Youth in Placemaking: Barriers and Benefits.
Lessons from Cuenca, Bandung, and Envigado

Viviana A. Cordero-Vinueza and Vija Viese

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Appendix 1. Results Table

Results				
Identified themes	**Programme leaders (In-depth interviews)**	**Progress reports (Output Indicators and Strategic Learning)**	**Youth participants (Focus group)**	**Supporting theory (non-exhaustive)**
BARRIERS				
Placemaking terminology				
Introduction to the term	Some actors were familiar with the concept, but many were not - in the implementation teams, local officials, youth participants, and the general public. Despite the English term being new, many realised that they had done similar activities before, but using different words to describe them. Many stakeholders attended the workshop to understand the principles or learnt directly from their colleagues that were experts.	Output Indicators Capacity building for local administration and other professionals: 20 (2022), 24 (2023), 83 (2024). Strategic Learning Most stakeholders learnt about placemaking through workshops and coaching sessions with experts in placemaking and urbanism.	Most learnt about placemaking from the programme, learning from the workshops and experts from the programme. Nevertheless, most expressed a difficulty in understanding the meaning of placemaking in their specific context.	Research suggests that the concept is increasingly being used globally, yet sources from the Global South are fewer (Strydom et al., 2018).
Using the English term	Despite no unanimous agreement on its usefulness, some benefits were indicated: global connection to other projects and practitioners, being conscious and intentional about the approach, and introducing successful concepts locally. It was generally perceived as a positive term with good associations and motivations. Nevertheless, the use came with many challenges: having to repeatedly explain it to different stakeholders, creating a distance with those who don't know it or don't speak English, and creating a feeling of exclusion.	Strategic Learning Reports indicates a growing interest in youth and placemaking, promising scaling results in the future.	The youth were divided on the use of the English term. They used it depending on the context - with professionals, during events, or to discuss with other like-minded partners. Otherwise, it was often replaced with other terms in local languages. Some participants used it enthusiastically and taught the concept to others.	Beza et al. (2018) indicate that subtleties of some words (e.g. the difference between "place" and "space") do not translate in all languages, which emphasises the need for locally understood terms. Hes et al. (2020, p.4) emphasise that even if the term is Western, the concepts of shaping and adapting space to one's needs and identity are old and universal, having different names and expressions in other languages.
Interpretation and implementation	Despite the unclear definition, core values of placemaking were identified in implementation (e.g., space appropriation, affordances, multi-stakeholder collaborations, inclusivity and access to all). Hard to access or unclear information on placemaking led to more "personalised" interpretations. Overall, programme leaders saw placemaking as an approach or a "prism" through which already known processes and frameworks could be implemented, with adaptation.		The youth have formed a strong connection between the term placemaking and the concept of the Right to the City, and their projects often reflected these core values. Sometimes they would avoid using the term, saying "it was not placemaking per se," referring to a series of successive events that had differing levels of spatial impact.	Courage (2020) outlines key core values associated with placemaking: a human-centric approach, fostering community attachment, nurturing positive relationships among individuals and communities, promoting inclusivity and diversity, instilling a sense of ownership and empowerment, and embracing co-creation
Cumbersome collaborations and stigma				
Support from local governments	Programme leaders describe difficult collaboration with local governments as: - lacking frameworks, policies, and resources to include youth, - mistrust towards them and their ideas, - bureaucratic obstacles and long time-lines, - changing government officials, - community conflicts from expectations and participant fatigue. Nevertheless, the multi-stakeholder collaborations were recurrently mentioned as one of the most important benefits of placemaking. Collaborations with the private sector and other organisations were considered more successful and less demanding.	Strategic Learning Trust-building is a long and time-consuming effort that has to be restarted from scratch when the local officials change. Local authorities could only offer limited support, due to both their capacity and limited frameworks to include youth. Effective advocacy is important early in the project and can be made stronger by pairing youth teams with specific government departments. Successful partnerships with the private sector, NGOs, and academia allowed the youth initiatives to be sustainable in the long-term.	Difficult collaboration with local governments was the most often mentioned barrier to project implementation. Youth expressed that without the programme as mediator the projects would not be listened to and even with the programme being there most felt not fully heard. Many bureaucratic obstacles were mentioned in all stages of the process. Tensions were created by officials taking credit of youth's work, imposing their priorities, and negotiating project support in exchange for political backing. In contrast, collaborations with like-minded people and programme partners were perceived as smooth and positive.	Akbar and Edelenbos (2021) note the "Level of openness and awareness towards resident's participation" and the "Collaboration with other stakeholders" to be most often cited influential factors from the government side to assure the success of placemaking efforts. Cases from the study by Costa et al. (2023) attest to the difficulties in the collaboration and the sharing of power and responsibility in decision-making processes. The case by Mason and Whitehead (2011) offers a striking illustration of how bureaucracy itself can cause the cancellation of projects, not the laws or regulations outright forbidding them.
Conflicting visions with local governments	Some youth projects were delayed, modified, or cancelled due to misalignment with official processes, legislation, and the vision for the city's development.	Strategic Learning Youth took an active role in bringing their topics of importance and interest into discussion by organising public debates.	Youth perceived that their issues, interests, and ideas were not seen as priorities by the local officials, rather focusing on "adult-centric" topics.	The case from Ljubljana in Costa et al. (2023) supports the importance of having local leaders who are sensitive and listen to the needs of youth.
Lack of trust and stigma	The mistrust in youth was visible and an obstacle in project conception and implementation, from both the local authorities and the wider community. Time and advocacy were needed to overcome these barriers, and it was not always successful or long-lasting.	Strategic Learning During successful collaborations, the mistrust between youth and government officials lessened, with both youth better perceiving the administration and the administration increasingly recognising youth and their projects.	Participants encountered many problems in the adult-centric decision-making spaces. Their projects were blocked by officials or local residents who had more political power. Strong stigma persists against youth activities, especially art-based ones (murals, graffiti, etc.).	The case from Lisbon in Costa et al. (2023) shows how even in placemaking processes that are geared towards youth, adolescents are still often put in a role of dependency on adults' decisions, despite being fully capable of developing and articulating their own ideas.

Conflicting needs with other citizen groups	Communication and negotiation with other members or groups in the community were difficult when contested spaces or practices were in question.	Strategic Learning The youth-led initiatives had an impact on a large audience, including children, other young people, adults, and decision-makers in the municipality. The projects paid particular attention to the inclusion of these groups. Nevertheless, due to this large impact, tensions were created between contested needs and ambitions.	Youth perceived the mistrust and stigma as being a bigger obstacle than differing needs. They explain taking into account other community members when designing their projects, yet resistance and opposition remained. Thus, they used tools like advocacy and awareness building to demonstrate to the community the potential benefits of their projects.	Costa et al. (2023) indicate six key aspects of what youth desire and need in public space (including safety, sense of belonging, comfort, and socialising), and these elements produce inclusive spaces beneficial for the wider community.
Personal constraints				
Personal limitations	Programme leaders noted that young participants were often concerned with their school performance and other obligations that hindered them from participating fully. They found it especially hard to involve the youth in the long term. They also acknowledged that the participation process was exclusive, selecting only 30 participants each year who could commit to the necessary time investment. Nevertheless, they reflected that most personal limitations encountered by youth were universal to all participation processes, not only for young people.	Strategic Learning Youth participants managed to balance their studies, work, and community engagements effectively. However, in some cases, additional experts were assigned to the project teams to mentor and assist the youth, fearing that otherwise they would not have sufficient time to finish the projects within the programme timeline. This possibly took some agency away from the youth. Serious challenges were encountered in mobilising youth participants from lower-income communities, as they placed a higher priority on employment rather than participating in community development initiatives.	Participants acknowledge the difficulty in balancing school, university, employment, and other interests with the programme activities. Nevertheless, they recognised that being selected for the programme and having the time and resources to participate was a display of their own privilege, as many others from disadvantaged backgrounds are not able to.	These findings are supported by studies from Derr et al. (2018, p.122) and Little (2020b), who indicate that youth's busy schedules may not allow full participation, especially for those from lower-income backgrounds.
Motivation and capacity	The motivation, passion, and working capacity of youth were indicated as a powerful benefit in involving them in the placemaking process. However, the programme leaders remarked that the motivation was often challenged when facing bureaucratic and other obstacles. The lack of skill capacity was not a challenge, since the programme included mentoring and capacity building that each team used according to their needs.	Strategic Learning As the programme was only set up to fully support the winning teams for the implementation of their projects, this left many participants demotivated, disappointed, and unable to fulfil their visions.	An important obstacle was the loss of motivation when faced with mistrust from adults and complicated bureaucratic hurdles. Many of the bureaucratic obstacles were seen as intentional to hinder the progress of youth projects. Some mentioned the lack of resources and knowledge as a barrier to the long-term sustainability of the project.	Akbar and Edelenbos (2021) note that motivation is the most often cited factor that enables the participants to successfully engage and complete placemaking projects, followed by their capacity and actor networks. The Ljubljana and Volos cases from Costa et al. (2023) indicate that youth are competent in creating and presenting their projects when taught the "spatial language" necessary for the task.
BENEFITS				
Individual benefits				
Personal development, skills, and capacities	Many individual growth benefits for the youth were mentioned: Personal development: accountability, self-esteem, confidence Capacity building: presenting and pitching to different audiences, budgeting, reporting, technical skills, organisational skills, entrepreneurship, management, facilitation, partnerships Social competencies: leadership, teamwork, negotiation, advocacy, decision-making, mentorship	Output Indicators Reported number of youth engaged in capacity building activities : 102 (2022), 458 (2023), 1545 (2024). Capacity building topics: art and creativity, project management, facilitation, personal and social skills Mentorship for winning teams: project management, facilitation Strategic Learning Narrative report emphasis: leadership skills, teamwork, entrepreneurship	Capacity building: career development, planning, practical and technical skills, understanding political agendas Social competencies: teaching others, mentorship, leadership, negotiation	An important aspect of youth development is the ability to create and reinterpret spaces they can call their own (McEvoy-Levy, 2012, p. 3; Witten et al., 2019). Research shows that engagement with the built environment creates a sense of belonging and well-being thanks to accessible, age-appropriate activities and interaction with others (Ferguson et al., 2013; Owens, 2020; Gray, 2020). In addition, participation supports skill development and builds a sense of responsibility needed for active citizenship (Frank, 2006).
Empowerment and responsibility	Programme leaders mentioned developing empowerment and building responsibility through: - youth involvement in decision-making, - focusing on topics they care about, - encounters and trust building with local authorities, - having a voice in conflict situations.	Strategic Learning Young people are upskilled, connected, emboldened, and more aware of opportunities. Additionally, participants are innovating for change through various projects, workshops, and interventions. Monitoring indicators are still in early stages, but changes in youth self-esteem, connection to place, empowerment, and relationships across actors are observed.	Youth participants referred to power and responsibility as key benefits of the process. Power was perceived as the capacity to not just use, but also have a say in the transformation of spaces, whereas responsibility came with the ownership and long-term investment in a project that is built on multi-stakeholder collaboration.	Akbar and Edelenbos (2021) mention "Gaining local empowerment, education, and local capacity" as one of the most often mentioned social outcomes of placemaking.
Confidence and independence	Increased confidence and independence among youth were often mentioned in the interviews. The programme allowed youth to explore the city, find their place in it, express their needs, and make decisions about the spaces they want to see.	Strategic Learning Youth participants have grown confident in presenting their projects and demand to be heard by municipal authorities.	Many aspects intertwined in contributing to increased feelings of confidence and independence, including being outdoors more and confronting the existing biases, learning about the benefits of spending time in public spaces, exploring the possibilities of activities, and developing a voice and motivation to engage in and lead change.	Individually, young people experience enjoyable activities, skill development, self-growth, increased self-esteem, confidence, and empowerment (Melcher in Loebach et al., 2020, p.112).
Social ties and connection	The first phase of the programme (exploring the city) contributed to showing the youth that the city was a system in which they had a place and a role to play. This allowed them to explore their ties to the local communities and local identity, and to contribute to it.	Strategic Learning Many youth participants have developed strong friendships through their projects, within the teams and with community members. Many have gone on to build new endeavours with these teams (NGOs, companies, etc.). The project implementation suggests that teams formed through friendships perform better compared to those united by shared interests alone. Additionally, youth participation in these events tended to attract more youth participation.	The benefit of gaining new friends and meeting new people was often mentioned as a contributing aspect to the success, motivation, and long-term sustainability of the projects. Many participants mention becoming close friends with others encountered through the programme and developing new projects with them beyond the programme. However, since the teams were so tightly knit, the absence or decreased motivation of some team members could influence others.	"Strengthening social ties" is the second most often cited social outcome of placemaking, according to Akbar and Edelenbos (2021). Mateo-Babiano and Lee (2020, p.17) include human connection as a foundational aspect of the placemaking process.
Positive experiences	Programme leaders attributed many of the positive benefits to the capacity of placemaking to bring people directly into the action - being in the space, seeing the reality of the city, taking action, having a good time doing it. They speculated that this could contribute not only to the learning and social capacities of the participants, but also to tackling the mental health issues that are prevalent within this age group in the long term.		Despite the experienced hurdles, the participants overwhelmingly described the placemaking activities as a positive experience with more benefits than downsides. They acknowledged the duality of having short- and long-term influences on the changes in the city, and this potential was positively motivating. Moreover, they report using the city and the public space more. Not only being in the city, but "living the city".	Placemaking fosters positive relationships between individuals and their environments (Mateo-Babiano and Lee, 2020; PPS, 2018). Nurturing positive relationships among individuals and communities is one of the key core values associated with placemaking (Courage, 2020)

Collective benefits				
Place attachments and ownership	Increase in place attachment was repeatedly noted as the most important benefit from the placemaking activities. Programme leaders saw a great change in the way the youth talked about, perceived, acted in, and cared for the public spaces they were working with. Additionally, this care and consideration expanded beyond the places they worked with, and the perception of the city as a whole changed. They remarked that in today's polarised society, developing a sense of belonging to public spaces is particularly challenging for the youth but crucial to the social well-being of society as a whole.	Strategic Learning A noticeable shift in mindset among participants is evident, with many now actively engaging in public spaces.	Development of place attachments was often mentioned as an outcome of the programme and the project implementation. Youth mentioned forging attachments to places, people, their communities, and the city as a whole. Moreover, they also talked about others increasing their place attachments through the initiatives they organised (e.g. kids who participated in activities, university students discovering and using transformed public spaces).	Ellery et al. (2021) in their literature review note place attachment as the first key theme underlying placemaking as a process, noting both the connection to the physical space (sense of place) and connection to the community (sense of belonging). This is supported by research from Marshall and Bishop (2015), who indicate a strong link between place attachment and successful placemaking, as well as Mateo-Babiano and Lee (2020:17) who note place meanings and the sense of place as fundamental components in placemaking.
Improved process and outcomes of placemaking	Many advantages of youth participating in the process were noted: - sharing the fresh perspectives, - informing the experts on the needs and wants of this generation, - creativity stemming from their different experiences and points of view, - honesty and lack of hidden agendas, transparency, - willingness to participate, passion, - productivity in the tasks. Additionally, working with youth has a wider impact as through them it is possible to reach their families, communities, teachers, and friends.		Participants noted that youth-led participatory processes help reduce stigma by allowing adults to better understand how young people use public space. For example, when street artists invite the broader community to paint with them, it creates a bridge between adults and young artists.	Conclusions from Costa et al. (2023) support that young people have strong ties with their parents and peers, meaning that larger groups can be engaged through activities with them and confirming that youth-led placemaking can have positive impacts for the larger community.
Reduces delinquency and antisocial behaviours	Programme leaders saw placemaking as a possibility to reduce youth engagement in negative and antiæsocial behaviours, rather turning them to positive activities to do, teaching them new skills and capacities, allowing them to develop their interests, and providing more avenues to express themselves and spend time productively.		In their role of mentors and artists, some participants felt a strong responsibility and potential in their actions with other youth, in teaching them tools that will lead them away from delinquency and antisocial behaviours and will have a positive impact in their futures.	Research suggests that youth delinquency can be avoided with the appropriate space affordances and structured time and activities (Osgood et al., 2005), which supports the idea that placemaking by youth could be a pathway towards this.
Physical benefits				
Safety and well-being for all	Several physical benefits of space were mentioned: - positive branding and identity of spaces/communities, - revitalising and using abandoned spaces; - youth creating spaces for themselves; - positive and productive activities through new affordances.	Strategic Learning Many positive place-based improvements were reported from the different cities, ranging from small changes produced by the youths themselves (e.g., greenery, event activation) to larger infrastructural projects done in collaboration with the municipalities (infrastructure like cycling lanes, lights, etc.).	Through their initiatives, youth aimed to address both physical safety and overall well-being of different societal groups, by improving infrastructure (sidewalks, cycling lanes), urban amenities (lights, benches), and safety (lights, cycling infrastructure) for youth, pedestrians, parents, and other city-users, and vulnerable groups. All respondents indicated the feeling of having helped the community in some way.	In their literature review, Akbar and Edelenbos (2021) name many positive changes for public spaces that are possible to achieve through placemaking. They can be functional, ecological, aesthetic, economic, and social.
Perception of safety	In addition to the physical safety improved by projects, many of the placemaking activities led to improved perception of safety, which was often not connected to physical changes in space. Understanding the causes of perceived insecurity (e.g., abandoned spaces, vandalism, negative image of neighbourhoods), the youth could tackle these problems as well as their biases about these places. In some cases, positive improvements in perception of safety were already reported even before any actual physical implementation, meaning that the perceptions were not always based on physical aspects of the space.	Strategic Learning The youth initiatives have raised awareness about safety in the participating municipalities and their policy-making as well as a larger interest in involved communities.	All respondents agreed to feeling safer outdoors and more comfortable using public spaces than before the programme. The confidence they had gained through the project process allowed them to see the city without the bias of fear that had stopped them previously. Some reflected that their perceptions of danger had come from the media and did not reflect the reality in their cities and neighbourhoods.	Mehta (2014) remarks that safety is often referred to as the first concern when discussing public space, and Costa et al. (2023) identify it as one of six key needs for young people in public space.
Reduced sense of exclusion and stigma	Before the programme, a pervasive sense of exclusion was felt by youth in public spaces, as they were often rejected by the communities or the authorities. In particular, respondents from Latin America indicated that in their context, the relationships with public spaces were difficult, as many felt excluded and not allowed to express themselves as they wished. Thus, the programme leaders noted that in the beginning, they encountered difficulties in convincing the youth that they can have agency in public spaces. Through the project activities (mainly, direct meetings, advocacy, raising awareness, and collaborations), they managed to not only feel more accepted but also increase the perceived credibility of youth more generally.	Strategic Learning Starting with small activities, like tactical urbanism, empowered the youth to claim public spaces as their own and take on larger projects further on.	Echoing the words of the programme leaders, the youth also acknowledged perceiving public spaces as being controlled only by the government and not having any agency. Their projects allowed them to have more authority to be and transform these spaces, leading them to feel less excluded from the city overall.	Results from the literature review by Ellery et al. (2021) support the findings that one's perception of safety can have positive or negative impacts on their sense of place and belonging.
Independent mobility	Programme leaders observed that some of the youth had gained more independence in their use of the city, particularly in their independent use of public transport and being outdoors by themselves more. They speculate that these changes could lead to improved physical and mental health in the long term.		Youth indicated a significant change in how they use and move around the city. The increase in walking, cycling, and taking public transport by themselves was reported. Unknown places in the city that seemed far away and exclusive seemed more accessible to the youth now.	Research from Derr et al. (2018, p.213) confirms that young people have more obstacles in accessing unfamiliar places due to their lower independent mobility compared to adults. In addition, they also tend to avoid places they perceive as "adult" or where they could feel uncomfortable, intimidated, outnumbered, and bored. Torres (2020) adds that young people's independent mobility is restricted by both a lack of opportunities and increasing parental control.