



Placemaking in the Western Balkans and beyond - Symposium on Sustainable Cities Through Place-Led Development

On Wednesday, May 19, 2021 online Symposium on Sustainable Cities through Place-Led Development was held with more than 30 participants including urban planners, architects, local economic development representatives from the Balkan region, university students and professors, NGO representatives, artists and activists. Participants were mostly from the countries of the Western Balkans, but few joined from further cities like Oslo, Brussels and Valencia.

How to create public spaces? Number of successful projects done in the Western Balkans were presented:

- 100 ideas for Debar Maalo 2017
- Ksamil Urban Lab 2018
- Placemaking capacity building, Activating Riverfronts Nis 2018
- Placemaking- Central Square of Kanina 2019
- Placemaking – Skawina Urban Redevelopment Belgrade 2019
- Placemaking- Activating Monofunctional Housing Blocks Novi Sad 2020
- Placemaking Toolbox 2020

Placemakers, architects, urban planners, civil servants from the region exchanged knowledge about applied tools and methodologies. Representatives from Albania, Serbia, Croatia and North Macedonia shared their on-the-ground experiences in different projects. Ms. Tamara Jovanovic from the city of Nis, Serbia emphasized the importance of engaging more participatory tools in everyday work as it is a great tool to activate and engage people. Also, the importance of connecting locally in order to connect globally and run up proper network was mentioned. Mr. Ognjen Tomasevic from the city of Novi Sad, Serbia added that this is a parallel process where the people are developing and places where they live are developing along. Representative from Albania, Mr. Astrit Alikaj, defined Placemaking as a multifaced approach where it involves planning, design and management for the public spaces. By means of this approach, users can benefit from a more creative plan.



The two questions were asked to the participants in order to receive their feedback on placemaking as a process, as well as to get to know their main impressions and takeaways from the Symposium. As it can be seen in the photo above, the first associations to the Placemaking are **community** and **people**. The two words are embedded in the approach itself and are the basis of **participation** and the participatory planning approach. According to the answers we could say that the placemaking is **people**



centered approach of developing public spaces.

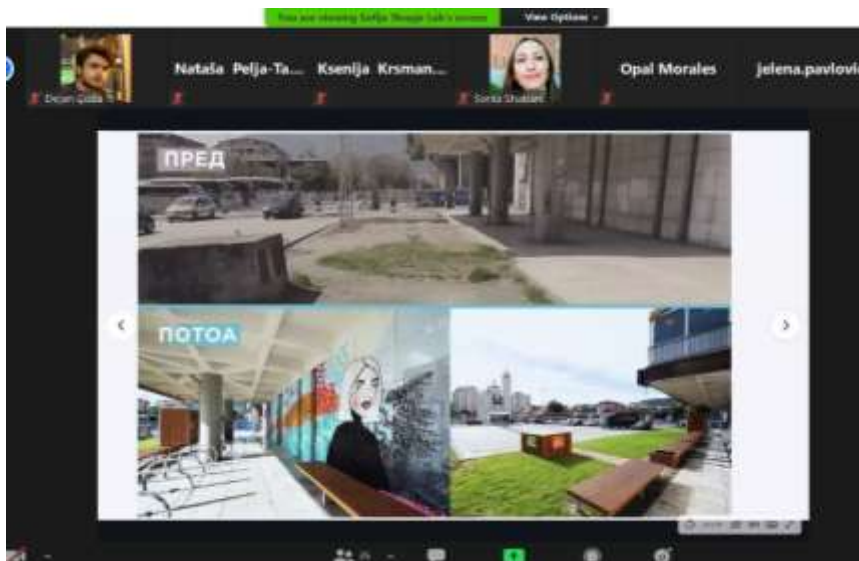
The participatory processes are understood as part of urban planning processes, and some of the most important characteristics are collaboration of different stakeholders in urban development and creation of urban spaces with character. The places created are co-designed, they are livable, providing people with the possibility to get involved, be creative and have positive experiences while doing something positive for their neighborhood and the city.

Ms. Helene Gallis from Nabolagshager, Oslo, explained how they partnered with local high school for a schoolyard pop-up furniture project teaching kids to use machines, paint, be creative and participatory. This project had a great result and reception among youth and other local residents.

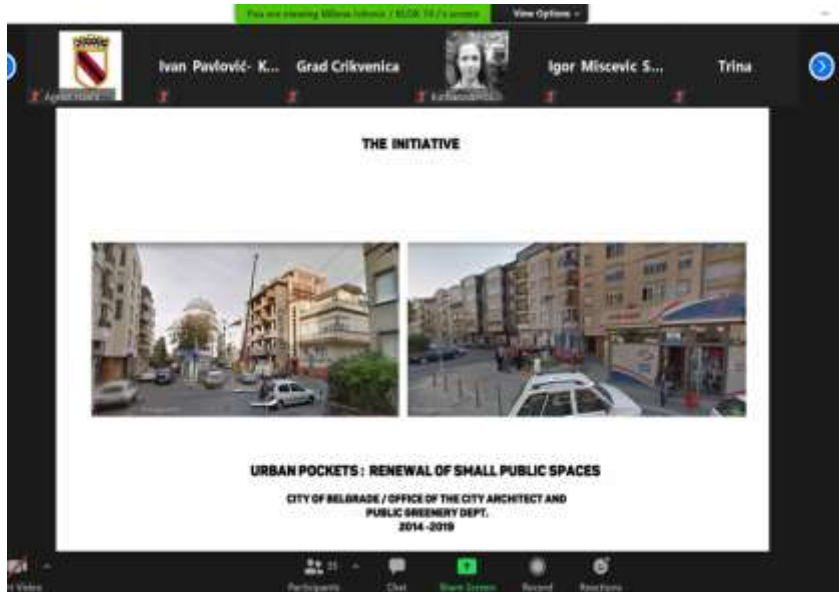


Ms. Sofia Bogeva from North Macedonia presented the project building the first Bike Square Parking with support of the city of Skopje. The main motives of this project were to increase the usage of alternative mode of transport, intermodal transport and travels, to bring more investments in the alternative urban infrastructure, and improvement of the current alternative infrastructure. It included private and public

sector in chorus. Furthermore, Ms. Bogeva explained how placemaking allows easier collaboration with the city to private and public sector. It is crucial to present plan accordingly prior to city budget allocation, she stressed.



Ms. Milena Ivkovic from Serbia presented Urban pockets initiative, with context of renewing small public spaces using urban gaming as a tool. This was another example of successful placemaking involving local community and public institutions.



“Placemaking could be a good tool to give back trust to government and public institutions, which is common feeling in the Balkans”, said Ms. Zina Ruzdic, architect and urban planner from Canton Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. She further explained “We should be able to rely on municipal and local administration regulations because there is a lot of public overuse. Overuse of public spaces leading to abuse of space due to thin line between public and private spaces in BiH”.

Ms. Rozina Spinnoy, representative from Belgium, Business Improvement District (BIDs), confirmed what Oslo and Skopje were propagating and that is the importance of Corporate social responsibility. Private sector involvement creates win-win situation linking community, public and private space.

Director of Placemaking Europe Mr. Ramon Marrades emphasized how placemaking projects are filling the gaps where public sector cannot do enough or doesn't do it well enough. The focus of his organization is to understand how placemaking can play a role for the After COVID city and exchange of information will be very important in following months. Making sure that placemaking has a big role on recovery strategies, it is important that we learn from the projects from smaller cities like Skopje, Helsingborg and Plovdiv rather than big capitals in trend. Smaller scale project work very well when aligned with broader vision, in need of orgware and long-term approach.

After very interesting presentations and discussions in the Symposium, participants were asked to say **what are the main takeaways form the session**. Main answers could be seen on the two photos below. Giving the summary of the answers, we could say that participants got very inspired by all examples and stories presented, appreciating learning and exchange, in the same time understanding that these are very complex stories and actions. Most prevailing thought is that there is a strong need to form a network of people who are working with spaces and placemaking approach in the Western Balkan region, as well as to become an affiliated network to the wider movement and organization.

The complexity of the actions presented was acknowledged and many people got inspired and amazed by the level of actions performed by different organizations/initiatives. At the end of the session it was noted that there is a strong need for further connections, including emerging individuals who are ready to initiate Western Balkans placemaking network.



The Placemaking Guidebook was presented during event – this step by step approach was developed based on the experiences of the activity “Piloting Participatory Approaches for Urban Development in Serbia – Placemaking” and on other activities delivered under the Program, including various presentations during the Mayors’ Symposium, and City to City Dialogues, the workshops conducted under World Bank Urban Partnership program, in Ksamil, Albania as well as the report on the Urban Regeneration Strategy for the town of Ksamil in Saranda, Albania that produced the Ksamil Integrated Urban Regeneration Concept (“Ksamil Urban Lab”). The guidelines introduce the concept of place-led development as part of sustainable urban planning and design in the region, under current circumstances and taking into consideration how Covid-19 affects cities and planning as they also highlight solutions such as virtual consultations, that can be used in the situation of pandemics or other situations preventing F2F meeting over a long period.

Guidebook was created for local administrators, civil servants, professionals in academic positions, architects, urban planners and other representatives of local administrations, as well as NGO representatives and students/young professionals who want to integrate placemaking tools into their own work. It introduces the concept of placemaking and place-led urban development, its origins, and its place in the history of urban planning, giving a range of definitions and interpretations to support broad understanding of placemaking. References to similar, but distinguishable concepts help to better delimit placemaking, its main benefits, and its limits.

Some of the main takeaways from the placemaking event:				
<i>Great presentation</i>	<i>New knowledge</i>	<i>Excellent organization, thank you</i>	<i>We need to make WB network</i>	<i>We have to create network</i>
<i>The Balkan placemaking network is possible and it's a great inspiration to see and learn of so many projects happening here in the region. Thanks</i>		<i>Need placemaking network in the Balkans</i>	<i>Exchange experiences and learn from good practices</i>	<i>Vision of future activities and potential placemaking network creation in the region</i>
		<i>Placemaking is possible in WB</i>	<i>Very motivation to learn from Skopje, Oslo, Brussels, Belgrade, Vienna, Novi Sad, Sarajevo, Nis, Ksamil...</i>	
<i>Connection, ownership, participation, collaboration</i>	<i>I am amazed by the strength and the quality of the work in the Balkans</i>	<i>Placemaking Western Balkans can learn and connect with Placemaking Europe</i>	<i>Super presentations. Taking interdisciplinary experimental, systemic approach. Work on relationships building with the local eco system. Also, private, public, civic, education, partnerships.</i>	