Challenging the city scale

Journeys in
People-Centred Design

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Foreword

By Josyane Franc and Olivier Peyricot

As the world is changing, we are faced with new paradigms. Rapid urbanisation throughout the 20th century has led to more than half of the world's population now living in cities. Within decades, this number will rise to over 70%. Cities will need to find ways to accommodate this growth. They will also need to seek solutions for a range of other challenges: economic and cultural globalisation, environmental crises, inter-city competition to attract investments and changes to the ways people live, work and spend their leisure time. All this means that cities are facing a new reality.

In the past decades, urban form itself has also changed dramatically. Researchers now speak of the "after-city", the "non-city" and, perhaps most remarkably, point at a newly emerging form of generic urbanity. What is clear is that the traditional city, with a centre and suburbs, is disappearing. It is being replaced by a world of networks, connections and multipolarity. "Flows", facilitated by land-based, maritime and digital infrastructures, now prevail over places. New scales have emerged too. Many cities, including small and medium sized ones, have developed strategies to adapt themselves to this increasing complexity. Design, with its capacity to improve living standards, plays a key role in these strategies.

This is the context in which, between 2014 and 2018, Human Cities_ Challenging the City Scale has questioned the scale and co-creation of the contemporary city. Based on a concept created in 2006 by Brussels-based international creative consultancy Pro Materia,

the project is now managed by Cité du design Saint-Étienne. The project was co-funded by the European Commission's *Creative Europe / Culture Programme* and has involved 12 partners from 11 European cities: Tallinn, London, Brussels, Belgrade, Cieszyn, Saint-Étienne, Graz, Helsinki, Bilbao, Ljubljana and Milan. The partners included universities, design centres and creative design consultancies. They shared a common goal: to identify practice that challenges the way cities are co-designed. In four years the project has seen a rich programme of activities and outputs: an investigation of 90 state-of-the-art case studies, collected in a book; 9 co-creative sessions, 18 experiments in 13 cities, 12 international workshops, 11 international conferences, 6 master classes, 9 exhibitions including digital exhibition catalogues; a website and blog; and this book.

The project started with an investigation of bottom-up initiatives conducted by all partners. This state-of-the-art research resulted in a collection of nearly 90 European case studies of projects. They include redeveloping public space, strengthening social cohesion and preserving natural, architectural and culinary heritage. Three teams of researchers (from Milan, Ljubljana and Saint-Étienne) followed a methodology conceived by the research department of Cité du design Saint-Étienne to compare and analyse the case studies. The work was published in the book "Investigation".

The case studies showed us that many citizens are actively looking for solutions to make their city more pleasant to live in. They

do this with a desire not only to improve the quality of the built environment, but also to improve the city from a social perspective. For some this was a necessity; they tried to mediate situations of economic precariousness or fill the gaps left by public actors. Others were motivated by the prospect of exploring new horizons or enjoying new encounters, and thus became involved on a voluntary basis. We concluded that public space clearly is no longer exclusively the domain of specialists, but in numerous European cities subject to debate among citizens. Within these debates, designers and architects often play a role as empathic mediators.

The lessons learned fed into the action-research part of the project, for which Cité du design proposed using experimentation. In our view, cities have become "living laboratories", in which experimentation is an indispensable tool. If done well, it provides a valuable tool to listen to the needs of citizens and respond to people's multiple identities and lifestyles, and thus helps to strengthen the socio-cultural assets of our cities. Moreover, experimentation provides people with the opportunity to be creative and help enhance the vitality of their cities. Experiments are inherently less defined than other types of initiatives (projects, programmes, etc.). Despite their openness in terms of actions and outcomes, they nevertheless observe rigorous protocols regarding both their planning and their practical implementation. Equally important is the accurate collection of data and the interpretation of results.

Many of our partners had not worked with experimentation before. Therefore, we decided to ask Alice Holmberg, a designer and co-creation expert, to help each partner start their experiment through co-creative sessions. On her tour, she met with various stakeholders in each city. Together they shared, compared, analysed and developed a wide range of (new) methods and tools. The work resulted in a new approach to participatory design, and established a co-creation framework that is applicable in a variety of contexts.

After the co-creative sessions, each partner departed on their own journey. For example, our partners in Saint-Étienne, Graz, Bilbao, Helsinki and London worked with citizens to turn vacant or underused spaces into test sites for new solutions for work, service provision, education and communication. In Ljubljana, Belgrade, Cieszyn, Tallinn, Brussels and Milan, our partners joined forces with citizens to contribute to the development of a neighbourhood through improving the quality of public spaces. We invited two journalists, Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg, to capture the stories of the experiments in each of the 11 partner cities. These stories comprise the main part of this book. The variety of experiments allowed us to learn from each other. These learnings are shared in the third part of the book.

We asked two urban experts to provide a context for our stories. John Thackara, a writer-philosopher, explains the importance of understanding the notion of the city "as a living system". His chapter emphasises the need to take care of our commons, a term that includes the spaces, memories, knowledge, skills, culture and biodiversity that we all share. One aspect seems to be crucial for this around the whole world: one must listen to the people.

Anya Sirota, founder of and architect at Akoaki, shares with us her experiences from Detroit, USA. In a context of severe urban decline, Akoaki designs architectural interventions, art objects, and social environments that aim to make an impact far beyond their physical appearances.

Since its start, the Human Cities project has led to a network of "Human Citizens" distributing their knowledge and skills across Europe, and beyond as well by making use of the network of UNESCO Creative Cities of Design. Human Citizens include residents, architects, artists, students, the unemployed, the retired, and many others. Coming from various backgrounds and driven by different motivations, but sharing similar values, they prove to be the real force behind bottom-up initiatives. They are often led by leaders and facilitators (many of whom are architects, designers and artists), who bring people together for meaningful conversations by employing various techniques, ranging from theatre and performance to music and cooking.

By writing this book, we hope to expand this network of Human Citizens even further. We hope that by sharing our enthusiasm and experiences, the book will be an inspiration and a valuable reference for those inclined to become involved themselves. Moreover, we want to convince policy and decision makers of the value of these initiatives and inspire them to take action to facilitate them better in the future.

The Human Cities partners for 2014-2018

Cité du design, Saint-Étienne [France] – Leader, UNESCO City of Design

Politecnico di Milano, Milan [Italy] UNESCO City of Literature

Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana [Slovenia] UNESCO City of Literature

Clear Village, London [United Kingdom]

Zamek Cieszyn, Cieszyn [Poland]

Association Design Week Belgrade [Republic of Serbia]

Pro Materia, Brussels [Belgium]

Aalto University, Helsinki [Finland] UNESCO City of Design

FH Joanneum, Graz [Austria] UNESCO City of Design

Association of Estonian Designers, Tallinn [Estonia]

Bilbao Ekintza, Bilbao [Spain] UNESCO City of Design

Culture Lab, Brussels [Belgium]

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Human Citizens Office in Rue de la République du Design – Biennale Internationale Design, Saint-Étienne 2017 – organised by Cité du design. © Pierre Grasset

Human Cities_Challenging the City Scale has been cited in the case studies in the UNESCO Global Report on Culture for Sustainable Urban Development: Culture Urban Future as an exemplary case of cooperation between creative cities [1].

It is a policy guidance document, intended to support governments in implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda. The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was created in 2004 to promote cooperation with and between cities, having identified creativity as a strategic factor in sustainable urban development. The network currently includes 180 cities from 72 countries covering seven creative fields: Crafts & Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Music and Media Arts.

In 2018, 31 ambassador Cities of Design from 25 countries were appointed as part of this initiative [2].

1   See the UNESCO website: "Culture for sustainable urban development"; www.Unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/culture-and-development/culture-for-sustainable-urban-development/

2   Discover the Cities of Design on www.designcities.net/design-cities and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network on https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/home

Towards a Human City

By Côme Bastin

Josyane Franc is Head of International Affairs at the Cité du design and the Saint-Étienne School of Art and Design (ESADSE). She coordinates Saint-Étienne UNESCO City of Design and has been leading Human Cities_Challenging the City Scale since 2014.

C. B.   For the past four years the Human Cities project has been all about "challenging the city scale". What does that mean exactly?

J. F.   It means many things, it's a very broad idea. We can think about the city scale in different ways; it's not only about size. When we discussed the topic with our partners, many had their own interpretations. We discussed scales of organisation, scales of governance, scales created by digital technology. In spatial terms, it's about the places where people live, such as their streets and their neighbourhoods. And for example in organisational terms, it's about how these streets and neighbourhoods connect to each other. In any case, the important thing is that people feel disconnected from the various scales of the city and this is what we want to change. We want to reinvent the city with people.

C. B.   Why do you believe cities need to be reinvented?

J. F.   In many respects, things have got worse in cities in recent times. This is something we see very clearly in Saint-Étienne, but it's true for other cities as well. For example, city centres are no longer the lively places they used to be. Many shops are empty because people go to supermarkets in the suburbs or shop online. In fact, we tried to address this issue in one of our experiments in Saint-Étienne called "Ici Bientôt", which you can read about in this book. At the same time, young families in particular are leaving the city centre and moving to the suburbs. This affects urban demographics and also causes problems like congestion. So the city has become unbalanced and this is what we need to address.

C. B.   And you think normal citizens should help with that.

J. F.   Yes, of course, because they are the ones who need to be happy in our cities! If people are not happy, they will move to other cities or the suburbs. Many politicians still don't understand this and don't respond to what people need. And this is where democracy on a local level has to change. Just having elections isn't enough; what we need to do is really involve people in reinventing their city for decades to come. This is not to say that we don't need politicians anymore, but modern governance can't be done by top-down decision-making as has been the case for so long. And in the same way, we can't reinvent cities through megalomaniac masterplans that try to create a perfect city.

C. B.   Do we still need designers in that case or have they become superfluous?

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J. F.   Designers are still important. Richard Florida and Charles Landry explain how cities can be transformed with the help of their creative residents, like designers, artists, and so on. But I think the role of designers has changed. It's no longer about getting a bit of input from residents when you develop plans for the city, but about entering into a genuine collaboration. Designers should use their skills to translate people's needs into services and products that make the city better. And they should ideate, prototype and test solutions together with them. We see this happening in more and more places: it's a movement, and so not driven by economics. The designers I've met who are engaged in this aren't doing it for the money; there isn't much money in it. They're doing it because they want to change society. It often happens on a small scale, but if we all do something on a small scale we'll achieve big things together.

C. B.   When did you become interested in this new movement?

J. F.   For us at Cité du Design it started in 2008 when we organised the City Eco Lab exhibition at the Design Biennale. John Thackara was the curator; he's one of the contributing authors of this book and a leading expert on civic innovation. It was a turning point for us, as we really started to understand what this whole idea of bottom-up change was about. From then on, we felt we had to work with local communities and try to make a change at the local level. For example, during the City Eco Lab we ran a project called "Cantine Moins de 80 Km", a canteen which sourced all its food from within a radius of 80km around Saint-Étienne. 80km is a critical distance, because once you go over that you have things like additional regulation and refrigeration to worry about. After the Biennale, the idea was implemented in a school canteen and then the Mayor of Saint-Étienne included organic, locally sourced food in the city's school food policies. That's when we realised we could change things by experimenting. We prototyped and tested a solution and it became mainstream. At the time, this was still a relatively unusual process. But now there is a lot of experimentation going on, not only in France but also internationally.

C. B.   As Human Cities demonstrates… What made you want to lead the project?

J. F.   Cité du Design was one of the partners of the second edition of Human Cities, which ran from 2010 to 2012 and was about reclaiming public space. I'm very grateful to Lise Coirier of Pro Materia for involving us. Lise launched Human Cities in 2008 and invited several partners at different points. We really enjoyed being part of the project and were keen to be involved in the third edition. And since we had had the experiences I just talked about, and many others, we felt we had the know-how and the methodologies to play a leading role. We also thought it would be helpful for the work we were doing on social design. Saint-Étienne has a long design tradition, but it's a city of engineers. There's a strong focus on industrial design and the connection of design to economic development. What we wanted to do was complement this tradition by showing that design can also be a tool for social innovation. That is of course what Human Cities is about: using design to improve the city together with people.

C. B.   One of the first things you did as project leader was radically expand the Human Cities network. What was your reason for that?

J. F.   We wanted to have a wide range of partners with different backgrounds, different skills, and different areas of expertise. And we're very happy with the partners who have joined us! We have major universities like Politecnico di Milano and Aalto University, design institutes like Zamek Cieszyn and the Estonian Association of Designers, and smaller organisations like UIRS Ljubljana, Clear Village and Belgrade Design Week. We also wanted to have partners from other UNESCO Cities of Design, and we're very pleased that Bilbao Ekintza and FH Joanneum from Graz came on board. One of the things we wanted to do was examine how much bottom-up activity there already was across Europe, so obviously it was important to have partners from a range of countries. We also hoped that a large partner group would lead to many interesting experiments.

C. B.   And did it?

J. F.   Yes, definitely. What has really struck me about the experiments is their diversity. Each city interpreted the brief completely differently, and as a result, we've had a wide variety of projects addressing many different issues and involving many different people: artists in Bilbao, high school students in Helsinki, makers in London. To be honest, we in Saint-Étienne sometimes found it hard to see where a partner was going with their experiment, but in the end everything fell into place. And it wasn't only the experiments that showed this diversity; it was the same with other parts of the project like the Human Cities exhibition that travelled to each partner city. In Milan, for example, the exhibition was presented as something of a travelling circus with giant balloons. But in Ljubljana, it was based on the thirteen shared values we had defined at the start of the project. Another highlight for me was the exhibition in Graz; it was designed as a minigolf course and was very playful and fun.

C. B.   Having fun has been an important part of the project.

J. F.   Yes, it has. When you have so many partners it can be a real challenge to make sure everyone works together, but fortunately we never had any problems. Everyone was always very constructive and wanted to collaborate rather than compete. It's interesting; the European Commission is generally very keen on things like capacity building and skills exchange when it funds projects. We never really spoke about these things, but I think we achieved them and they're important legacies of the project.

C. B.   Speaking of which: what will happen to Human Cities in future?

J. F.   The future is looking bright! We're already preparing the next edition of the project, which will be led by Politecnico di Milano. After focusing on experiments during this edition, we're now going to look at what happens afterwards. What impact and legacy do experiments have when they're finished and how can we improve their impact and legacy? Most of the current partners want to be involved

Human Cities partners celebrating the opening of Kragujevac Creative Grand Park (Serbia) in February 2017. © Belgrade Design Week

in the new edition, which is a good indication of the success of the project. Apart from that, it also looks as if we're going to expand internationally. We've been invited by Seoul Design Foundation to a conference in September 2018 where we will present Human Cities and where Human Cities Asia will be launched. They're going to start the same way we did in 2014, by collecting case studies and best practice from around the continent.

C. B.   So your future might be in Asia?

J. F.   Perhaps! I have an appointment now with a Chinese curator, so that could be a sign.

From Neighbourhood to Bioregion: The City as a Living System

The Greek physician Hippocrates described the effects of "airs, waters, and places" on the health of individuals and communities. For a short period, the industrial age distracted us from this whole-systems understanding of the world – but we are now learning again to think of cities as habitats, and as ecosystems, that co-exist on a single living planet. Humanising the city in this context-making it healthy for people – therefore means making it habitable for all of life, not just human life. It means thinking of the city as a local living economy, not as a machine. And it means the embrace of biodiversity, and local economic activity, as better measures of a city's health than the amount of money that flows through it. The notion of the city as a living system generates cultural energy, too: A narrative based on caring – for each other, and for our places – creates the meaning and shared purpose we've been so badly lacking.

Civic Ecology

One design consequence of this cultural awakening is the growth of ecological urbanism, or civic ecology. These practices study how to help living organisms and their environment thrive together. They enrich city design with the insights of ecology, botany, climatology, hydrology, geology, and geography[1]. The movement is growing rapidly: The *Urban Nature Atlas*, for example, contains more than one thousand examples of nature-based solutions from across 100 European cities[2]; And another fast-growing platform, *The Nature of Cities*, hosts 650 professional contributors from around the world[3].

Ecological urbanism is not much about planting seeds on barren ground. On the contrary, it builds on some surprisingly good news. Scientists are

1   http://annewhistonspirn.com/pdf/
     spirn_ecological_urbanism-2011.pdf
2   https://naturvation.eu/atlas.
3   https://www.thenatureofcities.com/

finding that there can be more biodiversity in cities than in many rural areas that we think about as 'nature'[4]. Urban biologist Claudia Biemans, an edible plants researcher in The Hague, identified about 300 different species in one square km of her city compared to 50 different species found in the same area of industrially-farmed countryside nearby. In fact, an ecological approach is not preoccupied by the concepts of 'urban' and 'rural'. On the contrary, this approach to city design involves care for living systems that already exist at a bioregional scale, but have been neglected or ignored: watersheds, food-sheds, fibersheds and food systems.

Urban food projects are a good indication of the extent to which social innovation, and civic ecology, are converging. Twenty years ago, urban farming projects were small and disconnected. They are now becoming pervasive. This is thanks to supporting infrastructures. Educational and leadership programs, job training for underserved young people, internships, and hands-on workshops have empowered a new generation of community leaders to transform lives and neighbourhoods. By 2017 the city of Milwaukee boasted more than 100 urban farms. As pioneer Will Allen puts it, "we're not just growing food, we're growing community"[5].

Locality

A growing body of research confirms that small-scale, locally owned food businesses create communities that are more prosperous, entrepreneurial—and, yes, connected—across a wide range of metrics[6]. The beauty of local-ness as a measure of value is that it generates a practical to-do list in the form of new enterprises, new economies, and new livelihoods that need to be created. A variety of local economy blueprint tools are now available to help citizens and city managers begin this work: Tools to measure the percentage of food grown locally; the amount of local currency in circulation as a percentage of total money in circulation; the number of businesses locally owned; the percentage of energy produced locally; the quantity of renewable building materials available; the proportion of essential goods being manufactured within the community[7].

The convergence of civic ecology and local economic development is not just a task for scientists and policy makers. A variety of different stakeholders—formal and informal, big and small—need to work together. The question—and it is also a design question—is how?

One precondition for working together is to curate meaningful conversations among all the people who need to be involved. An especially effective approach has been developed in England by Encounters Arts. Their *Art of Invitation* practice uses techniques from theatre, as well as the insights of psychology, to bring people together who are diverse in age, experience and

4   https://www.sciencedaily.com/re-leases/2014/02/140212132950.htm

5   https://civileats.com/2017/10/04/milwaukee-is-showing-how-urban-gardening-can-heal-a-city/

6   https://ilsr.org/key-studies-why-local-matters/.

7   http://www.reconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/How-to-do-a-Local-Economic-Blueprint2.doc.pdf

background. The group's facilitators – many of them artists – have developed groundbreaking approaches to the co-creation of a shared response to systemic challenges facing their communities[8].

Co-operation

Once local-scale conversations are under way, the next challenge is to organise real-world activities in an equitable way. A good candidate for this task are so-called Platform Co-ops. These platforms enable multiple actors – including businesses, government institutions & NGOs – to meet basic needs collaboratively: shelter, transportation, food, mobility, water, and elder care. Value, in a Platform Coop, is shared fairly among the people who make it valuable. Its activities depend more on social energy, and trust, than on fixed assets and real estate. There's an emphasis on collaboration and sharing; on person-to-person interactions; on the adaptation and re-use of discarded materials and abandoned buildings and land. Thriving neighbourhoods also need shared community spaces. In London, the Participatory City Foundation is breathing life into communities by helping citizens develop shared gardens, canteens, kitchens, workshops, and maker spaces.

8   http://www.encounters-arts.org.
     uk/index.php/the-art-of-invita-
     tion-creative-engagement-for-our-
     selves-and-our-communities/

If humanising the city is mainly about life-friendly and resource-light ways to meet daily life needs, then the poor people of the world are further down the learning curve than the rest of us. The diverse ways in which poor people meet daily life needs are usually described as poverty, or a lack of development – but in 35 years as a guest in what used to be called the 'developing' world, this writer has come to a startling conclusion: Living sustainably is second nature for people who cannot depend on the high entropy support systems of the industrial world. Humanising the city must surely include connecting with the shadow economy of poor people and their diverse cultures. This is not to trivialise the extreme challenges faced by poor people on a daily basis – but the fortunate among us have much to learn from the ways people with low cash incomes meet these needs in an ad hoc way. Other cultures than our own have developed sophisticated ways to mutualise risk among traditional networks of reciprocity and gifts; many social systems based on kinship and myriad ways to share resources already flourish outside the formal economy.

Commoning

Millions of local living economies already exist wherever people are meeting practical needs using local resources. But a lot of this work feels fragmented. We need an umbrella concept, a coordinating idea, to make sense of the work we do as individuals in the swarm.

The Commons is that umbrella concept. As an idea, and a practice, it generates meaning and hope. Commoning gives shared meaning to the emerging 'leave things better' politics that otherwise lacks a name. It's the opposite of the drive to turn everything into money. Seen through that lens, the commons provides a motive for all a city's inhabitants to care collectively for the living systems of a city: land, watersheds, and biodiversity, for sure; public buildings and spaces, of course; but also social systems such as common knowledge, software, sharing platforms, or skills. The important thing is that the commons are a form of wealth that a community looks after, through the generations. The idea embodies a commitment to 'leave things better' rather than extract value from them as quickly as possible. And because the commons, as an idea, affirms our codependency with living systems and the biosphere, it also represents the new politics we've all been looking for to replace the industrial growth economy we have now. The commons is a system by which a community agrees to manage resources, equitably and sustainably – as we have done for most of human history.

Part 2

Experiments

Co-creation across Europe

By Alice Holmberg

It's early 2015 and the quest for co-creation and experimentation across Europe has begun. I'm sitting in London in the middle of winter, when all at once the gloom is dispelled by a phone call asking me to serve as co-creation expert for the Human Cities partners in eleven European countries.

The role of the co-creation expert is to develop and align co-creation practices across Europe, which is no simple feat. Firstly, because of the level of ambition of the Human Cities programme: to create lasting change in each city in the network and to do so together with citizens. Secondly, because of the diversity of the partners. This is very positive in a way, as it increases the opportunities for shared learning, expands the potential reach of experiments, and allows for different takes on similar topics. But on the other hand, it also raises questions about how to achieve equal footing and balance that with doing something meaningful in each city. To illustrate the diversity, consider Politecnico di Milano. They are intellectual heavyweights in the urban discourse and veritable grandmasters of social innovation, yet also an enormous organisation. Compare them to a smaller organisation like Belgrade Design Week who are a steamroller of entrepreneurial energy and get so much done in a single day that they seem able to warp space-time–or maybe there are simply more hours in a day in Serbia? But of course there are also challenges to being comparatively small and new on the scene. Human Cities tries to square these different perspectives–and nine others besides!

But of course organisational size is not the only parameter of diversity. There is also geographical and cultural variation. Think about Helsinki with its solid, quiet design and its strong tradition of social democracy, and then jump to Bilbao with its massive urban regeneration programme in the past 20 years, and then move on to Cieszyn, a border city which is literally divided between Poland and the Czech Republic and whose mere location is mind-boggling to anyone who knows anything about local politics. These examples from opposite ends of the spectrum underline the fact that all the partners are unique in their own way. Yet all of them are also members of Human Cities and have committed to the same goal: to create lasting change in their cities together with citizens.

It is plain to see that serving as the co-creation expert for the Human Cities network will bring opportunities and challenges in equal measure. What makes it meaningful is the possibility to challenge the city scale, put humans back at the centre of the discourse, support a diverse partnership that can achieve more than any individual or bilateral effort, and stick out one's neck and share both failures and successes along the way.

Challenge accepted.

Local residents in Ljubljana were invited to a picnic to express their visions for the future of the central public open space of their neighbourhood. © Blaž Jamšek / Photoarchive UIRS

The music of many minds

Co-creation is often equated with a co-creative event. But thinking that co-creation is an event is like thinking that music is the same as a concert. To continue the analogy, imagine staging a concert. You don't start by jumping onto the stage. First, you have to compose music. After that, you have to make people aware of it, build up a fan base, plan a tour, book a venue, sell tickets, and deal with other logistical matters before you can proceed to a stage performance with impact. Co-creation is similar. What we have to compose, or rather define, is the challenge to be addressed. Then we need to communicate this, and although it might be overly optimistic to look for fans, we do need to identify people or organisations who might be interested. As with the concert, this is followed by coordination, logistics and–only then–the grand event.

But unlike the concert, this is followed by something even more important. The actual change. Human Cities is all about taking action. Therefore when we speak about co-creation in relation to Human Cities, we mean the whole shebang–from composing, to staging, to actually making real change. Like a band with a new release, Human Cities went on tour with co-creation. I had the pleasure of getting started a year in advance, as a type of one-woman band warming up the audience for the main gig. The warm-up consisted of briefings with each partner's project team to build local capacity and align approaches across the Human Cities network.

The co-creation framework

The aim was to create meaningful co-creating briefings for all partners individually, while keeping a common foundation throughout the network. For that reason, we worked with a co-creation framework rather than a prescriptive methodology. The framework was designed specifically for Human Cities and could be adapted to each partner's context, while ensuring common ground and comparability. In practical terms, the co-creation framework

breaks down big topics into a workable set of questions and prompts. Take context as an example. It is key for each partner to have a profound understanding of the context of their experiment. To achieve that, we separate the complex notion of context into its constituent parts, such as space, history, geography and discourse. In the co-creation framework, we then address elements of context like:

- Physical space: where will the experiment take place?
- Spatial context and history: what is currently there, what used to be there?
- Motivation: what makes the place interesting and why has it been chosen?
- What is the connection to the state of the art as analysed by the Human Cities research team?
- How is the experiment related to other experiments or cities in the Human Cities network?

The co-creation framework covers topics such as context, potential, partners, reach, impact, planning and tools. Taken together, this allows for a 360-degree review of a co-created experiment, helps with its implementation, and enables good decision-making and active thought leadership[1].

The co-creation briefings

The co-creation framework was the starting point with each partner. It was used to prompt the project teams in each city before we moved on to the co-creation briefings: two days of capacity-building onsite in each city. With our preparations behind us, the journey began with a wonderful train ride over the Alps to Ljubljana.

Slovenia: city & heritage
Community – active spaces – participatory process

Ljubljana opens one's eyes to the complexity of European culture. Once part of Yugoslavia on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain (at least if one uses Churchill's original definition of the Iron Curtain), Slovenia is now an independent state and a member of the EU. Slovenians are culturally adjusting to the new reality, but parts of the built environment remain unchanged. Thus walking around Ljubljana is like talking a stroll down recent Slovenian history. This level of readability in a city is fascinating for a visitor. But what is it like to live here? Do the built environment and cultural landscape adapt to emerging realities? Or vice versa? Excitingly, our Slovenian partners chose to work on this very theme, i.e. the relationship between people and the heritage around them. They focused on a neighbourhood built during the socialist period and aimed to activate public spaces in a way that would enable local residents to feel ownership of both process and place.

1   The full framework is available under http://www.thatsomething.dk/work.html#human-cities

France: city & connection
Human-centric design – momentum – urban drivers place-making

It is sometimes said – jokingly though not without a grain of truth – that when two Frenchmen meet they say hello to each other, but when three Frenchmen meet they start an association. The country boasts a lively civil society, but that also means there is a dense web of interest groups that can easily become entangled.

In Saint-Étienne, the local government has already undertaken a paradigm shift in urban planning, moving from an industrial past to a creative present and future. As a result, civil society has been thriving – or you could say running wild. It is exciting to see that the French partners dared to address exactly that: the lack of coordination between the many different initiatives related to public space. The aim is to connect, unite and create common ground for collective impact in the city.

Finland: access to the city
Circular economy – social innovation – service design policy making

Helsinki is the Nordic representative in the network. The city is strongly committed to the idea of democracy, not only as a system of government but also as an egalitarian principle running through Finnish society. Democratic notions, in particular about equal access, also underpin the Finnish Human Cities experiment.

As a quirk of the Finnish education system, there is a large number of pupils in temporary school buildings at any one time. This is the unintended consequence of school buildings being kept to a very high standard and undergoing frequent refurbishment. During this time, they are not fit for use and pupils are accommodated in barrack-like structures instead. Some of these barracks are close to Aalto University. The great idea of the Finnish partners was to open up their campus to pupils and make their facilities and infrastructure accessible – not to the general public quite yet, but at least to a part of the public who would make very good use of it. But how would all of this work exactly?

Thoughts along the way

Although I still had a long way to go on my co-creation tour, it seemed to me that a thematic pattern was emerging. In the cities I had visited so far, it was easy to see that the Human Cities partners had committed to a shared paradigm, yet made it their own. This created a diversity of perspectives and provided an excellent framework (or at least an excellent set of questions) to understand what the idea of Human Cities could mean in different contexts. What needs do people have in different cities? What is missing and what is already there? What types of initiative tend to be particularly popular? How do people engage? What role does the urban realm play in public life and what can we achieve by transforming it? Thematically mapped, the themes that arose during the co-creation briefings seemed to lie within the parameters of humans and cities, values and tools.

Alice Holmberg wears eye-tracking glasses to evaluate Jakomini Street. © FH Joanneum

Italy: city & theatre
Cultural development – societal commons – activism – bottom-up

Hitting the road again, it was time to visit our Italian partners in Milan. They had decided to take an action-focused approach to their experiment and had already started to collaborate with a strong local partner, a theatre. Using the power of performance, as well as various other tools and techniques, they wanted to bring new life to a large but little-used public space.

Poland: city & identity
Place-making – societal commons – entrepreneurship

The Polish Human Cities partner is based in Cieszyn. A river divides Polish Cieszyn from Czech Těšín–but since both countries are in the Schengen Area, you can easily cross the border on an evening stroll without noticing that you've gone from one country to the other. Not surprisingly, a history of border disputes and the current political division have diminished Cieszyn's importance as a regional centre. This was the challenge our Polish partner initially wanted to tackle: how could a once-thriving market town rediscover its economic vitality despite (or perhaps thanks to) its dual identity?

Austria: non-commercial gathering places in the city
Societal commons – cultural development – place-making creative spaces

In the heart of Europe, our Austrian partners had chosen a challenge that is critical for countless other cities: making sure that public space is truly public and non-commercial. If that one could be cracked, the beautiful city of Graz would be a model for everyone else to follow. During our co-creation session, we worked onsite in Jakomini neighbourhood and focused on monitoring and understanding change. To achieve that, we had a world premiere with yours truly serving as guinea pig. Exciting! Imagine eye-tracking glasses like the ones that are used to test user interfaces. In Graz, glasses like these were combined with a camera in the same headset. This allows you both to "look inside" at the movement of the eyes and to "look outside" at the streetscape through which the person wearing the headset is moving. Combining these two datasets allows you to see what the person was looking at. It was a fascinating experiment and a novel way to use technology to monitor and evaluate change in the public space. By getting people to walk through the streetscape with these rather chunky specs, you can do a before and after com-

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Launch workshop of the Ici Bientôt initiative in rue de la Ville, together with cultural associations, shopkeepers and urban planners of the neighbourhood. © Ici Bientot/CREFAD

parison of what catches their attention, how many times they stop, where they spend most time, and so on.

Estonia: mindfulness in the city
Behaviour change – human centricity – urban futures

Next, we returned to the north and travelled to the capital of Estonia, Tallinn. Together with our Estonian partners, we jumped straight into one of the biggest conundrums of modern urban life: pace. The idea of the experiment was to react to the frenetic pace of modern life and to complement our busy public spaces with ones that are quiet, peaceful, and enclosed. This is a big idea and could do wonders for our well-being! But where should we position these time-decelerating pods? And how can we make sure that they're public, yet closed?

Serbia: beacons of aspiration in the city
Flow spaces – human centric urban futures – desirable futures

Crossing the continent again, we travelled south to our Serbian partners in Belgrade. Developing the positive power of culture and cultural identity seemed like a particularly relevant thing to do here – partly because of the direct link to design and partly because the city had suffered from the negative effects of conflict until recently. The idea of the experiment was to provide a positive and proactive counterweight. It had elements both of stepping back from urban busyness and of throwing oneself into it, by withdrawing to envision desirable futures and then leaping back into the thick of things to make them happen. Take that!

Spain: participatory change in the city
Participatory process – place making – social innovation
circular economy

Appropriately, the final stop on the tour was Bilbao, the city with the iconic harbour development spearheaded by the Guggenheim Museum. Our Spanish partners wanted to explore the question: "what happens 20 years later?" They had already started a con-

versation about urban spaces to uncover overlooked gems, i.e. projects and initiatives that had been quietly successful. This encouraged us to look at the San Francisco neighbourhood, which seemed to be on the verge of major change. Could this be achieved without destroying the local elements that functioned well? And how could the community be mobilised to play an active role in this change and benefit from it?

The end of the tour

After a year and a half of touring across Europe and crossing the continent from east to west and north to south, the Spanish sunshine seemed like a good concluding image for the brightness and warmth that the Human Cities partners had been bringing to their work. Viewing the Human Cities network as a whole, it's noticeable that no two partners chose the same focus. This provides us with a range of perspectives of what human cities are all about and what themes are worth exploring: heritage, identity, access, connectivity, art, commons, participation, mindfulness, aspiration and so on. All in all, Human Cities makes for a rich tapestry of how and what you can work on in the public space.

It was a privilege for me to work with each partner. It required me to focus deeply on the experiment in each city as well as connect them as Human Cities. I also believe that the involvement of a co-creation expert had a number of benefits:

- It introduced a neutral outside perspective which helped facilitate discussions that were strategic, constructive, and that took into account local priorities.
- It added a sense of urgency to the process by forcing everyone to move away from long timelines and vague agendas and get things done within deadlines.
- It enabled knowledge to be shared across the network, which allowed us to develop a common understanding of methodology and tools and how these could be applied in different contexts.

The unique role of a co-creation expert for the Human Cities partners has been every bit as diverse, meaningful and exciting as I'd expected. As the experiments proceeded, many of the expected problems melted away and some valuable insights emerged. The most fascinating findings in my opinion were as follows:

Commonality

The first and perhaps most inspiring discovery is that the Human Cities partners have more commonalities than differences–despite the apparent diversity.

Complexity

Public space is a heavyweight topic to grapple with in all our partner cities. Making changes in public space means addressing almost all aspects of society: politics, infrastructure, culture, ownership, commerce, civic society–and even the weather!

Perspective

Interestingly, all the partners felt that their context was unique and uniquely complex. Whilst there is a lot of truth in this notion, it can be stifling. The Human Cities network had a great mitigating effect, as each partner was directly confronted with other partners' equally unique and equally complex contexts. I expect this to be a powerful legacy of the programme.

Co-creation

Finally, there is the relationship to co-creation itself. In places like Finland, France and the UK, co-created urban development has been in vogue for a while. In other countries like Poland and Estonia, the co-creation craze has not yet hit. And in some of the former socialist countries, the notion of community-based development even has an old-fashioned ring to it. The different approaches are striking and underline the value of international collaborations like this.

This co-creation expert confidently concludes that co-creating is neither harder nor easier in any one country than anywhere else. Challenging the city scale takes tenacity and determination no matter what country you're in–but it helps to have collaborators to help with the work, co-visionaries to support the agenda, and fellow travellers to accompany you on the journey.

Travelling to Human Cities, whether in real life or in this book, will present you with fantastic perspectives–and a great deal of passion!

Cocreative workshops in Bilbao brought together representatives
from various local organisations and residents. © UrbanBat

Map of experiments

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No Man's Land
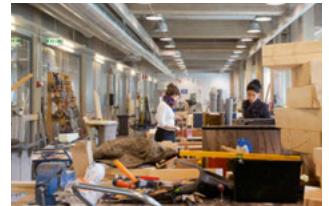
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Saint-Étienne

✕
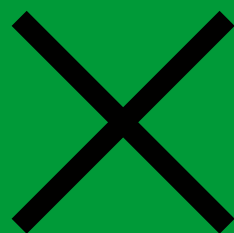
A Space Odyssey

By Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg

The Cité du design has been working with citizens' initiatives in Saint-Étienne to bring empty spaces to life. Together they have transformed a vacant lot into a public square, incubated businesses and projects in empty shops, and engaged residents in the regeneration of their neighbourhood.

An installation designed by CREFAD was used to collect suggestions from passers-by on how to revive the Beaubrun neighbourhood. © EtienneB-photography

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A slide and a mini-golf course on the central stairs were among the many interventions in the Crêt de Roch neighbourhood. © Hypermatière
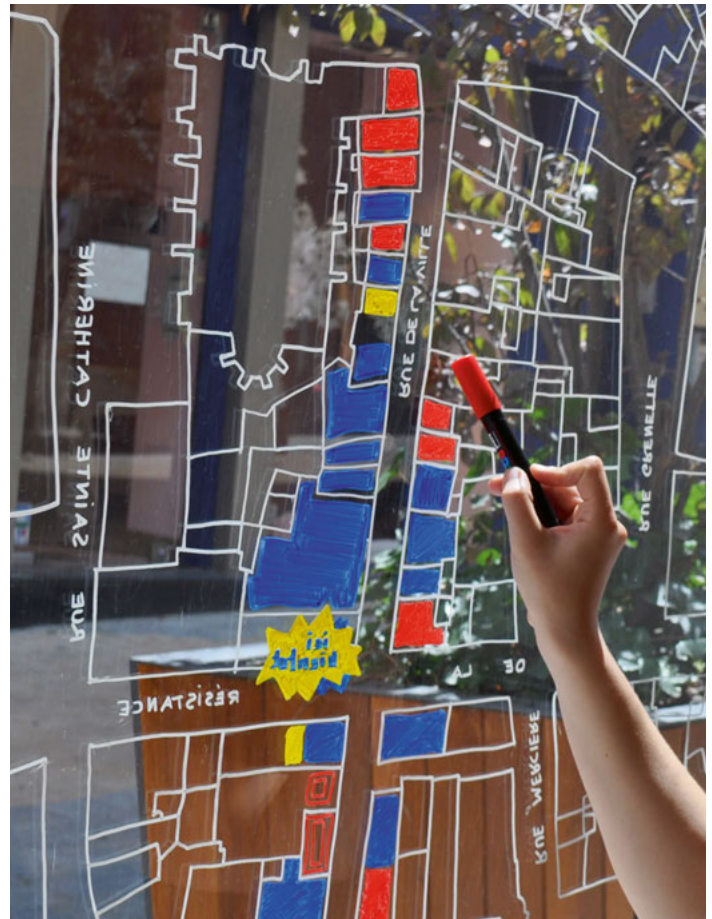
Vacant and occupied shops in rue de la Ville were mapped on the window of the Ici Bientôt office. © Ici Bientot/CREFAD

"When there is large-scale renewal work going on, we tend to forget there are still people living in the area."

Raymond Vasselon, Amicale Laïque du Crêt de Roch.

The growth of supermarkets in the suburbs and the shift to online shopping pose an existential threat to shops in our cities, not just in France but throughout Europe. "*There are a lot of empty shops in the centre of Saint-Étienne and they affect the atmosphere,*" says Josyane Franc, who is a member of the Saint-Étienne Human Cities Team and the Head of International Affairs at the Cité du design. "*It's a serious problem, because small shops are important for neighbourhoods. In their windows, you can see the different elements that make up the city's identity.*" In Saint-Étienne, which is still suffering from the after-effects of industrial decline, the issue is particularly acute. "*As a result, people who live in the city centre try to develop new networks and services, and come up with new ideas to revitalise public spaces,*" Josyane Franc explains.

In 2014, the Cité du design became the leader of the Human Cities project. It was a valuable opportunity to experiment with new ways to co-create the city with citizens. "*Several neighbourhoods in Saint-Étienne were undergoing renewal,*" says Nathalie Arnould, who is Design Manager at the Cité du design and in charge of incorporating design into municipal and regional policies. "*Many residents and groups weren't happy about this and started to reclaim public spaces, vacant lots and empty shops.*" This raised a number of important questions. Can design tools be used to find common ground between citizens, landlords and the authorities? And how can empty spaces be reinvented in a way that supports the regeneration process? The Cité du design launched its experiments in a bid to find answers.

Second life for spaces

Thomas Fremaux is a Project Coordinator at the CREFAD Loire Association. Since 2015, he has been working with local actors to improve the bad reputation of rue de la Ville. The street dates from the 14th century and is filled with picturesque buildings; Saint-Étienne's first town hall used to be located here, too. But over the years, many shops have closed and many buildings have become vacant. We meet at his office called Ici-Bientôt, which translates to Coming Soon. "*Ici-Bientôt transforms streets, focuses attention on windows, and imagines how empty shops can be used differently,*" is posted by the entrance. Within just a few years, the organisation has managed to breathe new life into the historic street in the Beaubrun neighbourhood. "*Over here we have opened a new craft workshop,*" he says as we walk down the street. "*Over here is a community café. And here is a space we gave to a seamstress who was desperately looking for cheap work space.*"

After a 30-minute walk to another part of the city, we meet another activist. Raymond Vasselon is a retired architect who is trying to tackle some of the problems in the Crêt de Roch area. Located on a hill next to the city centre, this popular neighbourhood faces some of the same challenges as Beaubrun. "*The city has gone through major industrial decline and the public response has been to implement large-scale urban renewal plans,*" he says. "*But while this work is going on, we tend to forget there are still people living in this part of the city.*" Many buildings and shops have

Designers from Captain Ludd, students, members of community associations and children from the Crêt de Roch neighbourhood all participated in constructing the welcome desk for Place du Coq. © Hypermatière

From an industrial to a creative city

Textile mills, mines, iron foundries, arms factories… From the 16th to the 20th century, Saint-Étienne was home to France's most important industries. In the 1950s, many large housing estates were built for workers from various European countries and the French colonies in North Africa. During the 1970s, Saint-Étienne was badly affected by the decline of the coal industry and increased competition from Asia. Many factories had to shut down and the industrial city had to reinvent itself. New institutions (such as a university, theatre and conference hall) were established, while the mines became a historical museum. Only the most advanced industries like optics or high-tech textiles were able to survive, but Saint-Étienne retained a "maker" spirit. This was one of the reasons why the city turned to design as a new source of growth and a potential remedy for some of its ills.

ESADSE design students and children from the Crêt de Roch neighbourhood during the construction phase of Place du Coq. © Axel Mariotte

Top: Urban gardeners and designers from Detroit (USA) met designers from Captain Ludd in Place du Coq during Biennale Internationale Design Saint-Étienne 2017. © Fernando Mascaro

Bottom: The entrance of Place du Coq on Neyron Street. © Captain Ludd / Martin Guillaumie

"Together with design students and local residents, we constructed a stage, a terrace, a bar, and some play equipment for children."

Juliana Gotilla, member of Captain Ludd

become vacant in Crêt de Roch, which has acquired a reputation for being dangerous. Raymond Vasselon has tried to turn things around with his associations "Amicale Laïque du Crêt de Roch" and "Rues du Développement Durable". During several editions of Biennale Internationale Design Saint-Étienne, they helped create a new design workshop, several community gardens, and a space for public events.

Hypermatière and Ici-Bientôt

The two activists were both involved in Saint-Étienne's Human Cities experiment. In July 2015, a creative meeting was held which brought together 40 people and organisations involved in the transformation of the city. Participants included designers, education associations, and urban planning institutions. After the meeting, the Cité du Design launched a call for proposals to tackle some of the main issues in the city. "*The idea was that the people who were chosen would be like an agency of experts,*" says Camille Vilain, International Project Manager at the Cité du design. "*What we wanted to do was create an office of urban experimentation.*" Two collectives were selected: Hypermatière in the Crêt de Roch neighbourhood and Ici-Bientôt in the Beaubrun area.

The members of Hypermatière included Raymond Vasselon, designer Magalie Rastello, and design collective Captain Ludd, which was already working with residents of Crêt de Roch and the association Amicale Laïque. "*We did a project called Atelier*

Toboggan at the 2015 Design Biennale," remembers Juliana Gotilla, a Brazilian architect and member of Captain Ludd. "*We organised a participatory workshop and built a street slide on the steps that lead down from Crêt de Roch.*" Captain Ludd managed to obtain cheap office space with Raymond Vasselon's help. His association Rues du Développement Durable negotiated the rent with the landlord. "*There are a lot of run-down but overpriced properties in Crêt de Roch,*" Raymond Vasselon says. "*We convinced the landlord that it's better to get a bit of rent than nothing at all. We also promised to renovate the place.*" Using the same arguments, Rues du Développement Durable helped several other shops and organisations find space in Salengro Street.

Cité du Design helped Hypermatière carry out more interventions in the area. In 2016, Magalie Rastello got together with gardener Matthieu Benoit-Gonin and mosaicist Yai Acosta-Valois to develop the "Epidermal City" project. It consisted of a ceramic herbarium, which was produced in public workshops and then 'planted' along a route through the neighbourhood. The Epidermal City was an invitation for residents and visitors to discover not only the ceramic plants that had been made, but also the real plant diversity in the numerous empty spaces of Crêt de Roch. For the 2017 Biennale, Hypermatière thought of another ambitious project and transformed a 600 m2 vacant lot in Neyron Street–considered one of the most run-down in the area–into a giant event space. "*Together with design students and local residents, we built outdoor furniture using recycled materials,*" says Juliana Gotilla. "*We constructed a stage,*

"We showed that it doesn't take much time, money or personal investment to change things."

Thomas Fremaux, CREFAD Loire.

a terrace, a bar, and some play equipment for children." The space was named "Place du Coq" and a programme of activities including concerts and workshops was developed. It proved so popular that the space stayed open for several weeks after the Biennale.

A street is reborn

At the same time, Ici-Bientôt brought new life to the Beaubrun neighbourhood. The project was led by education association CREFAD Loire, graphic design collective Typotopy, and activist association Carton Plein which works on temporary projects in public spaces and empty buildings. "*We tried to talk to the owners of empty shops,*" Thomas Fremaux says. "*A lot of the time they just wanted to sell their property. So we said to them: 'why don't you let us use it temporarily? And if you sell it, we'll leave*". In the meantime, Ici-Bientôt also opened a resource centre in rue de la Ville to help people set up projects in vacant spaces. The goal was to open a network of temporary spaces and shops by the time of the next biennale. "*We helped them turn their idea into a real project, find a space, and renovate it,*" Thomas Fremaux explains. "*And if their project wasn't right for us, we signposted them to other organisations.*" During the 2017 biennale, Ici-Bientôt opened 5 temporary spaces: a bar, a cooperative craft shop, a cooperative tea room run by mothers from the neighbourhood, an atelier for activities related to reading and writing, and an exhibition space. A group of 30 volunteers worked with the designers to renovate the spaces and create new shopfronts. 150 people came to the artistic interventions, performances and parties on the opening day. To maintain the momentum after the biennale, "*we considered all spaces individually,*" Thomas Fremaux says. "*And we also managed to open a few new ones: a coffee shop, a cooperative bar, a sewing workshop, and a community workshop in partnership with Saint-Étienne's Fab Lab.*" The collective also organised temporary events, like a creative week at nearby Boivin Square. A group of 40 students from around Europe will soon renovate the whole street and a Syrian grocery might open as well.

"*We showed that it doesn't take much time, money or personal investment to change things,*" Thomas Fremaux says. Raymond Vasselon believes that the reputation of Crêt de Roch has also improved. "*The area used to be viewed as the Bronx of Saint-Étienne, but it's now considered creative. It's much more valuable to have a lot of people getting involved in a neighbourhood than to have a large regeneration plan.*" An important lesson can be learnt from both projects: the volunteer work done by residents and activists is enormously valuable. "*We managed to open public gardens for a tenth of the price it would have cost the city to employ professionals,*" Raymond Vasselon says. He hopes that there will be more support for participatory approaches in the future and that they will play a larger role in urban development, both in Saint-Étienne and elsewhere. Are there some initial signs of this already? "*Captain Ludd and Rues du Développement Durable have been contracted by EPASE to design temporary spaces during the regeneration of another part of Saint-Étienne,*" Camille Vilain says with a smile.

Partners from Human Cities and UNESCO City of Design Detroit suggested new uses for vacant shops during a workshop in rue de la Ville. Left photo: © Ici Bientot/CREFAD Right photo: © EtienneB-photography
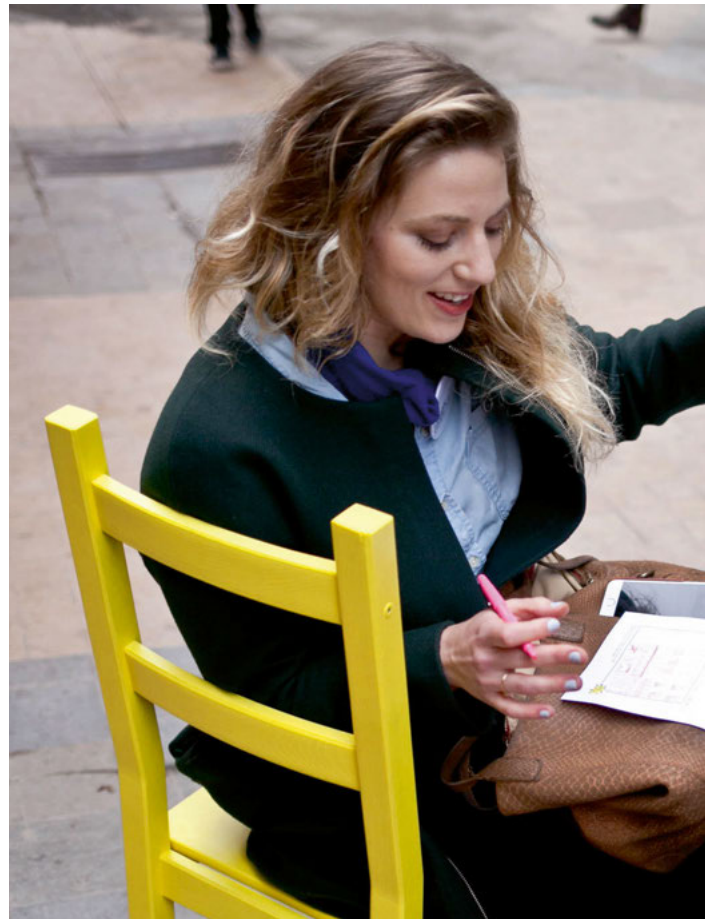
A city of design

Together with the Saint-Étienne Higher School of Art and Design (ESADSE), the Cité du design was established on the former site of an arms factory in 2009. The Cité du design, which has led the Human Cities project since 2014, is a platform for research, higher education, economic development, design and art promotion. It is supported by the city of Saint-Étienne, the metropolitan government, the Rhône-Alpes region, and the ministry of culture. The Cité du Design and ESADSE came together in 2005 around the common goal of developing research through creative action. The Cité du design focuses on human-centred design: design that enhances our everyday lives and enables tangible improvements in a range of fields, from housing and mobility to energy and health.

Ici Bientôt used advertisements displayed on their office window to help entrepreneurs find empty spaces. © Cité du design

Milan

X

Design and Theatre Meet in No Man's Land

By Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg

Together with a local theatre company, the Design Department of Politecnico di Milano has transformed an empty square into a hub for culture and play. Design students of the Politecnico spent 9 months working with residents to bring new life to this peripheral neighbourhood. They built objects from recycled materials, set up an urban theatre, introduced a skills market, created a relaxing corner... In the end, they put up seven giant letters to show the world the hidden name of this no man's land: La Piana.

Walking around "La Piana" can feel like walking around hundreds of city suburbs all over Europe. Residential buildings surround the large, empty space on top of a car park which is located on street level. When you're here, it's hard to tell if you're in a private or public space, inside or outside the city. Right next to this empty 10,000 square metre space, Nadia Fulco co-founded the 200-seat Ringhiera Theatre in 2007. It was a huge challenge in an area that was far away from the city centre and that suffered from a general lack of cultural activities and events. During the next ten years, the ATIR[1] association worked closely with the local community and organised countless activities, especially for children, teenagers, older people and people with disabilities. The activities were carried out in parallel to the theatre's on-stage events and helped to create synergies. As a result, "*we managed to build a vibrant community,*" says Nadia Fulco, who is responsible for ATIR's social projects. "*A lot of the residents regularly come to our plays.*"

An unsafe place

But what could be done with this urban wasteland right in front of the Ringhiera Theatre? "*The locals call it 'La Piana' and it has inspired us since we started here,*" Nadia Fulco says. "*It was known as an underused and unsafe space, but we thought it had a lot of potential.*" With the help of volunteers from a range of backgrounds (architects, scenographers, intellectuals), the members of ATIR thought of numerous ways to improve the space. Giant flowers, visible on Google Maps, were painted all over the square to make it more attractive. Together with local cooperatives and associations, they started collecting local people's ideas for La Piana.

At this point the collaboration between the Ringhiera Theatre and Politecnico di Milano began. "*In February 2015, Professor Isabella Vegni* (from the European network GIDE, Group for International Design Education) *put us in touch with Professor Davide Fassi from Politecnico di Milano,*" Nadia Fulco remembers. Davide and his team had worked on other social design and participatory action projects in Milan. "*We felt we could build on that experience at La Piana,*" Davide Fassi explains. "*We also thought that the social challenges of the area were a perfect context for a student assignment in our Temporary Urban Solutions course.*" With the additional resources brought in by the students, the efforts that had been started by ATIR could be scaled up.

Reshaping with design

"*The Ringhiera Theatre already wanted to change the place in an artistic way,*" remembers Annalinda De Rosa, a PhD candidate who worked with Davide Fassi on the La Piana urban experiment. "*For us it was an opportunity to see how we could engage people in the area through different kinds of actions, not only artistic actions but also project-based and design-based ones.*" An initial co-briefing session took place in October 2015. The members of ATIR acted as guides for the Politecnico di Milano research team, helping them understand local people's needs.

The needs that were identified formed the brief for the coursework of the 60 international students who were involved in the project. "*The idea was that they should become familiar with the area themselves,*" Davide Fassi explains. "*They had to try and understand the spontaneous interactions that were taking place and the social challenges of the area.*" They were divided into ten

1   Associazione Teatrale Indipendente per la Ricerca, which translates to Independent Theatre Association for Research

The main entrance of the ATIR theatre on La Piana square. © Martina Mazzarello

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Members of the public helped make colourful panels for La Piana square.
© Martina Mazzarello

A square with no name

Located at the southernmost end of Milan's southern suburbs, the area where our story takes place does not have an official name. Residents call it "La Piana", which translates to "The Plain". It's a no man's land which illustrates the history of much of 1960s architecture, built in a hurry to meet housing needs after World War II. The area was urbanised in response to increased demand for low-cost residential housing caused by immigration from the south of Italy. Over the years, it came to be known as a marginalised dormitory district. La Piana has a reputation for antisocial behaviour and drug abuse.

"The idea was that they should become familiar with the area themselves, to understand the spontaneous interactions and the social challenges of the area."

Panels advertised La Piana square to people in the street below.
© Caterina Corti, Vanessa Pinzoni

groups and linked with local groups such as informal citizen's groups, children involved in cultural activities at the Ringhiera Theatre and people over sixty who were an important part of the regular audience. Each group had to set up co-design sessions with residents. "*In this ideation phase, the students used design tools to develop ideas to improve the image of the area, which currently suffers from a lack of activities,*" Davide Fassi says. The design tools used by the students included design scenarios, storyboards, role plays, concept models, cards and visuals for concept descriptions, and cards to collect memories.

12 solutions and a giant name

The co-design sessions led to the most important phase of the experiment: transferring the project from paper to reality. It started on 30th January 2016 with an experimentation lab, during which "*students prototyped and tested 12 solutions to help people interact with La Piana,*" Davide Fassi explains. The actions that were carried out included Listen+look+play, a collection of swings, unexpected points of view, and colourful light effects to make La Piana visible from the street. "*Since the square is above street level, students used mirrors and recycled materials to create physical elements that invited people down below to come and see what was happening,*" Annalinda De Rosa says. Urban games from all over the world, called Planae, were also prepared. Local people used La Piana as something of a fairground to celebrate differences and get to know each other. There was a co-designed urban theatre, an urban skills market, a relaxing corner… "*There's only one thing we regret,*" Davide Fassi says. "*It was raining that day and since our activities were outdoor, we had to change the layout of the event and try to use a few sheltered areas.*" As a result, "there were less than a hundred people."

The weather was better on the second day of the experiment, which took place during Milan Design Week in April 2016. After a bike trip in the area, all the Human Cities partners were invited to a neighbourhood lab. The aim was to co-design a sign with local residents to make La Piana's name visible. "*We started making big panels for each of the 7 letters,*" Annalinda De Rosa remembers. "*We used colourful strips of cloth for the letters and added photovoltaic lights, so you could see them from the street below at night.*" The lab met a basic requirement mentioned by local people. "*They complained that nobody knows what the place is called,*" Davide Fassi says. In June 2016, the annual festival of the Ringhiera Theatre took place. The ATIR Association and the Politecnico team decided to re-use the large panels from the Human Cities Milan exhibition for a different purpose. People were asked to decorate them so that they could be transformed into sunshades for sunny days on La Piana.

Reopening

The experiment is over now and the Ringhiera Theatre has closed its doors, as the municipality decided to refurbish the building. But the signs designed with residents are still there, a reminder of those active days in the empty space. "*My best memory is that there was a kind of spontaneity in the way we interacted with people,*" Davide Fassi says. "*On the other hand, I regret that our action didn't last longer as it was based on temporary games.*" Is he right about that? Annalinda De Rosa believes that "*the continuous collection of feedback and the sequential steps of the design process made local residents, city inhabitants and local organisations pay attention to the area again. The experiments helped to create new synergies and enhance existing ones. Many of the ideas the students came up with, like Listen+look+play and the urban skills market, could be implemented more permanently in the future.*" Nadio Fulco is planning a big public event when the Ringhiera Theatre reopens. It will be an epic show "*involving all the faces of the large community that's part of our theatre: disabled people, older people, children, teenagers, actors, educators…*" And she concludes: "*we will treasure our experience with Politecnico when we organise this event and also in the future.*"

"Nothing happens here". One of the projects at the experimentation lab by design students of the Politecnico. © Davide Pedone and Arianna Villa

Italy's leading design school

Politecnico di Milano is the largest technical university in Italy. It offers undergraduate, graduate and higher education courses in engineering, architecture and design. In 1993 it became the birthplace of a degree course in industrial design, the first of its kind in Italy. This developed into a design faculty and has now become a design school, located in a city with a rich tradition of craftwork and professional design practice. The Design School of Politecnico di Milano is now the largest international university for the training of product, communication, spatial, service and fashion designers, both by the number of students and of teaching staff. It is ranked 5th in the QS international Rankings in the field of Art and Design. Politecnico di Milano joined the first edition of the Human Cities programme in 2010 and hosted the exhibition "Human Cities_Challenging the City Scale/Milano" at BASE Milano in April 2016.

An overview of La Piana square during the experimentation lab in June 2016.
© Martina Mazzarello

"The sixth act", one of the projects created by design students of the Politecnico, involved building a temporary stage on La Piana square. © Davide Pedone and Arianna Villa

Ljubljana

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Building Community on the Outskirts of the City

By Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg

During the socialist period, the housing blocks of Bratovševa ploščad were lively sociable places, but the neighbourhood has now become a dormitory area. In cooperation with a local association, the Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia has been involving residents in re-imagining possible futures. They have launched a range of activities, from picnics to photo story competitions, to show that this undervalued piece of architectural heritage on the edge of the city is a great place to live.

Students exhibited their ideas for Bratovševa ploščad in a newly constructed open-air meeting space. © Blaž Jamšek / UIRS

Residents were actively involved in co-designing interventions in the public space of Ruski car. © Blaž Jamšek / UIRS

"*Until the eighties, urban planning in Slovenia was largely focused on achieving urban growth by means of large industrial complexes and housing schemes,*" explains Matej Nikšič, PhD at the Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (UIRS). But the switch to capitalism in 1991 changed urban development issues, explains the architect who also serves as the coordinator of Human Cities activities in Slovenia. "*Today most Slovenians dream of a detached house with a garden, while living in the large apartment blocks has lost its appeal.*"

For the UIRS, the rise of stand-alone houses and the disaffection with the urban heritage of socialist times is a double concern. First, "*It leads to a city that is more and more horizontal,*" explains architect Nina Goršič, a team member of Human Cities Ljubljana. "*This affects Ljubljana in terms of transportation, the environment, and real estate prices.*" Secondly, it harms the quality of life in existing housing. The transition to capitalism has substantially changed the way of life of most Slovenians. "*People used to start work at 6 am and finish at 2 pm, they had the afternoon off and families used to gather in the public spaces*", Matej Nikšič describes.

"*Today, offices close in the evening and people don't spend time outside with their kids anymore. Suburban areas that used to be full of life have now become dormitory places.*"

"Together to the platform!"

When the Urban Planning Institute was considering how to contribute to the Human Cities programme in 2015, Matej Nikšič and his colleagues Biba Tominc and Nina Goršič wondered how they could promote the image of socialist housing. "*We didn't only decide to focus on the suburbs because the Human Cities slogan is Challenging the city scale,*" Matej Nikšič explains. "*We also did it because for the last ten years the city of Ljubljana has spent most of its regeneration budget on the historical city centre.*" For that reason they chose an area called Ruski car (Russian Tsar) on the northern edge of Ljubljana, with apartment blocks up to 16 storeys high and a central open space called Bratovševa ploščad. "*We tried to identify places where residents wanted to improve the public space,*" Matej Nikšič recounts. "*In Bratovševa ploščad there was an initiative called 'Skupaj na ploščad!'.*" It means "*Together*

The "let's be neighbours" corner, co-designed by residents.
© Blaž Jamšek / UIRS

The two lives of Bratovševa ploščad

50 years ago the district of *Ruski car*, with its large central square called Bratovševa ploščad, was one of the symbols of Ljubljana's urban expansion. Under the former socialist government, the country had to be rebuilt after the war and large affordable housing estates were constructed to support the country's industrial growth strategy. Located in the northern suburbs of the Slovenian capital, the *Ruski car* neighbourhood was one of the new districts built to house the enlarged urban population. 50 years later, Bratovševa ploščad—named after two World War II heroes—has lost its original character and identity. The urban heritage of the neighbourhood is listed, but it is badly in need of regeneration. The Human Cities project aimed to improve daily life in the area by means of participatory approaches.

Top: After a call for ideas, a "well-being station" was set up by students of the Faculty of Architecture in Ljubljana. © Blaž Jamšek / UIRS

Bottom: The "Photo story of our neighbourhood" project was popular with adults and children. © Blaž Jamšek / UIRS

to the platform!" in English because of the appearance of the open space in the middle, which is actually the concrete roof of a car park.

Skupaj na ploščad! was set up in 2013 by a group of architects and landscape architects living in the area. Its objective is to "*deal with spatial issues, which are inseparable from the social ones*", explains architect Damjana Hudnik Zaviršek, who founded the association. "*We are trying to make residents aware of the need to revitalise the neighbourhood.*" To reinforce the sense of community that had been lost over the decades, Skupaj na ploščad! has organised a range of events: an open-air film night in summer, a communal herbal garden as well as community beehives, a workshop with children to ask them about their dreams for the public space, a market for fresh vegetables from the farms in the nearby villages, and so on.

Giant picnic

"*We connected with Skupaj na ploščad! to understand the area and its residents,*" says Matej Nikšič from the UIRS. In spring 2015, "*we invited everyone to a guided tour of Bratovševa ploščad*". During this walk with the two organisations, citizens had an opportunity to speak their mind. "*At first some of our urban planners were afraid, because they thought locals would just complain,*" Matej Nikšič remembers. "*But in this case it was very constructive. 30 people joined us with ideas about what was good in the neighbourhood, how the public space could be used and other topics related to the quality of life.*" The following day a co-creation session was organised with designer and entrepreneur Alice Holmberg, who served as a Human Cities adviser. "*We tried to get a better understanding of the problems by having different groups of residents exploring topics in a round-table manner,*" Nina Goršič explains. "*Some of them were concerned about the condition of the car park which they thought might collapse, others were worried about the maintenance of the front gardens, and so on.*"

At the end of the consultation process, a decision was made to work with Skupaj na ploščad! to make the most of the potential of Bratovševa ploščad's central platform. "*The idea was to set up small events to show that it's more than just the roof of a car park,*" Matej Nikšič says. And what better way to bring people together than with food and drink? The two organisations therefore started by organising a giant public picnic in summer 2015. Locally grown food helped to lure children and families out of their apartment buildings and meet on the platform. "*People could also make their own drinks with juice-bikes, to promote sustainable mobility,*" Matej Nikšič says. "*There are actually too many cars in the neighbourhood.*" Organising urban games allowed Skupaj na ploščad! to attract residents who are not usually involved in discussions about local matters. "*It helped to reinforce a sense of community among residents,*" Damjana Hudnik Zaviršek believes.

Photo story competition

However, one of the problems encountered by the UIRS and Skupaj na ploščad! was that some people did not want to meet in the public space or take part in discussions about it. To get them involved, the two organisations decided to combine photography and digital technology in an initiative called "Photo story of our neighbourhood" (see also http://humancities.uirs.si/en-gb/). "*We organised a public call asking residents of any large housing estate, in any city, to give their impressions of their neighbourhood by taking a photo and sending it to us,*" Matej Nikšič recounts. Participants were encouraged to focus on positive aspects and to write a brief explanation of what they wanted to communicate with their photo. The initiative was also a way to explore the challenges faced by other suburbs, both inside and outside Slovenia. "T*he success of this project showed us that some people don't want to communicate directly but need a bit of distance to express themselves,*" Matej Nikšič explains. "*Taking a picture is a good way to do so.*"

In the meantime, UIRS and Skupaj na ploščad! organised several activities with local school children and the Museum of Architecture and Design (MAO). "*The activities were a combination of lectures and workshops to introduce children to participatory urban planning and encourage them to preserve the heritage of their neighbourhood,*" explains Natalija Lapajne, a mentor and curator of MAO. "*They went out to the fields and tried to imagine public space interventions.*" Together with the children, Skupaj na ploščad! has also made urban furniture for the Bratovševa ploščad square, like a bee and bird hotel. Urban planning students at Ljubljana's Faculty of Architecture even designed and constructed a wooden pavilion – called a "station of well-being" – which now serves as a meeting place in Bratovševa ploščad. After all these workshops with young people, "*we gained a better insight into their ideas about neighbourhood*", Damjana Hudnik Zaviršek believes. "*We prepared them to be active citizens in the future.*"

During the international Human Cities meeting in Ljubljana in May 2017, the Human Cities open-air exhibition was shown in the neighbourhood to inspire residents. It featured the photo story competition, the activities of the children, ideas from students, and examples of public space interventions in other European cities. "*We wanted to demonstrate that cooperation and working together brings many shared benefits. Thanks to the contributions of the Human Cities partners, we were also able to communicate good case studies from around Europe as an inspiration for local activities in the future,*" Matej Nikšič says. The exhibition was then moved to the building of the UIRS "*and in summer 2018, the first Slovenian architectural gallery DESSA wanted to host it in their exhibition space in the city centre*", Matej Nikšič adds enthusiastically.

Support for the citizens

Looking back at the experiment, Matej Nikšič and Damjana Hudnik Zaviršek both think that they have managed to change the image of the neighbourhood. "*It's important, because this kind of dense housing can be a very good place to live,*" Matej Nikšič says. "*Just a short walk away there are open landscapes leading to the Alps, and you also have small eco-farms all around that provide delicious food on your doorstep.*" But working on the reputation of the area isn't enough. Government policies are needed to give the old suburbs a new lease of life. "*Incomplete and unregulated*

"The idea was to set up small events to show that it's more than just the roof of a car park,"

Matej Nikšič

One of the co-design activities for residents and children.
© Tomaž Zupan

Top: Children from a local primary school used various participatory design tools to develop their ideas. © Blaž Jamšek / UIRS

Bottom: Facilitated by Skupaj na ploščad! children developed concrete actions to improve public space like constructing a bee and bird hotel. © Blaž Jamšek / UIRS

ownership of public space is a major issue for urban regeneration," Damjana Hudnik Završek explains. During the socialist area, Bratovševa ploščad was owned by the national construction company. After the switch to capitalism, the organisation went bankrupt and quickly had to sell its properties to settle its debts. "*It's a big mess now and we urgently need policies to address it,*" Matej Nikšič says. "*The square is partly privatised and it's not clear who the owner is. You need a lawyer to figure out how to deal with it!*"

This also explains the ongoing physical and social degradation of the area, which is what Skupaj na ploščad! fights against. "*By sharing common values residents are preparing to share space and spend time together,*" Damjana Hudnik Završek says. "*Many of the socialist neighbourhoods have self-organised initiatives like this, but they need a bit of financial or even administrative support*," Matej Nikšič adds. "*In the long run, people can't keep investing so much of their free time, money, and energy in urban revitalisation*." For now, Ljubljana's municipality recognises the civic initiative but does not actively support it. "*When we began the experiment, the municipality ignored us because they did not want to spend their budget on participatory urban regeneration in the suburbs*," Matej Nikšič says. "*But we managed to get support from the local city office.*" Admittedly the local city office doesn't have much money or power. "*Still, they supported us by promoting our events, taking part in them, giving chocolates to the participants.*" Matej Nikšič hopes it's the first step towards changing the mindset of Ljubljana's central authorities.

UIRS: from urban planning to urban thinking

Founded in 1953, the Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (UIRS) used to be a government institution responsible for spatial development questions throughout Slovenia. With the end of socialism, the organisation had to redefine itself and became a research institute. It now explores a wide range of topics related to urban space in order to develop new methodological approaches, inform decision–making and support policy development. The institute is involved in a multitude of international exchanges between Slovenian practice and the global planning community. In May 2017, the UIRS organised a Human Cities_Challenging the City Scale exhibition lab and workshop. European partners helped Bratovševa ploščad test experimental participatory tools with the local community. Academic activities included the international seminar "Public spaces for local life", organised together with AESOP's "Public Spaces and Urban Cultures" thematic group and the urban planning department at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Ljubljana.

"We prepared the school children to be active citizens in the future."

Damjana Hudnik Zaviršek

The experiment helped connect residents through activities like gardening, reading and taking care of animals. © Damjana Zaviršek/Skupaj na ploščad!

Top: Local school children were actively engaged in the revitalisation of their neighbourhood. © Blaž Jamšek / UIRS

Bottom: Human Cities partners engaged in co-design activities during their visit to Ljubljana. © Blaž Jamšek / UIRS

The tool "Photo-Story of our Neighbourhood" was tested with the international group
of participants of the Human Cities event in May 2017. © Blaž Jamšek/UIRS

London

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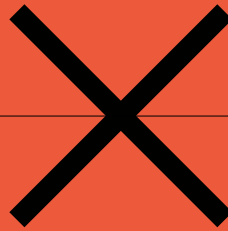
Makers of London, Unite!

By Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg

How can the productive role of cities be reinvented in the age of globalisation and digitalisation? This is the question that led Thomas Ermacora and his team to launch the Maker Mile, after having opened the first Fab Lab in London. By bringing makers together and showcasing their activities to the wider public, this organic network aims to stimulate the maker economy and connect it to the needs of local people.

"The products people want and the food they need can be made and grown in a network of mini factories, farms and maker spaces scattered over a city."

Gareth Owen Lloyd, coordinator of the Maker Mile.

"According to conventional wisdom, fabrication is where raw materials are turned into finished goods on a large scale", says Gareth Owen Lloyd, coordinator of the Maker Mile. *"The image that comes to mind is of industrial buildings on the brown belt of a regional city, and shipping containers packed with products for a global market."* But what if rather than sending objects from a factory far away, citizens could download a design file and do their own fabrication in a local digital manufacturing space? *"The future is distributed,"* Gareth Owen Lloyd believes. *"The products people want and the food they need can be made and grown in a network of mini factories, farms and maker spaces scattered over a city and enabled by digital technology and the internet."*

The Maker Mile was launched in London in 2015 to promote such a "Fab City". At the intersection of Mare Street and Regent's Canal, this informal brand gathers old and new makers from the boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets within a one-mile radius. Among them, you will find Lime Wharf, a "culture factory" hosting the first Fab Lab in London; Surface Matters, a centre of innovative architectural materials; Keeley & Lowe, a printer with a 100-year history; London Hackspace, a community-run workshop where people share digital tools and knowledge; and London Fields Brewery, the first commercial brewery to open in central Hackney since the 19th century. Over time, some 60 organisations have come together to contribute to an ecosystem of producing. Every year in September during the London Design Festival, the Maker Mile opens its doors to the public to increase awareness of local fabrication.

The first Fab Lab in London

It all started when Thomas Ermacora, a social entrepreneur working in the field of participatory urbanism, opened Lime Wharf in the area in 2012. Described as a "culture factory", this innovation place enables artists and scientists to collaborate in residencies, think tanks, gatherings and exhibitions. *"I think one of the sources of urban dysfunctionality is that normal people haven't been given the infrastructure to take part in the global knowledge and culture economy,"* explains Thomas Ermacora. *"With Lime Wharf, I wanted to open a centre that would serve as a prototype."* But soon, Thomas Ermacora wanted to go further and allow ordinary citizens to have a greater impact on their cities. He set up the first Fab Lab in London, Machines Room. Filled with tools such as 3D printers, laser cutters, digital milling machines as well as more standard equipment, this manufacturing space allows professionals and novices to prototype whatever object they want. *"We realised that the area was hosting some of the last remaining craftspeople in London and also a new maker population focused on using skills and technology to become participants in the next economy,"* he recalls. *"So we started to map those communities and began a conversation, offering them the opportunity to use our machines."*

Earlier in 2009, Thomas Ermacora launched Clear Village, an NGO involving communities in micro-urbanistic interventions to accelerate urban regeneration. In 2014, the organisation joined

James Hoyle and Son's foundry has been in the Maker Mile area for over 100 years.
© Machines Room

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Top: For the past three years, tours around the Maker Mile have helped promote different maker industries in the area. © Machines Room
Bottom: Technology Will Save Us, a company producing educational technology kits for children, was one of the stops on the tour. © Machines Room

For a new industrial revolution in London

During the 19th century, London was the cradle of an industrial revolution that changed the face of the world. Yet nowadays the capital of the United Kingdom is considered a leading financial centre. Like many major European cities, London is no longer much of a productive city. The skyline of the financial district dwarfs the former smokestacks and rising rents have pushed the working class out of the city. With the birth of the Fab Lab and Fab City movement, a new wave of makers have appeared who combine craft with recent digital and physical tools of production. Could it be a way to let London's inhabitants create the objects and the city they want?

"We had both local and international visitors. Some were interested in art and design, but others didn't have any ideas about it."

Jane Campbell, marketing director of Surface Matter and coordinator of Open Mile 2017

Participants of the Open Mile learned about the printing process at Keeley and Lowe Ltd. © Machines Room

Makers analysed their common needs at the start of the experiment. © Clear Village

Bottom-up urban design

Clear Village is a London-based charity that helps communities build a better future through creative regeneration. They work together with partners like social landlords, local councils and community groups to bring durable change to communities. They identify challenges, build on existing community assets and involve community members through participatory design.
Clear Village was founded in 2009 by Thomas Ermacora, who also set up Lime Wharf and Machines Room. The three organisations are located at the centre of the Maker Mile, a large cluster of fabricators, studios and workshops in East London.

"In 5 or 10 years, we will have been part of shaping the conversation about how ordinary citizens, craftsmen, makers and designers can claim the urban space they are living in."

Thomas Ermacora, founder of Clear Village.

the Human Cities programme and in 2015, Clear Village, Lime Wharf and Machines Room co-organised one of the first Human Cities events, which brought together all the partners in the network. The event saw the launch of the first ever "Open Mile". For one evening, 12 spaces in the area, all within walking distance of each other, opened their doors to the public. Visitors could get involved in hands-on making in multiple locations. Over 600 people collected a map, made locally at East London Print Makers, and followed the design trail on a rainy Monday night. "*They experienced a thriving community that many hadn't realised was on their doorstep,*" remembers Gareth Owen Lloyd.

Recycling plastic

One year later, during the 2016 edition of the London Design Festival, the Open Mile took place again, on a larger scale. Visitors were invited to join a guided tour of the Maker Mile, discovering both the fabrication spaces of tech newcomers and the older workshops of local makers. The tour started at the Fix Our City exhibition, hosted by Machines Room and filled with projects from the Maker Mile. "*It proved that the area was a rich example of Fab City principles,*" Gareth Owen Lloyd points out, "*showcasing local companies such as Sugru (a glue for makers), SAMLabs (a kit for learning about hardware and software), Technology Will Save us (educational toys for children) and Open Desk (a digital library of furniture that can be downloaded and manufactured locally)*". The Open Mile highlighted the principles of recycling and circular

economy, at the core of the Fab City philosophy. "*People were asked to give us their plastic bottles for the Precious Plastics exhibition,*" Thomas Ermacora says. "*These were then shredded and heat pressed in a microprocessing station, to make everyday objects like cups and plates.*" Finally, the highlight of the tour for many was James Hoyle and Son's foundry, which has been operating since 1880. Including traditional businesses in the tour helped to create a link between past and future industries in the Maker Mile area.

For the 2017 edition of the London Design Festival, the Maker Mile became part of the official "design routes", which highlight clusters of design activity in the city. One of the challenges of the Open Mile is to attract more local citizens, not only those already working in making or interested in design. "*That's always the hardest thing and it takes time,*" Thomas Ermacora believes. "*At first, the Maker Mile attracted people in the maker movement, but we've had more and more citizens who aren't from the educated middle class.*" The hope was also that someone in the Maker Mile community outside of Machines Room would take the lead. That hope became reality when Jane Campbell, Marketing Director for Surface Matter, organised the 2017 edition. Her studio also hosted an immersive installation by Artist Lisa Traxler. "*We had both local and international visitors,*" she remembers. "*Some were interested in art and design, but others didn't have any ideas about it.*"

Organic network

The Open Mile may be the key occasion to federate and democratise the Maker Mile, but its survival is ensured by what happens in between. Members have been getting together for digital and physical workshops, exhibitions and potluck dinners. Indeed, rather than branding local producers, the project is about creating an organic community that can become self-sustainable and self-organised. "*We want to create meaningful relationships between citizens instead of taking a top-down approach,*" Thomas Ermacora explains. It's a philosophy inspired by the book he published in 2016, "Recoded City: Co-creating Urban Futures", in which he explores an emerging range of collaborative solutions and distributed governance models for alternative urban design. "*The main difficulty with the Maker Mile and that kind of organic project is that you don't know in advance where it will end up,*" says the founder of Lime Wharf, Machines Room and Clear Village. "*But in 5 or 10 years, we will have been part of shaping the conversation about how ordinary citizens, craftspeople, makers and designers can claim the urban space they are living in.*"

The conversation is urgent, as the Maker Mile area is changing very fast. "*Despite the high concentration of makers, many of the industrial buildings are redesignated as residential,*" explains Gareth Owen Lloyd. "*Stars of the Open Mile event have been forced out by rising rents.*" Recently, the Machines Room Fab Lab had its rent doubled and had to move to another location nearby. By planting a flag for makers, Gareth Owen Lloyd hopes awareness can be raised that this part of the city has to remain a productive area. "*For future cottage industries to grow we will have to find ways for housing and manufacturing to coexist–with the help of Human Cities we can test this in the Maker Mile, the perfect prototype for a Fab City.*" The Maker Mile hasn't received any municipal support for its efforts. But the collective is not alone, as other areas of London have also started to work towards the same goal. Jane Campbell hopes that everyone in London can "*link up in the future*". And outside London, the European Fab City network now stretches from Amsterdam to Barcelona: all citizens who claim that their city is not only about offices and housing, but also about co-construction and co-production.

Cieszyn

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Transforming a Bus Station into a Laboratory for City-Making

By Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg

When the main bus station of Cieszyn had to be temporarily moved, residents started to protest. But Zamek Cieszyn, the design centre of the city, saw an opportunity to re-imagine what users could expect from such a nerve centre. Together with locals, designers introduced a range of improvements to the bus shelters, from wooden benches and book-sharing boxes to a whole new information system that could change the face of this border town.

February 2017. For the inhabitants of Bolesław Chrobry Street, in Cieszyn, the morning started with a surprise. They woke up to discover that the main bus station had been moved... right beneath their windows. Because of the renovation of the train station and the construction of a new shopping centre, the municipality and transport company had had to find a new location where intercity buses could pick up and drop off passengers. Unfortunately, the location they had chosen was far from ideal.

"*The buses were parked right in the centre of town from five in the morning onwards,*" explains Beata Mońka, a member of the Human Cities team from Cieszyn. "*There was a lot of traffic when children were crossing Chrobry Street. Passengers had nowhere to sit and wait. It was dangerous and – on a local level – a disaster!*" Local residents, who had been neither warned nor consulted, were deeply dissatisfied with how their living space had been reorganised. They spoke with the vice mayor and asked him to find another place for the buses to stop. "*What was interesting is that sometimes people just protest. But here, they were also trying to find solutions and suggest new locations*," Beata Mońka says.

A temporary bus station

This challenging situation was the starting point of the Human Cities experiment carried out by Zamek Cieszyn, the design centre of Cieszyn. The institution took part in discussions with the municipality and residents about the bus issue. In March 2017, when the city decided to set up a new temporary station in a car park near the castle, the Zamek Cieszyn team chose to prioritise it. Working on the design of the bus station gave the design centre the opportunity to improve the daily lives of bus passengers as well as local residents. In addition, the station served as a laboratory to prepare for the permanent station that will be constructed near the new train station. "*We knew that the engineers of the transport company would just build a bus stop and that would be the end of the story,*" explains Ewa Gołębiowska, director of Zamek Cieszyn. "*As we had recently joined the Human Cities network, it was a perfect opportunity to make the temporary location more human and prototype the new station.*"

That was the beginning of a long process to rethink the bus station from a user perspective. "*People had been furious about waking up one day with the old station, so we started by telling them about the new one,*" relates Beata Mońka. To put citizens at the heart of the design process, Zamek Cieszyn then invited taxi drivers, school pupils, tourist guides, students, and visually impaired people to take part in workshops. Local organisations like Stanisław Brzozowski Association / Political Critique helped them connect to residents living close to the car park. The aim of the consultation was to understand how people wanted the bus station to be improved and, more broadly, how transportation issues in Cieszyn could be tackled.

Learning to talk

"*We need toilets, clear timetables and information, places to sit and rest, WiFi... All those things that were mentioned during the workshops are central to users*," explains Beata Mońka. But getting people to talk about their needs wasn't that simple, as it was new to some of Cieszyn's citizens. "*Most people take the bus because they have no other options: no money, no car, no driving licence. So when we asked them about their expectations, they didn't have any because they simply couldn't imagine that things could work better.*" To dig deeper, a group of students from a business school carried out a survey of 430 users of interurban transport services. Even children were invited to prototype the bus station of their dreams during a small design workshop, although "*not all of their proposals could be integrated,*" Beata Mońka admits with a smile.

Convincing the vice mayor Aleksander Cierniak of the relevance of this bottom-up approach to city-making was also challenging. Could this be a legacy of the communist period? "In Poland, public officials usually just follow the rules and tend not to ask people what they think," Ewa Gołębiowska says. "But the vice mayor understood that you don't need a huge amount of money to improve a lot of things; you just need to listen and talk."

Since May 2017, the temporary bus station has gradually turned into a place to gather and share as a result of the dialogue process. "*We set up a relaxing corner with wooden benches which has turned into a meeting point and picnic area for families and young people,*" Beata Mońka recounts. "*One night, a backpacker even settled down for the night in a hammock!*" With the help of local citizens, Zamek Cieszyn also introduced a book-sharing box on a tree, free internet connectivity, a few flower pots on the grass, a bicycle rack… In summer, "*it's part of our daily lives and a place of joy for local people,*" the Human Cities team member says.

Towards new signage for Cieszyn

With the approach of winter and the cold, this little paradise has had to shut its doors. But even in the middle of January, the temporary station is unlike any other. One of the bus shelters is dedicated to the memory of Zofia Kirkor-Kiedroniowa, a women's rights activist from the beginning of the 20th century. It was designed by the Stanisław Brzozowski Association / Political Critique. "*I think the most important thing has been to transform the temporary bus station into a social place,*" says Joanna Wowrzeczka at the association's head office. "*This kind of work, which is not done individually but together, has made us look into the future.*" Several bus shelters are now covered in texts and pictures rather than advertisements. "*We're very proud of it,*" Ewa Gołębiowska emphasises. "*We are now discussing with the vice mayor and the transport company whether all of Cieszyn's bus shelters could commemorate famous citizens.*"

The results of the experiment were used to develop new signage for Cieszyn's railway station. © Beata Mońka

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The design of the temporary bus stop showed that a big impact can be made even on a shoestring budget. © Rafał Soliński

Living on the edge

Cieszyn, the capital of the eponymous duchy, existed as a single city from the end of the 13th century until World War I. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, a new border was established between Poland and Czechoslovakia which followed the course of the Olza River, passing through the middle of Cieszyn. The city was therefore divided into two towns and between two countries. Many families were also separated as a result. After the Nazi occupation, the situation persisted until the fall of socialism and the integration of Poland and the Czech Republic into the European Union. Today, simply by crossing the main bridge, you can freely walk from Český Těšín (24,650 inhabitants) to Polish Cieszyn (35,824 inhabitants), the side where our story takes place. Both cities are crossing points for people travelling from one country to another.

The bus stop became a popular meeting and picnic place for families and young people.
© Beata Mońka

"With the help of local citizens, Zamek Cieszyn also introduced a book-sharing box on a tree, free internet connectivity, a few flower pots on the grass, a bicycle rack."

Testing free wi-fi at the temporary bus station – one of the most important amenities for passengers. © Edyta Wojaczek

A design centre in a castle

In 2000, the castle ('zamek' in Polish) of the formerly united city of Cieszyn was restored with European funding. It is located on a hill close to the city bridge and the border with the Czech side of Cieszyn. Zamek Cieszyn, one of the first design centres in Poland, opened right next to the castle in 2005. It serves as an incubator for entrepreneurs and "craftspeople" as well as a hub for tourists. The idea of establishing a cultural institution like this in a small historical town may have seemed crazy at first. But today, it hosts numerous events and workshops and attracts students from nearby towns like Krakow and Katowice. Zamek Cieszyn joined the Human Cities programme in 2014 and organised the Human Cities event during its annual design celebration in January 2018. Building on the successful experiment that had been carried out in 2017, Zamek chose "conflict" as the main theme of its conference. The methodologies that had been used with Cieszyn residents were tested with Human Cities partners to deepen research on signage. About 20 European participants, with little knowledge of the city, were given the task of finding their way from the train station in Polish Cieszyn to the one in Český Těšín. The exhibition of the Human Cities project was held in the former checkpoint at the border: a building that has fortunately been out of use for 10 years, but that serves as a symbolic reminder of the value of unity.

Moreover, timetables and maps don't look the same here as else-where. During the consultation, local residents often mentioned that it wasn't easy to find one's way around the city. Some of the workshops were therefore devoted to developing a new informa-tion system, and panels were put up in the temporary station. The results of the experiment have been used by the graphic designers responsible for the permanent signage of the future train and bus station. "*We made them question the functionality of the building*", explains Lubomira Trojan, vice director of Zamek Cieszyn. "*What route would people follow? What would be the best way to get from one station to another?*" Justyna Kucharczyk, a specialist in information design and teacher in the city of Katowice, started working on the train station at the same time as the design cen-tre began work on the temporary bus station. "*The work Zamek Cieszyn did with user groups helped us understand the historical and spatial issues in the city,*" she points out. "*They provided us with valuable information that we used to design our panels, like the places people are proudest of.*"

A year after Zamek Cieszyn started looking after the temporary station, the permanent one was opened. "*People's first impres-sions are very positive. What we need to do now is check that the adopted solutions are working: is the information legible and helpful, is the furniture comfortable, is the technology working properly?*" says Lubomira Trojan. All of this could also be the start of a larger effort to redesign the city's signage, which suf-fers from a general lack of clarity and coherence. On the other hand, Beata Mońka and Lubomira Trojan both admit this will take a long time, as the municipality has to be convinced. Whatever happens, there will be one lasting, invisible, but momentous leg-acy of Zamek Cieszyn's Human Cities experiment. "*We showed politicians that even a temporary solution can be attractive,*" Ewa Gołębiowska insists. "*And most importantly, the municipality is now open to the idea of listening to people's opinions to improve the city together.*"

"The municipality is now open to the idea of listening to people's opinions to improve the city together."

Improving the information brochure for bus passengers. © Edyta Wojaczek

Work in progress on the temporary bus stop. © Edyta Wojaczek

Belgrade

Root-and-Branch Transformation

By Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg

Belgrade Design Week has brought together public, private and civic actors to promote design thinking as a tool for solving some of the country's most pressing problems. This led to the launching of an innovative public space programme in 2014, and three new "creative playgrounds" have now been built in the cities of Belgrade and Kragujevac.

"The park now hosts a state-of-the-art designed children's playground, a modern exercise unit for young people, and motoric training equipment for older people."

Belgrade Design Week

Belgrade Design Week was founded in 2005 by global entrepreneur Jovan Jelovac. It was established as a non-profit NGO in the tradition of private endowment foundations that fostered culture and education in Serbia in the first half of the 20th century. For 10 years, Belgrade Design Week organised an annual festival of creative industries in Serbia and the South East European region, covering a geographical area that is home to more than 100 million. For many international participants, Belgrade Design Week provided their first opportunity to visit Belgrade, Serbia and the wider region. It also enabled local and regional creatives and professionals to come together and share ideas. Belgrade Design Week has always viewed design as a special methodology for introducing and realising new ideas in society. Despite the success of the festival, Belgrade Design Week decided to transform the event to focus on another challenge.

The design of the playground was based on extensive consultation with Kragujevac residents. © Belgrade Design Week

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A boy tries the new playground equipment in Belgrade's Kalemegdan fortress. © Belgrade Design Week

For the inhabitants of Kragujevac, the fourth largest city in Serbia, the Grand City Park has always been a favourite place for a stroll. With its paths, benches, sports grounds and canopy of century-old trees, the Grand City Park has been a haven of relaxation in the city since it was built in 1898. "*Unfortunately, the park shared the inevitable fate of the city and deteriorated,*" says Jovan Jelovac, the founder of Belgrade Design Week. Serbia has endured many trials and tribulations in the last few decades–the Balkan Wars, the break-up of Yugoslavia, the global financial crisis–and Kragujevac hasn't been spared. Throughout this time, the Grand City Park suffered from a lack of attention and investment.

But in 2017, the park recovered some of its former lustre. For a period of several months, designers, urbanists, architects and construction companies joined forces to restore a neglected area between the public swimming pool and the Faculty of Engineering Sciences. Renamed the "Creative Grand Park of Kragujevac", this 10,000 square metre section of the park now hosts a state-of-

the-art designed children's playground, a modern exercise unit for young people, and motoric training equipment for older people. All these components are connected through biomorphic gravel paths and green areas. New park furniture and a fountain have also been built.

The new Creative Grand Park is the result of a complex process involving multiple stakeholders. "*The work was planned and managed by Belgrade Design Week,*" explains Vesna Jelovac, the CEO of Belgrade Design Week, "*but we had key financial and operational support from the Dragica Nikolić Foundation (the charity set up by the former First Lady of Serbia). We also cooperated with the city of Kragujevac, invited some of the best Serbian creatives to work on the design of the park, hired local construction companies, and received support from leading manufacturers of playground equipment*." In fact, Kragujevac was not the first but the third creative playground built by Belgrade Design Week, which has pioneered a unique approach to urban regeneration in Serbia.

Children enjoying the newly constructed playground. © Belgrade Design Week

An emerging design culture

The roots of the Kragujevac project stretch back several years. From 2005 to 2014, Jovan Jelovac organised Belgrade Design Week, a unique annual design event in Serbia. But eventually he and his team wanted to work on something more permanent. "*We were disappointed that we couldn't extend a seven-day festival into an ongoing project,*" Jovan Jelovac says. "*We were also frustrated by Serbia's inability to create design institutions that work all year round.*" In 2014, the organisation joined the Human Cities network. It was an interesting opportunity for a country that was still outside the European Union and didn't have a well-established design sector.

"*We hoped the Human Cities project would give people in Serbia a greater understanding of the value of design,*" Jovan Jelovac explains. "*That's why we decided to transform our festival and explore opportunities to influence life in Serbia 52 weeks a year.*" The organisation kept its original name, but shifted to a more hands-on approach and decided to use its design methodology to "*help the weakest members of society: children, young people and older people, who can't improve their situation on their own.*" After investigating a range of public spaces that would benefit from interventions, the team decided to focus on playgrounds for children and exercise areas for older people.

Public-private partnership

Belgrade Design Week launched a non-profit campaign with an ambitious objective: to build 100 creative playgrounds across Serbia. The aim was to collaborate with local municipalities and private businesses to identify and develop appropriate sites on public land. "*We also wanted the playgrounds to meet the European Union's highest environmental and sustainability standards,*" Vesna Jelovac says. "*And we collaborated with leading Serbian creative professionals as well as international partners.*" In 2014, Belgrade Design Week started on the State of the Art phase of the Human Cities project. The team carried out in-depth analysis of the desolate state of playgrounds and public spaces in Belgrade. It also conducted numerous interviews with key stake-

"We wanted these special sites to reflect the European Union's best environmental and sustainability standards, and we collaborated with leading Serbian creative professionals as well as international partners."

Vesna Jelovac, Belgrade Design Week.

The playground was furnished with equipment from leading international manufacturers.
© Belgrade Design Week

Belgrade Design Week aims to develop 100 creative playgrounds across Serbia.
© Belgrade Design Week

Serbia's former capital

Kragujevac was Serbia's first capital, where its first constitution was proclaimed, and the first secondary school, university, printing press and pharmacy were established. In the 19th century it became an important centre of military production. In World War II it was the site of a mass ex-ecution of civilians by German occupation forces, which led to the establishment of a large memorial park in the city. Kragujevac today is best known for its weapons and automobile industries – represented by brands like Zastava and Fiat – and is also a region-al university hub with 20,000 students. Belgrade Design Week chose Kragujevac as its Human Cities focus because of the city's important civic, urban planning and industrial heritage in the heartland of Serbia – and its post-industrial challenges.

"We hoped the Human Cities project would contribute to a greater understanding of the value of 'design thinking' inside Serbia – especially with the public, its institutions and media. We shifted to offering a more hands-on experience grounded in improving the quality of daily life in Serbia."

Jovan Jelovac, Belgrade Design Week.

holders: officials from the city of Belgrade, potential investors, and partners from academia, media and related citizens' initiatives. To engage the people of Belgrade in an original way, Belgrade Design Week partnered with Dr. Nataša Čiča of Kapacity.org to deploy her innovative THINKtent methodology. Dr Čiča hosted a series of conversations about the project in a portable 5 x 5 metre canvas bell tent with up to fifteen people per session.

Thanks to this extensive process, Belgrade Design Week managed to build an extremely successful public-private partnership. Partners and donors included the city of Belgrade, the NIS energy company, and the Lamda development group. In cooperation with the Embassy of Finland, Belgrade Design Week also invited the Finnish company Lappset to contribute its sector-leading playground equipment. As a result, two creative playgrounds were opened in the Kalemegdan fortress area in the centre of Belgrade in 2014 and 2015.

It may be common in other European countries, but a partnership like this between the public, private and civic sectors was quite new in Serbia. "*It allowed us to improve one of the most important leisure destinations in Belgrade and create a new, inspiring and safe place for children to play – a place which leading European cities would be proud of,*" Jovan Jelovac emphasises. His view was shared by the Mayor of Belgrade, Siniša Mali, who said at the project's inauguration: "*Too often, we have tried to do everything alone. But as we don't have enough money or knowledge, relying on the civil and private sectors is the solution.*"

Post-industrial city

Belgrade Design Week subsequently decided to create a new playground specifically for the Human Cities project. Located in central Serbia, the city of Kragujevac faces complex post-industrial challenges similar to those in Saint-Étienne in France, which also used to be the "*weapons foundry of the nation*". "*The location in Kragujevac offered very exciting opportunities, partly because of its size and partly because of the multiple ways it is used,*" Vesna Jelovac says. An innovative public-private partnership was again set up and substantial support was received from the Dragica Nikolić Foundation, established by the then First Lady of Serbia. "*It was not by accident that Kragujevac became the host of the Human Cities project,*" she said at the opening of the first phase of the Creative Grand Park project in Kragujevac. "*The choice wasn't only determined by theoretical considerations, but also inspired by the challenge of redeveloping our city for our citizens.*"

Belgrade Design Week implemented the project in partnership with Professor Aleksandru Vuja and his team of students from the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Belgrade. The project helped spark a discussion about the future planning of green areas in Kragujevac. This included exploring their connection with Šumarice Memorial Park, where many citizens of Kragujevac were murdered by the Nazis in World War II. Belgrade Design Week again engaged local people through participatory urbanism, based on analysis and consultations combining the

methodologies of IDEO.org and Jan Gehl. *"In a short period of time, we did a lot of surveys and interviews with local people to understand their needs*," Professor Vuja remembers. He hopes that the project will encourage the inhabitants of Kragujevac to take part in the ongoing development of their city.

In February 2017, Belgrade Design Week organised an international creative conference in Kragujevac to celebrate the opening of the new playground. "HUMAN CITIES / SHARING CLOUD Kragujevac 2017" welcomed local residents, civic activists from Serbia, and partners from all over Europe for a series of public talks and workshops. The THINKtent was once again used as a unique way to engage people in participatory urbanism. *"These collaborative models really helped us improve the Grand City Park,"* Jovan Jelovac says. *"But they do much more than that. They also set new standards for regenerating other parts of the urban fabric.*"

And not just in Kragujevac. After all, there are still 97 more creative playgrounds to be built across Serbia.

Brussels

Making a Splash

By Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg

Imagine a city without an outdoor swimming pool and imagine that this city is the capital of Europe. Using design, research, public happenings and tiny pools, the Pool is Cool collective has been advocating for a pool in Brussels since 2016. And understandably so, because an open-air pool isn't just a place where you can swim, but a social space for all citizens.

"Since there aren't any swimming pools in Brussels, they have even built some themselves!"

"Big Jump" at the Brussels canal: the pan-European event highlights the importance of good water quality in cities. © Pool is Cool

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"Guerrilla swimming" at St. Catherine's fountain to raise awareness of the lack of outdoor swimming facilities. © Pool is Cool

In Brussels, the thermometer rarely climbs above ten degrees in the winter. All the same, on this particular day a group of people is bathing in one of the public fountains in the Belgian capital. After a while, two police officers turn up and order them to get out of the water. Are they Siberian tourists who miss their morning ice bath? No, they are activists doing what they call "guerrilla swimming": braving the elements – and municipal prohibitions – to protest. A few months ago these water guerrillas revealed the name of their organisation: Pool is Cool. But what are they fighting for?

"*The problem is pretty clear: there is no outdoor swimming pool in Brussels, which is extraordinary for a city this size,*" explains Paul Steinbrück, architect and co-founder of Pool is Cool. It is true that there are many cities with fewer inhabitants and sometimes a colder climate – Helsinki, Zurich, Oslo – that don't have this problem. "*For us, an outdoor pool is much more than a place to swim,*" Paul Steinbrück says. "*It's a social place where people can gather and be connected to nature. It's an urban feature that can change the face of the city.*"

One of Pool is Cool's most recent actions was a petition to the city of Brussels to demand public open-air swimming. But that is only one of many tools the collective has been using since 2016 to mobilise fellow citizens and pressure politicians of the Brussels region. The members of Pool is Cool have been using design, masterclasses, happenings and civil disobedience in the public space to campaign for a public pool. And since there still isn't one in Brussels, they have even built some themselves!

Tiny Pool

In August 2016 Pool is Cool constructed its first public swimming pool, called BADEAU, in a popular area close to the port of Brussels. After receiving a grant from the municipality, the collective only had six weeks to design and build the tiny pool. For that reason, they opted for a light structure made of scaffolding material and wood. Black EPDM rubber (often found in garden ponds) was used for waterproofing, while plants with specific bacteria and a UV lamp were used to sanitise the water. The swimming pool was built in just 4 days and it stayed open for 3 weeks, each day looked after by two Pool is Cool volunteers.

The installation, which was more of a paddling pool than an Olympic one, immediately attracted people from all over the city in search of some respite from the heat. Children could walk around on its 40 square metre surface and swim in a small part that was deeper. In the meantime, parents could enjoy a drink at the nearby bar run by local association "Public Vzw".

For three weeks, from 2pm to 6pm, it became possible to relax by a pool in Brussels. And even though the location was not at all central, journalists and politicians also came and appreciated the value of public outdoor swimming. "*This area is sometimes seen as poor and unsafe,*" Paul Steinbrück says. "*But the whole experiment was very positive and we made friends with many of the locals!*"

Positive disobedience

It's been eight months since Pool is Cool started their "lobbying" actions in Brussels. Apart from the guerrilla swim in March, which was documented in numerous photos and video posts, a Big Jump in the city canal was organised during European River Swimming Day in July. The event, which wasn't actually permitted, helped communicate the need for clean places to swim. "*I think it's important to understand that we use public disobedience with a smile and without bad intentions,*" says Louisa Vermoere, who is a member of Pool is Cool and also is Human Cities Communications Coordinator. "*We don't want to be negative, but to engage people with funny initiatives and show them how fantastic it would be if there were a place to swim.*"

Other actions developed by the collective include dry swimming. Members were first photographed on a green screen and then superimposed on different pictures. As a result, they could be seen swimming in crazy places like a meadow or a filthy lake. The idea was taken a step further during the SuperMoucheSuperVlieg Festival in Brussels's Forest Park in June 2017. Pool is Cool installed a "dry pool" where participants could swim on a blue plastic tarp, with a trickle of water from a hose. "*Even before we opened, there were lots of kids impatiently waiting to jump into this pool which didn't really exist*", Louisa Vermoere remembers. "*It was proof for us that this was needed in Brussels.*" In Paul Steinbrück's opinion, it showed that the atmosphere of an open-air pool isn't only about the water. "*Parents and visitors enjoyed watching the children bustle about while they themselves relaxed in their deck chairs.*"

Children are ready to jump into the "SUPER DRY POOL"; the event showed one doesn't need much water to have fun in a pool. © Pool is Cool

Pools for the people

Outdoor swimming pools may have gained in popularity in the past decade, but they are not a new idea. During a research trip to London, the Pool is Cool team discovered that the majority of public open-air swimming pools in the United Kingdom had been built in the 20s and 30s, to give the growing middle class additional opportunities for sport and socialising. Almost every borough had its own pool, seen almost as a basic right in modern society. With the rise of liberalism and the consequent reduction in public investment, many were closed or demolished. During the inter-war years, Brussels also had an Olympic outdoor pool, surrounded by meadows, which closed in 1978. Today, the Belgian capital still lacks essential public facilities which have been reintroduced in other major European cities.

"We don't want to be negative, but to engage people with funny initiatives and show them how fantastic it would be if there were a place to swim."

Louisa Vermoere, Pro Materia and cofounder of Pool is Cool.

For one day, the fountain on a roundabout in Brussels North Business District became a pool for children, highlighting the possibility of outdoor swimming even in the dense city centre. © Pool is Cool

Top: BADEAU, the first pop-up pool constructed by Pool is Cool brought together a diverse crowd on hot summer days. © Pool is Cool

Bottom: Pool is Cool presented their research to the public on various occasions to engage citizens in the debate and gather their suggestions for the project. © Pool is Cool

Challenging the city

In August 2017, Pool is Cool set up an open-air summer pool for the second time. Located in the city centre, the installation combined a dry and wet pool and was deep enough for swimmers to be fully immersed. The pool was part of the festival terrace programme of the Bozar (Centre for Fine Arts Brussels) and was intended for a more adult public. On the 11th evening a "Super Cool Pool Party" was organised, with DJ sets until midnight. It attracted people from all over Brussels. *"It was another wake-up call for the authorities in Brussels that showed something urgently needs to be done about the lack of open-air swimming opportunities,"* Paul Steinbrück believes.

Challenging the city government is one of the collective's main goals, as they obviously can't create large permanent swimming facilities on their own. *"It's always a huge challenge to find money to construct our temporary pools,"* says the co-founder of Pool is Cool, *"so we've met a lot of politicians and officials to get the topic on the agenda."* Earlier in July 2016, the organisation discovered that more than 2% of the Brussels region (350,000 m2) consisted of lakes, and that 25 of these were large enough to be at least in principle feasible locations for swimming. The municipality was asked if they were suitable for outdoor swimming. *"We were told that there was no data on the biological water quality,"* Paul Steinbrück says. *"Instead, they simply assume that the water quality is either too bad or too delicate and that there can't be any swimming in the near future."* Meanwhile, Pool is Cool has met other European collectives working in the same field and become involved in masterclasses and research programmes.

In March 2018 there was good news at last. The Environment Minister of the regional government commissioned a study from the environmental administration into the possibility of swimming ponds in Brussels. It was a first step towards a second study, which will focus on the feasibility of open-air swimming in specific ponds or lakes. It's undoubtedly a victory for Pool is Cool, but there is still a great deal of work ahead. *"We have to keep putting maximum pressure on the politicians,"* Louisa Vermoere said. *"It's the only way we'll ever get the swimming pool we want so much."*

Pro Materia

Since 1999, Pro Materia has developed significant international design expertise, especially in the European Union "Culture" programme, now known as Creative Europe. By creating cutting-edge concepts, which are highly human-driven and collaborative, Pro Materia cultivates the art of bringing people together within frameworks that are informal, freestyle and co-creative (workshops, labs, exhibitions). The Brussels-based creative design agency has conceived numerous innovative projects from scratch. Human Cities is a prime example of this; Pro Materia started the programme in 2006 and is currently in charge of communications.

“It's always a huge challenge to find money to construct our temporary pools, so we've met a lot of politicians to get the topic on the agenda.”
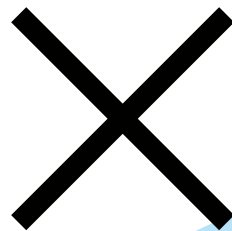
Paul Steinbrück, cofounder of Pool is Cool.

Situated on the edge of a canal, Badeau showed how open-air swimming can enhance the city. © Pool is Cool

In the summer of 2017, „The Biggest Pool" of Brussels was a tiny container in the city centre. An urban oasis at an unlikely spot. © Pool is Cool

Helsinki

X

Sharing Spaces for Social Learning

By Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg

What if we could use existing resources instead of constructing new buildings? This is the philosophy that led to the creation of the first "School as a Service", in the city of Espoo in the Helsinki region. By sharing space with Aalto University, this award-winning school solution doesn't only reduce educational costs, but also offers a new pedagogical approach which allows learning to take place everywhere.

A:space is an open, collaborative and creative home for Aalto students, the community-at-large, businesses and partners. © Anne Kinnunen

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Top: T-Talo – the Department of Computer Science of Otaniemi's campus. © Anne Kinnunen
Bottom: Startup Sauna hosts the largest start-up community in Europe. © Marc Goodwin.

"To go from one lesson to another, pupils at Haukilahti High School walk freely around the Aalto campus. They can meet students of the university and follow some of their courses."

Walking into Haukilahti High School, you could easily believe that you have entered the wrong place. There are some adolescents in the main hall, sitting on Fatboy pouffes or at the table of a Korean restaurant. But there's no reception desk, no loud playground, no timetable, no uniform or anything that would remind you of a traditional school. "*Are you waiting for me?*" asks Professor Jarmo Suominen when he arrives. Obviously, we are in the right place. A teacher of architecture and design, Jarmo Suominen is one of the main initiators of this school, which is unlike any other. He calls it "school as a service", versus "school as a product". What does it mean?

In the same way that city dwellers tend to use mobility rather than own a car, the school building is not owned by the city of Espoo but rented. It is situated in the heart of Aalto University's Otaniemi campus, one of the largest in Finland. Our meeting with Jarmo Suominen took place in the main building of Haukilahti High School, but all the teaching is spread around the campus's facilities: physics in the university's chemistry department, sports on the football pitches, drawing in the visual arts building... Even the school's career services aren't in the main building, but are located elsewhere on campus. For lunch and coffee, students go to places like the Korean restaurant. Run by a Finnish lady who used to live in Seoul, it offers meals like Korean bibimbap–much healthier and tastier than what you would find in a classical school canteen.

Social learning

School as a Service aims to create a new kind of education, in which learning takes place everywhere, at all times and in interaction with others: social learning. "*Today students need to develop creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration,*" says Jarmo Suominen. "*Those skills can be taught inside a society, not outside.*" To go from one lesson to another, pupils at Haukilahti High School walk freely around the Aalto campus. They can meet students of the university and follow some of their courses, like Chinese or communication, preparing themselves for future studies. There are also multiple spaces where they are free to do what they want: networking, teamwork, giant chess games, open source electronics, or music bands. Since adopting this new educational model two years ago, Haukilahti has become one of the leading high schools in Finland. The number of applicants increased by 176.6% between 2016 and 2017, clearly showing that adults and children were interested in the concept. "*A survey shows that students are also much happier than in an average school,*" adds Jarmo Suominen. How can this success be explained? And what is the logic behind such a distributed school?

To get an idea, we met Group X (a focus group concentrating on cross-disciplinary design at Aalto University's Department of Architecture), which started the project. "*Here in Finland, we are quite good at pedagogy,*" says Antti Ahlava, director of Group X.

"*But the school buildings and the underlying principles are still from the 19th century, like everywhere in Europe.*" Together with Jarmo Suominen and the members of Group X, Antti Ahlava tried to figure out how to adapt architecture to new ways of learning, and what would be the school of the future. "*Instead of being concentrated in a single place, we concluded that a school should be a kind of network in multiple locations. That way, schoolchildren and teachers can meet other people and collaborate with them.*" In summer 2015, they organised a workshop called "Lab for Learners", in collaboration with London's Royal College of Art. At the time, a nearby high school in Espoo, called Tapiola, was being renovated. With the support of the city of Espoo and Aalto University, Group X started to imagine how it could transform its theoretical ideas about service design into a real experiment with a school. Tapiola users participated in the workshop and the concept of School as a Service was born. It was first tested with Haukilahti high school, another school in Espoo.

Platform economy

The goal of the approach is to provide better education at a lower cost. It is inspired in this respect by the "platform economy" (Uber, Airbnb), aiming to optimise the use of existing resources rather than create new ones. "*Any city in the world has facilities and spaces that have a low occupancy rate and could be suitable for a school,*" explains Antti Ahlava from Group X. In the case of Espoo, "*the process started by bringing together all the potential participants in the project – residents, workers, construction companies, government officials, investors. Instead of doing traditional top-down urban planning, we mapped their resources in order to create a vision together.*" By sharing and renting spaces in collaboration with Aalto University, rather than building a whole new school, School as a Service has proved the efficiency of its approach. Even the furniture of a typical classroom is 80% recycled or taken from underused facilities. As a result, the new Haukilahti High School is less than half the size of its previous premises. "*The total investment per student by Espoo has been divided by three,*" Jarmo Suominen points out. "*The municipality saves about 10 million euros per year!*" This number relates to the operating costs and does not include the research costs of the project. But it is still very promising.

In 2016 and 2017 the School as a Service concept won five Finnish and international awards, for quality of education, innovation and municipal governance. Two other schools in Espoo are now also adopting the approach, both of them using the resources of Otaniemi's campus. In addition, Professor Suominen is working with the Design Department of Shanghai's Tongji University, in China, who also want to apply his method. Furthermore, "*the service architecture philosophy could be applied to health, public administration, event management*", Jarmo Suominen believes. As an example, the small city of Kotka is now working with Group X on a "Space as a Service" approach. "*They did not have the money to build a concert and conference venue,*" Jarmo Suominen explains. "*So we helped them cooperate with local universities so that they can use the campus as an event facility instead of building one*". Finally, the whole City of Espoo has decided to become the first ever "City as a Service" in the coming years.

Top-down and bottom-up combination

School as a Service may look like a success story now, but it wasn't clear at the outset that the experiment would achieve its objectives. "*I would love to say that we knew where we were going, but the truth is that the whole innovation process was very messy,*" Jarmo Suominen acknowledges. The nature of service architecture means that it has to involve both top-down and bottom-up innovation. Top-down, because to share spaces, resources and knowledge you need the support and funding from those who own or control it. "*At first, Espoo's real estate department felt that their task was to build a school and that our platform approach couldn't work,*" Jarmo Suominen recounts. "*But the mayor gave us critical support and decided to try our solution for two years.*" Bottom-up, because a new spatial and social model like this requires the participation and engagement of all users.

"*During the first few meetings, some parents were suspicious of this new pedagogy,*" Antti Ahlava remembers. "*Today the number of applications shows that they appreciate that their kids get inspired by the university environment.*" Consideration had to be given to less sociable students, who sometimes felt even lonelier than in a traditional school. Applications like WhatsApp were therefore used to develop communication between pupils, for example if any of them got lost. As part of the Human Cities programme, several workshops with students were organised by Natalia Vladykina, PhD student in architecture and a member of Group X. The objective was to further enhance the concept of School as a Service for students, for example by figuring out how they could make spaces their own and what games and activities they could take part in after school hours. However, some of the teachers were not convinced. "*At this high school, we needed experts in pedagogy rather than teachers in specific fields,*" explains Jarmo Suominen. "*Even so, we told them not to worry too much and to keep going the way they had done before.*" Three years later, we meet one of them in the main building. "*It has been a lot of work,*" she admits, "*but I don't miss the old system.*"

Startup Sauna is a business accelerator open to everyone, including the students from Haukilahti High School. © Juho Heikkinen

Aalto University and the greater Helsinki area

Aalto University was established in 2010 as a fusion of three major Finnish universities: the Helsinki University of Technology, the Helsinki School of Economics and the Helsinki University of Art and Design. Today it is one the largest universities in Finland. It is named after the famous Finnish architect Alvar Aalto, who designed some of its iconic buildings. The main campus of Aalto University is located in the city of Espoo, which is part of Helsinki's capital region (1,050,819 inhabitants). Modern and functional, the campus includes the first "Design Factory", a coworking space for students that has been duplicated around the world, and a startup incubator (Startup Sauna), developed by the Aaltoes student community. It's located in the same area where Haukilahti High School used to be. Today, the high school uses the resources and facilities of Aalto University's campus as the first "School as a Service".

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"In this high school, we needed experts in pedagogy rather than professors in specific fields."

Jarmo Suominen, Group X.

Paja – the wood workshop of the Department of Architecture. © Marc Goodwin
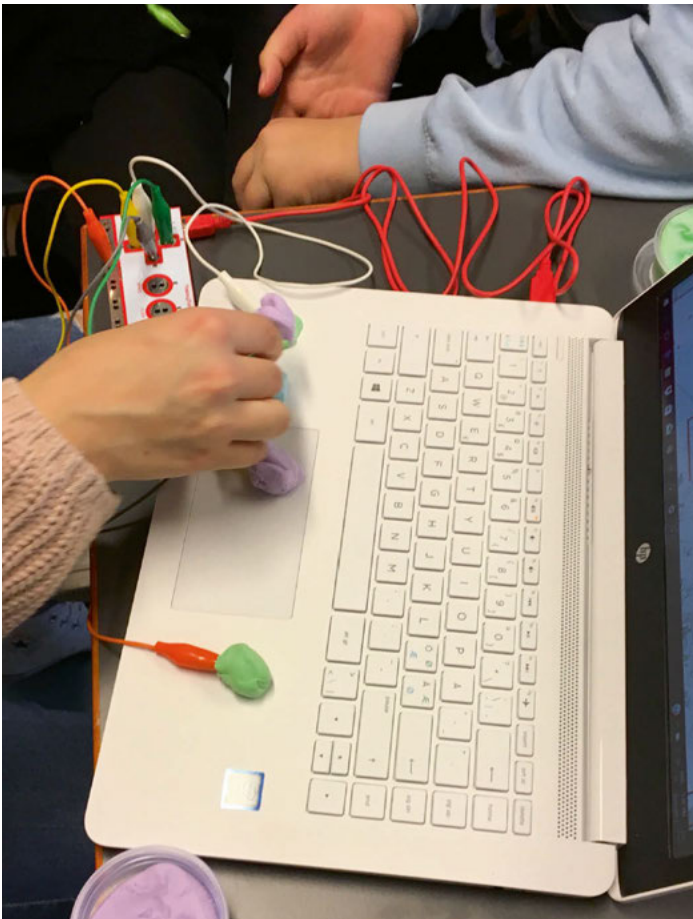
The "Map that Matters" workshop with pupils of the high school. The Makey-Makey tool was used to create a playful atmosphere and facilitate students' creativity. © Natalia Vladykina

Service architecture

Group X is part of the Department of Architecture of Aalto University. It consists of professors, researchers, lecturers and tutors who focus on user-centred design and spatial development from the point of view of active users and sustainability. The key philosophy of Group X is the culture of sharing: how architecture can lead to the sharing of spaces, knowledge and technologies. To reach this objective, the group has developed specific co-design and co-creation methodologies in communicative planning and design. Opposing the normative assumption that architecture is about teaching clients and users how to live, Group X supports the idea that it should be a collective construction of knowledge for creators and users alike. During the 2017 Human Cities workshop in Helsinki, the members of this pan-European creative project developed ideas for leisure activities at School as a Service.

"As part of the Human Cities programme, several workshops were organised with students to understand how they would like to make the space their own."

The new Aalto Bioproduct Centre aims to stimulate collaboration between students and research groups. © Marc Goodwin

Graz

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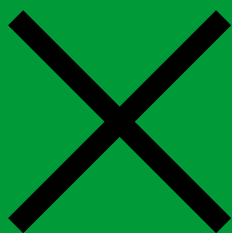
Benches for the People

By Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg

Over the years, Jakomini Street has degenerated into a transit street and many of its shops and buildings now stand empty. With the help of local collectives working in the fields of architecture, radio and art, FH Joanneum has been using design to reclaim the public space for local residents and create more social interaction. Among the various experiments that have been carried out, it's worth highlighting the free benches that have started to multiply at an unexpected rate...

On a sunny weekend in May, Jakomini Street in Graz is busier than ever. Its shops and narrow pavements are crowded with people. Many of them are going home with yellow benches in their arms. 200 of them have been produced and handed out for free, to whoever wants them, in local shops and bars. A private garden has been turned into a distribution centre and a live band adds to the festive atmosphere. A visitor may wonder what this open-bench day is all about. In fact, it's taking place for the second time and is the direct result of the Human Cities experiment in Graz, led by the University of Applied Sciences FH Joanneum.

From transit space to public space

"*We started being interested in this area in 2014*," says Anke Strittmatter, a German urbanist who teaches at FH Joanneum and leads the Human Cities Graz team. "*We looked at everything we could: the colours of the facades, the lighting, the history of the houses and the communities that live here.*" Although it is close to the city centre, Jakomini Street and its surroundings are considered a run-down area. Some of the shops are closed and some of the buildings are empty. Moreover, the poor quality of the public space is a concern. "*The street is very narrow and there are two tram lines passing through*," Anke Strittmatter says. "*As a result, there's nowhere to sit or stand and people just walk along as quickly as they can.*"

How can this transit space be transformed into a shared space where people can meet and spend time without being forced to consume? This is the question FH Joanneum decided to explore as its Human Cities experiment. To begin with, students of Information and Exhibition Design carried out a community survey and observed the public space. They used research methods developed by Danish architect and urban designer Jan Gehl, such as counting, mapping and tracing. As a result, "*the students concluded that people wanted somewhere to sit and more greenery,*" says Erika Thümmel, who has a special interest in the street. As well as being a teacher of Exhibition Design at FH Joanneum and a member of the Human Cities team, she lives in Jakomini Street and has been an activist ever since she moved here nine years ago.

Street experiment

To translate knowledge into action, an experimentation week called "Five Days in Jakomini" was held in May 2016. After a month of workshops, students were divided into three groups and asked to find ways to improve people's experience of spending time in Jakomini. Each group collaborated with a different creative partner. One of them worked with OSA (Office for Subversive Architecture) and decided to make the three-minute walk through Jakomini Street more appealing for people by pushing them along on a wheeled throne. "*People could use those three minutes in a more enjoyable way,*" Anke Strittmatter says. "*To make the project better still, the students thought of partnering with local shopkeepers to offer people a cup of tea during their trip.*"

Another group of students worked with art collective Zweintopf to make people more aware of the area. "*Since there isn't much physical space, the idea was to have a sound programme created by Jakomini residents and local radio station Helsinki for local residents,*" Anke Strittmatter says. The students had to record outdoor sounds that were typical of the area. Passers-by could then listen to the live programme on transistor radios. The third group of students collaborated with InterACT, an interactive theatre group that strives for social change in cities. After the students interviewed people in the area, InterACT transformed the results into a piece of theatre which they subsequently performed in public.

The first benches

In the meantime, FH Joanneum started a final experiment to reclaim the public space in Jakomini. "*We knew that we were permitted to put objects in front of buildings as long as they didn't stick out more than 50 centimetres,*" Erika Thümmel explains. "*That's why we thought of thin benches that would allow people to sit down for a while.*" A first series of 12 benches was thus installed in Jakomini Street, mainly in recesses in the buildings. Designed with local architecture collective Brauchst, the benches are reminiscent of a traditional Austrian design prevalent in the mountains. "*When you go up to the mountains, you often find small benches in front of houses where you can have a rest or chat with the people who live there,*" Erika Thümmel says. "*It's a kind of space that's somewhere between private and public and it could help make our cities more human.*"

"*The experiment was a real success*," Erika Thümmel remembers. "*People used the benches immediately! They sat down to eat something, have a chat, make a phone call, smoke a cigarette... All of these things that never happen in Jakomini Street.*" But the downside was that within three days all the benches had been stolen. The Graz team felt slightly disheartened after all the experiments. "*It was sad, because we had had lots of ideas for the area but nothing happened afterwards,*" Erika Thümmel said. "*The event had only been for one day,*" Anke Strittmatter adds, "*so we started to wonder how we could make the experiment sustainable.*" Both of them tried to talk with the municipality, but in vain.

280,000 benches for Graz

Things eventually took a turn for the better. Reiner Edler, architect and co-founder of the Brauchst collective, decided to scale up the bench experiment. "*The feedback from local residents was really good,*" he says, "*so we wanted to keep going.*" Together with another collective called Studio Magic, Brauchst managed to secure support from Doka, an Austrian construction company who promised to provide free wood for the benches which would be modelled on the version developed by FH Joanneum. The two architecture collectives then launched a project called "*280,000 benches for Graz*", as there are 280,000 inhabitants in the city.

The aim was to keep handing out benches until everyone in Graz owned one and made it available for use in the public space. "*It's a huge target, but we want to achieve it step by step by doing a few hundred benches a year,*" Reiner Edler says. One year after

Top: The benches weren't allowed to stick out onto the pavement too far. © DJAKOB

Bottom: The architects and carpenters from "Brauchst" developed the 280.000 Benches For Graz project. The long-term aim is to give a bench to every resident of the city. © Team Jakomini

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Free yellow benches were handed out to residents. © DJAKOB

Certificates of ownership were given to the new owners of the benches. © Team Jakomini

The team conducted a community survey and public space observation at the start of the experiment. © Team Jakomini

Austrian capital of design

With more than 600,000 inhabitants in its metropolitan region, Graz is the second largest city in Austria. It is famous for its UNESCO-listed historic centre, but it has more to offer than that. The city has six universities, about 60,000 students, and a vibrant cultural scene. It became European Capital of Culture in 2003, which led to the construction of the Kunsthaus which became an architectural landmark. Since 2009, Graz Design Month has been held every year, transforming the city into an international hub for urban design. In 2011, Graz was selected as a UNESCO City of Design. The Human Cities exhibition was held during Design Month 2018.

"The municipality has started to warm to the idea of people reclaiming the public space."

The neighbourhood was promoted through a radio programme produced by the students that was broadcast in the streets. © Team Jakomini

"The feedback from local residents was really good, so we wanted to keep going."

Reiner Edler, founder of Brauchst architecture collective.

the first round of experiments, in May 2017, Brauchst organised a "bench fest" in Jakomini at which 100 benches were given to residents. To become an owner, you had to fill in a form with your details and the number of your bench. "*We realised that we had to give the benches to people who would care for them and share them with others,*" Erika Thümmel explains. "*It's also a matter of legal responsibility, as the benches are in the public space.*"

Challenges in the public space

One of the things that became clear in the course of the bench experiment is how challenging it is to act in the public space. FH Joanneum and collectives like Brauchst struggled to get permission to organise anything. "*Health and safety regulations are a massive problem*," Anke Strittmatter remembers. Fortunately the team was able to use Erika Thümmel's garden and local cafes. But what would have happened if that hadn't been the case? "*The only way you can organise an event in the street these days is by paying a lot of money for fees and insurance,*" she says. "*This really has to change, because the public space belongs to everyone and everyone should be able to use it.*"

All the same, the work done in Jakomini has been extremely positive for the image of the neighbourhood. "*People now think of it as a creative area,*" Erika Thümmel says. Moreover, the municipality has started to warm to the idea of people reclaiming the public space. Recently, the green, socialist and conservative parties of

the district acknowledged the value of the ideas that had been developed. Members of the Human Cities Graz team are now invited to urban planning meetings. "*What we did on a local level is being used on a city level,*" Anke Strittmatter says.

In May 2018, another 200 benches were handed out. And the next few years should see similar numbers. For the Human Cities team members, the second life of the bench experiment is a form of recognition. "*The way it happened, with us researching and triggering an idea and local collectives then developing it, is a good example of how designers and citizens can innovate in the public space*," Anke Strittmatter believes.

She hopes that some of the other projects presented during the "5 Days in Jakomini" festival in May 2016 will have a similar trajectory. And leaving aside the Human Cities project, Erika and Anke will continue to investigate the public space with their students. "*280,000 benches for Graz is proof that it's worth doing*", Anke Strittmatter says.

During one of the experiments, passers-by were taxied through Jakomini Street while enjoying a cup of tea. © Team Jakomini

Applied sciences and practical design

With 4,200 students, the University of Applied Sciences FH Joanneum is the second largest university of applied sciences in Austria. It offers degree courses in specialised technical and economic disciplines, including management and information design.

The university takes a holistic approach to learning to enable graduates to deal with new problems in their professions. The Department of Information Design focuses on research topics in aesthetics, cognitive science, cultural studies, education, engineering and rhetoric in order to build digital systems with which users can communicate, interact and learn more effectively. The department collaborates closely with a range of European and other international universities.

Students interview passers-by to collect their wishes and proposals for the neighbourhood. © Team Jakomini

Tallinn

Relaxing in the Wilderness and the City

By Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg

How can we come up with new ways and places to relax in modern society? The Estonian Association of Designers has investigated this question by means of two experiments, one on mysterious Saaremaa Island and the other in the innovative capital Tallinn. Their journey of exploration involves a music festival in the wilds, pop-up hotels made of recycled materials, and a relaxation capsule for stressed city dwellers.

"A competition was organised and 14 students were invited to build 4 different models of pop-up buildings for festival guests."

The pop-up hotels made by students from the Estonian Academy of Arts ready for the first guests of the Juu Jääb jazz festival. © Mari-Liis Heinsaar

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The first prototype of the relaxation capsule HÄLO designed by Elmet Treier, which was exhibited during the Tallinn Design Festival 2016. © Mari-Liis Heinsaar

From Tallinn to Saaremaa

The two Estonian experiments took place in radically different environments. On the one hand, there is Tallinn with 2,814 inhabitants per square kilometre. The Estonian capital isn't only famous for its UNESCO-listed medieval city centre, but also for its prowess in technology and innovation, as is demonstrated by companies like Skype, Playtech and Transferwise.

This Silicon Valley of the Baltics, as it is known, has used technology to simplify many aspects of daily life: from registering a new business online within minutes, to paying for services like parking and public transport by mobile phone, to signing legally binding contracts with a digital signature linked to one's ID card. In addition, Tallinn is renowned for its

creative industries. Then on the other hand there is Saaremaa with a mere 13 inhabitants per square kilometre. Estonia's largest island is famous for its impressive meteorite craters and as a birthplace of pagan beliefs.

Located on Saaremaa Island, Villu Veski's family home is in the middle of what looks like a wild version of paradise. It's April, and although winter has passed, the trees are still bare. The white, wooden building stands alone in a sweeping landscape of fields and forests. We meet Villu Veski on his terrace after a 3-hour drive and a 30-minute ferry trip from Tallinn. It's hard to imagine that there is a music festival for two thousand people here every summer, but when you look closely there are a few indications. "*This wooden platform is used as the main stage,*" Villu Veski says as he shows us around. "*And here we build a big fire at night. And over here are the tiny hotels we constructed for the festival.*"

Four small structures are dotted around a field. They have accommodated guests since the 2015 edition of Villu Veski's "Juu Jääb Festival". The famous jazz musician first decided to organise a music event far from the capital in 1997. "*I think people get frustrated just going to a concert hall nowadays,*" he explains. "*They don't only want music but want to have an experience.*" The wild landscapes of Saaremaa provided an inspiring and relaxing backdrop to the festival. But there was a problem: Saaremaa might be the largest Estonian island, but it's sparsely populated and doesn't offer much accommodation for festival visitors. "*There are a few hostels, but they are expensive,*" Villu Veski says. "*There are also not a lot of bed and breakfasts.*"

A pop-up competition

Villu Veski and Ilona Gurjanova, who is the head of the Estonian Association of Designers, decided to tackle the challenge. "*Villu and I have known each other for many years*," Ilona Gurjanova says. "*I organised a concert for his band in Finland during the nineties, at the end of the Soviet period.*" In 2014 the Estonian Association of Designers joined the Human Cities programme. "*I thought about how we could ask design students from the Estonian Academy of Arts to help improve the Juu Jääb Festival experience,*" says Ilona Gurjanova, who also created the Tallinn Design Festival. "*We both organise festivals, so it was natural to imagine a transdisciplinary collaboration,*" Villu Veski explains. "*As designers, it was also interesting to work on a rural area rather than a city,*" Ilona Gurjanova adds.

The jazz musician's initial intention was to ask students to design a new festival stage. In the end, however, the accommodation issue was considered more important. "*The musicians often had to sleep in my house,*" Villu Veski says. "*We really lacked a place where people could relax during the day and at night.*" A competition was organised and 14 students were invited to build 4 different models of pop-up buildings for festival guests. The aim was to create an innovative type of hotel that was cheap, unobtrusive and sustainable. The parameters were strict: "*the hotels had to be easy to set up, easy to transport, and avoid damaging or polluting the environment,*" Ilona Gurjanova says. Students weren't given any funding for the project, but received a large amount of industrial felt donated by a bed and sofa company.

Two days before the jazz festival, the students started getting their hands dirty. "*Coming from the textile department, I thought it would be nice to make a house out of textile,*" says Egle Lillemäe,

CUBE/KUUP, in the background, was selected by an international jury as the winner of the competition. © Mari-Liis Heinsaar

one of the participants. Together with Kristiina Veinberg, she designed a 2-metre long wooden structure whose walls were made of felt. "*We fitted the entrance with zips, used plastic bottles to make lights, and also made little windows with mosquito nets,*" she says. Their pop-up house, called CUBE/KUUP, can accommodate two people. The front can even be raised to create something of a shaded terrace during the day. The industrial felt keeps the interior cool when it's sunny and warm at night. And there was also a small surprise awaiting guests. "*We hid a bottle of wine inside,*" Egle Lillemäe says with a smile.

Do-it-yourself philosophy

CUBE/KUUP was selected as the winner of the competition by an international jury consisting of representatives from the worlds of hospitality, media, design and music as well as festival guests who had stayed in the pop-up hotels. It wasn't only thanks to the wine. "*The project met the needs of the festival really well,*" Ilona Gurjanova says. "*It showed how design thinking can create value by upcycling industry leftovers and how you can create a better*

physical and social environment by involving local players and users." The CUBE/KUUP was presented at the Juu Jääb Festival and an extra one was constructed for the 2015 edition of Tallinn Design Festival. For the time being, both are kept in Egle Lillemäe's garage. "*Unfortunately it's not very resistant to heavy rain,*" she explains, while hoping it could be further developed. "*The model could be taken to other festivals and it could also be made bigger and used as a shed or a boathouse,*" Ilona Gurjanova believes.

To protect the four little buildings on his field in between festivals, Villu Veski has covered them with plastic sheeting. They are still used by musicians and participants at the festival. "*I also rent them out to bicycle tourists looking for a place to sleep and companies that want to send their employees off on a break,*" he says. In the future, he would like to have more pop-up hotels and maybe ask members of the audience to help build them. "*Members of the new generation have been addicted to screens, but they're now rediscovering the do-it-yourself philosophy,*" he says. "*The most successful festivals these days are the ones where people are allowed to do things themselves, like Burning Man.*" In addi-

"The model could be taken to other festivals and it could also be made bigger and used as a shed or a boathouse."

Ilona Gurjanova, president of the Estonian Association of Designers

The pop-up hotels at Juu Jääb jazz festival. © Mari-Liis Heinsaar

"We decided to use lighting technology that makes the inside of the Hälo go from a dim to a pure light by the end of the session."

Jan Graps, cofounder of Hälo.

tion to the pop-up hotels, Villa Veski would like the next edition of his festival to feature bicycle repair, massage and a number of newly built smaller stages.

Mind-restoration pod

To dig deeper into the topics of deceleration and digital detox, the Estonian Association of Designers started another project in 2015 as part of its Human Cities activities. It again consisted of a retreat of sorts, but this time was designed for cities rather than a rural environment. "*The mind-restoration pod was initially called EX <IT, but because of the negative connotations of Brexit we renamed it Hälo,*" Ilona Gurjanova says. Currently in the concept stage, "*Hälo is a small retreat for a single person: a tiny architectural masterpiece that combines ergonomic, eco-friendly aesthetic and high-tech solutions.*" It aims to give stressed city dwellers short breaks of 20-30 minutes in an environment that's been optimised for relaxation. It's just what you need for an extra dose of energy.

At the offices of the Estonian Association of Designers we meet the founders: Jan Graps and Ken Ruut, who run an interior design studio, and architect Martin Melioranski. "*In cooperation with Elmet Treier we built the first prototype for the 2016 edition of Tallinn Design Festival,*" Jan Graps says. The other members of the team were Egle Lillemäe, Merle Randmäe and Kirke Tatar.

"*During the festival, we also did a survey of what people would like from a relaxation pod.*" With more than 80 people trying out the prototype and nearly 40 filling in the questionnaires, this first phase of the experiment helped refine the concept. "*We included natural sounds and binaural beats from the Estonian start-up Synctuition, which make your brainwaves resonate in a positive way,*" Jan Graps explains. "*We also decided to use lighting technology that makes the inside of the Hälo go from a dim to a pure light by the end of the session.*"

With an estimated cost of 5,000 to 15,000 euros per Hälo depending on the type of material and technology used, the project needs funding to move beyond the concept stage. The founders want to explore three potential routes to investment. "*The government could fund Hälo as a public service for urban citizens,*" Jan Graps says. "*It could also be of interest to wellness institutes or spas. And finally, wealthy people might want to buy a Hälo for personal use.*" Ilona Gurjanova believes that Hälos could be used "*at large fairs, airports, factories, schools.*" As a small step towards these future opportunities, the Hälo prototype will be showcased at the Human Cities exhibition during the 2018 Tallinn Design Festival.

People queued enthusiastically to test the HÄLO capsule. © Mari-Liis Heinsaar

Estonian design

The Estonian Association of Designers wants to bring together Estonian design actors and help preserve the country's cultural identity. Estonian design went through a radical change in the 1990s. As the country was exposed to the market economy, design began to be viewed as an important creative force with which to achieve a modern, successful society. Estonia's skill at combining creativity and new technologies has a long history. The famous Minox camera de-signed by Walter Zapp in 1936 is a good example. But in recent years Estonia has acquired a new dynamism, during which well-known brands such as Skype, Transferwise and Grabcad have mushroomed. The Estonian Association of Designers has initiated and organised a wide range of activities to support Estonian design. In 2006, the association launched the Tallinn Design Festival (Disainiöö), which has since developed into a week-long international event at which designers from 20+ countries show their work. In 2011, the Estonian Design House was opened to introduce and sell Estonian design and also promote it abroad. And in 2015, an exhibition of Estonian design called Size Doesn't Matter travelled to Brussels, Vienna, Stockholm, Caen, London, Paris and several design festivals around the world. The Estonian Association of Designers joined the Human Cities network in 2014.

A visitor inside the HÄLO capsule. © Mari-Liis Heinsaar

Bilbao

X

Public Art to Build Bridges

By Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg

In a part of Bilbao that's still marginalised but rapidly gentrifying, giant pictures of women have been painted on the walls. Led by Bilbao Ekintza and URBANBAT, this large urban design project wants to make women more present in the public space and highlight the historical role they played in this post-industrial district.

"On the edge of the Ria, one of the paintings shows a 19th-century woman towing a boat out of the docks with a rope."

An example of the tools used during the workshops to develop the experiment.
© UrbanBat

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This painting by artist Iagoba Moly celebrates the diversity of women in the area. © UrbanBat
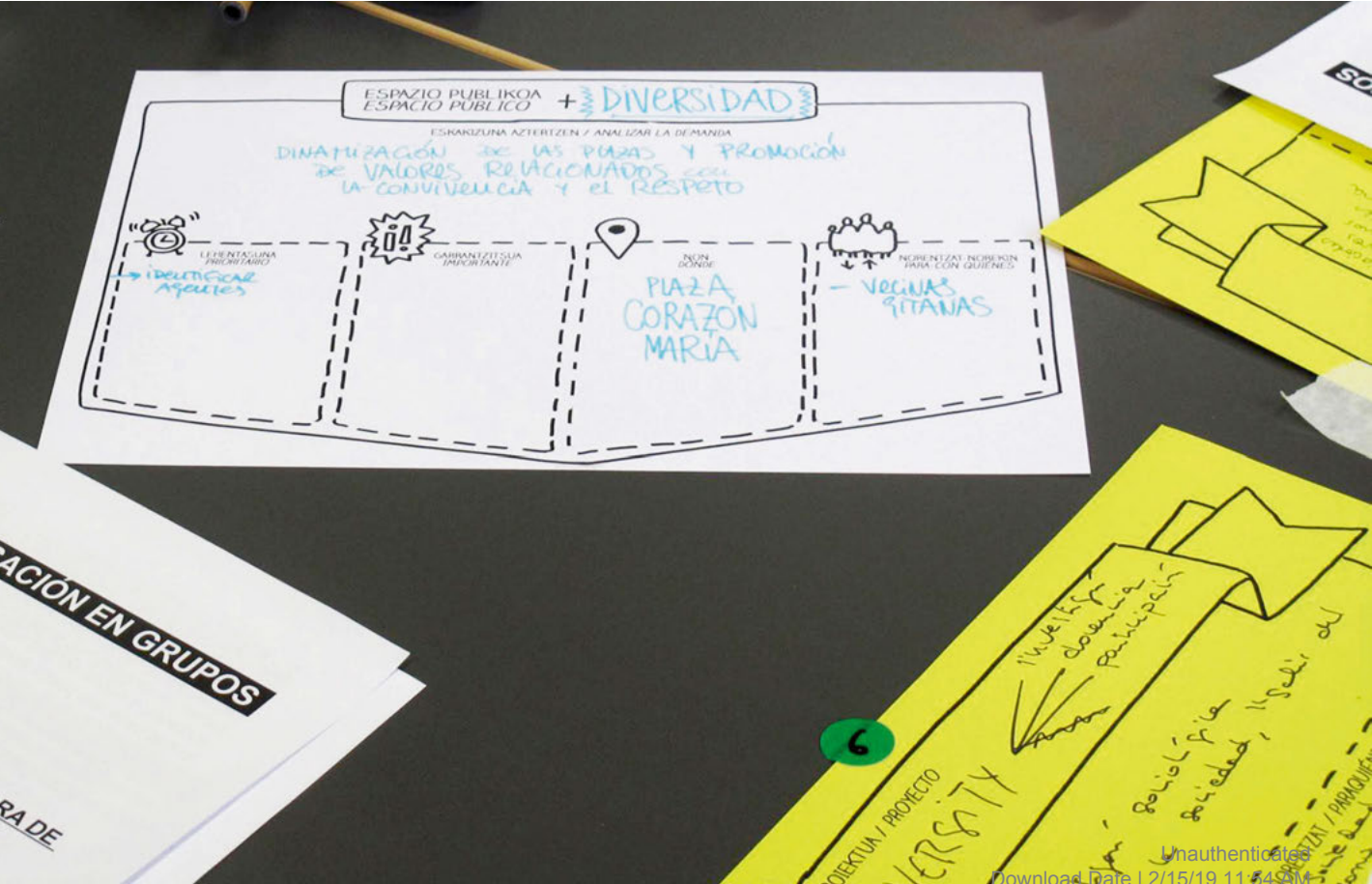
Our story, which takes place in the San Francisco, Bilbao La Vieja and Zabala neighbourhoods of Bilbao, is all about building bridges. *"It's a diverse, open-minded area with a rich history. People here come from different cultures, which leads to a melting pot of perspectives, ways of life and languages,"* says Ruth Juan, a local artist who settled here in 2009 after having lived in Barcelona. *"On the other hand, it's a stigmatised area. People from other parts of the city don't come here, as it's considered dangerous and run-down."*

Together with nine other artists, Ruth Juan has been painting the shutters of shops in the area to build bridges–between neighbourhoods, histories and residents. This public space intervention is the result of the Human Cities programme in Bilbao, which started in February 2017. *"At first, the regional government was involved in the project,"* explains María Jesús del Blanco, Manager of Economic Strategic Sectors at Bilbao Ekintza. *"But they decided it would make sense to work on a more local scale and at a level that would reach citizens more directly."* And this was exactly what her municipal organisation would be able to bring to the project. *"Bilbao Ekintza promotes creativity and design as driving forces behind the social, cultural and economic development of the city."*

Citizen laboratories

From the outset Bilbao Ekintza decided to partner with URBANBAT, an office of urban innovation run by Maria Arana Zubiate. It aims to *"bring together local communities and experts like architects, artists and designers to tackle challenges in the area."* Bilbao Ekintza and URBANBAT joined forces to achieve the common goal of improving the image and the atmosphere of San Francisco, Bilbao La Vieja and Zabala. *"Because we organise an annual festival and a lot of workshops with residents, we had already identified several social and urban issues in our collaborative workshops and laboratories,"* Maria Arana Zubiate says. *"One of them was that women weren't present enough in the streets."* And indeed, men hang around in the streets in the evening and women sometimes do not feel safe, even though the area has a vibrant nightlife. *"Another problem was the obvious sociological separation between the three neighbourhoods."*

To find out more about local people's needs and figure out how to address them, the two organisations decided to host several citizen laboratories. *"We wanted to involve the local community and design the experiment collaboratively,"* María Jesús del Blanco explains. *"We put up posters and used the social networks of many of the organisations who are active in the area, especially URBANBAT's."* The coworking space Wikitoki, based in San Francisco, hosted several of the meetings. Since the area was already gentrifying, one of the challenges was to make sure that different groups of residents would participate, not only the new creative class. *"We were very sensitive about this issue,"* Maria Arana Zubiate says. *"For example, we invited the coordinator of an association working with immigrants, prostitutes and drug users."*

Painting history

In the end, the partners and locals decided on ten street art interventions and called the project "Haciendo la Calle!", which translates to "Walking the Streets!' Local artists–of whom there are many in the district–were invited to paint women all over the three neighbourhoods. But why was art considered the right tool? The answer lies in art's capacity to build bridges between different communities. First of all, by focusing on women's issues. Most of the painters were women and more importantly, all the paintings represented women. By making women artistically visible on the walls of the area, the Human Cities partners also wanted to make them feel more welcome in real life. All of the paintings, which were each done by a different artist, represent a different type of woman.

This leads us to another bridge that "Haciendo la Calle!" wanted to build: reducing the gap between San Francisco's past and future. *"We had noticed that the gentrification process destroys local history,"* Maria Azana Zubiate says. *"We wanted to keep, share, and show the story of how women contributed to this part of Bilbao."* Women played an important role in the area, which had long been defined by the docks, the working class and prostitution. On the edge of the Ria, one of the paintings shows a 19th-century woman towing a boat out of the docks with a rope. Another, in Zabala, shows a spinner belonging to the so-called union of the needle, which became Spain's first female trade union in 1911. Walking around Bilbao la Vieja, you can also admire an abstract flower painting, which refers to the private parts of the prostitutes who used to ply their trade here. The artist Ruth Juan decided to focus on the city's mining history, during which women were paid less than men for their work while continuing to care for their children. *"The idea was to have a strong, free woman, so I decided to show her bare-breasted,"* she explains.

"If you're going to San Francisco..."

... you will probably have to cross a bridge. From the city centre of Bilbao, you will pass over the many train tracks that converge at the main train station. From the old town, you will pass over the river that runs through Bilbao, the Ria. The physical separation might be why San Francisco has never looked like the rest of the city. The working class of the industrial Basque Country used to live here. It is also where most of Bilbao's immigrants have settled. At the same time, the area is covered in street art, bars are alternative, people are artsy, and old buildings are being renovated. It's easy to see that San Francisco and its neighbouring area are rapidly gentrifying.

Finally, "Haciendo la Calle!" is also about building bridges between San Francisco, Bilbao La Vieja and Zabala, the neighbourhoods among which the paintings were spread. For this reason, a city guide was designed and handed out in popular spots in the area. "*The map shows the paintings and connects the three neighbourhoods,*" María Jesús del Blanco says. During Bilbao's Human Cities event, partners from all over Europe followed the urban trail through the area.

Art against gentrification?

It's always difficult to measure how art affects people. What effect did those works of art have on residents? Before the artists could start their work, some of the shopkeepers of the shops involved had to be convinced. "*We sometimes had trouble explaining the ideas behind the abstract paintings,*" Maria Arana Zubiate remembers. In the end, they all gave their approval. "*My experience while painting my mural was very rewarding,*" says artist Ruth Juan. "*People were curious to see how many of their neighbours knew about this part of their history. It confirms what I've read about these women being so invisible.*" For María Jesús del Blanco, from Bilbao Ekintza, "*the reaction of the residents was very positive*". When you walk around the streets of San Francisco, you can already see many of the paintings. We asked a few passers-by what they thought of them. Most of them liked them, but only one person had heard of the project and the urban trail created by "Haciendo la Calle!" It made us wonder: doesn't adding more street art just contribute to the gentrification of an area?

Maria Arana Zubiate from URBANBAT believes, on the contrary, that art and creativity can be "*a tool against gentrification when they're used to create links between residents and different sensibilities*". Who is right? In March 2018, Ruth Juan's painting was defaced by local activists. On top of the women who had been initially depicted on the shop shutters you could now read: "Refugees welcome, tourists go home!" This is of course just another type of intervention in public space, which does not belong to any one group. But a local association called Xake mobilised citizens to restore the original. "*Local people and the artist worked hard together and the result is amazing,*" Maria Arana Zubiate says. "*We are proud, because we can now say that the leadership of this collaborative urban design project has been taken over by citizens.*"

Together with nine other artists, Ruth Juan has been painting the shutters of shops in the area to build bridges–between neighbourhoods, histories and residents.

A guide for public space interventions

During a participatory Human Cities laboratory, URBANBAT edited a guide. It gives organisations and individual activists a list of 20 recommendations as well as a methodology as to how to act in public space. Build a more resilient area; use urban voids; cross the line between identities; introduce a gender perspective; don't forget about the neighbourhood's past... Although the guide is partly based on the Bilbao experiment, each recommendation is illustrated with examples from around the world. Interested readers can obtain a free copy at https://issuu.com/urbanbat/docs/guia_20de_20recomendaciones_web_eng

This work by Maider Celada depicts the immigrant women who worked as housemaids. © UrbanBat

Participants of the workshop discussed possible interventions in public space. © UrbanBat

Bilbao's social wealth agency

Created in 1989, Bilbao Ekintza is a municipal organisation that aims to promote the generation of economic and social wealth in Bilbao and boost the city's attractiveness as a place to invest, establish companies, achieve corporate growth, and increase opportunities for employment. As part of its work on Strategic Economic Sectors, Bilbao Ekintza carries out a range of design-related activities such as hosting Bilbao-Bizkaia Design Week and being part of the UNESCO Cities of Design network. Special attention is paid to ensuring that socio-economic and quality of life conditions are balanced throughout the city's districts and among its inhabitants. Bilbao joined the Human Cities programme in February 2017 and hosted a Human Cities meeting during Bilbao-Bizkaia Design Week in 2017.

Participants of the workshop were taken on a tour around the neighbourhood to understand the area's problems. © UrbanBat

Building Societies: Detroit's Micro Utopian Urbanisms

In an off-the-cuff conversation Patrick Bouchain, the French architect and social impact guru, once divulged why working in economically challenged urban scenarios had proved professionally consequential and politically affirming. When things hit rock bottom, he explained, change is imminent. The key for an architect seeking to guide that change is to get involved at the right moment, just as signs of an impending upswing start to show. Tricky as it sounds, design's agency spikes in that brief and transformative instant when the profession is temporarily liberated from its perennial bonds to capital and power, Bouchain alleged, offering the architect real social sway.

Delivered with affable confidence just steps from the Centre Pompidou at the Le Bouledogue Brasserie, the tip seemed alluring. Over the span of two energetic decades, Bouchain's Paris-based studio Construire had, after all, realized an impressive array of original and experimental cultural spaces in some of France's more complex, post-industrial urban environments. With each project Bouchain and his partners shrewdly advanced new paradigms in inclusive, informal, and participatory design, inspiring an entire generation of practices on the way.

Still, for an architect like myself looking to apply emergent methods in social practice to the North American context, concerns lingered: Could such collective efforts translate to a scenario with a less robust social safety net? Could significant, urban-scale projects be realized without access to public funding? And could design still make impact where basic civic infrastructure had collapsed? Soon enough, my partner Jean Louis Farges and I would have the opportunity to tackle these questions when we moved our architecture

Constructing Akoaki's stage set for the Detroit Afrikan Funkestra, an open-air opera in three acts. The first performance took place in 2016 at the Oakland Avenue Urban Farm. © Akoaki

Detroit Afrikan Funkestra performimg at the Oakland Avenue Urban Farm in Detroit's North End. © Doug Coombe

studio Akoaki to Detroit, Michigan. As luck would have it, we arrived in 2008 just as the city's economic crisis had reached fever pitch and standard-of-life metrics plummeted to all-time lows.

To say that we were ill prepared for the scale of the calamity would be an understatement. Detroit, then in the throes of an unprecedented housing crisis, was struggling to pay for services other cities might take for granted: basics like security, sanitation, schools, transportation and running water had become increasingly difficult for residents to access. Dilapidated houses were being torn down by the thousands; the real estate market had tanked leaving homes for sale at prices comparable to a smart pair of shoes; and infrastructure was crumbling. On top of it all, the city was facing imminent municipal bankruptcy, the largest such default in American history.

In full transparency, from the get-go we were keenly aware of our outsider status: Jean Louis, a Parisian ex-patriot and myself, a Soviet refugee and East Coast transplant were anything but local activists. Accordingly, for the span of a few tentative years we hardly stirred at all. We continued working in the United States and internationally. In Detroit, wary of design's capacity to meaningfully address the complexity and scale of the scenario, we watched and absorbed.

From our critical vantage point, we soon became acquainted with Detroit's well-rehearsed ascendency story: Modern innovation had made Detroit great, with Fordist-Taylorist industry, the first free-span factory floor, and the first concrete paved highway accounting for just a few of the city's notable inventions. Streamlined productivity and a robust economy enabled the emergence of a Detroit working class with middle-class buying power and progressive aspirations. This unique social dynamism rapidly transformed the boon of modernization into cultural ingenuity, with Motown and Techno, Detroit's homegrown music genres, reverberating globally.

In contrast, the demise apologue revealed a less unified take. Some Detroiters pointed to the collapse of a lethargic auto industry. Others attributed the economic disaster to federal retribution for left-leaning political affinities as typified by Detroit's once prominent unions and black-power movements. Still others, highlighting the demographics of the predominantly African American city, faulted the country's unsettled racial inequities and policy-based disparities as foils to a quicker recovery. One thing is certain: no single account suffices to naturalize the city's decades-long decline, manifested by the vast and disintegrating urban landscape of a city built for 1.8 million with now fewer than 700,000 people residing.

Detroit musician and composer Cornelius Harris of Underground Resistance speaking at the inaugural convening of the nomadic Detroit Culture Council. © Doug Coombe

Musicians Efe Bes + IBM performing with Akoaki's Mothership at the Flint Free City Festival. The space capsule was designed as a DJ booth and urban marker to activate vacant and underused spaces. © Akoaki

In the interval following our arrival, we encountered countless architects, designers, planners, artists, and cultural tourists struck by the visual power of Detroit's modern ruins and shaken by the human catastrophe. Keen on combating decline and lured by the scenographic power of the circumstances, many considered the seemingly limitless expanse that makes up the city's 139-square-mile urban center a formidable attractor for participatory design experiments, tactical interventionism, and dexterous contemporary practices. For all the good intention such efforts brought, and the institutional support they garnered, projects were often met with significant measures of criticism: allegations of parachute aid, cultural insensitivity, and bad politicking all virtually unavoidable in a climate of exceptional social need and resource paucity.

Over time, despite the challenges and the enduring aura of apology around working in Detroit, we met people doing things differently. Self-aware of issues around gentrification, race relations, and cultural appropriation, some designers were persevering, working on slow-cooked, inclusive projects at neighborhood scales. The artist-architect design duo Mitch Cope and Gina Reichert of Power House Productions, for instance, were transforming a series of vacant homes in a predominantly Bangladeshi community into a network of experimental sites for performance, music, studio art and sport. Anishinabe artists Sacramento Knoxx and Christy B. were building a multi-media art collective honoring the cultural practices of Detroit's first nations; and dancer-curator Ryan Meyer-Johnson had launched the Sidewalk Festival, an untethered outdoor performance space intended for annual events. Different as the sites and programs appeared, the projects shared common attributes. Each advanced incrementally; formed partnerships across professional and creative fields; navigated the pitfalls of the city's overburdened and dysfunctional bureaucracies; independently sought public and private funding; and thought critically about how locally-rooted culture strengthens cities.

Learning from these politically astute efforts, and with newfound confidence from a deeper understanding of the context, our studio began stepping up its contributions to the growing constellation of Detroit's micro-utopian urban projects. At first, we acknowledged a tinge of envy of firms working in the European context, where the production of culture benefits from steady access to state funding. Soon enough, however, we looked for ways to reconcile our aspirations with the realities of local governance models, and began crafting an autonomous practice dedicated to making change through a synthesis of aesthetics, social enterprise, and event planning. In Detroit's historically African American North End neighborhood, we proactively articulated design questions by seeking out sites of need, formulating necessary programs, convening the appropriate user groups, and securing external funds, all before the conception of design proposals even began.

Akoaki's Bureau of Emergent Urbanity, a former barber shop converted to host events in Detroit's North End. © Akoaki

Akoaki's model for the Detroit Cultivator project, a six-acre civic commons designed for the Oakland Avenue Urban Farm in Detroit's North End neighbourhood. The project combines food production, cultural programming, and enterprise to imagine new sustainable models in urban farming and collective land ownership. © Jacob Lewkow
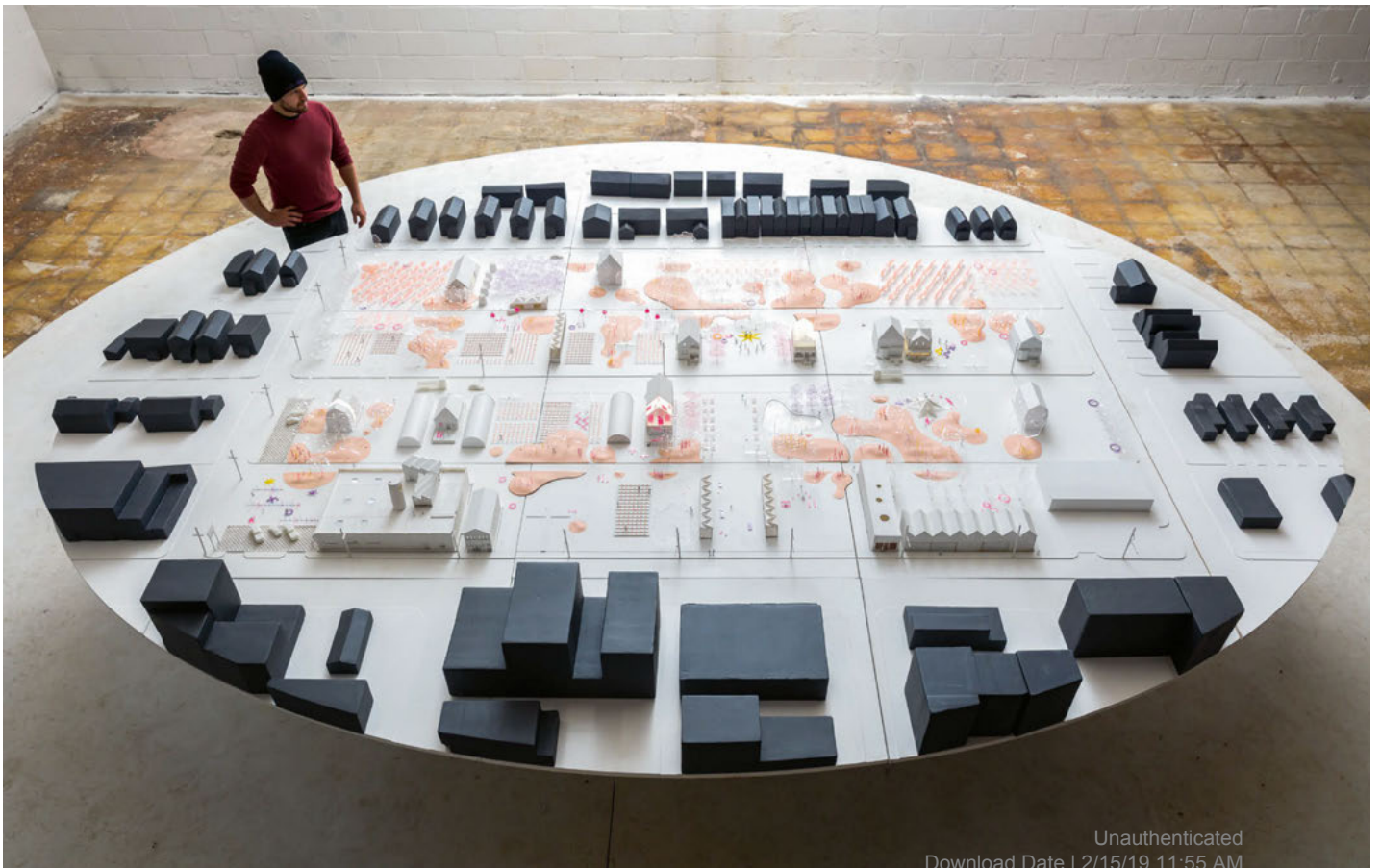
Tangibly, over the course of five years, the work took the form of architectural interventions, art objects, and social environments, designed to make urban impact. We launched the Mothership, a P-Funk inspired DJ booth and space capsule. We built opera sets in vegetable gardens. We clipped extravagant gilded arches onto vacant buildings and catalyzed ephemeral arts institutions. We created fetching images of neighbors and collaborators. We published shiny magazines, generated programs, harnessed social media, and planned parties. We instigated a series of collective projects: O.N.E. Mile, Detroit Cultivator, and Detroit Afrikan Music Institution, among others. In short, we deployed design to communicate invisible cultural narratives through the power and prowess of a latent collective imaginary. But perhaps more importantly, we amassed a set of experimental and emergent tactics conceived to productively re-situate design and architecture in the realm of planning and equitable urban development.

Paradoxically, since the city's bankruptcy, economic indicators have been improving, and Detroit, poised for a comeback, finds itself in the international limelight once more. With the attention comes a steady stream of young international designers and architects eager to explore new ways to exercise agency in a changing world. For visitors, our studio's self-sufficiency, rising from necessity, often conceals liberating possibilities by expanding the role of the designer to include cultural instigator, developer, collaborator, and even scriptwriter for the production of urban situations. Our strategy, I concede, has benefited from engaging in an urban scenario at a pivotal moment; one Bouchain alluded to some years back.

Part 3

Conclusion
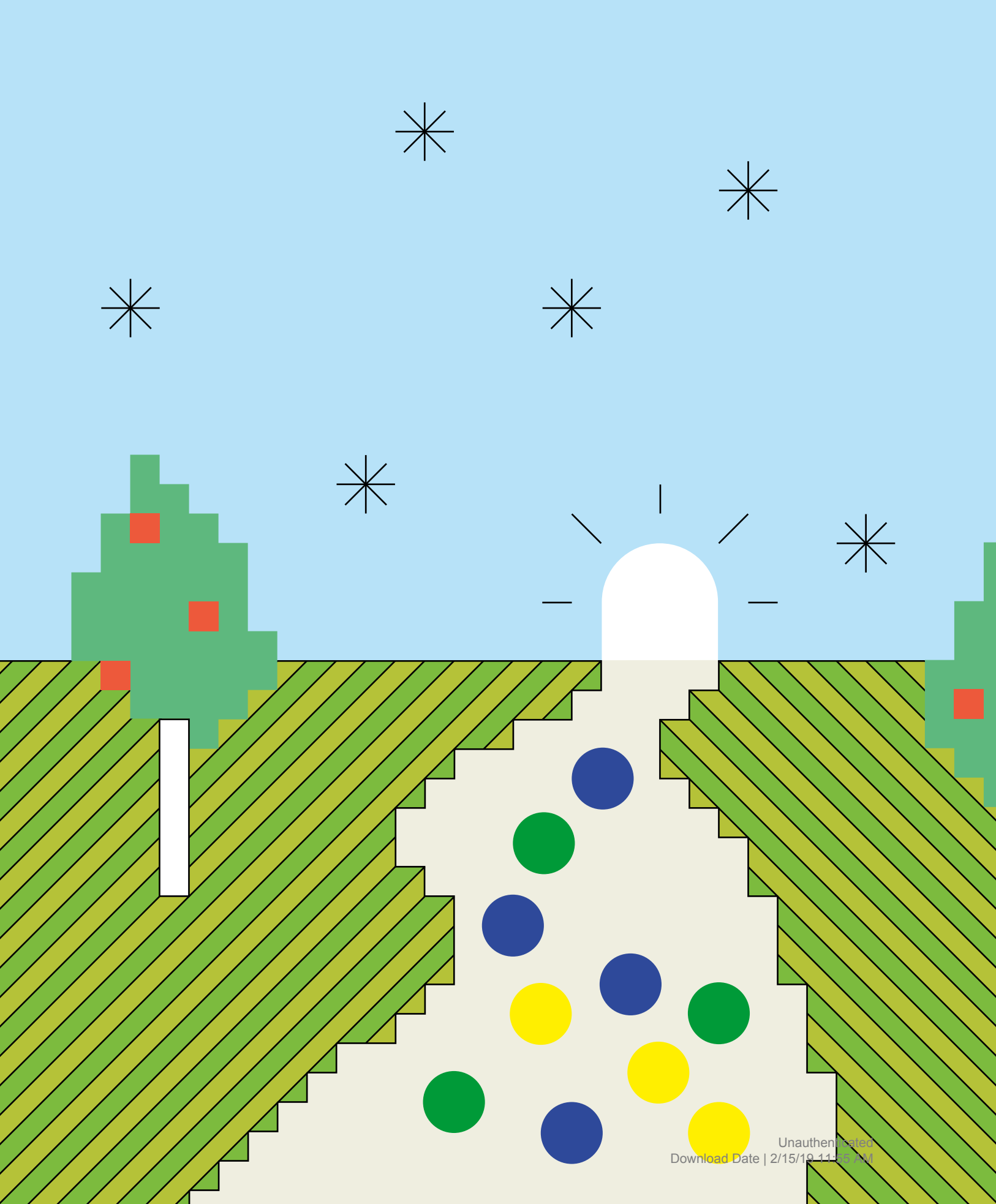
Lessons from the Journey

By Robin Houterman

In the year 1322, the English knight John Mandeville left home and embarked on what would become one of the most famous journeys of the Middle Ages. During the next three and a half decades, Sir John visited countless kingdoms, lands, and isles. He served the Sultan of Egypt, fought for the Great Khan of Cathay, and even travelled to the mythical Land of Prester John...

We have always conceived of Human Cities as a journey as well. It has been a journey to eleven cities across Europe, and within each city it has been a journey from an initial idea to a fully-fledged experiment. Interestingly, the starting points of the experiments were very different. Experiments took place in disadvantaged inner-city areas, post-industrial zones, modernist housing areas, a university campus, and a range of other locations. As set out in Alice Holmberg's chapter on co-creation, all experiments were based on a thorough analysis of an area. Looking at how the experiments took shape, it could be said that each of them tried to answer one of the following questions:

1.   Is there something missing in the area?

Some of the experiments originated from a sense that something was lacking in a part of the city. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated by Pool is Cool in Brussels, where a group of like-minded people with a passion for open-air swimming came together. Realising that many similar-size cities in Europe had open-air swimming facil-

ities, they felt this was a case worth fighting for. Judging by the success of their pop-up swimming pools and dry swimming events, they had a point.

2.   Is there a particular problem in the area?

Other teams decided to deal with a specific issue. For example, both Saint-Étienne's experiments addressed the problem of disused space. Ici Bientôt focused on empty shops in a historically important part of the city. The empty shop windows were a blight and the streets were less lively than before. By experimenting with new activities, the experiment improved the situation for landlords and residents. In the Crêt de Roch neighbourhood, the focus was on abandoned land. Here, the Hypermatière collective worked with residents and students to transform a vacant wasteland into a thriving community space.

3.   Are there assets that could be developed?

Finally, some teams focused on existing assets that could be built upon. Assets can be thought of in different ways: they can be economic assets like the maker community in London, neighbourhood networks like in Bilbao, or public spaces or buildings. The team from Aalto University focused on the latter. The university's Otaniemi Campus is a vibrant learning environment with cutting-edge resources, but the Aalto team noticed that some of the buildings were relatively underused. Since they had already been researching the relationship between education and architecture, they felt this

Creative tools
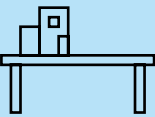
Workshop
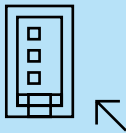
UX-UI design

Party
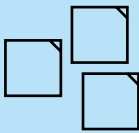
Process design

Public talk

Service design
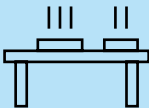
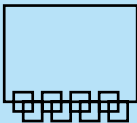**Giant picnic**

Graphic design
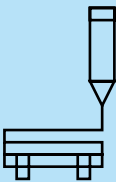
Urban design

Barbecue
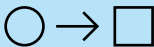
Visual design

Open-air cinema

Human citizens

Citizens

Creative people

Public authorities

was a good opportunity to test their School as a Service concept. They invited a local high school suffering from a lack of space to start using Otaniemi Campus. This made the campus much livelier and helped high school pupils and university students interact with each other in a way that proved beneficial for both.

In the course of his travels, Sir John came across "many divers kinds of folk of divers laws and shapes." He saw yellow and green people dwelling near the Indus and people with heads like dogs in Natumeran. In the land of the Pigmens, he met little men who were only two feet tall and were engaged in a perpetual war with cranes.

The Human Cities experiments have also involved a wide range of people, from children in Belgrade to artists in Bilbao. The evaluation of the project carried out by Politecnico di Milano showed that local organisations were involved in 6 of the 11 experiments, public institutions were involved in 8, and individual citizens were involved in 10. Students played an important role in nearly all the experiments. They carried out research and mapping work in London, contributed their design skills in Milan, and helped prototype solutions in Graz.

It is clear that most projects cannot be implemented by a single person. Other people need to be involved. In fact, a study among initiators of bottom-up initiatives conducted by the Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (UIRS) and Saxion University of Applied Sciences in The Netherlands [1] showed that project initiators considered human resources more important than financial resources. So who are some of the possible partners in a project?

First, there are likely to be other individuals who share similar concerns or see similar opportunities. The collective 'Skupaj na ploščad!' in Ljubljana is a case in point. The collective consists of dedicated, like-minded neighbours who believe that the use of public space in the area should be increased. Their combined networks made it easy to reach out to other neighbours as well as local organisations and institutions, such as the schools their children attended.

Second, there may be other groups and organisations who are already working in the area. These organisations often have crucial local knowledge. They know what is at stake in a community, including the nuances not mentioned in the standard reports produced by local authorities and other external bodies. In addition, they often have strong local networks already. The experiment in Bilbao provides an example of this. By linking up with UrbanBat, Bilbao Ekintza was able to build their experiment around an issue that had been identified in previous workshops: namely, the insufficient presence of women in the streets of the San Francisco, Bilbao La Vieja and Zabala neighbourhoods.

Third, it is often essential to involve larger public and private institutions, especially if a project aims to have a large impact. The team at Belgrade Design Week certainly set itself an ambitious target when it decided to build 100 playgrounds across Serbia. Communicating this grand vision played a key role in securing the support of large partners such as the NIS energy company, the Dragica Nikolić Foundation, and leading manufacturers of playground equipment.

1   See Matej Nikšič's article 'Civil Initiatives Improving Urban Public Spaces' in Human Cities_Challenging the City Scale: Investigation, published by Cité du design Saint-Étienne, 2018.
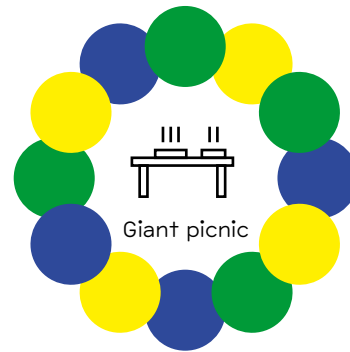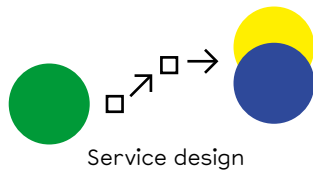
A human cities journey

Process design
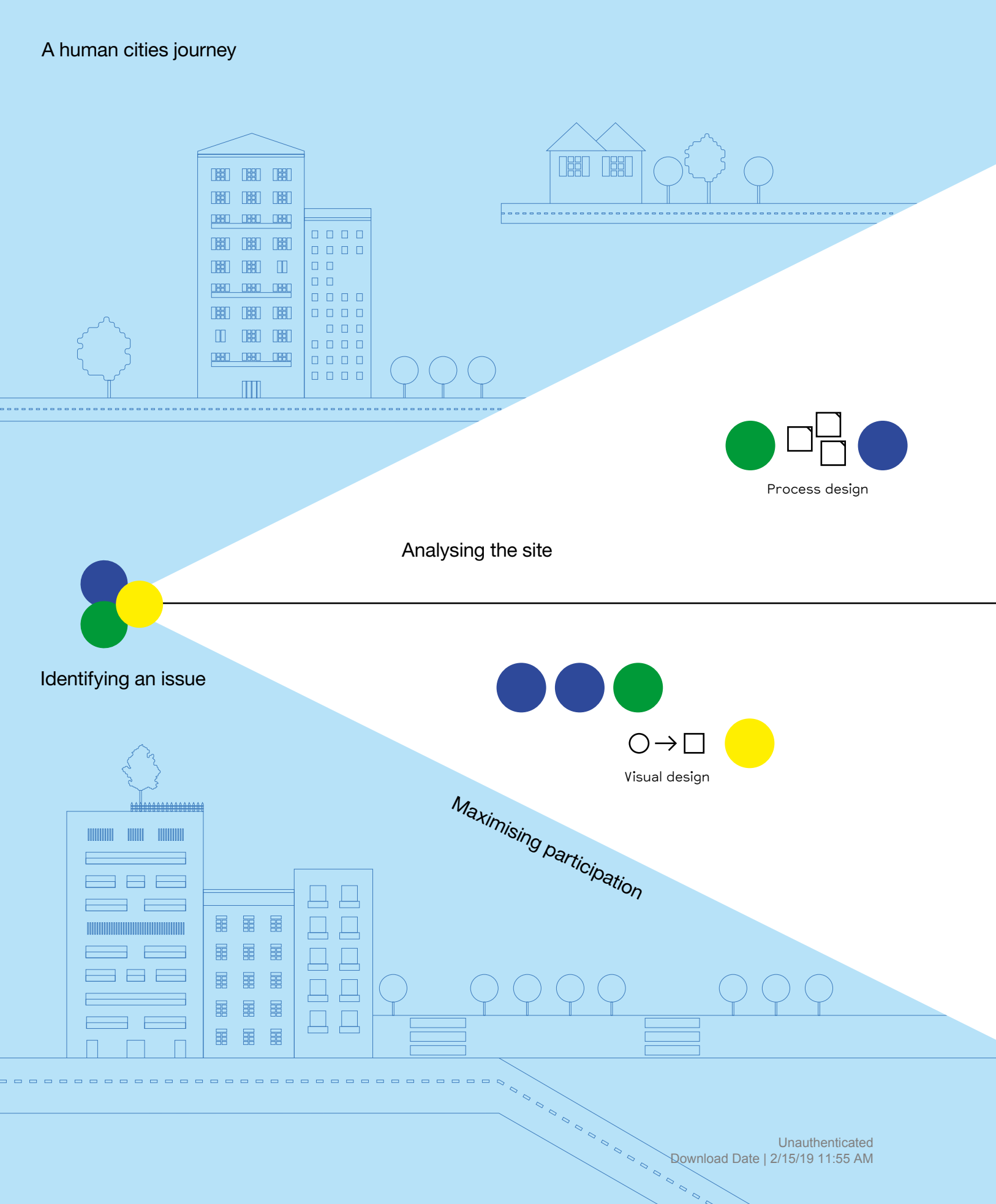
Analysing the site

Identifying an issue

Visual design

Maximising participation

Service design

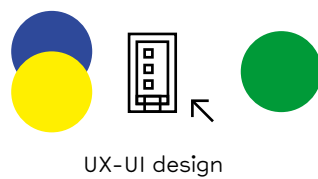Giant picnic

Mobilising resources

Experimenting

Pursuing a long-term strategy

Workshop

Urban design

Public talk

UX-UI design

Lessons for citizens

Build a community of stakeholders
and make the case to public authorities

Party

Open-air
cinema

Barbecue

Graphic
design

Public talk
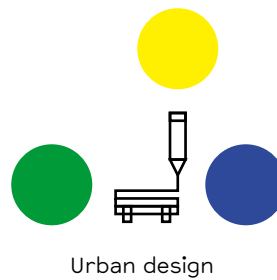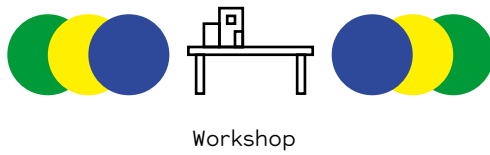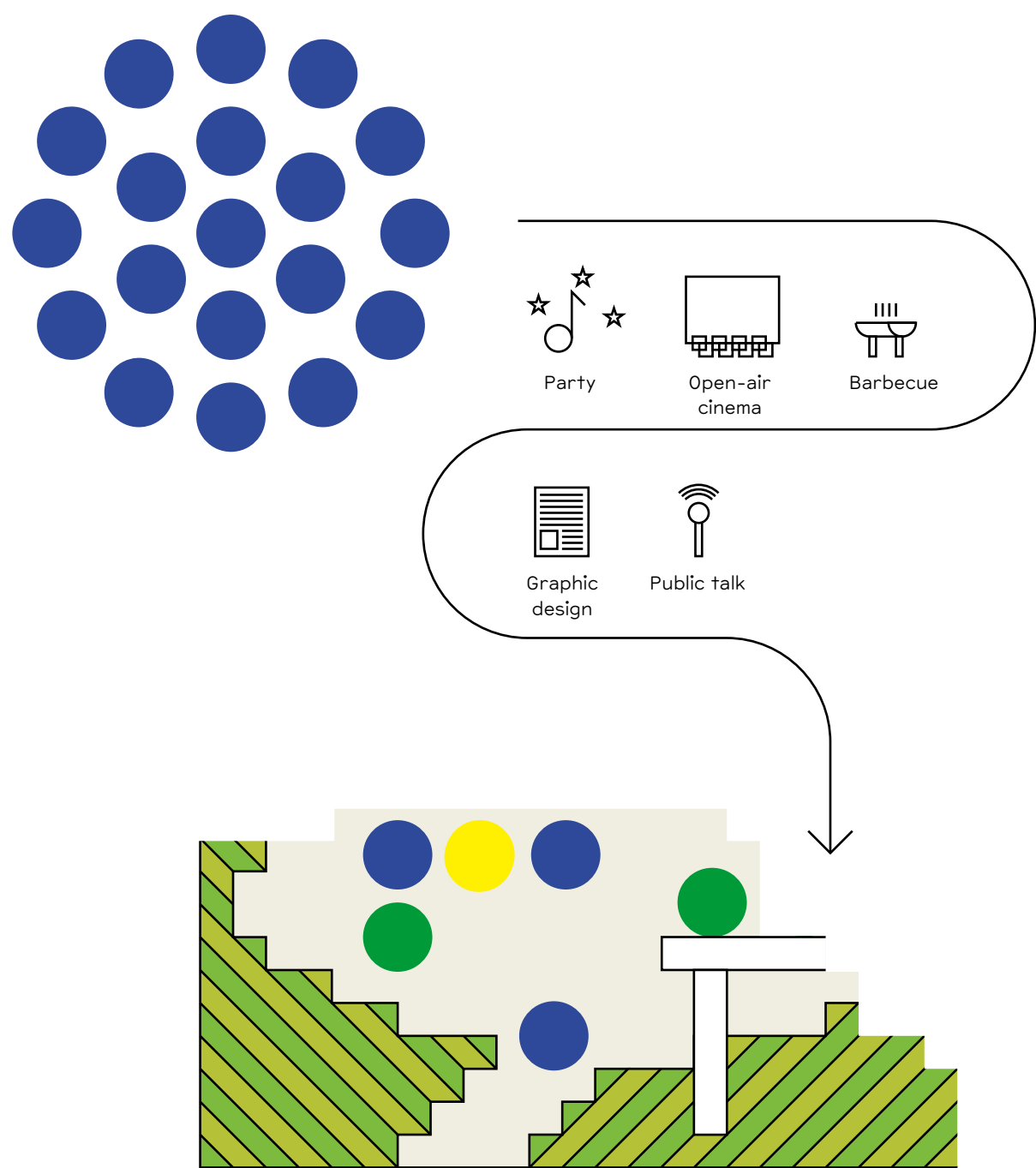
As an experienced traveller, Sir John has some valuable recommendations on what to take on a journey. A piece of the Dry Tree, which grows near Hebron, will protect you from epilepsy and ensure that your horse never founders. And a diamond is more helpful still: it will make you bold, ward off wicked spirits and poisonous animals, and heal you if you succumb to lunacy.

The Human Cities experiments had to make do without diamonds and magical trees and rely on design tools instead. One of the most important challenges in all cities was to involve people and a wide range of engagement tools was used.

Many of the experiments used tools to build a community around their project. Organising a food-related event, as was done for instance in Ljubljana, is an excellent way to bring together young and old. On the other end of the spectrum, digital tools can also be helpful. The London team used meetup.com, for example, to create connections in the Maker Mile.

Other tools, such as tailored workshops, were used to gather input on the project. The Bilbao team hosted two workshops which started with the rather abstract idea of addressing gender issues in the area and developed this into a concrete public space project that could be realised with the help of local artists.

Finally, several teams also used tools to co-design, prototype and test ideas. The team from Politecnico di Milano was particularly successful at engaging a wide range of people from the local community. With the help of tools such as storyboards, role-playing and concept models, student teams co-designed possible interventions which were subsequently staged on La Piana square. This allowed the students to assess how well they had engaged residents and whether their temporary actions might work as permanent interventions.

Two conclusions can be drawn about the tools used in the experiments. First, they originate from a variety of design disciplines, including:

• interaction and experience design
• workshop design
• graphic design
• urban design and architecture
• product design
• service design

Second, most experiments used a combination of tools to achieve the intended outcomes. This requires skill in process design. The key to successful engagement is to design a strategic framework with suitable tools for each phase of the project.
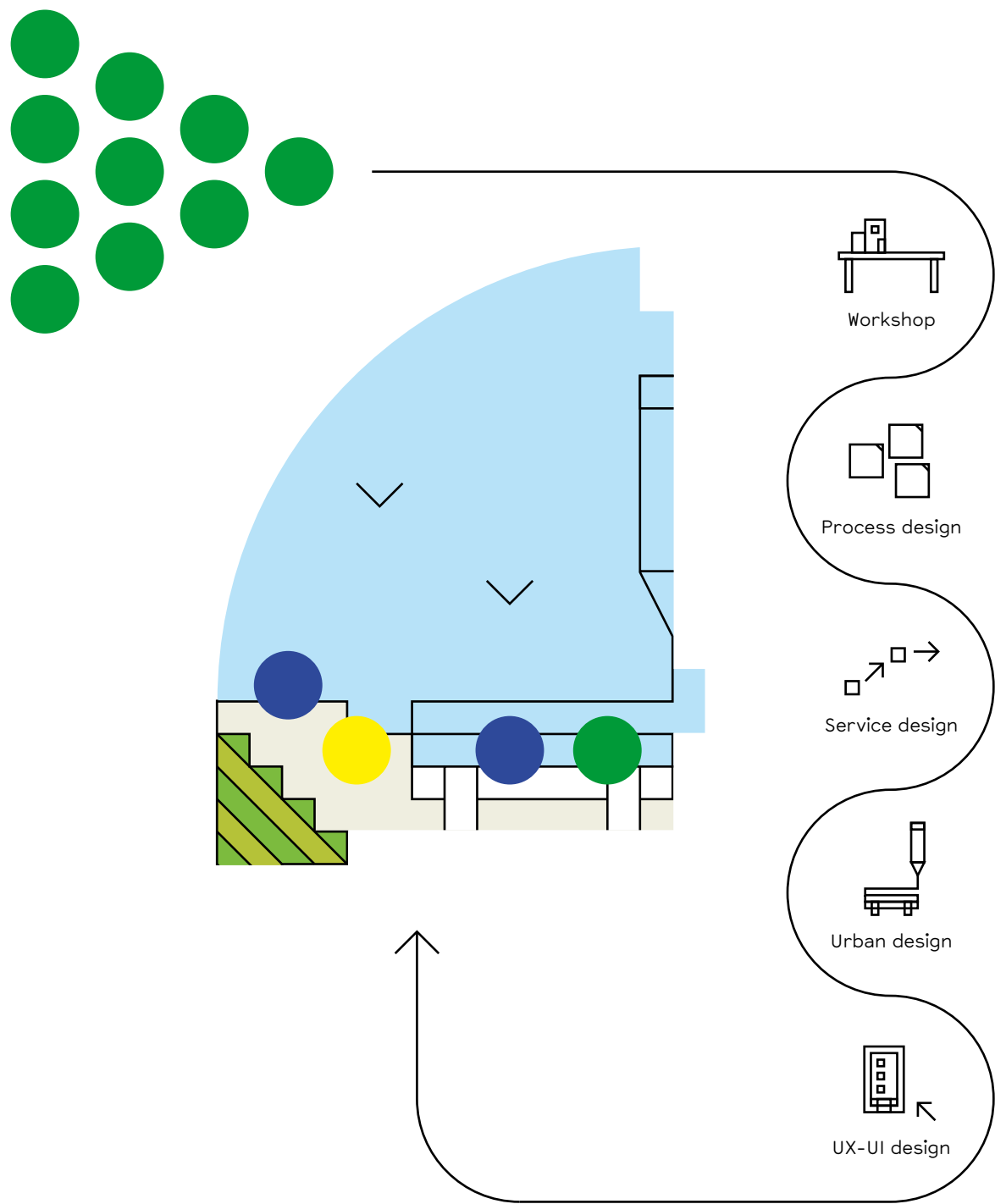
Sir John discovered many different customs and mores as he travelled around the world. In Cana, he met people who worshipped the first thing they saw in the morning. And in Tracota, he came across people who venerated a stone which had sixty colours. He also visited a land where the people were so good and pure that they never had bad weather.

We cannot claim to have been as good and pure as the people John Mandeville met, as is shown by the rain in Milan mentioned elsewhere in this book. But that said, the Human Cities project has had a strong focus on values. It has been built on thirteen shared values defined by the partners at the outset. These are: empathy, wellbeing, sustainability, intimacy, conviviality, mobility, accessibility, imagination, leisure, aesthetics, sensoriality, solidarity, and respect.

At the evaluation workshop conducted by Politecnico di Milano, we looked at how recognisable these values were in the experiments. Each project team wrote down the three values they considered most important in their own experiment and the three values they considered most important in the other experiments. The degree of overlap when comparing the results was striking. All the experiments had at least one value that was considered important both by the project team and by the other teams. The experiments in Bilbao, Graz, Helsinki, Ljubljana, London and Milan had two values in common. And the experiment in Belgrade had all three values (leisure, well-being and conviviality) in common. We do not believe that too many conclusions should be drawn from these findings, as the data set was rather small. But they do seem to indicate that the values one brings to a project shape its development and are recognisable (and hopefully appealing) to others.

So which were the most and least prominent values in the experiments? Based on how often they were mentioned by project teams and other teams, the most important value was conviviality, followed by sustainability, leisure, well-being and imagination. Conviviality was mentioned particularly in relation to the experiments in Belgrade, Saint-Étienne, Milan, Ljubljana, Tallinn and Graz. Interestingly, these were experiments with a strong focus on public space. This may indicate that re-imagining public space is a good way to create more conviviality and consequently more human cities.

The least mentioned values were intimacy, aesthetics and sensoriality. This allows for two different interpretations. Either the project teams didn't consider these values important and therefore didn't integrate them into the experiments – or the project teams did consider them important but didn't know how to integrate them. If the latter is the case, we will need to be more imaginative and creative in future to make sure that these values also play a role in making cities more human.

Lessons for creative people

Share tools for co-designing and prototyping solutions in compliance with regulations

Workshop

Process design

Service design

Urban design

UX-UI design

Sir John faced many dangers during his travels, but none was as terrifying as crossing the Valley of Devils near the River Phison. Sir John entered the valley with thirteen companions and was immediately assailed by devils flying around "with great thunders and lightnings." When he and his companions came out of the valley, there were only nine men left.

The Human Cities journey has also been difficult at times, though fortunately we haven't lost any partners. Everyone without exception encountered challenges in the course of their experiment. The main ones were as follows:

1.   Maximising participation

Several project teams struggled to engage the wider public or specific target groups. In London, for example, the Maker Mile team successfully engaged many different groups, but wasn't able to involve local residents as much as hoped. In Brussels, the Pool is Cool team easily reached certain demographics via social media, but had difficulty reaching out to other groups.

2.   Pursuing a long-term strategy

Not having a long-term strategy was another challenge. The Milan team regretted not having a clear plan to move from temporary solutions to permanent interventions. Similarly, the Graz team felt that some of their initial actions lacked a follow-up, although in the case of the bench project everything eventually worked out well thanks to the involvement of project partners.

3.   Engaging local authorities and decision makers

Finally, some of the project teams struggled to engage local authorities and decision makers in a meaningful way. The Graz team spent a long time trying to contact the local authorities about their experiment, but in vain. Similarly, the Ljubljana team found that the city's central authorities were reluctant to recognise the value of their experiment, let alone provide financial or organisational support. These on-the-ground experiences are in line with the findings of the study conducted by UIRS and Saxion University, mentioned previously. It showed that lack of institutional support and the need to "dance" with the bureaucratic system are among the most demotivating factors for initiators of bottom-up initiatives. The message to politicians and public officials is clear: be open to citizen initiatives and be willing to collaborate.

Sir John's journey wasn't only filled with danger and hardship; there were also occasions of great joy. Perhaps Sir John's happiest moment was discovering the Well of Youth near the city of Polumbum. He drank of it three times and as he reports, he has felt better and healthier ever since and will probably do so for the rest of his life.

Human Cities has also had many happy moments and many successes to celebrate, ranging from a brand new playground in Kragujevac to a popular distributed school in Helsinki. The evaluation of the experiments showed that there were a number of common factors that led to success:

1.   Addressing something that matters to people

Choosing a relevant theme for a project is key to creating impact. For example, after initially focusing their experiment on the city's main shopping street, the Cieszyn team discovered that the bus station was a more important issue for people. The team decided to scrap their original plans and adapt their experiment accordingly. This helped get the general public and local authorities interested in the experiment and also allowed the team to broaden the scope. Rather than only looking into the location of the bus stop, the experiment became an ongoing exploration to reinvent the place and prototype new ideas.

2.   Building on local resources

It might be a vibrant artistic scene, a close-knit community, or a network of attractive public spaces – but in any case, every area has assets which can form the foundation of a project. They may be tangible or intangible, easy to spot or hard to identify, but every neighbourhood has something that is special. In London, for example, the project team realised that a particular part of the city had a long history of fabrication as well as a dynamic high-tech making scene. The idea of the Maker Mile was born, and it proved to be effective precisely because it didn't originate from a creative brainwave but was rooted in the local context.

3.   Making engagement creative and fun

As mentioned in the study conducted by UIRS and Saxion University, having fun is one of the most important motivations for people to take part in local initiatives. Many of the Human Cities experiments were very successful at providing participants with a memorable and enjoyable experience. The experiment in Graz provides a particularly good example of this. The mobile throne that passed through Jakomini Street was an original and entertaining intervention, and using street theatre to communicate the results of a survey made for an excellent alternative to the usual dusty report.

4.   Thinking out of the box

Many of the experiments focused on bringing people together, based on the idea that human cities should facilitate interaction. But there is always scope for unexpected approaches. The team in Tallinn, for instance, based their experiment on the human need

# Support experimentation through policies and finance

Workshop

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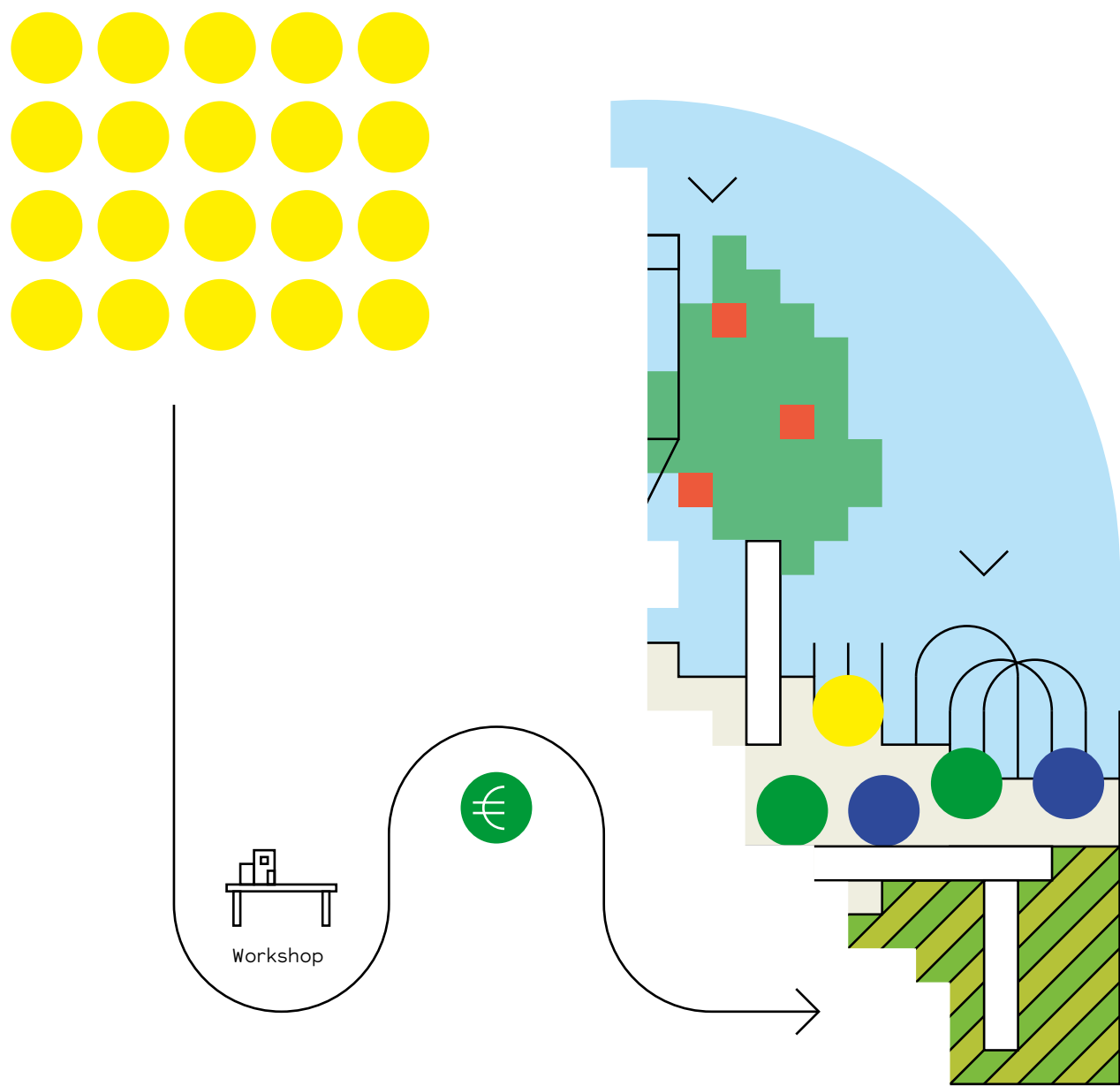
to get away from the bustle of the city and find a way to decelerate and relax. It is undoubtedly true that cities need more opportunities for people to do things together–but similarly, they also need more solutions like the Hälo pod.

In the year 1356, after "many honourable journeys and many honourable deeds of arms with worthy men", Sir John finally decided to return home. He wrote a book about his travels and passing through Rome on his way back to England, he showed it to the Pope and his council. They examined it and swiftly declared that everything in it was true.

We probably have a different opinion of the veracity of John Mandeville's book. In fact, we might even have doubts about the man himself. There is no historical evidence that there was a knight called John Mandeville, that he came from England, and that he ever travelled at all. Yet amidst the uncertainty, there are some things we do know. The Travels of Sir John Mandeville became one of the most widely read travel memoirs of the Middle Ages. And a little over a century later, it would be a profound inspiration for a more famous traveller who dreamt of sailing to the Indies...

Our Human Cities journey has also come to an end–at least for now. We can't claim that it has been as epic and heroic as Sir John's. But in our defence, it has at least been real. As we can see from John Mandeville's story, journeys often have the virtue of inspiring other journeys. And just as Mandeville inspired Columbus, so we hope that in a small and modest way, Human Cities may encourage others to embark on a journey. Not to look for valleys and wells on the other side of the world, but to discover possibilities and opportunities in our neighbourhoods and cities.
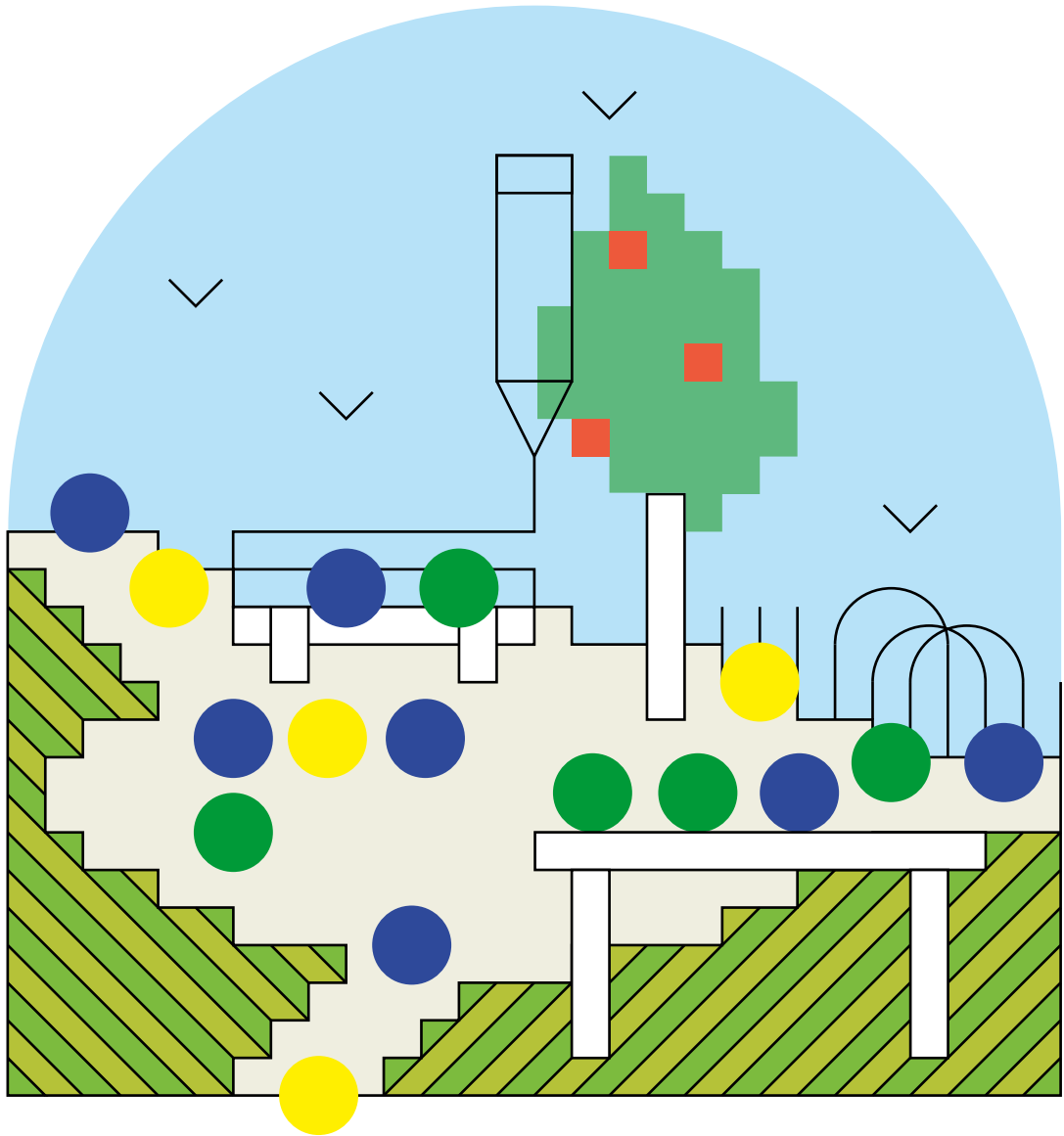
Afterword

By Josyane Franc and Olivier Peyricot

Co-funded by the European Commission's Creative Europe programme, Human Cities has in the past four years challenged the city scale with passion, determination and tenacity. It has been an exceptional learning opportunity for all partners involved in this international, intercultural and interdisciplinary network. We have learned about bottom-up initiatives across Europe through our state-of-the-art research. And we have learned from each other through the experiments. It has made us question our own cities. Are there transition spaces that can be transformed into places where people like to stay and meet, as the team in Graz did for Jakomini Street, and the team in Bilbao for the San Francisco neighbourhood? Does our city have empty squares that can be made into lively social spaces through culture and gamification, as in Milan and Ljubljana? Which neighbourhoods could we transform by creating new services, by working with makers and implementing ideas based on the circular economy, following the examples of London and Saint-Étienne?

We have seen the value of experimentation as a tool. Experimentation is safe, it is reversible and can be reoriented. Failure is acceptable and leads each time to learning. It provides an opportunity for people to live through an exceptional situation they created themselves, and see what can be gained, for themselves and for others. Sharing its success enriches the community and invites further dialogue, leading to further projects.

The value of experimentation, and more broadly of bottom-up initiatives, lies also in its capacity to question. That makes it a tool fit for the current age of postmodern societies that have no place for dogmas. Perhaps most importantly, it questions the politics of the city, for instance by reclaiming public space, or focusing on tackling issues that fall within the institutional or political sphere. It allows citizens to become involved in political actions, and to put into practice, as individuals or communities, their beliefs and aspirations.

However, this occupation of the political sphere by bottom-up initiatives comes with risks. As gaps left by the withdrawal of public services are filled by such bottom-up initiatives responding to the loss of commons, these newly occupied spaces may simply be monopolised by the wealthy and well-educated, to the detriment of those already left out, such as the poor, illegal migrants and the disabled. Therefore, the engagement in bottom-up initiatives of all stakeholders is a necessity to mitigate this risk of monopolisation. Within this multi-stakeholder context, design becomes a political action and loses its autonomy. As Anya Sirota so powerfully shows with examples from Detroit, design on its own is never a palliative treatment for places of dereliction, nor a replacement for political debate and public action. Nor, even if much can be achieved on a shoe-string budget, is it a solution for a lack of finance. What it can do however, is demonstrate that a better future is possible for everyone.

When many people get involved in a neighbourhood, it is evident that bottom-up initiatives have a more positive impact than extensive physical regeneration. With little time, money and personal investment, we can achieve positive change at the level of the neighbourhood. This begs the question whether bottom-up initiatives can also provide solutions for the bigger challenges our cities and societies face. For example, can they be a solution for global warming, or secure solidarity in times of economic de-growth? If we believe they can, how can they? Is it key that we scale up successful initiatives? Or should we aim to replicate successful initiatives widely whilst retaining their small scale?

John Thackara's chapter, with its argument to see the city as a local living economy, provides a compelling framework for thinking about these questions. The commons is a concept we can all root for and indeed, civil society seems to be experiencing a turning point. Many citizens have left their passivity behind and have decided to act. But leaving the protection of the commons solely to citizens and bottom-up initiatives provokes other questions. Bottom-up initiatives are clearly filling the gaps left by deficiencies in public policies, but should they? What validates them? Is it their success or their replicability? And who validates them? Public authorities or other citizens?

These are questions that make clear that citizens can't be the sole driving forces. Large-scale projects aimed at tackling major societal issues can only be initiated by public authorities. They should be led by people chosen in democratic elections. Moreover, public authorities have the responsibility to finance the common good. But this doesn't mean that citizens should be excluded from these larger projects, or that they form the only solution. As we have demonstrated with Human Cities_Challenging the City Scale, local networks and initiatives relying on design approaches are equally essential in tackling these major societal issues. Indeed, the solution to many of these challenges, such as global warming, lies in our cities.

In our view, policy and decision makers, from the European to the local level, could do a better job of understanding this. It is their role to provide a framework for meaningful dialogue and actions. And it needs to be done for issues on all scales, from the built environment, and urban social or cultural issues, to larger societal challenges. The next stage of Human Cities will therefore be about developing these necessary structures for action further. This will include the design of new decision-making bodies and processes, but also the reinforcing of networks and knowledge-sharing, as well as the re-activating of the commons beyond our neighbourhoods. As such, Human Cities will continue to imagine the future, bound by our practices and our common destiny.

Acknowledgements

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John Thackara

John Thackara is a philosopher, advisor and writer. His twelfth and most recent book is *How To Thrive In the Next Economy: Designing Tomorrow's World Today*. John curated the celebrated Doors of Perception conference for 20 years, first in Amsterdam, and later in cities throughout India. He was the first director of the Netherlands Design Institute, and has helped establish other research institutes in Italy, India, Japan, Hong Kong, and the UK. Thackara was commissioner of the social innovation biennial, *Dott 07*, in England, and the ecological city biennial, City *Eco Lab*, in Saint-Étienne, France. At the Royal College of Art he was formerly Director of Research, and is now a Senior Fellow.

Alice Holmberg

Alice Holmberg is a global entrepreneur, curious change-maker, energetic educator and experienced facilitator. She has specialised in cultural identity and driving cultural change in the fields of circular economy, co-creation, social innovation and design strategy in both the public and private sector. Alice has founded and runs the design bureau *That Something* in partnership with Michael Brinch.

Born and bred in Denmark, over the past decades Alice has worked across Europe and lived in Germany, Bangladesh, Greece and the UK, where she also teaches at Central St. Martins, University of the Arts London. She is a fellow of the British Royal Society of the Arts and has been awarded membership of the German National Academic Foundation. Alice is co-creation expert for Human Cities.

Côme Bastin & Fleur Weinberg

After studying philosophy, sociology and information, Côme Bastin started to work as a journalist both for web and print media focused on urban (StreetPress) and environmental (We Demain) issues. He was a weekly chronicler for Radio Nova and now works with the Socialter magazine, writing on social, green and technological innovations. He is editor-in-chief for the ConsoCollaborative.com web platform and writes contributions to studies and books for research institutions like Cité du Design. Apart from his work in France, Côme also reports on citizen innovation in India.

After studying political science and sociology Fleur Weinberg worked on editorial advice and writing for several start-ups. She now works as an independent journalist, writing for Vice, Socialter and various other web-based media platforms. Recently, she co-authored a book on global health innovators for the NGO Ashoka. Fleur also works as an illustrator and invests in associations for digital education.

Anya Sirota

Anya Sirota is an architectural designer, researcher and educator. As principal of the Detroit-based studio Akoaki, she works at the intersection of architecture and urban design. Her collaborative projects, created through a distinct synthesis of aesthetics, social enterprise, and cultural programming, have established a reputation for innovation in the urban realm. Ranging in scale from scenographic interventions to experimental building typologies and neighbourhood plans, Akoaki's explorations have contributed to numerous international exhibitions and publications. Sirota received her Master of Architecture degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and a Bachelor of Arts in Modern Culture and Media from Brown University. She is currently on faculty at the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, where she teaches design and directs the Michigan Architecture Preparatory program. Anya is the recipient of numerous awards including, most recently, the Architectural League Prize (2018).

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