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Integrating Placemaking into Urban Regeneration: Approaches and Prospects for Institutionalization

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Abstract. Placemaking is increasingly recognized as a flexible and holistic tool capable of addressing complex urban challenges such as social inequality, climate adaptation, mobility, and public space regeneration. However, many barriers still hinder the effectiveness of the placemaking as an urban regeneration tool due to the bureaucratic structures and procedures, insufficient cross-departmental coordination, limited long-term community engagement, and difficulties in measuring impact and securing funding. The current paper examines the integration of placemaking into urban governance and urban regeneration through institutional arrangements that support long-term participation, cross-sectoral collaboration and adaptive planning. The study focuses on two research questions: RQ1: How do intervention type and stakeholders involved shape the placemaking practice? and RQ2: What is the level of integration of placemaking into urban governance? A qualitative-comparative case study methodology is applied to six European case studies from Berlin, Milan, Rotterdam, Zaragoza, Brussels, and Plovdiv drawing on policy documents, program reports, academic literature, and project documentation. The case studies are evaluated using a comparative framework consisting of parameters describing intervention characteristics and stakeholder roles, together with criteria such as citizen participation, institutional integration, cross-sectoral collaboration, governance adaptability, social and environmental impacts, and the sustainability of funding and implementation. The findings demonstrate that although placemaking can be practiced through both bottom-up citizen initiatives and municipality-led programs, its long-term effectiveness depends on the level of institutional integration into the local governance structures. The comparison outlines that cities combining strong citizen participation with formal governance mechanisms, stable funding and interdisciplinary collaboration achieve the most durable spatial, social and environmental outcomes with regards to the implementation of placemaking. The study concludes that integrating placemaking into urban governance requires structural and cultural transformation within municipal administrations and arguments the need of a shift from the project-based participation towards decentralized collaborative governance supported by dedicated structures acting as mediators between city administrations and civic actors. Such structures can facilitate coordination across sectors, translate community initiatives into implementable policies, and strengthen institutional capacity for long-term place governance. The proposed framework contributes to the growing literature on placemaking governance by identifying practical governance models and institutional strategies that can support more resilient, inclusive and people-centered urban development.

Keywords: Placemaking; urban regeneration; urban governance; European cities; participatory planning

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INTRODUCTION

European cities face multiple urban challenges as social inequality, environmental degradation, pressure from rapid urbanization, and insufficiency of inclusive, safe, and high-quality public space [1]. Placemaking has emerged as an approach capable of addressing some of these problems by combining social, cultural, ecological, and spatial considerations in a participatory, community-driven processes. Emphasizing local expertise, social inclusion, and the co-creation of spaces where physical, environmental, cultural, and immaterial qualities are interwoven through consensus-driven design and management, the placemaking processes can be conceptualized as an inherently transdisciplinary, visionary, inclusive, adaptive and context-sensitive tool to address these problems [2,3,4].Despite the potential multiple benefits that place making provides, it is rarely systematically embedded within the local governance structures and many initiatives remain project-based, temporary, and with limited long-term impact and sustainability. This raises the question about its adequate institutionalization and becoming a structural element of urban governance rather than an ad-hoc intervention. Fundamental theoretical studies emphasize on Genius Loci [5] and citizens as active creators of urban environments in the social production of space [6]. Based on the communicative planning approach based on the earliest possible alignment of planning decisions with stakeholders [7], placemaking as a collaborative process through which the public realm can be shaped to maximize shared value, emphasizing both the physical characteristics and the socio-cultural identity of urban spaces was initially defined by Project for Public Spaces in the mid-1990s [8]. Gradually, it was considered a powerful practical approach for improving neighborhoods, cities, or regions that encourages communities to collectively rethink and rediscover public spaces as vital community assets as well as a tool for mobilizing a community's collective vision, fostering the reimagination of everyday spaces, and reinvigorating parks, squares, streets, interstitial areas, waterfronts, markets, and other public realms [8]. Since the 1990s, the academic discourse was shifted from the expert-driven project design to participatory decision-making that incorporates diverse stakeholders' perspectives [9,10]. Since the late 20th and early 21st centuries, research on placemaking increasingly addressed its governance and institutional dimensions. Governance, in the context of placemaking, is conceptualized as a horizontal network of actors complementing or replacing traditional sectoral and hierarchical governance structures, thus promoting partnerships among public, private, and civil sectors and collaborative policymaking [11-13]. Since 2010, citizens' participation is considered an essential factor for public space sustainability and resilience as it fosters the development of social capital, strengthens local identity and economic viability, especially when supported institutionally [14]. The public sector stakeholders play leading role in providing resources, legitimacy, and coordination, enabling local initiatives to scale to urban and regional levels [15,16]. Successful projects require interdepartmental coordination and private-sector partnerships, yet tensions often arise between community interests and economic or political priorities [17,18]. As a result, in recent theoretical investigations, placemaking is conceptualized as a tool for knowledge exchange and skill development that empowers communities to transform public spaces, bridging planning theory and practice and positioning as a hybrid approach connecting bottom-up initiatives and top-down policies [4]. It is increasingly framed as a tool for sustainable development, linking local action to global goals, with citizen participation recognized as standard practice in many cities [19, 20]. Despite the growing scholarship on placemaking, there remains a significant gap in research on what are the roles of the stakeholders in this process, how it can be better institutionalized and integrated within local governance structures with regards to specific contexts [2, 4, 21]. To address this gap, the study focuses on the assessment of the level of integration of placemaking into urban governance and the possible strategies that can support this long-term integration.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, APPROACH, AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study is to assess the level of integration of placemaking into urban governance and the possible strategies that can support such long-term integration. Therefore, two research questions are posed: RQ1: How do the intervention type and stakeholder involvement shape placemaking practice? RQ2: What is the level of integration of placemaking into urban governance? In order to address these questions, the study adopts qualitative comparative research designed to examine the level of integration of placemaking approaches into urban governance, regeneration, and development across European cities. The study adopts a comparative-qualitative case study methodology, examining placemaking initiatives in six selected European cities amongst which Milan, Berlin, Rotterdam, Zaragoza, Brussels and Plovdiv. Three main topics build the construct of each case studies: the baseline information, the summarized special information regarding the topics of the RQs – intervention type and stakeholders involved (RQ1), and information on the level of integration of placemaking into urban governance (RQ2). The information for each

case study was extracted and combined from primary and secondary data sources, including policy documents, municipal and regional strategies programme reports, academic literature, research reports, project and planning documentation, and publicly available evaluations incorporated into case-specific reports on detailed planning process, stakeholder engagement and implementation outcomes. The selected case studies represent practices from diverse geographical, institutional, and socio-political contexts within Europe. These cases were chosen based on their recognized relevance to placemaking practices, availability of data, representation of varying levels of institutional integration and the level of engagement and first-hand familiarity of the authors with the cases. By comparing them, the paper identifies enabling conditions and systemic barriers to the institutionalization of placemaking and outlines needed actions in transforming placemaking into an institutionalized practice of public space management.

The case studies have been analyzed using two sets of qualitative criteria (Table 1). To evaluate the practices each case study has been systematically assessed against six parameters as follows: the typology of public space, the type of intervention and type of placemaking, the initiator of the initiative, responsibility for the maintenance, the entity/group leading the process and the specific instruments used for each case for the realization of the placemaking practice. To extract the approaches, and instruments utilized for the integration of placemaking into urban governance from the stakeholder perspective (RQ1) comparative research was conducted against the six parameters relying on the sources listed in Table 1. To evaluate the level of integration of placemaking into urban governance (RQ2), the qualitative criteria used consists of six criteria, consisting of the degree and continuity of citizen participation, the level of integration within municipal governance structures, cross-sectoral collaboration, governance adaptability, and the sustainability of funding and implementation strategies. In order to assess the level of integration of placemaking into urban governance, the scale of low to very high has been implemented with the following scaling factors - low, low to moderate, moderate, moderate to high, high and very high.

TABLE 1. Sets of parameters and criteria used to compare the six case studies.

RQ1: How do intervention type and stakeholders involved shape the placemaking practice?	**RQ2: What is the level of integration of placemaking into urban governance?**
Parameter 1 (P1): Typology of the public space Parameter 2 (P2): Type of intervention and type of placemaking Parameter 3 (P3): Initiator of the initiative/ programme Parameter 4 (P4): Entity/group responsible for the maintenance of the public space after implementation Parameter 5 (P5): Entity/group responsible for leading the process Parameter 6 (P6): Specific instruments used for each case for the realization of the placemaking practice	Criteria 1 (C1): Degree and continuity of citizen participation and co-creation. Criteria 2 (C2): Level of institutional integration within municipal governance structures. Criteria 3 (C3): Extent of cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration. Criteria 4 (C4): Adaptability and flexibility of governance and regulatory models. Criteria 5 (C5): Achieved social, environmental, and spatial impacts. Criteria 6 (C6): Availability of sustainable funding mechanisms and long-term implementation strategies;

Introduction of the Case Studies

Berlin, Germany: The Tempelhof Feld Redevopment. The transformation of Tempelhof Feld, a historic 300-hectare former airfield in the urban core of Berlin, started after the airport's closure in 2008. The Senate initially intended to implement a master planned real-estate-driven development featuring extensive residential housing and commercial offices. After a growing civic opposition that culminated in the grass-roots initiative *100% Tempelhofer Feld*, a formal public referendum was hold in May 2014, where 64% of the participating citizens voted in favour of the civic counter-plan which legally banned any permanent construction on the airfield and guaranteed free access to the open space. [22,23] Since then, the space of Tempelhof Feld quickly evolved into a highly popular public park characterized by informal, open-ended community uses and was transformed into one of Europe's largest public parks[24]. The project is widely recognized as an example of community-led placemaking and commons governance, where citizens play an active role in shaping and stewarding public space.

Milan, Italy: The *Piazze Aperte* Initiative. Piazze Aperte or Open Squares is a municipality-led placemaking programme launched by the City of Milan to reclaim streets and underutilised intersections through tactical urbanism interventions. Using temporary, low-cost measures and collaborative design processes, the initiative tests new public spaces before implementing permanent urban transformations. As part of the programme more than 40 squares have been transformed since its initiation in 2018.[25] The program utilizes tactical urbanism - low-cost, rapid-delivery

experimental measures such as asphalt painting, temporary public seating, protective planters, and adjusted traffic delineations to reclaim vehicular domains for pedestrian and community use.

Rotterdam, Netherlands: *The Benthemplein Water Square.* Benthemplein Water Square is an innovative multifunctional public space in Rotterdam that combines climate adaptation with urban placemaking by serving as both a recreational square and a stormwater retention basin. Developed through collaboration between public authorities, designers and local stakeholders, the project demonstrates how public space can simultaneously address environmental resilience and social needs. [26]

Zaragoza, Spain: The "*Estonoesunsolar*" Programme. *Estonoesunsolar* is an urban regeneration programme initiated by the Municipality of Zaragoza to transform vacant and underused plots into temporary public spaces for community use. After the global financial and real estate crisis in 2008, the City of Zaragoza faced severe economic challenges, leaving the municipality with high unemployment rates and a growing number of vacant underused plots [27]. In response, the municipal Housing Department, working alongside the architectural firm Grávalos Di Monte, launched the initiative *Estonoesunsolar* ("This is not a vacant lot") [27, 28]. It was designed to address two challenges at once by generating immediate employment and reclaiming abandoned urban spaces. The municipality hired 61 unemployed local workers to clean up and secure neglected public and private infill lots across the historic city center. Once cleared, these sites were transformed through low-cost architectural interventions into temporary community gardens, pocket parks, children's play areas, and cultural spaces. [27] Through adaptive reuse and community participation, the initiative revitalised neglected neighbourhoods while awaiting long-term redevelopment.

Brussels, Belgium: Open Streets initiative. Open Streets is a grassroots placemaking initiative developed by Filter Café Filtré Atelier that temporarily pedestrianized streets adjacent to educational facilities, transforming vehicle-dominated corridors into active public spaces for children and local communities through tactical and DIY urban interventions [29]. Originally driven by citizen activism, the initiative evolved into a collaborative governance model that integrated the Brussles capital Region and the local municipalities. By demonstrating the social and environmental benefits of street closure, Openstreets initiative started a broader debate on sustainable mobility and street design, and Brussels Capital Region public space policy. [29, 30] The People's Choice Award at the Brussles Architecture Prize in 2023, recognizes the bottom-up initiative's impact of the transition from car-centric urban design towards community-oriented human scaled street design.

Plovdiv, Bulgaria: *The Neighbourhood Chat.* One of Bulgaria's earliest practical applications of placemaking principles, the practice, is a community-led placemaking initiative implemented in in public spaces of Trakia - the largest post-socialist housing estate of Plovdiv between June and August 2016 as part of the One Architecture Week festival focused specifically on strengthening interactions between citizens, civic activists and public institutions while promoting more inclusive approaches to public space development. The practice fosters neighbourhood engagement through dialogue, participatory activities and collective action in Plovdiv. A central feature of the initiative was the construction of a temporary mobile wooden installation referred to as an urban activator. Designed as a flexible meeting space, the structure served as a physical gathering place and a participatory research tool, enabling conversations, workshops, surveys and informal interactions with local residents. By relocating the installation to different locations within the neighbourhood over a twelve-day period, the project reached approximately 230 residents from surrounding housing blocks.[31] Rather than focusing primarily on physical interventions, the project emphasises social interaction, local identity and community empowerment as drivers of placemaking.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of the six European case studies suggests that the institutionalization of placemaking is not a binary condition but rather a gradual process through which community-led spatial initiatives become progressively embedded within formal planning systems. Rather than occurring through a single policy intervention, it involves the evolution of governance arrangements, administrative capacities, regulatory instruments, and organizational cultures.

The Influence of Intervention Type and Stakeholder Involvement on Placemaking Practice

The analysis of the six European placemaking case studies demonstrates that although all projects seek to improve public spaces through participatory approaches, they employ distinct governance arrangements, implementation instruments, and maintenance models, reflecting the institutional, political, and socio-spatial contexts within which placemaking is embedded. (Table 2).

TABLE 2. Comparative Case Study Matrix on the level of integration of placemaking into urban governance

Case Study / Initiative	P1: Typology of Public Space	P2: Type of intervention, Type of placemaking	P3: Who initiates the project/ initiative	P4: Who provides public space post-mplemen-tion mainten-ance	P5: Who leads the process	P6: What are the specific instruments
Berlin: ***Tempelhof Feld*** [2], [33-35]	Former airport transform-ed into metro-politan park	Adaptive reuse; Community-led place-making; temporary uses	Citizen initiative (*100% Tempel-hofer Feld*) toge-ther with Berlin Senate and Grün Berlin after pub-lic referendum	Grün Berlin GmbH and Senate Department, supported by community groups	Collaborative governance model with strong co-management and participa-tory planning	• Referendum preventing development o • Act providing legal protection and defi management principles. • Participatory Master Planning process. • Advisory Board • Stewardship agreements
Milan: ***Piazze Aperte*** [25,36]	Streets, intersec-tions and neigh-bourhood squares	Tactical ur-banism; street reclai-mation; tem-orary-to-per-manent pub-lic space transformation	Municipality of Milan *(Comune di Milano*) with AMAT and partners; later expanded through citizen proposals	Milan Muni-cipality through Collaboration Agreements with residents, schools and local associations	Municipality-led collaborative governance (institutiona-lised tactical urbanism)	• Collaboration Agreements • Open Calls for neighbourhood proposa • Tactical Urbanism toolkit • Pilot-testing and post-occupancy evalu
Rotterdam: ***Benthem-plein*** [26], [38-41]	Multifunc tional public square	Climate-adaptive placemaking; multifunction al landscape design	Municipality of Rotterdam with De Urbanisten, Rotterdam Cli-mate Initiative and local schools	Mainly Munici-pality of Rotter-dam; involve-ment of adja-cent schools and local stakeholders	Network go-vernance - public-led with stakeholder participation	• lined with the Rotterdam Climate Adap Strategy. • Rotterdam Climate Initiative • Participatory Design Workshops with s and neighbourhood organisations • Public procurement/design competitior
Zaragoza: ***Estonoes-unsolar*** [27-28], [44]	Vacant lots and underused urban spaces	Temporary urbanism; adaptive reuse; tactical placemaking	Zaragoza City Council with architects and unemployed residents	Municipality together with neighbour-hood orga-nisations and local users (depending on site)	Public-led collaborative governance with community participation	• Temporary land-use agreements betwe municipality and private landowners • Municipal regeneration program mana Zaragoza Vivienda. • Public employment program hiring un-residents for implementation. • Neighborhood consultation workshops • Temporary occupancy permits for vaca
Brussels: ***Openstreets*** [29-30], [46]	Residen-tial streets, near schools and neigh-bourhood public spaces	Tactical urbanism; temporary street closures; community-led placemaking	Grassroots citizen movement (*Filter Café Filtré Atelier*), later supported by Brussels Mobility and municipalities	Shared responsibility between mu-nicipalities; Brussels Mo-bility and local communities during implementation	Bottom Up Community-led Collaborative governance	• Open Streets permits issued by munici • Good Move Regional Mobility Plan su street reallocation. • Brussels Mobility funding programme. • Traffic regulations for street closures. • Co-creation workshops organised by F Filtré Atelier. • Pilot experiments (urban living labs). • Partnership agreements between NGOs municipalities and Brussels Mobility.
Plovdiv ***The Neighbour-hood Chat*** [31], [48]	Neighbou rhood public space	Social place-making; parti-cipatory neighbourhood activation; community engagement	NGO-led initiative *(The Neighborhood Chat*) with local residents and Municipality of Plovdiv support	Responsibility of Local co-mmunity, NGO and municipa-lity but practi-cally under maintained	Emergent community-led collaborative governance	• Small grant funding for neighbourhood initiatives.

Regarding the **typology of public space**, the case studies encompass a diverse range of urban environments, including former airport (Tempelhofer Feld), neighbourhood streets and intersections (Piazze Aperte and Open Streets), climate-adaptive public square (Benthemplein), vacant urban land (Estonoesunsolar), and neighbourhood public space focusing on local community interaction (The Neighborhood Chat). This diversity suggests that placemaking is a flexible approach that can be implemented in various urban contexts and can result in different **types of placemaking interventions**. Berlin and Zaragoza initially employ strategies for adaptive reuse thus gradually transforming public space. Milan and Brussels rely on tactical urbanism, using temporary interventions such as painted surfaces, movable street furniture and pilot projects to test alternative uses of public space before permanent implementation. In Rotterdam, placemaking is integrated into climate change adaptation actions through

multifunctional landscape design, while in Plovdiv it was use to foster dialogue and community engagement and as a tool to strengthen neighbourhood social cohesion. In terms **of project initiation**, placemaking can originate from both bottom-up and top-down processes, although the subsequent governance arrangements differ considerably. Two cases (Tempelhofer Feld and Open Streets) originated as grassroots initiatives driven by citizen mobilisation. In contrast, Piazze Aperte, Benthemplein and Estonoesunsolar were initiated by municipal authorities, while The Neighborhood Chat started as organisations' idea that was supported by the municipality. These findings indicate that. When it comes to **maintenance responsibilities** three distinct models are highlighted. Benthemplein represents a conventional municipal management model, where long-term maintenance is undertaken exclusively by local authorities due to the technical complexity of the water management infrastructure. Berlin, Milan and Zaragoza adopt shared maintenance arrangements, combining municipal responsibility with formal or informal community stewardship. Brussles demonstrates a flexible governance model that enhances the shift from temporary interventions managed by community organizations to municipal responsibility of projects that become permanent. In Plovdiv, the maintenance is limitted to sustaining community activities in short-run. Each one of the cases relied on an **intermediary body that enhance transforming citizens' claims into implementable projects**. However, the permanent action and decication of these intermediaries varies significantly: from technical/administrative units that serve as funding distributors and regulatory authorities (Berlin and Milan) to coordinated municipal departments (Rotterdam), and from decentralized model without an intermediatory body (Zaragosa) to empowering external civic-activist collectives (Brussels and Plovdiv). The comparative assessment of urban governance models demonstrates that **collaborative governance** is present across all cases but takes different institutional forms. Tempelhofer Feld is characterised by commons governance and co-management, where decision-making is shared between public authorities and organised civil society. Piazza Aperte represents institutional collaborative governance model, where the municipality coordinates the proces and formalizes it through collaborative agreements. Piazze Aperte represents institutional collaborative governance, with the municipality coordinating partnerships with schools, residents and local organizations through formal collaboration agreements, while Benthemplein is example of a collaborative multilevel governance model, relying on cooperation between municipal departments, technical experts and stakeholders. Estonoesunsolar operates through public-community partnerships involving temporary agreements with private landowners. Open Streets illustrates bottom-up collaborative governance, while The Neighborhood Chat represents community governance based on horizontal collaboration between residents, NGOs and local government. Finally, the comparison of **governance instruments** demonstrates that placemaking is realised through a variety of legal, policy and organisational mechanisms. Berlin relies on legally binding instruments such as the Tempelhofer Feld Act and the 2014 referendum, while Milan institutionalises participation through the Patti di Collaborazione, co-design workshops and tactical urbanism programmes. Rotterdam primarily employs strategic planning and climate adaptation policies. Zaragoza depends on temporary land-use agreements and municipal regeneration programmes. Brussels uses temporary traffic regulations, mobility policies and urban living lab experiments, whereas Plovdiv relies predominantly on soft governance instruments such as community workshops, participatory mapping and neighbourhood action plans initiated by an organizing team.

The Level of Integration of Placemaking into Urban Governance

The comparative matrix below evaluates the selected case studies against the six core qualitative criteria defined in the methodology, providing a clear overview of enabling conditions and systemic challenges. The six case studies reveal a range of strategies for participatory, cross-sectoral urban governance, ranging from highly institutionalized arrangements to bottom-up interventions. (Table 3)

Citizen participation is estimated high in Berlin, Rotterdam, and Brussles, where involvement went beyond consultation into co-creation. In Berlin this was achieved through a public referendum and a constituted Advisory Board; in Berlin, this occurred through a public referendum and a User Advisory Board; in Rotterdam - through intensive design workshops with local schools, and in Brussles - through grassroot networks. Although participation in Milan and Zaragoza is also estimated high, it was achieved through more managed forms by moving from municipal pilot efforts towards communities' proposals or co-design with neighbourhood associations. In Plovdiv the weak foundations for civil society hindered the dialogie between the local authorities and communities and limited participation to initial hearings and occasional NGO initiatives.

TABLE 3. Comparative Case Study Matrix on the level of integration of placemaking into urban governance

Case Study / Initiative	C1: Citizen Participation & Co-creation	C2: Institutional Integration Level	C3: Cross-Sectoral & Interdisciplinary Collaboration	C4: Adaptability & Flexibility of Governance Models	C5: Social, Environmental, & Spatial Impacts	C6: Sustainable Funding & Implementation Strategies
Berlin: *Tempelhof Feld* [2], [22-24], [32-35]	**Very High** driven by a public referen-dum and mana-ged via a User Advisory Board	**Very High** integrated through a state-owned enter-prise *Tempelhof Projekt GmbH*)	**High** balances environmental conservation with civic and cultural programming	**High** features struc-tured 1-3 year temporary use agreements via online portals	**High** preserves a major open space, pro-tects biodiversity, prevents infill development	**High** funded via Berlin Senate capital allocations and lease fees
Milan: *Piazze Aperte* [25,36]	**High** shifts from municipal pilots to community-initiated proposals	**Highly** institutionalized via the *Collaboration Pact* and AMAT agency	**Very High** connects the *Officina Urbana* design team with transport and environment units	**Very High** utilizes rapid tac-tical urbanism to test interventions before permanent investment	**High** increases pede-strian safety and expands public space; social and spatial impact	**Moderate to High** municipal funding covers tatical de-livery, support by corporate sponsors
Rotterdam: *Benthem-plein* [26], [36], [38-44]	**Very High** features intensive design workshops with local schools	**Very High** integrated into the city's Clima-te Adaptation Strategy	**Very High** merges water ma-nagement boards with urban deve-lopment teams	**High** uses the *Right to Challenge* to let residents manage local spaces	**Very High** manages storm-water while provi-ding recreational assets	**High** funded by joint municipal bud-gets and regional water boards.
Zaragoza: *Estonoes-unsolar* [27-28], [42-44]	**High** co-designed and maintained along-side 60 neighbor-hood associations	**Moderate** managed directly through the Municipal Hou-sing Department	**High** bridges social em-ployment initiatives with public land reclamation	**Very High** fast-tracks temporary use agree-ments on vacant public and private lots	**High** creates new public spaces while providing local employment.	**Low to Moderate** reliant on municipal social employment grants
Brussels: *Openstreets* [29-30], [45-46]	**Very High** driven by parent networks and local design collectives	**Low to Moderate** operates prima-rily as an activist intervention that shapes policy	**Moderate** links transport advocacy with childhood health and air quality	**High** tactical flexibili-ty uses temporary road closures to demonstrate alternative uses	**High** reduces vehicle emissions and enhances safety near schools.	**Low to Moderate** rlied on civic crowd funding, NGO resources, and public awards
Plovdiv: *The Neighbour-hood Chat* [31], [47-49]	**Low** limited prima-rily to initial public hearings or ad-hoc NGO interventions	**Low** missing formal integration within General Develop-ment Plans	**Low** constrained by si-loed departments and strict, construc-tion-focused procurement	**Low** faces regulatory hurdles regar-ding temporary spatial uses	**Low to moderate** delivers positive short-term projects but lacks systemic scale.	**Low** heavily depen-dent on short term EU prog-rams or NGO budgets

Institutional integration is closely related to the long-term performance of placemaking practices. Rotterdam and Milan built their initiatives into city strategies - Rotterdam into the climate Adaptation Strategy, and Milan through the formal Collaboration Pact with AMAT agency. Berlin relied on a purposely established state-owned enterprise, while Brussles's Openstreets and Plovdiv Neighborhood chat remain low-to-moderately integrated with a reduced systematic reach, as they relied more on activists for interventions or projects that were not necessary part of broader development plans. Institutional integration is also dependent on the specific spatial planning frameworks. The spatial planning frameworks of the analyzed cities operate within multi-level or decentralized governance structures that provide for legislative framework on national or regional level for municipalities or district administrations to implement spatial interventions. Structural flexibility needed for local experimentation was enhanced by different factors – in Berlin the complete decentralization that handled the responsibility of the district administrations for the localized zoning and neighborhood-level planning [32-33], the integration of placemaking into the implementation of long-term strategy for enhancing public space accessibility, pedestrian infrastructure, and localized environmental adaptation in Milan, the established consensus-driven planning culture in Rotterdam [26], the shared responsibilities between the national, regional and local level of governance in the case of Zaragosa, and the regionally-driven but most decentralized multilevel European governance in Brussels [45-46]. With its centralized statutory spatial planning framework [47], where masterplans and detailed development plans merely allow for adaptive bottom-up interventions in Plovdiv. **Cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration** was estimated strong in Rotterdam for combining water management with urban planning and development, in Milan for connecting transport and environmental management, and in Zaragosa for integration solutions to socio-economic problems and reclaiming of public plots. In

Plovdiv it was limited by poor departmental coordination and lack of flexible procurement procedures. **The social, environmental and spatial impacts** are estimated positive in all case studies, although there are different scopes of the practices ranging from the dual-purpose water squares (Rotterdam) and biodiversity protection (Berlin) to a localized short-term effect of activation social life (Plovdiv). The impacts are a direct response to the context-specific challenges modulated through problem solving to proactive visioning. In Berlin placemaking was driven by the structural social pressures of the increased post-unification inequality [22]; in Rotterdam - driven by the increased immigrant population diversity and climate change adaptation needs [2],[37, 38]; in Brussels the initiative emerged to respond to the citizens' needs and their concerns about public health (traffic safety, air pollution near schools) [29], in Milan and Zaragosa it was recognized by using legal mechanisms to bridge the gap between informal citizen actions and bureaucratic governance structures [30],[37-39], and in Plovdiv it remains as single civil society initiative within a limited public participation framework rather than policy driven action [31]. **Sustainability of funding** seems to be the critical fault line among the case studies. Berlin and Rotterdam secured stable, institutional funding channels (joint municipal-regional budgets and those from the Senate are allocated for the initiatives), while Zaragoza, Brussels and Plovdiv leave with uncertain long-term prospectives as they depend on short-term grants, crowdfunding, or EU/NGO programmes. To sum up, the cities, that paired strong citizens' participation with formal institutional embedding of placemaking, achieved more durable, cross-sectoral and sustainable results. The cities that implemented placemaking practices through high participation and limited institutional support (Brussels and Zaragoza) faced sustainability concern. The lack of both robust participatory arrangements and institutional integration (Plovdiv) outlines the risks of fragmented, donor-dependent urban governance. The comparative assessment of the six case studies outlines two different approaches to institutionalization of placemaking. The fully institutionalized (Berlin, Rotterdam, Milan), which makes the initiatives structurally resilient and replicable, is supported by dedicated legal entities, elected/advisory boards, secured funding, and regulatory mechanisms. Although recognized by the citizens and city administrations, the functionally institutionalized but not legally formalized approach (Zaragosa, Brussels) leaves the initiatives more dependent on policy continuity and political will. Despite the achieved real governance integration and policy recognition, it is initiated by activist-led collaboration and supported by flexible agreements rather than permanent legal arrangements. In Plovdiv placemaking is recognized by the civil society and administration but not yet integrated in the formal governance practice. This marks such efforts as structurally fragile, non-scalable and disconnected from policy reforms.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The comparative analysis reveals that the transition of placemaking from a temporary intervention to an institutionalized practice requires solutions that balance tensions between the bureaucratic work cultures of the local administration and iterative spatial practices, between the isolated governance structures and the interdisciplinary challenges; and between the short-term project funding and the long-term practice maintenance. To successfully integrate placemaking into the existing urban governance structures, cities have to make the transition from top-down control towards decentralized governance models that promote shared responsibilities between the stakeholders. This transition relies on two governance innovations. First, municipalities must pass down tangible decision-making authority and flexible funding to the neighborhood level. This can be achieved through context specific neighbourhood management frameworks (like Berlin's *Quartiersmanagement*) or neighborhood-level boards directly elected by residents (like Rotterdam's *Wijk aan Zet*), ensuring that public space development strategies are directly shaped by the citizens that use those places daily. Second, the establishment of a dedicated intermediary structure or "mediator" unit within the municipal governance structures seems to be one of the most effective tools for sustainable integration. These units can operate at the intersection of top-down administrative hierarchies and bottom-up civic movements. These intermediary structures perform several vital functions such as mediation, i.e bridging the gap between technical, legalistic municipal codes and the informal, creative ideas of local citizen groups; coordination that aligns multiple municipal departments around a single public space project; capacity building aiming to provide local residents with the technical toolkits, regulatory pathways, and design support needed to co-manage urban spaces safely and effectively. Overall, the findings indicate that placemaking is implemented through a spectrum of governance arrangements, ranging from community-led initiatives to highly institutionalised municipal programmes, supported by a combination of legal, regulatory, participatory and organisational instruments. The success of the placemaking process and its long-term implementation is directly related to the level of its successful institutional integration.

Effective place-making requires a comprehensive approach combining active community participation, institutional support, cross-sector collaboration, and coordination across spatial scales. Integrating placemaking into

the core of urban governance requires changes in the organizational culture and municipal administrative structure rather than treating community-led design as an occasional, ad-hoc projects. Forward-thinking cities must integrate these adaptive, human-scaled initiatives directly into their formal planning, financial and legal structures.

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