



EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR
CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS
AND OUTDOOR ARTS

THE ROLE OF OUTDOOR ARTS IN CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES AND SPACES



THEMATIC GUIDE 2024

ABOUT CIRCOSTRADA & ARTCENA

Circostrada

Circostrada is the European Network for contemporary circus and outdoor arts. Created in 2003 with the core mission of furthering the development, empowerment and recognition of these fields at European and international levels, over the years the network has become an important anchoring point for its members and a key interlocutor in the dialogue with cultural policy makers across Europe. In a few words, Circostrada is:

- A community of contemporary circus and outdoor arts professionals linked together by common values and aspirations, who advocate for greater recognition and more structured cultural policies.
- The voice and reference network of contemporary circus and outdoor arts in Europe.
- A group of passionate and committed individuals who meet several times a year at the network's events.
- A network dedicated to its members, engaged in facilitating the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and good practices at European and international levels.
- A digital resource platform that provides thematic publications, observation tools and news on contemporary circus and outdoor arts, available to all free of charge in English and French.

www.circostrada.org

ARTCENA

ARTCENA is the National Center for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, supported by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and is a permanent member of its steering committee. It works in close collaboration with professionals in the sector and offers them both publications and digital resources via its web platform. It also develops mentoring and training actions, tools and services to help them in their everyday practices. It supports contemporary creation through national support programs and encourages the international development of these three sectors.

www.artcena.fr

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

“The Role of Outdoor Arts in Creative Placemaking: A Step-By-Step Guide to Transforming Communities and Spaces” was conceived and written by Ariane Bieou and Chrissie Faniadis, with the coordination and editing of Circostrada.



Ariane Bieou, originally an architect, is now an independent cultural expert. She believes that heritage is the stage, the city is the playground, artists are the key players, citizens are the protagonists, co-creation is the rule process and the future is the next level. She was the Cultural Manager and Director of the

programme of Matera 2019 - European Capital of Culture, and the Head of project Millenium Caen 2025. She has coordinated IN SITU, the European Network for artistic creation in public space and has created site-specific events for Unesco World Heritage sites.



Chrissie Faniadis runs the independent capacity-building firm EUNIA since 2011. A College of Europe graduate, she also holds an MA in Broadcast and film management from Bournemouth Screen Academy. She is a producer and senior strategist, specialising in EU policy and capacity-building for the arts and culture sector. Chrissie

is an avid public speaker and moderator, a board member of the Swedish Royal Opera House, and a former advisor to the European Cultural Foundation. Since 2024 she is the managing director of Transit Kulturinkubator She has extensive experience in developing European projects, securing partnerships and funding.

FOREWORD

“The creative placemaking, arouses by focusing on the extreme power of Arts to shape physical and social character of spaces. Two are the words colouring the process, temporality and participation. Projects of creative placemaking are time-consuming but manage to alternate traditional linear and rigid procedures of changing the physical environment. It is in the very essence of creative placemaking the act of artistic presence that changes the experience of the place.”¹

Dimitra Kanellopoulou

Throughout its activities, Circostrada has engaged several cross-sectorial laboratories to facilitate exchanges between urbanism and performing arts. Building on these efforts, in 2021, Circostrada held its Annual General Meeting during the 22nd edition of Cratère Surfaces - Alès International Outdoor Festival in France, alongside a Focus on “Territories and Arts,” led by the Institut français, and the Plenary of the European and international Collaborative projects initiated by Occitanie en Scène. This event marked the first major milestone dedicated to placemaking, bringing together architects, artists, institutions, and professionals from various disciplines to reflect on and reimagine urban and rural spaces.

In 2022, the network built on the exchanges initiated in Alès around placemaking and performing arts by organising SPARK#2, a cross-sectorial laboratory held in partnership with Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, Eleusis 2023 European Capital of Culture, Institut français Paris, Institut français de Grèce, and Teatroskop - South Eastern European Network for Performing Arts. This event brought together around twenty professionals from across Europe in Greece, where participants were invited to explore the urban

territory of Elefsina and deepen their understanding of its relationship with performing arts.

From SPARK#2 emerged the recommendation to create a toolkit on “Placemaking and Performing Arts.” This toolkit, written by Ariane Bieou and Chrissie Faniadis features a step-by-step process perspective to transforming communities and spaces, as well as multiple case studies drawn from experiences in Alès, France (on the projects by l’Atelline, written by Marc el Samrani), Elefsina, Greece (written by Dimitra Kanellopoulou), and several locations in the United Kingdom (written by Rachel Clare and Sud Basu).

As part of its new “CS VOICES” project, spanning from 2024 to 2028, the network will continue building on the turning point set by the “The Role of Outdoor Arts in Creative Placemaking: A Step-By-Step Guide to Transforming Communities and Spaces”. New case studies will be added in correlation with three activities of the network: FRESH STREET #5 in Great Yarmouth (UK) in 2025, the network’s Annual General Meetings in Sibiu (Romania) in 2026 and the one in Tunis (Tunisia) in 2027.

1 Excerpt from “A place from scratch: Revisiting the commons in Elefsina 2023” of Dimitra Kanellopoulou, p. 28-32 of this guide

How to use this toolkit?

This toolkit is designed to serve as both a practical and inspirational guide on the role of outdoor arts in creative placemaking.

The first part focuses on highly practical information and tips, offering a step-by-step approach that covers everything from the basics to the conditions for success, and highlights the many meaningful benefits.

The second part presents three inspiring case studies that showcase the diverse best practices of Circostrada members and partners in this field. It explores the topic and its challenges at different scales and in various contexts throughout Europe, using a genuine and engaging narrative that encompasses a wide range of experiences with specific communities, unique approaches, and useful takeaways.

The last part offers a wide range of resources for further exploration of creative placemaking through outdoor arts.

Finally, the toolkit can be read linearly, by topic or issues, one can navigate the guide through the table of contents. “The Role of Outdoor Arts in Creative Placemaking” is a toolkit to keep close to hand for both beginners and experts, and to share with anyone who may be involved at any stage of placemaking through performing arts.

Ariane Bieou

Co-author

Chrissie Faniadis

Co-author

Stéphane Segreto-Aguilar

Circostrada Network Coordinator

Head of International Development at ARTCENA

PARTNERS

Co-organised by



Coordinator



With the support of



Co-funded by
the European Union



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CREDITS

- Circostrada Thematic Guide:
The Role of Outdoor Arts in
Creative Placemaking: A Step-
By-Step Guide to Transforming
Communities and Spaces
- Cover picture: © Loïc Salfati
- Graphic design:
Nikola Krizanac
- Layout: Kinga Kecskés, Max
Desvilles
- Editing and coordination:
Circostrada coordination team
- Published by:
Circostrada - European Network
for Contemporary Circus and
Outdoor Arts.
68 rue de la Folie Méricourt 75011
Paris, France
The European Commission
support for the production of this
publication does not constitute
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AN ORGANIC PROCESS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

“If placemaking was initially linked to the aims of reviving town centres, urban villages to pedestrian friendly environments with the goal of kick-starting economies, in recent years its application inspires entrepreneurs, artists, performance makers who deal with the common objective to ‘give life’ to certain spaces lacking street vibrant activities, public life.”¹

Dimitra Kanellopoulou

Placemaking is a dynamic and organic process that involves the active participation of communities in the development and enhancement of their public spaces. It was first established as a concept in the 1960s in the US as a way of taking a holistic approach to urban development (see Jane Jacobs² and William H. Whyte³ for reference), but it came into prominence in 2011 through the “White Paper on Creative Placemaking”, commissioned by the National Endowments of the Arts (NEA). In a European context one could argue that arts and culture have been integral parts of placemaking since antiquity, but in terms of modern city development and urban planning, the concept gained recognition in the 2010s. It seeks to amplify the unique context of the space, ensuring that the life within it can be enjoyed freely by all. This democratic process is about reclaiming spaces and re-imagining their potential to add value for the living, turning them into vibrant areas where social interactions flourish.

At its core, placemaking is a participatory process that invites community members to collaborate in shaping their environment. This engagement helps to ensure that the resulting interventions reflect the true

needs and desires of those who use them. By taking risks, placemakers can enlighten and re-imagine what a space can be, often leading to innovative solutions that might not emerge through traditional planning methods. Placemakers can emerge from all territories, be it urban, peri-/semi-urban or rural. More often than not they are rooted in their locality, they often engage local citizens and lead communities. They also tend to emerge in grassroot movements that address specific needs for animating a space and making it into a place. Many of these grassroot initiatives come from artists and artistic organisations, seeking to engage in the commons, inspire transformative processes and meet the needs of the local community.

However, placemaking is not without its challenges. Conflict or struggle is often a part of the process, as differing opinions and interests can lead to disagreements. While some may say, “we don’t approve, we don’t like”, this dissent can drive a more profound engagement and dialogue, ultimately leading to more resilient and inclusive outcomes. A strategy to avoid conflict therefore involves thorough and ongoing community consultations to ensure that all voices are heard and considered.

1 Excerpt from “A place from scratch: Revisiting the commons in Elefsina 2023” of Dimitra Kanellopoulou, p. 28-32 of this guide.

2 Jacobs, Jane. The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Ed. Paperback, December 1, 1992

3 H. Whyte Jr., William. The Exploding Metropolis (Volume 1) First Edition, 1958.

One illustrative example is the re-imagination of the agora and the reinvigoration of empty spaces as a result of years of financial crisis and social decline in Athens (Greece). In a time of economic and social upheaval, these public spaces were revitalized as centers of community and democratic engagement, showcasing how placemaking can adapt and respond to contemporary challenges (see ILAP Refill Athens Project, 2018⁴). Another example is the Terschelling Oerol Festival, one of the largest site-specific arts festivals in Europe. The festival is renowned for its ability to engage local landscapes and communities, creating a unique cultural experience that integrates performing arts into the natural and built environment of the island, fostering community engagement and revitalisation (see oerol.nl). A third, well-established example is Take Art in Somerset (UK), that leverages placemaking through performing arts by engaging local communities in creative projects that reflect their unique identities and histories. They facilitate performances and workshops in various public spaces, transforming these areas into vibrant cultural hubs. This approach has been fostering community cohesion and enhances the social and cultural fabric of Somerset for thirty-five years (see takeart.org). A final example is the Festival Chalon dans la rue in Chalon-sur-Saône (France). This outdoor arts festival transforms the small city into a dynamic cultural epicentre every summer, attracting performers and audiences from every corner of the world. The festival utilises public squares, streets, and parks as stages, fostering community engagement, revitalising local spaces, and boosting the town's cultural and economic vibrancy (see www.chalondanslarue.com).

Furthermore, placemaking involves a social justice type of organisation of space, aiming to create environments that are equitable and accessible. It is a question of freedom—ensuring that everyone has the right to participate in and enjoy public spaces. In essence, placemaking is about creating spaces that not only serve practical functions but also enrich the human experience. Through a process that values context, encourages participation, and embraces risk-taking, placemaking helps communities reclaim and transform their public spaces into lively, meaningful places where life can be enjoyed freely by all.

4 https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/2023-04/iap_athens_addma_eng.pdf

INTRODUCTION TO PLACEMAKING THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS

THE VALUE OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PLACEMAKING

“Artistic interventions in urban and developed spaces can help people to (re)discover a city by highlighting its physical and symbolic aspects, drawing attention to its distinctive features and offering new spatial perspectives. These artistic projects give rise to new narratives that produce shared social imaginaries, transforming the way residents and users perceive and experience their urban environments.”¹

Marc El Samrani

The value of performing arts in placemaking has been increasingly recognised as an important vector, offering a unique ability to connect people, share experiences, and break barriers within communities. Through the arts, public spaces are not only transformed but re-invented, opening up the possibilities for new forms of engagement and interaction. Performing arts give context to these spaces, transforming them into places, providing a narrative and meaning that resonates with those who use them.

One of the most powerful aspects of performing arts in placemaking is their ability to bring people together. They create opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage in a shared experience, fostering a sense of community and belonging. It helps to break barriers, as people find common ground through the universal language of the arts.

Performing arts turn ordinary places into extraordinary playgrounds for creativity and expression. Every action in the public space is a performance, whether it is a planned event or spontaneous activity. This perspective opens up the possibilities for how we view and use our public spaces, allowing them to take on new purposes and undergo

temporary changes that enliven the urban landscape. Awareness is another critical element brought about by performing arts in placemaking. Through the performances, audiences become more aware of the space around them and its potential. This heightened awareness leads to greater appreciation and care for public spaces, encouraging people to take an active role in their maintenance and improvement.

Moreover, performing arts provide a platform to give context to historical, cultural, and social narratives, making them accessible and engaging for the public. This storytelling aspect enriches the placemaking process, as it connects the past with the present and future, creating a continuous dialogue within the community.

1 Excerpt from “Experiencing public spaces: the city put to the test by artistic performances” of Marc El Samrani, p. 20-23 of this guide.

THE POSITION OF CIRCOSTRADA IN THE CONTEXT OF PLACEMAKING

Placemaking through its performing arts disciplines is not a new practice or focus for Circostrada and its members. For most outdoor artists and organisations, it lies at the core of their practice and is central to their existence. Many have been trailblazers in their own contexts, breaking new ground for placemaking through performing arts to be taken seriously. In fact, ever since its creation as a network, Circostrada has explored, supported, and actively engaged in creative placemaking, through its members as well as through its choice of activities and projects. Simultaneously, the network has been an active driver of local regeneration, helping in the reclaiming and development of public spaces, bringing communities together, and building audiences from the ground up. These two focus areas co-existed organically, perhaps not explicitly formulated as a discipline, but were nevertheless present from the start.

In 2021, however, the two were aligned at the Annual General Meeting in Alès, France, during the festival Cratère Surfaces, Alès international outdoor festival, and within the frame of the Focus “Territories and Arts” of the Institut français. This was a milestone in the practice of placemaking for the network, as it

applied more official terminology to what its members had been doing all along. The intention was also to make placemaking as a concept more defined and accessible. Another landmark moment came during Eleusis 2023 European Capital of Culture, within the framework of the SPARK activity - a transdisciplinary laboratory led by Circostrada - which underscored the need for a collaborative effort involving local inhabitants, politicians, and investors to sustainably transform and invigorate urban spaces.

In essence, SPARK illustrated that placemaking through performing arts is an organic, strategic process requiring a deep understanding of a place’s history, context, and community needs. It also reinforced the role of artists and activists as central to the process.

By formulating itself around the concept of placemaking through performing arts, Circostrada demonstrates the potential and power of transformation of the public realm that its members have been, and continue to be, engaged in, in their pursuit of local regeneration, community building, and artistic excellence.

EXPLORING THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL PLACEMAKING THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS

THE STAKEHOLDERS/ PROTAGONISTS IN SUSTAINABLE PLACEMAKING PRACTICES

“The dedication to co-creation and community engagement presents inherent challenges, especially in supporting participants with diverse lived experiences over extended periods. Both initiatives rely heavily on partnerships at local, regional, and national levels to sustain their innovative productions.”¹

Sud Basu & Rachel Clare

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Sustainable placemaking practices require a diverse array of stakeholders who are instrumental as generators of change. Each stakeholder plays a critical role in ensuring that placemaking efforts are not only impactful in the short-term but also have a long-term impact on the community and environment. From policy-makers to citizens, artists to experts, and organisations to ad hoc communities of practice, each plays a unique role in shaping and sustaining public spaces. The key to successful placemaking lies therefore in the ability to connect and collaborate across these diverse groups, fostering a shared vision and commitment to creating spaces that are vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable for the long term.

Citizens: At the heart of sustainable placemaking are the citizens who live and interact with the spaces. They are not just passive recipients but active participants and collaborators in the process. Engaging citizens opens the debate to everyone, ensuring that the diverse needs and desires of the community are met. Their involvement helps generate a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the space.

Ad Hoc Communities of Practice: These informal groups of stakeholders come together to share knowledge, skills, and experiences. They are flexible

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and responsive, able to address specific issues as they arise. These communities are essential for generating innovative solutions and ensuring that placemaking practices remain dynamic and adaptive.

Artists and artistic organisations: Artists are vital enablers and collaborators in placemaking. Their creativity and vision can transform public spaces, making the tangible impact of placemaking visible and engaging. Artists often take courage and embrace the unexpected, pushing boundaries and introducing new ideas that can redefine spaces and challenge conventional thinking. They are expert communicators and can lead transformative processes that connect a plethora of stakeholders and gather them around a common mission.

Policy-makers, enforcers and bureaucrats: Policy enforcers and bureaucrats, often seen as the paperwork handlers, play a crucial role in navigating the bureaucratic aspects of placemaking by ensuring that all necessary legal and regulatory requirements are met, helping to avoid potential conflicts and delays. Similarly, policy-makers are essential in setting the framework and conditions for sustainable placemaking. Their connection with politicians and ability to influence legislation are vital for creating policies that support

1 Excerpt from “From the Hyper-Local to the Global and Back Again: Transforming Communities and Cultural Narratives in the United Kingdom” of Sud Basu and Rachel Clare, p. 24-27 of this guide

sustainable and inclusive development. They provide the necessary financial support and ensure that placemaking practices align with broader urban and environmental policies, facilitating continuity and long-term impact.

Civic leaders, activists and experts: Who often have the courage to confront and challenge existing structures and expectations, play a crucial role in driving momentum for change by galvanising community action and bringing attention to important issues. Alongside them, experts such as urban planners, architects, and environmental scientists provide the technical knowledge necessary for sustainable placemaking. Their expertise ensures that projects are feasible and sustainable, addressing unknown problems that may arise. Together, they help translate creative ideas into practical, implementable plans that can withstand the test of time.

Organisations and institutions: There are always people in organisations such as NGOs, community groups, and cultural institutions who are key to driving placemaking initiatives. These organisations often act as intermediaries, facilitating connections between various stakeholders and providing resources and support for placemaking projects.

EXPLORING THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL PLACEMAKING THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS

THE KEY ELEMENTS AND GOALS FOR PLACEMAKING THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS

“Measuring impact in these cultural initiatives can be challenging, especially in the early stages of transformative projects. These pioneering efforts in placemaking, aim to reshape cultural narratives and empower communities through innovative approaches.”¹

Sud Basu & Rachel Clare

Key Elements of Placemaking through Performing Arts:

- **Community engagement:** Active involvement of local community members in the planning and development process to ensure that the spaces meet their needs and preferences.
- **Cultural and social revitalisation:** Emphasis on creating spaces that foster social interaction, cultural expression, and community activities.
- **Accessibility and inclusion:** Designing spaces that are accessible to all, regardless of age, ability, or socio-economic background.
- **Sustainability:** Incorporating environmentally sustainable practices in the development and maintenance of public spaces.
- **Local identity:** Enhancing and celebrating the unique character and cultural heritage of the place.

Goals of Placemaking through Performing Arts:

- **Enhancing public spaces:** Transforming underutilised or poorly designed areas into attractive and functional public spaces, using performing arts practices to engage, exchange and create agency in stakeholders.
- **Fostering community engagement:** Creating spaces that encourage people to come together, fostering a sense of community and belonging.
- **Improving quality of life:** Enhancing the physical, social, and economic well-being of the community, creating long-term engagement for sustainable development.
- **Promoting inclusion:** Ensuring that public spaces are welcoming and accessible to all members of the community.
- **Driving economic development:** Stimulating local economies by creating attractive and vibrant public spaces that draw visitors and investment.

¹ Excerpt from “From the Hyper-Local to the Global and Back Again: Transforming Communities and Cultural Narratives in the United Kingdom” of Sud Basu and Rachel Clare, p. 24-27 of this guide.

BENEFITS OF PLACEMAKING THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS

Social benefits of placemaking through performing arts:

Community cohesion and social interaction:

- **Enhanced engagement:** Performing arts activities bring people together, fostering social interaction and community bonding.
- **Inclusion:** Events and performances that are open to all can bridge social divides and create inclusive spaces where diverse community members can connect.

Increased civic pride and identity:

- **Cultural expression:** Showcasing local talent and cultural traditions helps reinforce a community's unique identity and pride.
- **Shared experiences:** Collective participation in cultural events creates shared memories and strengthens community ties.

Cultural benefits of placemaking through performing arts:

Cultural preservation and innovation:

- **Heritage promotion:** Performing arts can celebrate and preserve local traditions and cultural heritage.
- **Artistic innovation:** Encourages the development of new artistic forms and practices that reflect contemporary cultural dynamics.

Education and awareness:

- **Cultural education:** Performances can educate audiences about different cultures, histories, and social issues.
- **Raising awareness:** Can highlight important social and political issues, fostering greater awareness and dialogue.

Economic benefits of placemaking through performing arts:

Economic revitalisation:

- **Attraction of visitors:** Performances and cultural events can attract tourists and visitors, boosting local economies.

- **Increased foot traffic:** Events in public spaces can increase foot traffic to nearby businesses, benefiting local retailers and service providers.

Job creation and support for local artists:

- **Employment opportunities:** Events create job opportunities for artists, performers, technicians, and support staff.
- **Support for creative industries:** Strengthens the local creative economy by providing platforms for artists and cultural workers to showcase their work.

Environmental benefits of placemaking through performing arts:

Sustainable use of public spaces:

- **Activation of underused spaces:** Transforms underutilised areas into vibrant cultural hubs, promoting sustainable urban development.
- **Environmental awareness:** Performances and events can incorporate themes of sustainability and environmental stewardship, educating the public and promoting eco-friendly practices.

Urban development benefits of placemaking through performing arts:

Enhanced public spaces:

- **Aesthetic improvement:** Performing arts installations and events can enhance the aesthetic appeal of public spaces.
- **Functional transformation:** Converts ordinary spaces into multifunctional areas that serve both recreational and cultural purposes.

Increased safety and accessibility:

- **Perception of safety:** Regular events and increased foot traffic can make public spaces feel safer and more welcoming.
- **Improved infrastructure:** Investments in infrastructure to support performances (e.g., lighting, seating) can lead to long-term improvements in public amenities.

Educational benefits of placemaking through performing arts

Capacity-building:

- **Learning opportunities:** Workshops and participatory arts projects provide skill development opportunities for community members, especially youth.
- **Artistic exposure:** Enhances public access to the arts, fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of different art forms.

Creative thinking and problem-solving:

- **Encouragement of creativity:** Engaging with the arts fosters creative thinking and innovative problem-solving skills.
- **Educational programmes:** Integrates educational programmes that can be linked to school curriculums, enhancing students' learning experiences.

THE CONDITIONS AND METHODS FOR ACHIEVING SUCCESSFUL PLACEMAKING THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS

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A step-by-step process that fosters a sense of belonging and leads to create a steady ecosystem

Successful placemaking through performing arts practices requires a combination of conditions that foster engagement, sustainability, and community impact.

Step 1. Community involvement and engagement:

- **Active participation:** Engage local community members in the planning, development, and execution stages.
- **Inclusion:** Ensure diverse representation and involvement from various community groups, including marginalised populations.

Step 2. Collaborative partnerships:

- **Cross-sector collaboration:** Form partnerships with local governments, businesses, cultural organisations, educational institutions, and other stakeholders.
- **Supportive networks:** Develop networks and alliances with artists, performers, and cultural practitioners.

Step 3. Accessible and welcoming spaces:

- **Physical accessibility:** Design spaces that are physically accessible to people of all ages and abilities.
- **Cultural relevance:** Create culturally relevant and welcoming environments that reflect the local community's identity and values.

Step 4. Clear vision and objectives:

- **Defined goals:** Establish clear and achievable goals for the placemaking initiative.
- **Strategic planning:** Develop a comprehensive plan that outlines the steps needed to achieve the vision.

Step 5. Sustainable funding and resources:

- **Financial support:** Secure funding from various sources, including grants, sponsorships, and crowdfunding.

- **Resource allocation:** Allocate adequate resources for logistics, equipment, marketing, and artist fees.

Step 6. Artistic excellence and innovation:

- **High-quality performances:** Ensure the artistic quality and professionalism of the performances and events.
- **Innovative practices:** Encourage experimentation with new and creative forms of performing arts.

Step 7. Safety, inclusivity and comfort:

- **Safe environments:** Ensure that public spaces are safe, inclusive and secure for participants and audiences.
- **Comfort amenities:** Provide amenities such as seating, restrooms, and shade to enhance audience comfort.

Step 8. Flexibility and adaptability:

- **Responsive planning:** Be prepared to adapt plans based on feedback, changing circumstances, and emerging opportunities.
- **Pilot projects:** Test concepts with smaller-scale pilot projects before full implementation.

Step 9. Evaluation and feedback:

- **Continuous assessment:** Regularly evaluate the impact of the initiative through surveys, feedback forms, and community meetings.
- **Learning and improvement:** Use feedback to make continuous improvements and refine future projects.

Step 10. Long-term commitment:

- **Sustained effort:** Commit to long-term engagement and development rather than one-off events.
- **Legacy building:** Focus on creating lasting cultural and social impacts in the community.

EXPERIENCING PUBLIC SPACES: THE CITY PUT TO THE TEST BY ARTISTIC PERFORMANCES

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By Marc El Samrani

Marc El Samrani graduated in 2018 with a master's degree in architecture from USEK in Lebanon and a DPEA in Scenography from the National School of Architecture in Montpellier in 2020. He is currently preparing a doctoral thesis at the LIFAM lab in the Architecture School of

Montpellier and the University Paul Valéry – Montpellier 3 in France. His research focuses on cultural and digital mediation in creating new urban public spaces to address social isolation through spatial experience. For three years, he has been working at L'Atelline, Scène conventionnée d'intérêt national in Juvignac, France.

Artistic interventions in urban and developed spaces can help people to (re)discover a city by highlighting its physical and symbolic aspects, drawing attention to its distinctive features and offering new spatial perspectives. These artistic projects give rise to new narratives that produce shared social imaginaries, transforming the way residents and users perceive and experience their urban environments. Experiencing a place, discovering its cultural, historical, social and physical layers and engaging with its components and stakeholders seems essential to fostering the emergence of relational spaces. This involves two types of spatial experience: firstly, experimentation with the venue and a detailed understanding of it by the artistic teams, the host venues and all the parties involved in the design phases; secondly, the sensory experience of the venue by the public, as well as by passers-by, thanks to and through the artistic works on offer. “Experiencing” a venue therefore refers to these two distinct and complementary understandings.

The works in the spaces initiate these processes of experience and experimentation, times of enquiry and sensitive exploration that dig “holes” (Rancière), create breaches and above all develop new capacities, skills and knowledge, in the sense of Tuan (2001), to

co-construct collective images of places, generate immersive experiences and produce transactional spaces. Performing arts, when they take over the space-time of the city, produce spaces that are “other” and “ours” and create moments of “togetherness” (Macé, 2019).

As part of an action-research project in architecture (CIFRE), I was able to observe the deployment of artistic projects in the Montpellier metropolitan area, by working for three years with l'Atelline, a nationally-renowned stage — labelled art and creation — for the performing arts in public spaces. The Atelline project, structured around three “fabriques” (T.N: creative factory), is recognised for its ability to support and disseminate the creation of artistic projects for public spaces and non-dedicated venues. The structure is also recognised for supporting “the renewal and hybridisation of forms and writing for the public space, [...] the support and dissemination of works and artists who have chosen to invest the public space - in its physical, symbolic and political dimensions - as a terrain for writing, play and experimentation”¹. *In situ* creation is not seen as a specific disciplinary field, but rather as transdisciplinary, blending several aesthetics, forms and disciplinary fields: theatre, dance, contemporary circus,

1 Source: Presentation of the Atelline project via the website: www.latelline.org.

sound creation, and so on.

My interest in a cultural structure like l'Atelline, during a thesis in architecture, can be explained by its capacity to produce urbanities, to initiate physical and sensitive experiences of places, to propose new methods of participative construction of urban imaginaries and to activate space-time by multiplying inhabitant appropriations. This time spent working within the structure, observing the various stages in the development of an artistic project, provided food for thought on the production and activation of urban and suburban spaces. To illustrate this point, let's mention two artistic proposals supported by l'Atelline: *L'INSTANT T* by the company la Vaste Entreprise and *ANIMA* by the company Arrangement Provisoire.

L'INSTANT T turns the convention of theatrical performance on its head by placing the audience on a bleacher in a public space, serving as an observation post in a square, street or urban setting. For the duration of the performance, the space becomes, in the words of Nicolas Hérédia, a "fragment of suspended time", through the looped reproduction of a precise moment, paying particular attention to the infra-ordinary. The spectators, seated on the bleachers without being informed of the start of the performance, scan the urban space during a 360° immersion in a reality that has become strange. A game of observation and investigation is then set in motion to distinguish the performance from ordinary life. "The aim is to generate a very fine and acute attention to what surrounds us. We then slip variations, errors and bugs into this score to maintain the curiosity and the game of observation that has been initiated, and keep the spectator on alert to dissect this fragment of the city that he has probably passed through a thousand times without paying any attention to it"². The choice of venue is not insignificant. The company is looking to invest in a busy, lively space that the local population can identify with. "We need to have a fairly constant flow of people at each performance [...]. [...] In Montpellier, for example, on the esplanade opposite the Musée Fabre, there's this quality of flow, meaning that there's always a crowd. So we take advantage of this flow to create our musicality"³. L'Atelline had already supported the project during a creation phase at the Place du soleil in Juvignac, France, the town where the structure is based. "Juvignac is the archetypal suburban town. The way people socialise there is completely different from



L'INSTANT T. at La Vaste Entreprise in Montpellier, France
© La Vaste Entreprise

what we find in very urban areas or, on the contrary, in towns that are still based on the village model. There are human presences, but also social interactions that require a paradigm shift in order to understand them"⁴. For the company, the space proved to be a true laboratory. Each of the two contexts observed at l'Atelline tinted the project differently, while at the same time encouraging other readings of the performance. Proof, if proof was needed, of a semantic dialogue between the artistic work and the city.

By proposing a monumental structure in landscaped outdoor spaces, Jordi Galí of the Compagnie Arrangement Provisoire is also creating time-spaces that interact with the concrete of the site with *ANIMA*, time-spaces where spectators can rediscover and reactivate their perceptions of a familiar environment, one in which they have their habits and landmarks. "A landscape or a city has its own temporality, regulated by natural cycles and human, individual and societal transformations. And I believe that our perception of time is intimately linked to space and movement. My creations are an invitation to the audience to choose their own temporality, to take - or lose - the measure of time. To take the time to be where they are"⁵.

ANIMA is a six-storey structure connected by a complex system of ropes, manipulated from the ground by six performers accompanied by two musicians. The

2 Excerpt from an interview with Nicolas Hérédia, Artistic Director of La Vaste Entreprise

3 Ibid.

4 Excerpt from the interview with Marie Antunes, director of Atelline.

5 Excerpt from the *ANIMA* presentation pack.

performers, arranged in a circle, gradually unfold the structure until it reaches a height of 15 metres, bringing it to life, activating and animating it. Perceptive and sensitive links are then forged between the coordinated gestures of the performers, the structure's veritable

with the host organisation, allows people to invest in the area, to initiate invitations, to produce fertile moments of friction, and to see the emergence of new utopias situated and anchored in realities and contexts. These experiments offer alternatives for living in and with the



ANIMA by Arrangement Provisoire © Guillaume Robert

puppeteers, the monumental device in place and the spectators who discover the project. The performative and choreographed aspect, which allows the structure to appear and disappear, produces contemplative moments and questions the fragility of an ephemeral construction, as well as the collective effort required to put it in place. "Through its relationship with the present, art proposes a suspension of time, allowing us to think about the elsewhere [...]. [...] In my opinion, artistic creation offers the possibility of creating or maintaining a fascination with the world that is neither completely possessive nor fundamentally destructive. It is a refuge against the binary ways of thinking, a common place of civility. By plunging into the complexity of things, the work of art can become a foundation for an attentive and respectful contemplation of the world"⁶.

These two performances allow us to see the place through new eyes, to take our place in it, to find new postures and new physical anchors. Sensitive experiences of the space emerge, encouraging new ways of appropriating it for the people who live there. The time spent experimenting, in close collaboration

region. Mickaël Labbé⁷ points out that "we don't have to look anywhere else than where we already are to find alternatives to the alienation of urban life. The solutions lie in the folds of the city, right before our eyes. At the very heart of what already exists, that is where the idea of the right to the city is still alive and kicking"⁸.

These attention-grabbing devices sharpen the eye through the artistic performance, setting aside time for observation so that we can delve deeper and look for details; they allow us to see again different stratum of this urban landscape. In this way, the artistic proposal helps to tell the story of the site and bring out the stories and uses that shape it. Christophe Modica, sound designer, points out that the environment plays a role in the score, with unexpected elements of the site inviting themselves into the performance and blending into the narrative. "The venue has its own narrative part to play in the score we create [...] it tells its own story and we come to play with that story"⁹.

Inhabiting city spaces involves performative acts, symbolic appropriations that lay claim to ephemerality.

6 Excerpt from Jordi Galí's contribution to Conversations#3 organised by Atelline on 17 December 2023 at the Maison des Relations Internationales in Montpellier.

7 Mickaël Labbé is a lecturer in aesthetics and philosophy of art at the University of Strasbourg (France).

8 Labbé, M. (2019). *Reprendre place Contre l'architecture du mépris* (Payot). p.111

9 Excerpt from the interview with Christophe Modica, artistic director of Comptoir des silences, leader of the *Vivant* project, supported by l'Atelline.

Renewing these shape-shifting appropriations of the territory, by momentarily assuming a place in it, makes it possible to reactivate urban spaces, to renew appropriations and readings of the city. These processes fabricate and produce places, renewing them and engaging other ways to consider placemaking techniques. It also encourages the emergence of new forms of expertise in the area, by proposing a four-handed approach that respects the singularity of each individual: the poetic approach of the artist, and the relational, environmental and political approach of the host site.

CASE STUDIES

FROM THE HYPER-LOCAL TO THE GLOBAL AND BACK AGAIN: TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES AND CULTURAL NARRATIVES IN THE UK

© Will Osborne



Sud Basu founded Third Version Creative (TVC) in 2023 to produce, curate, and support international interdisciplinary projects. With two decades of experience, Sud has developed strategic curatorial frameworks for UK festivals and iconic spaces, collaborating with the Greater London Authority, the London Legacy Development Corporation,

and Arts Council England. He led major arts projects, including 14-18 NOW, which engaged over 35 million people globally. TVC supports City of Culture bids, curates Borough of Culture programs, and produces socially engaged artworks. Sud is a Trustee for London Sinfonietta and Without Walls and a Governor of Rose Bruford College.

© Jackie Friend



Rachel established Crying Out Loud (COL) in 2002 to develop, produce, and tour cross-artform performances, focusing on contemporary circus. COL creates opportunities for UK, European, and international artists by partnering with venues, networks, and festivals. They curate special events, notably Piccadilly Circus Circus for the

2012 Cultural Olympiad, and focus on Rural Touring in the South West of England and Europe. As a founder member of the Circostrada network, Rachel is well-connected to festivals, venues, and educational institutions innovating new practices across Europe and Africa.

By Sud Basu & Rachel Clare

As creative producers based in the UK, the connections of place, people and culture are at the centre of our practise. Placemaking, a cornerstone of UK cultural policy, continues to connect ever-changing sectors, people, and landscapes—from

local communities to a national scale—reshaping our identities and histories. Performance, integral to this narrative, has long been pivotal, evolving subtly over generations. Evidence from London 2012¹, to 14-18 NOW² and Unboxed: Creativity in the UK³ all highlight

1 In 2012, London welcomed the Summer Olympic Games.
2 14-18 NOW was the United Kingdom's arts programme for the First World War centenary. Working with arts and heritage partners all across the UK, the programme commissioned new artworks from 420 contemporary artists, musicians, filmmakers, designers and performers, inspired by the period 1914-1918.
3 Unboxed: Creativity in the UK was a national celebration held in 2022 in the United Kingdom, first announced in 2018 by the Conservative government following the Brexit referendum. The festival comprised ten projects shaped across science, technology, engineering,

how performance addresses contemporary issues on grand scales yet celebrates local and regional commonalities. A dynamic mirrored in the UK festivals and city programmes, and cultural districts or venues like East Bank in London and The Factory in Manchester, which integrate placemaking through performance into their fabric.

Arts Council England's Let's Create strategy underscores placemaking's role across its priorities, with initiatives like Creative People and Places or Place Partnership (CPP) schemes, empowering communities through local cultural engagement. There are currently 21 CPP projects underway in areas where there are few opportunities to get involved with the arts. Yet, challenges loom with dwindling funding and shifting cultural landscapes, necessitating new collaborative models and innovative practices.

In 2023, Third Version Creative (TVC) and Crying Out Loud (COL)⁴ started collaborating with a new model of cultural leadership to reimagine how we look across borders to explore co-creation and engagement and redefine arts' impact on place and people. An integral aspect of the collaboration between TVC and COL is an ability to transcend geographical boundaries, drawing on collective and individual experiences across diverse projects.

COL has a strategic focus on revitalising the Solent area on the South Coast through placemaking initiatives, targeting what are termed 'Priority Places' such as Portsmouth, Gosport, Isle of Wight, and New Forest. The approach to build an innovative offer of presenting work and commissioning new projects started in 2023. This initial year featured *Taroo*⁵ by Morocco's Company Zid, collaborating with Portsmouth's Funk Format, delivering skills development for their artists. This offer is underpinned by a relocation to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, a critical element in ensuring the approach and work is rooted in the locality.

In contrast, TVC's work with County Durham in the North of England started with support to a bid to become City of Culture with an aim to reshape its post-industrial narrative through the arts. From being pipped at the post to be City of Culture, Durham County Council and its partners have developed an ambitious three year 'Into the Light' programme, aimed at enhancing cultural capacity and aspirations. As a central part of this initiative, TVC has facilitated a new



Interactive Projection-mapped *Playable Monument* in Portsmouth by Thomas Buckley ©

and groundbreaking collaboration with South Africa's Isango Ensemble - renowned for transforming Cape Town's township through theatre. This collaboration has inspired the creation of Ensemble 84 comprising 20 members, many stepping in untrained and unemployed, to co-create theatre of all forms and for all spaces rooted in community narratives.

Audiences, Spaces, and Temporality

These local yet international initiatives have potential to be transformative, enriching respective regions through innovative cultural endeavours—deeply engaging diverse audiences and empowering local communities through participation and co-creation.

COL has quickly established a significant presence in the Solent with projects like *Taroo*, connecting unconventional collaborators such as street cleaners, Hip Hop dancers and a local digital artist. Beyond entertainment, these projects foster a profound sense of shared cultural experience and community pride. Events like the Street Arts Festival LOOK UP Portsmouth and Portsmouth We Shine, showcase the potential innovative use of traditional and digital

the arts and mathematics. It was spread across multiple venues in the four countries of the UK, and accessible free of charge, in person, on TV, on radio and online.

4 Crying Out Loud works in partnership with Third Version Creative to develop an international programme and is supported by Arts Council England.

5 *Taroo* is supported by Arts Council England, Institut francais Maroc and Shems'y Ecole National du Cirque.

spaces, enhancing cultural vibrancy and drawing visitors to experience Portsmouth as a dynamic arts destination. Through facilitating collaborations with key international artists, like Ireland's renowned aerial company Fidget Feet and Company Zid, COL are enhancing local artistic capabilities, offering one-to-one mentoring sessions, workshops, upskilling training

- data and information will start to come in. That said, the early signs are reassuring.

In the South, COL's journey in the reinvigoration of the Solent region has started to make a difference. The interactive projection-mapped *Playable Monument*, combines the contemporary street culture of Parkour



Ensemble 84 © Will Osborne

sessions and performance opportunities that empower artists from economically deprived neighbourhoods and open pathways into the cultural industries.

Ensemble 84⁶ is at the outset of a journey. Based in Horden, County Durham, they operate from an underused Methodist Church - which serves as a hub where participation, place, and performance converge to foster local pride and creativity. Ensemble 84's approach emphasises a fusion of global and local narratives, embedding the unique characteristics of the local area into process and productions. This is a performance offer that can transcend traditional audience boundaries and venue types, seeking to redefine Durham's cultural landscape to create compelling, tourable performances that resonate nationally and internationally, drawing on the rich tapestry of local experiences.

Placemaking and Impact

Measuring impact in these cultural initiatives can be challenging, especially in the early stages of transformative projects. These pioneering efforts in placemaking, aim to reshape cultural narratives and empower communities through innovative approaches

(Art de Deplacement) with the story and history of a significant city monument. Thomas Buckley, an artist working with technology and memory, begins by collecting inter-generational memories, reflections and stories about the monuments from a diverse range of people in the community. Then, in collaboration with Company Zid, Funk Format and local participants, he explores how Parkour, captured digitally alongside sound, can activate the public space through transformational digital spectacle. He tells unheard stories in a fresh new way. Working in collaboration with the local authority and their Heritage Strategy is a necessary and essential part of the delivery process, much of which takes time to evolve. Running in parallel are COL's skills training opportunities opening new pathways into the cultural industries, bolstering regional artistic capabilities and developing the local talent. Through these initiatives, we have confidence that the journey is one with a hopeful tone - through shaping immediate cultural landscapes while laying a foundation for sustainable growth and community engagement.

Heading North, this focus on Placemaking is central to Ensemble 84's mission, focusing on co-creating narratives of place with local communities to

6 Ensemble '84 is supported by Durham County Council, Redhills and by Arts Council England. It is part of the 'Into the Light' programme for County Durham.

produce artistically compelling, socially responsive, and sustainable performance-based works. Beyond direct participation, Ensemble 84's approach deepens connections between audiences, the creative process, and outcomes, exploring site-specific and traditional arts spaces alike. Their narrative, expressive, physical, and international theatre connects within County Durham's built and metaphorical landscapes, forging connections that extend beyond regional borders. Ensemble 84 aims for a bold trajectory over the next three years, expanding their presence beyond the North East to become a fixture in the touring and presenting landscape. They seek collaborative exchanges celebrating shared histories and place-based identities, cultivating connections resonating across nations. As their impact unfolds, Ensemble 84's journey equally promises to reshape cultural landscapes and inspire communities through the power of storytelling and creative expression.

Risks, Failures, and Results

Developing any new cultural initiative entails navigating significant risks, particularly amidst the profound challenges currently facing the UK arts sector. Whilst core funding remains until at least 2026 the reliance on fluctuating further funding poses challenges for long-term planning. There's also an ever pressing need to demonstrate immediate impact to secure future investments.

The dedication to co-creation and community engagement presents inherent challenges, especially in supporting participants with diverse lived experiences over extended periods. Both initiatives rely heavily on partnerships at local, regional, and national levels to sustain their innovative productions. The collaboration with community organisations and cultural venues is pivotal, yet these partnerships often grapple with funding constraints and operational sustainability issues. Audience engagement, crucial for showcasing the value of theatre in placemaking, faces hurdles amid cultural conflicts and varying perceptions of locally produced art. These challenges prompt ongoing scrutiny from programmers and funders regarding the artistic merit and sustainability of initiatives driven by untrained, local talents.

Amidst the competitive and resource-constrained cultural landscape, questions arise about the necessity of new ventures or relocation schemes. Despite sector-wide challenges, the initiatives spark both enthusiasm and apprehension within a diverse and passionate sector. The dynamics of competition for limited resources continually reshape industry landscapes, influencing the viability and visibility of emerging cultural endeavours.

There are no results quite yet, nor failures. More time is needed. However, in this context, the role of performance in placemaking feels both profound and essential. As both projects outline, a focus on place serves as a powerful tool not only to showcase artistic expression, but also to amplify the voices and stories of local communities. By fostering meaningful connections between artists, participants, and audiences, there is potential to rejuvenate and redefine narratives of place. With support, it can empower communities, inspire creativity, and cultivate a sense of belonging and pride. Looking to the future - as new elections loom in the UK, there is a commitment from many to keep nurturing this intersection of art, community, and place—and explore new models and approaches to contribute to a richer, more inclusive cultural landscape for all.

A PLACE FROM SCRATCH: REVISITING THE COMMONS IN ELEFSINA 2023

©Julien Perraud



By Dimitra Kanellopoulou

In 2021, a team of architects, urban planners, and circus artists visited the coastal city of Elefsina, at the west bay of Attica some kilometres away from the Greek capital. The industrial city carries the weight of a rich historical past, with several antiquity sites and an important archaeological park. After the 1950s, the landscape of Elefsina is marked by a greedy expansion (in terms of land use) of industrial plots of concrete, refineries, highways, and cargo harbours giving work to the local population installed in this territory through the 20th century, led by poverty, migration, exclusion and urgent need for low-cost housing. At a first glance, Elefsina has nothing very appealing to manifest in terms of urban fabric and public spaces. However, for the eyes of those wanting to explore a well-kept layering of popular culture, working unions' memory, and genius coexistence of parallel identities; the city can be a land of promise. The team of *Revisiting the Landscapes of Elefsina*¹ worked together within the *Escalating Eleusis*² project for more than two consecutive years having as an objective to imagine ways of unveiling the forgotten

Dimitra Kanellopoulou, an architect-engineer with a Master's in urban planning and a PhD in human geography, focusing on public space planning in Athens. Since 2019, she has been an associate professor at ENSAPM School of Architecture in Paris. Her research covers urban walking, public space, soft mobility, and tourism, using

quantitative and qualitative methods. She teaches urban planning theory, urban tourism, and fieldwork methodology. In 2018, she founded Politopia I walking cities, a consulting firm on walkability and participatory design. She was a visiting professor at Politecnico di Milano in 2022 and is a member of the AAU-CRESSON research team.

aspects of the city, the richness of its ethnic minorities, the strong memory linked to industrial past and the potential of a cultural regain capable of constructing a contemporary identity encompassing the plural images and experiences in the urban fabric. In the shade of chimneys and shipwrecks, a bet was taken; and what if the quest for meaning and direction in the invention of a collective contemporary identity was to be found in the most unnoticed places and trivial situations? The team of *Revisiting the Landscapes of Elefsina* decides to go to the meet of Elefsina's diverse ethnic minorities, populating the area progressively and in different periods during the 20th century.

The audiences, appropriating space and interweaving temporalities

Three groups were targeted in order to understand their way of inhabiting, appropriating public space and feeling of community; the *Mikrasiates*; the *Pontians* and the *Symiakoi*. An amalgam of cultures and customs,

1 Coordinated by Patrick Bouchain, Loïc Julienne from Agence Construire and Elefterios Kechagioglou from Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde.

2 A multi-dimensional French-Greek artistic project linking participatory urban planning and architecture with live performance in the public space. Escaladant Eleusis was coordinated by Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde and the architecture/urbanism firm 'Construire' (Patrick Bouchain and Loïc Julienne).

driven by personal and group stories of persecution, travelling, surviving, created in an organic spontaneous way a crafted city evolving progressively through autochthonous housing techniques, and proximity with important production plots (concrete factory, naval industry, petroleum, oil mild, etc.). The city of refugees and informal settlements that has inspired the institution of European Capital of Culture 2023 is also a city of stories of refugees' relocation, integration, acceptance, solidarity. The Pontian Greeks³ of Elefsina started settled on the "barren line" of the city, in the middle of the 1960s, the houses that were built at night with the trick of the "shack" to fool the police, the attempt to integrate, the racism of the new homeland, the strong tradition that kept them together. The story of the Pontians is also the story of building a neighbourhood from scratch. The community is one of the most vibrant in the city, numbering around 2,500 people. As for the *Mikrasiates*, they arrived after the 1922 Asia Minor's Catastrophe, leaving the already congested Athens, searching a temporary location at the outskirts of the capital. Elefsina with factories and cultivation fields, was a convenient place for testing a living for resourceless populations that could be easily absorbed to numerous industries and manufactures (TITAN, VOTRIS, IRIS, KRONOS). The community of Mikrasiates (which means "coming from Asia Minor") was formed progressively, and a large portion of them engaged in the creation of a worker's union in the port of Elefsina. The community is installed in the western north part of the city following a basic plan of long and narrow facade adjoining plots which are organised between a front street of social meeting and a backyard street of services. Following a rational hippodamian system, the crossroads and the small scale of dwellings allow dense forms of sociability and a tactical every day environment in the urban fabric. The sense of community is also reflected in terms of construction techniques, with great ingenuity in vernacular architecture, pooling resources and needs, resulting in a form of continuity and compact forms of dwelling. In the aroma of bitter orange lemon and lemon trees planted with provision on the narrow sidewalks, the community starts thriving and many *Mikrasiates* integrate the local society as entrepreneurs and merchants. A third community, the people from Symi⁴, was the last target group of exploration of the team of *Revisiting the Landscapes of Elefsina*. The first *Symiakoi*



Time Circus walking from Antwerp to Elefsina
©Elefsina official website

(which means "coming from Symi") arrived in Elefsina not as refugees or internal immigrants, but as self-exiles, around 1912, escaping the "Italianisation" imposed on them by the Italian authorities. The community settles close to the industry plot of the cement factory TITAN where many of them started working. Small houses with yards and names of the streets ensuring the link with the insular culture, show until today their will for soft integration in Elefsinas urban fabric. The settlement of ethnic communities in the city forged through the years a successful mix of traditions, neighbourhoods' architectures, and engaged plural ways of living in public spaces. The neighbourhoods of Elefsina have been assembled as insularities of slow life and group mutual aid, filling the interstices of a territory dominated by non-places of industrial manufacture and warehouse plots. The aim was to hear their narratives and try to reweave a thread of common destiny towards the economic transformation of the city.

While making a place

When arriving in Elefsina in 2021, the subject of meeting local communities and trying to unveil local

3 Comme beaucoup d'autres villes grecques, elles étaient situées le plus souvent sur les côtes ou à proximité de celles-ci, en raison du commerce avec l'étranger. La région a ensuite été appelée Euxeinos Pontos. De nombreux Grecs pontiques ont fui vers la Géorgie, le Kazakhstan et l'Arménie voisins. La plupart des Pontiens se sont réfugiés en Russie, créant ainsi une deuxième civilisation pontique. Jusqu'en 1918, la population pontique en Russie a dépassé le demi-million d'habitants. La majorité des Pontiens arrivés en Grèce après le génocide se sont installés en Thrace et en Macédoine, tandis que beaucoup d'entre eux se sont installés à Athènes.

4 Symi, close to Rhodes island in the East Mediterranean, passed to Italian control in 1912 after being under Ottoman domination. After WWII, the island became Greek in 1948 after a short period of British control.

ways of inhabiting the city was the only starting point of the team. On the other hand, discussions that were advancing with local authorities and representatives of associations of ethnic communities, showed the need to create diverse spatial situations - dispersed in the city - for converging cultures and identities. The opportunity appeared when the municipality informed the team that an interstitial and residual place hides right behind the industrial plot of TITAN, adjusted to an old football ground. The zone was a no man's land, of non-specific use, an in-between, surrounded by a eucalyptus grove, a supermarket department store, and a sports club. Even if existent in cadastral plans, the generous open field was almost unknown by inhabitants, hidden behind fences and parking plots, in a state of complete abandonment. A potential space of experimentation was then found. The process was long but inherently collective from the very first steps. Following the suggestions of the municipality, the architects' team work hand in hand with a group of circus artists travelling Europe with a playful wooden chariot. The Belgian collective Time Circus visited Eleusina already in 2018 and stepped into the forbidden zone literally by a hole. This scenic entrance had a symbolic weight. The team of *Revisiting* used this entrance for entering into an unknown field, like Alice entering her new world. For two years, the exploration of the space was accompanied by actions of revelation of its spatial qualities, creating a canvas for a new social capital to thrive. The team was quickly brought in front of the challenge to engage locals to the transformation of the space. While the concept of *placemaking* was already in vogue, the team did not exactly follow a specified - in advance - plan. The "making of the place" was delivered out of a succession of spontaneous, collective, sometimes unpredictable actions articulating citizens' expertise, feedback, on board resources, and in situ workshops during short residencies every year. In the end, the crafting of the place was the result of a three steps act: 1. observing 2. activating 3. co-constructing. In the beginning the team dealt with the ruin of the football court stands, trying to imagine ways in which this observation space can acquire new uses, secondly, the team started adding several ephemeral objects of collective use. In the last year, Time Circus fabricated the Arkopolis wooden arch celebrating the opening of the space to the community. The stands, a majestic ruin of damaged concrete, intrigued imaginations as for the ways of using it and creating space around it. The public 'spectacle' had to be reinvented. A small team of young adolescents became a protagonist figure from the very beginning in the brainstorming of the transformation of



The Mystery 99 Red Carpet, organised by Collectif MASI in Elefsina © Dimitra Kanellopoulou

the place. It was their idea, and need, the creation of a skate park and a place welcoming youth and reunions with friends. Two years of discussions gave the idea of a new common space centrality, where sitting, gazing, singing, eating, playing, relaxing could thrive again as a collective experience. The first years' small scale DIY installations were conceived mostly under the objective of bringing to light the abandoned place. A story needed to be told. Inhabitants and associations were invited to walk to the place and exchange ideas around first hand drawn sketches of transformation. This first act led to a second year's more orchestrated constructions ensuring better accessibility, protection from the sun and comfort of sojourning. The youngest start meeting and skating, at sunset, and dreaming of *their* place to be. The enthusiasm of the second year, put solid foundations for the final third year's inauguration of Arkopolis⁵. During a two-week intensive workshop, various complementary zones start flourishing around the ruin of the stands. A noisy and joyful repossession of the abandoned dressing rooms took place for months before the inauguration of European Cultural, offering a spectacle of an open kitchen, an inflatable pool, a skating area, and several moments of dancing, eating together, and debating. The space was finally opened to a larger public in June 2023 (under the name Mystery 99 The Ark) at the same time while Circostrada was organising a SPARK laboratory⁶ in Elefsina. A strong

5 TimeCircus started on foot from Antwerp in May 2022, and travelled 3,000 kilometres to arrive in Eleusis in 2023.

6 Spark took place from June 14th to 18th, 2022 in Elefsina (Greece). Organised by Circostrada, Spark was a two-day cross-sector



The Arkopolis Ark, a wooden construction fabricated on site by Time Circus group in 2023 ©Elefsina official website

will of the organisation committee Elefsina 2023 and the belief in the societal value of the project, led to gain funding from the Onassis Foundation in order to construct a proper skate park on site. The place which hosted *Mystiria* and performances⁷ during the summer of the European Capital of Culture is now accessible and open to the public from Ir. Polytechniou street or Marias Kiouri street vibrating in close proximity with the TITAN concrete implant. Surrounded by chimneys and in between archaeological sites and industry plots, the Arkopolis became a meeting point for evening strolls, and outdoor performances. The skate park, exclusive donation of Onassis to the municipality of Elefsina, colourfully decorated by the street artist GERA 1, communicates on the success of the bet. Creating a contemporary place of new sociabilities in a city-amalgam of classical antiquity history and early 20th century's industrial memory.

Lessons to learn and paths to walk

When in June 2023, the Arkopolis cultural site was launched, visitors saw a blissful place of diverse attractions and possibilities of use. If the result can incontestably confirm the creation of *a place from*

scratch, the long procedure of in the making merits a more attentive look. In fact, the concept of placemaking has seen the light of urban operations already in the 1970s, when urbanist visionaries launched an experiment of an organisation moving the rules of production of public space. The Project for Public Spaces, revolutionaries design protocols and principles in professionals around urban studies and democratises several tools of participatory design. This faith in a community's capacity and right to define its everyday space, has its origins in a rich corpus of writings of famous planners in the USA and in Europe (among them Jane Jacobs, Donald Appleyard, et al.). Numerous initiatives around the world show the extended field of application of a concept that, although its fame, remains in vogue conquering more and more the municipalities' agendas (Courage & McKeown, 2018). If placemaking was initially linked to the aims of reviving town centres, urban villages to pedestrian friendly environments with the goal of kick-starting economies, in recent years its application inspires entrepreneurs, artists, performance makers that deal with the common objective to 'give life' to certain spaces lacking street vibrant activities, public life. The creative placemaking, arouses by focusing on the extreme power of Arts to shape physical and social

laboratory that brought together a group of participants from different backgrounds and disciplines invited for the occasion. This event was organised in partnership with ARTCENA, Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, Elefsina European Capital of Culture, Institut français Paris, Institut français de Grèce, Teatroskop - South Eastern European Network for Performing Arts, and was supported by the European Union and the French Ministry of Culture.

⁷ Like the one of Collectif MASI under the title "Mystery 134 Persephone, The Red Carpet".

character of spaces. Two are the words colouring the process, *temporality* and *participation*. Projects of creative placemaking are time-consuming but manage to alternate traditional linear and rigid procedures of changing the physical environment. It is in the very essence of creative placemaking the act of artistic presence that changes the experience of the place. In the case of Arkopolis, the place in the making was woven during a three-years in situ construction of narratives and imaginaries and through the collaboration of diverse groups of people, investing time and thinking on the malleable scenarios of transformation. The circus artists of Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde (PPCM), climbing around the walls and stands in a rhythmic way, the members of Time Circus, inhabiting with their open air cuisines the space, the local artists of Elefsina, the elder people of ethnic associations, the architects, operated all in distinct thus complementary rhythms sharing values of social life, democratic procedures and mutual support and succeeded in interweaving their dreams and thoughts about the capability of the place to generate a new city's social agenda.⁸

8 The author warmly thanks the Elefsina 2023 organisation Committee, the Director of Elefsina 2023 Michail Marmarinos, Elefterios Kechagioglou from Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, Loïc Julienne, Amine Slimani, Alex Goin, and Valia Kaldi.

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KEY WORDS

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TO GO FURTHER

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CIRCOSTRADA

- [Best Practice Example · Emerging Urban Diversities And The Walking Realm: Learnings From Eleusis 2023](#)
- [SPARK #2 Podcast: Placemaking In The Performing Arts](#)
- [General Meeting in Alès - Welcome words, opening keynote and Roundtable #1 Living together](#)
- [General Meeting in Alès - Roundtable #4 “Territories with weakened ecosystems”](#)
- [General Meeting in Alès - Inspiring keynote: Soil, Fish and Tourism: Art as an infrastructure](#)

IN SITU - European Platform for Artistic Creation in Public Space

TRANS EUROPE HALL

- [Creative Placemaking White Paper](#)

OTHER RESOURCES

- Creative FED, “The European Federation of Creative Economy (EFCE)”

European Creative Economy Conference

#ECEC24 Creative Placemaking

“Local Ecosystem Partnerships for Creative Placemaking “

12th & 13th of June 2024, Helsingborg, Sweden

→ **Full video**

→ [Press release](#)

- [Center for cultural value](#)

Research Digest “Culture and Placemaking” 19 April 2024

→ [Full research](#)

- [Projects for Public spaces](#)

→ [Booklet “Placemaking: what if we built our cities around places?” 2022](#)

- Council of Europe

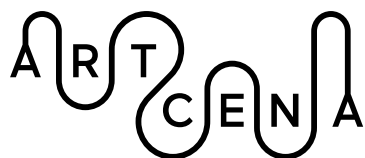
Intercultural cities Programme / [Pilot project “Intercultural cities in Placemaking”](#)

→ [Booklet](#)



EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR
CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS
AND OUTDOOR ARTS

Circostrada is the European Network for contemporary circus and outdoor arts. Created in 2003 with the core mission of furthering the development, empowerment and recognition of these fields at European and international levels, over the years the network has become an important anchoring point for its members - 162 organisations from over 40 countries - and a key interlocutor in the dialogue with cultural policy makers across Europe.



ARTCENA is the National Center for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, supported by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and is a permanent member of its steering committee. It works in close collaboration with professionals in the sector and offers them both publications and digital resources via its web platform. It also develops mentoring and training actions, tools and services to help them in their everyday practices. It supports contemporary creation through national support programs and encourages the international development of these three sectors.



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