



## COME2ART

*Introducing a collaborative scheme between artists & community members fostering life skills development and resilience through creative placemaking*

**Primary desk research to identify the basic notions and aspects for the programs' implementation.**

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## Introduction

The following text consists the first part of the research activities which have to be implemented as the main task of the first Intellectual Output of the COME2ART program. COME2ART is funded by 'Erasmus+ and led by ActionAid Hellas. Beside AAH the other program's partners are *IoDeposit* and *Melting Pro* from Italy, *Clube Intercultural Europeu* from Portugal, *Culture Action Europe* from Belgium, *Creativity Platform* and *Aristotle University of Thessaloniki* from Greece. According to COME2ART a series of artistic actions will take place in Greece, Italy and Portugal. In each country, in Thessaloniki, Treviso and Lisbon respectively, approximately 5 artists and cultural workers who are in limbo due to the COVID-19 pandemic will work together with 25 community members in order to create various mini artistic projects in public space. According to the program, the community members should preferably be women or belong to underrepresented social groups such as ethnic and cultural minorities. Local community centers active in the fields of civic participation and social inclusion should also be engaged.

A few questions arise: who would be the artists and what is their artistic background, who could be the social groups and the communities from where the community members would be selected, what would be the criteria for the selection of the participants, where would the spaces and places be located for the events and artworks, and last but not least what the artworks could possibly be; the themes, the topics, the materials and the aesthetics, just to name but few of the aspects to consider. Within this given framework, this text aims to function as an introduction to the project's requirements, to the various theoretical aspects, while in the same time it will combine empirical insights from existing examples, participatory experience from relevant collective projects and artworks in public space, as well as from the educational experience earned from supervising student projects concerning art in public space in the School of Fine Arts. Thus, it should not only provide theoretical background and information on projects, but mostly to provide the COME2ART program participants with an atmosphere of creating within its framework and eventually pointing out the potential actions and possibilities of *activating* space: acting in space and creating places through collaboration in arts, providing this way the *praxis* context for building life skills development. The results, in return, shall train the artists and the community members, and provide a fertile ground contributing this way to build resilient relations and communities.

In the following pages some central notions for the COME2ART projects, such as *Public space*, *Space and place*, and *Art in public space* will be discussed further on. Since the text is primarily referring to the artists and the community members who will take part in the project its style and vocabulary is by choice relatively simple. That said,



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strict Academic style and vocabulary is avoided, however this does not mean that scientific discourse is undermined. On the contrary, works by respected theoreticians are cited and combined together with first hand observations. The latter are based on the method of empirical *reflection* which suggests the composition of theory and practice in one. Such *synthesis* makes the *praxis*, whatever the field of application is, be it artistic works, education, medicine, science, sports and so on. It is the rethinking of the practice which is applied to the evolution of theory, and vice versa, it is the theories that apply to the practice on a perpetual feed-back.

Additionally, the present text aims to underline the various problems and obstacles that may appear during the process, as well as to suggest methodologies about dealing with ongoing participatory projects, teamwork and collective operating, while keeping in mind that the initial concept is about synergies of various people of different expertise and social backgrounds as well. Accordingly, the text follows the proposal's requirements and in multiple ways serve as an advisory curriculum for COME2ART, while in the same time it should be stimulating for the participants, and also leave open space for creativity beyond its pages. Finally, the text concludes answering back to its starting point and the Program's initial title explaining in detail how creative placemaking supports and benefits life skills development and community resilience. Beyond this text, as an integral part of the desk research and a helpful tool for the process of the COME2ART project implementation, questionnaires will be shared to the participant artists in order to learn from them and include their insight to the project and the final artworks too.

## 2. The impact of COVID-19 on arts and culture

One does not have to search much to realise the impact the pandemic and the lockdowns already had on any aspect of everyday life. At this moment (November 2021) it seems that the pandemic is far from being over and new lockdowns are always possible in every corner of the world. So far it has affected negatively all possible sectors, of course including the arts and culture too. Countless individuals lost their jobs, while so many others still remain in limbo either unemployed either by leaving any of their artistic works aside. Already in 2020, Culture Action Europe had estimated that 7.3 million jobs will be affected by COVID-19 within the cultural and creative sector at EU level. Artists and cultural workers are more likely to work part-time, not to have an open-ended contract, and to combine employment and self-employment in several countries throughout their careers, and in other sectors (services, education, etc). Self-employment is higher in the cultural and creative sectors (33%) than in employment for the total economy (14%). In 2020, the cultural sector lost approximately €200 billion



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in revenues. However, the economic impact of halting production will only be evident from 2021.<sup>1</sup>

It is common place that arts and culture benefit community resilience and society at large. They fulfill essential needs for wellbeing in terms of collective and individual education and entertainment, as well as they conduce to the quality of life through artworks in public space. In the same time, the experience of space has changed radically during and after the lock downs, and activities in public space have generally slowed down. Sadly, while everybody had wished for an end to the pandemic it is more likely that we cannot yet talk about a post-COVID era yet. The birth of new Coronavirus variants and the subsequent occurring lockdowns put the people's health and the everyday experience in danger, and times become even more challenging for the stability and the progression of social life. In this context, new needs and challenges have been generated and the arts and creative placemaking are of the factors to contribute positively in this direction, while it is as urgent as ever to invent new ways to reactivate space, the arts and the creatives.

### 3.1 Life skills development

Life skills are described in a multiplicity of ways. As defined by the World Health Organization in 1997, some of the basic life skills are *Decision making, Problem solving, Creative thinking, Critical thinking, Effective communication, Interpersonal relationship skills, Self-awareness, Empathy, Coping with emotions and Coping with stress.*<sup>2</sup> Another WHO description from 1999, adds *Assertiveness, Equanimity and Resilience.*<sup>3</sup> Further on, the text from 1997 explains that 'The life skills described above are dealt with here in so far as they can be taught to young people as abilities that they can acquire through learning and practice. For example, problem solving, as a skill, can be described as a series of steps to go through, such as: 1) define the problem; 2) think of all the different kinds of solutions to the problem; 3) weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of each; 4) chose the most appropriate solution and plan how to realise it. Examples of lessons designed to facilitate life skills acquisition are included in the appendix to this document'. Accordingly, life skills are the skills that apply to real life experience, to real life aspect, problems and needs'. In many cases there can be a theoretical approach in teaching and learning life skills, however *learning by doing*, learning in practice through occurring processes is the most effective way in developing one's life skills. UNICEF has defined life skills 'as psychosocial and interpersonal skills that are generally considered important. The choice of, and

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<sup>1</sup> Dâmaso, Mafalda, Tere Badia, Gabriele Rosana, Kornelia Kiss, Sebastiano Bertagni, and Maya Weisinger. 2021. *The situation of artists and cultural workers and the post-COVID-19 cultural recovery in the European Union: background analysis.*

[https://op.europa.eu/publication/manifestation identifier/PUB\\_QA0221325ENN](https://op.europa.eu/publication/manifestation identifier/PUB_QA0221325ENN)

<sup>2</sup> *Life skills education for children and adolescents in schools introduction and guidelines to facilitate the development and implementation of life skills programmes.* 1997. Geneva: Programme on Mental Health, World Health Organization.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/media/en/30.pdf](https://www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/30.pdf)





emphasis on, different skills will vary according to the topic<sup>4</sup>. The actual practice and the instant reflection on the *content* and the *nature* of each subject/topic to handle becomes itself the *training* for further development through *experiencing*. Similar viewpoint is shared by Madhu Singh in his text *Understanding life skills*, featured in the UNESCO website<sup>5</sup>, when mentioning practical but also *reflective skills* as well: 'It is evident that in addition to practical and vocational skills, other types of skills such as social, individual and reflective skills are also needed', she writes,<sup>6</sup> and also quotes Ouane and Goody: 'It is not enough to ask how life skills are defined in general; rather it is essential to ask how they are defined in particular life situations and through out life'.<sup>7</sup>

A similar description adds 'they are basic skills acquired through learning and/or direct life experience that enable individuals and groups to effectively handle issues and problems commonly encountered in daily life.'<sup>8</sup> Life skills 'include creativity, critical thinking (...) the ability to communicate and collaborate, along with personal and social responsibility that contribute to good citizenship – all essential skills for success in the 21st century, both for healthy societies and for successful and employable individuals. It is reasonable to suggest that the development of personal life skills, consequently effects community since they are applied to it. The arts and culture, as well as acting in public space (thus taking in consideration the complex matters of public life) are critical fields in the development of life skills, in the sense -but not limited to that- described above.

### 3.2 Public space, Space and place

Public space has been quite a central term in countless academic discourses, the main notion in various art practices and numerous related artworks. However, it is still difficult to remain to a single certain definition since the various approaches differ. It is also quite usual that public space is often referred as opposite to private space, nonetheless this binary is also under question. Although it is true that so many traditionally open public spaces face the threat of privatization and often become privatized, in many other cases there are hybrid private-public spaces. Some historically defined examples of open public spaces are the city squares and plazas,

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/azerbaijan/media/1541/file/basic%20life%20skills.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000146963>

<sup>6</sup> Madhu Singh. 2003. *Understanding life skills*, Paper commissioned for the EFA Global

Monitoring Report 2003/4, The Leap to Equality

<sup>7</sup> Goody, J. (2001) Competencies and Education: Contextual Diversity. In: Rychen, D.S, Salganik L.H. (eds.) (2001) *Defining and Selecting Key Competencies*, Göttingen, Hogrefe and Huber Publications, and Ouane, A (2002) *Key competencies In Lifelong Learning. Institutionalising lifelong learning: Creating Conducive Environments for Adult Learning in the Asian Context*, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.britishcouncil.gr/en/life-skills/about/what-are-life-skills>







the parks, and the pedestrian sidewalks. Shores, forests and mountains are also considered freely accessed public spaces where no State or private interventions are allowed, at least according to the constitutions of many countries such as Greece (and despite the various interventions that occasionally take place). On the other hand, places such as museums, stadiums, theaters, restaurants or cafes might be privately owned but at the same time they are *public*, meaning that people are present and presented to others *in public* and whatever they do there is acted publicly; in public view; in front of other people. Such places are private-public places; privately owned public spaces that differ to other public places and spaces in terms of ownership and free (and/or controlled) access. Another remarkable case are the building facades; the buildings' exterior walls are either privately owned or they belong to the State (for example a Courthouse wall or a city hall wall), however they are in public view, thus the vertical surfaces of the buildings can also be considered public space even though they are private (or State) property. So, in its most pure form, squares, parks and sidewalks are freely accessible public spaces, while other spaces are private but still in many respects they are public at the same time; they are both *private public spaces*. Instead of the private-public binary, Dimitris Kotsakis, former professor at School of Architecture in Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, suggests that the proper dialectics should be *personal space – public space* (based on the historical division *home-city*), and *private space – state space* (based on the property owners)<sup>9</sup>. He also speaks about the *Common space* which is the intersection of *public* and *private space*, while Stavros Stavrides, professor of Architecture at National and Technical University of Athens explains that Common space is a set of spatial relations produced by commoning practices; practices of sharing either between a community of commoners either in the form of an open network of passages through which emerging and always-open communities of commoners communicate and exchange goods and ideas opening the circles to include newcomers<sup>10</sup>.

Nevertheless, it is quite typical for artists, theoreticians, students and so on to wonder about the differences between space and place. Space is seemingly more general and in many aspects is abstract, while a place is more specific. French philosopher Michel De Certeau with his book *The practice of everyday life* was among the first ones to elaborate on the difference between the two notions.<sup>11</sup> Already, the title's word *Practice* in his book indicates the spatial practices that are possible within a city or any other space. He writes on the 'experience of space', meaning here the ways we as humans live, use and ultimately experience space. Chinese-american human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan elaborates on the *experiential perspective* in his book *Space and place, the*

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<sup>9</sup> Kotsakis, Dimitris. 2012. *3 plus 1 essays*. Athens: Ekdoseis ton synadelfon

<sup>10</sup> Stavrides, Stavros. 2016. *Common space: the city as commons*. London: Zed Books

<sup>11</sup> Certeau, Michel de. 1984. *The Practice of everyday life*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press





*perspective of experience*<sup>12</sup>. Again, comes Dimitris Kotsakis' insight who suggests that a *place* (in Greek: the *topos*) is the *experienced space*, a space experienced by *persons* either individually either collectively. The latter part answers to questions about *who* is experiencing space, whether that would be a single person, a group of people or any collective subject, as well as introduces matters of collective memory.

What becomes even more clear, is that the experience of space suggests a series of events in space; a vast range of *spatial practices* that contribute to our experience and eventually constitute the characteristics and the elements that define the places, and thus turn the *spaces* into *places*. According to Henri Lefebvre, physical space is not a vessel which includes the social space. On the contrary, the social space is the one that includes and constructs the physical space, and it is there where all the *spatial practices* happen and reconstruct the physical space and reshapes its social characteristics. The description of such *mechanisms* leads us back again to art in public space practices and to what is described as placemaking -which is what will be explained in the next pages. Additionally, it is worthy to remark that we do not say 'art in public *place*' but instead it is common to say 'art in public *space*', which consequently (the artwork) *makes a place*.

### 3.3.i Art in public space.

Investigating art in public space connects to the everyday city experience and eventually indicates the possibilities of acting in the framework of COME2ART. Creating art in public space is as complex and variable as the countless other spatial practices. Accordingly, it also involves a wide array of spatial practices not just limited to a specific type of acts, styles and techniques; it varies from traditional sculpture to contemporary art installations, from the simplest form of adolescent graffiti to the most elaborate tags, from graffiti 'bombing' and 'street art' stickers, posters and stencils to the graffiti productions in authorised 'hall of fames', from trompe l'oeil to enormous scale murals on the sides of tall buildings. It can also include video art, projections, light art, various digital media and interactive applications and of course, projects that can involve collective and/or civic participation processes. However, art in public space is in no way limited to the fine arts or to any strictly visual works. Street musicians are a typical example of how music can be also included in the family of art in the streets. The same can be said for any kind of performances; from juggling to street theater plays, from dancing break dance to tango, from conceptual acts to reading poetry in public, and countless actions an artist can imagine. To a certain extent, the same stands for activities such as skateboarding or parkour.

According to the actions just described, if on one hand there are the fine arts and any visual interventions and installations, then on the other there are the performative interventions. The two categories could be also differentiated by the fact that the former

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<sup>12</sup> Tuan, Yi-fu. 1977. *Space and place: the perspective of experience*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.





usually leaves a visible trace in public space, while the latter usually doesn't. But still, there are various types of *events* that combine all of them, for example a live concert, a festival or even a party which includes both the visual, the musical and the scenographic elements; images, sound, motion, and most importantly, the essential participation of the audience; as viewers, listeners, dancers, artists and after all, active participants that contribute to the creation of the artworks, to the atmosphere and to the *vibe* as a whole, too. In other works, a whole multifaceted event can be understood as a piece of art -even though many arts and actions are incorporated. In any case, the location itself and the way it is treated for the purposes of an artwork or event are crucial. Commenting on artful approaches and considerations, one could speak about the art of *event making*, the art of *curating*, or to return to our own project's title, the *art of placemaking*. Anyhow, regarding the aforementioned descriptions it is fair to state that *art in public space* is not really a genre nor a specific art movement but it is primarily defined by the mere fact that it occurs in public space. Thus, it can potentially include all possible types of acts or art practices, plus the *art* of handling space itself which anyway (space) is the essential element of these artworks; the host and the ground for them to take place.

### 3.3.ii Examining examples of spaces, places and interventions

Following the themes discussed above, a detailed examination of various artworks, events and actions is suggested before the artworks' preparations, as an integral part of the overall projects. Such case studies are always useful to our understanding of the sites and the artworks that can be placed and anything else could possibly happen there. Each one of the examined cases inevitably introduces a series of aspects, that in a multiplicity of ways incorporate mediums, strategies, ethics and aesthetics. They also introduce aspects of synergies and collectivities, the right to the city and the experience of space, and benefits to our understanding of each space and place's aspects. However, what one should keep in mind after all is that each space and place differ, and accordingly each artwork is examined in its special characteristics that are defined from the physical and social context of each place. Discussion between supervisors and the artists, as well as between the artists and the community members is further productive and crucial for the communication among them.

An indicative list of works could include a vast range of works, from the interventions Akay and Peter from Stockholm<sup>13</sup> to the installations and constructions of Brooklyn based artist Swoon<sup>14</sup>, from Krzysztof Wodiczko's projections to Jenny Holzer's appropriations of public infrastructure, from Gordon Matta-Clark to the City of Names

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<sup>13</sup> Barsky Brothers. 2006. *Urban recreation: Akay & Peter = Barsky Brothers*. Årsta, Sweden: Dokument Forlag

<sup>14</sup> Klanten, Robert, and Lukas Feireiss. 2009. *Space craft. more fleeting architecture and hideouts 2 2*. Berlin: Gestalten







collective installment in Berlin in 2003<sup>15</sup>, from ‘guerilla gardening’ practices to street parties, from local folk festivities to the events organized by IoDeposito<sup>16</sup> and Melting Pro Learning Societa Cooperativa<sup>17</sup>, from urban exploration to the art of mediating space in other artforms and platform, from outdoor music festivals to communally built playgrounds, from various gatherings and parades to the spontaneous events, artworks and performances during the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. Stavros Stavrides narrates and analyses the possibilities raised from similar examples where people of a neighborhood as well as people from other areas collectively rebuilt a whole park open to everybody, incorporating all arts from architecture to gardening, theater play and music. In his presentations he has also described how local festivals or even a dinner accompanied with music and dance in a public square can function to experience the city as a space of *commons*. In other examples, the element of play in artworks and activities is emphasized, as a quality and as a necessity, both for adolescent and adults.<sup>18</sup> Other cases help to understand whether murals can be either tools or signs of gentrification for an area, or whether they engage the community in possible manners.<sup>19</sup> Their sites could be benches or bus stops, parks or playgrounds, lakes or waterfronts, bunkers or tunnels, abandoned buildings and urban ruins, small squares or monumental sites, terraces or building facades, old boats or trains, potentially everywhere and everything.

Furthermore, there are various and different audiences each time in each place. Even though the works take place in specific areas, thus one of their main audiences are the local populations who might present a certain amount of cohesion, still the audience consists of various individuals of any possible age, gender, ethnicity, cultural and social background. However, in many cases, the events and artworks refer to communities and social groups with whom they correspond and interact and this is a fact consider before planning and while acting. Ultimately, highly important is the commentary on how the artists treat their subjects whether they deal with underrepresented minorities and social groups, and relevant examples have to be discussed as well.

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<sup>15</sup> Nabi, Adrian. 2007. *Backjumps - the live issue #3: urban communication and aesthetics*. Berlin: From Here to Fame Pub.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.bsidewar.org/en/bside-war-en/>, also see <https://www.iodeposito.org/en/projects/bside-war-vol-ii-program/inaugurazione-dellinstallazione-darte-sensoriale-insight-di-joshua-cesa-sound-di-alessio-sorato-e-lorena-cantarut/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://meltingpro.org/en/projects/invasioni-contemporanee/>

<sup>18</sup> Francis, Mark, Leanne G. Rivlin, Andrew M. Stone, and Stephen Carr. 1992. *Public space*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Pangalos, Orestis. 2020. ‘From mural interventions to gentrification. Dynamics, ethics and dialectics’, in Tsoukala, Kyriaki eds, *Space interweavings: ethos, spatial practices, architecture*. Conference proceedings, Thessaloniki: Epikentro





### 3.4 Audiences and factors involved

Considering the artworks and events there are various people and factors involved in the works' creation, as well as multiple audiences who experience them. Regarding who is responsible for the creation of the artworks we could trace two main categories, the ones who commission and the artists who execute the works. The former could be any local or State administration such as the Ministry of Culture, as well as foundations, institutions, or private companies and any other kind of sponsors. The works could vary in style, form, technique and scale. However, there is also a popular tendency of unauthorised works and events executed by artists in the tradition of street art, graffiti and other similar interventions, as well as acting freely in manners such as parties, concerts, performances and other collective acts. The latter cases differ compared to the commissioned ones in terms of appropriation of space and usually in scale too, due to the fact that they are self-funded, low budget, and also non legal risking a series of consequences. According to the aforementioned, a main division should be found between the institutional works and the ones done in a DIY manner by independent artists/citizens or collectives.

In the latter case, matters of legality and thus law-suit consequences, as well as results that affect the livability and duration of the works should be expected too. To many it might seem that there is no in-between alternative, however, that would be possible after negotiations, collaborations and synergies between independent artists or art groups, local administrations, people and collectives who belong to the communities involved, other local actors such as Schools, Universities or NGOs. That could possibly function as a bottom-up perspective and involve artists and people that are usually excluded from large scale and highly funded projects, either State funded, or funded big institutions, or they have a commercial character -funded from advertised companies. That said, there is still the possibility of creating works, events and projects that are closer to the community needs, with expression that is relevant to the places (neighborhoods, areas, local cultures and histories), by artists and people who are close to the local cultures, communities and populations.

As for the audiences, first it is the people who will take part; artists, community members, teachers and trainers, any of the NGO members that are involved in the project. An *audience* might mostly refer not to the ones who one way or another, participate in the creation of it, but still, they also experience the artworks as *viewers* too, and after all they will take part in the *placemaking* and further develop their life skills as well. Also, putting themselves a priori in the position of the audience is a tactic that will potentially benefit their perception of the artwork in progress, their experience, and the artwork itself as final result.

Then, and of equally importance, it is the people from the neighborhood, the pedestrians who pass by, the people who drive by car and other vehicles or the passengers of public transportation. In another case, there are the locals or any people who will pass by while the works are in the making. This occasion is of particular



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interest because the audience interferes with the artists expressing opinions who often are very intriguing. The artists can have a first-hand account of what the audience thinks when seeing the process or hearing their ideas. People may ask what it is all about or make commentaries about how they perceive the works that can be quite surprising and unimaginable beforehand. Sometimes they will also bring their own ideas which could also be somehow taken in account and even be creatively incorporated. In any case the mere dialogues can be proven very interesting and useful for both sides, while at the same time they contribute to the *placemaking* itself through the experienced space and time. Such a process can definitely benefit in the developing of life skills to all of the persons involved. On a next phase after the implementation of the works, then there are the receptions by the public, either the works were understood or not. If the project includes an event, thus a gathering too, then the whole experience will be collective in another level, since the human presence, the collective experience and social interaction are incorporated too.

But also, on an even larger scale the works refer to the people from the broader area, who are also the ones that are in one way or another impacted by the works; they are the people coming from the nearby neighborhoods and their communities. With similar actions in various ways they feel represented to other areas, communities, or even to other social groups -especially in the case that the artworks' sites involve underrepresented groups and minorities. Finally, another audience differs from the ones that will experience the works and the events in person; they are the ones who will first see the documentations through the various posts and articles in the media and maybe only later will see the artworks on site. Subsequently, the wider audience is potentially as vast as it can be. Anyhow, the projects will be at least mediated amongst the participant organisations in their own networks and communities in Greece, Italy and Portugal, only to start with. Nevertheless, such processes involve a series of factors and subjects, and multiple overlapping audiences. Their events, incidents, narratives and even traditions that affect both collective memory and experience, thus contributing to what we can consider placemaking and subsequently benefit the development of life skills and community resilience.

### 3.5 Creative placemaking

Placemaking as a notion could on one hand be based on what has been synopsised above, through the approach of *experienced space* that makes *the places*. Following this theoretical basis any action or *spatial practice* creates places, experienced and conceived individually or collectively, either if they differ for each person or group of people, and eventually contribute variably to personal and collective memories. Additionally, *creative* refers to the arts and culture, and what has been called the *creative sector*. Of course, in a sense all activities are *creative* since they produce meanings, objects and situations, or reproduce relations and so on; but the emphasis here is upon the arts, culture, and all relevant interventions that positively affect our wellbeing and everyday life. When it comes to the *arts and culture* special qualities are indicated, of the ones that support the citizens essential aesthetic and spiritual needs, and usually are evident in the physical environment too.



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On the other hand, the term *placemaking* is rooted in the 60s and the works of iconic personalities such as Jane Jacobs, and became relatively common only in the recent decades and *creative placemaking* became widely spread only in the past ten years. Later on, according to Jeroen Laven, Anna Bradley and Levente Polyak it was the Project for Public Spaces, a non-profit organisation based in New York committed to supporting public places that build communities, who begun consistently using the term since the mid-1990s, to describe their approach towards *building community around place*.<sup>20</sup> According to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), it was them who reinvented and made the term: 'In 2009, the NEA decided to focus on the role of arts organizations, artists, and designers in making better places and decided to call it 'creative placemaking'. It's a term that basically means giving the arts a seat at the community development table. In other words, when you are focusing on a new real estate development, transit opportunities, safety issues, public health crises, or other issues that impact how a place affects a resident's life, the arts should be one of the tools you consider using'<sup>21</sup>. Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa state that 'what in Europe is usually referred to as 'revitalization' of urban spaces, in the U.S. has been denoted as 'creative placemaking',<sup>22</sup> and Wilfried Eckstein adds that it is what nowadays tends to be reframed as 'arts in urban resilience', nevertheless *placemaking* remains the most common of all terms. As for the role of arts, Eckstein also comments that *creative placemaking* denotes artistic efforts to revitalize urban areas.

What has to be understood when it comes to *placemaking*, is that any person's or any group's, and any type or any scale activity is *making place* –it is *placemaking*, especially when talking on neighborhood and community levels. COME2ART proposal is clear that the desired processes would lead to achieve the synergies and the bridging between various persons, groups and factors, and it is not a high authority's plan; smaller in size, neighborhood and community level interventions that resemble to bottom-up processes rather than a masterplan proposal that excludes the people who will finally be the ones to experience the outcomes firsthand. In a similar fashion comes Nabeel Hamdi in the prologue of his book *Placemaker's guide to building Community*, who explains that he has 'preferred to use placemaker in his title (rather than architects, planners or experts) because it is inclusive of all who make and sustain the quality of human settlements, including principally the people and communities who are the inhabitants. The intelligence of place, I continue to maintain, is in the

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<sup>20</sup> Laven, Jeroen, Anna Louise Bradley, and Levente Polyak. 2019. "Placemaking in the European context. The movement is here to stay". *The Journal of Public Space*. 4 (Vol. 4 N. 1 | 2019 | FULL ISSUE): 135-154

<sup>21</sup> Schupbach, Jason, and Don Ball. 2016. *How to do creative placemaking: an action-oriented guide to arts in community development*.

<sup>22</sup> Schupbach, Jason, and Don Ball. 2016.





streets of places everywhere, not in the planning offices of bureaucracy'.<sup>23</sup> Landscape architect Lynda H. Schneekloth and architect and planner Robert G. Shibley state that 'placemaking is the way in which all human beings transform the places they find themselves into the places where they live'.<sup>24</sup> With these words they emphasise on the importance and the necessity of active citizen participation in the making of their environment, even though in their book they actually examine the 'true democratic collaborations of empowered communities with planning and architecture professionals'. In the MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning research *Places in the Making: How placemaking builds places and communities* the authors come back to the first sentences of this text's chapter when quoting: 'Placemaking is an act of doing something. It's not planning, it's doing. That's what's so powerful about it.'<sup>25</sup> In such a context, 'transforming the place you find yourself to the place you live', and 'the powerful act of doing something' one can find some of the true essence of placemaking; experiencing space, acting in space within various spatial practices, thus turning the *space* into *places*. When adding the unlimited artful ways within such practices could occur, responding to the actual needs of any neighborhood and truly engaging the community and the social groups they consist of, then they offer the potential qualities for a deeply essential *creative placemaking*.

### 3.6 The benefits of creative placemaking in life skills development through collective art projects in public space

'The importance of public space as a foundation for good cities is recognised across Europe at a policy level and also amongst practitioners', while 'its quality is the backbone of a sustainable city' say Anna Louise Bradley, Jeroen Laven, and Levente Polyak.<sup>26</sup> The Project for Public Spaces team explains that 'placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing

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<sup>23</sup> Hamdi, Nabeel, and Elizabeth L. Malone. 2010. *The Placemaker's Guide to Building Community*. Earthscan

Canada.

<sup>24</sup> Schneekloth, Lynda H., and Robert G. Shibley. *placemaking: the art and practice of building Communities*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995

<sup>25</sup> Here citing Fred Kent (Project for Public Spaces)

ps://dusp.mit.edu/sites/dusp.mit.edu/files/attachments/project/mit-dusp-places-in-the-making.pdf

<sup>26</sup> Laven, Jeroen, Anna Louise Bradley, and Levente Polyak. 2019. "Placemaking in the European context. The movement is here to stay". *The Journal of Public Space*. 4 (Vol. 4 N. 1 | 2019 | FULL ISSUE): 135-154.

<https://www.journalpublicspace.org/index.php/jps/article/view/1159>







evolution.<sup>27</sup> Laura Zabel adds that ‘artists can help people visualize possible futures for a place, designing community planning processes to translate their hopes and dreams into policy and action’<sup>28</sup> while the Department of Urban Studies and Planning team from MIT underline that ‘today’s placemaking represents a comeback for community. The iterative actions and collaborations inherent in the making of places nourish communities and empower people’.<sup>29</sup>

The last quote agrees with the former for the importance of public space and creative placemaking while it ends with the empowerment of the people. Indeed, the people are benefited by creative placemaking and the arts and this in return benefits the community. If we get back to the description of life skills, all of them one way or another are outcomes of a good placemaking process. As it was put already in the ‘audiences’ chapter, any of the people involved are affected in a multiplicity of ways, especially the ones who take part in the making of projects. They work in a framework of schedules and deadlines; they have to accomplish a series of tasks and a final product in a specific limit of time given. In such a process they learn to deal with any aspect of them, while they are also learning by doing. While the real-time experience is crucial for the life skills development, they experience a place, they practice in space and cooperate with others within a set of time limits and deadlines. Anyway, as explained earlier too, ‘the importance of process over product in today’s placemaking is a key point that cannot be overstated—and it is pushing the practice to a broader audience and widening its potential impact’.<sup>30</sup> Adding to the space/place aspects, it is the *sense of time* training (either during the action or as a tool of reflecting) added to each individual’s personal experience. Accordingly, the experience can be thought of as a notion of what one is doing at the time of the making, and on a second level, as a reflection to what they did in order to use the experience as a whole for any future activity. That said, the *experience* includes what one has learned through the time *being* in space, any reading of space and any possible future creation, representation, and maybe most importantly the mere use of it whatever the purpose and reason of the latter could be.

Another important aftermath is what the artwork would become (or what will remain) after its implementation and what the following public discourse will be. Firstly, any installation in public space keeps having a life of its own after the official inauguration. Secondly (and also special for the case of events and the performative arts) it is all about how it will contribute and remain to the collective memory, how it will be remembered and discussed, both by the ones who participated and the multiple audiences as well. Questions and matters of what the mediations will be -and how well

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<sup>27</sup> Project for Public Spaces, Inc. 2018. *Placemaking. What if we built our cities around places?*

<sup>28</sup> In Schupbach, Jason, and Don Ball. 2016. *How to do creative placemaking: an action-oriented guide to arts in community development*. Washington, DC : NEA Office of Public Affairs

<sup>29</sup> Silberberg, S., Lorah, K., Disbrow, R., Muessig, A. (2013), *Places in the Making: How placemaking builds places and communities*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

<sup>30</sup> Silberberg, Susan. 2013.





and accurate (or not) they will be featured or represented in the various media. But even these aspects contribute to the participants' life skills. As for the community and other audiences, it is the *visibility* of the social groups and the local populations that is important, which happens through i) the publicity of the events and ii) by the *sense of caring* that such placemaking interventions provide. This can be of exceptionally high importance for self-esteem of the locals, and the participant members too. *Decision making, Problem solving, Creative thinking, Critical thinking, Effective communication, Interpersonal relationship skills, Self-awareness, Empathy, Coping with emotions and Coping with stress* are some of the life skills, and they can all be traced as potentially gained by the multiple audiences, locals, community members and project participants through the creative placemaking and art in public space processes analysed above. In the same fashion the MIT once again reminds us that 'the contemporary challenge to placemakers is to address the pressing needs of our cities in a way that transcends physical place and empowers communities to address these challenges on an ongoing basis'.<sup>31</sup> The same team further states that 'the intense focus on place has caused us to miss the opportunity to discuss community, process, and the act of making. The importance of *the placemaking process itself* is a key factor that has often been overlooked in working toward many of these noble goals' reminding us again of the link between placemaking and community resilience.

#### 4 Suggested approaches and methodologies

As it has already been mentioned in the introduction, COME2ART program offers the chance to artists and community members to collaborate in pairs in order to create a number of mini projects, and finally to collaborate in groups to create three final works in Lisbon, Thessaloniki and Trieste. The possibilities of acting are countless. However, what is crucial in our case is the specificities of the process which requires team formations and collaborations. In fact, small teams are schemed in the first place, from which the three teams of ten people (5 artists and 5 community members in each country) will act together. The experience from larger projects as well as from projects and workshops conducted during the courses in the School of Fine Arts, indicates that any desired interdisciplinary character demands participants coming from different artistic backgrounds. For example, a collaboration between visual artists, sound artists, filmmakers, sculptors, performers and choreographers would guarantee a better approach on a multifaceted project. Their different disciplines can potentially offer ideas and insights on various aspects in a complementary manner. Nonetheless, their artistic practices are the ones that would dictate the projects' directions. Similarly, a variety of the ages of the participants could potentially be taken in advantage. For instance, it is more likely that a team of artists that includes members of different ages would work better than a team that has only 35 to 40 years old members, or only 18 to 23, 30 to 35 and so on. On the other hand, if most of the team members have more or less the same age, that could be taken in advantage too.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://dusp.mit.edu/sites/dusp.mit.edu/files/attachments/project/mit-dusp-places-in-the-making.pdf>





In any scenario, regular group meetings supervised by experts (the *trainers* as they are mentioned in the main COME2ART proposal) are important for the discussion and thus the progress and the success of the final projects. In the same fashion, the selection of places that will be suggested for the actions is a crucial part of the project and should be discussed extensively. Furthermore, a deep perception of the sites that will be finally chosen is essential. Visiting, revisiting and observing is advised for the times before and during the making of the artworks. The places of course should be proposed and examined together with the community members and the representatives of any underrepresented groups. The input of the latter is what would help the artists in their understanding of its place and situation's peculiarities and vice versa, the artists would provide ways that would fit to the topics and cases. What is again underlined here is the regular communication through frequent meetings that as a whole would provide the function of a workshop. Following what has been already discussed, any problems and obstacles provide the ground for a critical discursive approach and the possibility of successful results. In many cases, the various restrictions of space come to prevent the progress of a proposed idea, the process itself can be continued on the projects' advantage. Any 'accident' can be turned around for the benefit of a process that was previously unimaginable; this opens up room for further creative solutions and the option of unexpected possibilities. One should have in mind that this is a *fixed idea* that might not work firsthand and the team members can build on the alternation of it, as a work that develops creatively *through the process*. Whatever the final result may be, the MIT team asserts that 'the importance of process over product in today's placemaking is a key point that cannot be overstated—and it is pushing the practice to a broader audience and widening its potential impact.'<sup>32</sup>

Another significant level of work is the documentation of i) the process, ii) the final outcome, and iii) the artworks in the months and years after their implementation. This is important firstly for the presentation of the works to the public in any form and media, and secondly for the better understanding of the works, the process and the experience as a whole. In all cases, these processes contribute to further placemaking and life skills development beyond the ones during the making of the artworks. That can also be quite helpful for the first approaches, and secondly during the discussion of the projects. If is an artwork, for instance in the form of a performance, then again, the pictures, the videos, and any kind of reviews and publishing is what will keep its memory alive to a further audience expanding the ones who experienced it in person. Ultimately, after the implementation of the works a number of final meetings and a concluding text summarizing the experience would be a useful tool to document the

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<sup>32</sup> Silberberg, S., Lorah, K., Disbrow, R., Muessig, A. (2013), *Places in the Making: How placemaking builds places and communities*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

<https://dusp.mit.edu/sites/dusp.mit.edu/files/attachments/project/mit-dusp-places-in-the-making.pdf>





experience as a whole. That would be an important input for any relevant future project, in terms of art in public space, community involvement and resilience, civic participation, synergies, placemaking and life skills development.

## 5. Epilogue

So far, we introduced to the project's specificities and we elaborated on the programs identifying terms and to the multiplicities of space. We briefly provided some of the general aspects and the related discourse for the COME2ART's framework, and hopefully mapped some of potential directions its projects can take in Portugal, Italy and Greece. In the same time, we prepared for the program's next Tasks concerning the following Intellectual Outputs and contributed to mini-projects first approaches that will be the preparatory stages for the COME2ART final projects. Meanwhile, suggestions and quotations from this essay' pages can be taken in consideration for the participant artists' training in Brussels. Hopefully, it has been even more clarified what possibly comes to mind in the first place when hearing 'creative', 'placemaking', 'life skills', and 'community resilience' altogether in one sentence. The research team from MIT also states that 'Placemaking today is ambitious and optimistic. At its most basic, the practice aims to improve the quality of a public place and the lives of its community in tandem.'<sup>33</sup> However, if 'tandem' indicates an hierarchy, that one is first and the other is second, the order here is not the case and it should be working bidirectionally: the lives of the community can thus contribute to even further creative placemaking and vice versa.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://dusp.mit.edu/sites/dusp.mit.edu/files/attachments/project/mit-dusp-places-in-the-making.pdf>





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