

# Placemaking in Practice

VOLUME 1

*Experiences and Approaches  
from a Pan-European Perspective*

*Editors-in-Chief*

**Carlos Smaniotto Costa, Mastoureh Fathi and Juan A. García-Esparza**

*Editors*

**Aleksandra Djukic, Conor Horan and Francesco Rotondo**



# Dynamics of Placemaking

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# Contents

List of Figures and Tables IX

Introduction 1

*Mastoureh Fathi, Juan A. García-Esparza and Carlos Smaniotto Costa*

## PART I

### *Cultural Heritage and Placemaking*

- 1 Cultural Heritage and Placemaking 7  
*Conor Horan and Francesco Rotondo*
- 2 Placemaking and Networking of Heritage for Sustainable Tourism 11  
*Aleksandra Djukic, Dina Stober, Piero Tiano, Mircea Negru,  
Jelena Maric, Marichela Sepe and Agisilaos Economou*
- 3 Cultural Heritage as an Inspiration for Placemaking in the Historic City:  
A Transversal Approach 37  
*Juan A. García-Esparza, Carola Hein, Ljiljana Rogac Mijatovic  
and Mircea Negru*
- 4 Placemaking at a Time of Changing Port City Relations 60  
*Carola Hein, Juan A. García-Esparza and Lucija Ažman Momirski*
- 5 Memory and Placemaking: Competing Memory, Forgetting and  
Distorted Rediscovery in Eastern European Cities 79  
*Emina Zejnilović, Erna Husukić, Nika Đuho, Tatsiana Astrouskaya  
and Edmond Manahasa*
- 6 Placemaking within Urban Planning: Open Public Space between  
Regulations, Design and Digitalization 99  
*Branislav Antonić, Despina Dimelli, Francesco Rotondo,  
Alexandra Delgado Jiménez and Agisilaos Economou*
- 7 The Use of Digital Technologies in Improving the Quality of Life:  
ICT-Supported Placemaking in Urban Neighbourhoods 127  
*Matej Nikšič, Cor Wagenaar, Gilles Gesquiere and Kinga Kimic*

## PART 2

*Collaborative Processes for Placemaking*

- 8 Collaborative Processes for Placemaking 155  
*Juan A. García-Esparza and Aleksandra Djukic*
- 9 Using Dialogical Exchanges and Social Interactions to Evaluate and Improve Placemaking Practices 163  
*Conor Horan, Bahanur Nasya, Clara Julia Reich and Roland Krebs*
- 10 Mega-events and Placemaking: Place Image Construction between Reality and Imagination 182  
*Erna Husukić, Emina Zejnilović, Dimelli Despina, Ayse Ereik and Nika Đuho*
- 11 Guideline Principles to Accomplish Social Inclusiveness in Placemaking 204  
*Marluci Menezes, Preben Hansen and Aleksandra Djukic*
- 12 Improving the Impact of Placemaking Practices: An Engaged Scholarship Approach 226  
*Bahanur Nasya, Conor Horan, Anna Louise Bradley and Laura Martinez-Izquierdo*
- 13 Young People and Placemaking: The Provision of Public Spaces for and by Youth 243  
*Carlos Smaniotto Costa, Marluci Menezes, Tatiana Ruchinskaya, Monica Bocci, Matej Nikšič, Nina Goršič and Mastoureh Fathi*
- 14 How People Change Public Parks by Using: Notes on Before and After the Covid-19 Outbreak 272  
*Kinga Kimić, Carlos Smaniotto Costa, Monica Bocci and Nagayamma Tavares Aragão*
- 15 The Perception of Personal Security in Urban Parks: A Comparative Analysis of Research Methods 290  
*Miloslav Šerý, Lucia Brisudová, David Buil-Gil, Kinga Kimić, Paulina Polko and Reka Sołymosi*

16	Digitalizing Trauma: Virtual Re/Presentations in Central Europe	309
	<i>Juli Székely, Nevena Dakovič and Tim Mavrič</i>	
	Index	329

# Placemaking within Urban Planning: Open Public Space between Regulations, Design and Digitalization

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## Abstract

Placemaking is generally considered as a multi-layer and multi-aspect approach in urban studies focused on public open spaces, such as streets, parks, town squares or quays. These places are the core of local community identity. In research and practice, placemaking is more related to concrete open spaces and their urban design. This means that they have been planned without regard to urban relationships and urban planning connections. However, these elements cannot be omitted even though they are less prominent and exploited within placemaking. Therefore, the main topic of this chapter is to explore the possibilities of the placemaking approach in the urban

planning process, which is a process to embrace creative and flexible strategies to design and manage public open spaces, with the ultimate aim to contribute to the development of both urban environments and local communities. From this perspective, placemaking-driven urban planning is close to community planning as a wider concept. In addition, urban planning is becoming more complex in the present-day digital age, which embraces digitalization as a tool to enhance the whole process. The practical aim of this chapter is to examine this complex relation by utilizing the eleven key principles of successful placemaking, which are critical for its in situ implementation, and to determine which part of these principles need to be adjusted to this perspective of the urban planning process in the digital age. The principles that properly address this aim are used as criteria to examine five case studies – the master plans and other planning strategies of five secondary cities from four Southern European countries: Bari in Italy, Chania and Trikala in Greece, Estepona in Spain and Smederevo in Serbia. All of the case cities share the Southern European experience of having traditionally lively and vibrant public open spaces, which is important for placemaking. Furthermore, the common scale of the cities versus different national regulatory frameworks enables the main purpose of this multi-case study – to identify the scope and local variations of the (potential) applicability of placemaking within the urban planning process. Also to be questioned is how their master plans as key planning documents support public open spaces and their importance for local communities. This challenge requires a comparative analysis, where both the selected cities and their main master plans will be compared according to selected principles of successful placemaking. The findings of this comparison are inputs for three sets of recommendations related to: (1) how to complement the current knowledge in the placemaking approach in the future to develop more integrated urban planning methods; (2) how to improve local urban planning to be more responsive to the local community, making them more liveable and distinctive places; and (3) how to apply digital tools, in the context of their current roles and perspectives, in order to facilitate the implementation of placemaking principles within the urban planning process.

### Keywords

urban planning – community planning – digitalization – secondary cities – global versus local – master plan



## 1 Introduction

Placemaking is generally considered as a multi-layer and multi-aspect approach in urban studies focused on public open spaces, such as streets, parks, town squares or quays. In this sense, planning, designing and maintaining open public spaces are equally important (PPS, 2018). A prevailing stance regarding placemaking among many scholars and practitioners is that it is more attached to micro-scale urban design. This is probably related to everyday urban practice, where placemaking is more related to concrete open spaces and their urban design. Nevertheless, understanding placemaking within this approach is a significant limitation to embrace the essential aspirations of placemaking – to make better places for people (Palermo & Ponzini, 2015). Hence, urban planning with its macro-urban perspective cannot be omitted in these concerns, despite the fact that it obviously has a less visible role in placemaking than urban design. Generally, qualitative public open spaces cannot be “made” or created without planning inputs (Carmona, 2019). This means that these places have to be planned while taking urban relationships, social collaborations and urban planning connections into consideration, including regional and even global dimensions (Friedmann, 2010).

Therefore, the main topic of this chapter is to explore the possibilities of the placemaking approach in the urban planning process. The ultimate aim of the chapter is to understand the planning processes that embrace creative and flexible strategies to design and manage public open space, so they can contribute to both the urban environment and the local community. From this perspective, placemaking-driven urban planning is complementary to community planning. A key issue for both theoretical concepts is to position human capital and society as key elements for urban planning (i.e. it is more important than the built environment) (Hecht, 2014). In line with this stance, the expected improvement of public open spaces has to address a wide range of prospective users (Strydom et al., 2018). Healey (2010) therefore positions public open spaces as critically important for urban planning in the twenty-first century, as they are more socially susceptible today than ever before.

This intention is even more complicated today, as urban planning is becoming more complex in the rising digital age. The tools of digitalization and development driven by information and communications technology (ICT) are slowly, but completely, changing the whole process of “making” community-based public open spaces. Using these new opportunities, public open space has got an additional, digitalized dimension (Menezes & Smaniotta Costa, 2017). It can be utilized in various ways: virtual and augmented reality,

artificial intelligence, digital and online participation, the use of sensors to enhance urban life, etc. As a result, the proper use of digital and ICT-driven tools in a certain public open space can both facilitate the number of its users and their overall experience (Kuyper & Van Bussel, 2014). However, digitalization in urban planning and design has many challenges, as it requires significant organizational, professional and financial capacities and intersectional and multi-layer cooperation.

In this intricate research context, it is important to start with basics. Hence, the proposed research begins from the fundamentals of placemaking theory – eleven principles of successful placemaking. The main promoters of these principles, the group Project for Public Spaces (PPS, 2018), organized them into four groups, depending on their impact on placemaking in situ:

#### Group 1: Underlying ideas

1. The community has the expertise. Take into account the inputs of the people who will be using the public space the most.
2. Create a place, not a design. Mix all elements of urban life during the creating of a place.
3. Look for partners. Placemaking is a group effort, one particularly embedded in the local community.
4. People always say, “It can’t be done”. Be ready to deal with obstacles.

#### Group 2: Planning and outreach techniques

1. Have a vision. Create the conception of the whole community.
2. You can see a lot just by observing. Make observations and act on them.

#### Group 3: Translating ideas into action

1. Form supports function. Understand the importance of urban function in forming a place.
2. Triangulate. Place urban amenities strategically so they can encourage and intensify social interaction.
3. Experiment to make it lighter, quicker, cheaper. Use simple and short-term improvements to make a great impact.

#### Group 4: Implementation

1. Money is not the issue. Local enthusiasm and efforts can significantly reduce costs.
2. You are never finished. This is an ongoing process, so include regular maintenance.

Further research analyses the suitability of these principles for local urban planning in a digital age through five case studies of the master plans of five Southern European secondary cities: Bari in Italy, Chania and Trikala in Greece, Estepona in Spain and Smederevo in Serbia. The findings from this comparative analysis are inputs for three sets of recommendations related to:

(1) how to complement the current knowledge in the placemaking approach in the future to develop more integrated urban planning methods; (2) how to improve local urban planning to be more responsive to the local community, making them more liveable and distinctive places; and (3) how to apply digital tools, in the context of their current roles and perspectives, in order to facilitate the implementation of placemaking principles within the urban planning process.

## 2 Methodology

This research is a multi-case study. This is a convenient method when general knowledge about a certain phenomenon is relatively scarce, such as the case with the chosen topic of the role of placemaking in urban planning in the digital age. As it was underlined, eleven principles of successful placemaking are the starting point of the research. They are first checked as not all of them are suitable to analyse urban planning; some of them refer exclusively to micro-scale urban design or the maintenance and management of open urban space. Those ones that adequately relate to urban planning level are accepted as criteria to analyse the five case studies in order to derive findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Knowing that successful placemaking implies a “place-based approach that can innovate and integrate planning regulations, strategic spatial visioning and urban development projects” (Palermo & Ponzini, 2015, p. 5), the five mentioned case cities were chosen by several mutual characteristics. First, they share the Southern European experience of traditionally lively and vibrant public open space, which is principal for placemaking. Second, all of them are secondary cities in their national urban networks. Hence, these five cities are not global nodes and they are not therefore profoundly researched as primary cities or national capitals. Nevertheless, they have a regional significance being a link in urban-rural continuum (Chen, & Kanna, 2012; Carrillo, 2014). The size of these secondary cities also infers less complicated urban planning than in bigger cities, which is important for a qualitative comparative analysis. In the end, all of them have master plans as the key planning-strategic documents of local urban development.

It is still questionable on how master plans in general support public open spaces and their value to local communities. This challenge again highlights the importance of a comparative analysis, where both the selected cities and their main master plans are compared by the selected principles of successful placemaking. Their suitability for the proposed research is given in Table 6.1.

TABLE 6.1 Eleven principles of successful placemaking

No.	Principle	Importance for the analysis	Research criteria
1.	The community is the expert	Important	C1: Does the plan facilitate the involvement of the community in local placemaking? Does the plan allow digital and ICT-driven participation?
2.	Create a place, not a design	Important	C2: Does the plan recognize the importance of urban life and public open space in general? Does it rely on digital data in these matters?
3.	Look for partners	Important	– (Already included in C1)
4.	They always say “it can’t be done”	Less important	– (Strictly implementation)
5.	Have a vision	Important	C3: Does the vision of the plan support and/or suit placemaking? Does it clearly imply the use of digitalization and ICT-driven development?
6.	You can see a lot just by observing	Important	C4: Does the plan recognize the importance of context? Does it rely on digital data, ICT-led analyses and pre-studies?
7.	Form supports function	Important	C5: Is the plan position the functional aspect of placemaking before a physical one? Does it prescribe ICT tools to develop or determine it?
8.	Triangulate	Less important	– (Micro level > urban design)
9.	Experiment: lighter, quicker, cheaper	Important	C6: Does the plan highlight simpler and short-term improvements? Is this supported with digital and ICT-led tools?
10.	Money is not the issue	Less important	– (Strictly implementation)
11.	You are never finished	Less important	– (Strictly implementation)

To conclude, the principles 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 9 are clearly related to urban planning and they are suitable as criteria for the multi-case study analysis.

### 3 Cases

Five cases in this analysis are the master plans of five cities from four Southern European countries: Bari in Italy, Chania and Trikala in Greece, Estepona in Spain and Smederevo in Serbia. They will be analysed in the following order: a profile of the city; brief data about the case – the master plan of the city and how it concerns open public spaces, in general; the descriptive explanation of the elements of the master plan by the settled criteria; and the first findings from the case study as its results. The explanations by the settled criteria were valued with four possible options: the plan (1) does not support or it (2) partly, (3) indirectly or (4) directly supports the criterion. The last result is the most favourable one, as it does not mean just the relevance of this criterion for the plan, but it also highlights or alludes to a digitalization and the use of ICT tools.

#### 3.1 *Smederevo (Serbia)*

##### 3.1.1 Presentation

Smederevo is a middle-size city in central Serbia, 50 km east of Belgrade. The urban zone of Smederevo has approximately 80,000 inhabitants. The city is important in national history, as it was the last capital of medieval Serbia. Medieval Smederevo Fortress with a fortified court on the Danube (fig. 6.1) is the largest lowland fortress in Europe and is the most important heritage site in the city (Belij et al., 2014). Despite its rich cultural heritage, Smederevo is better known as an industrial city and it has the largest steelworks in the region. This dichotomy has shaped the recent history of Smederevo (Djukić & Antonić, 2019).

Many of the old industrial and port facilities along the Danube and around the city centre are brownfields today. On the other side, Smederevo Centre with its pedestrianized main square, main street and Danube Quay is the most vibrant urban part of the city (fig. 6.2). Hence, one of key challenges for local urban planning has been to enable the (re)development of the city centre and the gradual transformation of the brownfields into new central nodes. This is clearly visible in the operative General Urban Plan of Smederevo, adopted in 2009 (fig. 6.3). General urban plans in Serbia are strategic documents, which envision general urban development for 20 to 30 years and give guidelines for lower-level plans regarding physical and functional regulation. The analysed plan recognizes the importance of the main open public spaces along the aforementioned linearly shaped pedestrian zone (CS, 2009, p. 45) and the big concentration of green areas along the Danube Quay (CS, 2009, p. 47). One of the planning aims is to preserve open spaces as a “reserve” for the qualitative upgrading of the city territory (CS, 2009, p. 71). The pedestrian zone is planned



FIGURE 6.1 The view of medieval Smederevo Fortress  
SOURCE: TOURIST ORGANIZATION OF SMEDEREVO



FIGURE 6.2 The focal point of city life is the main square  
SOURCE: TOURIST ORGANIZATION OF SMEDEREVO

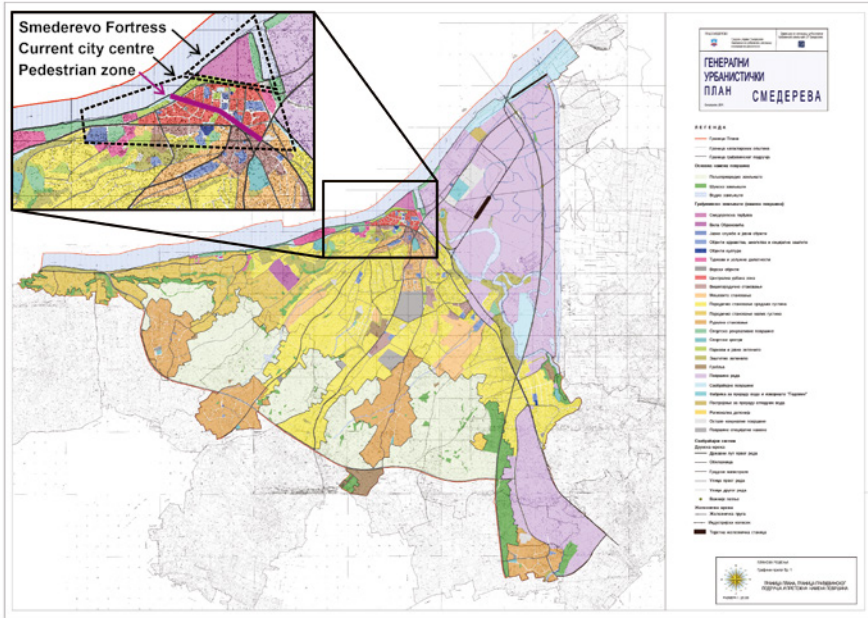


FIGURE 6.3 The General Urban Plan of Smederevo, a land use map with urban zones  
SOURCE: CITY OF SMEDEREVO

to retain its retail and leisure character through reconstruction (i.e. to remain the core of urban life) (CS, 2009, p. 77). In contrast to this, Smederevo Fortress as a key heritage location is planned for a total conservation with better connections to the rest of the central zone, including the relocation of the obsolete rail and port facilities (CS, 2009, p. 77).

### 3.1.2 Placemaking

*Criterion 1:* The plan partly supports this criterion. There are many places in the plan which underline the general accessibility and proximity of public (pedestrian and green) places, as well as public services to the community. However, the possible ways of community participation are not concretely mentioned. One small plus is a separate section for urban design for physically disabled persons.

*Criterion 2:* The plan indirectly supports this criterion, but it considers the importance of urban life and public open space in a traditional manner. The sections about central urban zones and local centres refer to the use and basic standards of open public spaces. Some novel elements, such as shared spaces or the formation of a green network, are given with basic design instructions. Nevertheless, the plan does not mention the use of digital data or tools.

*Criterion 3:* The plan indirectly supports this criterion. One of 12 planning aims is to preserve and properly design open public spaces to serve citizens. However, the inclusion of digitalization development is not specified.

*Criterion 4:* The plan directly supports this criterion. In the last section of the plan about its implementation it is highlighted that all important urban zones and parts had to be further planned by lower-level detailed plans, respecting the specific elements of the local context. In relation to this, the plan affirms the inclusion of different and more accurate means of data.

*Criterion 5:* The plan indirectly supports this criterion. The functional aspect of the reconstruction of the zone around the pedestrian zone, the redevelopment of centrally located brownfields and the revitalization of the fortress is mainly described by discussion about new urban functions which should revive the city core. The physical aspect is also covered, but it is not well elaborated, in general. The plan does not prescribe any digital tool for these purposes.

*Criterion 6:* The plan does not support this criterion. The elaboration of urban improvements, including simpler and short-term ones, is transferred to subordinated detailed plans.

### 3.1.3 Results

First findings from the case study confirm that this plan supports placemaking elements, but mostly related to the central zones of Smederevo, in the old city core, along the Danube Quay and in local centres. Planning aims and measures usually imply which character of open public space is desirable (more or less greenery, with or without retail in the surrounding, reconstruction versus new construction, etc.). All these planning premises are given in a traditional way as digital elements are not distinctly presented, but covered by the promotion of innovative approaches and the importance of new technologies.

## 3.2 Chania (Greece)

### 3.2.1 Presentation

Chania is a middle-size city in southern Greece, in the western part of the island of Crete. It has approximately 110,000 inhabitants. The history of the city goes back to the Minoan period and through the centuries many civilizations have shaped the city as it is today. The Minoan, Byzantine and Venetian roots of the city have attracted many visitors over recent years. The economy of the



city is based on tourism, activity associated with the technical university and agricultural production that takes place outside the city's borders.

The city expanded around its historic centre during the last century (fig. 6.4), which is its most vibrant urban area. The main problems with the city's spatial development are that its urban areas developed over the last 30 years in a sprawl and that the development of tourism has exceeded the city's carrying capacity. The city has few open public spaces (there is only 2 m<sup>2</sup>/inhabitant) but a lot of land is available for development into open and green spaces, including an abandoned military camp and the moats in the historic city centre. The key planning challenges are the control of the urban sprawl, the definition of restrictions and regulations on tourism and the development of open public spaces through the transformation of the available urban voids.

The General Urban Plan of Chania was legislated in 1988 but a new version has been in public discussion since 2017 (Doxiadis Associates et al., 2017) and is supposed to be legislated by the end of 2023 (fig. 6.5). It is a plan that envisions the city's development for the next ten years and provides guidelines and regulations for the lower-level spatial plans. The basic aim of the plan is to increase public spaces, propose the upgrading of the existing open and green public spaces and develop sub-centres of public activities for the functional decongestion of the historic city.



FIGURE 6.4 The view of the historic centre and the new city

SOURCE: GOOGLE EARTH



FIGURE 6.5  
The General Urban Plan of  
Chania, a land use map with  
urban zones  
SOURCE: MUNICIPALITY OF  
CHANIA

### 3.2.2 Placemaking

*Criterion 1:* The plan partly supports this criterion. In the historic centre, open public spaces create a network combined with the pedestrianized zones (fig. 6.6). In the areas of the modern city, open public spaces are developed in a fragmented way. The accessibility is, in many cases, difficult as the city is designed mostly for vehicles. Recently, the municipality has been working on a sustainable mobility urban plan which is in many cases not in accordance with the General Urban Plan. Both plans promote participatory procedures with questionnaires about the citizens' vision for the city through e-platforms, but the participation of citizens is still limited.

*Criterion 2:* The plan recognizes the importance of public spaces, so it indirectly supports this criterion. It is based on the application of quantitative standards, and it proposes areas but not networks. Recently, the municipality's authorities have relied on architectural competitions to make decisions about the urban design of public spaces, but no plan has materialized. Another interesting effort was the use of the e-platform to make decisions about the use of the abandoned military base. Citizens were invited to propose ideas about how to develop it, but this appeal resulted in a low level of participation. Hence, although the plan does not mention any use of digital tools, the authorities indirectly promoted their use for its implementation.

*Criterion 3:* The plan supports the preservation of open public spaces to serve citizens, but it does not clearly imply the use of digitalization and ICT-driven development. Thus, it partly supports this criterion.

*Criterion 4:* The plan supports this criterion as it is based on statistical data analysis. In its last section it proposes the areas that must be prioritized and further planned in a more detailed way.



FIGURE 6.6 Two examples of open public spaces in Chania. The Venetian port of the city (*left*)

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA, COURTESY OF RUPH

The historic market (*right*)

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA, COURTESY OF LAPPLAENDER

*Criterion 5:* The plan indirectly supports this criterion as it bases its proposals for the redevelopment of urban functions and the regeneration of the historic centre through its decongestion. The plan does not use or propose any digital tool for these purposes.

*Criterion 6:* The plan does not support this criterion. Simpler and short-term urban improvements are transferred to urban design plans in accordance with the urban plan basic directions. In many cases these proposed improvements are ignored.

### 3.2.3 Results

The General Urban Plan of Chania supports placemaking through its proposals for public spaces. Still, it is limited in its quantitative approach and its main aim is to propose new public spaces in available urban voids and to prioritize the upgrading of the existing ones and it does not include proposals for qualitative upgrading. The role of ICT is limited in the plan's elaboration and application. The recent efforts made by the authorities to enhance the participation of citizens with the use of ICT has not yet been effective and should be more strongly promoted.

## 3.3 Bari (Italy)

### 3.3.1 Presentation

Bari is one of the 14 Italian metropolitan cities and is located at the centre of the Apulia region in the south of Italy. It is a city of about 300,000 inhabitants and covers 116 km<sup>2</sup>. It is characterized by a strong trade economy organized around its port, airport, railway and highway links. Even though Bari is the seat of the Apulia region and a developed tourist destination in southern Italy, the

city has fallen behind other metropolitan cities in Italy. Bari has lost nearly 70,000 inhabitants over the last 40 years (it had 371,022 inhabitants in 1981), which underlines the development challenges for the city. Comparisons using data from the 2011 census shows that there has been a progressive ageing of the population at a rate higher than the national average. The average age is 44.6 years against 45.2 in Italy. The unemployment rate is significantly higher (17.7% Apulia and 13.1% Italy).

The pandemic limited the possibility of using public spaces in a city like Bari, whose inhabitants were accustomed to conducting most of their public and private events in public outdoor spaces. During this period, as happened in other countries (Pradifta et al., 2021; Troy & Quentin, 2021), the city planned the use of tactical urbanism interventions in public spaces promoted by the municipality itself, after an online participation process. The city of Bari has a very old General Master Plan (fig. 6.7), designed at the end of the 1960s by the well-known architect Ludovico Quaroni (as annotated by Barbera, 2014). It has an interesting urban layout, but its zoning is rigidly monofunctional, which is anachronistic today. The city is developing a new plan, but there is still a long way to go. In this context, planning tactical urbanism interventions in open public spaces (Lydon & Garcia, 2015), the only areas where during the pandemic it was still possible for people to meet, appeared to be a possible alternative. The city has proposed a new strategic urban plan named “Bari Open Space” (fig. 6.8), a programme on sustainable mobility and public space for the implementation of distancing measures related to the Covid-19 emergency. It

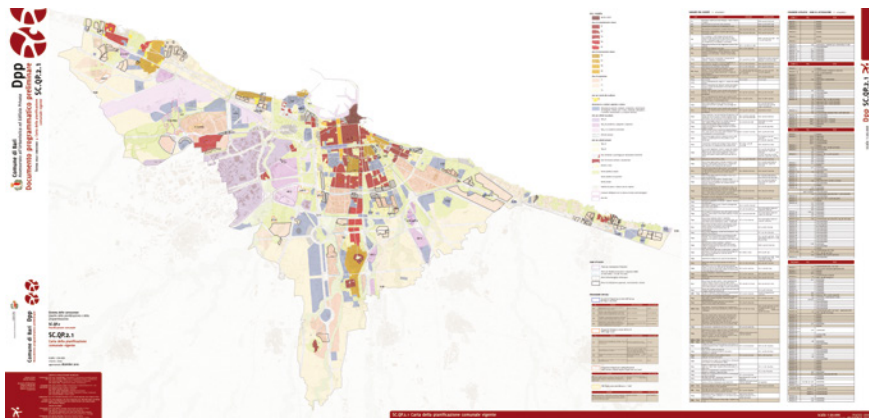


FIGURE 6.7 The General Master Plan of the city of Bari (approved in 1978), updated to the current state of implementation carried out by the design group of the new general urban plan (2014)

SOURCE: MUNICIPALITY OF BARI



FIGURE 6.8 Strategic urban master plan named “Bari Open Space”. Plan for 30 tactical urban planning interventions in the five macro *quarters* of the city (*left*). Action plan for a network of cycle paths and zones (*right*) where cars cannot exceed specific speeds (10, 20 or 30 km/h)

SOURCE: MUNICIPALITY OF BARI, [HTTPS://WWW.COMUNE.BARI.IT /-/BARI-OPEN-SPACE-PRESENTATO-IL-PROGRAMMA-DI-INTERVENTI -SULLA-MOBILITA-SOSTENIBILE-E-SULLO-SPAZIO-PUBBLICO](https://www.comune.bari.it/-/bari-open-space-presentato-il-programma-di-interventi-sulla-mobilita-sostenibile-e-sullo-spazio-pubblico), ACCESSED 30 JUNE 2023

is a redesign and redevelopment of the public spaces provided for by the old General Master Plan.

The strategic plan had the objective of reconfiguring public spaces and other areas for temporary use during the pandemic. In particular, with reference to spaces for mobility, it mitigates the risk of contagion on local public transport vehicles through physical distancing favouring the diversification of the movement towards cycling, electric and pedestrian mobility. Referring to public spaces, it reorients the function of public space towards well-being and physical activity, and it favours the function of public space as a support for commercial activities lacking in confined space.

### 3.3.2 Placemaking

*Criterion 1:* The General Master Plan of the city of Bari (approved in 1978), does not support the involvement of the community in local placemaking. The new plan (“Bari Open Space”) has the aim of facilitating the involvement of the population in the use of new tactical urbanism public spaces. Neither of the two urban plans allow digital or ICT-driven participation.

*Criterion 2:* The “Bari Open Space” plan recognizes the importance of urban life and public open space in general. It was initiated for this reason. For the use of some street furniture or sports equipment, it provides instructions through QR codes.



FIGURE 6.9 Setting up of public spaces such as open-air gyms in Lungomare Starita in San Cataldo in Bari. The same place before (*left*) and after (*right*) the intervention

SOURCE: MUNICIPALITY OF BARI

*Criterion 3:* The vision of the plan supports and suits placemaking, and it clearly implies the use of ICT (with the use of QR codes), but it does not claim to include an integrated use of digital tools.

*Criterion 4:* The plan recognizes the importance of context, but it does not rely on digital data or ICT-led analyses.

*Criterion 5:* The plan supports this criterion. It changes the use of public spaces to define new physical aspects through urban design. The plan does not prescribe any digital tool for these purposes.

*Criterion 6:* The plan supports this criterion. All the interventions are made to highlight simpler and short-term uses by the inhabitants. The plan does not prescribe any digital tool for these purposes.

### 3.3.3 Results

“Bari Open Space” was created to provide an answer to the needs for the use of public spaces during the pandemic through reversible interventions of tactical urban planning. It has created new ways of using spaces traditionally dedicated to cars (the streets) or without furniture or otherwise unusable. Most of them are still in force. People have discovered new ways to use streets and open spaces. The challenge now is to transform these light urban furnishing interventions into long-term changes capable of regenerating cities

and neighbourhoods by placing public space at the centre of urban dynamics (Carmona, 2019).

### 3.4 *Estepona (Spain)*

#### 3.4.1 Presentation

Estepona is a middle-size city of the western Costa del Sol, 33 km west of Marbella (Málaga). The city has approximately 70,000 inhabitants. The economic engine in the last decades has been the sun and beach tourism, being one of the preferred destinations for second homes (fig. 6.10). The main challenges are the poorly diversified economy concentrated in coastal tourism with a strong seasonal nature and a tendency of the popular towards ageing, accentuated by the high rate of emigration of the younger population due to a lack of opportunities. Added to this is a dynamic of strong pressure on natural resources due to seasonality (Estepona City Council, 2016).

The urban space is very compact in the city centre, but that is not the case in the new neighbourhoods due to the rapid, low-density pattern of development followed over recent decades, which increased the need for the use of private vehicles. The city centre of Estepona, “The Garden of the Costa del Sol”, is full of places of interest and has the typical Andalusian-style houses, whitewashed buildings, narrow streets full of charm and greenery. There are a lot of places of tourist interest in the area: the Plaza del Reloj, the Santa María de los Remedios church, San Luis Castle and the Plaza de las Flores. Beyond the city centre, there are also other iconic spaces, such as the Orchidarium of Estepona, the Paseo Marítimo, Los Reales de Sierra Bermeja and El Pinsapar nature park. In terms of the challenges related to public spaces (fig. 6.11), the urban centre has lost permeability, which has led to the degradation of some parts of the historic area. This has also led to a worsening of access and an increase in traffic and parking problems (Estepona City Council, 2016). The quality of the open spaces is high in the new neighbourhoods (gardens, services, etc.), but these areas are mainly private, so they do not constitute a network of public spaces.

#### 3.4.2 Placemaking

*Criterion 1:* The plan of 2010 does not consider this criterion and acts only as a regulatory tool that has adapted the 1994 General Urban Plan. The Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of 2016, the most recent tool, includes the promotion of citizen participation in the efficient and sustainable use of ICT. The urban centre and its complementarity with other nearby facilities represents an area of great potential for the creation of living spaces and coexistence and is a base for placemaking.



FIGURE 6.10 Two views of Estepona. The view on the long coastline as the archetypal image of the city (*top*)  
SOURCE: ANTONIO PERIAGO MIÑARRO ON FLICKR



Aerial view of the city (*bottom*)  
SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA, COURTESY OF KALLERNA



FIGURE 6.11 The 2010 General Urban Plan of Estepona showing the south area, an adaptation of the 1994 General Urban Plan  
SOURCE: CITY OF ESTEPONA



*Criterion 2:* The 2016 plan indirectly supports this criterion, because the focus is a city in which the residents enjoy a good quality of life. It is a vision of a city with an identity, one that is efficient, green and attractive to live in, to visit and to invest in, a dynamic city that offers new opportunities, knowledge and innovation, and one that is cohesive and inclusive. There is no information in either the general plan or in the Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy about the use of digital data or tools for supporting placemaking. ICT is mentioned as needed for the city to take a step forward and turn its administration into a transparent electronic administration and to avoid a digital divide.

*Criterion 3:* The plan indirectly supports this criterion. There are 14 lines of action, and six of them are related to urban transformations to serve citizens. However, the inclusion of digitalization development is not specified. One programme aimed at the preventive conservation of cultural heritage through monitoring (Estepona Intelligent Heritage) is the most related to digitization, but it is diffused across the territory, and it does not identify specific actions to take in specific areas.

*Criterion 4:* The plan indirectly supports this criterion, including specific ideas for the parts of the cities, such as the historic centre, not specifically related to ICT-led analyses and pre-studies.

*Criterion 5:* The plan indirectly supports this criterion, as explained with an example in Criterion 3.

*Criterion 6:* The plan directly supports this criterion. The elaboration of urban improvements, including simpler and short-term ones, is included in its different objectives: Thematic objectives, specific objectives, strategic objectives, intermediate objectives, operational objectives and, finally, line of action. For instance, to promote the rehabilitation and recovery of public urban land for green areas, leisure and recreation, it identifies River Park. But the objectives are not supported by digital tools or led by ICT, such as would be included in a typical Smart City plan, but are focused on administration or tourism.

### 3.4.3 Results

First findings from the case study confirm that the plan of 2010 does not take placemaking into consideration and acts only as a regulatory tool that adapted the 1994 General Urban Plan. However, the Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of 2016 – the most recent approach – promotes placemaking (directly or indirectly) as well as the use of ICT, but it does not use

digital tools for placemaking. The only exception is the Estepona Intelligent Heritage line, a programme for the preventive conservation of cultural heritage. The monitoring it proposes relies on digitization, but its application is diffused across the territory, and it does not identify specific actions to take in specific areas.

### 3.5 *Trikala (Greece)*

#### 3.5.1 Presentation

The city of Trikala is a middle-size city in central Greece. The urban area of Trikala has 61,653 inhabitants. The city has a rich history. It was built near the ancient city of Triki. In ancient times it was known as the birthplace and main home of Asclepius, god of medicine in ancient Greek mythology. Three buildings dating to the times of the early Romans and another dating to the Byzantine period have been found in an archaeological site, Asclepieion of the ancient Triki, north of the present-day city. The central part of Trikala is an old urban core next to a central square, with uniform architecture (old shops) (fig. 6.12). This part of Trikala and the main pedestrian street – Asklepiou Street – is the city leisure zone with many entertainment centres, cafés, bars and taverns, and which attracts many visitors throughout the year. Trikala is the only city in Greece divided by a river. The Litheos River and the river grove of 500 acres are the city's green lungs and give a special physiognomy to the place. The main metal bridge across the river is also a declared historical monument (from 1996). It is an example of an early metal bridge and was built by French engineers in 1886 (Katsaros, 2009).

At the same time, the city of Trikala is considered a smart city due to its implementation of several electronic information systems. There is the wireless coverage of the shopping centre area, smart lighting and parking systems, and applications for informing citizens about the cultural events of the municipality.<sup>1</sup>

The operative General Urban Plan of Trikala dates from 1985 and had its most recent major revision in 2007. The new plan proposes the renovation of the traditional centre (Varousi) and the new historical centre of Trikala, by imposing more specific conditions and building restrictions, as well as morphological restrictions. The modifications of the road plan refer to the definition of the operation of the public space (common areas, roads, sidewalks, parking areas and others) as well as and the declaration of all its historic buildings as protected (fig. 6.13). It also proposes the renovation of the old Manavika Shopping Centre, and the determination of land uses and interventions to upgrade public spaces (fig. 6.14).

<sup>1</sup> <https://trikalacity.gr/>.



FIGURE 6.12 The view of the centre of Trikala  
SOURCE: GOOGLE EARTH

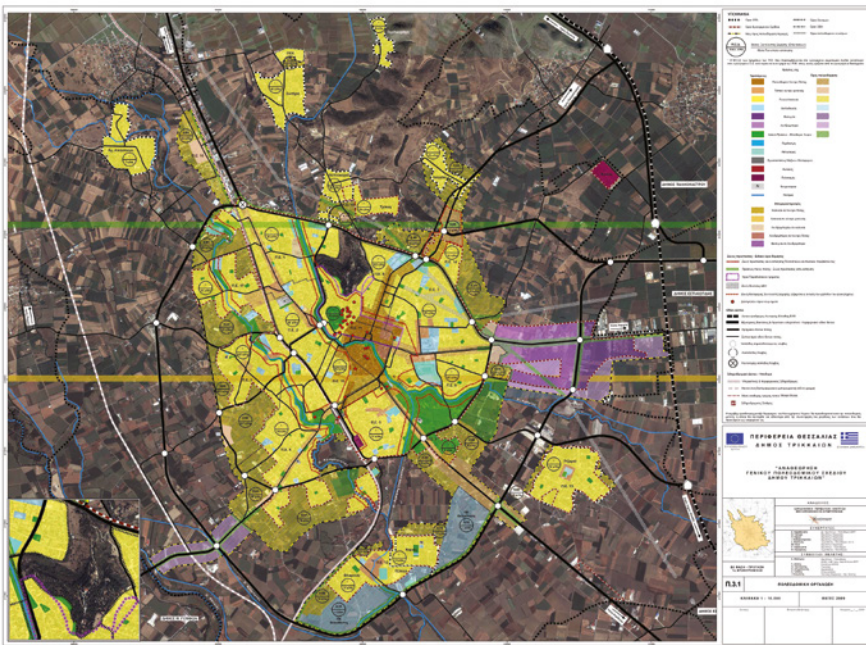


FIGURE 6.13 The General Urban Plan of Trikala, a land use map with urban zones  
SOURCE: MUNICIPALITY OF TRIKALA



FIGURE 6.14 Open public space in the city of Trikala  
SOURCE: A. ECONOMOU

### 3.5.2 Placemaking

*Criterion 1:* The plan supports this criterion. There is accessibility and proximity to sidewalks and open green spaces. In the central parts of the city, there are ramps for the disabled.

*Criterion 2:* The plan takes into account the quality of life and the public open space. The large common areas (central square), the zones on both sides of the River Litheos and the development of greenery, the pedestrianization of the main street as well as the renovation of the public market contribute to the improvement of the quality of the urban environment.

*Criterion 3:* The plan takes into account the maintenance and renovation of open public spaces for the benefit of citizens. The new plan proposes interventions for the city centre to upgrade the historic centre and aesthetic upgrades of dilapidated buildings.

*Criterion 4:* The plan supports this criterion. The plan relies on digital data and the analysis of statistical data. The existence of a large open space allows for the possibility of further development and organization of the space, according to the principles of sustainability.

*Criterion 5:* The plan supports this criterion. In the central urban area, renovation projects will be carried out, such as the upgrading of the central square of the city to increase the amount of greenery and water features, the installation

of shaded areas and the renovation of the riparian zone of the river. These projects will revitalize the core of the city by allowing for increased and new urban activity.

*Criterion 6:* The plan indirectly supports this criterion. The plan is supported by the results analysis of the users of the wireless network. While the decisions for the further upgrade of the centre takes into account mainly the analysis of the studies.

### 3.5.3 Results

The case study shows that the central area of the city (the old shops, the central square, the riparian zone of the Litheos River that crosses the centre of the city and the main pedestrian street) constitute the public space of the city and is where the social life of the city takes place. These areas contain placemaking elements, which enhance the development of human activities and the functional organization of the space. The connection of open public spaces, the construction of the sidewalks, the renovations, the increase in the green areas, are all carried out taking into account the physiognomy of the area (with an eye towards the preservation of the traditional elements). Digital data are used to better plan these urban interventions while ICT tools are used to inform the citizens.

## 4 Discussion of the Outcomes and Results of the Five Cases

The first results of the analysis of the master plans show a great variety on how they perform regarding placemaking. The creating process of master plans or similar documents follows the same logic and typology of urban planning systems in all the countries of the case studies and this common approach is useful to compare them. This comparison of the results by each of the six criteria extracted from the principles of successful placemaking also gives a better overview of the whole case study analysis.

First, it is obvious that the Bari master plan meets the criteria much better than five other cases. This urban plan is also the newest one as it was developed recently. The other plans, all older than ten years, scored almost identically.

A greater diversity is visible in checking the performance of the six cases by each criterion. The criteria with the best performance of the plans are C4 and C2. C4 is in the very essence of the urban planning process – the adaptation of planning rules to a certain urban context. A similar stance can be taken for the second-highest scoring criteria, C2. Public open space is a key public

TABLE 6.2 Comparison of the main results from five case studies regarding six selected criteria

Research criteria	Case 1 Smederevo	Case 2 Chania	Case 3 Bari	Case 4 Estepona	Case 5 Trikala	Sum
C1: Does the plan facilitate the involvement of the community in local placemaking?	1	1	2	1	1	6
C2: Does the plan recognize the importance of urban life and public open space in general?	2	2	3	2	3	12
C3: Does the vision of the plan support and/or suit placemaking?	2	1	3	2	2	10
C4: Does the plan recognize the importance of context?	3	3	3	2	3	14
C5: Is the plan position the functional aspect of place-making before a physical one?	2	2	3	2	2	11
C6: Does the plan highlight simpler and short-term improvements?	0	0	3	2	0	5
SUM PER CASE	10	9	17	11	11	/

1. The plan does not support this criterion
2. The plan partly supports the criterion
3. The plan indirectly supports the criterion
4. The plan directly supports the criterion

good for urban planning and ensuring a vibrant urban life that is inseparable from a successful public open space. Thus, these results have been somehow predictable. The worst-performing criteria are C1 and C6. The results for C1 show that the involvement of community in local placemaking, regardless of whether it was conducted in person or digitally/online, is unnoticeable in the selected plans. For C6, it seems that the plans are monolithically concentrated on complex urban issues and long-term urban actions, usually lasting for 15 or more years, not prioritizing simpler and short-term improvements thereof. During the analysis, some side results also emerged. First, historic cores are mainly in the spotlight of placemaking in studied master plans, dealing with

public open space more thoroughly. However, the other parts of the cities are not as well-represented. Second, all plans highlight the vibrancy of urban life in the related city, accustomed to the Southern European urban environment. Finally, the plans do not involve digital or vectorial information per se.

## 5 Lessons Learned

Several points are crucial:

First, the analysed master plans work well with the placemaking criteria that are, in essence, part of urban planning. Regarding the criteria that recognize the importance of urban life and public open spaces, the context and the functional aspect of placemaking are as relevant as the physical aspects.

Second, the age of the master plan really matters in the case of placemaking content in the present-day digital age. The new kind of plans, for example, “Bari Open Space” or the Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of Estepona, are better at addressing this issue.

Third, it is very important to repeat that the involvement of the community in local placemaking is not properly presented by the plans, despite citizens being already involved through public audits and presentations during the planning process. Thus, this is one of the questions that have more room for improvement, and may be related to the way urban planning is carried out as a legal document that sets certain qualities rather than a flexible document with room for transformation.

Fourth, the Mediterranean and Southern European countries have a long path to contribute with master plans and other strategies to placemaking, although in an informal way and through bottom-up processes they are taking part in a significant way and as a part of a long tradition.

## 6 Conclusions

To summarize, master plans and other similar plans developed in urban planning support the postulates of placemaking that are related to place creation, such as to envision and create both functionally and physically public open spaces adapted for a certain urban environment. However, they are weaker relating to those postulates of placemaking which mainly refer to the process of forming a plan, such as community involvement in the process, or the implementation of the plan, such as the focus on concrete and simpler actions.

Several recommendations are important to facilitate placemaking processes through urban planning, especially concerning the use of novel planning instruments, supported by digital data and ICT-driven tools.

Urban planning documents usually target long-term planning interventions, lasting up to 20 or 30 years. This is a problem in the current, fast-developing digital age, where digitalization and ICT development has completely transformed urban life over the last ten years. Therefore, it is essential for urban planning to be innovative. For example, it could include vectorial information in the planning process and the implementation, develop in parallel the digital and analogue versions of a plan or customise WebGIS or WMS (Web Map Service) for the use of a planning document, which are already initiated in some countries (Italy, for example).

Community involvement should be properly covered by a plan, through an adequate explanation of the whole process, community members and groups involved, the steps and the achieved results. Already existing relevant activities with the community, such as public audits and presentations of a draft plan, are mandatory components of the final document or, eventually, the subordinated annex.

The master plans for cities are general documents and there is limited space for concrete actions, especially those that are simpler and short-term. Nevertheless, the plan can incorporate or, better, shape the section about priorities that can be easily implemented, such as the interventions of tactical or pop-up urbanism or micro experiments in urban acupuncture. In this upgrading, it is also important to expand these considerations to the entire urban territory, not just to historic cores or focal points, such as the main square or pedestrian zone, which are more in the spotlight of both planning experts and citizens.

Mentioned recommendations are a good starting point for further research on improvements in urban planning. Taking into account that both placemaking and digitalization are new processes in urban space, they can lead to a big step forward in transforming urban planning to be more open and flexible regarding the local community as its focal users.

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Placemaking has become a key concept in many disciplines. Due to an increase in digitization, mobilities, migration and rapid changes to the urban environments, it is important to learn how planning and social experts practice it in different contexts. *Placemaking in Practice* provides an inventory of practices, reflecting on different issues related to placemaking from a pan European perspective. It brings different cases, perspectives, and results analysed under the same purpose, to advance knowledge on placemaking, the actors engaged and results for people. It is backed by an intensive review of recent literature on placemaking, engagement, methods and activism results - towards developing a new placemaking agenda. *Placemaking in Practice* combines theory, methodology, methods (including digital ones) and their application in a pan-European context and imbedded into a relevant historical context.

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