

Paint & Pedal

From street art to public art

Angela Souza

Public Relations

Belgium

souzaangelacosta@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to the topic of urban creativity from the perspective of placemaking and participatory leadership. In this empirical paper, we will be presenting the Paint & Pedal project while discussing urban creativity and Placemaking¹. The author will explore the participatory process and collective creativity as methodologies to achieve the project goal: to use public art to create awareness for UN Sustainable Development Goals². Furthermore, the author discusses the impact that the project could have on local communities in smaller towns. This paper finishes with a testimonial about how misunderstanding a community's culture led to this project being archived.

Keywords/ Tags: urban intervention, urban practice, participatory leadership, urban creativity, SDGs, collaboration, PPS.

1. Introduction

After so many years of struggling to fit machines and people into the same space, cities are finally being transformed into people-friendly spaces. As a country, Belgium is a good example of this, especially from a mobility perspective. Bicycle lanes, as well as parking and recharging points for electric bicycles, are now part of a familiar landscape in cities and towns.

The Paint & Pedal project emerged as a proposal to transform and create a better use for the bicycle tunnel that connects two small towns in Belgium's countryside, Mol and Balen. The project invited the local community to participate in collective activities in order to transform a specific public space. Through this interaction, the project's founders aimed to arouse the intangible, yet indispensable, sense of belonging and ownership in the community.

In recent years, there have been many projects focusing on the repercussions of the size of a mural, rather than the representation of a community. The use of walls as a canvas to send a message, is something natural in

the street art movement, as natural as the relationship between artists and communities. And once you change the scale of the message it changes the level of community involvement as well. In 2016, Javier Abarca published a paper called "From street art to murals, what have we lost?", which looked at the relationship between mural projects, artists and communities:

"murals exist on an inhuman, monumental scale, very far from the viewer. [...] A mural reveals nothing about the possibilities and limitations of the relation between the human body and the built environment. It is no longer a portrait of the relation between a person and his or her surroundings, which is necessarily open to dialogue. It is, instead, a portrait of the way in which power relates to the environment, which is most often a blind, imposed monologue." Excerpted from "From street art to murals, what have we lost?", Street Art and Urban Creativity Scientific Journal Vol 2 N°2, 2016.

This paper is still one of the main papers one should read before starting an urban creative project. It reinforces the importance of bringing the community closer to what is being created, for both the artists' and locals' benefit. It

also examines the values of street art while focusing on the community's participation in the project.

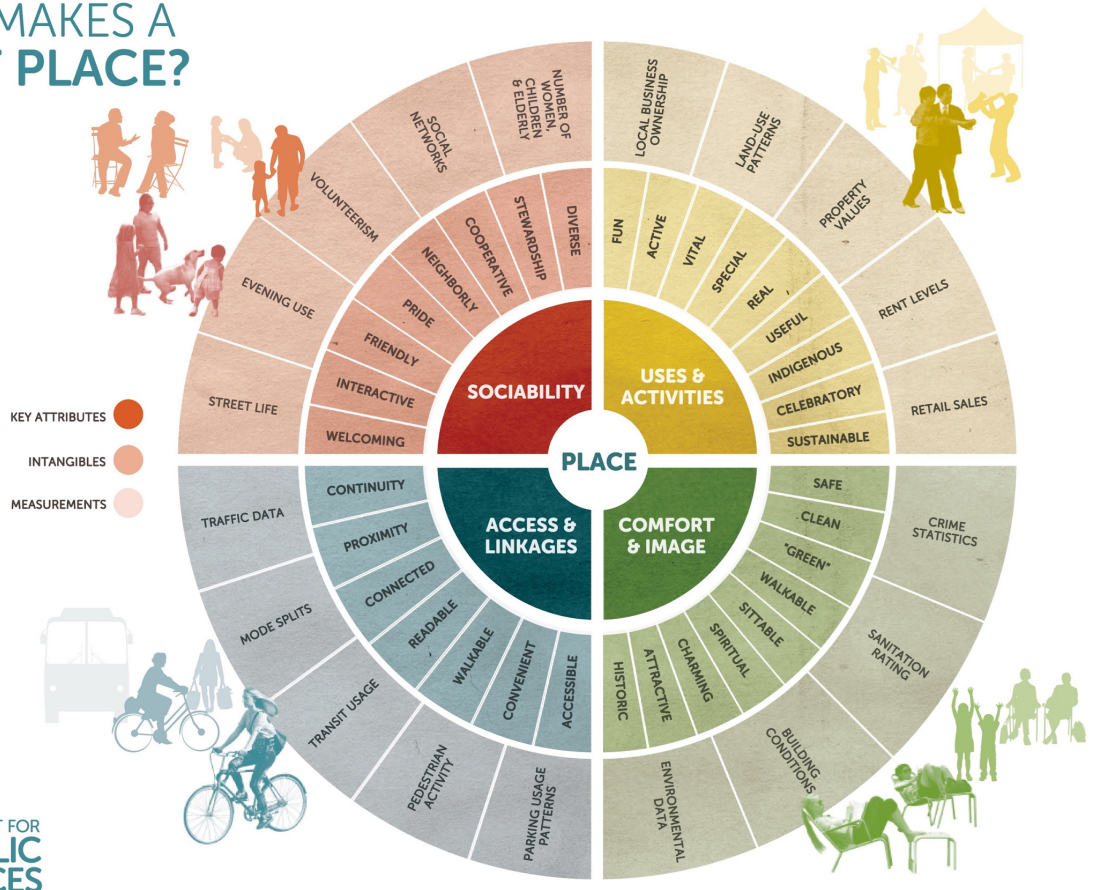
There are many well-known creative projects for public spaces that were built on a backbone of community engagement. A few examples are Sorry, Not Sorry³ in Ghent, Belgium; Lata 65⁴ in Lisbon, Portugal; Boa Mistura⁵ in Madrid, Spain, and Favela Painting⁶, a project by Jeroen Koolhaas and Dre Urhahn, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Individuals working within urban creativity is a growing movement, with professionals focused on creating a positive impact by transforming public spaces.

However, the Paint & Pedal project is an attempt to follow the Placemaking⁷ guidelines in correlation with the dissemination of the SDGs. The authors considered the need to clarify the possibilities of a small community, to contribute to the achievement of the UN Sustainable

Development Goals. At the same time they explored the placemaking field with the idea that it “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 evolution.” Excerpted from “What if we built our communities around places?”, Project for Public Spaces, 2007.

The Paint & Pedal project aimed to subconsciously approach the topic of integration, by creating collaborative spaces that allow art to be at the centre of a cultural mix.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?



The Place Diagram. Excerpted from Project For Public Space (PPS)

This makes the goal for a more sustainable community speak louder than the misconceptions about race and nationalities.

2. Urban creativity and placemaking

Authors such as Charles Landry, have been speaking about creativity and cities since the 1980s. For Landry, creativity is a key factor that allows modern cities to react to changes, change traditional approaches to governance and distribution of resources, integrate technological innovations, and rediscover their cultural heritage.

Creativity in public spaces or urban creativity allows communities, visitors and businesses to think about public spaces differently, giving tools for people to interact with each other, and to build a new open-air dynamic. Therefore, to develop an impactful urban creativity project, it is fundamental for creative professionals to take into consideration a few key attributes. This is in order to cover the social and cultural aspects of communities and their common-use spaces.

According to the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) from the 1960s, “the PPS mentors [Jane Jacobs](#) and [William H. Whyte](#) introduced ideas about designing cities for people, not just cars and shopping centers.” Since then, “their work focuses on the social and cultural importance of lively neighborhoods and inviting public spaces.” From the mid-1990s onwards, PPS started using the term “Placemaking” to describe this approach.

According to PPS, for a place to be successful they must “generally share the following four qualities: they are [accessible](#); people are engaged in [activities](#) there; the space is [comfortable](#) and has a [good image](#); and finally, it is a [sociable](#) place: one where people meet each other and take people when they come to visit.” Going back to the objective of this paper, to develop the Paint & Pedal project, the authors considered all four qualities.



Images from the site. Foto: Angela Souza



1. Accessibility: the very essence of the space which this project was created for. It is a bicycle tunnel that connects two different towns, which contains a sidewalk and shelter for rain and bad weather. "A successful public space is easy to get to and get through; it is visible both from a distance and up close." Excerpted from Project for Public Spaces.

2. Activities: "Activities are the basic building blocks of great places: They are the reasons why people visit in the first place, and why they continue to return. They are also what makes a place special or unique." Excerpted from Project for Public Spaces.

In this sense, the Paint & Pedal project would host the first open community activity on site. The authors propose to create a collaborative art piece to cover the grey walls and invite artist, Mr. DiMaggio⁸, to join the local youth and artistic communities for a co-creation session. The idea is to create a three-day on-site workshop, and to strengthen the local creative community, open pop-up spaces which artists could share their work in.

3. Comfort & Image: "Whether a space is comfortable and presents itself well - has a good image - is key to its success. Comfort includes perceptions about safety, cleanliness, and the availability of places to sit - the importance of giving people the choice to sit where they want is generally underestimated." Excerpted from Project for Public Spaces.

The image aspect is one of the main goals of the Paint & Pedal project. The project's idea started with the need to transform the grey bicycle tunnel into a more attractive, playful and colourful path. Even if the public spaces are created to be a safe transit path, it doesn't mean it should be grey and unattractive.

For this site specifically, the comfort aspect would be a secondary objective. The reason is that first and foremost, the place is built for mobility and people's transit. The Paint & Pedal authors considered the option of creating urban furniture made from empty spray cans and paint containers, to display under the shelters. The idea behind it was to provide locals with one more way of using the public space, and to minimize the negative environmental impact of the project, by applying the circular economy⁹ concept on the project's production.

4. Sociability: "When people see friends, meet and greet their neighbors, and feel comfortable interacting with strangers, they tend to feel a stronger sense of place or attachment to their community - and to the place that fosters these types of social activities." Excerpted from Project for Public Spaces.

Paint & Pedal is a project that subtly approaches the topic of immigration and integration from those who have experienced it and are knowledgeable of the topic. The project's activities were developed as an attempt to generate a connection between the different ethnic groups of the area. It is also to bring together people born in the town with those that weren't, those who may feel less of a sense of belongingness.

In this context, the realization of the Paint & Pedal project would be a step further to encourage different individuals to get involved in the redesign of public spaces in this town. Such projects in public spaces attract locals as well as visitors, helping them to have a different perspective about the place and encourage them to tell different stories. This exchange allows diversity and encourages citizens to be more participative in their communities.

3. Urban creativity & communities

Creativity in public spaces is a powerful tool to help communities address their complexities. As Charles Landry mentions in his book 'The Origins & Future of the Creative City', "the scope of creativity must be comprehensive and include creative solutions to social issues and management." Later he adds that "encouraging creativity and legitimising the use of imagination within the public, private and community spheres will broaden the ideas-bank of possibilities and potential solutions to any urban problem."

To make it possible, it is fundamental to consider the participatory approach when designing an urban creativity project. Community participation and its engagement during the course of a project, are key to transforming public spaces into community-friendly places.

After developing a socio-cultural diagnostic about the community where Paint & Pedal was intended to happen, the project's team found that while the city council had started engaging with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiative, so far no action had been taken.

That's why the project designers hosted a session inviting locals to understand the SDGs better, and offer a chance for them to suggest their own ideas that would contribute to this community achieving their goals.

The second workshop would be focused on the youth community as well as the artistic scene. The goal is to invite local creatives to join Mr. DiMaggio for a 'painting in large scale' workshop co-designed by the project team, the art school teachers and local artists. The aim is to discuss the street art world, as well as best practices on painting on a large scale. As a result, the attendants of this workshop would be able to paint the bicycle tunnel following discussions from the workshops and directly contribute to the project.

The combination of both sessions would therefore involve a big part of this community. It is more suitable splitting the target audience and their responsibilities, in order to strengthen the sense of belonging, resulting in a positive social impact.

4. Conclusion

Urban creativity is an important tool that has been transforming communities around the globe. But in some cases, it ends up not being a problem-solving per se. Adding a creative process into an urban project will allow people to think more openly, focusing on the transformation process rather than the solution itself.

When looking at the Paint & Pedal project, it could have positively impacted a local issue on community integration. In this case, it would go beyond a government program and would be an opportunity for this specific society to embrace its outsiders.

Public art and urban creativity are strong strategies to engage communities if the process is designed in a participatory way. Nowadays, methodologies such as collaborative service design, or co-creation and co-production, are underlying trends that have already changed how products and services have been designed.

So why not use the same approach while creating a public space? Paint & Pedal uses a multidisciplinary team mixing artists, designers, urban planners, urbanists and citizens to generate impact in communities while transforming public spaces. Those involved are then invited to use the site in a way that would encourage a sense of belonging and community.

Endnotes

1: Placemaking has community-based participation at its centre, an effective placemaking process capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well being. Retrieved from Project for Public Space website.

2: The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. The Goals interconnect and in order to leave no one behind, it is important that we achieve each Goal and target by 2030.

3: Sorry, Not Sorry - street art festival in Ghent. The city of Ghent, Belgium, has been conducting an active policy on graffiti and street art for years. Culture Ghent wants to give artists the opportunity to use the city as a play and creation place and street art to the side bring a large audience.

Street art is viewed here from the broad meaning of the word: physical artistic interventions with a temporary or permanent character that responds to situations in the public space.

4: Lata 65 is an initiative for the elderly within the urban art, in its genesis developed by WOOL | Covilhã Urban Art in partnership with CoworkLisboa. Therefore LATA 65 | urban art workshop for seniors emerged as a challenge, to take this interest shown by Urban Art beyond, with precise intentions: to bring the less young closer to a form of artistic expression usually associated with younger ones; to prove that concepts such as active ageing and intergenerational solidarity makes more sense every day; to demonstrate that Urban Art has the power to foment, to promote and to value the democratization of the access to the contemporary art; and to demonstrate that age is just a number.

5: Boa Mistura is a multidisciplinary team with roots in graffiti art. Born in late 2001, Madrid, Spain. Their work is mainly in the public space. They have carried out projects in South Africa, USA, UK, Brazil, Mexico, Georgia, Chile, Algeria, Norway, Kenya, China, Serbia or Panamá.

6: Favela Painting - The first Favela Painting project took place in 2005 when artists haas&hahn (Jeroen Koolhaas and Dre Urhahn) painted a large artwork with members of the local community in Rio de Janeiro. Favela Painting builds bridges between community art, urban planning and social design, creating multi-faceted social impact

with a lasting legacy. Over the years, Favela Painting has become a creative laboratory implementing art to unite, empower and contribute to an inclusive world.

7: Placemaking is a term used in the mid-1990s to describe the approach of PPS Project for Public Spaces about design cities for people. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build strong communities. They are the central hub of the global placemaking movement, connecting people to ideas, resources, expertise, and partners who see a place as the key to addressing our greatest challenges.

8: Mr. DiMaggio is an Italian artist, currently living in Milan and passionate about art and cycling. Mr. DiMaggio usually travels to spread his art around Europe, in places such as Tel Aviv, Halle (Saale, D), Leipzig, Chemnitz and Berlin. And beyond such as Boston and New York.

9: A circular economy is based on the principles of designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems.

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