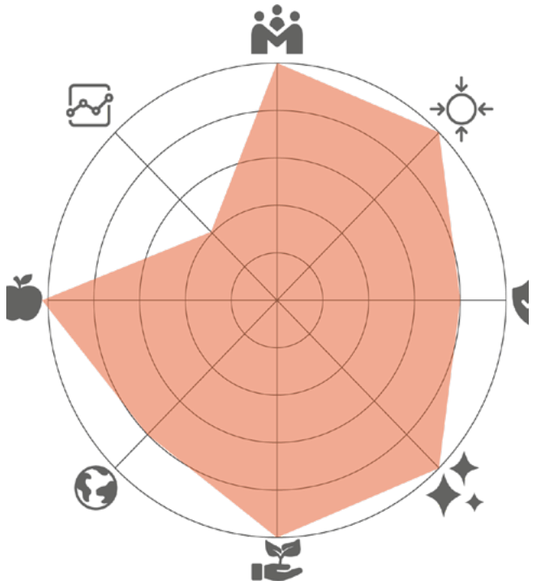







## Interventions

- Lightness
- Gamification
- Local Identity Enhancement
- Urban ecology
- Bottom up
- Semeiotics
- Reclaim the street
- Digital interaction
- Public Art
- Programming

## Impacts

- Community building
- Community sense of responsibility
- Inclusivity
- Environmental Sustainability
- Safety
- Heathy habits
- Aesthetic Improvement
- Info collection
- Community sense

## 6.6.1 **The project**

"Giardini Venerdì" originated from a Design Competition organized by the "**Architecture of Shame"** association, as part of the cultural program of **Matera 2019 European Capital of Culture**, with the aim of revitalizing the public space in the popular district of Serra Friday, which is known for its social housing.
The competition marked the culmination of a **collaborative process** involving the promoting association, local institutions, and the residents of the district. Extensive research was conducted with both the residents and professionals in the field, focusing on **three specific areas** within the neighborhood: Viale F.S. Nitti, Parco Serra Friday, and Viale G. Mazzini/Via L. Tansillo, including the social space, the wood and the neighborhood itself.

Among the participants, the project proposal called **"Giardini Verdi**" stood out and was awarded first place by a technical commission comprising **three experts in the field and two residents.** As a result, a prototype based on their design was developed and implemented.
The central theme of "Giardini Verdi" was the Neighborhood, which effectively addressed all the requirements specified in the competition brief. The primary objective of the project was to engage the Serra Friday **neighborhood, associations, small businesses, and resident**s in a collaborative effort to **redefine the public space through creative transformation.** The entire project also focused on the identification of **biodiversity**, and paid careful attention to the surrounding buildings, ensuring a comprehensive and cohesive integration within the **project area.**
The initial phase involved **clearing the area** by removing deposited waste. The "Francesco Saverio Nitti" elementary school in the neighborhood played a pivotal role in this process, with approximately 200 children, accompanied by their parents and teachers, participating in workshops facilitated by members of the Soqquadro groups, Scuola del Terzo Luogo, collectors of ancient seeds, and the FuoriVia Association.
The groundwork for collective planting was prepared, followed by an event called Dejeneur sur l'herbe, an afternoon of relaxation to perceive the neighborhood from a **different perspective.** Over the following month, participants continued their efforts by **planting** Helichrysum, Murgia, apples, pomegranates, rosemary, sage, and pervskia. Concurrently, work tables were set up to discuss the project's progress and the creation of furnishing elements such as tables, platforms, reinforcing the edges of garden islands, constructing insect houses, and gathering ideas for a mural.
A ***neighborhood walk*** was conducted after the final workshop to summarize the work accomplished thus far. Throughout this process, a mural was created, with artists selected and proposed by the Soqquadro and Scuola del Terzo Luogo groups, alongside artistic director Fabio Ciaravella.
The project concluded with a **final week-long celebration** called "Happy Birthday Shame!" dedicated to "POP HOUSING - rethinking public housing" at the Giardini on Friday. The event featured an **exhibition, workshops, and collective reflections on interventions i**n public space, which were later documented in "L'Atlante della Vergogna" and published on the Architecture of Shame association's website.

*Source: Architecture of shame official website*



## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

Giardini Venerdì, and all the “Architecture of Shame” work in general, serves as a remarkable model for **revitalizing public spaces in regions characterized by numerous social housing**, through the transformative **power of art, creativity**, and the **responsible management** of shared resources. Also very peculiar is the relationship between **urban construction and “shame”** and the reflection on how the conception of these urban elements by the inhabitants can be re-evaluated.

The uniqueness of this project is further highlighted by its ability to **engage diverse stakeholders** with varying levels of expertise. Professionals, school children, teachers, and street artists were all successfully involved, with the common goal of revitalizing and reassessing the resources within the local area. Being a project born in the context of the “**Capital of Culture 2019**”, it is also useful as a starting point for projects originating from similar special events for cities, such as that of the **World Design Capita**l.



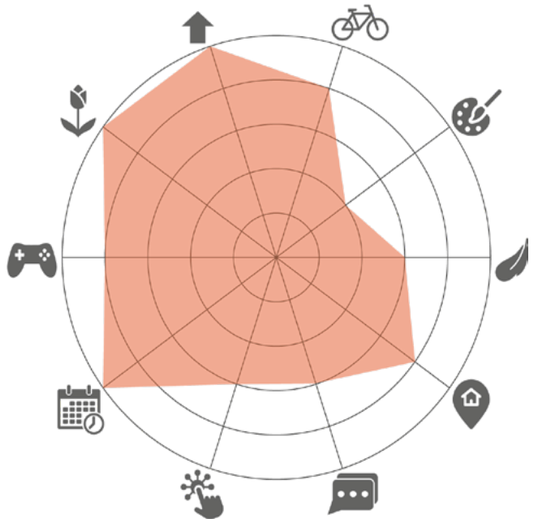





# 7 R-Urban

**Location:** *Colombes (FR)*
**Design**: *Atelier d'architecture autogeree*
**Year:** *2011*

Interventions



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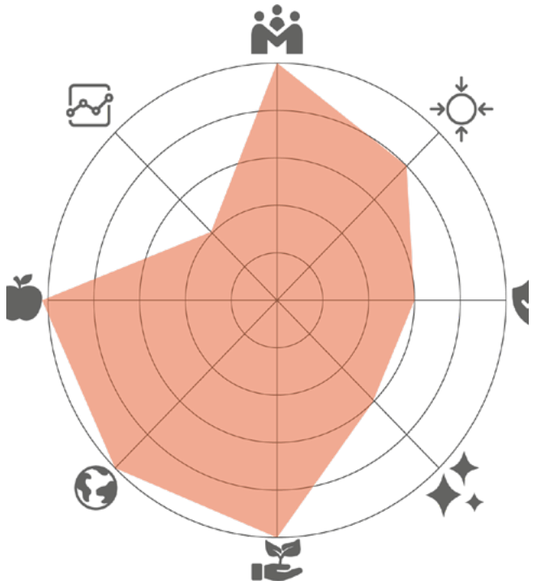
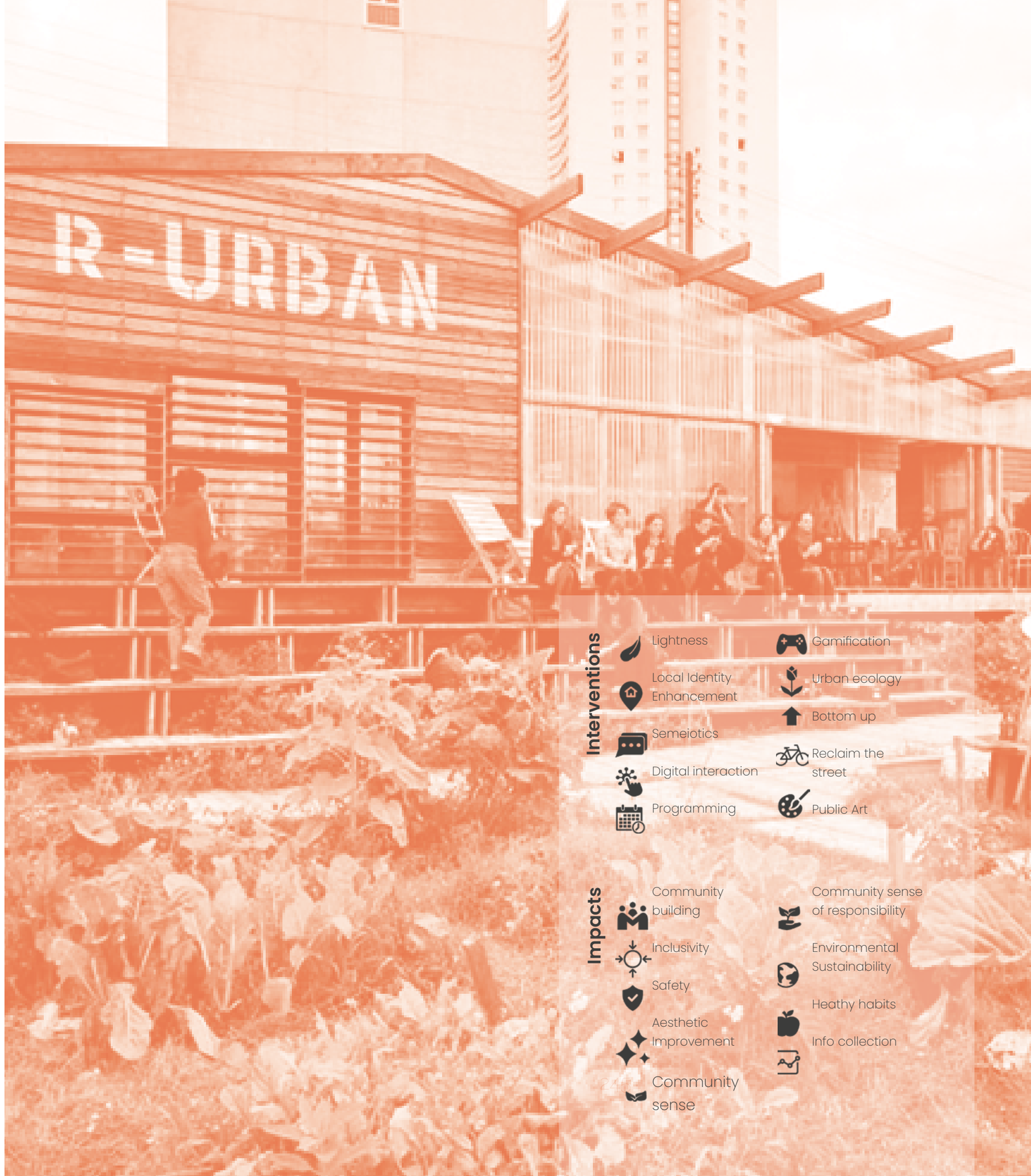






## 6.7.1 **The project**

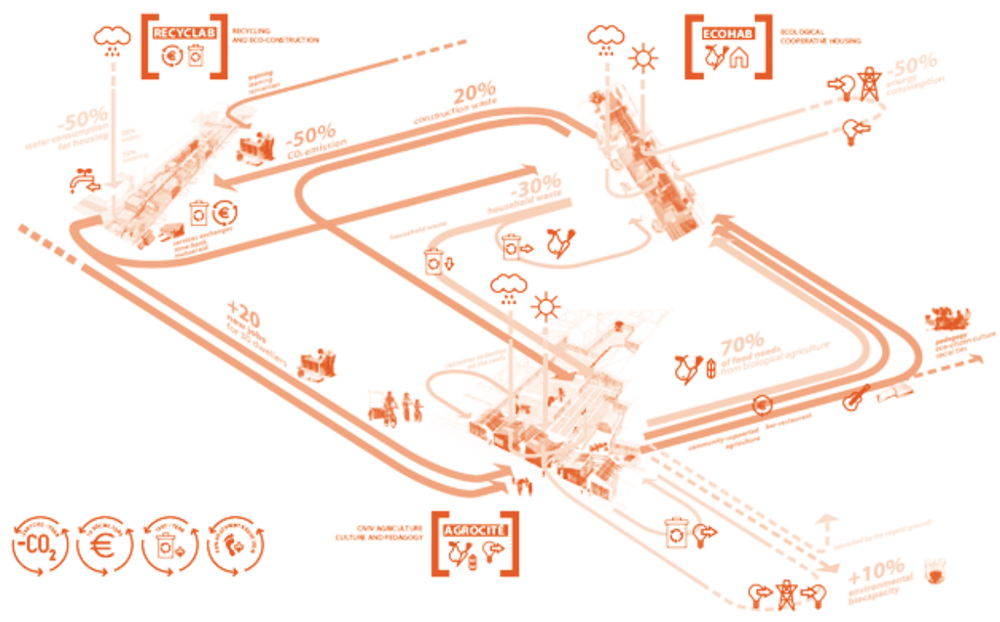
R-Urban is an innovative project born with the aim of improving **urban resilience** by implementing a network of **resident-led structures** and promoting **collaboration** in key sectors such as the economy, housing, urban agriculture and culture. We had the opportunity to come into direct contact with this reality by attending the conference held by **Manon Marmet,** from **atelier d'architecture autogérée** , an exponent of the movement, also a guest at Utopian Hours 2022 edition. By establishing locally closed ecological cycles, R-Urban seeks to **promote alternative models of life, production and consumptio**n, bridging the gap between urban and rural areas.
The project is based on the idea (shared in this thesis work) that to face the current crises (climate change, resource depletion, economic challenges and population growth, etc..) there is a need for a change in the lifestyle of citizens, who should actively participate in **collaborative practices** and local networks to support each other in driving sustainable change.

R-URBAN provides tools and resources to facilitate citizen engagement in the project, including guidance for **emerging local and regional initiatives** that align with its objectives. The first projects were started in **Colombes**, (to then expand into other French cities and in London) in France, where real places were born (***AgroCité, RecyLab , ECoHab, AnimaLab***), where people could actively carry out activities such as the creation of **community gardens, the construction of urban greenhouses, the installation of solar panels and wind turbines, the creation of rainwater collection systems and the construction of low energy consumption building**s, as well as environmental **education** and professional training on the issues of self-sufficiency and resilience. Actively **involving local communities** has made it possible to create a **sense of ownership and responsibility** towards the sustainable spaces and infrastructures created.

The "R-Urban" temporary complex in Colombes has been the subject of controversy. While the "R-Urban" network was being completed with the construction of the third node, **"Agrocité" was scheduled to be dismantled** to make room for a **municipal car park.** LocWal residents **protested** this decision. However, the two completed pavilions and community gardens have helped breathe **new life into previously desolate spaces.** In addition to the physical transformations, the complex has activated the social fabric, involving the residents in shared projects. Despite uncertainties about the future of the complex, **other municipalities** in the Paris metropolitan area have shown interest in adopting the "R-Urban" model.

*Source: R-Urban official site*

RURBAN PILOT FACILITIES AND CYCLES



## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

R-Urban is an **excellent example of practical implementation of sustainable practices** for the city with a great **systemic approach**, where each single element of the system gives a great contribute to the whole project.
In addition it is a **completely bottom-up** project, which has been able to involve the community more and more and spread the issues it promotes increasing the citizens' sense of responsibility towards the place.
This is also possible thanks to the **educational aspect of the project**, which is not overlooked and becomes an **integral part** of the system.
If similar examples were more widespread in current cities, the **environmental impacts** would be significantly reduced and people would live in more **harmony with nature and the community.**









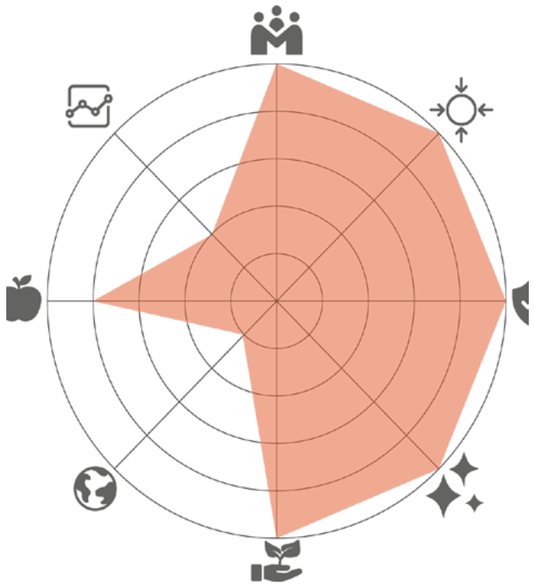
# 8 Bryant Park

**Location:** *New York, (NY)*
**Design**: *Project for Public Spaces*
**Year:** *2002*

Interventions



Impacts







# 6.8.1 **The project**

Bryant Park, located in Midtown Manhattan, faced neglect and safety concerns in the early 1980s. Project for Public Spaces (PPS) conducted an **extensive study of the park, analyzing its usage patterns through observations and interviews.**
Led by **Fred Kent and William H. Whyte**, the PPS team identified negative activities near **park entrances,** shielded by plantings and close to high foot traffic areas. Although actual crime rates were low, the **perception of crime was high.** Additionally, the park lacked amenities and activities beyond sitting on benches.
Based on their **research**, PPS provided design and management strategies to tackle these challenges and create **programming opportunities**. The Bryant Park Restoration Corporation (BPRC), supported by a business improvement district, implemented the recommendations, transforming Bryant Park into a **popular and influential urban park.**

To address **safety** concerns, entrances were opened up, shrubbery was removed for better visibility, and **lighting** was improved. The park was reimagined to **attract visitors**, with movable chairs allowing **flexibility**. These **small but efficient solutions** represented a springboard to relaunch the park in a new direction:
**Food** options were introduced, generating income and attracting visitors.
The park became a h**ub for events,** including performances, games, and outdoor movies. Over time, permanent activities like ping-pong and a carousel were added. The park's success led to the establishment of the Bryant Park Corporation.

Despite being celebrated as a remarkable public space renewal project, Bryant Park's management regularly **reviews and refines programming**. The **park's** **flexibilit**y in allowing outside programmers access has resulted in a range of events and a significant source of earned income. Bryant Park stands as a successful, inclusive, and innovative public space.

*Source: Project for Public Spaces official website*






## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

Project for public Spaces, as explained in the previous theoretical chapters, was among the first promoters of **placemaking practices**, and the redevelopment of Bryant Park represents one of the first **iconic** examples of their work.
It is also interesting the application of the main principles of PPS: Lighter, cheaper, faster. The **small but targeted and efficient solutions** represented a springboard to a completly new image of the park, thanks to the observation and research done in the previous phase of the design. We have found the use of a **systemic approach**, ahead of its time, for the identification of challenges and opportunities useful for the realization of efficient solutions to be extremely interesting.



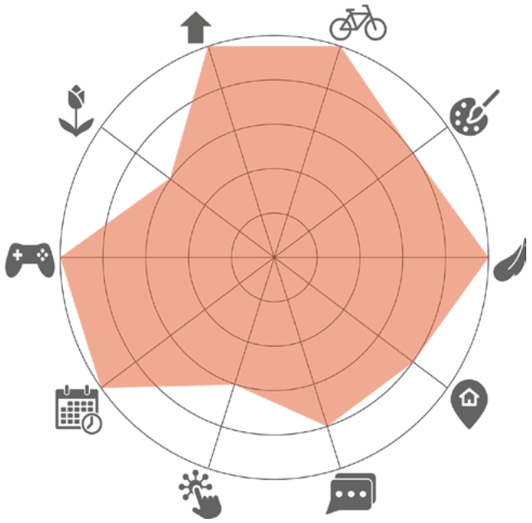




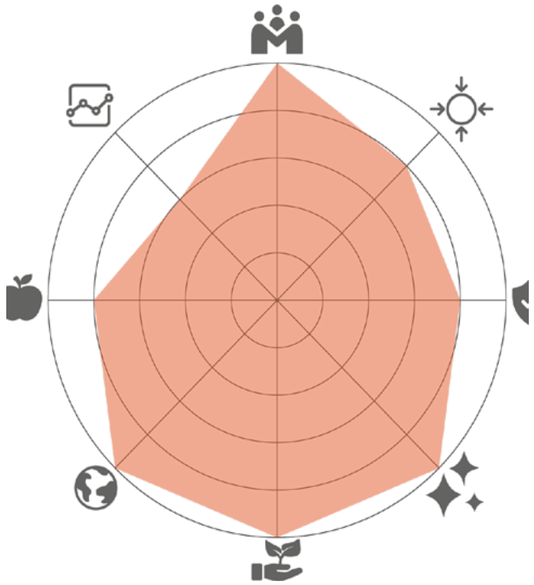

# 9 PARK(ing) Day

**Location:** *San Francisco (CA)*
**Design**: *Rebar*
**Year:** *2005*

## Interventions



## Impacts







## 6.9.1 **The project**

Park(ing) Day is a **globally recognized public initiative** where individuals **temporarily transform curbside parking spaces into public parks** and social spaces. It aims to promote safer, greener, and more equitable streets.
Originally a **guerilla art project** and act of design **activism**, Park(ing) Day it has evolved into a global movement, inspiring the creation of ***parklets*** and COVID-era "streeteries" in cities not just in the United States but also worldwide.

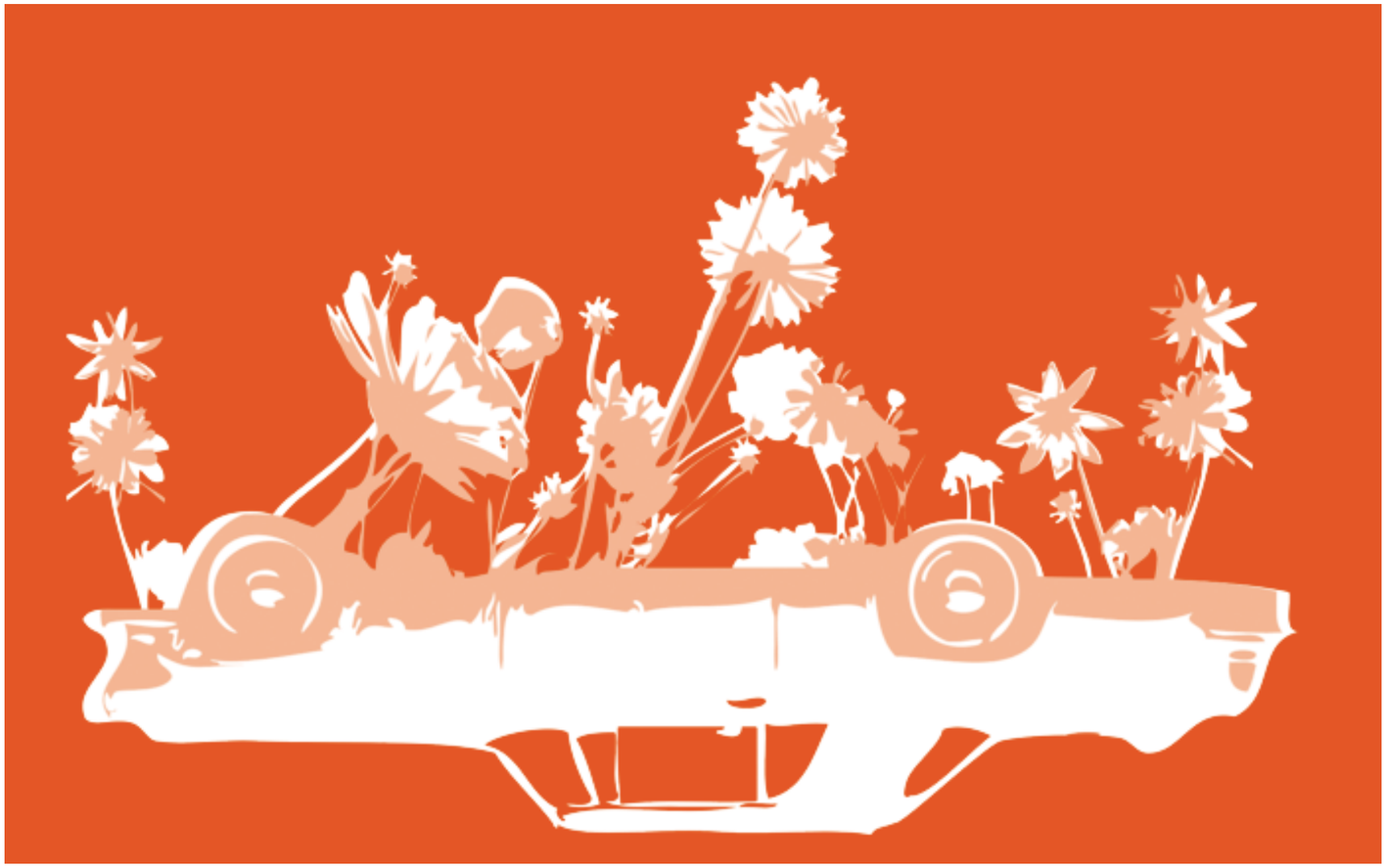
The first Park(ing) Day origin fron **Rebarr group,** (inspired by Gordon Matta Clarke's Fake Estates project) that saw the potential of parking spaces as inexpensive real estate in **San Francisco.** They discovered that it was legal to use **parking spaces** for purposes other than parking cars. With a significant portion of the city's land dedicated to vehicles, they explored **creative ways to utilize this public space.**
The project gained attention when Andrea Scher shared images of their installation, **attracting interest from people globally**. To facilitate replication, Rebar created an **accessible manual** for creating similar interventions. This led to Park(ing) installations appearing in cities worldwide.

In partnership with the Trust for Public Land, Rebar launched Park(ing) Day as an **annual event**, empowering people to reclaim urban space one parking spot at a time. The initiative quickly grew, with numerous cities and participants joining each year.

Inspired by Park(ing) Day and temporary plaza programs, San Francisco's Department of Greening collaborated with Rebar and other design firms to develop **Walklet, a modular system for creating parks in parking spaces**. San Francisco's Parklet program, part of Pavement to Parks (now Groundplay SF), was established as a result.

Rebar's vision was to transform metered parking spaces into **sites for art, activism, and cultural expression**, creating an **open-source urban design accessible to all.** The success of Park(ing) Day led to the formation of an international event, where thousands of people worldwide create parks, reprogramming vehicular spaces for social exchange, artistic expression, and play.

*Source: Project for Public Park(ing) day movement official site:*



## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

What makes this project fascinating, in addition to the **disarming simplicity and creativit**y of its creators, is the enormous impact it has had and continues to have on the mindset of citizens worldwide. Park(ing) Day events are multiplying, often extending beyond a single "day".
The official movement's website features a **map showcasing implemented projects worldwide**.
Park(ing) Day is an incredibly simple, cheap nd fast solution with **significant cultural impact,** that often lead citizens to radically change their habits and **spread positive message**s

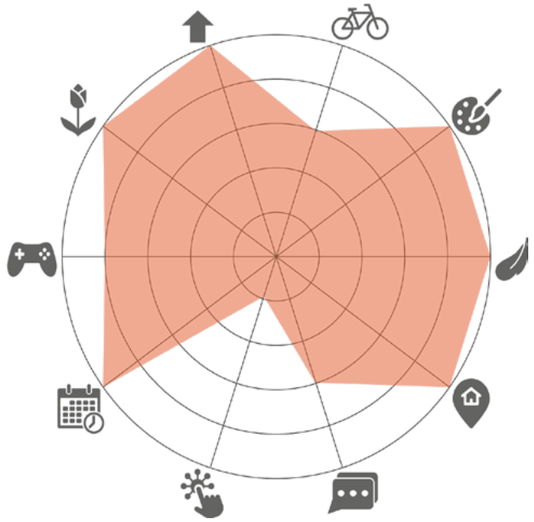




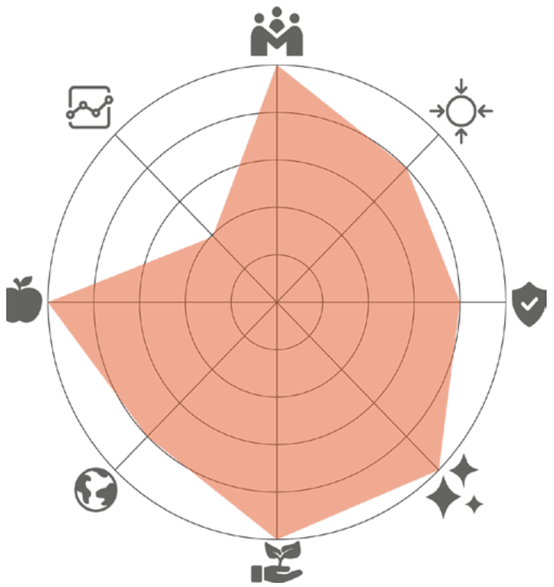

# 10 Open Bricolage

**Location:** *Roma (IT)*
**Design**: *Orizzontale + Studio Superfluo + Lab Falegnameria*
**Year:** *2011*

Interventions



Impacts







## 6.10.1 **The project**

The project is part of a broader initiative called ***KIUI - Instant Urban Interaction Kit***: a research-action project by the collective Orizzontale focused on the short-term reactivation of public residual spaces using recycled materials. It was funded by the European Commission through the Youth in Action program and carried out over approximately six months, from autumn 2011 to spring 2012.

The KIUI project includes several urban interventions known as "public acts": **Eco|Agro|Cult Urbano** (the self-construction of an urban garden and shared garden in the Pigneto neighborhood), **Libero Mercato** (the temporary occupation and reactivation of the disused Torpignattara Market building), and **S.O.S. Open Source Space** (a semi-permanent site-specific installation for reactivating an abandoned urban space located within the public garden of the Centocelle neighborhood).

**Open Bricolage** is the second public act of the KIUI project, consisting of an instantaneous intervention (completed in one day!) to transform a residual space on Via Fortebraccio in the Pigneto neighborhood into a t**emporary collective space.**
The intervention was carried out by Orizzontale in collaboration with Studio Superfluo and Lab Falegnameria: three groups that employ **reuse and assembly techniques** with the city's discarded materials to create micro-urban transformations.

The transformation involves setting up a blind wall of a building facing the space as a **domestic environment**, with the aim of bringing the intimacy of a home into the communal space. Additionally, various seating areas are created to emphasize the importance of **social relationships** for the vitality of neighborhoods.



Through these instant and low-cost transformations, the residual space on Via Fortebraccio is reactivated to give rise to new uses, encourage chance encounters, and celebrate the **value of shared leisure time**.



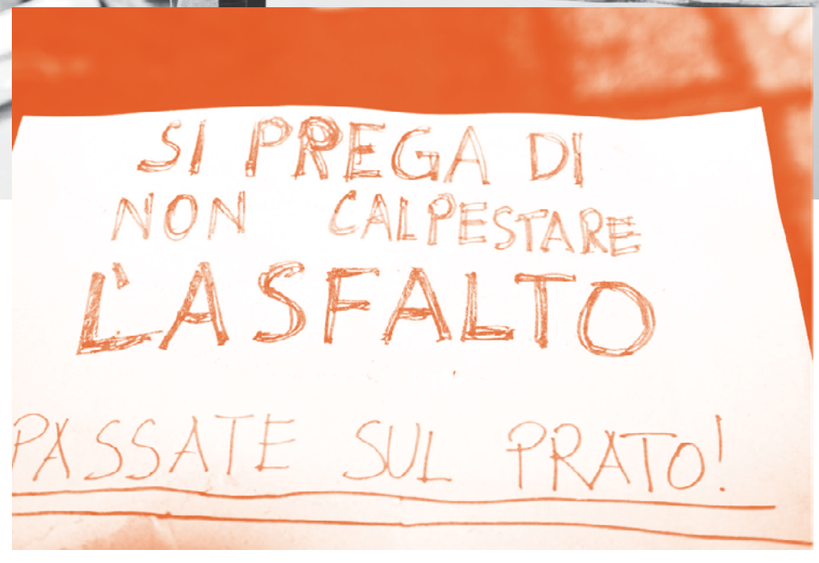
*Source: Orizzontale official website*

## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

What we found extremely interesting in this case study is the concept of translating the **home environment** into the **public space**.
Making urban spaces feel like "home" for their citizens leads them to experience them in a **more attentive and participatory way**, and this project is a prime example of this
It is also important to underline the extreme simplicity of this project (**done in just one day!**) which gives it a significant added value.
The **exclusive use of waste materials** should also be underlined, which places the project in line with the principles of environmental sustainability.





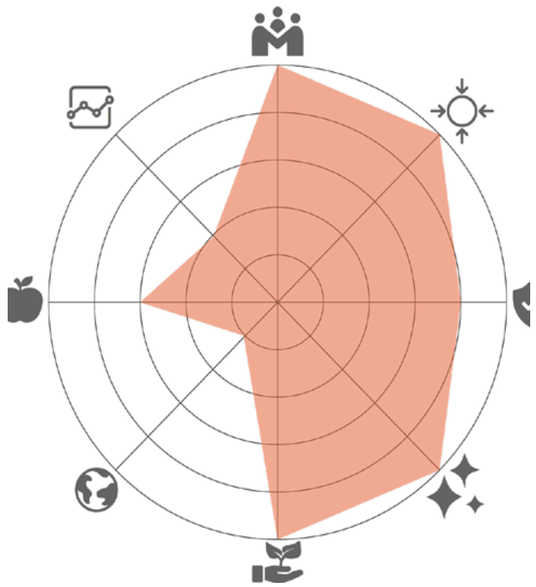
# 11 Pôle Molière aux Mureaux

**Location:** *Parigi*
**Design**: *Atelier graphique Malte Martin*
**Year:** *2014*

Interventions



Impacts







Interventions

- Lightness
- Local Identity Enhancement
- Semeiotics
- Digital interaction
- Programming
- Gamification
- Urban ecology
- Bottom up
- Reclaim the street
- Public Art

Impacts

- Community building
- Inclusivity
- Safety
- Aesthetic Improvement
- Community sense
- Community sense of responsibility
- Environmental Sustainability
- Heathy habits
- Info collection

## 6.11.1 **The project**

**Malte Martin** has opened with **Agrafmobile**, a space for artistic experimentation and expressive research that explores urban spaces and everyday areas.
One of his notable projects is the collaboration with the **Molière Center in Les Mureaux,** a complex undergoing renovation in the Parisian suburbs, comprising a child care center, an elementary school, function rooms, a restaurant, and a coffee shop.

To give the Molière Center a **unified identity**, the intervention of an artist was sought, leading to the creation of a **signage system** that embodies each building within the complex. Graphic designer and artist Malte Martin developed a panel of geometric shapes, including circles, squares, triangles, and diamond shapes, associating each building with a specific color and shape. Instead of being an additional layer or decorative element, this signage system **integrates directly with the architectural design**, becoming an intrinsic part of it.
These shapes harmoniously merge with the walls, windows, and floors of the complex, providing visual cues to aid visitors in orientation. This intuitive visual language allows the inhabitants of Les Mureaux to **easily navigate** and understand the different functions of the public city.
Moreover, the **geometric vocabulary** employed in the signage system has led to the creation of various visual games, offering graphic initiation opportunities.

**Workshops** were organized for residents of all ages to actively participate in the construction process. Using the ***modulos Fais moi signe***! (Make me a sign!) concept, individuals could **express their creativity** by composing patterns on different scales, whether on paper or through frame projections.



These interactive workshops have become integral parts of the **artistic signage project**, fostering a sense of community engagement and allowing individuals to take ownership of the space. The resulting artworks and creations from the workshops will be made available in the school, toy library, and media library of the Molière Center and the city of Les Mureaux, enriching the cultural offerings and promoting artistic expression within the community.

*Source: ecouter-pour-voir.net*



## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

This case study was chosen because it is emblematic of how **graphic-communicative** aspects can be significant within placemaking projects.

In this case the communication project itself is part of a **participatory process**, to which everyone can have access. Inclusiveness is also guaranteed by the very nature of the process, which uses s**imple and elementary shapes** going beyond any type of **linguistic and/or cultural obstacle**.





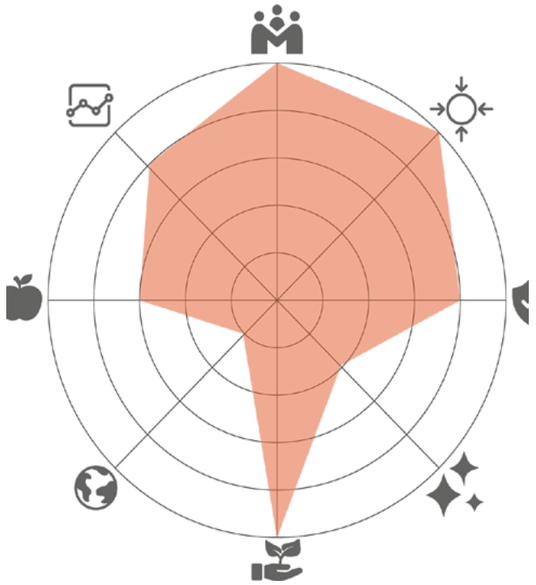


# 12 Hello lamp post

**Location:** *Bristol (UK)*
**Design**: *Pan Studio*
**Year:** *2013*



Interventions



Impacts





## 6.12.1 **The project**

In 2013, Bristol's Watershed arts venue introduced the ***Playable City Award***. The winning design, called ***Hello Lamp Post***, was developed by PAN Studio. This innovative initiative encouraged people to **interact with street furniture** such as lamp posts, post boxes and bus stops using repair numbers as SMS codes. The subject asks a series of text-based questions in response. When the next person interacts with the same object, she can learn **about previous responses**. The goal was to allow players to **discover various stories** about the **hidden lives of the city's inhabitants** through continuous conversations with these objects. The objects in this project are recognized as components of complex systems: Hello Lamp Post aimed to **create a network** that unifies these intelligent systems to achieve a more human result, exploring the concepts of memory and city and contemplating how individuals build their own **psychogeographies** of family environments. The designers were inspired by the novel "Austerlitz" by Sebald, where the city mirrored the mind of the protagonist. The team looked for ways to reintroduce these memories into the **physical world**, creating a **connection between the tangible city** and the stories connected to it.

To ensure inclusiveness, the Hello Lamp Post technology relied on **SMS** and object codes rather than GPS, bypassing the need for specific devices or applications. The designers looked at the **design of networked cities** and citizens, recognizing the historical tradition of technology reshaping cities through the engagement of their residents. They acknowledged the emergence of thinking **surrounding alternative versions of the *smart city***, stressing the importance of considering all the elements that make up a city, not just the technology.
Hello Lamp Post aimed to **infuse the city with personality**, incorporating **citizen participation and their personal stories.**
The concept of transforming cities into **playful spaces**, focusing on overlooked objects rather than prominent landmarks, has appealed to many.
Hello Lamp Post served as an **inclusive** introduction to the Internet of Things, accessible to all without requiring advanced smartphones or wearables. The game anticipated a future in which everyday objects, from household appliances to public transport, would be **interconnected and communicative**. This added depth has transformed the user's interaction with the device, creating a dialogue between the user and the product.

*Source: HLP official website*



## WHY DID WE CHOOSE IT?

This case study is extremely interesting for the purposes of our thesis because it explores very peculiar topics.
First of all, it is an interesting explicit reference to the concept of ***playful city***, and through **gamification** it pushes users to change their habits and interact with the environment in a more spontaneous and engaging way.
It also allows to **give character to the city**, and bring out its **local identity,** both at the level of individuals and as a community, thanks to a **systemic vision of the city** itself and therefore focusing on the relationships it contains.
It also represents an **object of affection** that invites users to respect the space, establishing an emotional bond and thus leading them to an increase in the **sense of responsibility** towards it.
It also represents an important example from a **communicative** point of view, where the design choices from this point of view have been able to involve everyone, thanks to a friendly and inclusive tone.
**Inclusiveness** is another important aspect, given by the interaction system, which does not necessarily require the possession of a smartphone.
Finally, it is a fairly **low-tech solution**, which does not require expensive infrastructures, but **optimizes the resources** available.





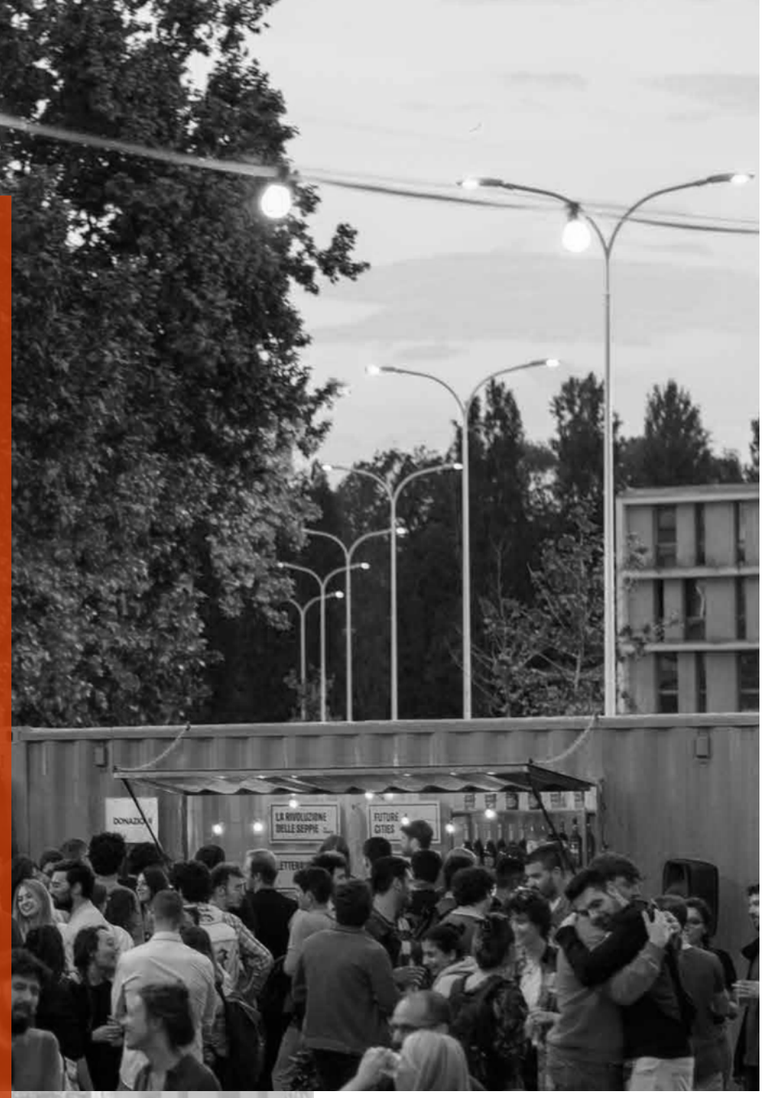





*“Una Sibilla, interrogata sul destino di Marozia, disse: - Vedo due città: una del topo, una della rondine. L’Oracolo fu interpretato così: Oggi Marozia è una città dove tutti corrono in cunicoli di piombo come branchi di topi che si strappano di sotto i denti gli avanzi caduti dai denti dei topi più minacciosi; ma sta per cominciare un nuovo secolo in cui tutti a Marozia voleranno come le rondini nel cielo d’estate, chiamandosi come in un gioco, esibendosi in volteggi ad ali ferme, sgombrando l’aria da zanzare e moscerini. - E’ tempo che il secolo del topo abbia termine e cominci quello della rondine, - dissero i più risoluti. […] Sono tornato a Marozia dopo anni; la profezia della Sibilla si considera avverata da tempo; il vecchio secolo è sepolto; il nuovo è al culmine. La città certo è cambiata, e forse in meglio. Ma le ali che ho visto in giro sono quelle di ombrelli diffidenti sotto i quali palpebre pesanti s’abbassano sugli sguardi; gente che crede di volare ce n’è, ma è tanto se si sollevano dal suolo sventolando palandrane da pipistrello. Succede pure che, rasentando i compatti muri di Marozia, quando meno l’aspetti vedi aprirsi uno spiraglio e appare una città diversa, che dopo un istante è già sparita. Forse tutto sta a sapere quali parole pronunciare, quali gesti compiere, e in quale ordine e ritmo, oppure basta lo sguardo la risposta il cenno di qualcuno, basta che qualcuno faccia qualcosa per il solo piacere di farlo, e perché il suo piacere diventi piacere altrui: in quel momento tutti gli spazi cambiano, le altezze, le distanze, la città si trasforma, diventa cristallina, trasparente come una libellula. Ma bisogna che tutto capiti come per caso, senza dargli troppa importanza, senza la pretesa di star compiendo una operazione decisiva, tenendo ben presente che da un momento all’altro la Marozia di prima tornerà a saldare il suo soffitto di pietra ragnatele e muffa sulle teste. L’oracolo sbagliava? Non è detto. Io lo interpreto in questo modo: Marozia consiste di due città: quella del topo e quella della rondine; entrambe cambiano nel tempo; ma non cambia il loro rapporto: la seconda è quella che sta per sprigionarsi dalla prima”.”*

*-Italo Calvino, Le città invisibili*








# 07 Corso Farini linear park

*Participation in a Placemaking project on the city of Turin with Torino Stratosferica*

# 7.1 Torino Stratosferica and *City Imaging*

Torino Stratosferica is an innovative project that serves as a collective laboratory. Its main objective is to explore the creative power of urban imagination and the impact of visionary ideas on the city, through ***City imaging.*** Their work envisions urban scenarios of the future, reshapes the collective perception of places, and aims to generate a positive impact in the communities and territories where it operates. In other words, Torino Stratosferica aims to imagine the best version of Turin. Without constraints, preconceptions, or feasibility calculations, it is a project driven by generosity and foresight, sometimes provocative, sometimes utopian, to emphasize the importance of projecting forward and aiming high, contributing to a positive and shared narrative about the city.
In addition to city imaging, the project also focuses on **placemaking and community building** themes. Stratosferica produces and disseminates knowledge about urban phenomena and the evolution of cities.
After its initial activities, Torino Stratosferica formally established itself as a non-profit cultural association in 2016.
Stratosferica has become one of the leading organizations in Italy for creating content and fostering debates on urban issues, working at the international, national, and local levels.
Among the various activities carried out by Torino Stratosferica in the Turin area, there is ***Utopian Hours***, a city imaging festival in which we participated in 2022, as mentioned in previous chapters.
The festival consists of a combination of debates, panel discussions, exhibitions, and workshops. Utopian Hours portrays the concept of ***city-making*** through ideas, projects, and places that are improving life in cities around the world. For three days, the festival gives voice to the protagonists of these changes: city-makers, activists, architects, and innovators who share their experiences, stimulating new visions of urban evolution and reflecting on the concept of the city.

The theme for the 2022 iteration was "***A World of 8 Billion Cities***," emphasizing the civic duty and its significance for individuals living in urban environments on a global scale. This theme highlights the increasing urbanization of our world, with the global population surpassing 8 billion people.





# 7.2 **Precollinear Park: an emblematic case study**

During June 2020, immediately following the initial lockdown, Torino Stratosferica embarked on its inaugural placemaking endeavor, utilizing a portion of its own resources. The project aimed to convert an abandoned strip of land, formerly part of overground line 3, into a **temporary urban park.** Over the initial months, the area saw the addition of urban furniture, which remains integral to the community's daily utilization of the space. Throughout the summer and autumn seasons, the park hosted a plethora o**f cultural and recreational events,** transforming into a hub of creativity and communal sharing that welcomed all individuals.
Stretching across 800 meters, the Precollinear Park commences at the central corridor of the Regina Margherita bridge, with the "green line" traversing all the way to Hermada squadre, ascending the tree-lined avenue of corso Gabetti. This park serves as a unifying force for four adjacent districts: Borgo Po, Madonna del Pilone, Vanchiglia, and Vanchiglietta. The park's design draws inspiration from the High Line concept while maintaining a grounded approach that aligns with the preferences of Turiners.
From the **ponte Regina Margherita,** one of the six bridges spanning the river Po, visitors can relish the refreshing breeze and breathtaking panoramic views of the Alps, the Basilica di Superga, the surrounding hills, and the captivating sunset over the Po. Torino Stratosferica has established a vibrant yellow repurposed shipping container at the far end of the bridge, serving as an information point and a bar during events. Additionally, the bridge currently houses "Visioni da Torino Stratosferica," an exhibition showcasing 40 visionary images focused on the future of the city and its spaces. This exhibition is accessible to all, without any restrictions on the day or time, and completely free of charge.
Since June 2020, numerous local residents and individuals spanning all age groups have eagerly participated in the park's care and maintenance on Saturday mornings. In light of this, Torino Stratosferica initiated the official **team of Park Volunteers**, consisting of over sixty individuals who dedicate their free time every week to ensure the pristine condition of this distinctive public space.
The establishment of Precollinear Park is the outcome of a collective endeavor. The ability to revive and relish this magnificent green space together is owed to the invaluable contributions of numerous volunteers and the generous donations from hundreds of supporters.
Torino Stratosferica, being Precollinear Park born as a temporary project, was aware that the GTT ("Gruppo Torinese Trasporti") could restore the tram line on the bridge.
GTT has in fact stated this year that the works to restore the tracks will begin in the autumn and that the availability of the new two-way vehicles is scheduled for spring 2024.
However, the **community** that the park has given the possibility to create is very strong and has consolidated more and more over the years, so the citizens themselves have decided to launch a **petition to stop the works**.
It is not known what the fate of the precollinear Park will currently be, but what is certain is that it has fully succeeded in its objective of redevelopment of an unused area and the creation of an important community in the Turin area.
The effects can be seen in the **huge participation of this community in the regeneration of the adjacent Corso Farini area**, in which Torino Stratosferica has launched a new project for the creation of a new linear park, in which we took part (which we will explain in the following paragraph).



*To the left: Precollinear Park*
*Source: Torino Stratosferica*

# 7.3 Design Unit for Corso Farini

Stratosferica is carrying out the **Corso Farini linear park project** in collaboration with the City of Turin and Cities4Forests. It is a collective placemaking and community building project aimed at revitalizing public spaces. A series of lightweight interventions have been designed to improve the perception of the area and **enhance its potential for public use.**
It is called "Precollinear Park Extended" because it is an extension of the existing Precollinear Park. This walkway not only connects the city's two rivers but also links the Precollinear Park to the boulevard in front of Gradenigo on Corso Regina, Corso Farini, Viale Ottavio Mai, crossing the Dora river and Largo Verona, and finally reaching Corso Brescia.

The **co-design process** of the park involved numerous young designers, communicators, and interested individuals who collaborated in designing the space, furnishings, and storytelling. In particular, for the design of the urban furnishings, a "**Design Unit"** was established, in which we participated. Weekly meetings were held for the collective design of park elements: **1 stage, 2 chaise lounges, 1 seating with backrest, 1 yoga platform, 8 planters, 3 community tables, 15 chairs, and 8 new seats,** as well as repairs to existing benches.
Once the design work was completed, self-building workshops were organized. Over 200 participants, including the Design Unit, volunteers, national and international students, the LASTIN PoliTo Laboratory, the AUT collective, and the San Carlo Technical Schools, took part in the physical construction of the park, transforming this unused space into an important gathering point for the community.

The **opening of Corso Farin**i, held on May 5, 2023, attracted more than 1200 people, demonstrating the effectiveness of the project and the power of the community that Stratosferica has built over the years through participatory and inclusive interventions.










*Drone photography of the city of San Diego.*



*“A Maurilia, il viaggiatore è invitato a visitare la città e nello stesso tempo a osservare certe vecchie cartoline illustrate che la rappresentano com’era prima: la stessa identica piazza con una gallina al posto della stazione degli autobus, il chiosco della musica al posto del cavalcavia, due signorine col parasole bianco al posto della fabbrica di esplosivi. Per non deludere gli abitanti occorre che il viaggiatore lodi la città nelle cartoline e la preferisca a quella presente, avendo però cura di contenere il suo rammarico per i cambiamenti entro regole precise: riconoscendo che la magnificenza e prosperità di Maurilia diventata metropoli, se confrontate con la vecchia Maurilia provinciale, non ripagano d’una certa grazia perduta, la quale può tuttavia essere goduta soltanto adesso nelle vecchie cartoline mentre prima, con la Maurilia provinciale sotto gli occhi, di grazioso non ci si vedeva proprio nulla, e men che meno ce lo si vedrebbe oggi, se Maurilia fosse rimasta tale e quale, e che comunque la metropoli ha questa attrattiva in più, che attraverso ciò che è diventata si può ripensare con nostalgia a quella che era.*
*Guardatevi dal dir loro che talvolta città diverse si succedono sopra lo stesso suolo e sotto lo stesso nome, nascono e muoiono senza essersi conosciute, incomunicabili tra loro. Alle volte anche i nomi degli abitanti restano uguali, e l’accento delle voci, e perfino i lineamenti delle facce; ma gli dèi che abitano sotto i nomi e sopra i luoghi se ne sono andati senza dir nulla e al loro posto si sono annidati dèi estranei. E’ vano chiedersi se essi sono migliori o peggiori degli antichi, dato che non esiste tra loro alcun rapporto, così come le vecchie cartoline non rappresentano Maurilia com’era, ma un’altra città che per caso si chiamava Maurilia come questa.”*

*-Italo Calvino, Le città invisibili*





# 08 Molo ‘61

*Development of an urban redevelopment concept through Placemaking in the suburb of Nice-Millefonti*

# 8.1 New European Bauhaus

The **New European Bauhaus (NEB)** is an initiative launched by the **European Commission** in 2020. It represents a creative and interdisciplinary movement that connects the European Green Deal with the EU's climate and environmental agenda, with the aim of achieving **climate neutrality by 2050**. The NEB promotes innovative design to bring together citizens, experts, researchers, artists, businesses, industries, and various other entities in envisioning and designing a sustainable, beautiful, and inclusive future.
By bridging different backgrounds, disciplines, and fostering participation at all levels, the NEB inspires a movement to facilitate transformation based on three inseparable values:

- **Sustainability:** From climate goals to circular economy, zero pollution, and biodiversity, the NEB emphasizes sustainable practices.

- **Inclusion:** By valuing diversity and ensuring accessibility and affordability, the NEB aims to create an inclusive environment.

- **Aesthetics:** Beyond functionality, the NEB recognizes the importance of quality experience and style in design.

These three values have a strong focus on living spaces and lifestyle and are considered integral parts of NEB projects.
The NEB has identified four key thematic axes, each providing a design brief:
***Reconnecting with nature:*** Encouraging individuals and communities to reconnect with nature to contribute to the regeneration of natural ecosystems and prevent biodiversity loss. It also invites people to reconsider their relationship with nature.
Regaining a sense of belonging: Enhancing the **"spirit" or "meaning"** of places, communities, or assets that celebrate diversity, thus fostering a sense of belonging.
***Prioritizing the people and places that need it the most***: Addressing the needs of territories, communities, and individuals based on economic, social, or physical characteristics, with a focus on those requiring immediate attention.
***Long-term life-cycle thinking in the industrial ecosystem:*** Redesigning the long-term life cycle within the industrial ecosystem by contributing to more sustainable practices.

Furthermore, the NEB defines three operating principles that describe how projects should be implemented:

- **Participatory processes:** Involving the communities affected by the project in decision-making and implementation phases.

- **Transdisciplinary approaches:** Bringing together knowledge from different fields and professionals across various sectors to find holistic solutions that positively impact all dimensions involved in transforming a place.

- **Multi-level engagement:** Engaging stakeholders at both global and local levels, enabling effective coordination between vertical and horizontal cooperation methods.

Finally, the NEB is responsible for awarding prizes to projects that meet these criteria. The NEB prizes recognize and celebrate existing achievements while supporting young generations in developing concepts and emerging ideas. They showcase examples and concepts that demonstrate the existence of beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive places. Competitions are organized at various levels, providing access to funds for project development and inclusion in the European Makerspace.
Our project, Molo'61, won the **first prize** at the **NEB4Cities Hackathon - Designing regenerative, circular, and irresistible Cities!** (November 2022) held at the **University of Turin, SAA** (School of Management) campus. Subsequently, it also emerged as the winner in the "Regaining a sense of community and belonging" category in the **New European Bauhaus Hackathon Winners Contest** (December 2022). Currently, our Molo'61 project is in the development phase within the European Makerspace, thanks to the €10,000 prize we received.







*NEB Prizes won by Molo '61*

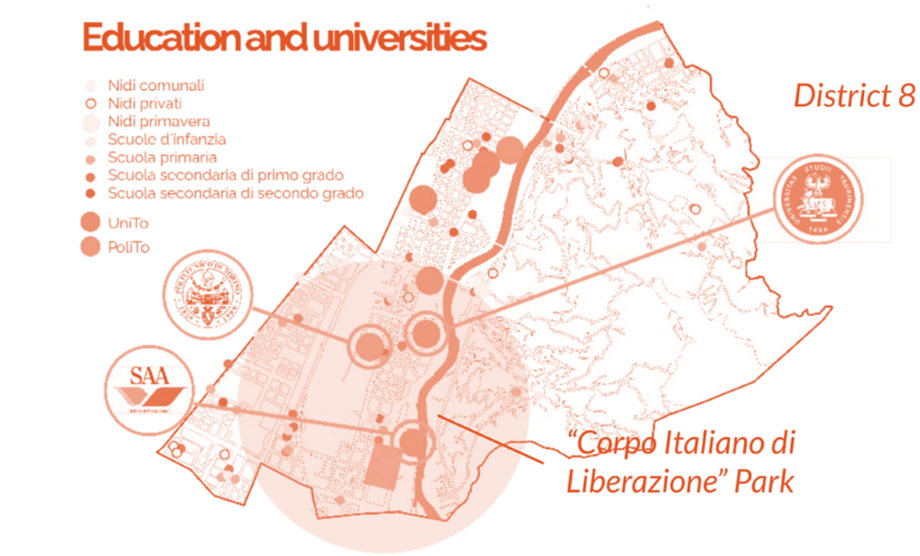
# 8.2 **Molo ‘61**

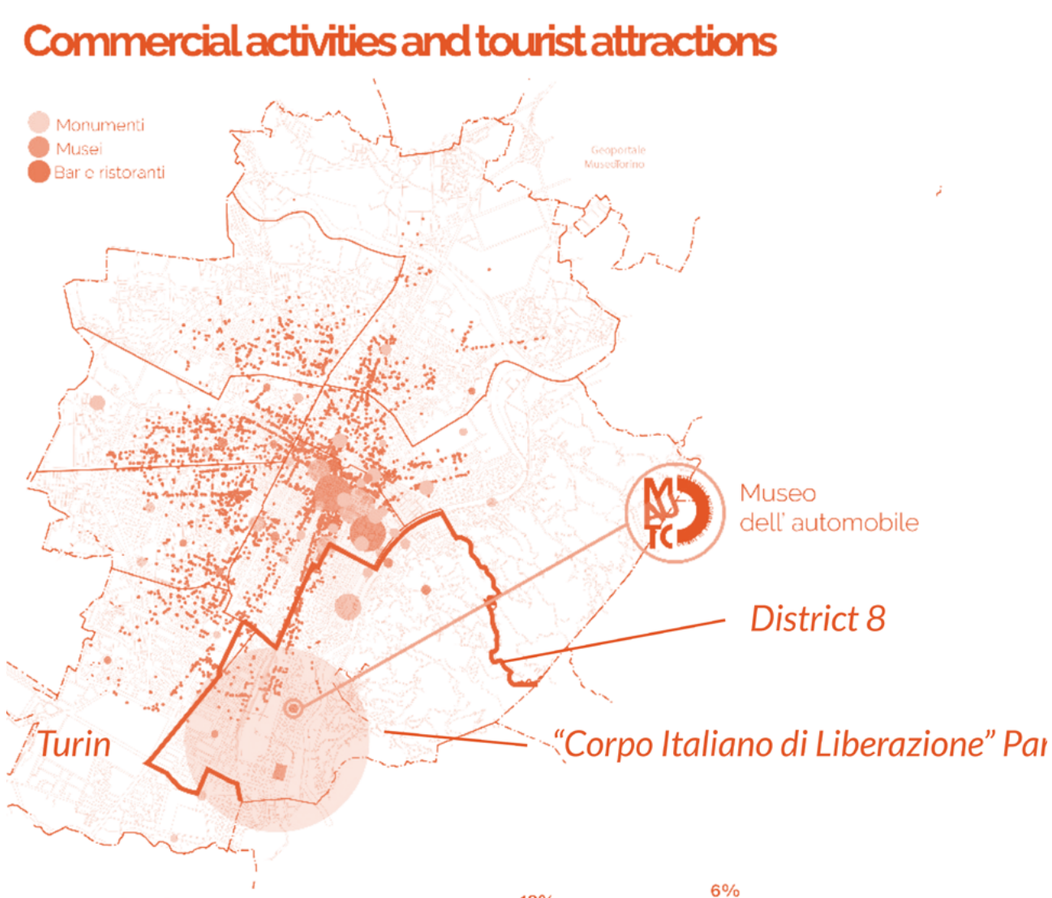
The project aims to redevelop “Giardino Corpo Italiano di Liberazione”, a park located in the suburban neighborhood of Turin Nizza Millefonti.
In particular, the project aims to relive a space that once brought prestige to the city: the park “Giardino Corpo Italiano di Liberazione”. Built for the International Labour Exhibition in 1961, it features unusual and (once) futuristic architectural elements, such as the monorail suspended over an artificial lake, now totally disused and subject to decay and abandonment, without any plan to improve its conditions.
A space currently disused and degraded would be revalued, giving it a new image: a **self-sufficient** (from an energy and material point of view) and engaging space, transforming a **border area** into a “bridge” area between both the suburbs/center, and the rich and poor areas of Turin.

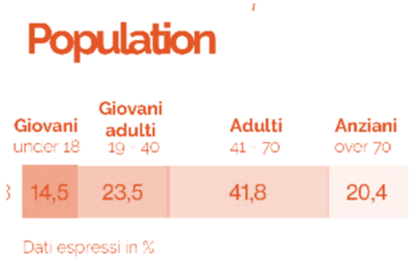
For this park, a series of solutions have been identified, mainly targeted towards young people but not limited to them, in order to revitalize the space and the neighborhood, which the residents themselves described as “worn-out and anonymous” or even dangerous during nighttime hours.
To carry out the project, a territorial analysis was conducted, identifying the main activities and dynamics of the surrounding neighborhood so that the park could serve as a useful and optimized resource for the community.
The Nizza Milefonti neighborhood is a peripheral neighborhood in Turin, located to the south, between the course of the Po River and the adjacent Lingotto district, where a busy train station is located.
Despite the area being surrounded by schools and universities, as can be seen from the mapping we have done, there are no dedicated spaces for young people to engage in any type of activity, whether leisure, study, or co-working. The main challenge therefore is the neighborhood’s lack of sense of belonging and identity due to the lack of activities, services and a safe place to meet in the area. In fact, this park today is frequented only by elderly, children (there is a small play area) and by residents walking with pets. Overall, the park is not much attended and especially in the evening is desolate, conveying a feeling of **insecurity** and **uselessness.**

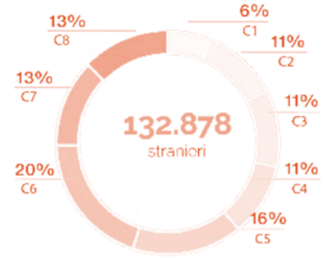
*Holistic Diagnosis of the area*





The park also faces the great **hill of Turin**: the background against which the park stands is of immeasurable beauty, an uncontaminated green extension that could serve as a setting for the activities and events proposed by the project. Once implemented, the project will change the image of the park, which will become a **safe place to meet, relax or have fun**, but also to **study and work** in front of the water, surrounded by nature.
On the other hand the location of the park represnts oppoortunity, being visible from the southern entrance of the city and thus to those accessing it from outside: promoting it would mean giving a **new image of Turin to visitors.**
It should also be emphasized that the neighborhood has a lot of potential that today the city of Turin is trying to exploit. Indeed, the new subway stops were inaugurated just a few months ago: this reflects the fact that this suburban neighborhood will no longer be considered as such.

As we said, the park is an image of the decay, because of its abandoned structures, which give it a negative image, and do not invite users to frequent it: huge investments were made for these events to improve transportation, aesthetics and the city's overall lifestyle, creating an attractive city, symbol of future and progress.
But now, unfortunately, everything is **in ruins.** For sixty years, most of

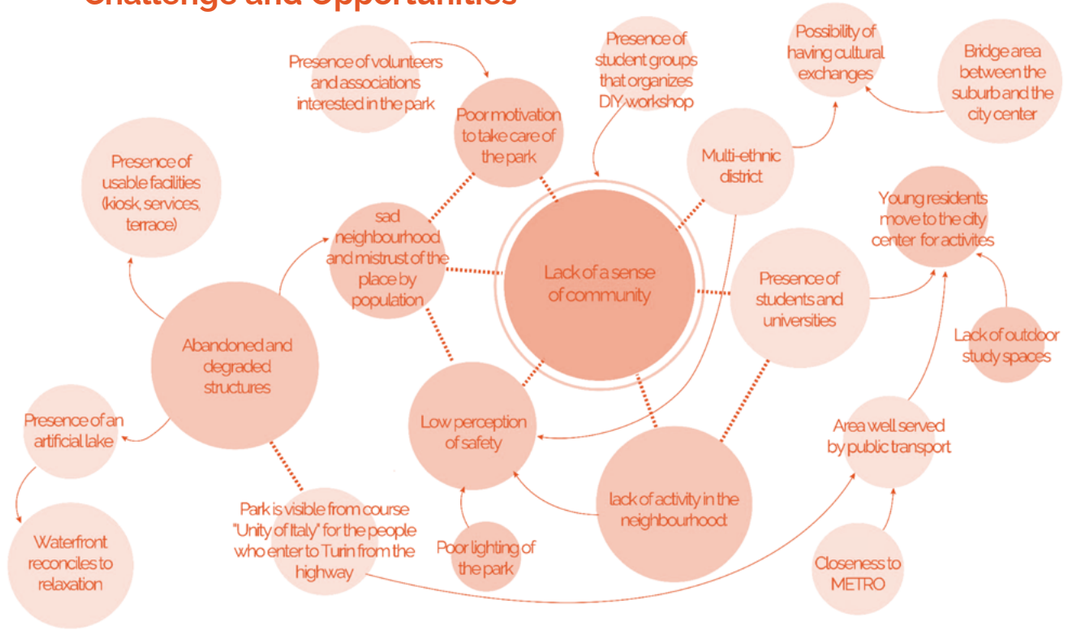
*To the top: Challenges & Opportunities*

*To the left: Palazzo del Lavoro, abandoned building.*
*To the right: the current state of the lake and of the abandoned monorail*





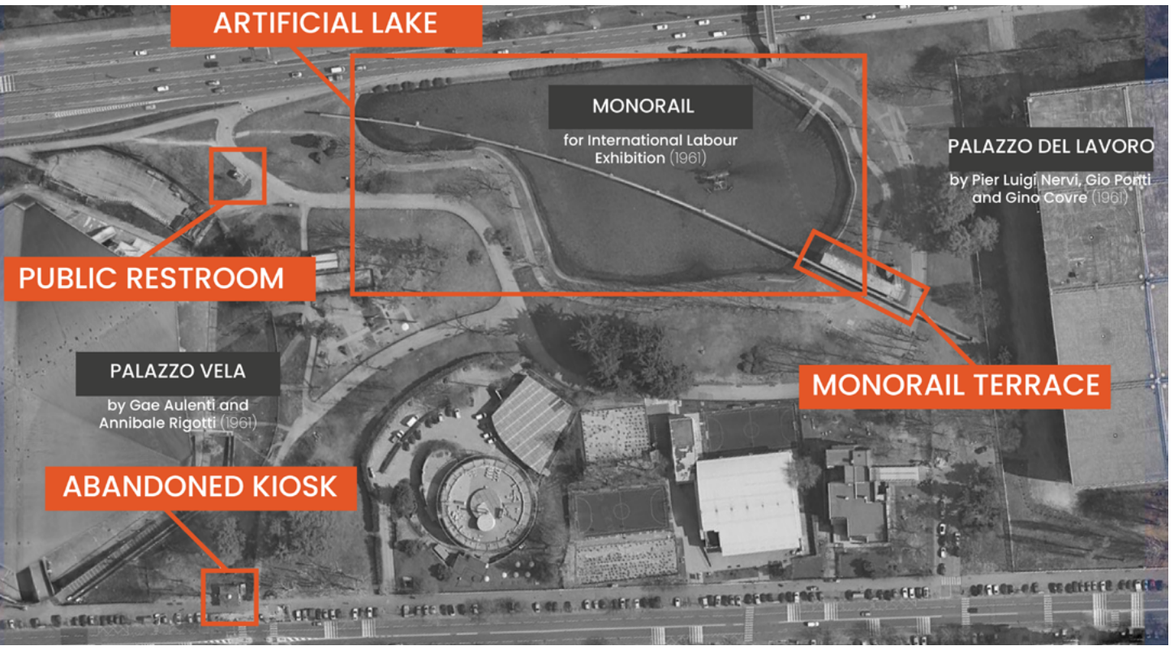
## Challenge and Opportunities








the remaining architectures have been in a **state of neglect, aimless and subject to urban decay**. The remaining green area is fairly well maintained, but has untapped potential. Residents discreetly frequent the park, but they carry sadness in their hearts to see such waste: a space that could be beautiful, once alive, thriving and full of expectations about the future, now abandoned.
Going into detail, once the park included a **station for a monorail** connecting the north with the south of the city and passing over artificial lakes (a kind of subway developed to improve transportation in the Expo area). A few years after the event, the monorail was no longer used and partially destroyed, leaving only a small piece in the
Italia '61 park; its artificial lake, although it is cleaned from time to time, is a lifeless and miserable place. There are aslo some structures, **build more recently, but still abandoned**, because of the poor use of the park: a kios and restroom services.
The old structures were used in the project to give them a new value., and enhance them to give a general new image to the park, and to create a hub for young people to **meet and activate the space.** The objective was to make them protagonists of the life in the nearby community, by means of the opening of using the kiosk as a bar/cultural-literary cafè, that, with other engagement activities of the community, like **workshop to build DIY urban furniture,** inclusive events and shared vegetable gardens, it leans to give new life to the area Including then a larger target: old people and children as final **users or volunteers.**




*To the left: mapping of existing structures*

*To the right: The public restroom , the kiosk and the old monorail*



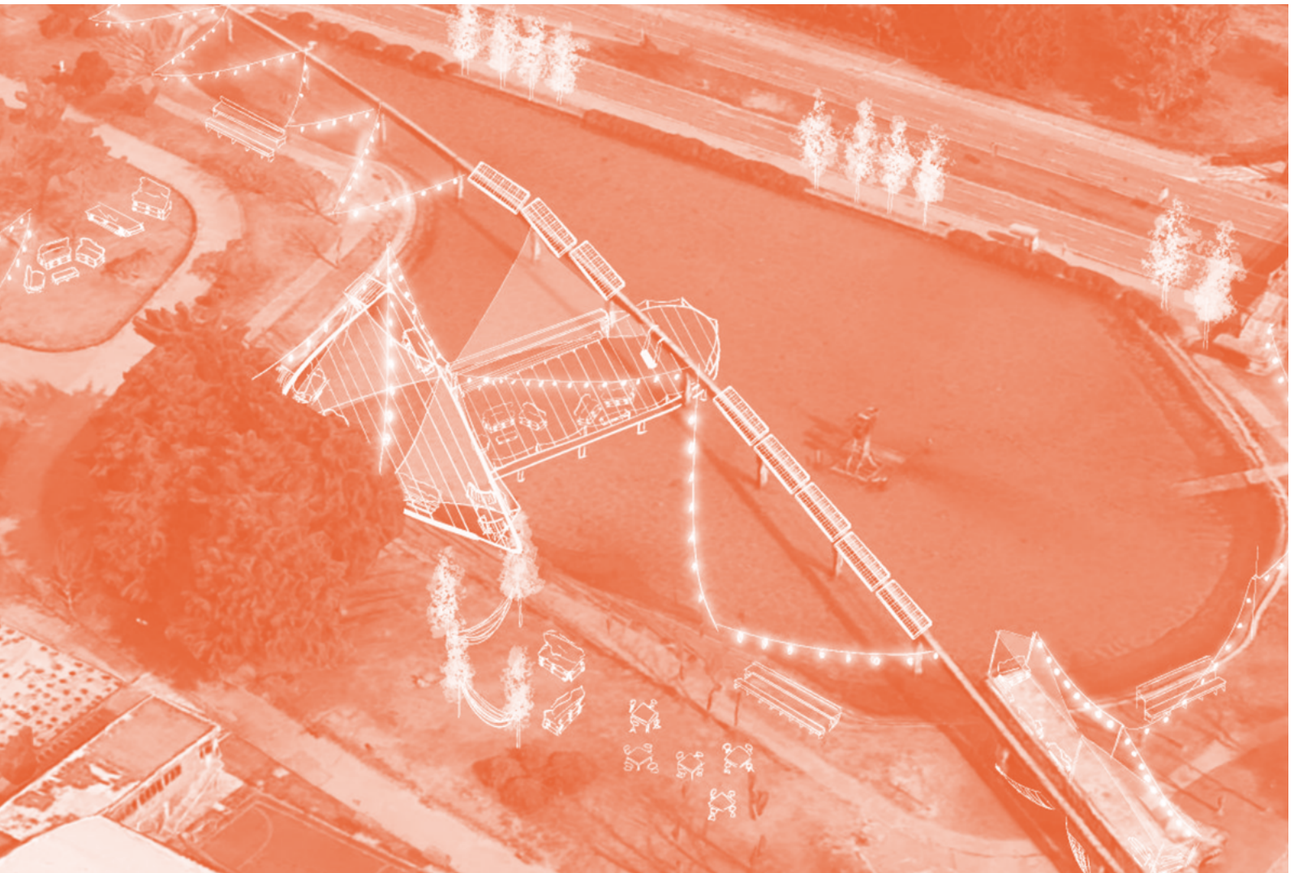




It is developed with a view of **complete sustainability**: all the furnishings are made from reused materials, such as lounges and chairs made from wooden pallets. Then, during the first year a number of events are planned, where the community can **develop their own solution,** always using **waste material**, so as to give the place a personal look, enhancing a park that has lost shine and interest in the eyes of the citizens.
In these **co-design events,** citizens of all ages are invited to actively participate in the reorganization of the park, giving them the opportunity to choose and invest their time in a project that can become a plus for the city of Turin.
These events are also seen as a link between the **city and its citizens:** giving people the chance to customize a place as they like will help them feel part of the city, with the final goal of giving value to something that is now abandoned. In the end, these activities will bring to a reduction of any type of waste, based on the principles of circular economy.

A key aspect that must be taken into account is the **self-sufficiency of the park:** the project also includes a system of solar panels (with their own accumulators) placed coherently with the landscape, in order to provide energy to any activity conducted in the park, without corrupting the beautiful landscape that it offers. Moreover, the deployment of solar panels will minimize the CO2 emissions, compliant with the new European standards.

*An evocative image of the final result of the park*



The whole park has the main goal of becoming a place where people of all ages can meet and stay together, having fun or relaxing in front of a small lake. Moreover, the project aims to **reduce the gap** that there is between citizens and political leaders and decision-makers that control the public projects: in order to be accepted, any project must follow a sequence of long bureaucratic steps that could bring the developers to lose enthusiasm and passion for what they are going to realize. With this project, this gap will be reduced, since citizens will play the main role in the requalification of an abandoned place.
The indirect goal of the project is to provide a **new view to the visitors** that enters the city from South: corso Unità d'Italia runs along the whole park, showing entrants an overlooked place. The aim of the project is to restore the initial beauty of the park through the previously mentioned activities. In addition to that, some other solutions can be implemented to make the **park more attractive:** a removable walkway obtained by sustainable wood, a large panel to project movies in summer (removable), and also a seesaw fastened at the monorail to swing just above the water.
The roll-out of this project would therefore lead to the replenishment of an attractive and multifunctional hub for meeting, with a view to a revaluation of the district.
Indeed, the nearby area is nowadays growing day by day: it is surrounded by schools and universities, such as the **SAA - School of Management, Lingotto Headquarter of the Politecnico di Torino**, and other schools scattered throughout the territory. Some collaborations could be thought of with elementary schools, even introducing courses or workshops aimed at education in beauty and sustainability.
The realization of the **wooden walkway** on the lake, the introduction of a pump system for the cleaning of the lake itself, the placement of street furniture created in co-working with the citizens and the addition of a lighting system, will bring the park to its top aesthetic level, considering the actual state.
The walkway over the lake (as a future implementation) will also be built following circularity principles: the wood raw material will be recovered thanks to the collaboration with the **Cities4Forests** net, which already works on the Turin municipality and deals with the conscious and sustainable management of forests.
Furthermore, the collaboration with the volunteer group already in place, like the boat modelling association (***A.S.D. Millefonti 2012***), a group of volunteers already working on the site, will be strengthened thanks to our innovation project. In fact, due to the integration of a pump system, the lake will always be clean and suitable for their activities. The team also thinks that this partnership will help to bring some past activities back into vogue and some new in.
However, the main partners in the project are residents: by hearing their voices it is possible to exploit any kind of solution that they purpose, to enhance the district's quality of life. For this purpose, semi-annual surveys are prepared and shared among them, to capture any feelings

*To the top: Systemic Project*

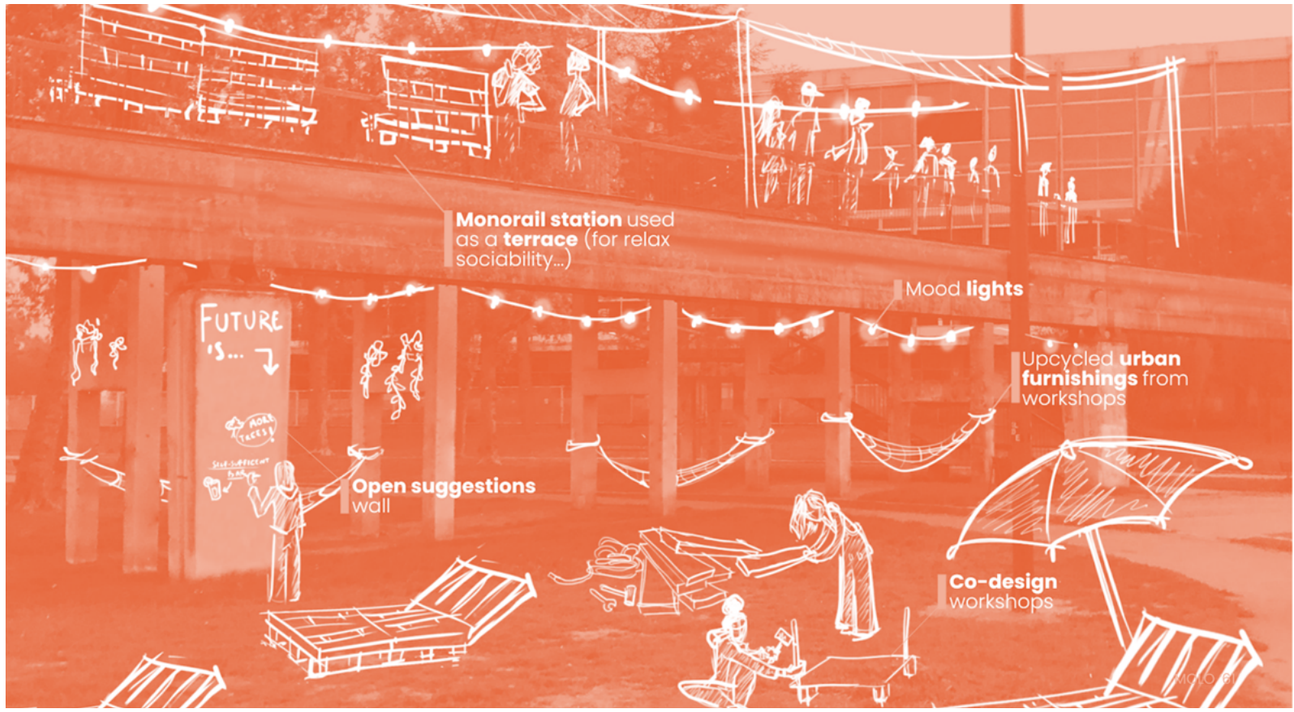
*To the left: Sketch of the Final result*

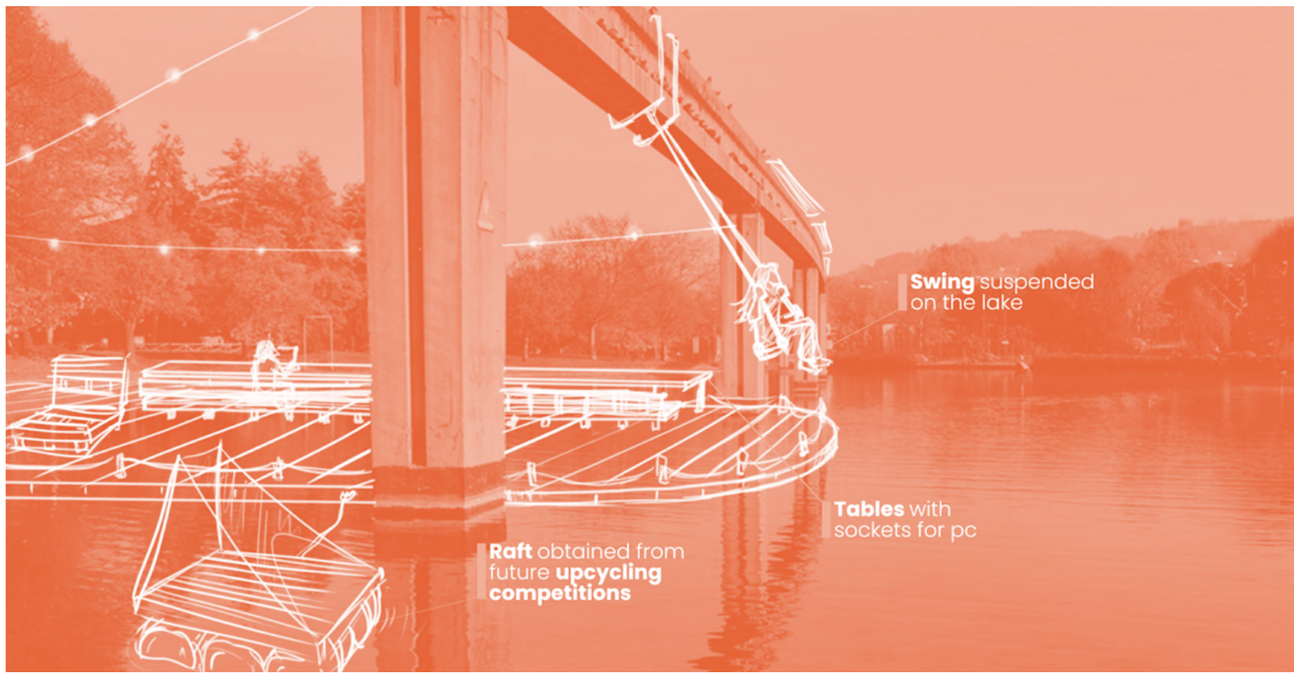
about the implemented project.
Leading self-building workshops in collaobration with different stakeholders like **TorinoStratosferica,** or **AUT Polito,** citizens in the first place will be able to express their ideas and then carry out their own projects.
The urban garden could be used for creating activites for elders and children, in collaboration with nearby schools and association such as UGI., managed by local gardering no-profit association Orti Alti.
Events could be organized together with **ASD Millefonti** (that already operates in the park); for example involving citizens in making models of rafts with recycled and reused materials, or mural contest, to beautify all those buildings already present in the park but abandoned, so as to give it a new image.
Through the creation of a cultural association and through the proposed activities Molo '61 will proceed with fundraising, to make the park self-sufficient.
Then private individuals and institutions interested in the project will be involved to sponsor it, such as **Mauto, Automobile Museum**, which is not far from the park. Once it has been founded, the cultural association can also collect funds through crowdfunding: residents that live the district will be enthusiastic, feeling safe thanks to the project development, so that the team could ask them money for investing in other activities or furniture that can be useful for the park. In this way, citizens are more involved in the **decision-making process**. The criterion for selecting future partner activities such as cafes, study areas, areas to be devoted to sports, inside and outside **Palazzo Nervi** (which could be redeveloped in the future so that it can be used for the listed activities), will direct toward the selection of activities that have sustainable, environmental, social and economic choices as a common denominator, so as to create a park with its own intrinsic message of sustainability and self-sufficiency, thus becoming a symbol for the city.

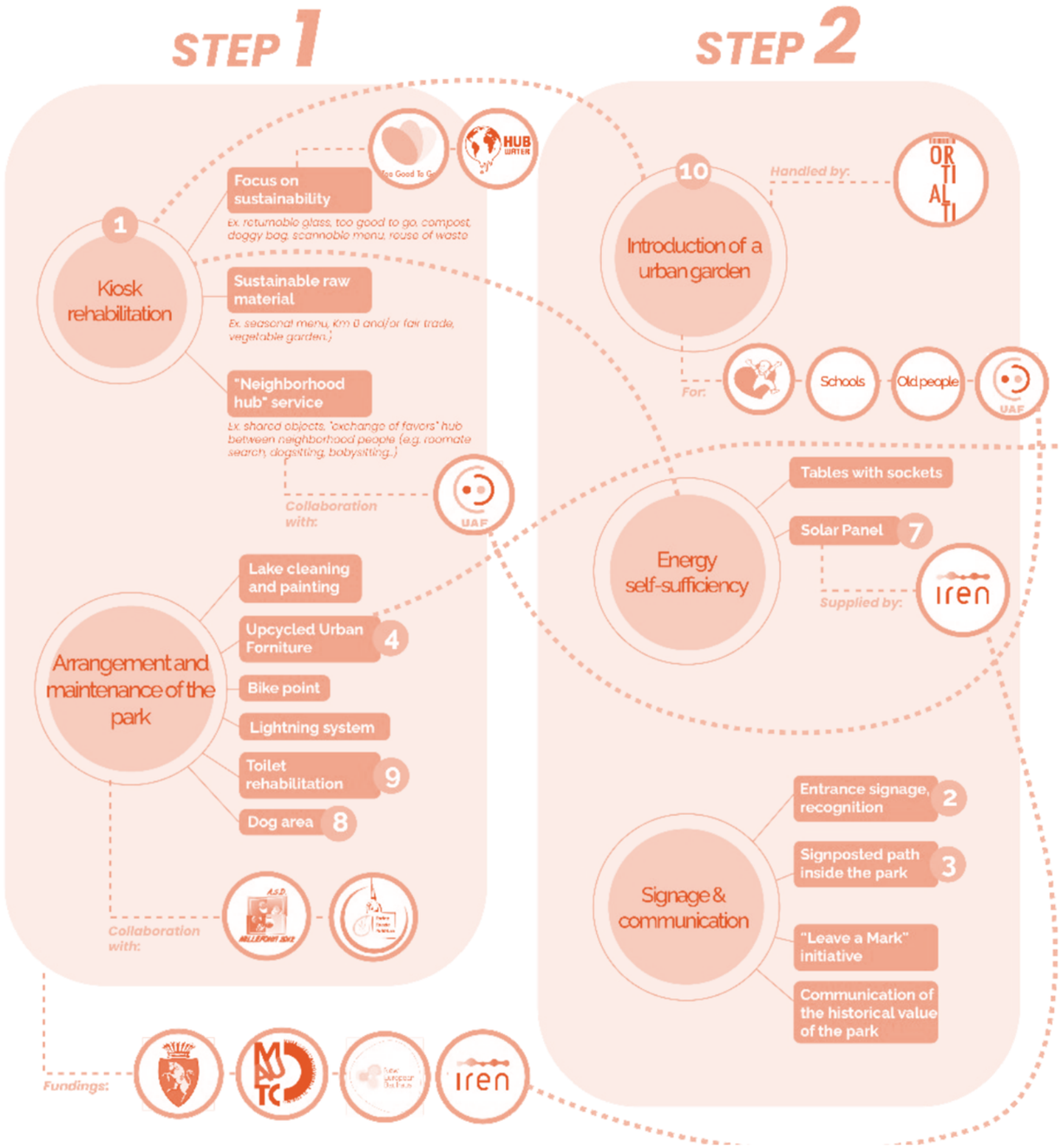
*Sketch of the Final result taken from the application video for the contest.*
*To see the video:*

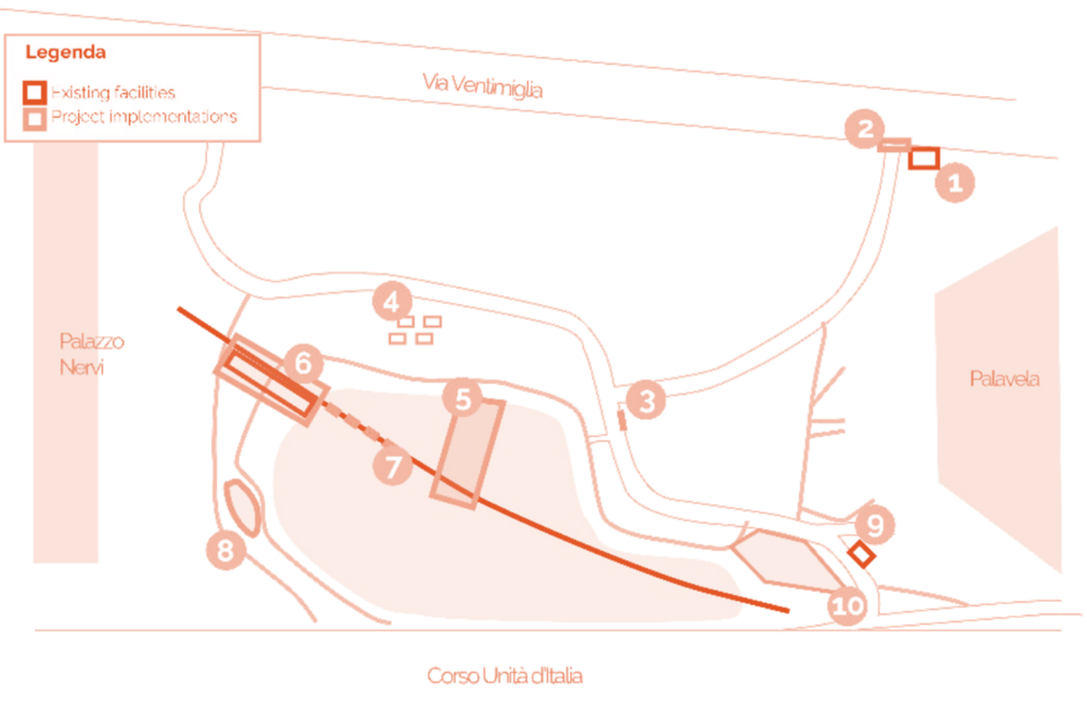







*Systemic Project of the requalification of thepark*



*“ In due modi si raggiunge Despina: per nave o per cammello. La città si presenta differente a chi viene da terra e a chi dal mare. Il cammelliere che vede spuntare all’orizzonte dell’altipiano i pinnacoli dei grattacieli, le antenne radar, sbattere le maniche a vento bianche e rosse, buttare fumo i fumaioli, pensa a una nave, sa che è una città ma la pensa come un bastimento che lo porti via dal deserto, un veliero che stia per salpare, col vento che già gonfia le vele non ancora slegate, o un vapore con la caldaia che vibra nella carena di ferro, e pensa a tutti i porti, alle merci d’oltremare che le gru scaricano sui moli, alle osterie dove equipaggi di diversa bandiera si rompono bottiglie sulla testa, alle finestre illuminate a pian terreno, ognuna con una donna che si pettina. Nella foschia della costa il marinaio distingue la forma d’una gobba di cammello, d’una sella ricamata di frange luccicanti tra due gobbe chiazzate che avanzano dondolando, sa che è una città ma la pensa come un cammello dal cui busto pendono otri e bisacce di frutta candita, vino di datteri, foglie di tabacco, e già si vede in testa a una lunga carovana che lo porta via dal deserto del mare, verso oasi d’acqua dolce all’ombra seghettata delle palme, verso palazzi dalle spesse mura di calce, dai cortili di piastrelle su cui ballano scalze le danzatrici, e muovono le braccia un po’ del velo e un po’ fuori dal velo. Ogni città riceve la sua forma dal deserto a cui si oppone; e così il cammelliere e il marinaio vedono Despina, città di confine tra due deserti. “*

*-Italo Calvino, Le città invisibili*



WORLD DESIGN CAPITAL SAN DIEGO TIJUANA 2024

# 09 Systemic Placemaking for WDC 2024 SD-TJ

*International mobility project for World Design Capital 2024 San Diego-Tijuana*

# 9.1 World Design Capital San Diego Tijuana 2024

The **World Design Capital** (WDC) is a prestigious designation bestowed every two years by the **World Design Organization** (WDO) to recognize cities that have effectively leveraged design to drive economic, social, cultural, and environmental development. Through an extensive year-long program of events, the chosen city showcases exemplary practices in sustainable design-led urban policies and innovative approaches that greatly enhance the quality of life for its residents.
Over the years, several cities have had the honor of being designated as World Design Capitals. In 2008, Torino (Italy) held the title, followed by Seoul (South Korea) in 2010, Helsinki (Finland) in 2012, Cape Town (South Africa) in 2014, Taipei (Taiwan, Chinese Taipei) in 2016, Mexico City (Mexico) in 2018, Lille Metropole (France) in 2020, and Valencia (Spain) in 2022.
**San Diego-Tijuana, choosen for 2024 edition**, is the first cross-border region to be designated as World Design Capital. The selection of San Diego and Tijuana was driven by their exceptional and distinctive history, a thriving and diverse design community, a steadfast dedication to cross-border collaboration, and the countless unique opportunities that arise from their interconnected community.
One of the main challenges highlighted in the introductory document of the World Design Capital (WDC) "**Reimagining the border**" that aims to make the border between the two cities more humane and mutually advantageous through design thinking, galvanizing stakeholders across neighborhoods and connecting communities.




*- World Design Capital 2024 San Diego-Tijuana*



In order to fit into the project landscape offered by the WDC SD-TJ 2024, we chose to take up the aforementioned challenge "Reimaging the border" because of its global appeal and **uniqueness** (in fact, the border between San Diego and Tijuana is the only land border between the first and third worlds).
In addition, during our **Field Analysis** we identified a neighborhood (San Ysidro) whose community constitutes fertile ground for the **implementation of Systemic Placemaking** practices; in fact, the people we met and interviewed turn out to have an extremely open and welcoming culture, and have **a strong need for having "meaningful places" to live.**

So we worked for the World Design Capital San Diego-Tijuana organization (whose preparations are underway since it will be held in 2024) by personally traveling to San Diego during an **international mobility period that lasted from April 18 to May 29, 2023.**

We met **WDC CEO Carlos de la Mora** and his executive assistant **Miranda Diaz** who introduced us to the city of San Diego and warmly gave us hospitality in the city and in their office; with them we discussed the project direction: the idea of focusing on the areas of the city that need the most attention and that can help the Mexican community was welcomed, and we had extreme freedom of action.
In fact, Carlos greatly appreciates the work and perspective of young designers, and we deeply thank him for the trust and affection shown to us.

Carlos introduced us to **Elena Pacenti**, professor of Design at NewSchool of Architecture and Design, a woman with an extraordinary and engaging personality who guided us through her university to meet other architects and designers working in the San Diego area such as **Mike Cintron**, our friend and spirit guide in this adventure, an architect at Domus Studio and a fifth-year architecture graduate student working on the Casa Familiar project (of which one of the leaders is **Goyo Ortiz,** whom we met and interviewed).
We met professor emeritus of architecture **Michael Stepner** (NewSchool) who in turn introduced us to architect **Xiomara Ibarcena Laj,** a graduate student with a project on San Ysidro that involves a tactical urbanism strategy that revolves around designing a women's shelter. We also got in touch with fourth-year NewSchool design students and attended their classes for the "Street Forniture" workshop, where we met **Shawn Sistrunk** and discussed his project with him.

We also met other personalities such as **Ginger Martinsen**, an artist who works on City Imaging in Encinidas and who included us in her project "2222: how our lifes will be?" and many people such as artist Anastasya Korol, our roommates **Michael** and **Will**, designer **Fabiola**

**Dominguez,** architect **Aaron Cote** and others who accompanied us to discover the city and its hidden wonders that only a citizen can know. All of their testimonies were instrumental in helping us have a memorable experience and define a rich and full-bodied Field Analysis.
In order to facilitate the reading of the project, we decided **not to report in this chapter the full Desk Analysis on the two cities San Diego-Tijuana**, since the WDC's requests dwell on the implementation and presentation of concepts and project ideasfor the region
The Analysis Desk, in fact, was quite useful for us to investigate a region previously unknown to us. In addition, prior to our departure, we were provided by Carlos and Miranda the "**Bid Document**", a documentation detailing SD-TJ with a focus on the region's challenges that are proposed to designers, including the one in which we are going to graft our project (Reimaging the border).
Therefore, the holistic work of gathering data and information on the area is pleonastic for the WDC itself, which is already aware of many dynamics, problems, and information about the area; for this reason, we decided to carry out the Desk Analysis but to **enclose it in an appendix;** however, it was essential for the drafting of a "**Cross border" Holistic Diagnosis**, a next step that made it possible to merge and connect certain elements of the Desk Analysis on the two cities (which, in addition to being two territories separated by a physical border, are extremely different quantitatively and qualitatively, being two diametrically different worlds).

Finally, we decided to give ample space to the **Field Analysis** (moreover, a part of it was also included in the previous chapters: in fact, our experience in San Diego reinforced or smoothed out some of the awareness acquired before our departure during the systemic study of the system-city carried out for the writing of the previous chapters).
In fact, as Carlos explained to us, it would have been in his interest to discover and investigate the city from **new perspectives**, under the lens of two young and European female students, in order to broaden his own view of the city.
Field Analysis in fact proved to be an essential tool for our work: following Jane Jacobs' philosophy, we walked around the city and investigated it according to a "city-walker perspective at street level" (Chapter 3), thus carrying out a (very long) series of "**Jane's Walks**" that gave us a way to savor the atmosphere of each neighborhood (which, as we have already explained in Chapter 4 and will continue to address in the previous chapters, is extremely different and detailed for each of them), **align our interiority with that of the community** that lives this territory on a daily basis, and **empathically connect with them.**

In fact, as we have extensively recounted in the previous chapters, these steps proved to be fundamental to being able to carry out an effective bottom-up project for "**turning spaces into meaningful places**".
As described especially in Chapter 4, we intend to propose a project that takes into account the social behavior of residents by analyzing



the events, activities, andmixed-uses they make of their urban spaces *(Jacobs, 1961)*; we also captured the self-narratives that the city performs *(Johnston-Zimmerman, 2022)* by identifying the level of social cohesion that hovers in the community through direct interviews, directly asking people whether or not they would be willing to embrace a Systemic Placemaking and Smart decline project *(Popper&Popper, 2002)* that could revitalize places in their neighborhood.
The project focus area we chose is **San Ysidro**, a San Diego neighborhood on the border with Mexico that is home to a majority of people who are Mexican or of Mexican descent: we got to know many of them and understood how **their spirits are marked by a great open-mindedness and a deep attachment to life and its beauty**; they are simple, good, hospitable and welcoming people who believe intimately in the strength of human bonds, desire to create and forge their own place in the world and seek to make room for themselves with respect and delicacyin a world that, unfortunately, tends to oppress them, exclude them and **relegate them to labeled areas** such as San Ysidro and Barrio Logan, another San Diego neighborhood with a Mexican ethnic majority or Chinano.
Despite this, **they do not feel resentment** for this condition: in this regard, we want to report the sweet words of Maria Isabela and Avi, a woman and a man of Mexican descent who have lived in San Ysidro for decades (they do not know each other, but as fate would have it, they told us exactly the same words, which we try to report thus):
*"I believe that in the world there is good and evil; I do my best, if someone does evil, I can't do anything about it. it's life, and I respect that too."*

These people, along with many others we met and interviewed in San Ysidro whom we will talk about in the next paragraphs (Ugo, Jacqueline, Randy, Tony, Marco Antonio, Hugo, Maria) **warmed our hearts with their optimism, enthusiasm, and gentleness**; we got to know the soul of a community broken by a physical border, but strong and determined to build **a bridge between the two cities** and the two communities that live in them.
From our point of view and from the demonstrations they offered us, the people of San Ysidro are people who are ready to take any external input and stimulus such as to give purpose to their environment and spaces, especially if they are given room to let their **historical and cultural identity** live and survive in order to preserve and integrate it with the younger American one.
Our project therefore aims to initiate a Systemic Placemaking project that can give them the opportunity to convert a simple urban space in San Ysidro into a place that they, over time, can begin to appreciate and consider meaningful because, by **recovering fragments of human habitat** *(Friedmann, 2010),* it can offer them meaningful experiences that they themselves can conduct in collaboration with their neighbors, creating a "primary space of social reproduction" that can offer itself as an "event," an "unstable stage for social performance" *(Cresswell, 2004)* to be experienced, reiterated, broken down and recomposed

such that a possible new future for the community is created.
The latter, in fact, by setting up its living spaces according to its desires and needs, contributes to respecting and caring for it as it feels legitimized to manage and protect it *(Collin, 2019)*.
A meaningful place, in fact, "tacitly allows for encounters, centering, and connection between people" *(Feuchtwang, 2004)* and can be considered a "sacred place" *(Hester, 2006)* by residents if **it gives voice to** and **communicates their interiority.**

To conclude, we would like to emphasize the concept behind our project on which we also based the entire Chapter 4 of our thesis: "**feel at home**." This is also one of the key concepts proposed by the WDC for defining a new design horizon for the SD-TJ region. In fact, in our project, we have tried to pour as much as possible of the knowledge gained in the course of our study into the urban system so that it is possible to offer people a meaningful place that they can consider "home."

The following paragraphs will propose a Holistic Diagnosis Crossborder of the region, Field Analysis of the San Diego Placemaking projects, and Field and Desk Analysis on the San Ysidro area; from their collection we will derive a Systemic Challenges and Opportunities map in whose framework our **Systemic Placemaking project** proposal will be placed, accompanied by the analysis of systemic future Outcomes and Impacts.
Thus, below we provide a very brief overview of the two cities at the Desk Analysis level, which, for readers unfamiliar with them, can be explored further in the Appendices (San Diego) and 2 (Tijuana).
**San Diego** hosts numerous festivals and cultural events throughout the year, is a city with a strong economy and great cultural diversity, with many tourist attractions and a rich natural environment. The city is well served by public transportation and has a strategic location on the southwest coast of California.

- **Geographical features**
San Diego is located on the southwest coast of California and covers an area of about 372 square miles. The city has a Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters. The city of San Diego has rich biodiversity and several natural parks, including Torrey Pines State Reserve and Mission Trails Regional Park. *(City Profile San Diego, 2022)*

- **Demographic characteristics**
The population of San Diego is about 1.4 million, making it the second largest city in California after Los Angeles. The city has a diverse ethnic composition, with the majority of the population being white, followed by Hispanics, Asians, and African Americans. *(City Profile San Diego, 2022)*

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- **Economic characteristics**
San Diego has a diversified economy, with a strong presence of industries such as biotechnology, defense, information technology, and tourism. San Diego is a popular tourist destination due to its coastal location and numerous attractions such as San Diego Zoo, Balboa Park, La Jolla Beach, SeaWorld.

- **Socio-cultural characteristics**
San Diego is a ethnically diverse city, with a wide variety of cultural groups represented in its population; given its proximity to Mexico, there is a high prevalence of Hispanics. San Diego has strong socioeconomic disparities: while some areas of the city are affluent and offer a high quality of life, other areas face economic and social challenges, with a higher incidence of poverty and limited access to services and opportunities.

For more about this Desk Analysis, you can refer to the *Appendix 1.*



*Drone photography of the city of San Diego.*

**Tijuana** is a city of strategic importance located in the northwestern part of Mexico, near the border with the United States. It represents an important commercial and cultural crossroads between the two nations, with a dynamic economy and a young, multicultural population. However, it also presents a number of social and security problems that pose great challenges for the city.

- **Geographical features**
Tijuana is located in the northern region of Mexico, along the Pacific Ocean coast, about 200 km south of Los Angeles in the United States (INEGI, 2020). The city covers an area of about 1800 km² and is located at an average elevation of 70 meters above sea level (INEGI, 2020). Tijuana's territory is characterized by varied topography, including hills, mountains, and valleys. The city is also crossed by the Tijuana River, which is an important source of water for the region.

- **Demographic characteristics**
According to 2020 INEGI data, Tijuana's population is about 1.8 million, making it the fifth most populous city in Mexico. Most of Tijuana's residents are ethnic Mexicans, but the city is also home to a large number of immigrants from other countries, particularly the United States. Tijuana is a young city, with a younger average population than the national average. In addition, the city has a relatively high population growth rate

- **Economic characteristics**
Tijuana is a highly industrialized city and is an important manufacturing center in Mexico. The city is home to numerous factories, especially in the electronics, textile, and food sectors (INEGI, 2020). Tijuana is also an important tourist center due to its prime geographic location and proximity to the U.S. city of San Diego. Tourism is a key sector of Tijuana's economy, attracting visitors from all over the world.

- **Socio-cultural characteristics**
Tijuana is a multicultural and cosmopolitan city where different ethnicities and cultures coexist. However, the city is also characterized by a number of social problems, including poverty, unemployment, and crime. According to data from the Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (2020), Tijuana is one of the Mexican cities with the highest crime rate, especially violent crimes such as murder.

For more about this Desk Analysis, you can refer to the *Appendix 2.*



*Drone photography of the city of Tijuana.*

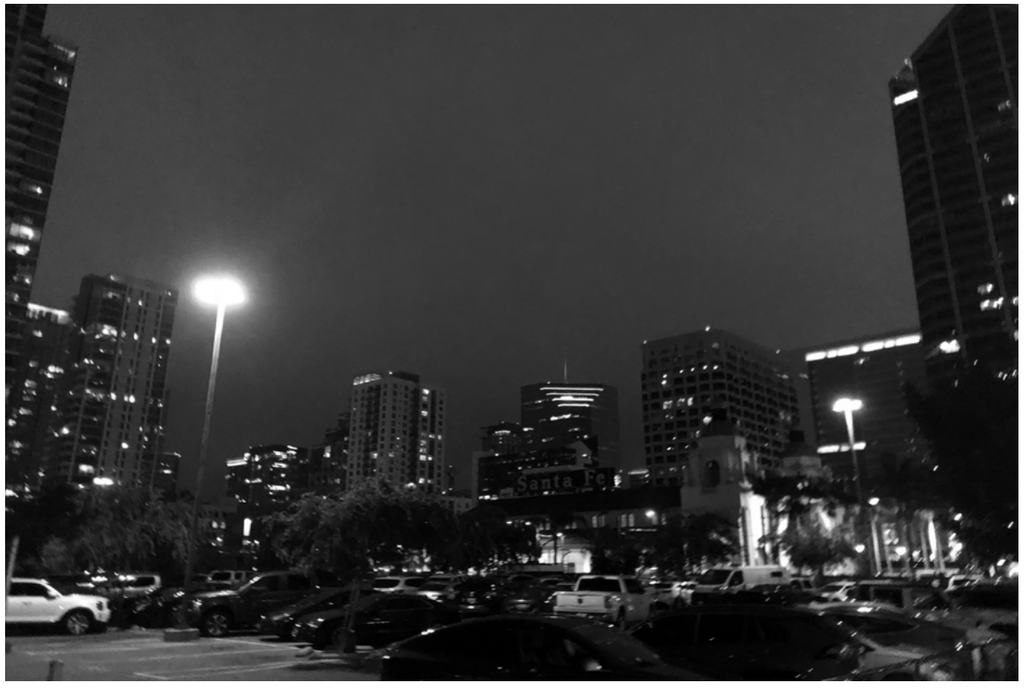
# 9.2 **Placemaking in San Diego: a Field Analysis**

This section condenses the main insights gathered through Field Analysis in the city of San Diego during our international mobility period. Following the ideas, principles and methodologies dissected in the previous chapters, the narrative of our "**Jane's walks**" through the streets of the city is proposed, which helped us to grasp the **serendipitous stimuli** offered by the place, savor its heterogeneity of atmospheres and grasp perceptions significant for the systemic study of its neighborhoods.

We also want to underline that **the whole Field Analysis is not included in this chapter**: in fact, we have used some experiences to emphasize new understandings of the founding concepts of City Imaging (as in *Chapter 4*), or to reinforce the holistic analysis carried out at the regional level (*Appendices 1 and 2*), of the cross-border area (*Chapter 9.3*), and especially for the analysis of the neighborhood chosen for the implementation of Systemic Placemaking (*Chapter 9.4*
In this section, therefore, we will focus on reporting a part of our **experience and perception of San Diego neighborhoods and Placemaking case studies** collected in different area of the metropolis.

Differently from North Park (which was discussed in *Chapter 4*), the center of the metropolis **Downtown** is characterized by a diametrically opposite landscape, marked by the presence of numerous offices, services, bars and restaurants agglomerated in huge skyscrapers that rise skyward. The streets, crowded day and night, are home to many homeless people who make do with tents and wide blackout drapes. The perception of insecurity is palpable in some areas (e.g., at bridges or the entrances to the many highways) while in others hovers the frenetic work mood typical of the downtown of a major metropolis. In Downtown, the architecture communicates more outward closure, and we did not find examples of "artistic mindshare" instead frequent in the North Park area. Our friend Mike introduced in the previous paragraph lives in a rented house in Downtown and confirmed the veracity of our perceptions of the area. However, the neighborhood is very crowded and dense with life at all hours of the day; during the day, the streets are very busy and in the evenings, especially on weekends, young people flock to the **Gaslamp** area in Downtown.




*Spots from Downtown (San Diego) in day and night.*

*Pictures took by us during our international mobility period.*

Our friend Mike told us about how, in recent decades, Downtown has undergone a lot of redevelopment, including Placemaking. As we walked together through the streets of the neighborhood, he showed us and described some concrete examples that, however, appear somewhat forced and disconnected from the surrounding context.
For example, **a linear park was created near Wheel Works and Broom Works building**, specifically on 14th Street between G Street and Market Street. The concept was to create a walkable space celebrating the former industrial reality of the place: thus, the fence was exploited to narrate the past through historical photographs, which, however, are hardly visible (they are placed too low to the human view and are not accompanied by any descriptive sign or plaque; therefore, it is not clear what they represent and sometimes go unnoticed). In addition, the park has not been completed and comes across as a fragmented and unhelpful pedestrian island, since it stands next to a sidewalk; in fact, passersby prefer to walk on that, partly because it is better connected with adjacent intersections and is more accessible (the park's pavement alternates rammed earth with urban paving and elevations). The park showcases some mechanical artifacts used in industrial infrastructure, but they too are disconnected from the context and have few or no descriptive plaques, so they are decontextualized.
Further example of Placemaking that our friend Mike told us about is located in front of the architecture, design and urban planning firm "AVRP Studios" at 703 16th street. Built on a parklet-like structure, it consists of a **community table** designed to accommodate residents and passersby; the concept is to be able to use a shared outdoor public space to relax, eat or work together, "reinventing" Downtown parklets. It was **created for the international event "Parkl(ing) Day,**" which invites planners to transform public spaces into temporary parklets.

*On the bottom: Project created for the international event "Parkl(ing) Day", in Downtown, San Diego.*

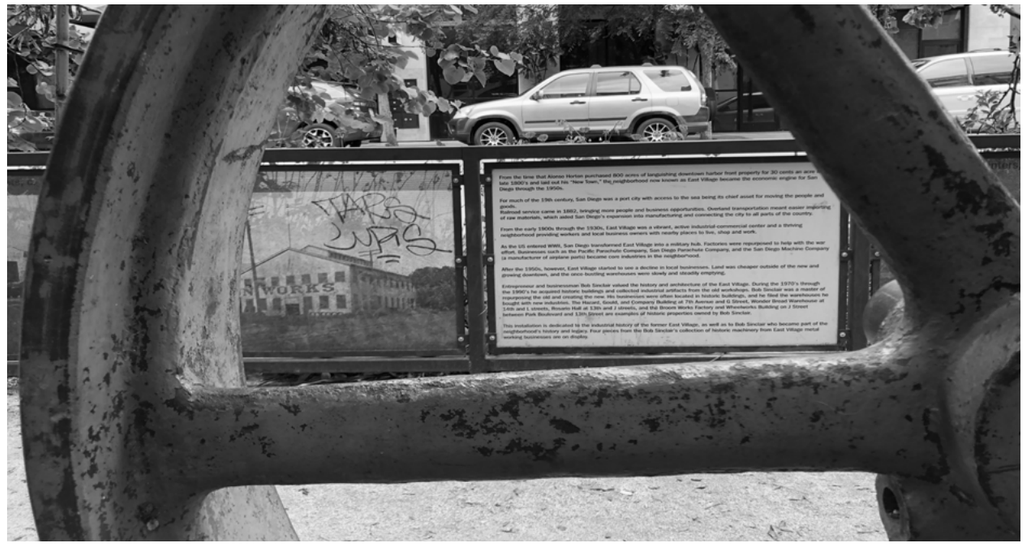
*On the right: Linear park by AVRP Studio in Downtown, San Diego.*

*Pictures took by us during our international mobility period.*





However, this example of placemaking is alsodisconnected from the context and is lacking in communication (its presence and function are neither made explicit nor signaled; passersby may think it is a private structure, thus not accessible). In addition, it has grooves in the central part evidently designed to accommodate plants, but at the time they were bare and barren compartments; this condition increases the perception of abandonment of the parklet, risking encouraging the risk of vandalism (see *Chapter 3* for more details). Finally, it has no seating stations, so its modes of use are somewhat confusing.






The Field Analysis we conducted in San Diego allowed us to investigate the local reality and appreciate the consistent efforts made by local artists and nonprofit organizations to the beautification of the city and in the creation of singular and iconic artworks.
The case study of Placemaking "**Quartyard**" is a concrete example of Placemaking initiated in 2014 implemented to transform an empty space into a community gathering place. Quartyard played an important role in transforming the area in which it is located by providing a safe and welcoming place for the local community. The site has been used to host concerts, festivals, markets, art exhibitions and many other cultural events, attracting a diverse audience and providing employment opportunities for local artists and small businesses.
It is an example of **Tactical urbanism** created by some students who set out to create apublic space for young people using low-cost and sustainable materials. In fact, the founders came up with this project after conducting an analysis of the city of San Diego (which revealed a lack of public and social gathering areas for young people). Initially conceived as a temporary project, thanks to community support and successful crowdfunding, Quartyard has been transformed into a permanent public space; in fact, it consists of a large stage, a bar (facing both inside the space and the street outside), bar tables and chairs, identifying reuse containers, and a large, extremely colorful mural that stands out in the city landscape. An outside observer is thus drawn to the **multifacetedness of the place** and invited to enter, since Quartyard effectively communicates its week plansat the entrance
During the daytime it turns out to be a calmer and quieter space, while in the evening and especially when it hosts events and activities Quartyard turns out to be a space packed with people and vibrant with life.



*Quartyard, a Placemaking project realized in Downtown., San Diego. Pictures took by us during our international mobility period.*






Another example is the **Mural Walks** created by "Ladies Who Paint," a collective of women artists in San Diego who are dedicated to creating murals to enhance the beauty of urban art and promote the message of inclusion and diversity. Their project called "Mural Walk" involves creating murals in different areas of the city, each of which tells a unique and meaningful story. Ladies Who Paint often collaborates with local communities and nonprofit organizations to create murals that veil important values and messages. Our friend Mike explained that the collective **funds local artists and promotes their visibility by raising funds through sponsorships**. In addition to creating murals, the collective also offers workshops to teach urban art techniques to women of all ages.
Finally, Mike explained to us that the two immense high-rise buildings characterized by red and yellow details (which locals call "Ketchup" and "Mustard" for obvious reasons) and housing apartments of private individuals take care of the "**Fault Line Park**," a small public space featuring aesthetic street furniture such as large shiny metal balls and manicured lawn beds. Although it is managed by the apartment building, Mike explained to us, it is a good example of placemaking since it provides the entire community with a public outdoor space.
Overall, Downtown turns out to be an extremely diverse neighborhood; local government and **Downtown community planners** also turn out to be sensitive to placemaking issues and convinced of the effectiveness of the approach, as also evidenced by the numerous examples on the web such as the Downtown Community Plan, the "*Downtown Placemaking action plan + implementation strategy*" report (both downloadable from the City of San Diego government website) and "*Placemaking Blueprint*" report produced by the *Downtown San Diego Partnership Placemaking Committee*. These documents provide a detailed analysis of the neighborhood, offering guidelines and solutions for sustainably advancing Downtownenumerating within it urban strategies and placemaking models for practical implementation.
Numerous websites also tell and explain the usefulness of placemaking for the city, communicating to the public the validity of the bottom-up approach through photos, videos, and interactive descriptions An example *aredowntownsandiego.org, downtowncorridorslincoln.com, and pps.org* in the "Downtown" category.
Finally, the **report "A Place for Placemaking in San Diego**" concretizes a further demonstration of the visceral importance of the issue for the city of San Diego. The report is introduced with these words:

*Mural Walks in Downtown (San Diego) by Ladies Who Painting.*

*Picture took by us during our international mobility period.*




"BOTH IN SAN DIEGO AND AROUND THE COUNTRY, THERE ARE SIGNS THAT **LEVERAGING THE POWER OF ARTS AND CULTURE** INTO TRADITIONAL PLANNING PROCESS CAN **IMPROVE NEIGHBORHOODS** WHILE **BETTER SERVING COMMUNITY INTEREST**. THIS CONVERGENCE OF INTEREST HAS CREATED A FIELD CALLED "**CREATIVE PLACEMAKING**." THE MOVEMENT IS GROWING RAPIDLY IN PART BECAUSE **CITIES AROUND U.S.** ARE LOOKING FOR **TOOLS TO REDEVELOP COMMUNITIES** IN WAYS THAT NOT ONLY INCREASE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BUT ALSO **BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL** AMONG RESIDENTS."

*- "A Place for Placemaking in San Diego" by Circulate San Diego*

The report outlines the most **successful Placemaking case studies implemented in the metropolis**, highlighting the challenges they have faced through recommendations and advice based on the best practices collected. It also provides examples of Placemaking implemented in the neighboring metropolises of Los Angeles and San Francisco, which, according to their guidelines, tend to convert spaces into "**parklets**" and "**plazas**" (meaning a European "square"; in fact, the concept of "plaza" does not belong to the American community, which therefore emulated the idea of a public space for city gathering by coining the term "plaza"). The parklet, on the other hand, is an expansion of the sidewalk to which a new use function is provided, such as a public space for sitting at a community table (as in the Placemaking example above) or, especially in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, to extend the available space of bars and restaurants that wish to welcome their customers outside.

During our time in San Diego and Los Angeles we found many such examples of parklets and plazas, especially in the Little Italy neighborhood. Both are two ways of conducting Placemaking in the city, as also reported in *Chapter 6* of the case study thesis.
So, during our Field Analysis, we also visited **Little Italy** under the guidance of our friend Mike. Unlike Downtown, this neighborhood is vibrant with life and denotes an overall perception of safety and good management of space and services. Little Italy, as sealed by its very name, is a neighborhood that historically housed Italian families who emigrated to America and, since the 1920s, worked hard to bring wealth to the city through fishing and tuna processing. Over the decades (and particularly after the "90s) the neighborhood has experienced the flourishing of business and artistic communitiesthat have told the story of Little Italy through public art exhibits and the creation of evocative "Plazas
We visited the neighborhood during the early afternoon hours into the late evening, enjoying an excellent dinner at a Parklet of one of the many Italian restaurants in the neighborhood streets. The place is teeming with life, people wandering around and stopping to eat outside under the evocative lights of the many light chains that wrap around the spaces; street performers try their hand at playing instruments of all kinds lightening the atmosphere with festive music; the cheerful chatter of people of all ages mingle in a pleasant cacophony that is very reminiscent of the climate of an Italian seaside town during summer weekends.
The centerpiece of Little Italy is the large "**Piazza della Famiglia**", at the entrance of which an elegant plaque describing its history has been placed. Mike explained that an experiment was carried out to close the street to traffic and let passersby enjoy a large public meeting space, exactly following the Italian "piazza" concept. The experiment, which was successful, permanently converted the street into a real public square. In the rest of the neighborhood, there are several spots that creativelyreinterpret the concept of the piazza by evoking the Italian style through elements such as fountains, statues and artistic representations (for example, of Italian Renaissance matrix) or sometimes through recurring symbolism such as that of the fish: this evoking the ancient use of the neighborhood that welcomed immigrant fishermen from Italy.






*Little Italy, "Piazza della Famiglia" in day and night in San Diego.*

*Pictures took by us during our international mobility period.*







*On the left: Parklet in Little Italy and musicians that are about to perform in the Plaza.*

*On the right: a Plaza with fountain in Little Italy.*

*Pictures took by us during our international mobility period.*

A totally different scenario presents itself a short distance from the pleasant festivity of Little Italy: having passed East Village, we come to a radical change of atmosphere in the **Barrio Logan** neighborhood where, since 1910, it has seen a large influx of refugees following the Mexican Revolution, hence the transformation of the neighborhood's original name (from Logan Heights it was called Barrio Logan: "barrio" is a Spanish word for neighborhood); as we explained in *Chapter 4* about the art exhibition held at The Front in San Ysidro (where one of the artists explained her art pieces by explaining her history as a "Chicano"), this neighborhood is **home to the Mexican-American community**, which has shaped the environment in such a way as to preserve its cultural identity and has found a symbol of resistance and pride in the famous Chicano Park. The park houses one of the largest collections of Chicano murals in the world, painted by local and international artists reflecting their history and culture; these artworks depict historical figures, cultural symbols, significant events, and political messages.

We were tremendously fascinated by this place, from which the struggles and aspirations of the Chicano community quiver and can be felt In addition, we walked the streets of the neighborhood entering the various local craft stores, thrift stores, bookstores, and other very unique businesses. is a lively neighborhood, strongly characterized by an artistic vein and rich in history, but also torn by pain and poverty: we noticed that the houses were somewhat dilapidated, a bit arranged; the atmosphere there is a bit tense (but maybe because we went there alone), but at the same time you can sense the power of a community trying to create its own place in the world outside its borders.

**Chicano Park** is a very peculiar example of placemaking: it is a place of vindication and subversion: in fact, we investigated on the internet that it was founded in 1970, when the Chicano community of Barrio Logan organized a protest to block the construction of a proposed police station on the land that was originally promised as a park; the protest led to the creation of Chicano Park as a symbol of Chicano community resistance and unity. artworks provide a vehicle for storytelling and education, helping to preserve Chicano memory and culture, but it is also an important cultural and community center where events, festivals, and concerts are celebrated to celebrate Chicano culture and engage other visitors. Chicano Park is thus more than a "space," **it is a "meaningful places" that represents a meeting point and celebration of a torn, but strong and living community.**





*Barrio Logan, in San Diego.*

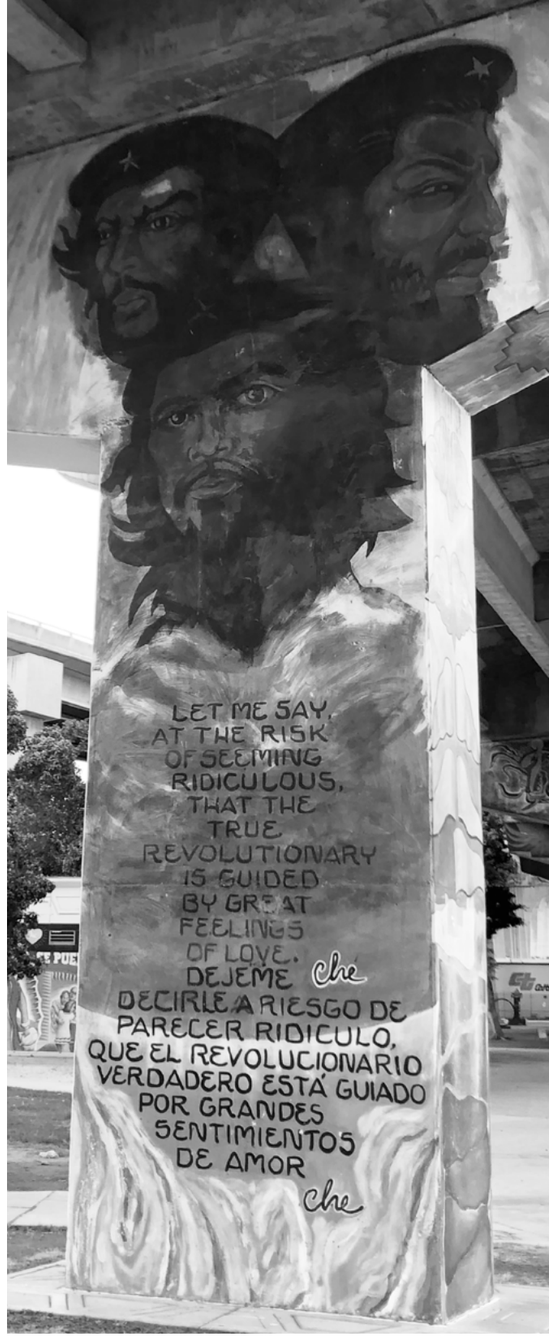
*Pictures took by us during our international mobility period.*





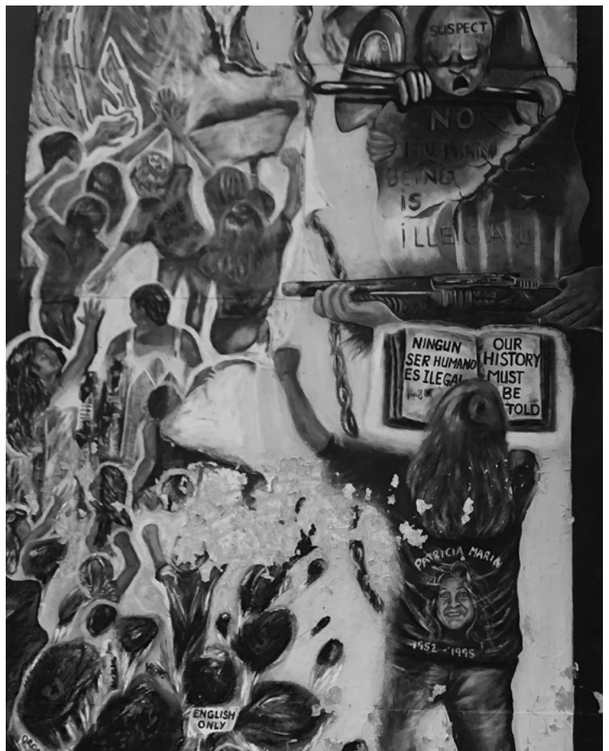
















*Chicano Park in Barrio Logan (San Diego).*

*Pictures took by us during our international mobility period.*

We also went to **National City** neighborhood famous for its examples of historic architecture dating back to the colonial years around the 19th century. In this case, Placemaking is aimed at **preserving the historic legacy** of the neighborhood. We went to this area during **San Diego's Open Houses** event during which the owners opened their large historic mansions to the public and recounted their evolution over time.
This peculiarity amazed us because, coming from an ancient and culturally rich country like Italy, we realized how much we undervalue our heritage, and howmore thoughtful the Americans are in protecting their young heritage. As Italians, we feel the need to express our disappointment about the way we treat and devalue our land: we have flashes of history and culture in every corner of every city, but we persist in trampling it and disregarding it out of ignorance or convenience (see *Chapter 3*). We should learn the lesson from the Americans and value our heritage more.

Another example of Placemaking based on the historical and cultural heritage of the place is definitely **Old Town**, a charming historic district with a strong Mexican historical and cultural influence. Through its architecture, museums and cultural activities, it offers visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in the past and discover San Diego's roots; in fact, it was the old "downtown" of San Diego, and was the first permanent European settlement in the region (it was founded in 1769).
We have visited there several times, and particularly on weekends it teems with busy people and tourists looking for souvenirs or waiting for their juicy serving of tacos. The streets are lined with historic buildings (dotted with plaques explaining and telling their history) such as Casa de Estudillo, Casa de Machado y Stewart, and Casa de Bandini, which have been restored to represent the look and feel of the era.
The historic atmosphere is evocative and picturesque, although it is perceived to be an "artifact" area aimed at attracting visitors; we have also found this aspect in Los Angeles in many areas predisposed to consumerism.

Finally, among the examples of Placemaking we studied in San Diego we also want to include those found in **San Ysidro**, which however will be explained in detail in *Chapter 9.4*, enriching our Field Analysis with interviews with the local community.

*Historic Brick Rown in National City. Homes constructed by Frank Kimball in 1887 at 909 A Avenue.*

*Picture took by us during our international mobility period.*

We also went in **Hillcrest** together with our Italian friends and a NewSchool girl we met in college, Fabiola,who told us how this vibrant neighborhood is one of the main LGBTQ+ areas in the city. It has a progressive, dynamic and inclusive atmosphere, offers many stores, bars and nightclubs, and the people are extremely friendly and welcoming.
We also visited **Coronado** and its famous and luxurious Hotel del Coronado, which we visited during the city's Open Houses; the atmosphere is particularly quiet and peaceful, and the area is dotted with many well-kept cottages. We were amazed by the many American flags towering over each cottage: this area, as our host Michael and his friend who accompanied us explained, Coronado is home to a community made up of many military veterans; in fact, there are many military bases and related services in the area.

We have also been to many popular tourist spots such as **La Jolla** (visiting the famous Cove which is home to a vast marine biodiversity including seals and sea lions) **Balboa Park, Black Beach, Kate Session Park, Torrey Pines** and more, plus we went on two hiking trips with our friends, one at **Laguna Mountains** and the other among the **Mira Mesa** Falls. We also stayed at the *WOW! Festival*, admiring the huge stage "The Rady Shell" in Jacobs Park.
The additional stops, as we explained at the beginning, are explained scattered in other chapters of this thesis.

*On the bottom: Laguna Mountains.*

*On the right (top): Black Beach .*

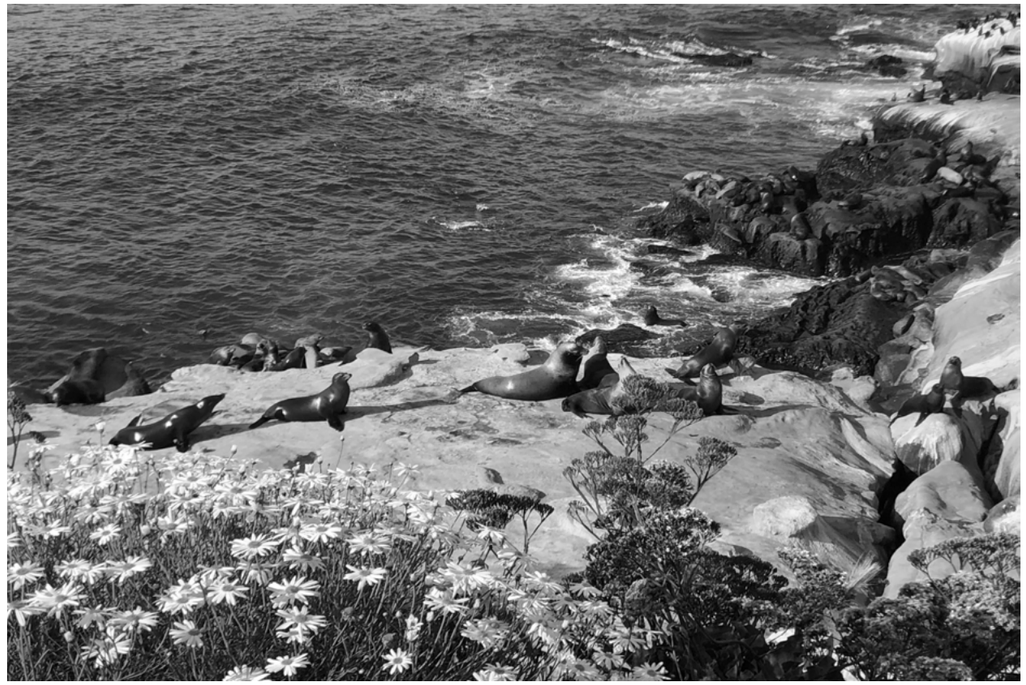
*On the right (bottom): La Jolla Cove*

*Pictures took by us during our international mobility period.*









Finally, we would like to talk about **Encinitas**, which we reached via the scenic Coaster, a train that runs through the city following the coast, therefore offering spectacular views overlooking the ocean. So we stayed at the **Self-Realization Fellowship meditation garden** with **Ginger** (artist from San Diego introduced in the previous subchapter) who invited us to have a very interesting meditative break with her; we meditated following her instructions, that is, reflecting on some of the concepts she is studying to realize her project "*2222: how our life will be?*". This project is in line with the ideas of **City Imaging** that we proposed in *Chapter 4* of the thesis. The meditation garden is very relaxing; it sits on a beautiful promontory over the ocean and is surrounded by nature (it is a multi-tiered garden, and is home to a vast array of plants and animals such as the fascinating Koi carp). Ginger introduced us to some of her friends who run a store near the garden, who explained that it was created in the 1920s by the famous Indian yogi Paramahansa Yogananda, in their words "the father of yoga" in the US. In addition, Ginger took us to **Moonlight State Beach**, where we noticed a strong community dynamism: in fact, there were many people intent on dancing and group sports, stretching or just relaxing together on the beach or in the bars. Ginger also showed us some murals of marine ecosystem activism that were part of the "**Surfing Madonna**" project, mosaics created by artist Mark Patterson.
As these various examples demonstrate, **Placemaking is a growing**



*On the left: Meditation Garden in Encinitas (San Diego). Artist Ginger Martinsen were working on the project "2222" with us.*

*From the right: "Surfing Madonna" mosaic project by artist Mark Patterson in Encinitas.*

*Moonlight State Beach in Encinitas.*

*Pictures took by us during our international mobility period.*






**movement** that stirs the quiescence of many areas of San Diego; this bottom-up approach allows the uniqueness of each neighborhood to be enhanced by ***"turning Spaces into Places"*** (to use the words adopted for the title of Chapter 4 of this thesis), creating public places that are well designed to accommodate the community and its changes over time. In the goals of the city's General Plan, in fact, the idea of characterizing each neighborhood by means of a distinctive feature that can give value to the peculiarities and attractiveness of the places that constitute them, improving the usability of the spaces themselves, is set forth.
However, as narrated in the course of this Field Analysis subchapter (which, again, let us recall, reports only a partial analysis; in the other chapters of this thesis we have scattered other findings that were useful to reinforce certain concepts of theory or analysis of the San Diego-Tijuana binational region), **some neighborhoods are much more advantaged than others: this should not be seen as a weakness of the region, but an opportunity to be seize** to revitalize otherwise barren spaces or to provide a meaningful place for an energetic and dynamic community that is quivering with the need to dispose of them thesis project that we will propose intends to respond to the brief offered by the World Design Capital, that is, to propose solutions for the "Reimaging the border" challenge to stimulate the birth and creation **place that can be meaningful to a community and can give value to the intrinsicity of the project area chosen** to initiate the Placemaking intervention.
For this reason, as introduced in the previous subchapter, we have chosen to focus on the San Ysidro neighborhood, whose Field Analysis unravels between that proposed in the next subchapter (focused on the Crossborder area) and unfolds extensively in *subchapter 9.4,* totally dedicated to its systemic investigation.

# 9.3 Cross-border analysis

## *9.3.1 The border: barrier or connector?*

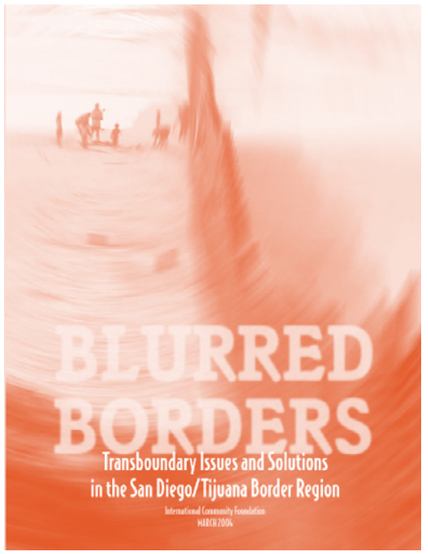
The "***Blurred Borders"*** report, edited by Professor Naoko Kada and Riccardo Kyi for International Community Foundation (ICF) in 2004, proved to be an essential document for understanding, investigating and analyzing the **San Diego-TIjuana binational region**, selecting data based on the research previously exposed in the overviews of the individual cities. Through an essentially **holistic and multidisciplinary approach** to the territory, the report dissects its components providing an extremely multifaceted and interesting framework; its analysis, enriched by further insights, interviews and external research whose source will be made explicit throughout the paragraphs, offers fertile ground for the identification of Systemic Challenges and Opportunities, essential for the implementation of the Systemic Placemaking project proposed by this thesis.

Although almost twenty years have passed since its publication, it has been our care to **study, report and actualize the data** set forth in the report. "Blurred Borders" is a noteworthy, full-bodied, and carefully detailed document: it was underwritten by the Rockefeller Foundation and the California Endowment, and numerous editors and professors from many universities and research centers in the United States, Mexico, and other countries around the world. In the following paragraphs, our own reworking and actualization of his arguments will be proposed, incorporating both the "Executive Summary" version of the report and its extended version.
In particular, we focused on aspects related to the border between the nations, the nature of the relationship between the two international communities, residents' perceptions about it, and the impact the border generates in their lives.
In addition, the bibliographies "***El Tercer Paìs*** - San Diego & Tijuana - Two Countries, Two Cities, One Community" by Michael S. Malone from 2020 of which we were kindly offered a copy by Carlos de la Mora (CEO of the World Design Capital San Diego-Tijuana 2024) and the masterpiece "***Temporary Paradise?"*** a bibliography suggested to us by both Carlos de la Mora and Michael Stepner, professor emeritus of architecture at NewSchool of Architecture and Design, also proved to be of paramount importance.

*On the right (bottom): Book cover of "El Tercer Paìs" by Malone M.S. (2020)*

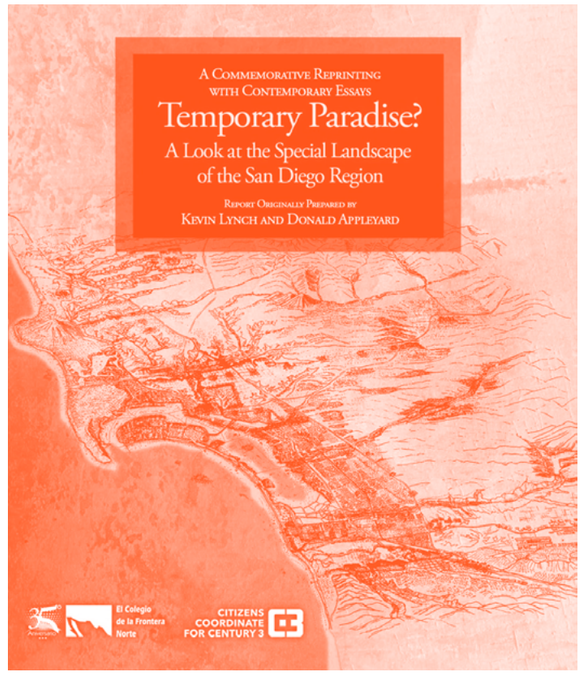


Over the years, the border between San Diego County and the city of Tijuana has **divided people on a wide range of issues**, including language, culture, national and public safety, and other cross-border issues. In fact, especially in the aftermath of the tragedy of Sept. 11, 2001, the **"us against them" mentality**, particularly on the part of the U.S. metropolis, has sharpened sharply, focusing on national security enforcement and the need to revise immigration policy to strengthen the international border.
However, the effect of globalization and migration has increasingly **blurred the border** between San Diego County and Tijuana.










*On the top: Book cover of "Blurred Borders: Transboundary Impacts and Solutions in the San Diego-Tijuana" Region. Edited by Kada, N., Kyi, R (2004)*

*Book cover of "Temporary Paradise?" by Appleyard, D., Lynch, K. (1974)*

The border area between San Diego and Tijuana accommodates **growing interconnections** between the two communities and a willingness on the part of residents to strengthen existing relationships and proactively create new ones.
In fact, the twinned region is connected by a series of **economic, cultural and social ties** that have increased job creation and thus generated greater economic opportunities for both communities; these interdependencies are not limited to trade, tourism and recreation, but also extend to the areas of health, human services, education, environment, arts and culture.
Despite shared public sentiments, few collaborative programs exist in the areas of education, economic development/job creation, and management of common cross-border health problems; to strengthen these ties, the 2004 report argued that greater cross-border civic participation by the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, as well as more investment, was needed.
However, almost two decades later, the situation has not changed much: for this reason, among the priorities of **World Design Capital 2024** is the need to highlight the uniqueness and distinctiveness that distinguishes the region (especially compared to the cities designated as World Design Capital in previous editions), namely its **binational character**. The goal is to **convert the mindset** regarding the border between the two cities, transforming and innovating the perception of fragmentation that currently identifies it. The border constitutes, therefore, one of the protagonists of the revitalization of the territory, offering the opportunity for designers and creators to initiate cross-border collaborations and try their hand at the Challenge "**Reimagining the border**," covered in the Bid Document of WDC2024.

*"Home", the main theme of World Design Capital 2024 San Diego-Tijuana.*






The *Blurred Borders* report reports on the analysis of the commonalities and challenges that San Diego and Tijuana share being the largest binational metropolitan area in North America. As it argues within its pages, **the border influences the lives of the communities living nearby;** therefore, the report investigates how to meet the growing needs of both metropolises, highlighting on the one hand the importance of the border and on the other hand highlighting the many shared interests among residents of both communities.
In fact, updating these statements, the 2021 Regional Plan made by SANDAG argues that the history of the San Diego region is intrinsically tied to its shared border with Mexico and the close relationship between the metropolitan areas of San Diego and Tijuana.

Cross-border interactions have played a crucial role in various aspects of life, including personal connections, economic activities, cultural exchange, and educational opportunities. The strong bonds between individuals on both sides of the border have been nurtured by **historical, familial, cultural, linguistic, culinary, and educational affinities.**
These connections have been further strengthened by the **economic**




*The living legacy of California's first permanent settlement at Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, San Diego's first "downtown." Old Town represents San Diego's Hispanic heritage. Source: San Diego website*

**interdependence** that exists between the regions. Today, Mexico stands as California's primary trading partner (USA accounts for 93.8% of the Tijuana's trade destination. *Source: Data Mexico 2022 in Appendix 2),* fostering economic growth and facilitating trade within the binational area that encompasses Tijuana and San Diego.
One institutional political agreement that has facilitated export and import between states is NAFTA, signed in 1994 and then renewed in 2020 under the new acronym USMCA (further discussed in *Appendix 3*).
The shared border has not only **shaped the social fabric** but also contributed to the **cultural diversity** and economic development of the San Diego region. The intertwining of these metropolitan areas has created a unique and dynamic environment where people engage in **cross-border travel** for various purposes, including visiting loved ones, engaging in commercial activities, accessing healthcare services, pursuing education, and enjoying leisure activities.
Overall, the shared border between San Diego and Mexico has played an integral role in shaping the history, culture, and economic potential of the region. It serves as a **vibrant gateway** that connects people, fosters collaboration, and fuels opportunities for growth and mutual prosperity.

*Mariachi (the typical Mexican musical groups) for San Diego International Mariachi Gala on July 16th 2022. Source: The San Diego Union- Tribute*





The birth and strengthening of this connection is described within the pages of the book ***El Tercer Paìs*** cited earlier: In the late 1950s and early 1960s, San Diego experienced significant growth and a shift in perspective. The city began to develop a sense of civic pride, looking beyond its envy of neighboring Los Angeles and focusing on its own identity. It began to recognize the significance of Tijuana, a rapidly expanding town just south of the border, which had a population of nearly eighty thousand residents.
**The connection between San Diego and Tijuana became increasingly stronger**, and both cities realized they shared a common destiny. In the 1930s, children from wealthier families in Tijuana started attending school in San Diego, despite initially facing institutional racism.
However, over time, as San Diegans became more accustomed to Mexican students in their schools and as friendships developed, social ties between the two cities began to form. These ties would continue to strengthen as these schoolchildren grew up and became community leaders on both sides of the border.
Simultaneously, an increasing number of Tijuana residents crossed the border into Chula Vista and San Diego for work and shopping, contributing to the growth of civic connections.
The collaboration between the San Diego and Tijuana sewage systems to address emergency overflows that threatened to release raw sewage into the Tijuana River was one early example of the two cities coming together to solve common problems.
Additionally, the Bracero Program, which brought thousands of Mexican farmworkers across the border, further linked the two cities.
As the 1960s began, San Diego entered a period of significant growth driven by the Vietnam War, the space program, and the Electronics Age.
These developments further transformed the relationship between San Diego and Tijuana, as both cities recognized their shared history and embraced **a common destiny filled with great potential.**

In fact, the results of a major binational and bilingual survey of San Diego and Tijuana residents conducted by Cross Border Business Associates (CBA) cited in the Blurred Borders report show that residents of both communities are generally transient and non-native, and share a common interest in developing a **sense of local pride** and view education, health care, jobs and the economy as major issues of importance.
Currently, as explained in *Blurred Borders*, **residents' perception** of the Mexico-Tijuana border has been affected by several factors, including U.S. migration policy, drug trafficking, and violence. In addition, heavy traffic and long lines are a daily problem for cross-border workers, while the **militarization** of the border and restrictive U.S. migration policies create tensions and concerns for families divided by the border.

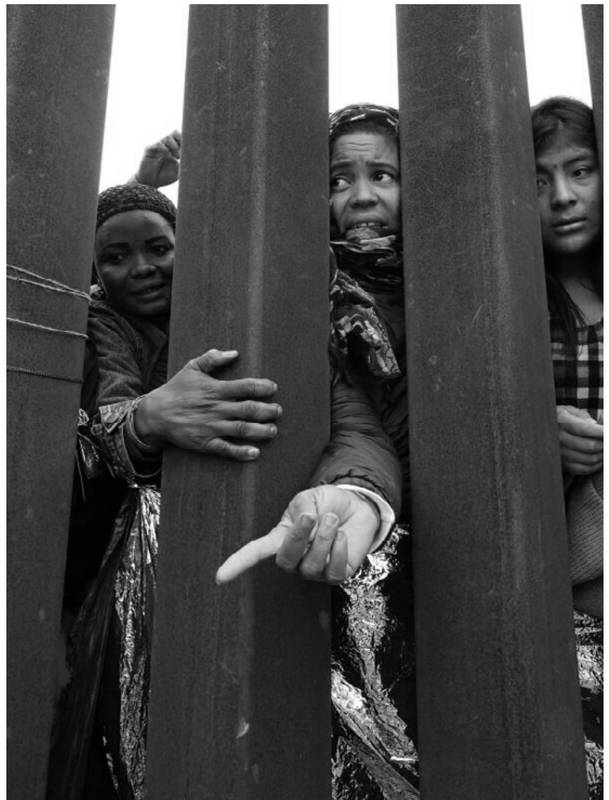
## *9.3.2 The limits imposed by the border: broken families and long travel times*

Sometimes the border constitutes an **icy barrier** that sharply separates the two communities. Standing out in the horizon between the two nations, it dramatically **breaks interpersonal and family relationships,** figuring as an impassable wall from the perspective of the affective-relational sphere.
According to a 2019 report by the Migration Policy Institute, there are about 4.9 million Mexicans born in the United States who have at least one parent born in Mexico. In addition, the report states that about 35 percent of Mexicans born in Mexico have at least one relative living in the United States.6 As for the city of Tijuana, a 2017 research from the University of San Diego found that 25 percent of Tijuana residents have family members or relatives in the United States.

We report below the **testimony of our friend Issac**, a citizen with dual nationality (American and Mexican), which turned out to be valuable in investigating the regional reality. Issac told us how he lives his







*On the top: "Families struggling in San Ysidro". Photography for Maya Srikrishnan's articles (2017). Source: Voice of San Diego.*

*From the left: Photographies of people at the border U.S.-Mèxico. Source:San Diego Union-Tribune.*

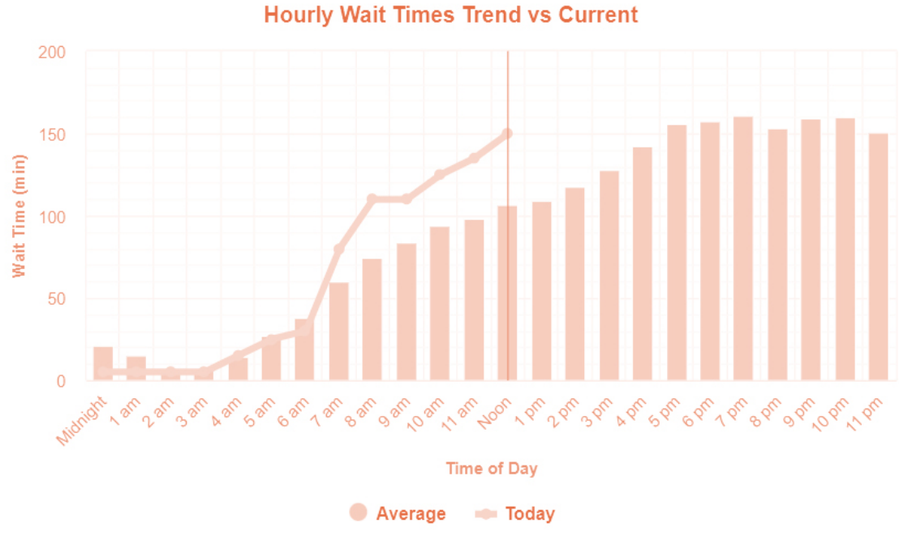
relationship with his family: he lives with his mother in Santa Cruz (CA, U.S.A.), while his sister and father are Mexican and live in Tijuana. Often, he travels to Mexico to spend time with them and sometimes get supplies of goods (particularly medicines) that he can get in Tijuana for less cost. Unfortunately, it takes her **several hours to cross the border to wait in line** for inspection, and sometimes she prefers to walk it to maximize the time.

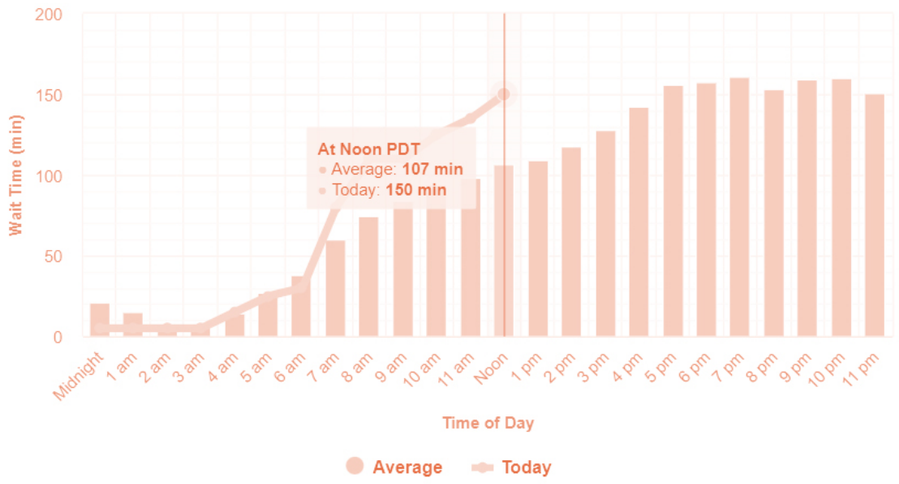
Civic networks and connections are not developed enough to adequately support the **large flow of people crossing the border every day, over 150,000 per day** *(source: U.S. Custom and Border Protection)*. Another testimony comes from our San Diego host, Michael, who told us how many of his friends take between 2 and 4 hours to get from one city to another; the record is held by a friend of his who took as long as 7 hours.

The U.S. government website (U.S. Customs and Border Protection) provides **real-time border crossing information**; currently, (May 6, 2023, local time in San Diego 12:30 a.m. - UTC -8 / Pacific Standard Time (PST) the wait time turns out to be 150 minutes.




*People in line in Mexico for U.S. Port of Entry. Source: KPBS*




*U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Interactive government website to see data of U.S. Port of Entry. Retrieved May 6th, 2023.*

## *9.3.3 Sharing cultures: the vibrant binational art community*

One of the most important but overlooked regional resources in the San Diego-Tijuana border region is the vibrant arts and cultural scene emerging in Tijuana, which not only catalyzes a binational arts community but also plays an instrumental role in the promotion of community **beautification, educational arts enrichment** for underserved communities, and special education programs throughout Tijuana.

In addition, the recent Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report on culture and creativity in Mexican cities recognizes **Tijuana as one of the country's major cultural centers,** highlighting the importance of local initiatives and cross-border collaboration between San Diego and Tijuana.

In 2021, the international website Artsy listed Tijuana as one of the world's top ten emerging cities for contemporary art, noting the expansion of museums and art galleries in the city.

According to the British Guardian newspaper, "*Tijuana is in the midst of an artistic flowering in which artists are reexamining the city's hybrid (binational) culture.*"

Tijuana has quickly become a **magnet for artists**, both Mexican and foreign: in fact, its strategic location along the international border with San Diego is considered "*one of the hottest interfaces between the 'first' and 'third' worlds.*" Indeed, artists have been attracted to and inspired by the San Diego-Tijuana region because of its unique characteristics, where "*essentially a Third World environment [is] slammed against a city [San Diego] that is one of the richest in one of the richest states in the richest countries in the world" (The Guardian, 2002).*

The **importance of arts and culture for economic development** has been widely discussed in the academic literature: according to a study commissioned by Americans for the Arts reported in the report Blurred Borders, spending by nonprofit arts organizations and audiences attending cultural events can create jobs not only in the arts sector, but also in the tourism and restaurant sectors given the influx of audiences following arts and cultural events.

In fact, the study found that total spending by local nonprofit arts organizations and their audiences reached $326 million during fiscal year 2000. This spending, according to the study, supported the full-time equivalent of 6,462 jobs, generating $135 million in family income, $9.0 million in local government revenue and $12.4 million for the state. *(Kelly,*







*On the left (top): Artwork by artist Natalia Ventura on U.S.-Mèxico border. Source: Artist at work*

*On the left (bottom): In 2015, 1,500 students from San Diego and Tijuana counties gathered between Border Field State Park in San Diego and Playas de Tijuana to share a message, "Unite Por El Mar" at the U.S.-Mexico border after picking up trash on the beaches.*

*2004)*. In addition, promoting the arts can have **positive effects on the community** as a whole. A study by the National Governor's Association listed several benefits of promoting the arts, such as encouraging the promotion of local crafts and increasing cultural tourism. The arts can also serve as a hub for community revitalization or as the center of vibrant public spaces, and can create a more positive regional and community image *(National Governor's Association, 2001)*.

Thus, the economic benefits of investing in arts and culture are obvious: arts and cultural activities increase a sense of pride in communities; they also provide educational enrichment and **stimulation for children and youth** who, without artistic outlets, may be at risk of engaging in less desirable and dangerous activities such as substance abuse or crime. In fact, binational arts and cultural activities have already had a positive impact on the region, both economically and socially. The Appendix 3 includes some case studies analyzed, such as the innovative work undertaken by the Border Arts Workshop in Maclovio Rojas and the InSite project.
Fostering a vibrant arts and cultural environment can be especially important for communities seeking to attract the "creative class."
In "The Rise of the Creative Class", Richard Florida argues that knowledge workers, or **the "creative class," are crucial resources** in the increasingly information and knowledge-based economy. Florida argues that the creative class needs a vibrant arts and cultural environment to thrive, and thus communities with a rich cultural environment will prosper while those without such an environment will lag behind *(Florida, 2002)*

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The art and cultural scene in San Diego Tijuana is constantly evolving and sometimes uses **art as a means of expressing political and social ideas**: a significant example given in the Blurred Borders report recounts the experience of some residents who took part in an inSITE 2000-2001 art project; six maquiladora workers expressed their thoughts and feelings about domestic hardship and abuse, workplace problems, and police violence by projecting their voices and faces in front of a crowd of more than 1,500 people on the dome wall of the Omnimax Theater at the Centro Cultural Tijuana *(Wodiczko, 2002)*.

Another case involves ten families in Maclovio Rojas: in the picture there is Brazilian artist Monica Nador embarked on her project for inSITE2000; she painted their houses with colors and motifs symbolic of their **cultural and regional heritage**, and at least one of the participants went on to improve her house on her own.
Indeed, in a departure from conventional notions of the artist-audience relationship, Nador collaborated with ten local families to introduce a **participatory** form of embellishment for the exteriors of their homes; by encouraging each family to identify ancestral symbols, signs, and other imagery that reflected their regional and cultural heritage, Nador, along with a small team of assistant artists, embarked on the creation of stencils for adorning the houses.





*On the left: "Tijuana Projection' Proyección en Tijuana." A project by the artist Krzysztof Wodiczko realized in Omnimax Theater at the Centro Cultural Tijuana. Source: InSite art official website*

Over a period of approximately six months, the artist's underlying drive that "*beauty is beneficial for mental and spiritual well-being*" manifested in vibrantly painted and adorned houses, which were perceived by the entire community as a unifying force and a visual abundance that could be enjoyed collectively.
Indeed, art is a powerful communicative medium that can form a "bridge" between the two communities, but it also acts as an **amplifier of voices and testimonies** that would otherwise go unheard. The region's art community thus has a potentially important role to play in helping bridge the current divide that exists between the two twin cities, reconnecting San Diegans and Tijuanenses through artistic expression.

A friend of ours residing in San Diego, **Anastasya**, told us about her experience as an **artist** and singer; she works at San Diego Music and Arts Company and is the frontwoman of her music group. She told us that she would often, especially before the pandemic, travel to Tijuana to play concerts in the city, and that she particularly appreciates the **Tijuana arts scene as it is extremely open and willing to support each other**, much more so than in San Diego. She explained that, for an artist, the support of her friends and the people who attend the performance is crucial.

In addition, Anastasya told us about her drama of living in a small town near San Diego (for economic reasons) but having to drive to San Diego every day to work and go out in the evenings with her husband; in fact, they sometimes prefer to avoid going out so as not to grind out miles in the car every day, but this involves not being able to take part in supporting their friends when they play at some club. In fact, because of its urban conformation, San Diego is an extremely large metropolis (covers 342.5 square miles and stretches nearly 40 miles from north to south) and this causes her to live "***a perpetual car life***."
Instead, according to her, Tijuana (being a more compact city) manages to accommodate the local art scene more favorably.

Despite the benefits exhibited, the *Blurred Borders* report argues that the **binational arts community in the San Diego and Tijuana region is underfunded**, and that strengthening San Diego's creative quotient could be affected by the presence of Tijuana's more dynamic cultural offerings.
Tijuana could thus become a hub for arts and culture in the region, attracting artists and creatives from around the world and providing inspiration for San Diego and other nearby communities. In this way, promoting arts and culture in Tijuana could help also strengthen San Diego's position as the region's creative hub and contribute to its knowledge-based economic development.
Tijuana's thriving arts culture is one of its most important civic assets, and if properly harnessed, its thriving arts community can help stimulate the regional economy by **enriching the cultural climate on both sides of the border.**








*On the top: Photo by Valadez, Belinda (photographer). Artist Nador, Mônica (Brazilian painter, born 1955). Project for residency in the Maclovio Rojas community in Tijuana.*

*On the bottom: Our friend Anastasya performing in North Park with her music group "Phantom Twist".*

## *9.3.4 The intensity of trade, services and tourism between cities*

A further plane of interpretation of the relationship between San Diego and Tijuana is the intensity of trade across the border.
Tijuana, as the main city of Baja California, has been at the center of this intense **trade exchange**, especially for the production of manufactured goods, food products, clothing and footwear.
**Tourism**, for example, is an important source of income for the city, and many residents cross the border to shop, attend cultural events, and visit family and friends on the other side.
In addition, many foreign visitors and tourists take advantage of the proximity between the two different realities to enjoy the gastronomy, tourist attractions, and nightlife of both cities, capturing the different experiences offered by the two cultures.
So, despite the fact that communication barriers persist due to language and cultural differences, **many Americans seize the opportunities offered by Tijuana and vice versa**: in fact, each nation has unique or more convenient knowledge, skills, and experiences than their home area.

For example, as explained in *Blurred Borders* report, many U.S. issues are solvable in the Hispanic community given the greater **accessibility of health care, educational and artistic enrichment, drug prevention, and environmental education**.
Regarding health care, the high cost of medical services in the United States drives many Americans across the border to purchase cheaper drugs and medical services in Tijuana.
Tijuana's affordability and **cost of living** compared to San Diego is thus one of the reasons why many Americans cross the border periodically.

Conversely, many Tijuanenses cross the border to take advantage of the **services or opportunities** offered by the U.S. territory. For example, many children cross the border from Mexico to attend school in San Diego. However, U.S. teenagers and college students cross the border to take advantage of the lower drinking age in Mexico, often engaging in binge drinking and substance abuse.









*On the top: Kids living in Tijuana are going to school in the United States. Source: CGTN America youtube channel.*

*On the bottom: A souvenir vendor in Tijuana welcoming tourists.*

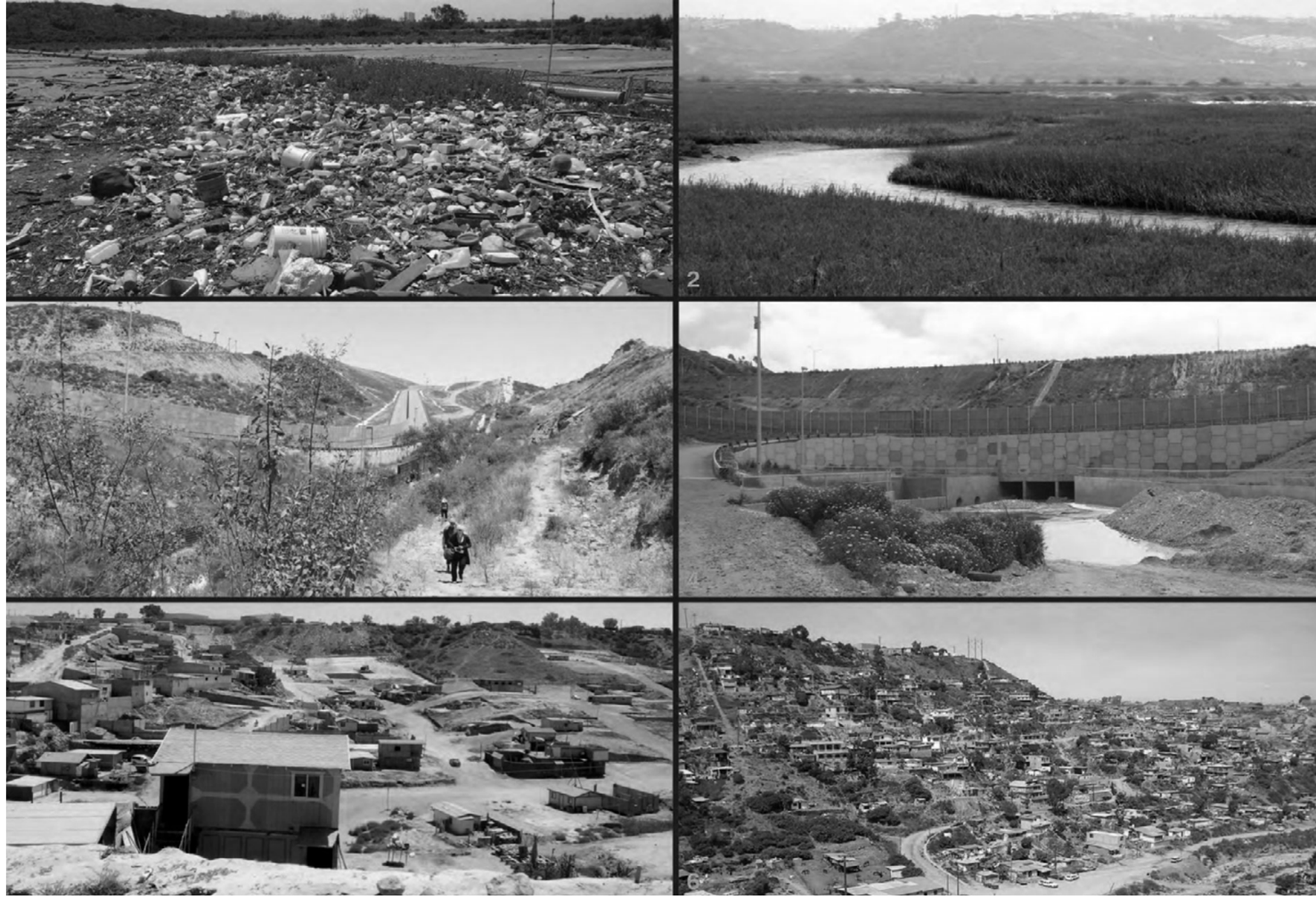
## *9.3.5 Environmental ecosystem management and impacts of human activities*

While the crossings of people and goods are more visible, many of the impacts of living in the border region are intangible or have long-term effects.
In fact, an additional dramatic element relates to the fact that the border breaks the environmental, social and economic ecosystem that coexists in both cities but is actually deeply interconnected.

For example, *Blurred Borders* explains how **ecological corridors result segmented and disrupted** by national defenses, fueling serious problems in preserving living species and the ecosystem.
For example, the construction of the border wall has disrupted natural ecological corridors, **isolating different species of animals and plants** and preventing them from moving between the two regions. This disruption may lead to increased inbreeding and thus lower genetic diversity *(Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2019)*.
In addition, the closure of water sources on the Mexican side of the border due to the construction of the wall caused a decrease in water resources and led to water access problems for wildlife.

Regarding environmental **pollution** caused by human activities, the data are equally alarming. Industries located in the region have generated high levels of air and water pollution, contributing to increased levels of toxic substances in the air and water. For example, waste from factories located in Lower California can contaminate soil and rivers in the region.
The failure of energy companies to adequately consider the environmental impacts of their facilities threaten **fragile habitats** in what is the last known undisturbed coastal sage scrub in California's floristic province.
Industrial and commercial activities in the region have also led to increased **deforestation**, **soil erosion** and loss of natural habitats, compromising the region's biodiversity.
Increased **motor vehicle traffic** along the border has contributed to increased levels of air pollution in the region, with negative consequences for human health.

In addition, as explained in Appendix 1 and 2, the entire San Diego-Tijuana area faces several water scarcity issues, being characterized by a **scarcity of natural water resources**.
Its location in a semi-arid area and the limited presence of rivers or



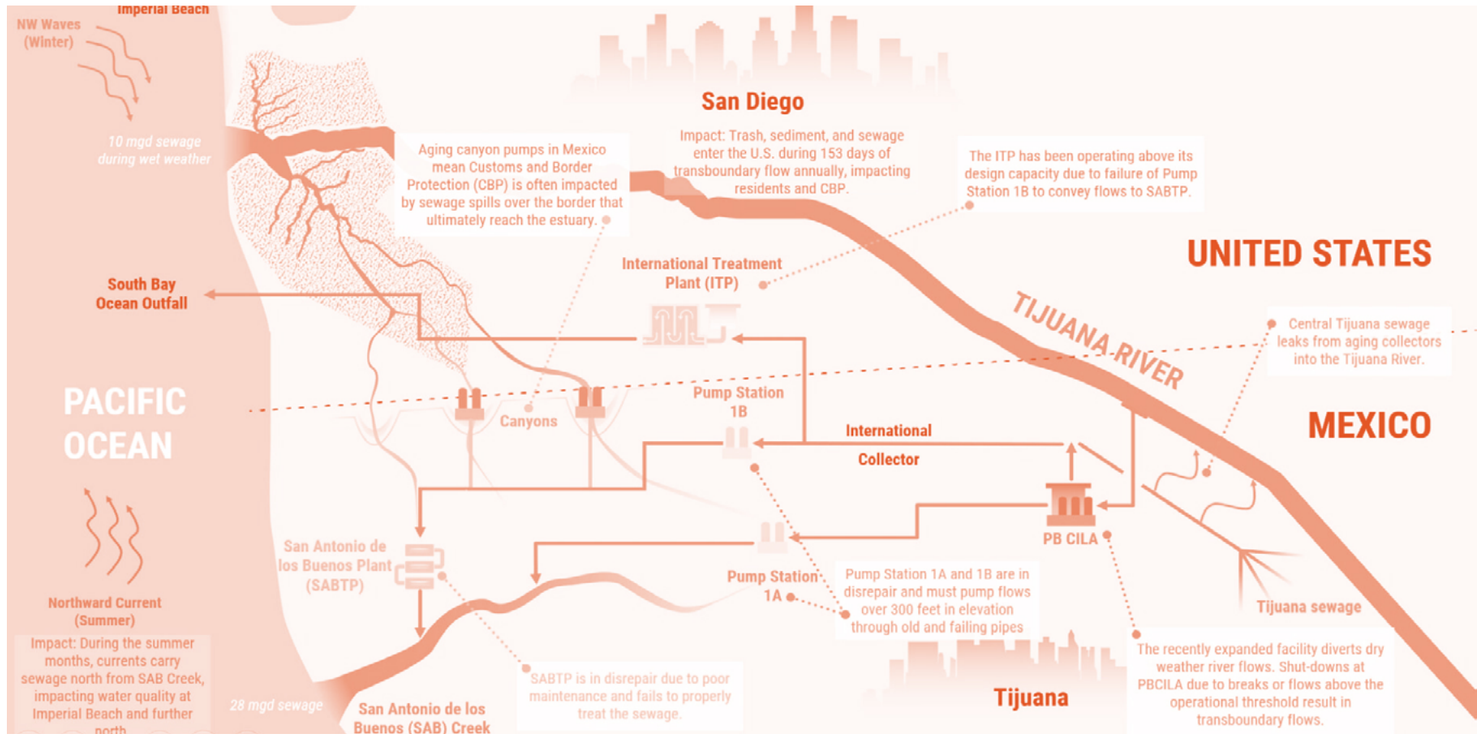



*On the left: The Cross Border Environmental Commons. courtesy of Estudio Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman. Source: Art Papers website.*

lakes make water supply a constant problem.
In addition, **rapid population growth** in the region has put further pressure on existing water resources. The growing population requires more water for domestic, agricultural and industrial use, creating a demand that exceeds the availability of water.
Due to the scarcity of local water resources, the San Diego-Tijuana region is largely dependent on external sources of supply. A significant portion of the water consumed is imported from other regions through aqueducts and pipelines.

However, the sharing of water resources between the United States and Mexico can lead to **conflicts over water management.** The San Diego-Tijuana region faces challenges in negotiating and allocating water resources with governments and agencies responsible for water management decisions.
The extraction and use of water resources can have negative impacts on the local environment: declining water tables, land subsidence, and saltwater intrusion are just some of the negative effects related to water scarcity in the region.
In addition, **climate change** may exacerbate the water scarcity situation in the region. Decreased precipitation and extreme weather events may further reduce available water resources and create additional water management challenges.
To address these issues, in recent times the San Diego-Tijuana region engages in collaborative water conservation initiatives, search for alternative sources of water supply, promotion of sustainable practices and cross-border cooperation for shared water resource management.

During our Field Analysis, we went to the **Friendship Park**, the border park in the US jurisdiction whose purpose is (as its name suggests) to provide a meeting place between the two communities, although divided by the wall border.
Despite this, when we went it was "formally" forbidden to cross it, even on foot. We were about to go home, but then we met a Border Control guard who assured us that it was possible to cross on foot.
We also met two nice ladies (Maria, from San Ysidro, and a Mexican colleague of hers who had just started working in San Diego who spoke very little English) who were nearby and wanted to hike down to the beach. We shared the path, but once we arrived we noticed a sign stating that the **waters were contaminated**, and Maria told us not to touch anything.
Doing some digging, we found that an independent audit of the Baja California water agency found that many **international companies with operations in Baja California** have been paying for only a fraction of the water they have used for years and **have been dumping unauthorized waste into the sewer system**. overburdened by Tijuana, contributed by corrupt water agency officials.







*On the right (top): A schematic of Tijuana wastewater and river flow. (Graphic via EPA). Source: Sam Ribakoff's article on Courthouse New Service on February 2, 2023*

*On the right (bottom): Signs warning visitors to the Friendship Park beach (on the US-Mexico border, under US jurisdiction) to stay away from the ocean as it is contaminated by toxic waste from companies.*

## *9.3.6 The question of Native people*

During our mobility period **we attended a dissertation at UCSD** (University of California San Diego) in which the drama of Native peoples was exposed, with a research project titled "*Unmapping UC Matkoolahooee*," which examines and rewrites the history of present-day La Jolla from the Kumeyaay perspective.

The San Diego region has been attracting people with its natural beauty and pleasant climate for thousands of years. Native Americans have inhabited the area for at least 12,000 years, with the **Kumeyaay**, Cupeño, Cahuilla, and Luiseño tribes being the most prominent ethnic groups in the region. San Diego County is home to 17 federally recognized tribes, the highest number in any single county in the United States, with jurisdiction over 18 reservations.
Before the arrival of Europeans, Native Americans in the region thrived by utilizing the resources available to them. They harvested food from the sea, maximized the resources found in the inland, mountain, and desert landscapes throughout the year, and established trade relationships between different tribal groups. Ancient trade routes formed the basis for some of the region's major roadways. Native tribes had their own knowledge of astronomy, botanical characteristics of native plants, and innovative methods for water and resource storage. Their **deep connection to the natural environment** sustained them for thousands



*On the left: UC San Diego's Kumeyaay scholars who bring expertise in history, education, anthropology, archaeology and repatriation. Talk taken on May 04th, 2023 at UCSD, about research project titled "Unmapping UC Matkoolahooee."*





of years and continues to influence their culture today.
Conservation efforts in the region have often drawn inspiration from the culture and history of Native American communities. Individuals, advocacy groups, government agencies, businesses, and other organizations have looked to **Native American culture for guidance.** Governmental agencies have increasingly sought the partnership and knowledge of tribal communities to improve planning for development, mobility, conservation, equity, and environmental sustainability.
In line with numerous regions nationwide, **historical inequalities** perpetuated by various levels of government have had a lasting impact on present-day communities. Persistent disparities stemming from systemic racism, redlining practices, and the appropriation of tribal lands by settlers have contributed to inequities throughout the region.

The San Diego-Tijuana border has had a significant impact on the lives of native peoples, particularly the Kumeyaay, who have inhabited the region since time immemorial.
**The border has disrupted the traditional territory of the Kumeyaay and adversely affected their culture, language, and traditions;** in particular, urban sprawl and infrastructure construction (such as the construction of the border wall and highways), have directly impacted the traditional lands of the Kumeyaay, damaging their sacred sites and reducing access to natural resources such as water and medicinal plants.

In addition, the militarization of the border has led to increased surveillance and restrictions on the movements of the Kumeyaay, preventing them from freely crossing the border to participate in traditional ceremonies and celebrations, and the **restriction of their access to ancestral lands.**

*On the bottom: "MEXUS: Collisions between the political and the natural." Courtesy of Estudio Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman. Source: Art Papers website.*

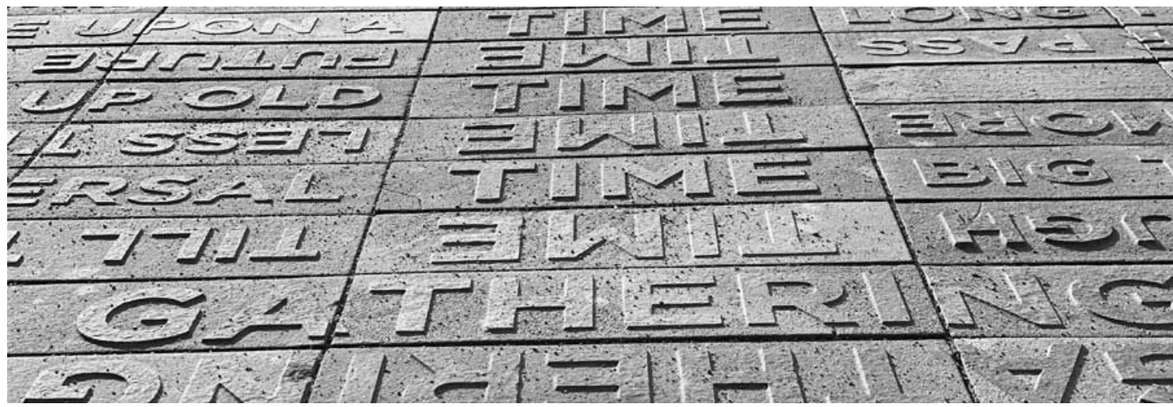
The impact of the border on the Kumeyaay was recognized by the U.S. government in 1994 with the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (**NAGPRA**), which allowed the return of sacred objects and human remains to their Kumeyaay descendants. However, problems caused by the border persist to this day.
The *Blurred Borders* report tells how the play "Nuevo California" brings to the stage the plight of the Kumeyaay, now divided between Mexico and the United States: their **sacred mountain** is in fact located on the U.S. side of the border, but many members of the tribe live on the Mexican side.

Connected with the Open House program on April 29th, 2023, we also took part in a celebration for the completion of the pathway of the UCSD university campus, made with an artwork by visual artist Ann Hamilton entitled "**KAHNOP - to tell a story.**" According to the artist, the work represents the impulse to share the discoveries made through reading, which she describes as "a tactile chorus of language and material"; to create it, Hamilton and her team read the works of thousands of UC San Diego-related authors; among the 1,500 lines of quote fragments that ensue have resulted (weaving together themes regarding social justice, technological progress, environmental activism and impact on the Kumeyaay nation), is a 36-line poem written by UC San Diego Kumeyaay scholars Eva Trujillo and Alexandria Hunter entitled "**Yeechesh Cha'alk**."

*On the bottom: An incomplete section of the border fence: California's Kumeyaay tribe blocks border wall construction. Source: John Gibbins for San Diego Union-Tribune.*

*On the right (top): pathway artwork by Ann Hamilton "KAHNOP - to tell a story"*

*On the right (bottom): 30th Annual Balboa Park Pow Pow, celebration festival of Native Americans cultural heritage. Picture took by us during our international mobility period.*




In addiction, on "mother's day" we attended the **30th Annual Balboa Park Pow Wow**, an atmospheric festival where Native American dancers, singers and drummers performed to celebrate and preserve their local culture and heritage.
We got very emotional when they asked the audience to take part in the dances claiming how we were all part of the same world, sharing the same land, and reaffirming our duty to respect and celebrate it.



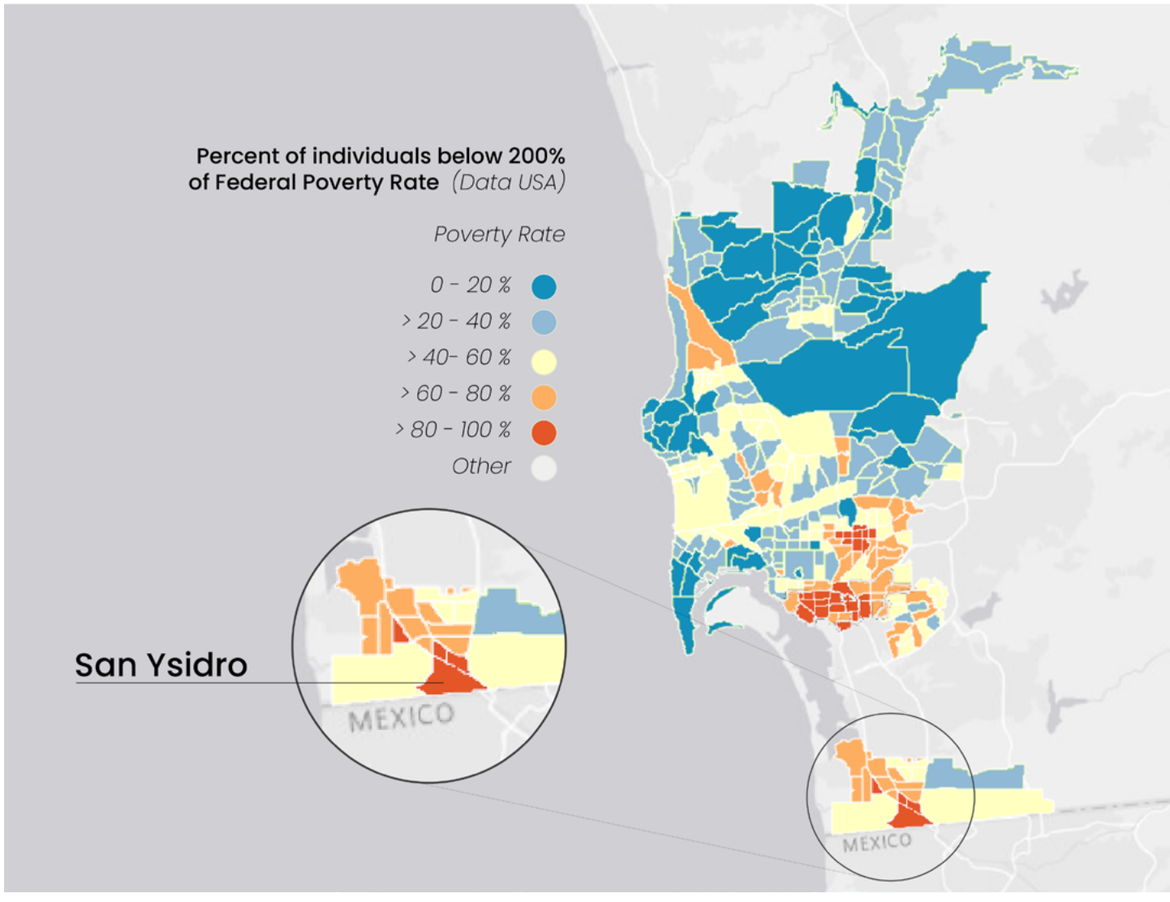


## *9.3.7 Urban poverty, economic inequality and social impacts*

"SAN DIEGO MOSTLY DISMISSED THE CITY ACROSS THE BORDER; EXCEPT TO TREAT IT AS A **SOURCE OF CHEAP LABOR** AND AN **OUTLET FOR TRASGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR** OF SAN DIEGANS. NOT UNTIL THE 21th CENTURY DID **SAN DIEGO** FULLY COME TO REALIZE THAT IT, TOO, **NEEDED TIJUANA** FOR ITS YOUTHFUL VITALITY, PRODUCTIVITY AND COMPETITIVENESS. TIJUANA, A VILLAGE OF FEWER THAN ONE THOUSAND PEOPLE IN 1900, HAS GROWN TODAY INTO A DYNAMIC METROPOLIS OF NEARLY 2 MILLION PEOPLE, A POPULATION LARGER THAN SAN DIEGO.

*From "El Tercer Paìs" (2020), Melone*

In the next lines, *El Tercer Paìs* explains the value of cross-border trade, and how many residents work in one city but live in the other. Throughout Baja Californiana from a social point of view, a problematic urban poverty scenario emerges; **many areas of San Diego, particularly those near the border, host a high concentration of Mexican migrant workers**. Among San Diego residents of Mexican descent, the incidence of poverty is growing due to the absence of affordable housing, the high cost of living, and the inability to earn a decent wage.
Even more dramatic is the overall picture in **Tijuana**, where urban poverty is increasing in alarming proportions: many of the new residents live in **shanty town** without adequate infrastructure, limited or absent potable water, and the prevalence of waterborne infectious diseases and other health risks. If left unattended, the consequences of these disparities and the region's growing pockets of poverty will pose a threat to quality of life (causing an increase in Friedmannian entropy; read Chapter 2 for further discussion), economic prosperity, and the long-term competitiveness of the San Diego-Tijuana region relative to other metropolitan areas in North America.
As the *Blurred Borders* report denounces, for many San Diego business and civic leaders, **border issues are not a strategic priority** because much of the regional economic growth is focused on expanding the biotechnology and telecommunications sectors. Moreover, to a large extent the perception of Mexico, for many Sandiegans, is limited to trade. The report thus underscores the current indifference to emerging challenges in the border region between San Diego and Tijuana due to growing **economic disparities between the two cities** and within their respective communities. These disparities are compounded by four interrelated problems: the concentration of urban and rural poverty is exacerbated by human migration, racial and socio-economic segregation, and uncontrolled urban sprawl. The latter concept, explored extensively in Chapter 2 of this thesis, indeed figures as a growing threat in both areas; it will be explored in more detail in the next subsections *(9.3.9.)*
Indeed, heavy **economic inequalities persist within San Diego County.** This binational region is home to some of the wealthiest and most expensive communities in the United States, such as Rancho Santa Fe, Del Mar, and La Jolla. However, there are still many poor communities in the county, including the San Diego area adjacent to the border, namely San Ysidro. The interactive map provided by SEEN in 2021 displays the percentages of individuals below 200% of the federal **poverty rate,** which includes **San Ysidro** and areas near the border. It can be seen that the most affluent areas of the city are located toward the north of San Diego, such as Point Loma and La Jolla, whose urban landscapes are diametrically different from those in San Ysidro.




*On the bottom: San Diego City map of percent of individuals below 200% of Federal Poverty Rate. Source: S E E N (State of Equity and Engagement in Neighborhoods: Elevating the Voices of San Diego's Urban Communities). A research partnership between RISE San Diego and The Nonprofit Institute (2021).*

A further 2018 study published by San Diego State University shows that the border neighborhoods between San Diego and Tijuana are characterized by **unemployment** and **low levels of education**. In particular, the San Ysidro neighborhood has a high poverty rate, low incomes, and poor accessibility to basic services such as education and health.
The nonprofit "Border Angels" says the San Ysidro community is plagued by a number of **serious social problems**, including drug trafficking, violence, prostitution and human trafficking. The community is also home to one of the largest Mexican producers' markets in the United States, but many local residents cannot afford to buy fresh, healthy food. In fact, San Diego County has experienced a rising cost of living, with a 2.7 percent increase in 2021 over the previous year.

To analyze the problem, we decided to report a portion of the **study by Sheridamae Gudez**, Ph.D. Student in Criminology & Social Data Analytics at Penn State; Gudez was born and raised in the Barrio Logan neighborhood, which is home to mostly people of Mexican (Chinano) and Mexican descent. As a result of observations made in the of her life, in which she noted the **significant racial differences between her city's neighborhoods,** Gudez questioned why the wealthier neighborhoods had a more diverse population, thus exposing the injustice and social equity that hovers in the metropolis by exposing a series of significant data:

- **Percent White in San Diego County**

In this first map displays the majority of percent White in San Diego County (that is located along the coast, the deserts, Downtown San Diego, and central San Diego County).
The lowest percentage of White populations are found in areas nearer to the Mexican border.

- **Percent Hispanic in San Diego County**

The second map shows that the majority of percent Hispanic in San Diego County is located in the far South-West, South-East, and South-West areas (all areas near the Mexican border), as well as in some pockets near Oceanside, Vista, and Escondido. The lowest percentages of Hispanics are in areas near the central coast, and the top

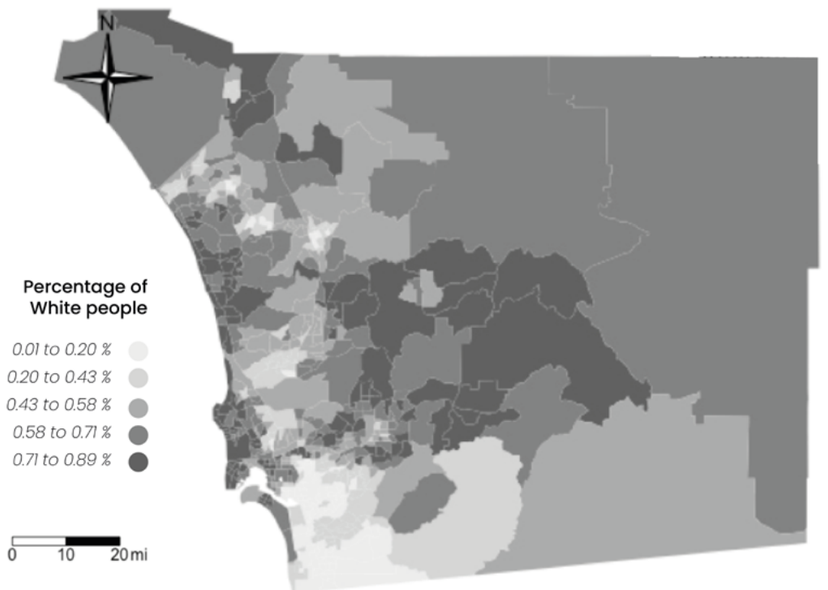
- **Median Household Income in San Diego County**

The third map shows that the concentration of higher median household incomes are located in areas along the central coast and central areas (like Oceanside and Carlsbad), as well as in Coronado Island, some areas of Downtown San Diego, and around the Chula Vista area. The areas with the lowest median household income tend to be in areas within the greater San Diego city area, in San Ysidro and in the far East.

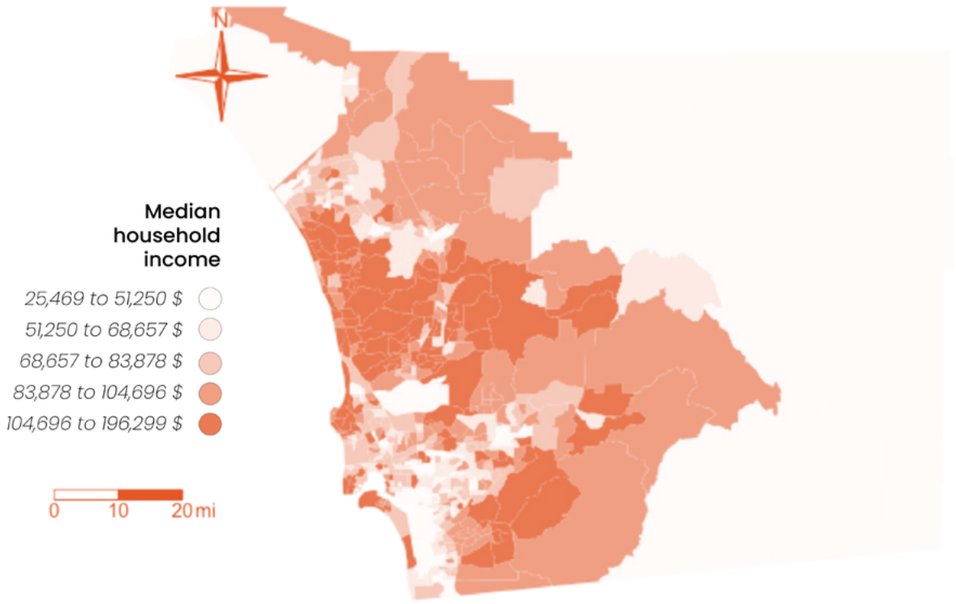
*On the right (top): Map of percent of White people in San Diego County.*

*On the right (bottom): Map of percent of Hispanic people in San Diego County.*

*Both sources: Sheridamae Gudez (2021)*






After this, Gudez put in relationship the data of Median Household Income with the Race/Ethnicity in San Diego City.

- **Percent White and Median Household Income**
  The correlation coefficient between median household income and percent White is 0.54. This means that there is a medium positive correlation between median household income and percent White.This graph and the correlational analysis shows that the higher the percentage of Whites the greater the median household income.

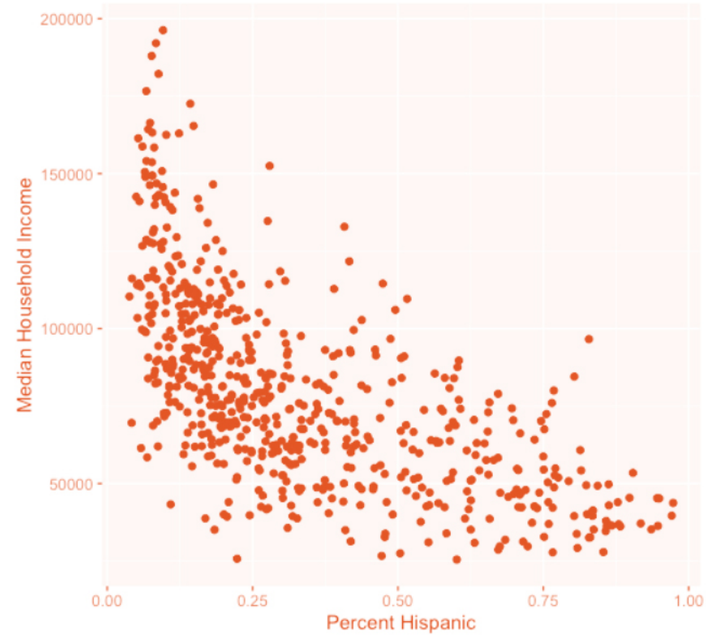
- **Percent Hispanic and Median Household Income**
  The correlation coefficient between median household income and percent Hispanic is -0.63. This means that there is a strong negative correlation between median household income and percent Hispanic.
  This graph and the correlational analysis shows that the higher the percentage of Hispanics the lower the median household income level.

Finally, Gudez defines the Multigroup Entropy Index for San Diego City, which she conducted through R Studio software to calculate and create a corresponding variable.

*Map of median income in San Diego County. Source: Sheridamae Gudez (2021)*






*On the top: Distribution of median household income per percent of White people in San Diego.*

*On the bottom: Distribution of median household income per percent of Hispanic people in San Diego.*

*Both sources: Sheridamae Gudez (2021)*

To enhance the understanding of the data, a map was generated to illustrate the Entropy Scores for different areas within San Diego County and San Diego City. The maximum entropy score was determined using the formula log(5) due to the consideration of racial groups of White and Hispanic; the highest possible score is 1.609438, indicating greater diversity within a region. **The higher the Entropy Score the greater the diversity.**

- **About San Diego City**
  The map revealed that the areas with the highest diversity levels were primarily located in the North (such as Mira Mesa area), central San Diego (including Clairmont Mesa and Sierra Mesa areas), and the North East (encompassing Skyline- Paradise Hills area, North Park area, and parts of Otay Mesa).

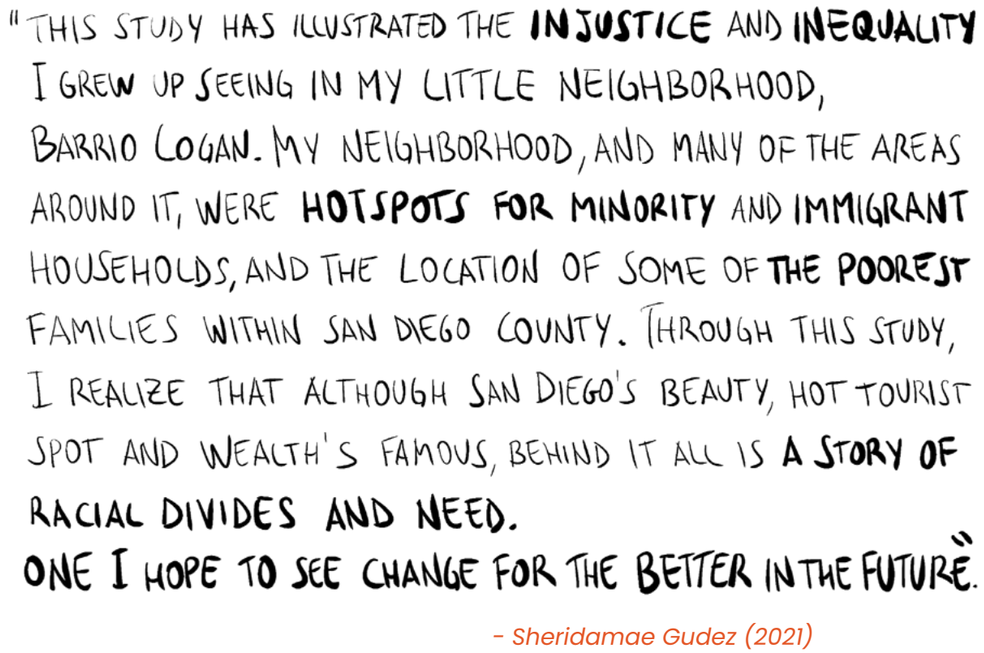
  In contrast, the areas with the lowest diversity were predominantly found along the coastal regions, including Downtown San Diego, Barrio Logan, La Jolla, and extending toward Fairbanks, but also San Ysidro and some areas near the border. Most neighborhoods with low diversity exhibited a significant concentration of either White or Hispanic populations.

Generally, neighborhoods with a higher concentration of Whites tended to have higher median household incomes, while areas with a higher concentration of Hispanics had lower median household incomes.
Additionally, the analysis revealed significant levels of **segregation** between minority populations and Whites within San Diego City. Minorities and Whites tended to be spatially separated within the city.
This lack of diversity was also evident in various parts of San Diego County, particularly in areas with a high proportion of either Whites or Hispanics. This pattern aligned with the distribution of median household income, where areas with **predominantly White populations tended to have higher median incomes, while areas with higher Hispanic populations had lower median incomes.**
In conclusion, the data analysis indicated a correlation between racial demographics, particularly Whites and Hispanics, and median household income in San Diego County.

Furthermore, as described in chapters 3 and 4, we recall that a low level of urban heterogeneity corresponds to a low level of serendipity in the area, which leads to an urban ***monoculture*** and the related risks *(Jacobs, 1961; Friedmann, 2010)*.

Overall, this study shed light on the realities of racial divisions and **inequalities** present in San Diego County.
It emphasized the relationship between racial demographics, segregation, and median household income.
Addressing these issues and working toward a more inclusive and equitable future remains essential for the region.






*- Sheridamae Gudez (2021)*

Like its sister city, **Tijuana is characterized by a profound economic unevenness:** some areas of Tijuana are adequately developed and accommodate a prosperous and wealthy middle class, while numerous other areas of the city present dramatic scenes of poverty is widespread, with essential services are often inadequate or nonexistent. In these areas, houses and buildings are often constructed from waste materials, and **services** such as potable water, electricity, and sewage systems are inadequate.

From Data Mexico (2022) the rate of economically active Tijuana population in the first quarter of 2022 is 61.6 percent, and the unemployment rate is 2.7 percent.
However, as pointed out in Appendix 2, it is important to note that these data do not take into account the **informal economy**, which accounts for a significant share of employment in Tijuana, although the average wage of an informal worker is lower than that of a formal worker (in the first quarter of 2022, the average wage of a formal worker in Baja California is $6.66k MX, while that of an informal worker is $4.1k MX).

There are also **crime problems** in many parts of Tijuana. The city has long been a transit point for drug and arms trafficking between Mexico and the United States, and this has led to increased violence.
In 2023, the Tijuana murder rate per 100,000 inhabitants is 105.15; for this ranking (Statista, 2023) Tijuana is the second most dangerous city in the world.

In addition, many Tijuana residents are **migrants** from other parts of Mexico and Central America who seek work and a better life in the city. These migrants often live in precarious conditions, in slums or informal camps, where access to essential services is limited.
Therefore, further limitation imposed by the border turns out to be the management of undocumented migrants: this situation is described in Alessio Marchiona's article for Internazionale on September 25, 2017; the article is about the situation of migrants from Central America trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, and recounts stores like that of Camila Catalella Suazo, a Honduran woman trapped in the U.S. migration system trying to escape violence and find a better life, but she (like so many others) have been turned away or deported.
The article points out that despite expectations of a massive influx of undocumented migrants after the election of Donald Trump, the numbers of those deported from the United States have declined; however, the measure signed by **Trump** has made almost all undocumented people potential deportation victims.
Tijuana is described as a city that has always adapted to and is economically dependent on U.S. decisions. Despite economic disparities, people on both sides of the border think of Tijuana and San Diego as one city, but the **benefits are mainly for those living in the United States**. The article goes on to argue the growing number of undocumented immigrant prisoners in the United States and the 'impact on the Mexican border.
In conclusion, Tijuana emerges as a city that faces significant **challenges in terms of poverty, economic inequality, unrecognized informal economy, and crime**.
While there are parts of the city that are well-developed and with a wealthy middle class, many residents live in precarious conditions, and these problems are often concentrated in specific areas of the city.



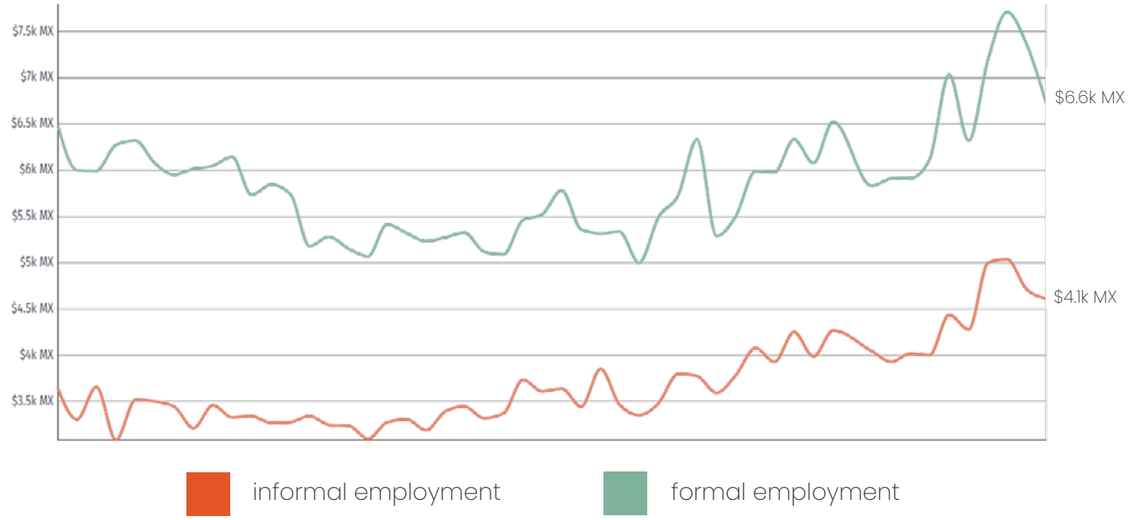
*To the left: Camila Catalella Suazo, a Honduran woman trapped in the U.S. migration system in a refugee camp near the border. Source: L'Internazionale*

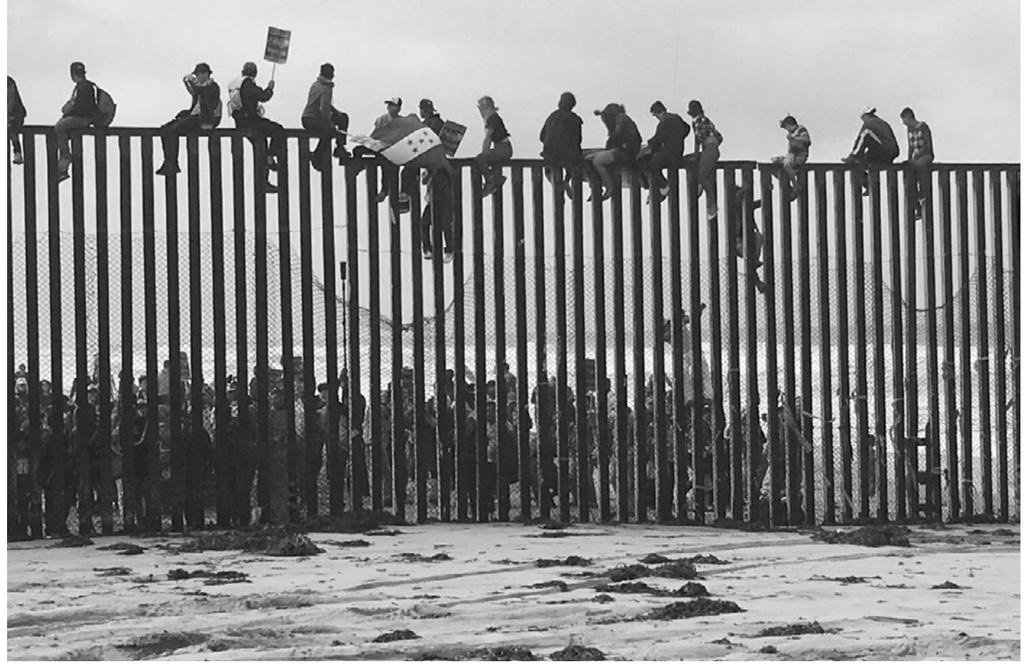
*To the right (top): Evolution of average monthly salary in Baja California differentiating formal and informal workers. Source: Data Mèxico website*

*To the right (bottom): "March Without Borders", U.S. caravan in the south to Border Field State Park in San Diego County in a show of solidarity with Central American refugees in Tijuana. They marching to the border to draw attention and support to the plight of refugees fleeing U.S.- funded instability and violence in Central America. Source: Liberation News*



Evolution of average monthly salary in Baja California
(differentiating formal and informal workers)



## *9.3.8 Industrial relocation, cheap labor and its environmental and social impacts*

Industrial relocation between San Diego and Tijuana has been influenced by various factors, including geographic proximity, economic advantages, and the implementation of the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and later the **USMCA** (United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement), which eliminated or significantly reduced trade barriers between the United States and Mexico, facilitating the flow of goods, foreign investment, and the establishment of integrated supply chains between the two nations. (insights in Appendix 3); this made it more attractive for U.S. companies to move some of their manufacturing operations to Tijuana, **taking advantage of lower labor costs and favorable trade tariffs.**
The geographical location also has facilitated close economic and commercial collaboration between the two cities: the geographic proximity enables **easy transportation** of goods and smooth communication between businesses.

Through industrial relocation, many U.S. companies have established subsidiaries or production plants in Tijuana to leverage the benefits of cheaper labor, infrastructure availability, and commercial opportunities offered by its proximity to San Diego. Sectors such as electronics, automotive, apparel, and many others have witnessed significant shifts in their operations to Tijuana. This economic collaboration has led to the growth of manufacturing activities and the **consolidation of integrated supply chains between the two cities.**

The book "*El Tercer Paìs*" by Malone (2020) introduced at the beginning of this subchapter explains these dynamics with an example: the *Poly plant* in Tijuana is a notable factory that emerged during the maquiladora movement in the 1990s, marking the growth of a "new" Tijuana. This movement can be traced back to the Border Industrialization Program established in 1965 between Mexico and the United States.
However, there were earlier initiatives like the ***Bracero Program*** in the 1940s, which allowed Mexican "guest workers" into the United States primarily for agricultural jobs.
When the Bracero Program ended, the Border Industrialization Program aimed to generate employment opportunities in Mexico. It involved **reducing restrictions and duties** on machinery, raw materials, and equipment crossing the border, as well as promoting infrastructure development such as roads, electricity, water supply, and factories in the border regions of both countries. Crucially, **Mexico offered incentives for foreign firms**, including American companies, to import raw materials at reduced costs, while the United States allowed the duty-free export of finished goods into its territory.
Tijuana, seeking an alternative industry apart from the unpredictable tourism sector, particularly after the Mexican debt crisis of the preceding years, eagerly embraced this new opportunity. The federal government's "Decree for Development and Operation of the Maquiladora Industry" further facilitated foreign investment by lowering barriers.
Consequently, the first factories funded by foreign entities started



*"Maquiladoras" in Tijuana.*
*Source: LSE Latin America and Caribbean.*

appearing in different parts of Tijuana, both in the city itself and its less-developed eastern areas along the border.
The industrial relocation between San Diego and Tijuana has had significant **impacts on the environment at a local level.** These impacts can be described through various aspects:

- **Air pollution**
The increase in industrial activities in the region has led to an increase in air pollutant emissions. Factories and industries often produce harmful gases, smoke, dust, and other pollutants that can contribute to air pollution. This can have negative consequences for human health and the local ecosystem.

- **Water pollution**
Industries tend to use large amounts of water for production purposes and may discharge industrial effluents containing hazardous chemicals into surrounding water bodies. This can cause pollution of surface and groundwater, damaging water quality and aquatic life.

- **Waste management**
The increase in industrial activities also leads to an increase in waste production. Proper management of industrial waste becomes critical. If waste is not treated properly, it can contaminate soil and water resources, leading to long- term environmental issues.

- **Exploitation of natural resources**
Industrial relocation can result in increased exploitation of natural resources in the destination region. For example, the construction of new industrial infrastructure may require deforestation of forested areas or the use of agricultural land. This can have a negative impact on the local ecosystem and biodiversity.

- **Changes in urban planning**
The expansion of industrial activities can influence urban planning and the development of local communities. Increased industrial presence can lead to increased traffic congestion, unplanned urbanization, and greater pressure on local resources and infrastructure.

At the social level, an overview is offered by journalist Marchiona, in his 2017 reportage article for The International in which he recounts how immigrants and Mexicans are willing to do **cheap labor or seasonal work (work that U.S. people would refuse to do**) thus keeping entire California industries, such as agribusiness (a $47 billion a year industry), afloat.
The author also denounces the **working conditions** under which these people are forced to live, such as the harmful effects of pesticide exposure on farm workers in the Central Valley: in May 2017, 47 workers became ill after being exposed to a pesticide that had been banned by Obama but kept in circulation by Trump at the end of his term. Then, in early August, 13 people who were harvesting garlic experienced the same symptoms.
Unfortunately, these are not isolated cases and point to a larger problem. Between 2010 and 2014, more than 1,000 workers in the Central Valley fell ill due to pesticide exposure. This highlights the need for stronger measures to protect the health and safety of agricultural workers and address pesticide use and management in the area.
Situations such as these raise concerns about pesticide regulation and the impact of policy decisions on **human and environmental health**. It is important that regulatory and safety agencies for agricultural workers consider such incidents and work to ensure safe working environments and controlled exposure conditions.




*Impacts of "maquiladoras." Source: The Story of the Maquiladora. Pollution, Corruption, and Destruction. By Brandon McDowra (2020)*

** The term "maquiladora"*

*It's derived from the word "maquila," which originally referred to the process of grinding wheat into flour in medieval Spain, as well as the grain retained by the miller as compensation. Since that time, the word has evolved to represent today's modern meaning: a manufacturing operation that processes raw materials into finished products to be sold in countries other than where they were manufactured (Rascon 2020 quotes in McDowra, 2020).*

## *9.3.9 Uncontrolled urbanization: sprawling between San Diego and Tijuana*

**Rising housing prices** are one of the main challenges faced by the San Diego-Tijuana region, with many families and workers being forced to seek cheaper housing in areas away from coastal urban centers where housing is relatively more affordable.

This phenomenon has led to rapid uncontrolled urban sprawl as new housing construction has encroached on the surrounding rural areas. This uncontrolled urban sprawl results in several negative effects. First, there are **longer travel times** for parents to commute to workplaces and for children to reach schools. Second, there is a decrease in income in urban centers, which negatively affects public services, particularly in education. Finally, there is a loss of rural spaces, resulting in a **deterioration of the natural environment.**

The Blurred Border report analyzes this aspect as well, and its claims have been supplemented with our prior knowledge gained from studying the Literature review carried out for the first chapters of this thesis. In fact, urban sprawl is a phenomenon extensively analyzed and discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.
Thus, sprawl between San Diego and Tijuana refers to the uncontrolled and haphazard spread of urban sprawl in the surrounding areas of the two cities; therefore, some key points regarding this theme are proposed below:

- **Unplanned growth**
Urban sprawl between San Diego and Tijuana has been caused largely by the rapid and unplanned growth of the two cities. The lack of long-term urban plans and effective regulations has allowed disorganized development and urban sprawl to occur unevenly.

- **Expansion over vast areas**
Urban sprawl has led to the expansion of urban areas over vast expanses of land. This has resulted in the conversion of agricultural land, open land and natural habitats into new residential, commercial and industrial areas. Unrestricted urban sprawl has consumed valuable resources and negatively impacted the environment.

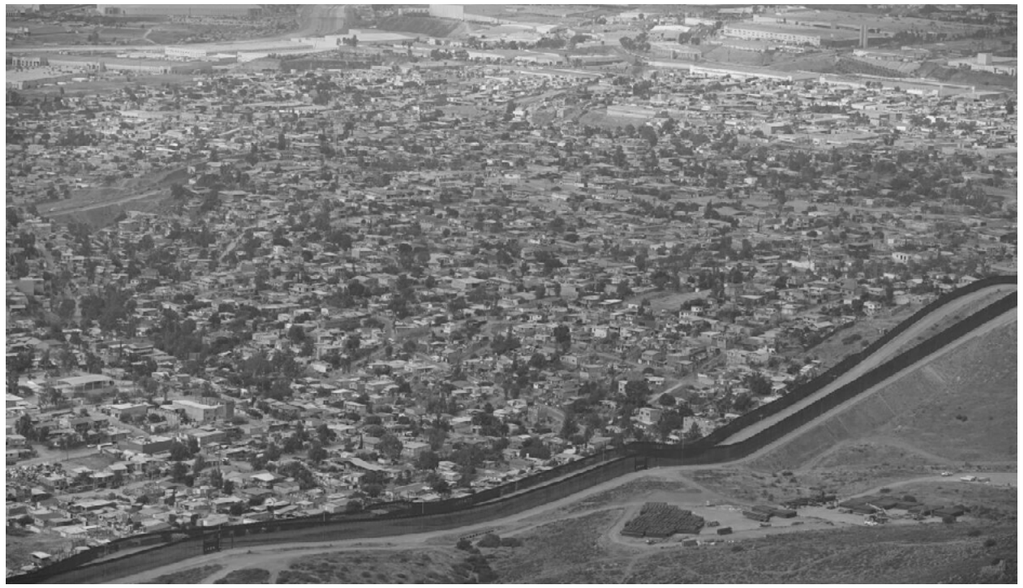


- **Car dependence**
Urban sprawl has promoted a heavy reliance on the use of the car as the main mode of transportation. Urban areas have been developed in a dispersed manner, making it difficult to access services and facilities without a private vehicle. This contributed to traffic congestion, air pollution and poor air quality.

- **Limited infrastructure**
Urban sprawl has placed significant pressure on existing infrastructure, such as roads, public transportation networks, utilities, and recreational facilities. Lack of proper planning has often led to a gap between the demand for infrastructure and its availability, causing problems of congestion and inefficiency.

- **Impact on the environment**
Loss of natural habitats, destruction of ecosystems, land fragmentation and soil sealing are just some of the negative effects of uncontrolled urban expansion. This can lead to problems such as soil erosion, flooding, decreased biodiversity and loss of natural resources.

- **Socioeconomic challenges**
Urban sprawl can also exacerbate socioeconomic and spatial disparities. The haphazard expansion of urban areas can create divisions between more privileged and disadvantaged communities, with differential access to services, job opportunities, education and infrastructure.



Regarding the issue of urban sprawl, it is worth noting that despite initial predictions of a slowdown in the housing market due to the COVID-19 pandemic, San Diego's residential sector has shown increasing activity and house price appreciation.
The **rental market** also showed positive momentum, with San Diego rental prices exceeding the national average. This result surprised analysts, who had initially predicted a 10 percent decrease in rents due to the economic effects of the pandemic. Instead, rental prices increased, demonstrating sustained demand and resilience of the rental sector.
This disproportionate increase is due to multiple factors, including demand **outstripping supply** (given the cities' attractiveness given job opportunities, favorable climate, and more) and significant **population growth**, but also to exaggerated **real estate speculation** (by investors seeking to profit from rising housing prices: Casa Familiar aims to combat this mechanism to provide affordable housing for Mexicans who want to move to San Diego).
In addition, the increase in prices is also due to construction costs and especially **the cost of land**, which, as our architect friend Mike explained to us, are particularly high in San Diego; in fact, the entire region is characterized by very high housing density, which means that there is limited building land available. This leads to **competition for buildable land**, driving up land prices and consequently housing construction costs.
Finally, as argued earlier, the economic differences between the two cities contribute to increased demand for housing: while San Diego is a highly profitable U.S. city, Tijuana is markedly cheaper, which has led to increased demand for more affordable housing in Tijuana by those seeking an affordable housing solution than in San Diego. Finally, the rise in housing prices in San Diego can also be attributed to the increasing demand for higher quality housing by those who can afford it, hence the resulting dramas related to **gentrification** (the dynamics of which were argued in Chapter 2 of this thesis).

In order to address the problem of urban sprawl, it is essential to **adopt sustainable land-use planning strategies**, including long-term planning, creation of compact and walkable urban areas, promotion of urban spaces to serve the community, improvement of public transportation infrastructure, and responsible use of natural resources.

Thus, urban sprawl has occurred in both cities given the population explosion they have undergone in recent decades; however, in addition to leading to unprecedented real estate expansion, it has also fostered positive factors such as improved intra-city and inter-city transportation services (see Appendices 1 and 2 for details). In addition, urbanization between San Diego and Tijuana has led to increased **economic integration between the two cities.** Many businesses operate on both sides of the border, facilitating international trade and creating cross-border employment and investment opportunities.





However, there are also serious problems with traffic congestion, environmental pollution, socioeconomic disparities and differences in infrastructure and public services between the two cities.
To manage the effects of cross-border urbanization, San Diego and Tijuana have sought to **promote cooperation and human rights management** through organizations such as Border Angels. Additional stakeholders can be found in Appendix 3.
To conclude, urbanization between San Diego and Tijuana is a complex phenomenon that has affected economic growth, demographics, and the environment in the border region: joint management and planning are crucial to address the challenges and maximize the benefits of this process.

According to *Blurred Borders* report, there is much evidence to suggest that **international collaborative efforts** are essential to the region's economic growth and job creation, as well as contributing to greater border security and infrastructure. For more in-depth analysis, see Appendix 3.
From a socio-cultural perspective, despite the divisions and challenges facing the San Diego-Tijuana border region, the *Blurred Borders* report illustrates the tremendous progress that has been made to build and **strengthen the shared social capital** that exists between the two communities and the shared assets in the San Diego-Tijuana region that, too often, are dramatically overlooked.
To begin to address these issues, more collaborative effort and investment is needed from both the public and private sectors, locally and across borders. For this reason, *Blurred Borders* report argues for the importance constituted by the **region's cultural connectors**, which would play a key role in helping to cement relationships that promote the dynamism of a binational civil society.
Although the number of cross-border connectors in the San Diego-Tijuana region is still relatively small, they are collectively helping to create the point critical based on which others in the region will take a more active interest in border opportunities.

# 9.4 San Ysidro analysis

## *9.4.1 An overview on San Ysidro: History, Culture and Economy*

We choose to focus our researches on San Ysidro because it is a unique place, were people's life is extremely influenced by the border situation in which they live.
It is in fact a well-established community with deep **Mexican roots**, situated in a distinctive location along the international border. Its close proximity to Mexico provides abundant opportunities for cultural exchange and trade, catering to both tourists and local residents. **San Ysidro's Land Port of Entry** stands as one of the world's busiest terrestrial border crossings, exerting a direct influence on the San Ysidro community.
However, being located in such a position also exposes San Ysidro to the challenges linked to the border such as **traffic congestion** and the resulting **vehicle emissions.** Moreover, it experiences geographic isolation from much of San Diego, posing additional hurdles to connectivity and facing aging infrastructure.
Nonetheless, thanks to the resilience and unity of its people, San Ysidro thrives as a **vibrant community** and serves as the **gateway** to both San Diego and the broader United States.

The urban form of San Ysidro has been shaped by various factors. Originally inhabited by the **Kumeyaay tribe,** it was later colonized by the Spanish in the 18th century. The establishment of a ranch by the San Diego Presidio near the Tijuana River in 1829 marked a significant development. This area, known as "Rancho de la Nación," served as a crucial crossing point for agricultural trade between the United States and Mexico.
During the Spanish and Mexican colonial periods, San Ysidro primarily relied on **agriculture**, with numerous large estates owned by local families. However, the community's history is largely defined by the "Little Landers" movement, which emerged as a response to land speculation and the dominance of large landowners. In 1908, the "**Little Landers"** founded the cooperative-based Little Landers Colony, aiming to provide small landholdings for local residents and foster self-sufficiency in food production.
The success of the "Little Landers" movement transformed San Ysidro into an agricultural and trading hub. This movement also championed the rights of small-scale farmers and promoted social justice. The residents of Rancho San Ysidro relied on neighboring Tijuana for supplies, leading to a close economic and cultural connection.
However, the colony faced challenges, including a devastating **flood** in 1916 that destroyed most of the homes. Despite this setback, the community persevered, although many residents eventually left. The commercial districts along San Ysidro Boulevard and Camino de la Plaza emerged, catering primarily to border crossers.
Throughout the **20th century**, San Ysidro experienced significant growth due to increased **cross-border trade**, particularly with Mexico. The construction of Interstate 5 and the San Ysidro Port of Entry played a crucial role in driving economic expansion. However, these developments also introduced social and security issues, given the neighborhood's proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border.
Present-day San Ysidro remains a diverse and **multicultural** city, characterized by a strong Mexican and hispanic presence. Its traditional storefronts along San Ysidro Boulevard continue to cater to small businesses and individual enterprises, reflecting the community's unique character.
While efforts have been made to enhance connectivity and promote walkability through the preservation of the original street grid and alleys in the old town, challenges persist, including traffic congestion and limited pedestrian access due to the intersection of freeways and trolley tracks.

San Ysidro has a rich history of settlement and growth spanning over a century. Today, the community showcases an array of diverse buildings and architectural styles that have emerged through various phases of development since the early 1900s. This unique built environment, shaped by a culturally significant past, has transformed San Ysidro into a dynamic asset for the surrounding region. Situated on approximately 1,864 acres at the southern tip of the city, San Ysidro borders Otay Mesa-Nestor, Otay Mesa, the Tijuana River Valley, and the international boundary with Mexico.
The cultural fabric of San Ysidro thrives thanks to its geographical position and close proximity to **Mexico**. The influence of **Mexican heritage** is vividly displayed throughout the city, evident in its numerous authentic Mexican restaurants, grocery stores, and bustling open-air markets that offer a wide array of Mexican products. Additionally, San Ysidro proudly hosts cultural events like the Mexican Independence Day celebration and the Day of the Dead, which serve as reflections of the city's deep appreciation for Mexican culture.
While embracing its Mexican roots, San Ysidro is also touched by American culture, specifically that of San Diego County. This area is renowned for its surf scene and picturesque beaches, and such elements have seamlessly integrated into the fabric of San Ysidro. Furthermore, the city's proximity to Tijuana, a vibrant artistic hub, has had a profound impact on shaping the cultural landscape of San

Ysidro. The city boasts a thriving artistic community, regularly hosting captivating artistic and musical events..

San Ysidro proudly upholds a rich tapestry of **cultural and religious traditions.** Catholicism holds significant importance for many residents, with the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel serving as a focal point within the community. Moreover, the city embraces the traditional Mexican festival known as the Day of the Dead, an annual November event dedicated to honoring the departed.
The city's culinary scene is also a testament to its vibrant culture. Mexican cuisine reigns supreme in San Ysidro, with an abundance of authentic eateries. However, the city also offers a diverse range of culinary experiences, including Italian and Chinese cuisines. Additionally, gastronomic events such as the San Ysidro Tamale Festival are regularly held to celebrate the rich culinary heritage of Mexico.

Regarding the neighborhood economy,  San Ysidro serves as a significant hub for transportation and logistics due to its advantageous position near the border between the United States and Mexico. As




*Día de los Muertos artwork. La Catrina skull and hat painted on a fence in San Ysidro by artist Gerardo Meza.*



mentioned earlier, the San Ysidro Port of Entry holds the distinction of being the **busiest border crossing between the two countries**, with a staggering influx of approximately 20,000 pedestrians and 70,000 vehicles each day. In a report published by the San Diego Association of Governments, it was revealed that the international trade activities occurring at the US-Mexico border have contributed a substantial economic impact, exceeding $5 billion, to San Diego County.
Moreover, San Ysidro boasts a thriving landscape of small-scale enterprises. According to data compiled by Yelp, the town is home to a registered count of over 500 small businesses, ranging from charming eateries and local grocery stores to beauty salons and boutique clothing outlets.

Each neighborhood and district within San Ysidro presents a distinctive array of commercial establishments. Local bodegas and service providers cater to the needs of the community, while fast food chains, gas stations, insurance agencies, currency exchange facilities (such as Casas de Cambio), banks, small-scale wholesale operations, and outlets showcasing international brands occupy the regional and border areas. San Ysidro Boulevard, Border Village Road, Camino de la Plaza, Beyer Boulevard, Calle Primera, and Dairy Mart Road are recognized as the primary commercial corridors within San Ysidro.

An esteemed attraction in San Ysidro is the renowned **Las Americas Premium Outlets**, which stands as one of San Diego County's largest shopping destinations, drawing a diverse influx of visitors from both Mexico and the United States. This premier mall offers a luxurious shopping experience, housing over 125 high-end brand stores such as Adidas, Calvin Klein, Guess, Michael Kors, and Tommy Hilfiger. Additionally, the mall showcases a prominent selection of children's clothing and toy retailers, including Carter's, The Children's Place, and Toys "R" Us. A report from the San Diego Union-Tribune highlights the mall's consistent sales growth since 2014, reaching an impressive figure of over $290 million in 2019.

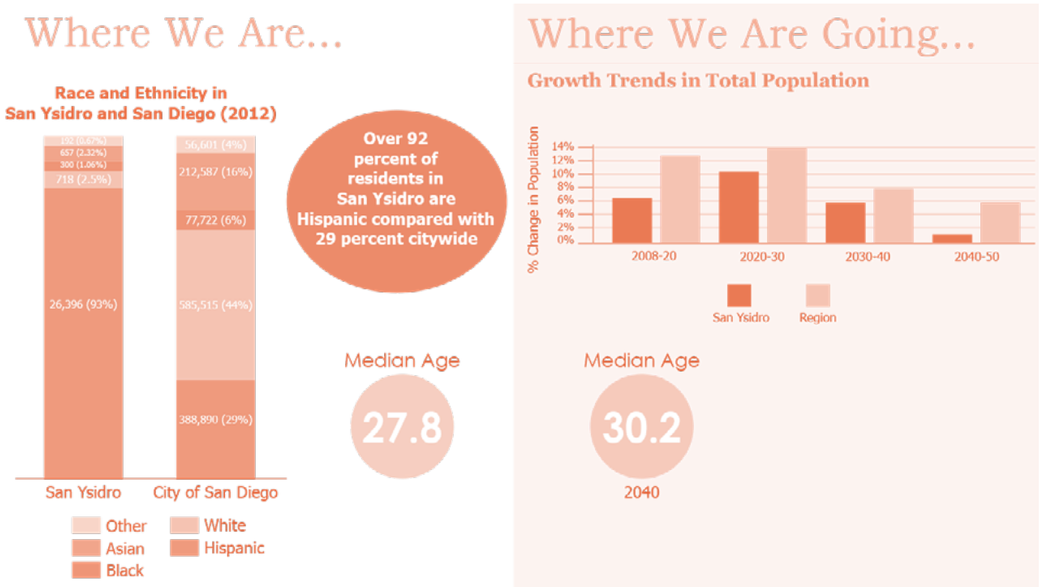


## *9.4.2 A socio-economic vulnerable situation: Demography, SVI and housing situation*

The population of San Ysidro consists of approximately 38,700 individuals. San Ysidro has a particularly youthful population, with nearly one-third of its residents being under the age of 18, and the average age of its inhabitants is 31.2 years. According to the 2020 census conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately **95.3% of the residents have a Hispanic or Latino background**, which is significantly higher than the average of 29% in the city of San Diego. This demographic makeup holds significant importance due to the unique and distinct position of San Ysidro and its historical context. As evidenced by the city's geographical and socio-cultural characteristics, San Ysidro can be identified more as an independent entity rather than merely a part of San Diego, strategically located to establish direct border proximity with Mexico.

In addition to its predominantly young and Hispanic population, San Ysidro is home to numerous large families, often encompassing multiple generations under one roof. These demographic attributes emphasize the necessity of providing extensive public facilities that cater to families with children, including parks, playgrounds, libraries, and recreational amenities. Despite the substantial proportion of families, the rate of homeownership in San Ysidro remains relatively low.

*San Ysidro demographic Data*
*Source: Community Plan and Local Coastal Program*

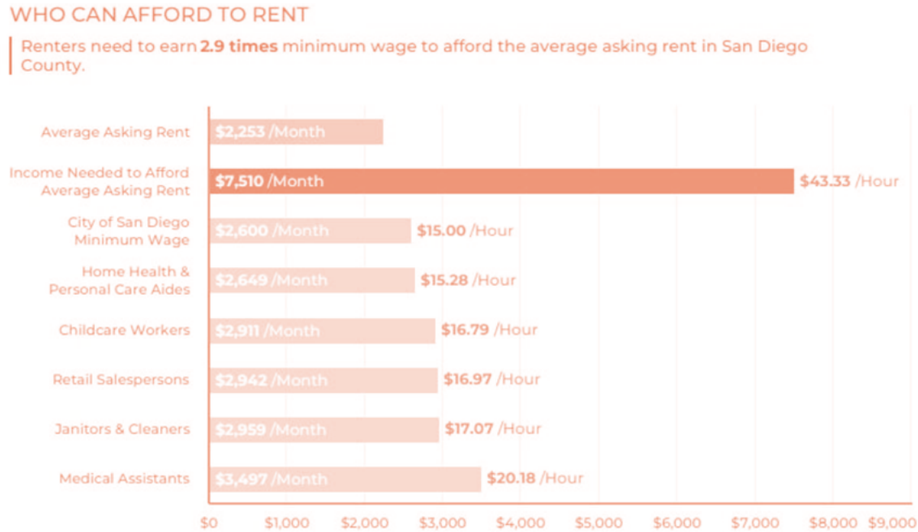


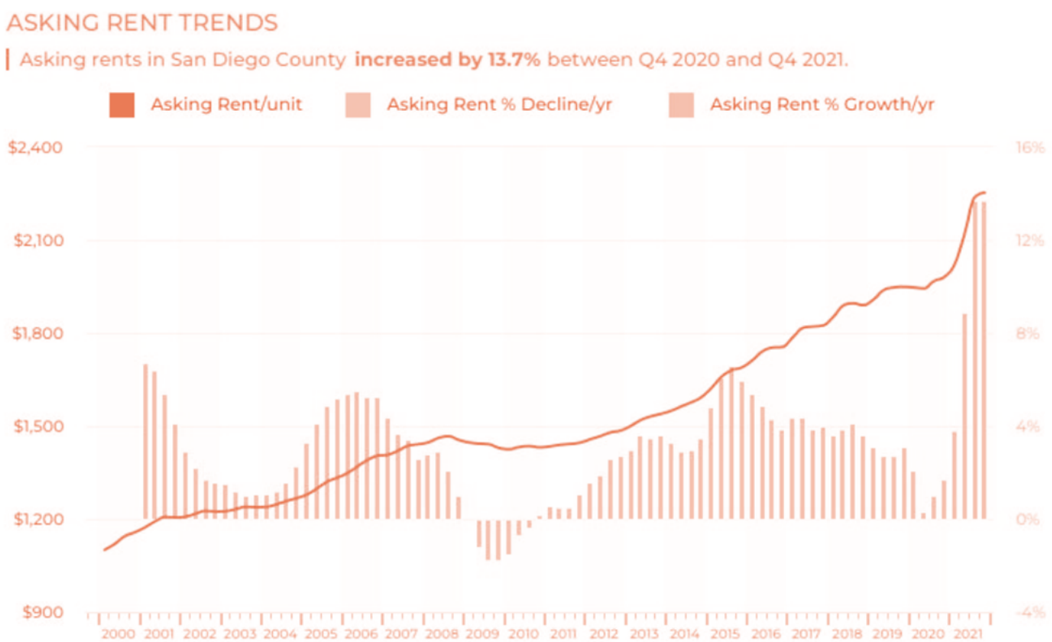

Approximately **30% of the existing housing** stock in San Ysidro comprises single-family homes found in San Ysidro West, San Ysidro North, the developed sections of Beyer Hills, and the Coral Gate subdivision in San Ysidro South. The majority of housing in San Ysidro is multi-family, with numerous multi-family residences lacking thoughtful design, disturbing the intimate character of the San Ysidro neighborhoods. Furthermore, a significant portion of the older housing stock requires costly rehabilitation, which is beyond the means of many residents.

Regarding property ownership, the rental rate in the San Ysidro neighborhood is high. In 2019, 65.7% of housing units were occupied by tenants, while the remaining 34.3% were owner-occupied *(U.S. Census Bureau, 2019)*.

This rental rate significantly surpasses the national average of approximately 36% *(U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)*.

According to a 2021 report by Apartment List, the average monthly cost of a studio apartment in San Ysidro is $1,268, while a two-bedroom apartment averages at $1,541 per month. These rental prices are comparatively lower than the county average in San Diego due to San Ysidro's proximity to the Mexican border and its substantial low-income population. Nevertheless, this presents challenges for many families in accessing housing.






A 2020 study conducted by the California Housing Partnership Corporation (CHPC) revealed that 69% of renters in San Ysidro spend over 30% of their income on rent, indicating a significant issue of **overcrowding.** The study also highlighted that 78% of renters in San Ysidro earn less than 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI), classifying them as low-income. It is important to note that the rental situation in San Ysidro is closely intertwined with the scarcity of affordable housing. The San Diego Housing Commission, a governmental agency responsible for managing affordable housing programs, states on its website that several affordable housing complexes cater to low-income residents in the San Ysidro neighborhood. However, data provided by the San Diego Housing Commission reveals a considerable disparity between the **demand and supply** of affordable housing in San Ysidro. In 2020, there were 1,829 requests for affordable housing, but only 255 units were available for rent in the neighborhood. Consequently, a mere 14% of families seeking affordable housing were able to secure a unit.
Furthermore, the occupancy rate of affordable housing units in San Ysidro is high, averaging at 97% in 2020. This indicates that the majority of available units are already occupied, leaving limited opportunities for new residents. To address the housing situation in San Ysidro, various

*Increase in rental prices: Source: Data provided by Casa Familiar*



affordable housing projects have been initiated, including the **Casa Familiar** project, which will be explored further in subsequent sections.

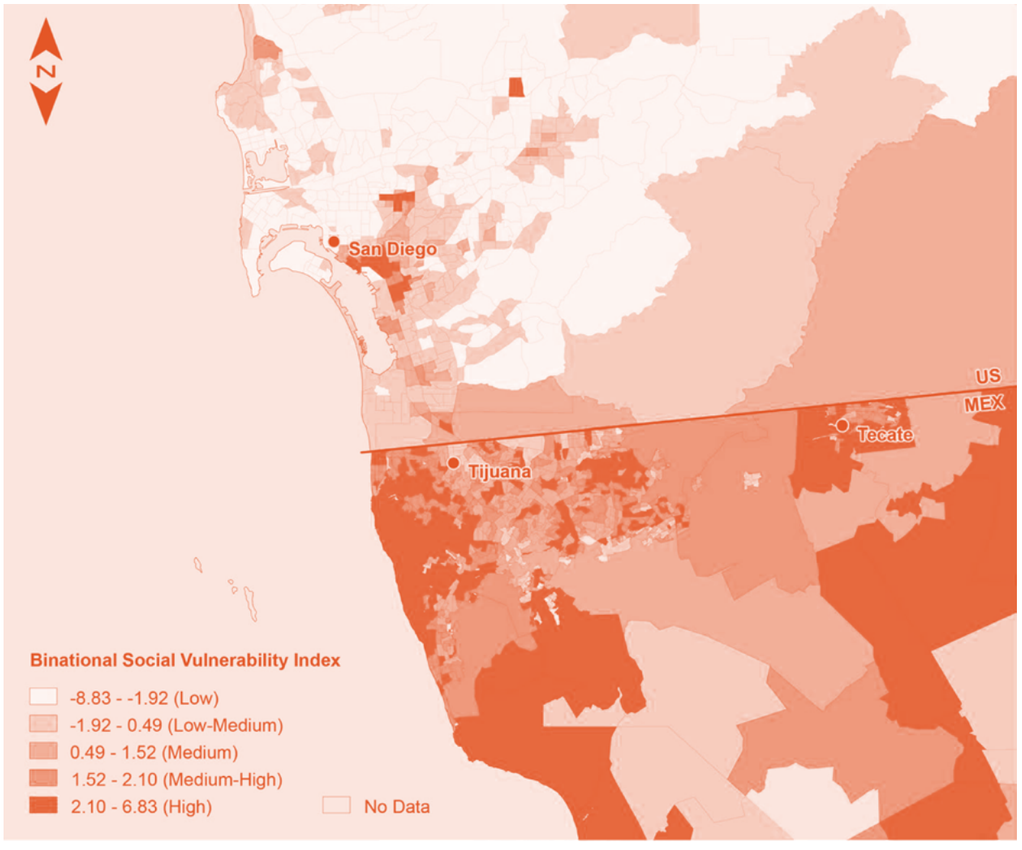
The housing problem is just one of the numerous significant social issues that have a profound impact on the lives of its residents, including poverty and high levels of unemployment.

**The Social Vulnerability Index (SVI)** serves as a measure of community susceptibility to social vulnerability, which refers to a community's capacity to effectively cope with and recover from emergency situations.
The SVI takes into consideration various factors, such as poverty, education, language, age, and family composition. These factors contribute to rendering communities more vulnerable to the repercussions of extreme events like natural disasters, economic crises, and infectious diseases.
In the case of San Ysidro**, the social vulnerability index surpasses the national average** by a considerable margin. A visual representation of this disparity can be observed in the map featured in the report titled "A binational social vulnerability index (BSVI) for the San Diego-Tijuana region: mapping transboundary exposure to climate change for just and equitable adaptation planning" *(M. Ros, K. Haines, T. Cruz, F. Forman, 2023)*. The San Ysidro neighborhood exhibits an exceptionally high social vulnerability index compared to many other neighborhoods in San Diego. This implies that the population of San Ysidro is more prone to **social and economic risks** when compared to other communities.
Specifically, an analysis of SVI data reveals that the San Ysidro neighborhood is characterized by a significant presence of **low-income communities,** with a poverty rate of **28.2%** compared to the national average of **9.1%**. Moreover, the neighborhood experiences elevated levels of unemployment, with 9.5% of the population actively seeking employment in contrast to the national average of 6.2%.
The 2019 census indicates that 24% of the population resides below the poverty line (*U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)*. Furthermore, historical neglect from the government has contributed to the dearth of economic and social opportunities for numerous residents (*Vigil, 2017)*. These factors collectively amplify the **vulnerability of San Ysidro's population** to the ramifications of economic and social crises.

The neighborhood's distinctive character, as home to a substantial immigrant population with a significant percentage of non-English speakers, presents challenges in accessing essential services and available resources, such as **healthcare** and **education**.
Additionally, the presence of the busiest border crossing point between the United States and Mexico within the neighborhood's vicinity entails socioeconomic consequences for the local community.
These consequences include heightened **vehicular traffic, increased crime rates, and exposure to health risks** due to the substantial flow of people and goods through the border.

In the reported images we can see the distribution of air quality and the health risks associated with it which, near the Border, reaches **extremely worrying levels.** These include diseases such as **asthma, cardiovascular disease, and low birth weight**.
San Ysidro is part of the disadvantage communities 2022 by the California office of environmental health hazards assessments (OEHHA)

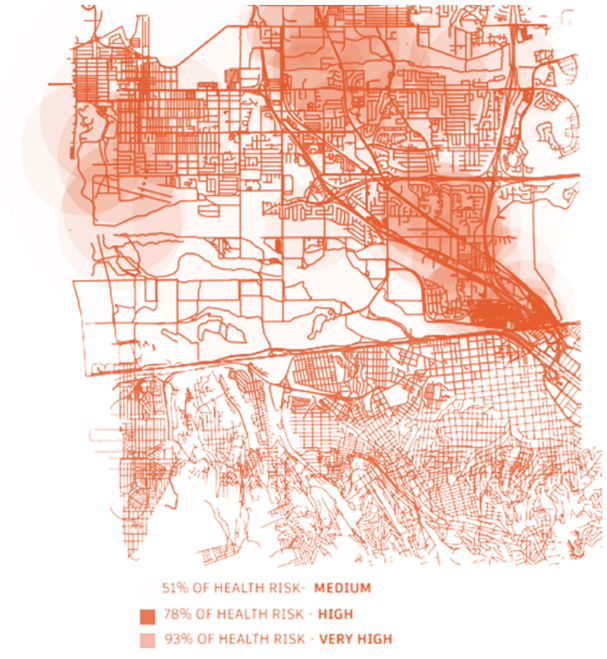
In summary, the social vulnerability index of San Ysidro reflects a multitude of **socio-economic factors that render the community more susceptible to risks** and the aftermath of economic, social, and environmental crises. Consequently, this underscores the crucial importance of implementing public policies aimed at enhancing the quality of life and bolstering the resilience of San Ysidro's population.












*To the right:*
*Increase in rental prices:*
*Source: Data provided by Casa Familiar*

*Comparison between health risk in San Ysdro and Air Pollution*

## *9.4.3 Education and language barriers*

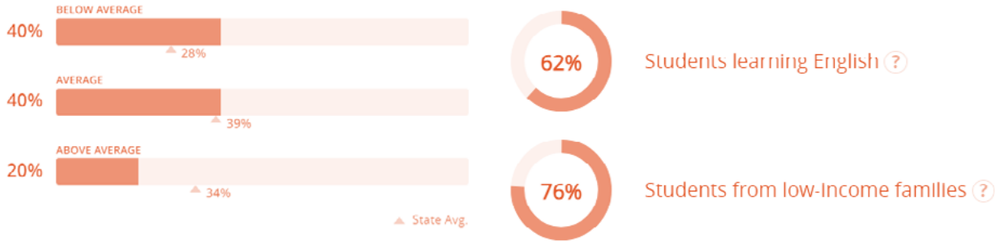
San Ysidro is home to a total of 10 schools, including 3 preschools, 6 elementary schools, and 1 middle school. Among these, 7 are public district schools, while 3 are private institutions located in the vicinity of Beyer Boulevard.

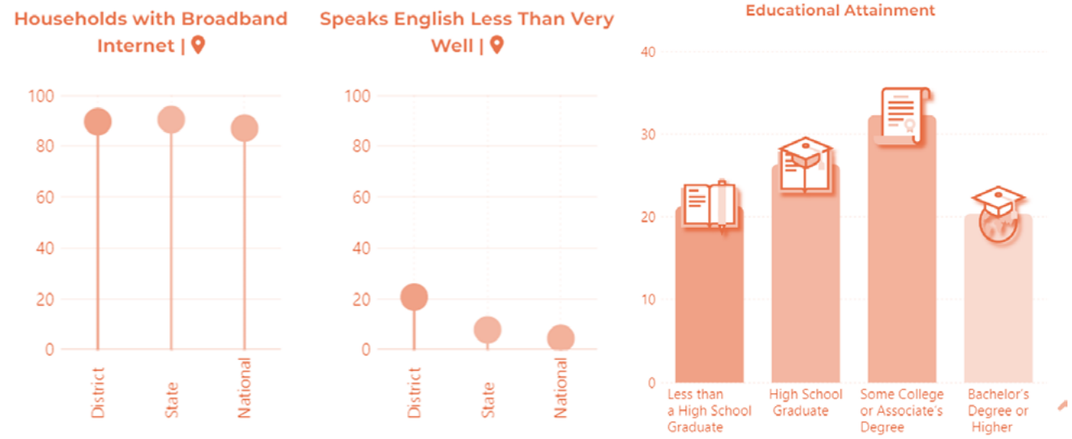
According to "greatschools.org," these schools have a **lower rating**, which combines Equity Rating, Test Score Rating, and College Readiness Rating, compared to the average rating for San Diego County. This could be attributed to significant obstacles within the border community. The "National Center for Education and Statistics" reports notable challenges such as **language barriers** and **socio-economic obstacles** faced by families enrolled in schools in San Ysidro. For example, 76% of students come from low-income families, and the percentage of families without internet access is lower than the California state average (85.3% vs. 88.9%). However, the most significant obstacle is the language barrier, as indicated by the data provided, with a percentage of students who speak English not very well at 21.9% (compared to the national average of 4.4%).

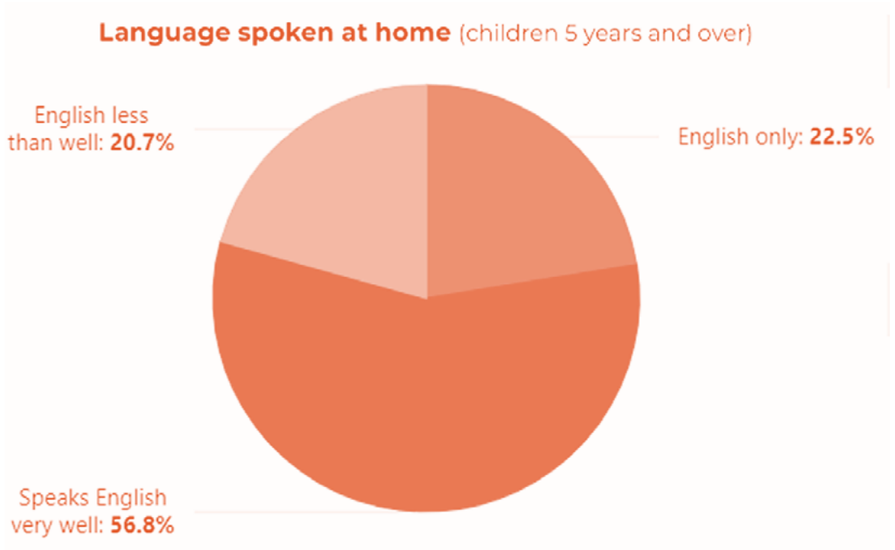
The frequency and nature of continuous interactions with Mexico play a crucial role in the acquisition of English among Spanish-speaking individuals. Many people maintain regular contact with Tijuana for various purposes such as social visits, shopping, religious activities, and medical assistance. The children residing in border areas face difficulties in **relating to American culture.**
Joan McNally, a bilingual specialist in the district, explains, "In San Ysidro, our aim is to assimilate them into American society while respecting their cultural heritage." This task is quite challenging as the non-Mexican population predominantly consists of minority groups. For most of these children, English is primarily **necessary within the school environment.** Spanish is spoken at home, in places of worship, and at local stores. Additionally, there are Spanish-language television and radio programs available.
Consequently, the school faculty serves as the **primary source of exposure to North American culture** for many of these children. Due to the significant number of Spanish speakers, San Ysidro often requires exemptions from funding regulations that specify the minimum percentage of English-speaking individuals in classrooms.

*Educational Berrers in San Ysidro: Source: IES NCES National Center for Education Statistics*





## *9.4.4 Mobility and transportation*

Bordered by an international boundary and divided by converging **highways** and a **railway line**, San Ysidro location within the San Diego region, presents a unique challenge in balancing neighborhood connectivity with regional access to Mexico.
Working in collaboration with the world's busiest port of entry, the transportation network in this area has a significant physical and cultural impact on the San Ysidro community and the overall regional economy.

First and foremost, it is important to note that, similar to the rest of the city, the predominant mode of transportation in this neighborhood is **automobiles.** This is primarily due to the long distances and the often inefficient public transportation system. The transportation aspect significantly influences the daily lives of San Ysidro residents, who frequently find themselves relying on cars, as we will further explore in the field analysis.
Despite the generally flat terrain, there are **notable pedestrian deficiencies**, including barriers presented by railway and highway infrastructures, as well as inadequate sidewalks and pedestrian facilities along high-volume roads with heavy pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Pedestrian connectivity within San Ysidro is negatively impacted by the presence of Interstate 5 (I-5), Interstate 805 (I-805), and the Metropolitan Transit System's (MTS) Blue Line trolley. These major transportation arteries divide the community into four sections, with limited existing pedestrian crossings along each interstate and railway line.

Existing pedestrian bridges over I-805 and I-5 are inconveniently situated and lack proper integration with nearby land uses.
Additionally, many other crossing points require improvements to enhance safety, accessibility, and overall appeal to pedestrians. Further constraints on mobility arise from State Route 905 (SR-905), which acts as a barrier between San Ysidro and the neighboring Otay Mesa Nestor community.
Approximately 51.6% of the community is located within a quarter-mile of public transportation stops, slightly falling short of the transit agencies' goal of 70% in San Diego County. According to the 2000 US Census surveys, 9% of San Ysidro residents utilize **public transportation** for their daily commute. This figure surpasses both the city of San Diego's average of 7.5% and the county average of 6.2%.
The southernmost point of the MTS Blue Line trolley is the **San Ysidro Transit Center station,** situated near the international border. As one of the busiest stations within the light rail system, the San Ysidro Transit Center accommodates over 17,000 daily passenger boardings and alightings as of 2014.

In addition to the San Ysidro Transit Center, the MTS Trolley Blue Line includes a stop at Beyer Trolley Station, which is also located within the San Ysidro community. Another station, the Iris Avenue Transit Center, is positioned just north of the community. From San Ysidro, the **MTS Trolley Blue Line** travels northward to the Santa Fe Depot in downtown San Diego, providing transfer points to the MTS Trolley Orange Line and MTS Trolley Green Line, which serve various destinations within the city of San Diego and adjacent cities such as Lemon Grove, La Mesa, El Cajon, and Santee.

During peak periods on weekdays, the trolley operates with three to four-car trains at intervals of approximately 7.5 minutes. During off-peak periods on weekdays and weekends, the frequency decreases to a train every 15 minutes.
**Two bus lines**, namely 906 and 907, serve the community with stops along Beyer Boulevard, Cottonwood Road, San Ysidro Boulevard, Camino de la Plaza, Willow Road, Calle Primera, and Howard Avenue. An intercity bus station is located on East San Ysidro Boulevard, just south of Camino de la Plaza.

## *9.4.5 San Ysidro neighborhoods*

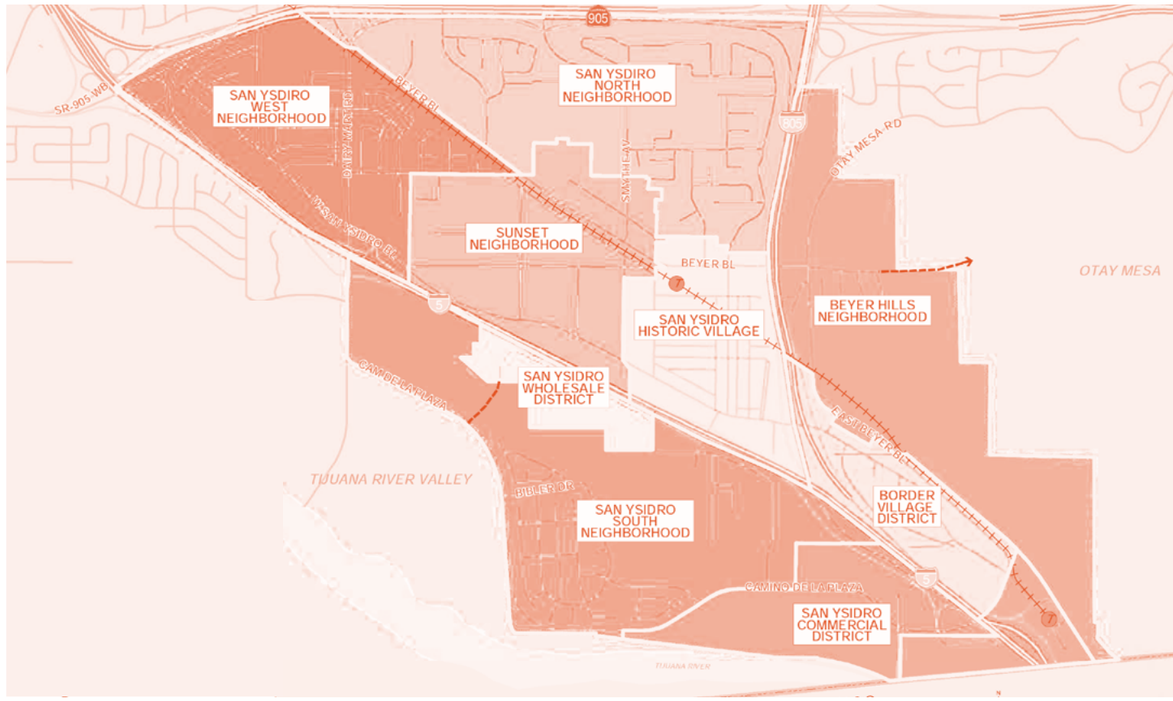
San Ysidro is predominantly made up of **residential neighborhoods and commercial centers,** with residential areas typically bounded by highways and commercial zones situated closer to the international border (refer to Figure 2, Land Use Map).

Within San Ysidro, there are **five distinct residential neighborhoods**, two neighborhood villages - the heart of the community: San Ysidro Historic Village and the Border Village District, two additional commercial districts, and the Port of Entry District.

The residential neighborhoods located in the northern, western, and eastern parts of the community primarily consist of single-family homes constructed during the '70s and early '80s, complemented by **neighborhood-supporting commercial establishments**. These neighborhoods remain relatively stable, with minimal ongoing redevelopment. The homes are generally well-maintained, and each neighborhood encompasses several medium and large-scale multifamily developments.

The southern neighborhood, divided by the Dairy Mart Ponds, comprises the expansive Coral Gate community along Camino de la Plaza, as well as a mix of multifamily housing options, including various projects facilitated by the Housing Commission along Willow Road. These neighborhoods present opportunities for small-scale redevelopment, often targeting vacant or underutilized lots.

Given the historical division of San Ysidro into three sections and its extensive development over the years, there exists a notable diversity of building types and property conditions.




**Legend**

**Name**

- Beyer Hills Neighborhood
- Border Village District
- San Ysidro Historic Village
- Port of Entry District
- San Ysidro Commercial District
- San Ysidro North Neighborhood
- San Ysidro South Neighborhood
- San Ysidro West Neighborhood
- Sunset Neighborhood
- San Ysidro Wholesale District

**Base Features**

- Community Plan Boundary
- Trolley Stop
- Light Rail
- Future Road Connection Alignments

*San Ysidro Neighborhoods*
*Source: Community plan Local Costl program (2017)*

## 9.4.6 San Ysidro Historic Village

This neighborhood holds significant national historical importance, showcasing the rich history and culture of the San Ysidro area. It is characterized by a blend of architectural styles and cultural diversity, reflecting its long-standing heritage. The local economy heavily relies on cross-border trade and tourism, attracting visitors from all over the world.

San Ysidro's historic village, originally consisting of around 1,920 houses, represents the remaining section of the "Little Landers Colony" from the late 19th century. In 2016, this neighborhood was officially designated as a national historic district, recognizing its cultural and historical significance *(National Park Service, 2016)*.
This village has played a pivotal role in shaping the community's identity through its small-scale, single-family, and multi-family dwellings. The neighborhood stands out for its remarkable architectural diversity, boasting numerous historic buildings and monuments representing various styles and eras. Noteworthy examples include Casa de la Bandera, constructed in 1906 and now serving as the local museum headquarters, the Church of San Ysidro built in 1925, and Casa Machado y Stewart, established in 1874.

The ***"Community Plan and Local Coastal Program Land Use Plan***" for the city of San Diego, prepared by RRM, a multidisciplinary design firm with offices across California, played a crucial role in supporting the analysis of the San Ysidro neighborhood.
The updated San Ysidro community plan received unanimous approval from the city council on November 15, 2016, and the local coastal program was certified by the California Coastal Commission in 2017.
A dedicated document focusing on the neighborhood, titled the "***San Ysidro Historic Village Specific Plan,"*** supplements this effort by providing a more detailed analysis of the San Ysidro Historic Village. The Specific Plan aligns with the objectives and policies of the General Plan and the San Ysidro Community Plan. It outlines additional zoning, development standards, regulations, design guidelines, necessary infrastructure enhancements, and implementation measures for the targeted geographic area.

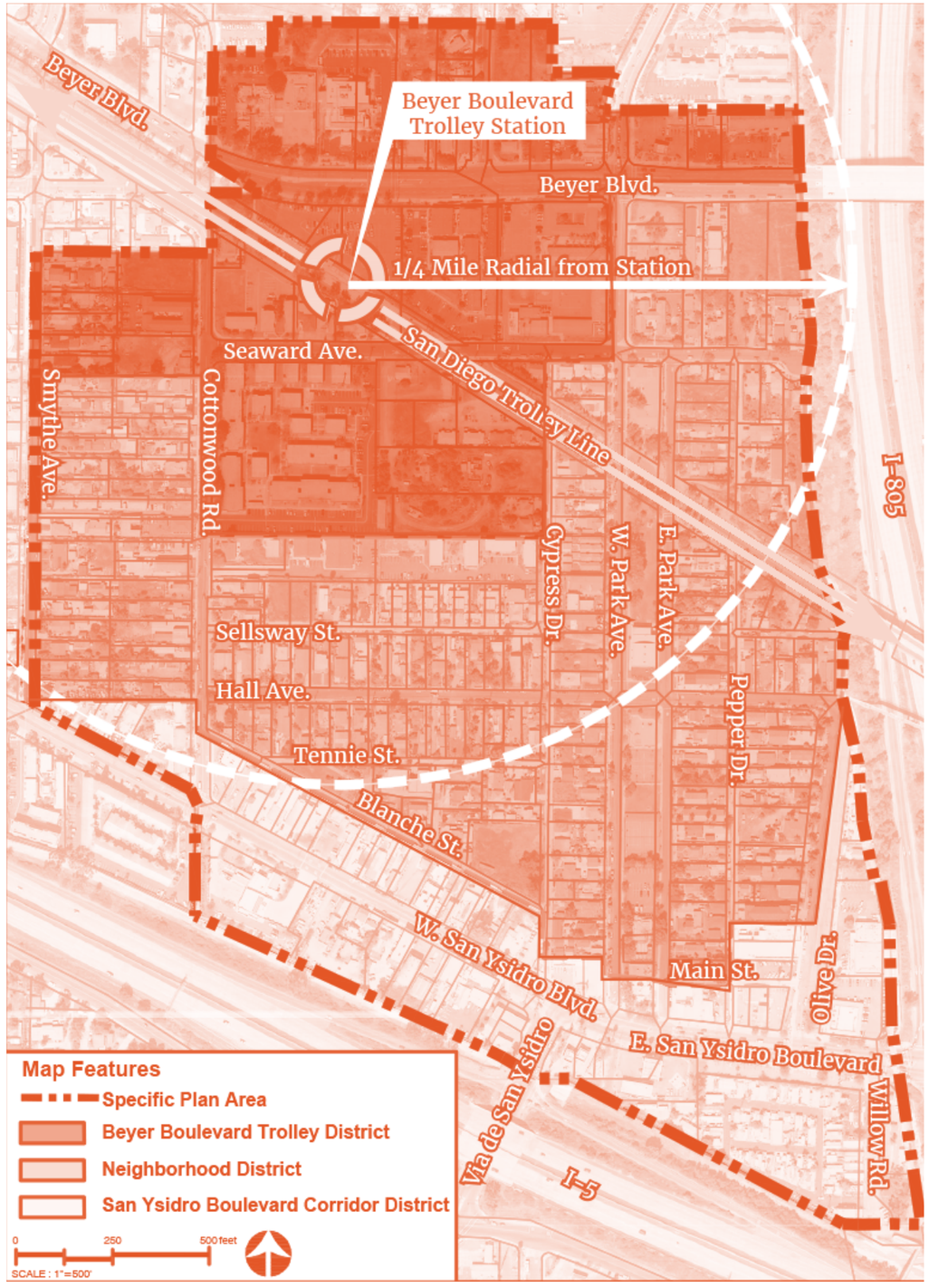
To promote the growth and development of the San Ysidro Historic Village, two key areas of focus have been identified by RRM the vicinity around the **Beyerer tram station** and the **commercial corridor along San Ysidro Boulevard**. These areas aim to preserve the low-scale, residential character while fostering a thriving mixed-use urban environment that offers opportunities for living, working, and enrichment. The "San Ysidro Historic Village" specific plan has been devised to guide this development, considering the area's unique opportunities and limitations, and to encourage transformative projects that stimulate the village's growth.
The San Ysidro  area spans approximately 1,800 acres and is bordered by the Otay Mesa-Nestor community and State Route 905 to the north, the Tijuana River Valley to the west, the Otay Mesa community to the east, and the international border with Mexico to the south. Before its annexation by the City of San Diego in 1957, San Ysidro (along with the surrounding communities) was part of the **unincorporated areas governed by San Diego County.** In the mid-1960s, San Diego initiated a decentralized planning program, and in 1967, the San Ysidro Planning and Development Group was recognized as a city planning committee working alongside the city's planning department. The San Ysidro Community Plan was adopted by the city council in 1974 and updated in 1990.
The document highlights that public awareness of the specific plan was primarily achieved through the community plan update advisory committee, the San Ysidro Community Planning Group, and a subcommittee dedicated to the specific plan. **Community involvement** and contributions were encouraged through a participatory strategy designed to collect and integrate input and feedback from community members, stakeholders, agencies, and the city.
Moreover, the Community Plan takes into account the neighborhood's cultural and demographic roots, often incorporating elements of "**Latin Urbanism.**" This approach embraces adaptive strategies, behavioral idiosyncrasies, and informal design elements based on how Latinos utilize space. It inspires a "staged environment" that encourages more intensive use of public spaces, the creation of new gathering areas such as courtyards, parks, and neighborhood spaces. Private gardens are often adorned and extensively landscaped. Housing among Latinos also displays greater diversity, with multigenerational homes and multifamily units being common.
To better understand how the neighborhood functions and the community life within it, we analyzed the main areas and their usage characteristics. The Community Plan divides the neighborhood into three main zones:

- **San Ysidro Boulevard:** This serves as the primary route connecting the northern part of San Ysidro to the border and Mexico. The Boulevard and the surrounding area, including Olive Drive and San Ysidro Boulevard lots, form an important commercial area. The historic section of San Ysidro Boulevard was established in the 1920s and 1930s to serve the growing rural community of San Ysidro. Over time, this area deteriorated due to the growth of the border commercial area and the construction of new shopping centers. However, recent efforts to

rehabilitate and invest in this area are helping restore it as the "Main Street." It plays a significant role as a pedestrian artery and landmark in the community.

• **Beyer Boulevard Trolley:** This area encompasses the vicinity of the Trolley station in the northern part of the neighborhood. It is crucial as it connects the neighborhood to the rest of San Diego. The Beyer Boulevard Trolley district includes designations for medium-density residential, community commercial, and institutional land uses. According to the Community Plan, this district offers the greatest potential for development and change within the Specific Plan Area. The plan emphasizes that the Trolley's transit service will stimulate future mixed-use and high-density residential development, and prioritizes pedestrian connectivity to link the Trolley station with bus stops along the main streets.

• **Neighborhood District:** This district has a historical significance, starting as the Little Landers Colony in the early 1900s. It primarily consists of single-family homes, diverse units on one lot, bungalow fields, and small-scale accessory units. The land use designations include low-to-medium-density residential and park areas. This district represents the heart of the historic San Ysidro neighborhood and holds great importance within the Community Plan. It serves as the main residential area of the village. The Community Plan aims to introduce various housing types in this district, including accessory dwelling units, to accommodate increased density while preserving the neighborhood's historical character. The plan suggests that new projects incorporating Latin urbanism concepts and designs will contribute to the appearance and atmosphere of the existing residential district. The plan also emphasizes the need for connectivity between the adjacent Beyer Boulevard Trolley District and the San Ysidro Boulevard Corridor District, incorporating pathways and alleys. According to the Community Plan, this district is an ideal location to embrace creative small-lot development solutions that are space-efficient and context-driven. It supports a cultural dynamic that is currently lacking in attached multifamily housing. This district provides opportunities for alternative housing options that offer the density of multifamily units and homeownership without the burden and cost of large single-family homes.




*"San Ysidro Historic Village" District Map*
*Source: "San Ysidro Historic Village Specific Plan" RMM, (2017 )*

## *9.4.7 Casa Familiar*

Casa Familiar is a key stakeholder in the area of San Ysidro Historic Village, because it represents the main promoter of all activities in support of the community.
It is a **non-profit organization** that focuses on community empowerment in the San Ysidro area. It provides various services and programs to cater to the needs of the residents, particularly those with low incomes. Casa Familiar offers affordable housing options for seniors, artist studios, and a gallery showcasing the work of border artists. Additionally, it provides healthcare services, manages public spaces and events, and organizes community festivals.
Casa Familiar was established in **1973** as a response to the lack of dedicated services for the diverse and evolving population in South San Diego County. Originally known as Trabajadores de la Raza and primarily serving Spanish-speaking residents in San Ysidro, Casa Familiar has grown over the years to provide services to **all residents of South San Diego County**.
Through a comprehensive program and a specific funding strategy, Casa Familiar aims to address the community's needs and support advocacy and development within the area. It has become the **leading organization** for community services and development in San Ysidro, offering a wide range of bilingual programs and services across multiple community sites. These programs cover various areas, including **civic engagement, healthcare, social services, arts and culture, and education**.
Casa Familiar aims to support the community by addressing their diverse needs through these programs and services:

- **Social Services:** They provide affordable social services that include income tax assistance, housing referrals, passport applications, public benefits enrollment assistance, translation services, emergency services, and immigration compensation application assistance. They also offer comprehensive services for the elderly, including personal development classes, social benefit program support, and recreational/cultural activities.

- **Financial Opportunity Center**: This center offers bilingual financial coaching, employment counseling, and connections to resources like public benefits and inclusive banking products, with the goal of promoting self-sufficiency and improved financial well-being.



- **Educational Programs:** Casa offers a wide range of educational programs, both in-person and virtual, to cater to different learning needs. They also address the digital divide by integrating technology education, providing internet and device access, and helping individuals manage connectivity.

- **"Safe & Brave Environment"** Program: This program focuses on youth and provides activities, homework assistance, summer camps, seminars on higher education, job readiness, and leadership development.

- **"Promise Neighborhood"** Program: Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, this program brings together schools, community organizations, businesses, and residents in local neighborhoods to provide coordinated health, social, community, and educational support, with a focus on parental involvement.

- **Domestic Violence Prevention** (DV) Program: Casa collaborates with local partners to raise awareness about domestic violence, provide resources, and initiate the healing process. They offer a theater production and discussion guide called "Etapas de Valor" to promote awareness, accountability, and support for victims and survivors.

- **Eviction Prevention Program**: In collaboration with City Heights CDC, Legal Aid Society of San Diego (LASSD), and the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), Casa Familiar helps community members by connecting them to educational workshops and tenant resources to prevent evictions.

- **Enviromental Justice**: Casa Familiar has an entity that harnesses the commitment, data, and resources of the community to address the specific environmental challenges of our border region, asserting that environmental justice is "essential in tackling the impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable communities." The objective of this entity within the association is to promote a healthy and sustainable quality of life through advocacy, just transportation policies, equitable climate initiatives, and green workforce development programs. A particular focus of their research work is on air quality, which, as explained earlier, remains one of the major concerns for the residents of San Ysidro.

- **Avanzando San Ysidro Community Land Trust (CTL)** Housing Development: "CLT" aims to create stable housing options and help build generational wealth for the San Ysidro community. The CLT allows for community ownership of land and serves as an anti-displacement strategy.

Casa Familiar will build 100 units of affordable housing to be converted into properties after 15 years. Building on existing community engagement programs provided by Casa Familiar, the association has begun engaging residents on housing credit, with workshops on housing access and anti-displacement strategies for tenants, as mentioned previously. The goal is to ensure permanent accessibility and create lasting community control of the land

They also have an Art Gallery, called **The Front,** located on San Ysidro Boulevard. The Front has transformed an abandoned area into a **vibrant public space.** Local artists, entrepreneurs, and the community joined forces to create a welcoming environment. The project began in 2013 with the creation of murals on old buildings, attracting attention and support. Through partnerships with local businesses, new public spaces like the Mercado del Barrio were established. Additionally, a public garden and a stage for performances were added near the bus station. The Front has revitalized the community, fostering social and cultural activities while stimulating economic growth and employment opportunities. The Front is the only art gallery in South Bay. Its director, Francisco Morales, is highly skilled at connecting people (exporting local artists, bringing people from Tijuana, etc.). His goal is to use **art as a bridge** between cultures and as a means to attract people to San Ysidro.

*To the right: Communnity Land Trust system*
*Source: Casa Familiar Presentation*

*To the left:"The Front"- Casa Familiar*
*Source: Casa Familiar Official SIte*









Finally, it is worth mentioning an important project which has marked the history of the neighborhood, **"Living Rooms at the Border"** designed by **Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman** in collaboration with Casa Familiar.

It is a transformative endeavor located in the historic core of San Ysidro. This comprehensive initiative spans 13,469 square feet and encompasses a diverse range of functionalities. Notably, it features **10 units of affordable housing**, contributing to the region's economic development. Situated less than a mile from the U.S.-Mexico Border, the project incorporates expansion areas designated for Casa Familiar's immigration services and the innovative "El K-Fe Barista Youth Training Program." In addition, the restoration of the esteemed Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, originally constructed in 1927, takes center stage within this visionary project. The church has undergone a remarkable revitalization, now serving as the **El Salon multimedia theater,** a collaborative endeavor with Teatro Máscara Mágica. This partnership ensures a dynamic and culturally rich performing space for the community.Living Rooms collaborate also with UC San Diego's Center on Global Justice to establish the UC San Diego Border Community Station as part of our innovative initiative. This collaboration actively involve UC San Diego's esteemed faculty, students, and research institutions in engaging with the vibrant culture and diverse individuals of the San Ysidro-Tijuana border community. The Border Community Station serves as a hub for knowledge exchange, fostering meaningful connections and promoting understanding between academia and the local community.

## *Field analysis: "Jane's Walks", Observations and interviews*

The Field analysis in San Ysidro involved various observations, interviews, and dialogues with local stakeholders, conducted over multiple days during our stay in San Ysidro. One of the methodologies we employed was organizing "Jane's Walks" around the neighborhood to better understand the local atmosphere and gain insights into the community's daily life.

- **"Jane's Walks"**:

First of all we will explain the impressions we got from our "Jane's Walks"
Our first encounter with this neighborhood was during the "Women, Words, and Weaving" exhibition, as discussed in Chapter 4. During this occasion, we had the opportunity to meet many individuals and experience the cultural richness of the area. We also witnessed the significant presence of **"border people"** – individuals whose lives are essentially divided by the border. Some have their families in Tijuana but work in San Diego, while others live in San Diego but need to make purchases in Tijuana. There are also those who reside in Tijuana but only commute to San Diego for work, and so on.
We conducted a site visit together with Michael Cintron, an architecture student from the New School of Architecture and Design who was working on an affordable community housing project for Casa Familiar. Michael explained that within the "Neighborhood District" area (the residential area between San Ysidro Boulevard and the B Trolley Station), there is a strong phenomenon of "**eyes on the street**." Everyone knows each other, and any external person or "unusual activity" is noticed, spreading throughout the neighborhood through word-of-mouth.

*"If we walk around here tonight, tomorrow someone from Casa Familiar will surely ask me, 'Michael, what were you doing in San Ysidro last night?'"* - Michael

Upon returning in the following days, we indeed observed what Michael had anticipated. We sensed that people were "noticing" our presence, but despite this initial wariness, we found that they were actually quite the opposite when we interacted with them.



The most striking aspect of our field analysis was the way residents engaged with us. They had an extreme need to "voice" their issues. Both the individuals we approached for interviews and those with whom we interacted for other reasons (such as store clerks or people we asked for directions) were extremely open and, in one way or another, tried to share something about their history and unique situation as "border people."

The Neighborhood District is relatively frequented by locals. Children come out of school, and there is a park where they play soccer or gather in groups. This area is home to several **Casa Familiar facilities**, including their headquarters, Teddy Cruz's "**Living Rooms at the Border",** multiple residential structures under the **"Land Trust"** program, and an auditorium where recreational and sports activities take place.
An important thoroughfare is **"Cypress Drive,**" which serves as the main connection from the heart of the historic village of San Ysidro between San Ysidro Blvd and the Beyer Blvd tram station. However, it is currently neglected, heavily trafficked, and unsafe. Through a community-led design process, community advocates and Casa Familiar are working with the city of San Diego and community members to transform Cypress Drive into a ***cultural corridor.*** This transformation involves incorporating public art installations, pedestrian safety measures, traffic restrictions, adequate lighting, and greening of fences along its length.
Moving away from the more residential area where Casa Familiar operates (around and beyond San Ysidro Boulevard), we encountered an extremely "**flat" situation.** There are numerous commercial spaces catering to the border: money exchanges,



*To the right: Cipress Drive, "Cutural Corridor", full of public art, and heart of community life*

duty-free shops, and some fast food establishments. However, we noticed a complete **lack of commercial services for the local community**. Residents are forced to use their cars for grocery shopping or any other type of activity.
By venturing further southeast, we reached the main shopping center in all of San Ysidro: **Las Americas Premium Outlets.** This large outdoor mall attracts many customers from both San Diego and Tijuana, offering numerous brand names. While exploring it, we noticed people of different backgrounds and origins engaging in shopping activities. However, it is a rather anonymous place focused on consumerism, lacking reflection of the cultural richness of the area. It is unfortunate that this is the only visible point of the neighborhood, but it still presents an interesting opportunity.
From the outlet, we proceeded to the last stop of the trolley, "San Ysidro," where people access to cross or return from the San Ysidro Port of Entry. Every time we visited this location, we witnessed an enormous influx of people. Streams of individuals with large or small backpacks, people carrying laptops or bags, women, men, and even some children returning home, going to work, attending university, or simply crossing to buy goods at lower prices.
Another noteworthy place we visited is the "**Cesar Chavez Community Center/Larsen Field.**" This spacious public space is frequently visited, especially by young people. Here, one can engage in various sports activities, bring their families for outdoor recreation, or let children play in the playground. However, this location is slightly detached from the community hub of San Ysidro in terms of spatial proximity.
On the other hand, the more central public spaces are not well-utilized. For example, there is a park along San Ysidro Boulevard, built five years ago at the City of San Diego's behest based on the Community Plan, but with an insufficiently participatory approach. This park reveals several problems and weaknesses: there is no access to the alleys, it is covered with native but prickly and uncomfortable plants, and although there is a beautiful tree in the center, it lacks a meaningful connection to the context. Consequently, as confirmed by residents, it is always empty except for occasional homeless individuals who sleep among the plants.

The park in front of Casa Familiar's Auditorium is the **"San Ysidro Community Park"** a large green area relatively frequented by schoolchildren after school hours. It serves as a **passageway** due to its proximity to the **Beyer Trolley Station,** and is surrounded by schools and public services such as the Senior Center and San Ysidro Teen Center, in addition to various Casa Familiar facilities. This park represents an important opportunity because, although it enjoys good visibility and accessibility, it lacks interesting activities or means of community engagement. It includes several picnic tables and even barbecue facilities.



- **Observations on site:**

Given the uniqueness of the area and the identified possibilities, we conducted field observations to better understand how the residents use the park.
These observations were carried out at different times of the day and week to understand how the activities in the park evolve during different moments.
The first observation took place on a weekday from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM. During this time, we witnessed numerous **school children** using the park right after school. Many gathered around the tables to talk or eat, while others played soccer in the large central space of the park. Many children, however, passed through the park without stopping and continued home. We also observed many people walking their dogs in the park.
During the observations conducted on **weekday mornings**

*San Ysidro Community Park*
*Source: pictures taken by us during our mobility period*









(around 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM), we noticed fewer children and a few individuals passing through the park without stopping.
On weekends, San Ysidro **generally empties out** because many residents return to their families in Tijuana. However, those who remain utilize the park to relax.

One structural element of the Community Park that particularly caught our attention is a rather unusual bench located in the northern part of the area. It consists of a square platform on which, on each side, there is a space for sitting. in the center of the square there are a series of tiles, each of which is painted with different, very colorful subjects and designs. Finally, in the center of the structure, there is a hole in which lies dry earth.
There are also **two other benches** in the park made in the same style of tile art, on which "**Trail to Literacy**" is written. In fact, each tile features drawings of some famous stories and fairy tales that have made the history of literature.
Upon closer inspection, the beholder's gaze is drawn to the vivid tableau of public art known as "Arbol de la Vida" or the "Tree of Life".

**"Arbol de la Vida"** by Victor Ochoa, 1995. This enchanting piece was commissioned for the esteemed community of San Ysidro and its steadfast citizens, under the auspices of the City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture. It stands as a resplendent embodiment of the Tree of Life.
So, by doing some research on the internet, we discovered that the bench is a work of art created by **Victor Ochoa**, an internationally renowned muralist, activist, and trailblazer of the Chicano art movement, has left an indelible mark on the artistic landscape of San Diego. His prolific body of work can be discovered throughout the city, notably adorning the environs of **Chicano Park.** Ochoa envisioned the overarching design, while the tiles themselves were lovingly painted by **local children:** this structure is a testament to the collaborative spirit that underpins this awe-inspiring creation. Once, this creation takes the form of a tiled mosaic planter and bench encircling a venerable tree, but now it appears as a dry earth with no purpose.






*From the top: "Trail to Literacy" public artwork*

*"Arbol de la Vida" public artwork.*

*Created by artist Victor Ochoa (1995) in San Ysidro (San Diego, CA, USA). They were realized in collaboration with the children of the local community, who painted the tiles by hand.*
*Source: pictures taken by us during our mobility period*

• **Interviews and dialogue with stakeholders:**

We had the opportunity to speak with **Goyo Ortiz,** a **Casa Familiar** association manager and architect, who kindly explained some dynamics of the neighborhood and Casa Familiar to us, taking us on a tour of the San Ysidro Historic Village.

Talking about the neighborhood he said: "*This place is **unique**, the culture, the language, the economy, etc. I am an intersection between the USA and Mexico and all the people who live here are, I am Mexican myself but I live here in San Ysidro*"

The diverse population that calls this place home reflects this convergence, including himself as a Mexican residing in San Ysidro. However, this distinctive dynamic also presents its challenges. Many individuals work in the United States but return to Mexico on weekends. Various factors contribute to this situation, such as the inability of entire families to relocate or the financial constraints that limit their housing options to renting a room rather than a complete home.
Consequently, the population remains in a constant state of **fluctuation**, making it difficult to engage people during weekends when many are away.
Goyo told us that the peculiar relationship between the cities has no parallel elsewhere, and as a result, it often draws negative attention. While it is true that there are challenges and issues associated with this border, it is crucial to acknowledge the hidden **co-dependency** that exists. Countless migrants patiently await their turn to cross the border, hoping for a chance at a better life. Culturally, the connection between the communities is strong, fostering a sense of unity and shared heritage. However, legally, obstacles hinder this unity, making reunification a constant pursuit. Unfortunately, the border jurisdiction seems disconnected from the realities and struggles faced by the people of San Ysidro, reflecting a lack of understanding and awareness..

San Ysidro is referred to as a "**jurisdictional island"** because it falls under the legal governance of distant authorities who fail to understand its real needs, often leaving it overlooked. The authorities' primary concern seems to be security rather than the well-being of the people. The border is even controlled from Washington, D.C., where they fail to comprehend the hardships faced by border communities, such as families being separated and enduring hours of commuting for work. Their focus remains on increasing security measures and erecting obstacles between the two nations.
Nevertheless, in response to these challenges, San Ysidro boasts a strong presence of individuals dedicated to improving the community's quality of life. Casa Familiar is at the forefront,



providing numerous services while actively listening to the residents' genuine needs.
Together with community members, volunteers, and neighborhood groups, they combine their efforts, primarily operating within the neighborhood village, where a sense of community thrives. Casa Familiar acts as an intermediary, engaging with the local community to understand their priorities and needs and then conveying them to the city authorities. Due to the **trust** they have built with both the residents and the authorities, their voices are heard.

Goyo emphasized the **slow and meticulous nature of their process,** as translating people's desires into actionable solutions can be challenging.
Identifying priorities, understanding needs, and presenting viable options require careful consideration. When discussing the relationship with institutions, he mentioned the prevalence of organizations promising innovations and funding for San Ysidro due to its unique nature and numerous hot topics. However, many fail to deliver on their promises, making it essential for Casa Familiar to be cautious not to lose the trust of the residents.
Goyo also highlighted the issue of **car-dipendancy.** He explained how San Diego once had functional trolleys within the city, but they were removed to accommodate more cars. The affordability and convenience of driving have incentivized car usage, leaving people with no other viable options. The lack of alternative transportation methods is a result of limited efforts to create a city with diverse mobility options.

Regarding ongoing projects, Goyo discussed the need to establish a "**Resiliency Center**" that introduces green innovations such as solar panels and water systems. These innovations are often prohibitively expensive for the local population. He mentioned that San Ysidro tends to lag behind the rest of the city in terms of introducing innovations. The Resiliency Center aims to combine innovative technologies and create five charging points for electric vehicles, which are currently lacking in the neighborhood. Additionally, it would feature a garage equipped with electric scooters and micromobility options. Although implementing such projects requires costly consultancy work and presents complexity, Casa Familiar deems them necessary to become a reference not only for San Ysidro but for the entire San Diego region. They aim to demonstrate that even peripheral and forgotten neighborhoods like San Ysidro deserve the same rights as the rest of the city.

Shifting our focus to San Ysidro Boulevard, Goyo explained that before the 1960s, there were no highways, and San Ysidro Boulevard was the sole road connecting to downtown San Diego. The buildings lining this street are relatively old. However, in recent years, little

has changed. Despite population growth, the commercial area remains stagnant, depriving residents of essential services. To grocery shop or access various services, they must drive to other areas. Recognizing this need, Casa Familiar has acquired a lot on the boulevard with plans to establish commercial spaces that cater to the missing services. Their approach follows a "bottom-up" logic, avoiding unnecessary commercial chains.
Near the **Auditorium**, there is a playground that the community, through Casa Familiar's efforts, has revitalized. Adjacent to it, a park with fruit trees has been transformed into an art installation called "Falling Fruit" by a group from Los Angeles. The goal is to have fruit trees where people can simply pick fresh fruit. Lastly, Goyo mentioned the **San Ysidro Community Park,** which Casa Familiar utilizes to host events occasionally, such as "Día de los Muertos."

We then interviewed other people who work for the community. Also adjacent to the park are two public amenities: the San Ysidro Senior Center, and the San Ysidro Teen Center.
We visited both, and the people who worked there greeted us with displeasure, explaining the dynamics of the place. The girl who worked at the **Senior Center** explained to us that the group of people who attend the center (50+), come 2 times a week from 4-6 PM and the activity they most like to do is sing Spanish songs at karaoke (everyone speaks Spanish, many do not even speak English or speak it poorly).
The **San Ysidro Teen Center**, on the other hand, is attended by middle school students (12-14).
The center is very popular with children because many children who go to school in San Ysidro live in Tijuana. Their parents go to work in San Diego and they wait for them in downtown, then they take them and go back to Tijuana together. In San Ysido this type of dynamics are very frequent.
They also organize camps during the summer, so the kids have somewhere to go when their parents aren't around.
As for the San Ysidro Community park, however, he explained to us that people often pass by but don't stop.
Kids prefer to go home, or go there, to the Teen Center. The Playground next to the park is much more used than the park.
And by the way there is another very large field (Larsen Field) across the highway that people use a lot more than San Ysidro Community Park (but it's slightly spread out).

Finally, we interviewed some local residents: people we met on the street, at the San Ysidro Community Park, Uber drivers, shop assistants... Everyone was very helpful with us, indeed, it was often they themselves who wanted to tell us something, without even starting a real interview. They told us about their neighborhood describing different facets, and what it means to live as "border people".







*Lack of services: on San Ysidro Boulevard there are just services for the border (money exchange ecc..)*
*Source: pictures taken by us during our mobility period*



Many spoke of the difficulty of **crossing the border,** and that there are many people who have to do it every day or many times a week, whose life is "cut in half" by this border:

*"It sometimes takes several hours to cross the border.*
*I have a brother who has to leave at 1 am to get here on time every day. And he gets very tired, but he doesn't want to live here, he doesn't like it. It's not his home. Some people don't like living here."*
*"I have to cross the border very often, it's a tiring life but it's done for work. Sometimes 12 hours sometimes even more, it happens that you work even 24 hours in a row.*
*Since it takes a long time to pass the border, once on the other side you have to make the most of being here and work as hard as you can and then when you get home you relax for half the day and leave again, so you don't have to pass too many times. Sometimes I have to pass 6 times a week, but it's really very heavy because it takes so many hours to cross the border."*

*"People on this side can no longer talk to their family. Before there was the Friendship Park, to have contacts from one side of the border to the other, but now it is closed and they can no longer meet."*

Another problem encountered in various interviews, and deeply felt by citizens is that of **racial discrimination** by Americans:

*"Everything you do in Tijuana has an influence here and vice versa, it is the most crossed border in the whole world and this has a great influence on people.*

*To the top: Larsen Field in San Ysidro*

*To the right: Karaoke event at Senior Center)*

*Source: pictures taken by us during our mobility period*



*I myself live in Tijuana but my family lives here, I used to live here in San Diego but I didn't like it because Americans see us as secondary citizens as we don't belong there. There is a lot of racism, and we feel it a lot."*
*"They don't understand that many Mexicans who live here, work here, and the jobs they do are the ones Americans don't do! (clean the house, cut trees, etc..)..*
*At the same time, however, it is a lesson to be learned because a lot of white people complain that they have no job, but if they have no job it is because they don't want it.*
*Americans are more comfortable with Mexicans doing these jobs, so it should be better for them too to allow them to do so, give him the documents."*

Finally speaking of the neighborhood, almost everyone explained to us in San Ysidro, especially **after the Covid period, there isn't much to do.** Sometimes they organize events but in everyday life it's not a very active neighborhood:

*"Young people need more, because they don't have many places to go. Too many people have become depressed during covid, because a lot of people like to go out, and they couldn't, they had to stay home. I think the situation is still a little bit like this now, it's better but there are still problems."*



# 9.5 Challenges & Opportunites

## *The strengths of the cross-border territory*

Following the systemic methodology, below is provided a framework of the main characteristics shared by the San Diego-Tijuana region, highlighting the challenges and opportunities offered by the territory that have emerged as a result of the Holistic Diagnosis.

**A shared culture and history**
The San Diego-Tijuana region has a long-standing shared history; its binational culture manifests itself in many different art forms, but it also emerges from the atmosphere of city neighborhoods, cuisine, and the contamination of styles between communities. In this sense, the border stands as a vibrant gateway that allows access to two different, but deeply interconnected worlds.
The region has developed a strong "borderland" culture, meaning awareness of its identity and history as part of the U.S.-Mexico border region. According to the writer and poet Luis Alberto Urrea, "The borderland is a creative space. It is a place where people can reinvent themselves and imagine a different future, far from political and cultural divisions" (Urrea quoted in Heidenry, 2018).
The shared culture and history are therefore an important opportunity to be seized, communicated and germinated in a project, so that its legacy is kept alive. In addition, supporting this aspect allows to increase the sense of pride and identity of the binational community.

**A vibrant binational artistic culture**
The binational artistic culture between San Diego and Tijuana is a vital aspect of the cultural life of the region, promoted by several cultural organizations and celebrations. In addition, a diverse community of artists, musicians and writers come from all over the world to make this region their home. The region is a cultural hotspot that offers inspiration and involvement for artists, musicians and writers who come from all over the world to take advantage of the opportunity to be in one of the "hot interfaces" between the first and third worlds.
The two territories can therefore act as an "unstable stage for performance" (Cresswell, 2004) so that artists can show themselves and tell their stories, but also to let the community interact with them and identify with their interiority and their own (art being a very powerful tool to embody this role; see Chapter 4 for further information). By celebrating the artistic-historical-cultural diversity of the region, opportunities are created for dialogue and collaboration between the two cities, allowing people to open up to understanding each other with empathy and emotion.

**A growing, bicultural and bilingual binational workforce.**
Since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and its evolution into the USMCA in 2017, the region has become a dominant trading center straddling the United States and Mexico. In fact, the manufacturing industry draws on two complementary workforces, allowing it to be the pioneers in multiple industrial sectors.
Thousands of workers cross the border every day to work in the two countries, increasing the labor employment rate, overall regional productivity and improving trade flows between nations. In fact, for example, many highly skilled workers come from Tijuana but work in San Diego in the advanced technology and information industries; other professional workers migrate to the U.S. to create small businesses and Mexican or Chicano commercial properties. On the other hand, many U.S. residents cross the border to take advantage of cheaper services offered by Tijuana (such as health service).

**There are many innovative and successful binational partnerships** already forged by non-profit organizations on a whole range of issues including urban and regional planning, education, health and human services, the environment, and arts and culture.

1. Border Community Alliance: Dedicated to promoting understanding, cooperation, and dialogue between communities along the U.S.-Mexico border. Its goal is to foster the integration of cross-border communities and overcome geographical and cultural barriers, working to encourage citizens of the two nations to meet, get to know each other and collaborate on projects that benefit both parties. It supports sustainable economic development and focuses on education and awareness raising specifically for border communities.

2. Border Angels: deals with the rights of migrants and asylum seekers, offering humanitarian assistance to migrants and raising public awareness of their rights.

3. Casa Familiar: focuses on empowering residents of the San Ysidro neighborhood, through economic, social and cultural development programs. It offers housing solutions at reduced prices through the Land Trust mechanism.

4. Tijuana Innovadora: aims to promote culture, innovation and entrepreneurship in Tijuana, through educational and cultural programs; the goal is to contribute to improving the image of Tijuana, challenging prejudices and stereotypes; organizes activities that stimulate creativity and encourage social and economic development by promoting local and international talent.

5. WiLDCOAST/CostaSalvaje: a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of the marine environment and biodiversity in the San Diego-Tijuana region; it works for the protection of coasts, marine species and for the reduction of pollution.

6. UCSD Connect is an affiliate organization of the University of California San Diego (UCSD) that focuses on fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaboration between academia, industry, and the community; It creates a bridge between academic resources and the entrepreneurial ecosystem to facilitate connections, the development of innovative ideas, and the creation of new businesses; it offers coworking spaces and access to technical resources, Physical infrastructure and networking.

**The contribution of older generations to the binational community.**
The elders living on the border between San Diego and Tijuana represent an important contribution to the region in terms of knowledge, experience, social commitment and philanthropy: their role and influence therefore contribute to the social and economic fabric of the binational community.
First, many elderly residents have lived in the region for a long time and have developed a deep understanding of local communities and resources, so they serve as valuable mentors and guides for younger generations, helping to preserve and pass on local culture and history.
In addition, many elderly residents are engaged in volunteer activities and philanthropy, donating their time and resources to nonprofits and social causes that support the local community.
For example, the San Diego City Senior Recreation Center in San Ysidro offers recreational facilities for people age 60 and older;
It offers programs and resources to promote the physical, social and emotional well-being of the elderly, with a wide range of activities, support and possibilities for interaction (such as physical exercises, yoga, dances, art classes, crafts and board games), but also organize excursions, trips, events to promote inclusion, social participation and connection among the elders of the community and combat social isolation.



**The contribution of the younger generations to the binational community.**
The presence of young people in the binational region of San Diego-Tijuana plays an important role in promoting cultural integration and economic cooperation between the two cities. They are an essential component for the growth and development of the region, as they bring with them new ideas and perspectives, as well as being often highly qualified and educated and knowing multiple languages.
In particular, young people can act as a bridge between the two cultures and communities, facilitating dialogue and mutual understanding. Often raised with the experience of experiencing both realities (for example, many Tijuana children attend school in San Diego, and many San Diego residents often cross the border to see loved ones in Tijuana), the region's youth can be a valuable asset in creating closer ties between the two sides of the border. Moreover, their ability to adapt quickly to the new challenges and opportunities that the region offers makes them protagonists of the economic and social life of the region.

## *The strengths of San Ysidro*

**Prensence of public amenities and associations actively involved in the community**
In support of the community, to compensate for the lack of services, there is the presence of good support from local associations. In particular, as seen in the previous chapter, Casa Familiar is a reality that the whole community can rely on for numerous problems including social services, help for young people and free training, cultural contributions, the affordable housing service, etc.
In addition to this strong presence, the community also relies on some public amenities made available by the city of San Diego, which give young and old the opportunity to spend their time together and find constant support in their neighborhood.

**Strong community with spontaneus social dynamics and a rich cultural history**
The community has a rich cultural history which, as explained in the previous chapters, has allowed it to acquire an important Hispanic cultural heritage at a cultural, artistic and socio-economic level.
San Ysidro presents, for example, the only art gallery in the south Bay, which often involves artists from both cities, and helps to enhance the artistic ferment of the area.
The community of San Ysidro is cohesive and active, leading the inhabitants to help each other in facing the major challenges posed

by their condition as “border people”, thanks also to the support of the associations.
An example of these dynamics is the “eyes on the streets” phenomenon conceived by Jane Jacobs (and mentioned several times in the first chapters), which allows an “informal surveillance” of the street, without the need for other security measures.

**Informal practices and latino urbanism**
The strong influence of Tijuana has allowed the spread of some typical customs of the city, which see an “informal urbanism” also called “Latin Urbanism” protagonist of many dynamics of the neighborhood. It is the citizens themselves who shape their own neighborhood and take care of it.

**Connection massive trasportation**
San Ysidro presenta dei buoni collegamenti con la città di San Diego grazie alle 3 fermate della linea del Trolley.
Il Trolley si spinge fino alla fermata “San Ysidro”, vicino al confine, e le perosne spesso utilizzano questo mezzo sia per andare al confine per oltrepassare il border, che per ragigungere tutti gli altri quartieri di San Diego.

**San Ysidro as a waypoint between two countries, with a potential great visibility**
Given its strategic position, it represents a district that has great potential for visibility. It represents in fact a meeting point between two historically different nations and this must represent a springboard for a neighborhood and a richer and more heterogeneous community.

**WIlingness of population to tell their condition as “border people”**
During the field analyses, a great need was found on the part of the residents to feel heard with respect to the peculiar situation they live in, divided in half by the border. As evidenced by the great artistic ferment present in the area, there is a great need on the part of the community to express themselves and make their own history known and empathized.

**Presence of many families and young population**
San Ysidro is mainly inhabited by families and young people. Often these are families from Tijuana, who return home together in the evening and whose children need a place to go while they wait. This finding underlines the need to provide adequate public facilities geared towards families with children, including parks, public spaces, playgrounds, libraries and various recreational facilities.



## *The weaknesses of the cross-border territory*

The resources that San Diego and Tijuana share are unique and collectively provide insight into the possibilities of working together toward a more prosperous future for the binational region. However, despite the great variety of opportunities offered by the territory, the region is forced to face several more difficult systemic challenges, in particular:

**Poverty and socio-economic inequalities:**
There are serious challenges associated with the migrant workforce, including lack of access to workers’ rights, discrimination, and language and cultural barriers. It is important to ensure that migrant workers are protected and treated with dignity and respect, and that they have access to training and professional development opportunities to improve their economic situation. Many people, especially Mexicans or Chicanos, live in poverty and degradation and also suffer the pressure of rising cost of living, gentrification and urban sprawling (Chapters 1 and 2), as well as being subject to a dramatic income disparity compared to white people. They are also affected by rising costs of living and property speculation.

**The region is facing a severe housing crisis generated by real estate speculation and population growth.**
The rise of urban sprawling threatens the landscape, ecosystem and open spaces. Therefore, equitable accessibility to housing is one of the main challenges in the region, especially for the most economically disadvantaged residents.
Sprawling is putting at risk the natural habitat of the region, threatened by the conversion of natural hotspots into expanses of infrastructure, houses and concrete.
Sprawling also generates socio-economic repercussions, such as the repercussions of gentrification explained above.

**Car dependance**
Due to the vastness that characterizes the urban apparatus of the two cities, residents are forced to constantly move by car to reach places of interest, their home, workplace, etc. This fuels pollution from fossil fuels, although many have an electric car. This addiction is also the cause of psychophysical discomfort of motorists.

**Pollution**
The dramatic scenario presented above appears to have serious repercussions on the fragile environmental context of the border between the two cities; the ecological corridors are also broken by the border wall, causing a substantial loss of biodiversity and natural habitats.
In addition, sprawling and reliance on machines contribute to contaminating the air, rivers and the ocean, although the main cause is discharges from industrial waste from unethical companies.

**The problem of water supply**
The location of the region is a semi-arid area with a limited presence of rivers;  water demand is currently outstripping supply in the San Diego-Tijuana region, whose main source of supply is water from the Colorado River. The watershed of the Tijuana River flows into the Pacific Ocean in the United States, but two-thirds of the watershed is on Mexican soil, generating conflicts over water management.

**Long border crossing times.**
This situation has a major impact on vehicle traffic at the ports of entry of Otay Mesa and San Ysidro, causing longer waiting times and increased vehicle emissions, resulting in reduced air quality for nearby communities.

**A native indigenous community with unique but threatened and endangered cultures, traditions and languages.**
The San Diego and Tijuana region has a long history of indigenous communities, including the Kumeyaay. However, the militarization of the border, modernization and urban development have led to the destruction of the habitat and culture of these populations, who now struggle to maintain their traditions and cultural heritage (especially regarding the loss of traditional knowledge and the extinction of languages). The native community faces a number of challenges due to the loss of ancestral lands and the sharp division of their sacred mountain due to the border wall. The indigenous communities of the Tijuana region are at risk of extinction and need action to protect their cultural heritage and improve their living conditions.



## *The weaknesses of San Ysidro*

**Social exclusion**
Come riscontrato nelle interviste vi è un grande problema di esclusione sociale da parte della città di San Diego, che spesso vede i cittadini messicani come -a detta degli intervistati- “cittadini di serie B”.
Gli abitanti sentono molto questo problema e si sentono esclusi dalla loro stessa città, rischiando di avere difficoltà nel trovare un posto in cui possano sentirsi veramente “a casa” e accolti dall’intera società.

**Large percentage of people who don’t speak English**
Il 95% della popolazione è ispanica., rispetto al 29% di media della città di San Diego. Molti di loro non parlano ingese, anche tra le generazioni più giovani. Per esempio nelle scuole vi è una percentuale di ragazzi che parlano la lingua inglese non molto bene di 21,9% (contro il 4.4% della media nazionale).
Questo dato rappresenta un ostacolo quando c’è bisogno di rapportarsi con la città di San Diego e con il resto del paese.

**San Ysidro as a “jurisdictional island”**
Questo quartiere spesso rappresenta un ostacolo per i suoi abitanti perchè è localizzato in un’area estremamente lontana dal centro di San Diego. San Ysidro è un quartiere completamente distaccato dal resto della città sia dal punto di vista fisico che culturale, e spesso viene messo “da parte” dalle autorità. Il border viene controllato addirittura da Washington DC, e loro non capiscono il dramma delle border people, ma pensano solo ad aumentare la sicurezza.

**Poor pedestrian connectivity**
Il quartiere è tagliato da due autostrade convergenti e dalla linea del tram. Questo rappresenta un ostacolo a livello di connettività pedonale. Infatti, nonostante il territorio sia principlamente pianeggiante, le persone tendono a camminare poco, e a muoversi principlamente con la macchina.Questo, sommato alla distanza del quartiere dal resto della città e alla mancanza di servizi di prossimità, porta il quartiere di San Ysidro ad essere estremamente dipendente dalle automobili.

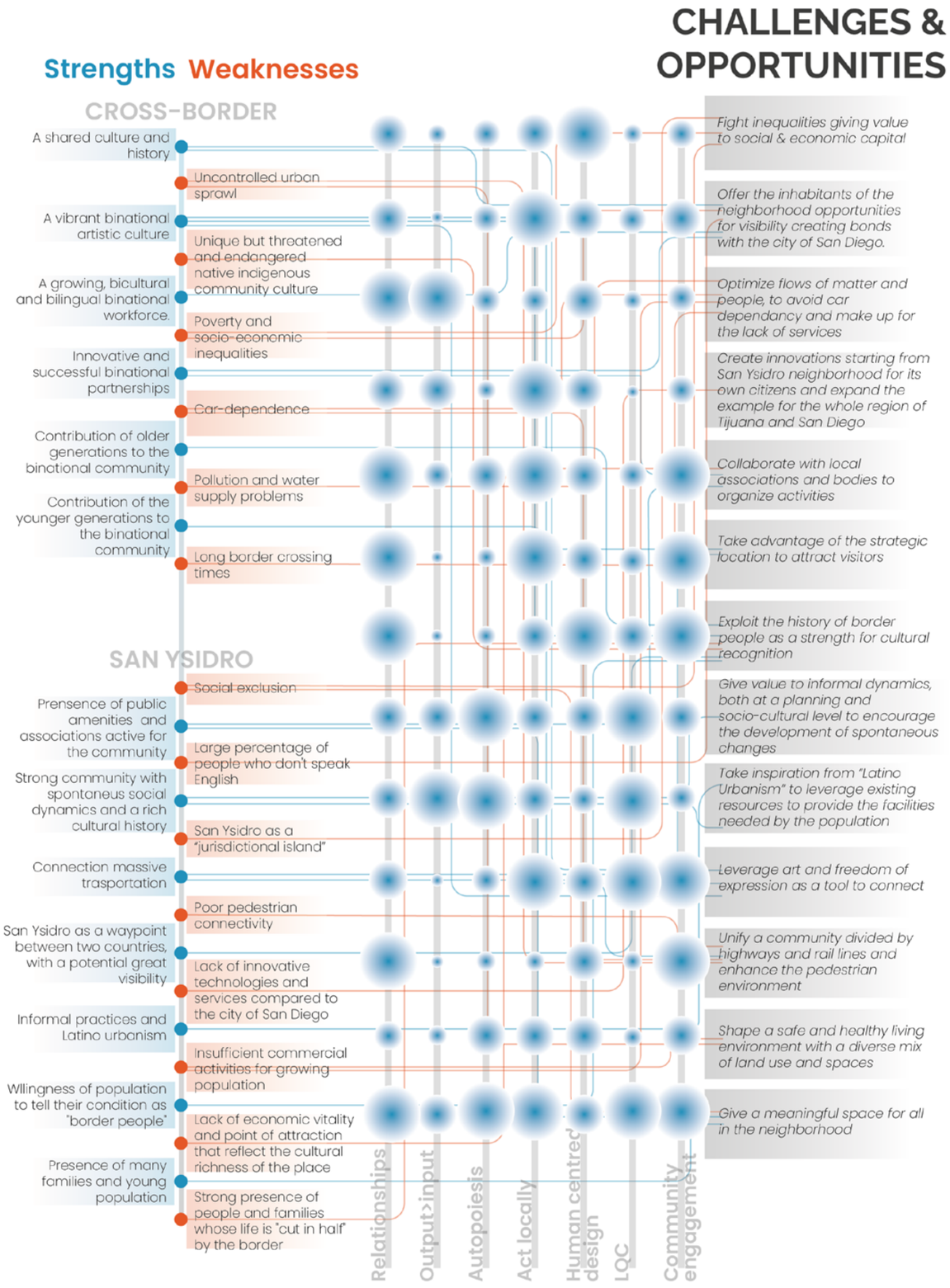
**Lack of innovative technologies and services compared to the city of San Diego**
La grande distanza dal centro di San Diego, isieme ai vari problemi sociali e all’alto tasso di povertà fanno sì che San Ysidro si ritrovi spesso a ottenere innovazione e servizi “nuovi” e freschi dopo rispetto al resto della città e dello stato. Casa Familiar sta costruendo il resiliancy Center, appunto per ovviare a questo problema nel campo della mobilità

sostenibile, e lavora anche sul fronte della ricerca attraverso
Questo dimostra, come Goyo stesso, responsabile di Casa Familiar, ci ha spiegato, che vi è volontà da parte dell'associazione e della comunità di rimettere il quartiere  al centro dell'attenzione anche dal punto di vista dell'innovazione

**Insufficient commercial activities for growing populatiom**
Nel corso degli anni la popolazione di San Ysidro è cresciuta notevolmente, espandendosi sia fisicamente che a livello di densità.
Tuttavia le attività commerciali a servizio dei cittadini non aumentano di pari passo con la crescita della popolazione.
Sul San Ysidro Boulevard per esempio sono presenti principalemente servizi per le persone di passaggio che crossano il borde, ma mancano attività commerciali per la vita quotidiana e bisogni di base.

**Lack of economic vitality and point of attraction that reflect the cultural richness of the place**
Vi è una mancanza di vitalità economica che impedisce al quartiere, nonostante la sua potenziale visibilità, di sfruttare a pieno le proprie risorse.
L'unico luogo di attività commericiali che attira visitatori è Las Americas Premium Outlets, rappresentando quindi una grande opportunità per il quartier. Si tratta però di un luogo molto anonimo, focalizzato sul consumismo, che non rispecchia la ricchezza culturale del luogo.

**Strong presence of people and families whose life is "cut in half" by the border**
The situation in the neighborhood of San Ysidro is extremely peculiar in terms of its population because it predominantly consists of people whose lives are significantly impacted by the presence of the border. These are often individuals who work in San Diego but live in Tijuana, or vice versa. Their families may be "on the other side of the border," or they may simply have the need to engage in activities or make purchases in Tijuana, but are subjected to long hours of waiting.
The two cities of San Diego and Tijuana, as revealed by research and numerous interviews, are closely connected and mutually influenced, with San Ysidro serving as the physical junction between them. As a result, the neighborhood's situation is fluid, making it difficult to consistently engage the residents, who often return to their families, especially on weekends.



# 9.6 **Systemic Placemaking project**

The lack of services and car dependency highlight a fundamental feature of the current situation of the neighborhood, supported by a good **sense of community** already present in the **Hispanic community** that lives there: helping each other by exploiting sharing. Our Systemic Project therefore aims a lot at exploiting this element to respond to some identified challenges, through a series of strategies.

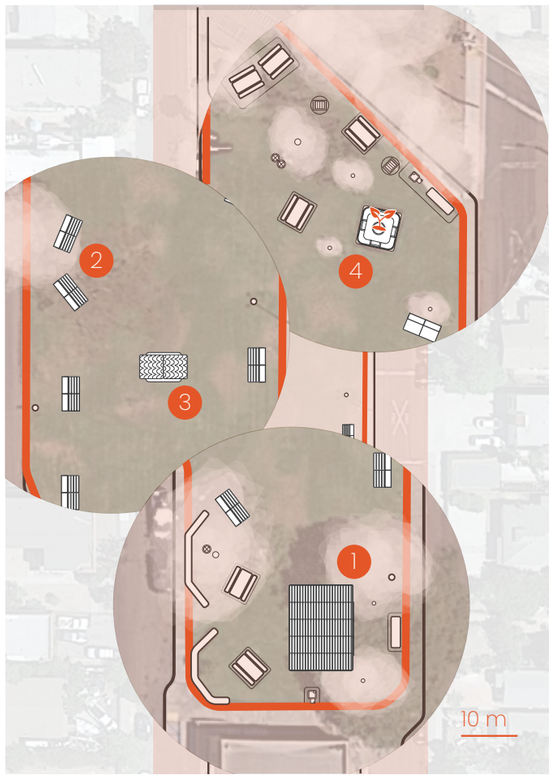
Furthermore, what emerged most from our analysis is that the inhabitants of San Ysidro, the so-called "**border people**", need to be listened to. As Goyo said, San Ysidro is a neighborhood that is too set aside and ignored by the authorities and needs to voice its problems.
Casa Familiar provides a fundamental and concrete support in the everyday life of these people, but the WDC could be an opportunity to put this neighborhood in the spotlight, through creative means shaped by the citizens themselves, and facilitate these people to obtain the just services on the one hand and unhinging prejudice and racial segregation on the other.

Finally there is the element of self-construction. The project deliberately has several possibilities of declination, and a large margin of modification so that it is the citizens themselves who choose which solutions are most suitable for them and how to implement them. Children waiting for their parents to return to Tijuana after school for example (and not only), would thus have a creative space in which to find and give shape to their own desires and needs. The simplicity and economy of the project is also given by the choice of reused materials for almost the entire realization of all the elements of the project, declining the "Latino Urbanism" in an educational sense and as an example for the whole city. DIY workshops could be led by **San Diego non-profit San Diego Craft** in partnership with adjacent civic centers San Ysidro Teen Center and **San Ysidro Senior Center,** which organize community recreation .

Our systemic project therefore has two main objectives: in the first place that of activating a place that, slowly, can become more and more participated and experienced, becoming a "sharing" hub, declined in different senses, to improve the life of the inhabitants. The second objective is to bring out this condition of "border people", or transform this extremely peculiar characteristic into a strength and a means to create visibility rather than a limitation, exploiting the context of the WDC to share results and arrive at throughout the city of San Diego and beyond.

Starting from this assumption, the methodologies explained in chapter 5 and some examples in chapter 6 were applied to select the most optimal solutions to achieve various objectives spread over time starting from a specific place with simple, **light and economic (LQC)** actions.
The project is focused on the park "San Ysidro Park", because it represents the central heart of the San Ysidro Historic Village, and is an important crossing point. Furthermore, the proximity to the **Auditorium of Casa Familiar** represents a strength that can be exploited to organize activities in collaboration with them.



# State of the art
San Ysidro Community Park



**San Ysidro Community Park**
Systemic Placemaking area

100 m



10 m

Legend

1. **"Tree of Life" artistical structure**
2. **Picnic benches and table**
3. **"Trail to Literacy" artistical bench**
4. **Drinking water fountain**
5. **Barbecue**
6. **Barriers**
7. **Waste bin**
8. **Lights**
9. **Tree**

1


2


4


5


3


6




# State of the project
San Ysidro Community Park



10 m

Legend

1. **Stage** "Share your place"
2. **Bench "Human Library"** "Share your story"
3. **Free Library** "Share your time"
4. **"Tree of Life " (plant again after 30 years)** "Share your thought"

1


2


3


4





## *Step 1*

The first step involves a series of interventions focused on the concept of "sharing" in order to strengthen the sense of community and give citizens back a lived-in space, exploiting pre-existing materials, and enhancing the activities that are carried out by citizens in the neighbourhood.

- **"COMPARTE TU TIEMPO"** (Share your time):

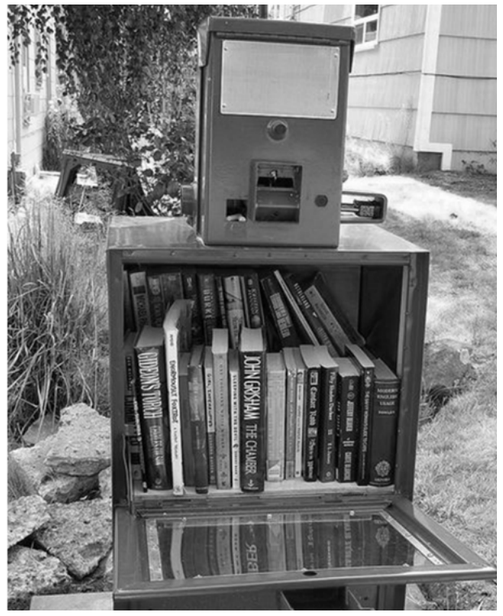
A "Free library" has been introduced, which is widespread in various neighborhoods in San Diego but completely absent in San Ysidro. Here, people can bring books they no longer read and freely take books that interest them, following the logic of **bartering**. This element could extend beyond sharing written words on books to also include sharing words written by the residents themselves, created by numerous children or seniors in public centers such as the **San Ysidro Teen Center** and **San Ysidro Senior Center.** Additionally, free libraries, as demonstrated by many case studies, can be created using various reused objects, such as an unused drawer, a broken refrigerator, or any type of container, eliminating the need to purchase new and impactful materials.
On the library a small notice board/calendar could be placed, in which citizens can list small tasks they need assistance with or can offer help for (e.g., purchasing medications, grocery items, or other dispersed products, providing companionship for the elderly, sharing tools or offering rides to school for children, receiving and safeguarding packages, etc.).
Encouraging mutual help can provide a temporary solution to the lack of services. Sometimes, even going to the supermarket can be **challenging** in an area where cars are the only means of transportation. By introducing a system where people can exchange "mutual favors," a first step can be taken to optimize the resources available in the neighborhood. This could represent a testing phase for future development initiated in "**Phase 3**" (to be explained later) to further optimize these resources.

*To the right: "COMPARTE TU TIEMPO" - Communication project*
*Source: authors*

*In the next pages: DIY free library, made out from sccrape materials.*
*Source: littlefreelibrary.org*

*Suggestive photomontages of the final result - Free library*
*Source: authors*







REVALUE AND GIVE MEANING TO THE "TRAIL TO LITERACY" BENCHES PUBLIC ARTWORK BY **VICTOR OCHOA** (1995)



**Yo necesitaría...**
**I would need to...**

**Estoy disponible para...**
**I am available for...**

ON THE BACK



este banco es Biblioteca Humana: te ofrece un espacio para contar a los demás o escuchar sus historias.
Elige dónde sentarte, ¡el globo comunicará a los demás lo que buscas!

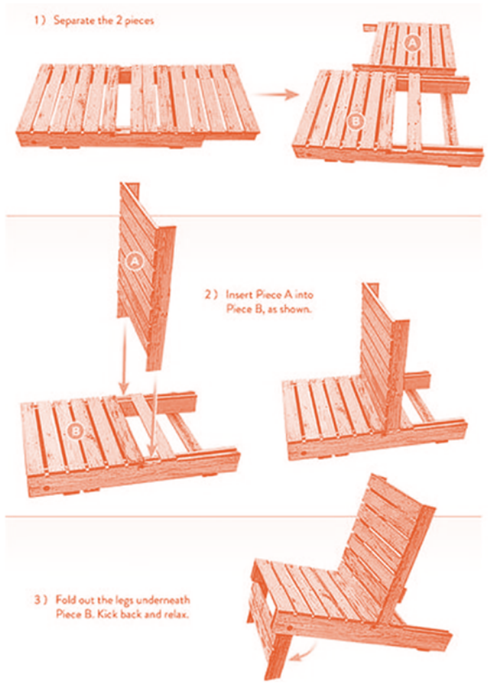
# COMPARTE TU HISTORIA

# SHARE YOUR STORY

this bench is Human Library: it gives you a space to tell others or hear their stories. Choose where to sit, the balloon will communicate to others what you are looking for!

• **"COMPARTE TU HISTORIA"** (Share your story):

Another interesting element could be benches, already present in the area but insufficient if the number of visitors increases. Built in collaboration with self-construction partners using discarded pallets (provided free of charge by the San Diego non-profit organization "Repalletize"), these benches could serve as a means of communication to encourage interaction among citizens. Graphics on the benches, employing gamification, could create a role-playing experience, with one side representing the "listener" and the other side representing the "open book." This concept draws inspiration from the case study of "The Human Library," analyzed in Chapter 6, which aims to connect people and break down prejudices. This activity could be carried out in collaboration with the association "Friends of the San Diego Public Library," which also works with the San Ysidro Public Library located adjacent to the park, potentially becoming one of the "Publishing Partners" of the "Human Library Organization" spread worldwide. Alternatively, or in addition to this, the project could attract language students (by establishing a partnership with one or more local colleges) or enthusiasts who are interested not only in hearing an interesting story but also in learning Spanish. This could provide a space for "Language Exchange," allowing residents who do not speak English to learn the language themselves.






*To the left: DIY Pallet chair made out from sccrape materials. Source: Pinterest*






*To the left: Suggestive photomontages of the final result - "comparte tu historia" Storyboard Source: Authors*

*To the right: Suggestive photomontages of the final result - "comparte tu historia" Communication Source: authors*

estas son las Rocas de la Bondad. Puedes coger una. En tu turno, si quieres, puedes escribir tu pensamiento amable en una roca y dejarla en el suelo. Otra persona lo leerá y se lo llevará.

# COMPARTE TU PENSAMIENTO

# SHARE YOUR THOUGHT

these are the Kindness Rocks! You can pick one up. In turn you can write your kind thought on a rock and leave it on the ground. Someone else will read it and take it!

• "COMPARTE TU PENSAMIENTO" :

This intervention aims to exploit the artistic elements created by Victor Ochoa, **"Arbol de la Vida"** (composed of an original square platform with seating spaces on each side and painted tiles with colored subjects in the center, representing a tribute to the collaboration between the artist and the local children who painted the tiles). As explained in the field analysis section, the work currently looks like a bench surrounded by dry earth without a purpose. Our project aims to **give value again** to this splendid artistic structure symbol of the **social cohesion** of San Ysidro to give them a new Tree of Life: we therefore proposed to plant a new tree on which the **Kindness Rocks** will also lie, a way of exchange quite common in San Diego (see Chapter 4) for the exchange of kind thoughts between strangers, which are written and adorned on stones placed at the disposal of the community. Once grown, the tree will also be able to receive further kind messages to **hang on its fronds** with colored fabric ribbons, so that even those who have more difficulty bending over and reading the stones can benefit from the initiative.

*To the left: "COMPARTE TU PENSAMIENTO" Communication Project Source: Authors*

*To the right: Details of "Arbol de la Vida" artwork*

*In the next pages: Suggestive photomontages of the final result - "COMPARTE TU PENSAMIENTO" Source: authors*









"TREE OF LIFE"
PLANTED AGAIN
AFTER 30 YEARS
IN ITS ORIGINAL SPOT
OF "ARBOL DE LA VIDA"
PUBLIC ARTWORK BY
VICTOR OCHOA (1995)






A FEW
YEARS
LATER...



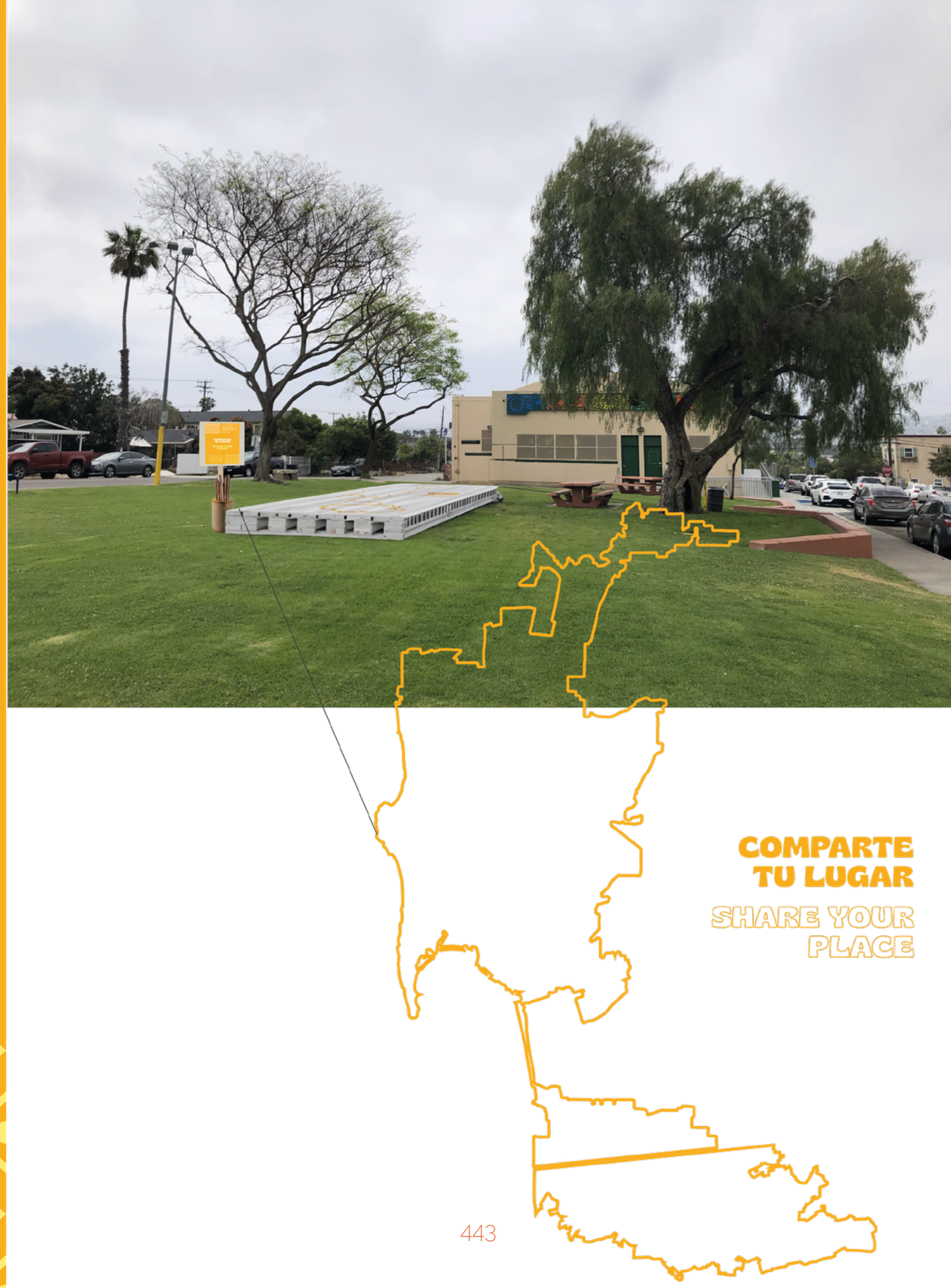


este mapa te permite marcar
tus lugares favoritos
de la región San Diego-Tijuana.
Puedes marcarlos con
pegatinas, sellos y marcadores,
y enlazarlos para
mostrar tu ruta.

# COMPARTE TU LUGAR

# SHARE YOUR PLACE

this map allows you to mark
your favorite places in the
San Diego-Tijuana region.
You can mark them with
stickers, stamps and markers,
and link them together
to show your route.



• **“COMPARTE TU LUGAR” (Share your place):**

The focal point of the project will be the “Border People’s Story Map,” a temporary interactive object that, through gamification, creates engagement within the community and encourages participation in the process. This element involves dual modes of interaction: a physical one for visibility and gamification, and a virtual one for data collection.

It takes the form of a stage, which can host various events, including “el día de los Muertos,” which also requires a small platform for an altar. This element can also be constructed through self-construction workshops, preferably conducted by the non-profit organization **“San Diego Craft**.” The material envisioned for this element is once again discarded pallets (provided free of charge by the San Diego non-profit organization “Repalletize”), serving as support for the platform and potentially covered



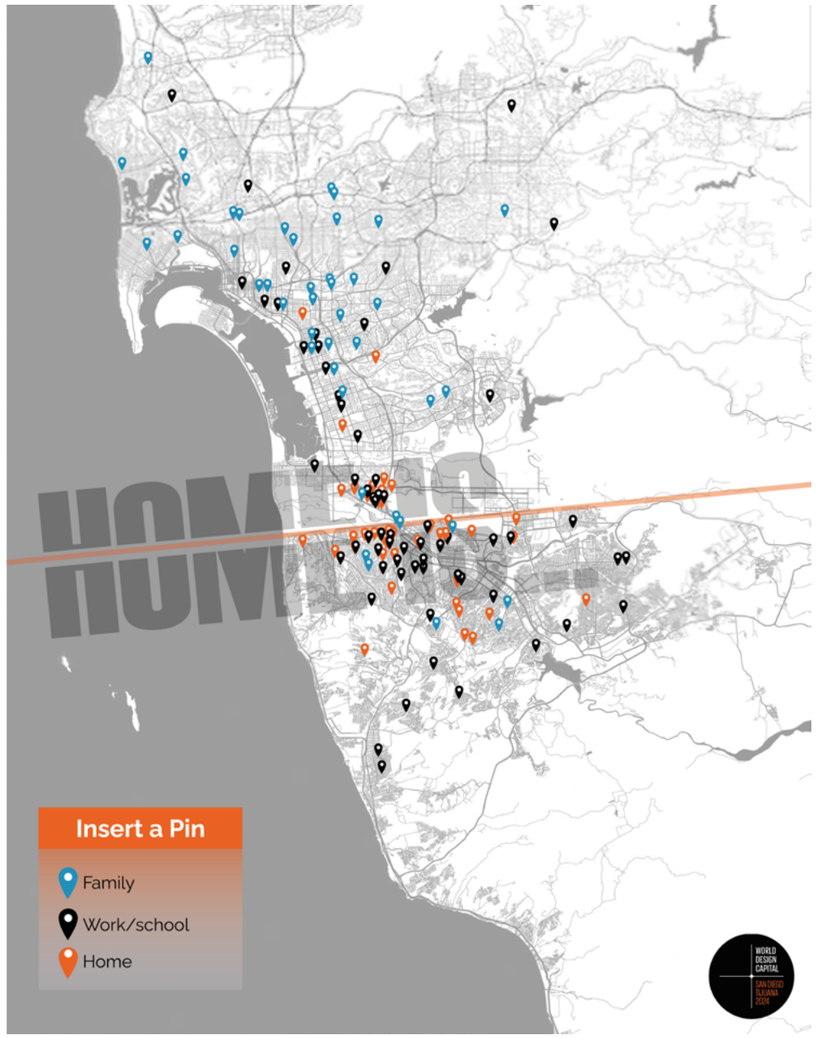




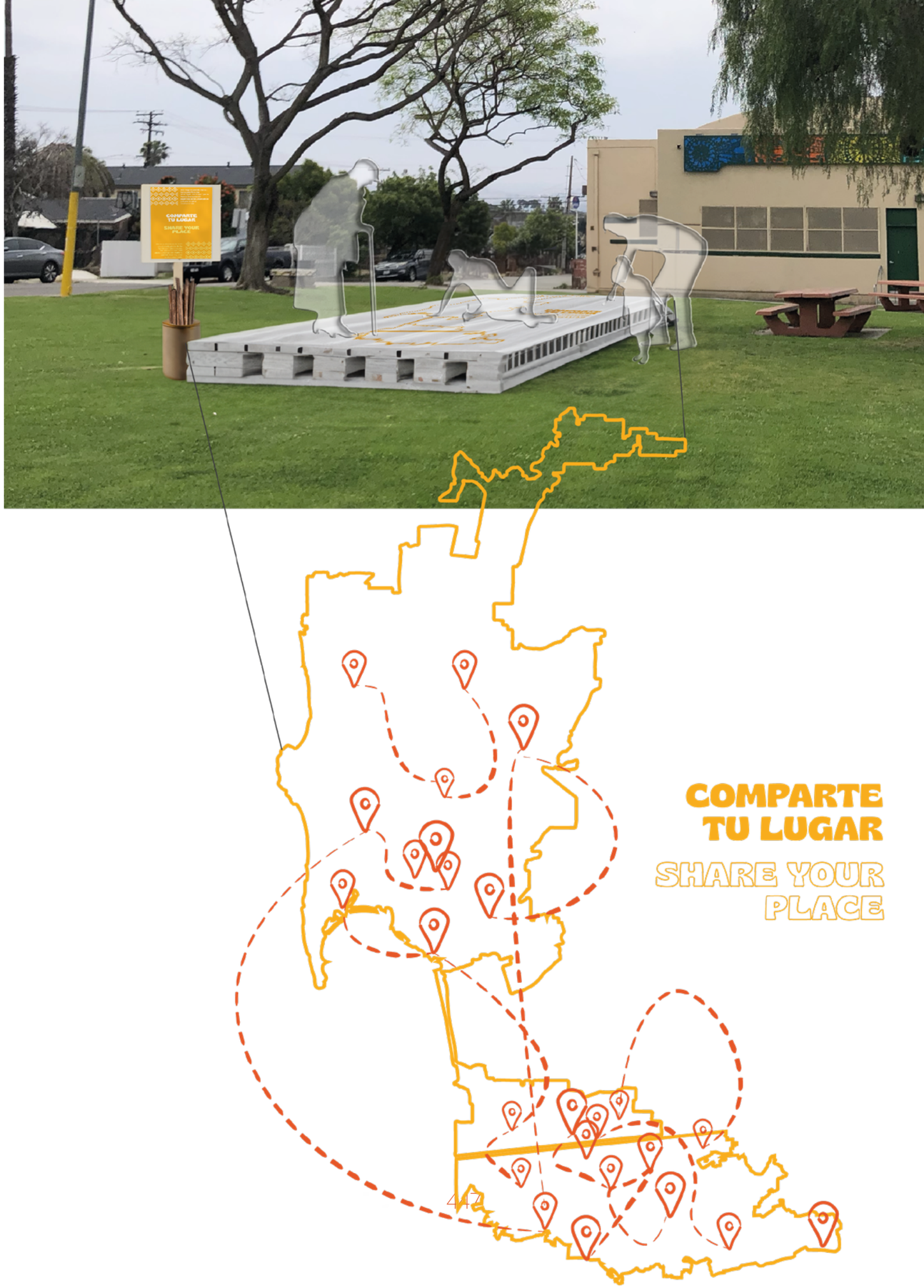
with plywood sheets. The boundaries of the San Diego-Tijuana region will be painted on this stage, highlighting the border that separates them. Users will be invited, through engaging semiotic work (“mi lugar especial es…”), to indicate with stickers or markers the locations within the region that are significant to them (home, where their family lives, where they were born, where they spend their time, where they meet friends, etc.).

Over a certain period, to be determined based on needs, an initial visualization of data can be obtained, showing the distances between these places and how the border represents an obstacle for them.

Once this first step is completed, a virtual mode of utilization will be available through a QR code, leading to an interactive map where users can indicate their most frequently traveled routes. This will enable the creation of a mapping of the most common flows of border people, allowing for an investigation into how these routes overlap and how they can be optimized when integrated into a system. If these two tools are combined, they could provide valuable data visualization for various purposes. The primary function is for the citizens themselves to gain a better understanding of their fellow residents, their stories, and how these stories may align or differ from their own, offering points of reflection and creating a more cohesive community.





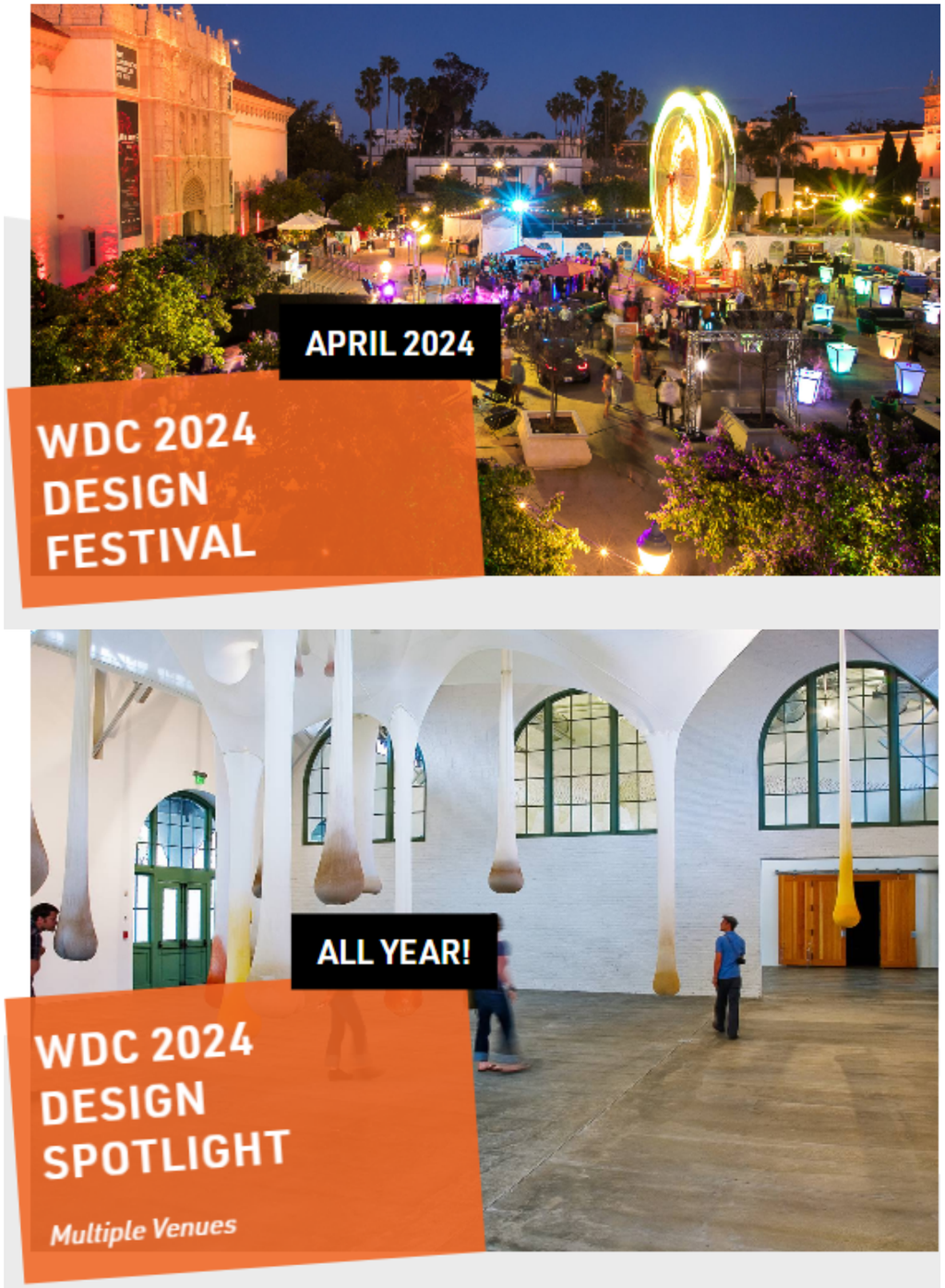
• **Step 2:**

We now come to step 2, where the element of the map ("Border People Story Map") can become a simple, effective, intuitive, and **visually appealing visualization tool** for understanding the situation of the "border people." It can be used as a means for raising awareness within the San Diego-Tijuana community. This visualization can be particularly valuable in the context of the World Design Capital San Diego Tijuana 2024, where it can be showcased as a graphic and artistic element during one of their events, thereby bringing visibility to the San Ysidro neighborhood.

In step 2, the Human Library project, featured in the phase 1 element **"COMPARTE TU HISTORIA"** (Share your story), could also be exported to the WDC context. It would provide an opportunity for volunteers who wish to become "books" to share their own stories as "border people" in one or more events organized by the WDC, both in the city of San Diego and Tijuana. This would give the WDC a tool to raise awareness on the issue and encourage people to overcome prejudices towards the "border people" and the Hispanic community.

• **Step 3:**

The final step, the long-term one, involves leveraging the data collected during the testing phase of the "Border People Story Map" to study a system for optimizing the obtained flows. This is clearly an impact that would occur in the future, but it would represent a first step towards such an implementation, specifically designed and tailored for the residents of San Ysidro.
A practical translation of this type of implementation could be, for example, a virtual platform that offers a sharing service to integrate activities carried out between different regions or within the city of San Diego itself (such as retrieving goods and medications, carpooling, etc.). This last implementation (referred to as "Step 3" in the systemic table) is tested on a small scale not only through the map but also through the "COMPARTE TU TIEMPO" program from phase 1. Similar to transportation, it aims to systemize services and small tasks.
By combining these two actions, the Step 3 of the systemic table would optimize various resources, thereby reducing unnecessary travel and addressing the issues of car dependency and limited services.




*Examples of WDC events that could become contexts for displaying the map. Source: WDC website*

# SYSTEMIC PLACEMAKING
## STUDY OF THE OUTCOMES

### Stakeholders

**Amenities & Recreation for San Ysidro Communities**
San Ysidro Teen Center
San Ysidro Senior Center
Casa Familiar

**Auto-build partner**
San Diego Craft (No Profit)

**The Human Library Parner**
The Human Library
San Ysidro Public Library

**Suppliers**
Repalletize
The Reuse People

**Government entities**
City of San Diego
City of Tijuana

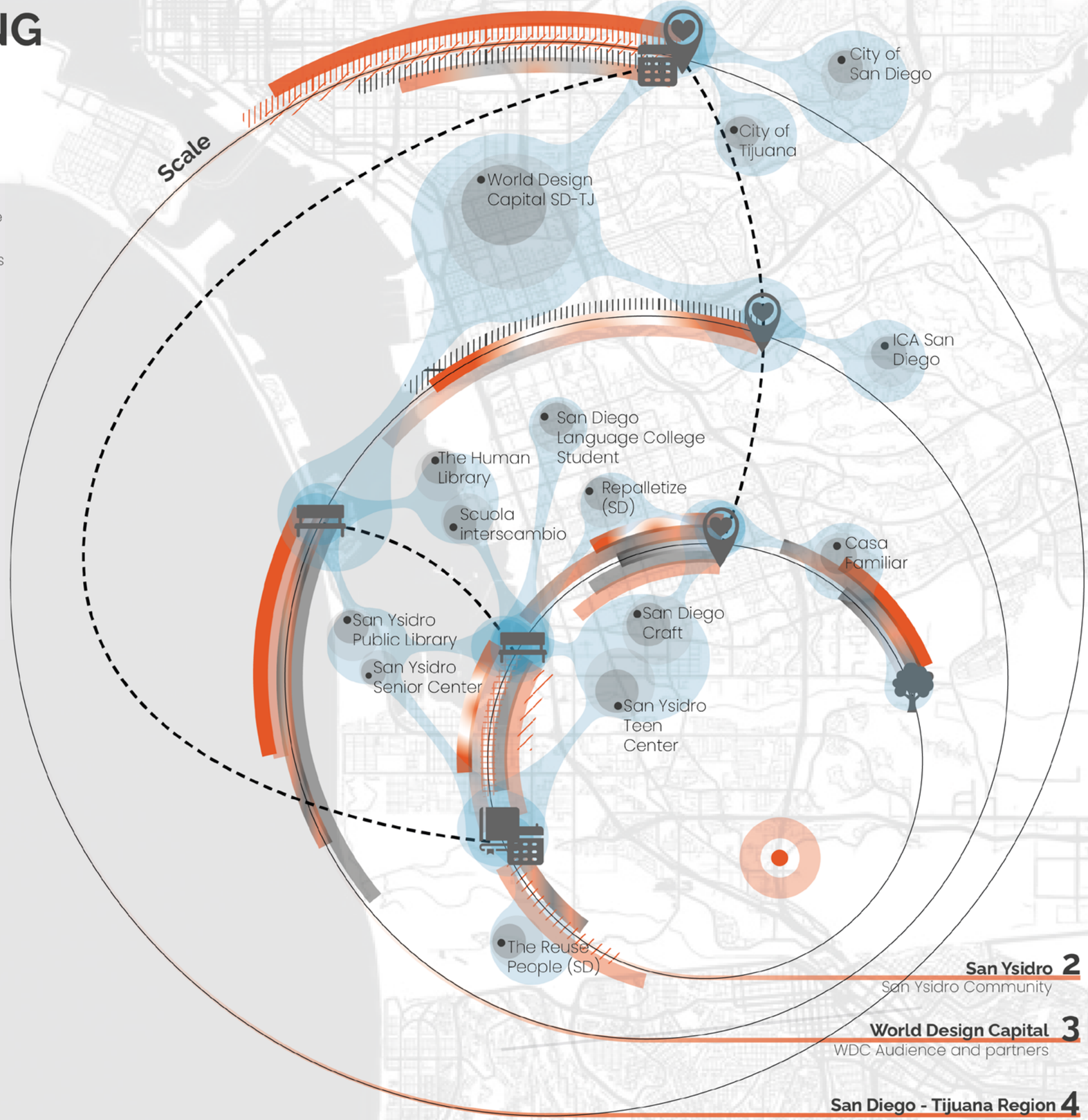
**Supporters**
WDC San Diego-Tijuana
San Diego Language College students

### Impacts

- Improvement in the use of space
- Strengthening sense of community
- Optimization of flows
- Data collection
- Raising awareness and creating empathy "Border People"
- Make up for lack of services
- Decreased car dependency
- Recreational and educational activity
- Use of waste materials
- Visibility to San Ysidro district
- Cultural exchange

### Interventions



# Conclusions

In conclusion, this thesis has successfully identified the main challenges of the current urban system, analyzed across various contexts. It has explored how the implementation of **systemic tools** can transform public spaces into bridges that revitalize community bonds, shaping healthier, livable, and shared environments through **sustainable and participatory urban practices**.

Based on the literature research and the projects analyzed and developed throughout this thesis, it can be affirmed that Placemaking demonstrates that large-scale structural interventions are not always necessary to bring about radical and transformative changes to a place. Often, small adjustments are sufficient to enable the community itself to regenerate spaces that would otherwise remain inaccessible. The true change is sparked by the **active involvement of people and develops gradually**, day by day, in a spontaneous manner. In this thesis, the emphasis was placed on interpreting the city as a complex system, where tangible changes arise from the interaction of all the constituent parts of the community and the urban system, akin to a living organism. By providing small adjustments as **inputs,** space is created for serendipity, investing the community itself with the task of guiding the change.

The thesis has engaged with **radically different contexts**, characterized by diverse urban, cultural, economic, and social scenarios. The aim was to identify common factors capable of triggering virtuous change in each of the communities under examination. It became evident that there is no single solution that can equally address all challenges. On the contrary, it is crucial to adopt a **holistic approach** that takes into account the specific needs of the community and actively involves its members in the decision-making process. The systemic approach is



therefore fundamental in the development of Placemaking projects, as it requires a 360-degree analysis of the **characteristics, challenges, and potentials** of the place and the community.
Systemic Placemaking represents an integrated approach that allows us to understand the **complex relationships between people and the urban context** in which they live, highlighting the interconnectedness between public spaces, communities, and collective well-being.

These considerations emerge clearly in all the projects analyzed within our thesis, and particularly in the one developed for the **World Design Capital**. Here, the approach of Systemic Placemaking, considering all elements of the urban system, has proven essential in establishing connections between the place and its surrounding environment, bringing potential long-term benefits. This paradigm has enabled the evaluation of the impact of Placemaking not only on individual spaces but also on **urban connections,** social cohesion, and environmental sustainability, using it as a springboard for chain-reaction changes. In this way, it has facilitated the development of a more integrated design and a holistic vision of urban transformations.

This thesis aimed to export the **framework of systemic design** and its know-how, presenting a new perspective for design within the international context of the **World Design Capital.**
It is hoped that the results and recommendations of this thesis can inspire future projects and guide the transformation of other urban spaces, within the context of the World Design Capital and beyond, improving the quality of life for people and promoting a **more sustainable and inclusive vision of cities**.

# Appendix index

**APPENDIX 1:** Desk Analysis of San Diego City
- Geography, topography and climate
- Natural environment
- Population and demography
- Economy and work
- Education and universities
- Art and culture
- Transportations
- Tourist attractions

**APPENDIX 2**: Desk Analysis of Tijuana City
- Geography, topography and climate
- Natural environmentl
- Population and demography
- Economy and work
- Education and universities
- Art and culture
- Healthcare
- Transportations

**APPENDIX 3:** Cross border Analysis
- Insights: Art and culture in San Diego-Tijuana region
- Insights: The value of bi-national collaborative efforts
- Insights: Collaborations within the region and relations with neighboring areas
- Insights: Cross-border territory stakeholders



# Virtual appendix

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