

# D1.5 Report on the role of art, design and culture in participatory planning processes

Authors: Anna Keszeg (Phd), Rita Szerencsés (Phd) (Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design Budapest)

Contributors: Lotte Luykx (VUB), Nicole Loeser (IFAI)

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## Executive summary

Over the past five decades, urban planning has emerged as a privileged arena for experimentation with innovation, co-creation, and civic creativity, aimed at producing more liveable and user-friendly urban environments. These transformations have unfolded against the backdrop of two intertwined dynamics: the growing participatory ambitions of citizens and the socially fraught mobilities generated by gentrification and related urban processes. Within this context, art and design have acquired a pivotal role, not only in shaping and reshaping the material and symbolic fabric of cities but also in rethinking and critically interrogating their underlying social politics. Our compendium situates itself within this debate by foregrounding a dimension that remains relatively underexplored: the involvement of youth and children in contemporary urbanism. The paper pursues a twofold aim: first, to map the key questions raised in the scientific literature at the intersection of art, design, and urban planning; and second, to distil from this body of work a set of central issues with practical implications, identifying best practices and assessing their transferability to the specific case of younger populations. Accordingly, the literature review will address three dimensions: (1) the conceptual, theoretical-methodological, and ethical foundations of the field; (2) best practices in implementing art and design in city planning; and (3) specific approaches that prioritize the involvement of youth. On this basis, our analysis will inform the design of a survey conducted within our project, confronting the best practices identified in the academic literature with a complementary overview of art- and design-related urban planning processes involving children, as collected by our project partners within the confines of a cross-fertilisation workshop.

The best practices identified through the literature review will not stand alone but will be complemented by the insights generated within the project itself. In particular, the conclusions drawn from the review is expanded by a curated list of practices compiled during the cross-fertilisation workshop, where project partners and stakeholders exchanged experiences and critically assessed the transferability of different approaches. This combined perspective ensures that the compendium does not merely reproduce the state of the art as established in academic debates, but also incorporates practice-based knowledge, thereby bridging scholarly reflection with the situated expertise of practitioners and future adapters.

Although often undervalued in urbanization processes, art and design can play a vital role in participatory planning by helping to bridge perceived or actual divides between stakeholders and social groups. The goal of fostering greater cohesion among diverse communities has led to the development of numerous critical, experimental, and participatory methodologies. This report aims to provide an overview of such approaches and map out best practices, contributing to a body of knowledge on how art and design can be meaningfully integrated into the study of urban mobility and the planning of proximity-based cities.

Art and design can intervene at multiple stages of the urban planning process, from the early phases of visioning and participatory agenda-setting to implementation and post-project

evaluation. Accordingly, our compendium is structured around the different stages at which artistic and design practices are mobilized, thereby aligning the analysis with the overall aim of tracing both conceptual debates and practical applications. Within this framework, four main areas are addressed, which together constitute the analytical backbone of the study:

- (1) how art and design are used and implemented in urban planning, as evidenced in the scientific literature;
- (2) which best practices can be tailored to specific phases of the planning process;
- (3) how such practices have incorporated children as active participants; and
- (4) how these questions can be further developed through the integration of insights from the project members and professional stakeholders who will act as future adapters.

Taken together, these areas operationalize the dual aim of the paper—mapping the key debates of the field and identifying practices with concrete applicability to the involvement of youth in urban development.

The main criteria examined in the scientific literature are as follows: (1) community engagement and participation; (2) place-making; (3) art as transformational tool; (4) sustainable development.

Accordingly, a central issue represents at what stages art and design can be used in urban planning, through comprehensive stages, from pre-design evaluations to post-implementation assessments.

1. Conceptual Design and Community Engagement (Marshall, 2015; Reaver, 2023; Scorza et al., 2021)
2. Integration of Art in Urban Design (Calderon, 2019; Saad-Sulonen, 2012)
3. Implementation and Adaptation (Handayani & Dianingrum, 2023; Kleinhans et al., 2015; Medeiros, 2021)
4. Post-Implementation Evaluation and Community Interaction (Dyer & Demeritt, 2009; Jiang et al., 2016)
5. Innovative Practices and Technology Integration (Ertiö, 2015; Tabi & Ikeda, 2023)

Finally based on the literature review we collected some city profiles where art and design were organically involved in the cityscapes – we focused on the following:

1. Glasgow, Scotland (Sharp, 2007)
2. New York, USA (Desai & Darts, 2016)
3. Beijing and Shanghai, China (Cheng & Worrall, 2021)
4. Canada, Montreal (Guinard & Margier, 2018)
5. Nicosia, Cyprus (Artopoulos et al., 2019)

Finally, case studies derived from the co-creation workshop and partner questionnaire were added. They combine methodological rigor with participatory knowledge to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

1. Association for Free Play, Budapest, Hungary
2. Playful Co-Design with Children and Youth, Hungary (Budapest, Budaörs, Miskolc, Vác, Veszprém)

3. Solidarity Landscape Project, Lurano, Italy (Bergamo Region)
4. Openstreets - Filter Café Filtré Atelier, Sint-Jans Molenbeek, Belgium
5. MUS-E Belgium, Belgium

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Brief overview of the role of art, design and culture in participatory planning

Based on a review of fifty scientific articles, we consider that the literature on participatory urban planning increasingly recognizes art and design as crucial mediators in engaging children and youth in shaping their environments. This body of work highlights that artistic and design practices are not only *tools for enhancing the aesthetic and functional qualities of urban spaces*, but also *methodological instruments that foster inclusion, creativity, and critical reflection* among younger participants. Children are positioned in this scholarship not merely as passive beneficiaries of urban development, but as active co-creators whose perspectives challenge conventional planning frameworks and expose underlying social, spatial, and political inequalities. At the same time, the literature underscores persistent methodological and ethical tensions, particularly regarding the translation of children's contributions into actionable planning outcomes and the risk of instrumentalizing participation without ensuring long-term impact. Taken together, these findings suggest that art- and design-based participatory approaches provide both opportunities and challenges for rethinking urban planning through the lens of intergenerational inclusion.

## 1.2 Goals of this compendium

Art, design, and culture play a crucial role in participatory planning by functioning as mediating tools that translate complex urban issues into accessible, experiential, and creative forms, enabling citizens - including children and youth - to engage more meaningfully with decision-making processes. Through participatory methods, these practices can be integrated into the study of urban mobility and urban planning by generating inclusive platforms - such as co-design workshops, artistic interventions, and creative mapping exercises - that make spatial problems visible and negotiable for diverse stakeholders. In this way, art and design not only enhance the communicative dimension of participatory planning but also foster critical reflection, collective imagination, and innovative solutions to challenges of accessibility, equity, and livability in contemporary cities.

- Clarify and explore what role art, design and culture can play in participatory planning.
- Demonstrate how participatory methods can integrate art and design in the study of urban mobility and urban planning processes
- Promote best practices in the field
- Develop a state-of-the-art knowledge base on the potential of incorporating art and design into urban planning

## 1.3 Methodology

The present compendium adopts the following methodology:

1. Systematic literature review of existing research on participatory planning involving art, design and culture;
2. Identification and analysis of best practices in art, design and culture-focused urban participatory planning processes;
3. Cross-fertilization workshop and data collection with partners on case study mapping.

1. Our literature review was guided by a set of key concepts—*urban planning, participatory planning, children, youth, art, and design*—with a particular focus on their **combinatory use** in scholarly debates. Searches were conducted in major academic databases, including **EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete, JSTOR Full Access Model, Sage Journals (HSS Collection), and Taylor and Francis Online – Social Sciences & Humanities (SSH) Library**. Rather than isolating individual keywords, we sought articles in which these terms were explicitly connected, thereby ensuring that the selected works addressed the intersections of urban planning, participatory approaches, the involvement of children and youth, and the role of art and design. The initial screening process, carried out manually, yielded 40 articles that demonstrated a clear alignment with these criteria. To further strengthen the dataset, we complemented this selection with an additional search in the **scite.ai** database, using the same combinatory criteria, which provided 10 further relevant contributions. The final corpus of 50 articles thus represents a targeted body of literature capturing conceptual, methodological, and practice-oriented perspectives on the use of art and design in participatory urban planning involving younger generations.

## 1.4 State-of-the-art issues in urban planning and implications of Art, Design, Culture



Fig. 1. Main inquiries shaped by prior scholarship

The main inquiries shaped by prior scholarship, and guiding our own review, can be grouped into a series of recurrent conceptual and thematic concerns. Our aim was to identify the most significant issues raised by previous research, namely the concepts and problems most frequently invoked and debated across the corpus of fifty articles. At a general level, the literature highlights the role of **participatory planning**, in which art and design function as mediating tools for negotiating between institutional frameworks and grassroots initiatives. A closely related strand examines **public art**, both as a **subversive tool** that challenges dominant spatial orders and as a **branding instrument** strategically deployed by municipalities to strengthen symbolic capital and attract investment. Extending these debates, scholars have explored the **artialisation of the cityscape**, whereby aesthetic and design practices transform the perception, meaning, and affective dimensions of urban environments. Building on these conceptual and strategic perspectives, the literature also points to a set of **applied dimensions**: the recognition of **children's agency in city planning**; the development of spatial concepts such as **playability** and **walkability**; the role of **active frontages** in mediating the thresholds between public and private realms; and the emerging redefinition of **public space through augmented reality**, where digital overlays intersect with material environments. **In the following, we will further develop these ideas with a particular focus on best practices and the involvement of children.**

## 2. Art, design, culture and participatory planning

### 2.1 Interconnection of art, design, and participatory urban planning

Art has historically played a critical role in urban spaces, transforming how communities interact with their environments. Markussen discusses the "disruptive aesthetics of hijacking urban space," which highlights how artistic practices can reframe public space usage and challenge conventional urban planning paradigms (Markussen, 2012). These practices, often inspired by Situationist actions<sup>1</sup>, encourage community participation by fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among residents. This aligns with Hill et al.'s argument about the importance of co-creation in urban contexts, emphasizing the need for innovative solutions that address sustainability while promoting social equity (Hill et al., 2024).

Children's involvement in urban planning is particularly vital, as their unique perspectives can shape child-friendly environments. Malone's research indicates that when children participate in planning, they not only contribute their insights but also experience a sense of agency (Malone, 2012). Drawing on participatory action research conducted in an Australian neighbourhood, the study positions children not merely as consultees but as researchers in their own right, capable of generating situated knowledge about their lived environments. By engaging children in mapping, observation, and collaborative design activities, Malone demonstrates how their perspectives can reveal overlooked dimensions of neighbourhood planning, particularly in relation to safety, accessibility, and environmental quality. Importantly,

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<sup>1</sup> The Situationist International was an avant-garde artistic and intellectual movement of the late 1950s and early 1970s, distinguished by its radical and subversive critique of capitalism and its creation of environments that deliberately blurred the boundaries between reality and artifice, everyday life and artistic practice. The goals of Situationist actions ranged from provoking political awakening to reimagining the conditions of everyday life, and from experimenting with new forms of collective experience to engaging with specific sites and their historical, social, and spatial layers. Central to their approach were concepts such as **psycho geography** and the **dérive**, practices through which individuals drifted through urban landscapes to uncover hidden affective and political dimensions of space. Through such methods, the Situationists anticipated later forms of participatory urbanism, in which the lived experience of place becomes a critical tool for rethinking urban design. Their interventions often unfolded in ordinary yet symbolically charged locations—streets, arcades, housing estates, and urban voids—where the layering of history, architecture, and social relations could be re-appropriated as a means of resisting commodification and reimagining collective life.

the article argues that when children are entrusted with such roles, they not only contribute valuable insights but also develop a sense of empowerment as environmental change agents, capable of linking local concerns to broader sustainability agendas. In this way, Malone's work highlights the dual function of child-centered participatory planning: improving the immediate quality of neighbourhood design while also cultivating intergenerational responsibility and foresight for more inclusive urban futures. For instance, Derr and Tarantini underscore the positive outcomes of involving young people in designing child-friendly spaces, revealing that participatory approaches can enhance psychological well-being and community cohesion (Derr & Tarantini, 2016). Gill expands upon this by advocating for a broader approach in which children's needs are integrated into urban planning, suggesting that effective designs stem from understanding their experiences and preferences (Gill, 2019).

The design of public spaces through the lens of children's perspectives can create not only more engaging environments that encourage play and physical activity, but also prototypes for alternative urban futures. Research by Jansson et al. emphasizes the role of green spaces that are both managed and unmanaged, suggesting that children thrive in adaptable environments that allow for creative play (Jansson et al., 2016). This insight points beyond immediate design improvements by indicating how flexible and hybrid landscapes can inspire new models of urban resilience and inclusivity. Similarly, Wridt's qualitative GIS studies highlight the importance of aligning children's perceptions of risk with the built environment, underscoring the potential of children's local knowledge as a generative tool for rethinking the assumptions embedded in urban planning (Wridt, 2010). Taken together, such evidence suggests that collaborative efforts involving children can function not only to enhance active transport and leisure in the present, but also to experiment with new planning paradigms in which youth perspectives actively shape visions of healthier, more imaginative, and futures-oriented cities.

The emerging paradigm of **proximity planning**, most prominently articulated through concepts such as the *15-minute city*, has become a key framework for rethinking urban life in response to climate change, public health, and social equity concerns. At its core, proximity planning seeks to reorganize urban environments so that essential services—education, healthcare, green spaces, cultural facilities, and everyday amenities—are accessible within short walking or cycling distances from residents' homes. This model not only reduces reliance on motorized transport and lowers carbon emissions but also enhances opportunities for local interaction, community cohesion, and more equitable access to resources. In relation to participatory planning and child-friendly design, proximity planning foregrounds **everyday geographies** - the routes children take to school, the availability of safe and shaded play areas, and the integration of cultural and recreational opportunities

into neighbourhood life. When combined with artistic and design-based participatory tools, proximity planning can serve as both a spatial and imaginative framework for empowering children and youth to envision urban futures that are sustainable, inclusive, and responsive to their daily practices.

Visual and spatial literacy can play a pivotal role in participatory foresight by equipping children with the tools to critically interpret and reimagine urban contexts. As Gülgönen and Corona demonstrate in their study of Mexico City, children's appropriation of urban spaces generates forms of critical engagement that move beyond immediate use to envision alternative possibilities for how cities might function (Gülgönen & Corona, 2015). Such practices underscore the capacity of young people to act not only as users of space but also as co-authors of urban futures, embedding their lived experiences into forward-looking planning processes. In a similar vein, Lucas highlights the transformative potential of child-friendly urban planning, arguing for frameworks that integrate children's insights within broader design initiatives as a means of prototyping more inclusive, resilient, and imaginative urban environments (Lucas, 2021). From this perspective, children's participation can be understood as a form of **anticipatory governance**, where their perspectives help surface emerging needs and alternative trajectories often overlooked in adult-centered planning. The effectiveness of participatory urban planning with children and youth depends on the use of **age-appropriate methods**, which ensure that their capacities, modes of expression, and experiential knowledge are meaningfully translated into the planning process (Paal et al., 2025). By engaging youth in processes such as scenario-building, speculative design, or participatory mapping, urban planning can move beyond incremental improvements to actively rehearse and test visions of possible futures. This futures-oriented orientation situates children not merely as stakeholders to be consulted, but as vital contributors to the collective imagination required for long-term urban sustainability and equity.

### 2.1.1 From vision to implementation: the role of art and design in urban planning stages

Urban planning is not a linear or uniform process but unfolds across distinct stages, from initial visioning and agenda-setting to design, implementation, and evaluation. Each of these stages opens specific opportunities for the integration of art and design, both as practical instruments and as critical interventions that expand the imaginative and participatory dimensions of planning. Rather than treating art and design as ancillary or decorative elements, contemporary scholarship emphasizes their capacity to function as catalysts for dialogue, creativity, and collective reflection.

In what follows, we examine how art and design have been mobilized within the different phases of urban planning, highlighting the practices, challenges, and possibilities that arise when these approaches are embedded in the core of planning processes. Participatory design processes are inherently **iterative**, requiring cycles of dialogue, prototyping, feedback, and refinement to progressively align diverse perspectives and generate solutions that are both context-sensitive and collectively owned.

1. Conceptual Design and Community Engagement (Marshall, 2015; Reaver, 2023; Scorza et al., 2021)

Problem identification and definition form a core component of **conceptual design in urban planning**, as they establish the critical framework within which planning objectives are articulated and potential solutions are later developed. Conceptual design forms the foundational vision of urban projects, integrating spatial ideas with social goals. Effective community engagement during this phase ensures that local voices shape the development process, fostering trust, relevance, and long-term support.

2. Integration of Art in Urban Design (Calderon, 2019; Saad-Sulonen, 2012)

Art in urban design enhances aesthetic appeal while reinforcing cultural identity and community cohesion. Through participatory processes, creative interventions can make public spaces more inclusive, meaningful, and interactive.

3. Implementation and Adaptation (Handayani & Dianingrum, 2023; Kleinhans et al., 2015; Medeiros, 2021)

The success of urban initiatives depends on flexible implementation that allows for real-time adaptation to local conditions and community needs. Ongoing adjustments can respond to feedback and unforeseen challenges, increasing long-term viability. This flexibility may involve temporary projects—such as a first installation or performance—that can be evaluated with participants before being scaled or modified. A study conducted in Sydney measured surface temperatures in ten outdoor playgrounds and found that playground equipment - especially made of dark-colored synthetic materials like wet-pour rubber and synthetic turf - reached dangerously high temperatures. Some surfaces exceeded **80 °C**, with one piece topping **91.8 °C**, posing a serious risk of contact burns to children (Pfautsch et al., 2022).

4. Post-Implementation Evaluation and Community Interaction (Dyer & Demeritt, 2009; Jiang et al., 2016)

After completion, evaluating outcomes and maintaining community interaction are crucial to understanding a project's social and environmental impact. This phase supports learning, accountability, and potential recalibration for future planning.

5. Innovative Practices and Technology Integration (Ertiö, 2015; Tabi & Ikeda, 2023)

Innovative practices and technology integration do not constitute a discrete stage of urban planning but rather operate as transversal elements that can be mobilized across all phases

of the process, from problem identification to implementation and evaluation. Technological tools and innovative methodologies are transforming urban design through data-driven insights and digital participation. These approaches enable more inclusive planning and real-time responsiveness, bridging gaps between planners and communities.

## 2.2 Cultural Differences and Diverging Historic Contexts

Participatory planning cannot be understood as a universal or uniform practice, since its forms and effectiveness are deeply shaped by cultural divergences and the urban planning models in which it is embedded. In contexts where planning traditions are highly technocratic and centralized, participatory approaches often struggle to move beyond consultation, as institutional cultures prioritize expert authority over civic input. By contrast, in planning models with stronger traditions of deliberation or community self-organization, participation may extend toward co-creation or even co-decision, allowing art and design to serve as mediating tools that reflect locally situated values and cultural practices. These differences underscore that participation is not a neutral technique but a culturally situated process, one that reveals divergent conceptions of citizenship, public space, and the role of creativity in shaping urban futures. Recognizing these variations is crucial for adapting participatory methods to specific contexts, ensuring that they do not merely reproduce dominant planning paradigms but instead foster genuinely inclusive and culturally resonant forms of urban development.

### 2.2.1 Cultural perceptions of mobility and spatial equity

Different cultural contexts have shaped distinct traditions in urban planning. The Nordic model, for instance, emphasizes environmental literacy—an approach that encourages people, especially children, to understand and engage with their surroundings in ways like how they might learn to engage in artistic activities. It focuses on everyday interaction with nature, thoughtful design, and community participation. In contrast, the Mediterranean model draws more heavily on traditions of public art. Here, streets and squares often serve as canvases for artistic expression, helping to tell the story of a place and bring people together. Art is not just decorative—it plays an active role in shaping how people use and feel about public space.

Based on prior scholarship, our research indicates that two distinct models can be meaningfully compared in order to highlight the cultural divergences in participatory

planning: the **Nordic approach**, where art is closely tied to environmental literacy and ecological education, and the **Southern and Eastern European approach**, where public art operates as a medium of civic dialogue and negotiation within contested urban spaces.

A comparison between the Nordic and Southern/Eastern European contexts illustrates how divergent planning models shape the role of art in participatory processes. Within the **Nordic model**, art and design are frequently mobilized as tools for fostering **environmental literacy**, particularly through projects that integrate children and youth in learning about ecological systems, sustainability, and the sensory dimensions of urban nature. Here, participatory planning aligns with broader welfare-state traditions that emphasize inclusivity, education, and long-term ecological responsibility, situating art as a medium for cultivating environmental awareness and stewardship. In contrast, in **Southern and Eastern European cities**, public art has more often functioned as a form of **civic dialogue**, mediating contested memories, political transformations, and struggles over public space. In these contexts, participatory projects tend to highlight negotiation, visibility, and symbolic presence, where art becomes a vehicle for communities to assert identity, resist marginalization, or articulate alternative narratives of belonging. Juxtaposing these models underscores the cultural contingency of participatory practices: while Nordic initiatives foreground ecological futures through child- and youth-centered engagement, Southern and Eastern European practices foreground the political and dialogical dimensions of public art in navigating social change.

## 2.2.2 Art and environmental literacy in the Nordic model

In the Nordic countries, planning historically emphasized child-friendliness and a close connection to nature, but this paradigm began to shift in the 1990s under the growing influence of commercial interests in the political sphere (Mårtensson & Nordström, 2017). The Nordic example is particularly illustrative of how a tradition of child-friendly urban planning is being undermined by financial interests. However, cities like Malmö demonstrate that it is possible to reintegrate industrial areas with green spaces while creating environments that foster children's creative development. The concept of Child-Friendly Cities (CFC) has also been consciously implemented in Changsha, China, where initiatives such as the Children's

Participation Work Camp of Changsha 2050 and the Fengquan Furui child-friendly community have played a role in reimagining urban space. (Yao & Xiaoyan, 2017)

Household mobility patterns vary across cultures, and these differences shape how walking is perceived—while some societies view walking as a valued, environmentally responsible choice, others may associate it with socioeconomic limitations, leading to contrasting psychological attitudes toward sustainable urban design. (Gallimore et al., 2011; Shliselberg & Givoni, 2016; Van Dyck et al., 2009)

### 2.2.3 Public art as civic dialogue in Southern and Eastern Europe

In cities like Barcelona, the politicized nature of public space is a given, and urban design is shaped by the need for inclusiveness, power balance, and consensus-building—an approach that often draws on artistic and design-oriented thinking to imagine more equitable and expressive urban environments (Calderon, 2019). For example, Barcelona’s **“superblocks” (superilles)** project reflects not only environmental and mobility goals but also contested debates about who has the right to access, use, and shape public space. Similarly, the city’s tradition of **community-driven festivals, street art, and neighborhood assemblies** illustrates how artistic and design-oriented practices are integrated into planning processes, providing tools for collective imagination and negotiation. Such interventions go beyond aesthetic enhancement; they function as **arenas for dialogue** where different voices and identities can be expressed and reconciled. In this way, Barcelona exemplifies how art and design can support a planning culture that is both **expressive**—making visible multiple social narratives—and **equitable**, by embedding democratic values directly into the material and symbolic production of urban space. In Lisbon, a public art program associated with Expo '98 played a significant role in the redevelopment with monumental architecture of the city's eastern riverfront (Ochoa, 2022). This initiative not only redefined the visual and cultural identity of the area but also set a precedent for similar interventions along other parts of the waterfront. Over time, this process contributed to the emergence of a more inclusive model of urban planning—one that gained momentum in the 2010s through the adoption of participatory approaches (Medeiros, 2021). These approaches expanded beyond individual citizen engagement to include a broad spectrum of stakeholders, such as schools, NGOs, businesses, academic institutions, surrounding municipalities, and various civil society actors.

This multi-actor model reflected a growing commitment to democratic spatial development and collaborative city-making.

Art installations can serve as powerful tools for public engagement, transforming everyday spaces into platforms for dialogue, reflection, and collective expression. A striking example is the Hungarian ARC kiállítás, held annually in Budapest's Bikás Park. This open-air exhibition features large-scale billboard artworks that address current social, political, and environmental issues with bold visual language and sharp commentary. Located in a large park, the exhibition invites spontaneous interaction from a wide audience, including local residents, passersby, and school groups. By placing provocative and often humorous artworks in an accessible, non-institutional setting, ARC fosters critical thinking and encourages people to engage with complex topics outside traditional cultural venues. The event not only democratizes access to contemporary art but also reclaims public space as a site for civic conversation and creative dissent. Importantly, public art in this context becomes a tool for informing policymakers about citizens' expectations and concerns regarding their urban environment. It positions the cityscape as a space of creative action, where public imagination and artistic expression can influence the shaping of urban futures (Percy-Smith & Carney, 2011; Prawata, 2024).

## 2.3 Child-friendly environments as the starting point for creative urban transformation

In this part of our review, we turn to several key strategic concepts that have emerged in the literature on participatory urban planning involving children. Our intention has been to present these concepts not as isolated themes but as elements of a process that unfolds through successive layers of engagement. Beginning with the broad framework of **child-friendly planning principles**, the literature advances toward more specific dimensions such as **playability and children's agency**, which emphasize the embodied and creative roles of young people in shaping urban environments. From there, research highlights the potential of **public art and participatory tools** as vehicles for collective expression and negotiation, and more recently, the integration of **digital enhancements in co-creation**, which open new pathways for visualization, interaction, and foresight in planning. By structuring our review along this sequence, we aim to highlight a set of key concepts that can serve as focal points for further analysis—concepts that provide possibilities to “zoom in”

and explore how children’s perspectives may be systematically embedded in planning processes.

As discussed earlier, the Nordic countries—particularly Finland and Sweden (Björklid & Nordström, 2007; Mårtensson & Nordström, 2017)—have long served as leading examples of environmentally child-friendly urban planning. A central framework in this context is the Bullerby-model, a literacy-based approach to understanding how children relate to urban space. This model emphasizes two key criteria: children’s ability to move independently within their environment, and their access to a diverse range of environmental affordances that support exploration, play, and learning (Broberg et al., 2013). Children’s development is strongly supported by opportunities for **unsupervised play and independent discovery of their neighbourhood**, which foster autonomy, spatial awareness, and a deeper sense of belonging to their everyday environments. These factors are deeply interconnected, promoting a sense of personal agency that is vital for creative self-expression.

**Table 1. The Bullerby-model based on Broberg et al., 2013**

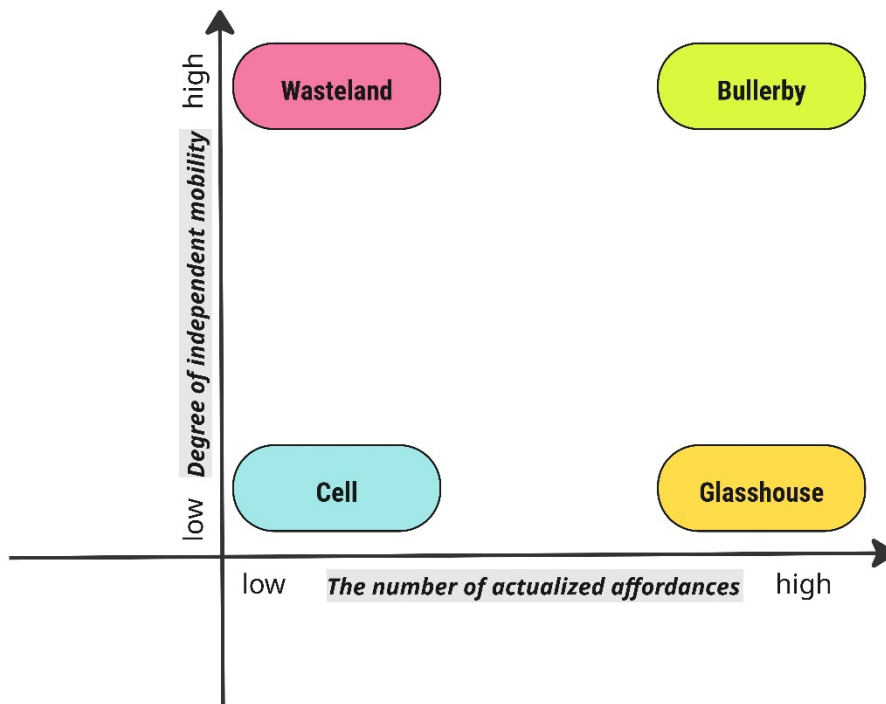


Fig. 2. The Bullerby-model based on Broberg et al., 2013

The Bullerby model conceptualizes children's environments along two axes: the degree of independent mobility and the number of actualized affordances (opportunities for action). In this framework, wastelands offer high mobility but few affordances, glasshouse settings provide many affordances but restrict mobility, cells limit both, and the idealized Bullerby environment combines high mobility with rich affordances, thus supporting children's autonomy and development most fully.

### 2.3.1 Playability/Gamification

Importantly, this agency is not isolated but rooted in children's active participation in the social and communal life of their neighborhoods, reinforcing a holistic vision of urban inclusion and well-being. A key criterion of these approaches is the concept of playability—a notion whose implications vary depending on children's age and patterns of physical activity. (Christina S. Han et al., 2018)

Urban playability describes how city spaces can support open-ended, engaging activities that encourage both personal exploration and social connection. Places enabling casual, everyday social encounters help build community trust and deepen residents' involvement with their surroundings. Playability acts as an important connexion between generations and people with different social backgrounds (S. Han et al., 2018).

Playability is becoming a crucial concept in contemporary urban planning as cities seek to foster more inclusive, vibrant, and participatory environments. It refers not only to spaces designed for play but to the broader ability of urban environments to engage people in meaningful, exploratory, and often unexpected ways. Urban gamification—using play and playfulness to reshape perceptions and behaviours—has emerged as a key strategy in activating citizens, but risks becoming disconnected from real community needs unless combined with grassroots practices like DIY urbanism and critical design (Hassan & Thibault, 2020). Playability is more than a form of entertainment; it's a way for citizens to reclaim their right to the city, re-signifying public space through both analogue and digital interactions, from flash mobs to participatory Augmented Reality (AR) planning (Thibault, 2020). Especially in post-pandemic urban life, ensuring equitable access to playable spaces for diverse groups is increasingly seen as a matter of social justice (Ye & Yang, 2023). Research highlights how the presence—or absence—of playful elements in cities reflects deeper issues of inclusion, vitality, and spatial equity. Lighting design, for example, has been explored as a site for playful engagement in smart cities, offering opportunities for

expression, interaction, and place-making. Case studies on playful lighting show how such interventions can contribute to a sense of community and well-being when carefully designed with public input (Pihlajaniemi & Luusua, 2020). Together, these perspectives underscore playability as both a design principle and a political tool for creating more liveable, just, and human-centred cities.

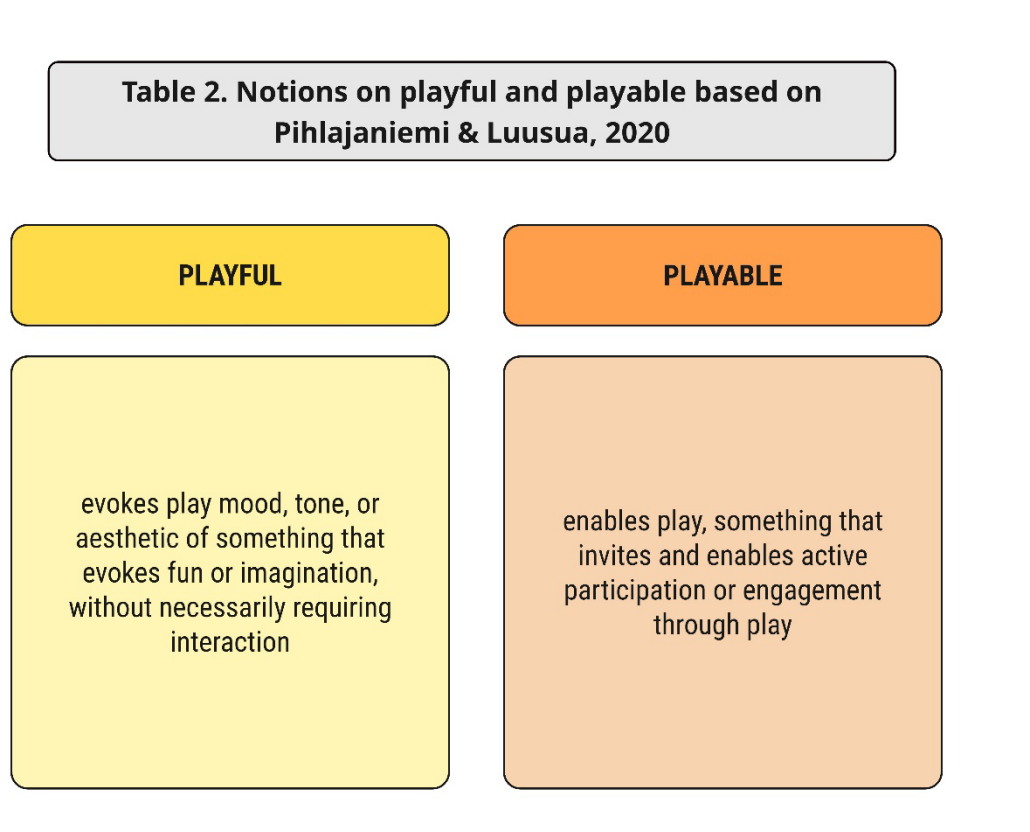


Fig. 3. Notions on playful and playable based on (Pihlajaniemi & Luusua, 2020)

According to Fig. 3, something playful evokes the mood, tone, or aesthetic of fun and imagination without requiring interaction, while something playable enables and invites active participation through play, highlighting the distinction between evoking play and facilitating it.

**Table 3. Notions of walkability, playability and gamification based on articles cited in the present sub-chapter**

PLAYABILITY	WALKABILITY	GAMIFICATION
<p>Playability refers to the potential of an urban space to invite exploration, imagination, and joyful interaction. It's not just about playgrounds—it's about how a city encourages people of all ages to engage with their surroundings in creative, spontaneous ways. A playable city supports curiosity and play in everyday spaces like sidewalks, plazas, and even bus stops.</p>	<p>Walkability describes how friendly and comfortable an area is for walking. It includes practical features like safe crossings, smooth pavements, and nearby amenities, but also sensory and social aspects—how pleasant, lively, or inviting a street feels. A walkable environment encourages people to move through the city on foot, which supports health, social connection, and sustainability.</p>	<p>Gamification is the use of game-like elements—such as challenges, feedback, rewards, or storytelling—in non-game contexts, like urban planning or public engagement. When applied to cities, gamification can turn everyday activities, like walking or commuting, into playful and engaging experiences, encouraging people to interact more deeply with their environment and community.</p>

*Fig. 4. Notions of walkability, playability and gamification based on articles cited in the present sub-chapter.*

Fig 4 highlights three interconnected concepts: playability, which emphasizes how urban spaces can invite imagination, exploration, and joyful interaction in everyday places; walkability, which focuses on the safety, comfort, and appeal of environments that encourage people to move through the city on foot; and gamification, which applies game-like elements to non-game contexts, turning ordinary urban experiences into playful and engaging interactions with the city and community.

### 2.3.2 Public Art

Public art is increasingly recognized as a vital tool for shaping more inclusive, imaginative, and sustainable urban environments. When approached not just as decoration but as a participatory and interactive medium, public art can activate public space, foster dialogue, and give voice to diverse communities—including children and youth, whose agency can be activated via public art (Prawata, 2024; Tuline Gülgönen & Yolanda Corona, 2015). Tools like participatory design processes (Calderon, 2019), child-friendly urban planning (Derr & Tarantini, 2016), and installation-based interventions (Percy-Smith & Carney, 2011) create space for co-creation (Björklid & Nordström, 2007), where the public becomes an active collaborator in imagining and transforming the city (Tang & Zhao, 2022). These tools

not only enhance the aesthetic and experiential quality of public space but also promote social inclusion, civic identity, and emotional connection to place. Integrating digital technologies—such as virtual reality and smart city infrastructure—into public art expands its potential for engagement, offering immersive and dynamic ways for people to explore, influence, and relate to their urban environment . Whether through playful installations, co-designed spaces, or digitally enhanced experiences, public art becomes a flexible framework for building cities that are not only functional but expressive, participatory, and alive.

Public art refers to artistic works or practices that are intentionally placed or performed in public spaces and are accessible to everyone, outside of traditional gallery or museum settings. It encompasses a wide range of forms—such as sculptures, murals, installations, performances, digital media, and participatory projects—and often responds to the physical, social, cultural, or political context of its location.

More than just decoration, public art can:

- ◆ Activate public spaces and enhance their identity,
- ◆ Engage communities in dialogue or co-creation,
- ◆ Reflect local histories, values, or conflicts,
- ◆ And challenge perceptions of everyday environments.

At its best, public art creates opportunities for interaction, expression, and inclusion, transforming how people experience and understand their shared urban landscape.

### 2.3.3 Active frontages

Active frontages are more than just architectural features—they are essential ingredients in shaping the social and sensory quality of public space (Heffernan et al., 2013). Characterized by transparent windows, doors, visual permeability, and human-scale interaction, these frontages animate the edge between private buildings and public streets. When done well, they create vibrant, safe, and engaging environments that invite walking, lingering, and socializing. But the real power of active frontages lies not only in their design, but in the co-creation of public space—a process that values the perceptions, experiences, and needs of the people who inhabit it.

Recent studies show that people perceive streets with high-quality active frontages as safer, more comfortable, and more sociable (Bartzokas-Tsiompras & Photis, 2021). These perceptions are crucial: they shape how people behave in public space and whether they choose to walk, stop, or engage. Microscale audits of walkability have

confirmed that retail and entertainment density—often expressed through lively, transparent facades—is one of the strongest predictors of walkable streets (Ewing et al., 2016). Features like windows, street furniture, and visual interaction between inside and outside contribute significantly to pedestrian activity, reinforcing the need for frontages that aren't just “active” in name, but responsive in function.

Fostering these environments requires moving beyond top-down prescriptions. Co-creation—engaging residents, shopkeepers, designers, and city officials collaboratively—can ensure that active frontages reflect the lived reality of local communities. Whether it's through participatory design, walkability audits, or public perception surveys, the process of shaping active frontages should be inclusive and adaptive.

## 2.4 Digital Tools in urban development

Conclusively, the integration of art and design into participatory urban planning yields multifaceted benefits, enhancing community engagement and fostering environments that prioritize inclusivity and sustainability. The literature underscores that when children are recognized as active contributors to the urban landscape, the urban fabric becomes richer and more responsive to diverse needs, ultimately leading to vibrant, resilient communities.

In the context of smart cities (Altarriba Bertran et al., 2021) speculative and playful design can reveal the socio-emotional potential of public spaces, inspiring future urban technologies that prioritize human experience. Augmented reality (AR) is shown to be an effective participatory tool, particularly for youth in urban planning processes, though current technological limitations and expert validation remain necessary (Reaver, 2023). The integration of Virtual Reality (VR) and Internet of Things (IoT) in public art design underscores the importance of balancing innovation with the preservation of local context. Finally, a semiotic approach to urban play emphasizes how playful acts—both analog and digital—can reshape citizens' perceptions and reinforce their right to engage with and reinterpret urban space (Thibault, 2020). Digital tools advocate for more inclusive, imaginative, and responsive approaches to urban planning and design.

### 3. Participatory planning and art, design, culture

**Participatory Planning** has increasingly been recognized as a framework that extends beyond technical decision-making to include processes of collective imagination and negotiation. Involving diverse stakeholders, and particularly children and youth, participatory planning shifts the focus from planning *for* communities to planning *with* them. It acknowledges that lived experience, local knowledge, and affective attachments to place are essential to understanding the complexities of urban life. By doing so, participatory planning becomes not only a method of improving current urban conditions but also a tool for **anticipating and shaping future possibilities**, embedding inclusivity and foresight into the very structure of urban governance.

**Art and Design** play a pivotal role within this participatory turn, as they provide methodologies, practices, and media through which participation can be facilitated and expressed. Artistic and design-based interventions enable participants to visualize, materialize, and critically question their urban environments, thereby making abstract planning processes more tangible and accessible. From participatory mapping and co-design workshops to public art installations and speculative design exercises, art and design open alternative modes of engagement that are experiential, creative, and dialogical. Rather than functioning as decorative afterthoughts, they serve as **mediating tools** that foster agency, enhance communication across social divides, and create prototypes of possible futures.

**Culture**, finally, constitutes the connective tissue between participatory planning and art/design practices. Cultural frameworks shape how participation is understood, legitimized, and practiced, as well as how artistic and design interventions are received and valued. In some contexts, participatory planning aligns with traditions of social democracy and cultural education, emphasizing inclusion and collective responsibility, while in others it becomes a means of negotiating contested memories, identities, and political struggles through artistic expression. Culture therefore not only determines the **interpretive horizon** within which participatory tools operate but also imbues them with symbolic significance, enabling urban spaces to be continuously **re-signified** and re-imagined. When understood together, participatory planning, art and design, and culture form an integrated triad that expands urban planning into a process that is creative, critical, and deeply attuned to both present needs and future possibilities.

Participatory planning is a collaborative approach to urban and community development where residents, stakeholders, and local voices are actively involved in shaping the decisions that affect their environment. Instead of relying solely on top-down processes led by experts or authorities, participatory planning invites people to share their ideas, needs, and experiences to help design spaces, policies, or services that reflect the realities of those who live there. It's about co-creating solutions, building trust, and ensuring that planning is not just done for communities, but with them.

## 4. State-of-the-art Examples of Urban Planning Involving Art and Design

Based on the literature review, we have selected five illustrative examples that capture the diverse ways in which art, design, and participatory practices intersect with urban planning across different cultural and political contexts. These include: (1) **Glasgow, Scotland** (Sharp, 2007), where the *Five Spaces project* demonstrates how participatory initiatives can become constrained within bureaucratic frameworks, resulting in what has been termed “*middling postmodernism*”; (2) **New York, USA** (Desai & Darts, 2016), where student-led interventions such as *This Is Not a Bus Stop* and *The Invisibility Suit* highlight the use of art as *public resistance* against managerialism, surveillance, and top-down infrastructural decisions; (3) **Beijing and Shanghai, China** (Cheng & Worrall, 2021), where public art functions predominantly as a *branding tool*, reinforcing state-led development agendas but limiting participatory potential; (4) **Montreal, Canada, and Johannesburg, South Africa** (Guinard & Margier, 2018), where art contributes to the *artialisation of public space*, simultaneously enhancing competitiveness and reconfiguring urban imaginaries; and (5) **Nicosia, Cyprus** (Artopoulos et al., 2019), where immersive digital technologies support participatory engagement with heritage-rich commons through virtual and augmented reality.

### 1. Glasgow, Scotland (Sharp, 2007) – MIDDLEING POSTMODERNISM

In the case of Glasgow, the Five Spaces project—developed within the framework of Glasgow 1999—exhibited characteristics of what Sharp has referred to as “middling postmodernism.” This phenomenon illustrates how urban initiatives ostensibly aimed at participatory engagement often become entangled in the bureaucratic structures of urban managerialism, ultimately limiting their transformative potential.

### 2. New York, USA (Desai & Darts, 2016) – ART AS PUBLIC RESISTANCE

Concerns about urban managerialism and the hollow responses often produced by bureaucratic systems informed two art and design student projects in New York City in the late 2000s: *This Is Not a Bus Stop* and *The Invisibility Suit*. The former emerged as a critical response to the MTA’s closure of the B23 bus line due to budget cuts—an act that followed shortly after the installation of new bus shelters commissioned from the Spanish corporation Cemusa. This project highlighted the disjuncture between public needs and top-down infrastructural decisions. The latter, initiated by Tara Finneran, was a public art intervention that disrupted everyday urban routines, sparking dialogue around the encroachment of surveillance technologies into public space under the guise of citizen protection. Both projects served as acts of resistance, rejecting the reduction of citizens to passive consumers of public services and reaffirming their participatory role in democratic urban life. In this context, urban interventionist art practices functioned as a form of public pedagogy, challenging dominant narratives and inviting critical reflection on the politics of space.

### 3. Beijing and Shanghai, China (Cheng & Worrall, 2021) – PUBLIC ARTS AS TOOL OF CITY BRANDING

Different historical and cultural context in Beijing and Shanghai implies a different use of public art. Public art and mainly prominent urban sculptures are used as a tool to support China's urban development policies, focusing on their role in shaping city identity, attracting investment, and promoting economic growth. Public art projects are largely top-down, driven by government and developers, with limited public participation and cultural specificity. Public art has potential to enhance urban space, its implementation often reflects fragmented policy coordination and prioritizes commercial goals. Research calls for a more inclusive and context-sensitive approaches to better align public art with the social and cultural needs of urban communities.

### 4. Canada, Montreal (Guinard & Margier, 2018) – ARTIALIZATION OF PUBLIC SPACES

In the case of Melbourne, a city of the Global North, contrasted with Johannesburg from the Global South, art emerges as a defining feature of contemporary urban development. While global cities may appear increasingly similar, the integration of art offers a means of cultivating distinct urban experiences. Different urbanization contexts enable varying models for embedding art within planning processes, yet in both cities, the creation of "artialized" public spaces is seen as essential for enhancing urban attractiveness and competitiveness. However, this integration goes beyond aesthetic transformation; it reflects deeper shifts in how public space is conceived and utilized within evolving urban strategies.

### 5. Nicosia, Cyprus (Artopoulos et al., 2019) – PUBLIC SPACES AND AR

The case of Nicosia serves as a compelling example of how immersive digital technologies can support the management and revitalization of historic urban commons. Through a virtual environment platform that reconstructs the city's public spaces as they exist today and as they appeared in 1951, before its division, users can explore the layered history of place via interactive media, 3D models, and VR sequences. This hybrid simulation, developed using techniques such as laser scanning and drone-based photogrammetry, enables planners, stakeholders, and citizens to engage with the spatial and cultural dynamics of the city. By tracking user interaction within the platform, the project aims to inform future planning decisions and design interventions, demonstrating how digital tools can enhance understanding, participation, and co-use of heritage-rich public spaces.

Taken together, these examples underscore the variety of roles that art and design can assume in participatory planning—from constrained participation to resistance, branding, aesthetic transformation, and digital co-creation—while revealing the strong influence of cultural and political contexts in shaping these trajectories.

## 5. Key takeaways

### 5.1 The power of art, design, and culture in planning

Art, design, and culture are not just aesthetic layers in city-making—they are tools for **bridging social divides, empowering communities, and activating participation**. When meaningfully integrated, they help shape more inclusive, creative, and resilient urban futures.

#### 5.1.1 A Framework for Participation

Participatory planning benefits from **creative, bottom-up approaches** that invite co-creation across all stages of the planning cycle:

#### 5.1.2 Children as urban co-creators

Children's perspectives are central to building more livable, human-centered cities. Their ability to explore, play, and interact with their surroundings must be protected and prioritized. **Child-friendly environments**, such as the Nordic Bullerby model, highlight how children's **agency and mobility** lead to more vibrant, democratic public spaces.

#### 5.1.3 Playability and gamification

Playability is not limited to playgrounds—it reflects how urban environments invite curiosity, exploration, and spontaneous interaction. When linked with **gamification** (adding game-like elements to real spaces), cities become more engaging, equitable, and emotionally resonant. But these strategies must remain grounded in **local realities and community input**.

#### 5.1.4 Public art as civic dialogue

Public art plays a vital role in activating space and expression. It's not just decoration—it's a **platform for dialogue, a tool for resistance, and a mirror of collective identity**. From Lisbon to Budapest, public installations have sparked reflection, participation, and even policy change.

#### 5.1.5 Active frontages and urban life

Streets lined with transparent, engaging building fronts—known as **active frontages**—create safer, more vibrant environments. These interfaces between public and private space thrive

when they are designed collaboratively, based on how people actually use and experience the city.

## 5.1.6 Digital tools for inclusive cities

Smart cities need smart engagement. Technologies like **augmented reality, virtual reality, and participatory apps** are making it easier for diverse groups—including youth—to visualize, shape, and co-own urban changes. But tech alone isn't enough—it must be guided by culture, context, and co-creation.

## 5.1.7 Context matters

Cultural and historical differences shape how participation happens. From Nordic environmental literacy to Mediterranean traditions of public art, context-sensitive planning is key. No one-size-fits-all model exists—**local culture and community history** must guide each project.

## 5.1.8 Participation as Practice, Not Just Principle

*This compendium emphasizes that participation must go beyond consultation—it's a creative, continuous practice grounded in listening, learning, and adapting. Through the integration of art, design, and culture, participatory planning can become a transformative force for equity, sustainability, and shared urban futures.*

processes

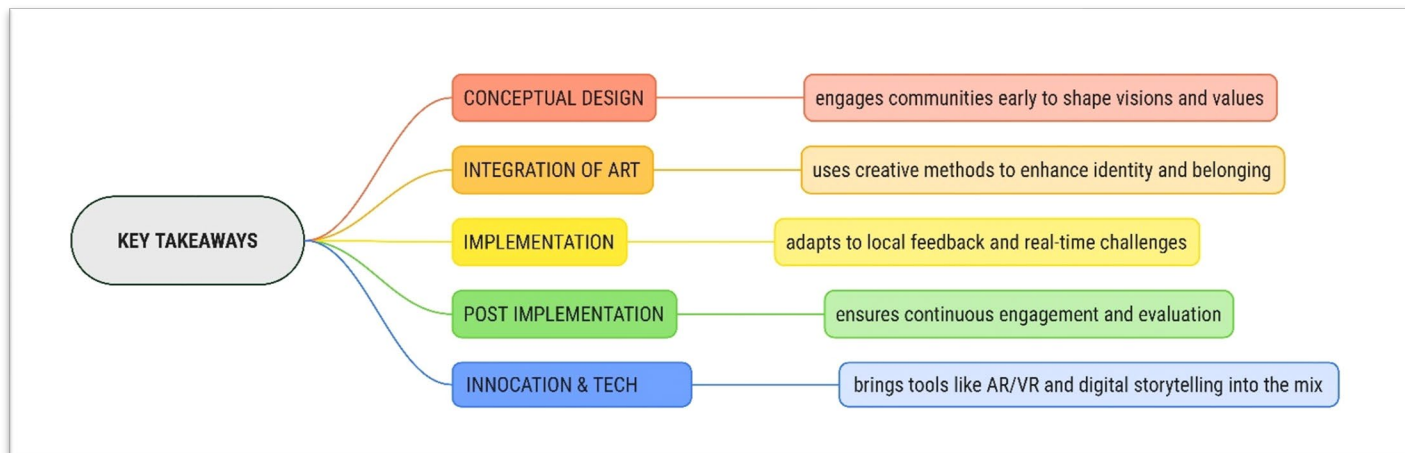


Fig 5. Key takeaways of the literature review

## 6. Case studies

### 6.1 Collection and selection of the case studies (criteria system and methodology)

The case study selection and gathering were conducted through an assisted, collaborative process that combined partner experience, mutual consultation, and organized data collection. It began with an online workshop facilitated in collaboration with the partners of the CONIFER project. It had two main sections.

During the first session, couples jointly named and proposed examples of good practice—projects they considered representative of the application of art and design tools to participatory action with vulnerable groups. This free flowing discussion provided a varied repository of innovative projects operating at the intersection of creative practice, social inclusion, and place change. Participants were invited to contribute their suggestions to an open digital board, detailing initiatives from their local or national context that represent innovative, community-led strategies.

In the second half of the workshop, the collective developed a system of criteria to guide the selection and analysis of the chosen case studies.

The discussion was around identifying the type of data to be collected in order to understand the relevance of art and design to solving urban, spatial, or social problems. The criteria were such as to describe both structural characteristics of each activity and the qualitative aspects of participation and impact.

This collective work was followed by the establishment of a first-round framework that consisted of a set of rudimentary descriptors such as project length, target group, aims and outcomes, participant numbers, location, environmental and socio-cultural context. Additionally, the framework addressed significant aspects such as modes of participation and inclusion, artistic and design procedure, specific creative tools employed, and evaluation of the impacts—with particular reference to sense of belonging, agency, and empowerment.

Based on this model, the team ranked a comprehensive questionnaire on the Typeform platform. The survey contained 39 questions, mainly open-ended to allow richer responses, augmented by a few multiple-choice questions (e.g., type of intervention or medium of artistic practice). The questionnaire was disseminated through two channels: partners were asked to forward it to representatives of their proposed projects, and the coordination team also made direct, centralized outreach.

Almost 60 subjects opened the questionnaire, a slight majority began to complete it, and six subjects returned complete responses. The relatively low completion rate reflected the survey's length and complexity—conscious choices to provide depth, analytic rigor, and data comparability.

With so few completed questionnaires, analysis did not aim for statistical representativeness but qualitative understanding. Of the six projects, one was excluded as it did not include art and design aspects, and the remaining five were presented as individual case studies, each structured under the main thematic headings of the questionnaire. The findings related to the use of art and design tools and methodologies were subsequently synthesized in isolation, cross-checking the individual cases. Finally, a consistent set of recommendations was developed to inform future implementations and to help practitioners and policymakers integrate innovative approaches into participatory planning among vulnerable groups.

## 6.2 Introduction of selected case studies

### **Project title: MUS-E Belgium**

**Project location:** Belgium

#### **Summary of the project:**

Since 2000, MUS-E Belgium has played a pioneering role in participatory arts. As a bilingual organization, MUS-E makes active artistic experiences accessible to children, young people, and adults, regardless of their background or prior knowledge through the intercreative processes of imagination and experimentation. MUS-E stands for INTERCREATION — an artistic practice in which professional artists from all disciplines create and find meaning together with a broad and diverse audience. It works cross-sectorally and initiates artistic projects in education, leisure, social welfare, and public spaces.

#### **Community or vulnerable group involved:**

Children and families in metropolitan Brussels, Flanders, and Wallonia, often facing poverty, limited space, language barriers, and restricted access to public or cultural spaces.

#### **Goals and objectives:**

The project aims to support the personal and collective development of participants of all ages—children, youth, adults, and seniors—through active engagement in the arts. The objectives are to promote social cohesion, empower individuals through co-creation, and strengthen participation in a more just, connected, and collaborative society. Art is

approached as a universal, transformative language that encourages curiosity, expression, and the sharing of diverse perspectives.

**Methodology:**

MUS-E's methodology is based on artistic intercreation, experiential learning, and equal exchange between professional artists and participants. MUS-E project consists of a series of around nine sessions, where the same artist collaborates with the same group of participants throughout the entire co-creative process. Rather than teaching art in a traditional way, MUS-E artists engage participants in shared processes of experimentation, imagination, and reflection. The approach is person-centered, interdisciplinary, and focused on process over product. Artists and participants are given a shared *carte blanche*—the process and outcome are not predetermined but are built playfully over time. A wide range of disciplines may be used—such as music, dance, theatre, visual arts, crafts, writing, multimedia, and movement—often in interdisciplinary format.

**Approx. participants:** ≈ 5000

**Project duration:** Each project ~9 sessions, ~2 hours each

**Intensity of engagement:** Ongoing series

**Field of intervention:** Urban planning, playground design, school streets

**Built environment:**

MUS-E operates in a range of urban and peri-urban environments across Brussels, Flanders, and Wallonia, and adapts its interventions to the specific character of each location. Projects may unfold in social housing blocks like Peterbos (Anderlecht), in public spaces in transition—such as the transformation of a former parking lot into a shared garden at Bizet Bizar—or in and around schools, including playgrounds and semi-public spaces.

**Socio-economic & cultural context:**

Many of the participating schools are located in neighborhoods facing socio-economic challenges. The demographic landscape is equally varied: children and families often come from different cultural backgrounds, with a wide range of histories, worldviews, and lived experiences. Many children attend schools in urban and peri-urban areas with high levels of cultural diversity, including families with various ethnic origins and migration histories and face challenges such as limited access to resources, language barriers, and varying levels of parental education.

**Main target group & stakeholders:**

The main target group of the project is primary school children. They participate in regular, co-creative art sessions led by professional artists, integrated into the school's weekly schedule. The project involved a broad network of stakeholders: professional artists from various disciplines, teachers and school staff, parents and families, engaged through presentations, community organizations, including local youth centers and social or cultural associations, local authorities and policy-makers, seniors and adult participants, involved in intergenerational and community-based projects. Moreover artistic and cultural institutions, such as museums, theatres, cinemas, artist collectives, and other art spaces, which served as partners, hosts, or sources of inspiration and collaboration

**Medium of artistic design activity used:**

Participatory design workshops, performing arts, photography, video, drawing, mapping.

**Step-by-step art or design process:**

1. Initial Meeting & Getting to Know Each Other: The artist and participants connect to build trust, share interests, and introduce the specific art form(s) involved—whether music, dance, visual arts, drama, crafts, movement, or multimedia.
2. Co-Creation & Carte Blanche: Participants contribute their own ideas and inspirations. The artist draws on these to guide the creative process, embracing trial and error and experimentation. Both artist and participants share a “carte blanche,” meaning the process and outcome remain open and flexible.
3. Exploration & Experimentation Across Disciplines: Through artistic sessions, participants explore various materials, techniques, and modes of expression related to the artist's discipline(s). Improvisation and imagination play a key role, allowing participants to discover new creative possibilities.
4. Collaborative Artistic Research: Artist, participants, and facilitators engage in reflection and dialogue to deepen the artistic inquiry and develop the work further.

Ideas and creations evolve as the group experiments and refines their work, maintaining openness to unexpected directions and discoveries.

6. Collective Artistic Expression: The process culminates in a shared artistic product or experience—such as a performance, exhibition, or installation—that reflects the multidisciplinary exploration, while valuing the quality of the creative journey over the final result.

7. Reflection & Sharing: The experience is reviewed together, often inviting families or community members to celebrate and connect through the arts.

**Engagement methods:**

Artists invited participants to share their ideas and inspirations, fostering a sense of ownership and co-creation. Through exploratory sessions, participants experimented with materials, movement, sound, or storytelling, which helped shape the direction of the project organically. Techniques like improvisation, visual mapping, storytelling, and collaborative brainstorming allowed everyone to contribute, ensuring the project evolved in response to the group's interest

**Design and art tools used:**

Traditional materials such as paint, clay, fabric, mosaic tiles, and drawing tools for visual arts; musical instruments and voice for music and sound exploration; movement and body expression techniques for dance and theatre; as well as multimedia tools like cameras, video and audio recorders, and editing software for photography, film, and radio projects. Tools for crafts and construction, such as woodworking or textile materials, and physical practices like martial arts or yoga, were employed to engage participants in diverse and hands-on creative processes.

**Achievements and outputs:**

The project successfully fostered creativity, inclusion, and collaboration among participants of diverse ages and backgrounds. It enabled children, adults, and seniors to discover and express their creative potential through a variety of artistic disciplines, strengthening personal development and social bonds. By creating shared artistic experiences, the project enhanced dialogue, respect, and understanding within communities. It also contributed to making public and communal spaces more vibrant and meaningful. Overall, the project promoted active participation, empowerment, and a stronger sense of belonging among all involved and resulted in social cohesion and trust-building.

## **Project title: Openstreets - Filter Café Filtré Atelier**

**Project location:** Sint-Jans Molenbeek, Belgium

### **Summary of the project:**

Since 2020, car-free summerstreets have been travelling through the 'Maritime' neighborhood in Molenbeek, showing that the street is key to improving a neighborhood's livability. Openstreets invite neighbors to participate in a wide range of free activities from dance performances to a circus initiation, a future imagination workshop preparing a meal together. Every street is furnished with furniture to sit or lie down and toys like a sand- and lego box & bikes. Openstreets continue to improve the neighborhood with small interventions in the streets. In a yearly summerschool, lessons learned are shared with a team of young architects, urbanists and other professionals. Concerns and wishes of the neighbors are processed into images, and design proposals to improve long-term livability. Every street is different and has different needs.

### **Community or vulnerable group involved:**

The Maritime neighborhood in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek reflects a low socio-economic status relative to the Brussels-Capital Region. It has low-income levels, high population density, and significant social challenges, including poverty and youth unemployment, but also shows signs of community resilience and urban renewal.

### **Goals and objectives:**

Imagine different uses of the street, provide qualitative and activated public space, remove car-traffic to make room for social encounters and neighbors meeting each other, give space for children to play as the private and public outdoor spaces are limited in this area.

### **Methodology:**

Car-free streets, a wide scale of free activities, imagination workshops to redesign the street, cultural performances (dance, theater, music...), cinema, sports, children's games, food, cooking together, crafts, drinks, bike repair.

**Approx. participants:** ≈ 15-50 per day

**Project duration:** 9 weeks

**Intensity of engagement:** 9 weeks during summer, programmed every day

**Field of intervention:** Urban planning, summerstreets

**Built environment and socio-economic & cultural context:**

Molenbeek's dense residential fabric is a network of shortcuts that allows motorized traffic to avoid the main traffic lanes. Urban, densely populated, housing blocks in apartments, little green, many schools around. The permanent flux of transit traffic impoverishes social life. Neighbors hardly know each other; children stay indoors because the street is too dangerous. Traffic pushes social life behind the facades. These neighborhoods need safe and quality outdoor space. The building blocks consist mainly of apartments without terraces or gardens. Families with children live in small spaces. That is why Openstreets continues to improve the neighborhood with small interventions in the streets.

**Main target group & stakeholders:**

The project offers a variety of activities to welcome everyone from and beyond the neighborhood. The project reaches a lot of children as it happens over summer. Set-up by a grass-roots NGO, neighbors, cultural organizations, many local initiatives are supporting with activities, the municipality.

**Medium of artistic design activity used:**

Participatory design workshops, performing arts, cinema, crafts, summerstreet

**Step-by-step art or design process:**

The programming and selection of streets starts in the beginning of the year together with collectives of neighbors and partner organizations. FCF-a is the lead organizer, coordinating the overall activities. Closer to summer, multiple meetings are set up with neighbors to discuss activities and logistics in detail.

**Engagement methods:** Not relevant since each and everyone is welcomed.

**Design and art tools used:**

Summerstreets, performance arts (dance, theater, music), participatory design workshops, crafts.

**Achievements and outputs:**

One of the main results is the networks of neighbors that know each other. Space and time to be outside in summer. Children gained free terrain right at their doorstep. The municipality started supporting the project as they saw the benefits. Neighbors started to be more involved in the organization. People were inspired to advocate for more car-free spaces.

## **Project title: Solidarity Landscape Project**

**Project location:** Lurano, Italy (Bergamo Region)

### **Summary of the project:**

The Solidarity Landscape project is a partnership between Consorzio FA, a social cooperative in Lurano, Italy, and Landscape Architecture students and staff from the University of Maryland. They are collaborating to co-create solutions to address issues of landscape accessibility, soft mobility, climate change, and social needs of the community. They are addressing community needs through projects such as the Tarantasio Trail, a bike loop connecting the region's residents with unique landscapes, heritage and educational sites, and agricultural sites.

### **Community or vulnerable group involved:**

The partnering organization, Consorzio FA, provides co-housing and social and educational services for adults with disabilities, children in foster care, young adults leaving the foster care system, single-parent families, and new immigrants.

### **Goals and objectives:**

The project goals are aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal #3 to promote health, well-being, and more active lifestyles for people of all ages and abilities; Goal #8 by providing personal development and social integration through a landscape-based social economy; Goal #11 providing safe and affordable housing and accessible and sustainable transportation options including soft mobility over car-use; Goal #15 protecting local fragile ecosystems and water (Fontanili), promoting sustainable, regenerative agriculture and agroecology, and practices to help locals be more resilient to climate change; Goal #17 these goals can only be met through partnerships between the municipalities, scientists, academics, and community members.

### **Methodology:**

This is a Participatory Action Research project - a collaborative research process grounded in the lived experiences of the community members and researchers. It is an iterative process of action and reflection in partnership with the community and researchers. We use PAR methods such as listening, interactive observation, co-creation, and prototyping.

**Approx. participants:** ≈ Over the past 3.5 years roughly 200 participants including community residents, staff, local farmers and other partner organizations.

**Project duration:** 3,5 years

**Intensity of engagement:** Ongoing series

**Field of intervention:**

Mobility, urban planning, playground design, landscape interventions: access to natural springs and agricultural sites, designing community gardens, healing gardens, and outdoor play and educational spaces.

**Built environment:**

This project takes place in an agricultural region of Northern Italy. The region has several small towns and villages separated by fields of agriculture.

**Socio-economic & cultural context:**

The demographics of the project participants range from children and teens in foster care to adults with disabilities, and the people who care for them as social workers, educators, and community staff members. We also work with local farmers and partner organizations. There is a wide range of challenges faced by this community. The children face challenges due to their family situations. The adults with disabilities may have parents who have passed away or are otherwise learning to live independently (see Italy's "After Us" law). The parents in the community face challenges including learning job and parenting skills, and those who are new immigrants to Italy also face challenges that come with living in a new country. The staff members are incredible but also carry a heavy load of caring for such a diverse community of needs.

**Main target group & stakeholders:**

The main partner in the project is Consorzio FA - a social cooperative - and one of their co-housing communities called Villaggio Solidale. Other stakeholders of the project include project partners, such as a nearby WWF restoration site - Renova Park, a new urban garden group - Asilo Vecchio, an organic farm - Castel Cerreto Cascina Pelesa, and other partner social cooperatives such as Cooperativa Sociale Alchimia,

**Specific needs of the target group addressed:**

We have focused on the needs of adults with disabilities and their mobility challenges to access the landscape. Some of these participants need walking aids and others use motorized wheelchairs. Many of our activities with these individuals are visual in nature, using visual aids and participatory activities everyone can participate in. We have also focused on the needs of the children for safely accessing the landscape, while retaining the ability to freely explore and take appropriate risks. In all our project methods, we include the community staff and educators who know the needs and abilities of everyone involved.

**Medium of artistic design activity used:**

Drawing/Mapping, Photography/Video, Participatory design workshops

**Step-by-step art or design process:**

All our art and design processes have been done during week-long Participatory Workshops over the past four summers. For drawing and mapping, we have done many activities, such as drawing childhood landscapes with community staff, and landscapes of the heart - drawing favorite or dream landscapes with residents. We have done co-design activities where we provided drawn map views of the community and its landscape and asked children and adult participants to co-design the landscape with elements, they want to see in the landscape they live in. We have done similar co-design activities with adults with disabilities, but instead of drawing landscape elements, we provided cut-outs of elements for participants to choose from and place in their desired locations. We have done collages of dream gardens using magazine images. We printed images of flowers and insects and colored them with participants to understand their favorite plants, colors, and insects.

For photography, one of the community staff members is a talented photographer and videographer and he has taken many photos and created a short documentary of our project.

**Engagement methods:**

These methods have also been combined with many discussions with the community about their needs, ambitions, and goals for their community. All of the drawings and maps have been coded and analyzed to understand patterns and the information we have gained from these activities is used for refining planning and designs.

**Design and art tools used:**

Paper, pens, scissors, glue, magazine images, drafting tools, cameras (and phone cameras), markers, colored pencils, seeds, materials found in nature, balsa wood, soil, clay, internet apps like Miro and Mural boards, sketchbooks.

**Achievements and outputs:**

We have gained new project partners through word of mouth and co-creation activities where we learned from community members about other like-minded groups to reach out to. We have created a training curriculum to train local educators and social workers in nature-based interventions. The young adults have created their own presentation to share with municipal leaders. We have had two masters of landscape architecture theses focused on the project. Public interest beyond our partner community is increasing so we can state that social cohesion and trust-building are the most relevant outputs realized.

## **Project title: Playful Co-Design with Children and Youth**

**Project location:** Hungary (Budapest, Budaörs, Miskolc, Vác, Veszprém)

### **Summary of the project:**

We co-design public spaces with children and local communities, using a playful approach based on our method described in the book “With Children in All Spaces”. In “*Shape Your School!*”, we redesign school surroundings—streets, forecourts, and yards. In the *Child-Friendly Vác* project, we focus on co-designing urban spaces that offer nature experiences.

### **Community or vulnerable group involved:**

We work with diverse groups of children and youth in schools and local communities. In “*Shape Your School!*”, we partner with teachers, parents, and municipalities to co-design school environments. In the *Vác Child-Friendly City* initiative, we collaborate with local families, activists, and the city to transform underused urban spaces into nature-experience places for children.

### **Goals and objectives:**

The goal of our projects is to empower children and youth to become active shapers of their environment and participants in decision-making. We aim to foster collaboration, critical thinking, and a sense of community. In *Shape Your School!*, we co-design school environments through participatory mapping, visioning, planning, testing, and implementation. In the *Child-Friendly Vác project*, we explore how nature-connected urban spaces can support children’s wellbeing and agency. Together with local families, experts, and students, we identify and co-create green spaces that offer authentic nature experiences for play, rest, and learning.

### **Methodology:**

Our projects are grounded in two complementary methodologies. In *Shape Your School!*, we apply the playful, participatory approach described in *With Children in All Spaces* (Szilágyi-Nagy & Mihály), a toolkit balancing design and pedagogy. It structures the process around five key questions (With whom? Where? What? How? Do we shape?) to support collaborative planning with children from exploration to implementation. In *Child-Friendly Vác*, we use a Living Lab approach to co-create nature-connected public spaces with local youth, families, and professionals. The lab began by mapping all green areas in the city, then focused on the underused Alsó-Törökhegy Forest.

### **Approx. participants:**

≈ 1600 participants in 8 schools for the Shape Your School! project and Child-Friendly Vác approx. 900 participants including children, families, local professionals, university students, and municipal actors

**Project duration:**

Shape Your School! 2019 – ongoing Each site-based cycle runs for 6–9 months in a structured process.

Child-Friendly Vác 2023 – 2025, part of the Open Landscape Academy Erasmus+ project.

**Intensity of engagement:** Ongoing series

**Field of intervention:**

Shape Your School!: Participatory school environment design – co-designing schoolyards, entrances

Child-Friendly Vác: Nature-based urban design with children and families – transforming underused green spaces (e.g. forest edges) into nature-experience places using Living Lab methodology

**Built environment:**

Shape Your School!: The interventions take place in school environments located in Budapest and larger cities (e.g. Miskolc, Veszprém), and suburban towns (e.g. Budaörs). Sites typically include schoolyards, entrances, adjacent streets, and green patches. Participating schools range from inner-city secondary schools to peri-urban primary schools, resulting in diverse spatial and social contexts.

Child-Friendly Vác: The project is situated in urban and peri-urban districts of Vác, a mid-sized town in the Budapest Agglomeration. Rather than direct physical interventions, the focus is on community-based exploration. The work began with citywide mapping and continued in a Danube-side school and the Törökhegy district—a newly urbanising area with limited infrastructure and an underused forest. The Törökhegy forest, once a green buffer, now lies within the urban fabric but remains disconnected from everyday life.

**Socio-economic & cultural context:**

Shape Your School!: The project engages a wide range of Hungarian school communities. Schools involved include public, private, religious, and alternative institutions, serving highly diverse student populations. In some locations (e.g., Miskolc or Zsendülő Tanoda), students face socio-economic disadvantages, while others come from privileged urban backgrounds.

*Child-Friendly Vác:* The town combines a rich natural setting with rapidly urbanizing areas like Alsó-Törökhegy, where families with young children lack access to nature and public infrastructure. The area's social dynamics—between more affluent and more isolated residents—shape the participatory design process, which aims to foster community dialogue and nature-based urban transformation.

### **Main target group & stakeholders:**

*Shape Your School!:* Children and youth aged 10–18 in diverse school communities. The project also engages teachers, school staff, and parents as supporting actors in shaping inclusive school environments. Local municipalities supported implementation, and NGOs provided facilitation. In some cases, the broader school community—such as maintenance staff and neighbors—also joined the process.

*Child-Friendly Vác:* Children and young families living in newly urbanized or underserved areas of Vác. The project focuses on children aged 4–14, involving them and their caregivers in community-based green space development. Among stakeholders' kindergartens, schools, local NGOs, university students and professors, municipal staff, and community activists are included. Informal forest users and healthcare institutions were also considered in the planning process.

### **Specific needs of the target group addressed:**

*Shape Your School!:* The process was always adapted to the everyday rhythm and institutional structure of each school. Activities took different formats depending on the context - sometimes as extracurricular clubs, project days, or integrated lesson blocks. Tasks, tools, and session lengths were tailored to students' age, interests, and learning needs.

*Child-Friendly Vác:* The project was shaped around children's and families' rhythms and interests. Activities were mostly outdoors and nature-based, such as forest explorations, seasonal events, or playful co-creation workshops. We continuously adapted the content, tools, and pace based on children's feedback — observing what they enjoyed, how they participated, and what supported their imagination and agency.

### **Medium of artistic design activity used:**

Drawing / Mapping, Model-making, Performing arts (e.g., theater, dance), Participatory design workshops, Storytelling / Narrative work

## Step-by-step art or design process

### Shape Your School!:

We followed the five-step methodology outlined in our guide With Children in All Spaces:

- WHO – Mapping the student community and forming a core group.
- WHERE – Exploring the school environment through walks, drawings, and surveys.
- WHAT – Identifying needs and opportunities through visioning and playful tools.
- HOW – Co-designing interventions through model-making, prototyping, and testing.
- TRANSFORMATION – Implementing small-scale changes and presenting proposals to decision-makers.

### Child-Friendly Vác:

The Living Lab approach involved an iterative and site-specific process:

- Exploration – Mapping green spaces across the city through participatory walks and student research.
- Focusing – Selecting Alsó-Törökhegy Forest based on accessibility, need, and community interest.
- Engagement – Organising child- and family-friendly activities to explore the site (e.g., Playmobil mapping, forest storytelling).
- Co-design – Gathering and developing ideas together with children and other stakeholders.
- Reflection & Planning – Sharing outcomes with the municipality and refining plans based on community feedback.

## Design and art tools used:

Shape Your School! – Art and Design Methods Used: participatory site mapping sensory walks and playful research photo documentation and mental mapping student-made videos vision collages and storytelling “dream schoolyard” drawings discussion prompts and poster-making prototyping with LEGO, cardboard, clay co-developed board games (To the Yard!, Spice Up the Schoolyard!) co-design sketches, campaign posters, voting stations. Art and design served as inclusive, democratic tools — bridging perspectives and stimulating dialogue among students, teachers, parents, and decision-makers.

Child-Friendly City Vác – Art and Design Methods Used: children-led walks and outdoor observations narrative interviews with clay modeling nature framing and sensory games collaborative mapping activities stamp-based forest shaping game co-creation of outdoor play elements storytelling sessions in the forest playful public events (e.g. Light Walk with LED

puppets, Midsummer creature-making). Art and design served as inclusive, democratic tools — bridging perspectives and stimulating dialogue among students, teachers, parents, and decision-makers. These art- and game-based methods helped children engage with the forest through imagination and shared experiences, while also contributing to planning through their ideas, stories, and creations.

These tools were used also as engagement methods to invite participants into the process and to keep their motivation up.

### **Achievements and outputs:**

Both projects empowered children and youth as active participants in shaping their environment through creative and democratic design processes. In *Shape Your School!*, students co-created visions and detailed proposals for their schoolyards. In many cases, these led to symbolic interventions (e.g. planting, building, painting) that served as tangible first steps toward larger transformations. The process strengthened skills such as collaborative decision-making, community engagement, and mapping of local resources. It also fostered ownership and motivation to advocate for further changes. In *Child-Friendly City Vác*, children and families rediscovered and reimagined urban nature. Through creative play and co-design, they activated a neglected forest area and transformed it into a shared, meaningful space. The project strengthened social ties, built ecological awareness, and planted the idea that children's needs and ideas matter in city planning.

## **Project title: Association for Free Play**

**Project location:** Budapest, Hungary

### **Summary of the project:**

The Association for Free Play is a Budapest-based organization of professionals from education, urban planning, architecture, culture, and social sciences dedicated to promoting children's right to free play, particularly in urban settings. We raise awareness of the importance of free play and promote natural, risk-taking forms of play that foster children's autonomy, creativity, and physical, mental, and emotional development. We see play as a democratic educational tool that can activate and connect not only children but also local communities.

### **Community or vulnerable group involved:**

Children in urban areas face shrinking opportunities for free, self-directed play due to lack of safe, natural spaces, over-regulation, and socioeconomic barriers. This limits their autonomy, creativity, and resilience, and reduces community connection. Promoting risk-rich, inclusive play protects their development and strengthens the social fabric of cities.

### **Goals and objectives:**

The Association for Free Play has set the following goals:

We emphasize the importance of the opportunity for free play in healthy child development and parenting, and we promote this concept widely.

We advocate for the psychological benefits of "risk-taking" and interaction with nature. We regard play as a democratic educational tool.

We challenge prevailing norms and promote spatial planning practices that actively involve children in the life of settlements, prioritize nature-based solutions, and foster community activity.

We urge the adoption of solutions that encourage children to engage in independent and risk-taking play, thereby supporting autonomy, creativity, and community functioning.

We work to promote the enforcement of children's fundamental rights in urban planning processes (see: UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment on Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2013).

We fight for the application of the principles of spatial justice: ensuring equal access to public spaces, expanding institutional infrastructure, and increasing free and safe opportunities,

with attention to reducing social, gender, and age-related disadvantages/inequalities and improving access for disadvantaged communities and families.

We work to foster collaboration between the fields of pedagogy, urban planning, landscape architecture, architecture, settlement design, social sciences, youth work, psychology, children's rights, as well as other cultural and artistic disciplines.

We promote and apply the ideas of volunteering, participation, and community.

### **Methodology:**

The project employs a multi-faceted, participatory approach to promote free play for children in Budapest: **Community Engagement and Co-Design:** We actively involve children, families, and local stakeholders in designing play spaces and activities, ensuring that interventions reflect their needs, preferences, and cultural context. **Urban and Nature-Based Interventions:** We create or improve accessible, risk-rich, and nature-oriented play areas in urban neighborhoods, combining temporary installations, pop-up playgrounds, and long-term planning solutions. **Advocacy and Awareness-Raising:** We organize workshops, campaigns, and events to highlight the benefits of free, self-directed, and risk-taking play, targeting parents, educators, urban planners, and policymakers. **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** We collaborate with professionals across urban planning, architecture, landscape design, education, psychology, children's rights, and cultural fields to integrate expertise into the planning and evaluation of interventions. **Capacity-Building:** We provide training and resources for educators, community leaders, and local authorities to support sustainable, child-friendly urban practices and foster ongoing community-led play initiatives. Through this methodology, the project ensures that children are not only beneficiaries but active participants.

**Approx. participants:** Variable depending on the specific project activities

**Project duration:** Days up to months

**Intensity of engagement:** From one-off events to ongoing series

### **Field of intervention:**

Urban planning, playground design, school streets, urban child development and play, child rights advocacy, community engagement

### **Built environment:**

Parks, playgrounds, schoolyards, courtyards, streets and other urban public spaces, often with limited greenery or natural play elements.

**Socio-economic & cultural context:**

The project takes place in diverse urban neighborhoods of Budapest, home to children from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Some areas face challenges such as limited access to safe green spaces, high-density housing, and social inequalities. Families may experience economic constraints, and disadvantaged communities often have fewer opportunities for organized or informal play. Culturally, the city is vibrant and multi-ethnic, offering rich potential for community engagement, but public awareness of the value of free, risk-taking play is still limited.

**Main target group & stakeholders:**

Children in urban neighborhoods of Budapest, particularly those with limited access to safe, natural, and risk-rich play opportunities. Besides the children as the primary target group, the project involved parents, educators, community leaders, and local residents. Professional stakeholders included urban planners, architects, landscape designers, psychologists, youth workers, and experts in pedagogy and children's rights. Local authorities, schools, cultural institutions, and NGOs were also engaged to support planning, implementation, and advocacy efforts.

**Medium of artistic design activity used:**

Model making, Participatory design workshops, storytelling / narrative work

**Step-by-step art or design process:**

The process is always open-ended, flexible, and centered on children's creativity - different every time based on the activity

**Design and art tools used:**

Art and design methods allowed children and community members to actively contribute to planning. These hands-on, creative activities made the process accessible, playful, and inclusive, encouraging participants to share perspectives, experiment with solutions, and shape the design of urban play spaces. Modeling clay, cardboard, natural materials (sticks, stones, leaves), water, pipes, sand, etc.

**Achievements and outputs:**

The project creates temporary, flexible, and risk-rich play spaces in Budapest that reflect children's ideas and needs. It fosters active participation, collaboration, and a sense of ownership among children and community members. It strengthens local networks, raises awareness of the importance of free play, promotes democratic and nature-based

approaches to urban design, and encourages ongoing community engagement in shaping public spaces.

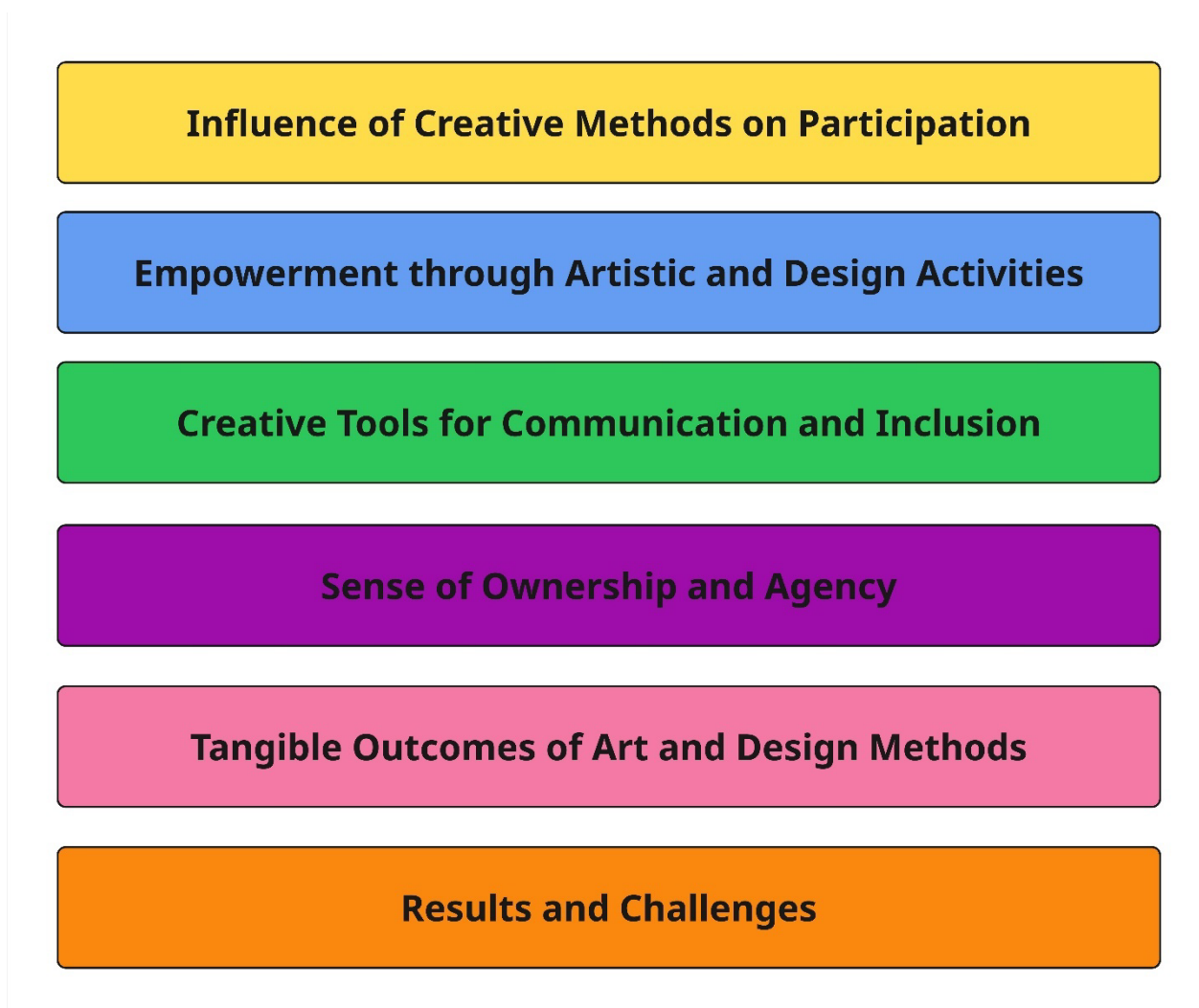


Figure 6 Case studies- key takeaways

## 6.3 Key takeaways

### 6.3.1 Influence of creative methods on participation

The introduced case studies of MUS-E, Shape Your School!, Child-Friendly City Vác, Solidarity Landscape Project and Openstreets show that creative methods produce better participation results than traditional methods. The methods used experiential and collaborative activities to create a shared creative process which replaced traditional top-down instructional methods. The MUS-E project used art as a social tool to drive participant imagination and experimentation while fostering dialogue between participants. The creative process established an inclusive non-hierarchical space which removed cultural and linguistic

obstacles to enable participants to express themselves freely and emotionally. The Openstreets initiative demonstrated how artistic and spatial interventions transform the way people experience public spaces. The initiative allowed participants to experience firsthand the benefits of car-free streets through creative events which exceeded the outcomes of standard public engagement methods. The Solidarity Landscape Project used creative teamwork through garden prototype construction and storytelling and visual communication to create hands-on participation opportunities. The process enabled participants from all backgrounds to share their ideas through visual and experiential methods that connected people across social and linguistic differences. The child-centered design approach in Shape Your School! and Child-Friendly City Vác created spaces for authentic child involvement. The combination of mapping and drawing and prototyping activities within children's daily spaces helped them develop self-assurance and better understand their surroundings. The co-created games and visual mapping activities in Shape Your School! helped participants develop group identity and decision-making abilities. The nature-based play activities and storytelling in Child-Friendly City Vác helped children develop a sense of place and self-authority. The combined practices established a new model of participation which combines skill development with sustained community involvement through real-life experiences. The analysis of these cases proves that creative artistic methods produce better results for inclusive and transformative participation. The combination of creative thinking with physical activity and teamwork produces higher participation numbers while building stronger community bonds and establishing active community involvement.

### 6.3.2 Empowerment through artistic and design activities

The MUS-E case study demonstrated how creative engagement enables participants to gain empowerment through collaborative co-creation and shared creative ownership. The program established protected areas for exploration which enabled vulnerable populations including children and seniors to develop self-assurance and independence while feeling part of a community. The Solidarity Landscape Project established partnerships through mutual learning because it treated community members as the primary authorities who understand their own life experiences. The creative outcomes of garden prototypes, seed-bombs and visual tools demonstrated to participants that their input mattered and strengthened their feelings of accomplishment. The Shape Your School! and Child-Friendly City Vác programs allowed children to see their concepts become reality in actual environments which demonstrated their status as change-makers.

### 6.3.3 Creative tools for communication and inclusion

The universal languages of visual arts, theater and music and movement enabled people from different cultural backgrounds and educational levels to connect with each other. MUS-E used non-verbal artistic methods to help participants from diverse backgrounds understand each other better while making complex concepts accessible and emotional connections possible. The Solidarity Landscape Project showed that co-creation methods including prototyping and drawing and storytelling enabled different communities to understand each other despite their differences. The methods helped participants turn complex concepts into visual representations which led to mutual comprehension and cultural empathy. The participatory design tools of collages and models and games in Shape Your School! and Child-Friendly City Vác helped children and their educators and planners and policymakers to engage in meaningful dialogue. The participatory design tools served as communication tools that helped people express their ideas while simultaneously developing their self-assurance and shared comprehension.

### 6.3.4 Sense of ownership and agency

The process of active participation in creation led to the development of ownership naturally. The MUS-E program enabled participants to take part in artistic development which built their self-assurance and sense of duty. The children in Shape Your School! gained control through direct actions that included painting their school environment and planting trees and creating prototypes for their school spaces. The Child-Friendly City Vác program allowed children to develop agency through their work on environmental projects. The combination of environmental activities including cleaning and planting and forest area recovery enabled children to develop personal bonds with their surroundings which evolved their role from participants to environmental guardians of their community.

### 6.3.5 Tangible outcomes of art and design methods

The art and design processes and methods created physical outcomes which surpassed visual artistic products. MUS-E used its creative output to create murals and installations and performances which brought new life to public areas and strengthened community spirit. Openstreets transformed public areas into shared creative environments which welcomed all members of the community to experience together. The Solidarity Landscape Project developed three different outputs which included garden prototypes and playing cards and

documentary films to track development and sustain audience interest. The Shape Your School! initiative resulted in actual schoolyard redesigns while Child-Friendly City Vác developed fresh play spaces and brought life back to abandoned green areas through innovative teamwork.

### 6.3.6 Results and challenges

The implementation of art and design elements throughout the case studies created an effective participatory approach that boosted participant involvement, social inclusion, and creative teamwork. The participants evolved into active contributors who shared authorship with the change process. The projects used interactive interdisciplinary approaches to unite different groups of people and professionals, community members and children thus making theoretical planning become tangible reality. The implementation of creative methods brought forward multiple obstacles to overcome. The main conflict arose from maintaining artistic freedom while producing specific design results that could be implemented. The facilitators needed to maintain a delicate equilibrium between free exploration and structured planning to ensure creative activities produced direct results for decision-making and spatial design. The project management needed flexible approaches and continuous assessment of participant development and their individual requirements for success. The process of inclusivity and accessibility presented itself as a recurring difficulty throughout the project. The facilitators of Shape Your School! and Child-Friendly City Vác developed flexible methods to support children who had different learning needs, energy levels and ages. The combination of brief sessions with creative materials and symbolic activities maintained participant interest while guaranteeing everyone received equal respect. MUS-E needed multimodal facilitation because its participants spanned different age groups and language abilities and cultural backgrounds so music and movement and visual art served as shared communication tools. The implementation of Solidarity Landscape and Openstreets faced various operational and environmental obstacles. The process of obtaining municipal authorization and handling community feedback and establishing enduring partnerships required continuous negotiation and determination. Creative tools served as essential elements for building local ownership and fostering civic imagination despite the existing obstacles. The development of new tools became essential because researchers needed methods to measure emotional and sensory experiences within specific contexts. The facilitators at Child-Friendly City Vác created nature-based games and observation activities which helped children express their forest experiences so these experiences could be translated into spatial data. The new design language incorporated play elements, emotional responses and narrative storytelling as essential components. The success of these projects depended on their ability to create tangible and joyful participation experiences which connected to everyday life activities. The creative methods showed that imagination and

expression serve as strong drivers for community development and social inclusion beyond traditional consultation methods based on words and technical plans. Through art and design communities experienced change beyond visualization because these practices transformed relationships and space usage and social perceptions.

## 7. Conclusion and recommendations

### 7.1 Synthesis of the key takeaways

Art, design, and culture are not add-ons or decorations to participatory planning—they are powerful drivers of inclusion, empowerment, and change. When they are properly woven into planning processes, they support crossing social divides, amplify the voices of marginalized communities, and turn abstract urban visions into concrete, lived experiences. MUS-E and Shape Your School! are two such examples.

Child-Centric City Vác, Solidarity Landscape Project, and Openstreets collectively demonstrate how innovative methodology has the potential to transform participation. This is particularly evident for marginalized groups such as children, families, and less privileged communities that are often underrepresented in formal planning mechanisms. Using imaginative and design-based approaches—drawing, mapping, narrative, performance, and co-design—went beyond traditional consultation to actual collaboration. In MUS-E, art was a social catalyst of dialogue and mutual understanding spanning linguistic and cultural boundaries. Openstreets exhibited how public space aesthetic appropriation can render participation experiential, allowing citizens to live urban change instead of merely discussing it. For example, the Solidarity Landscape Project used visual prototyping and storytelling to enable residents, including disabled individuals, to express ideas visually and make shared visions of their environment. Child-centered approaches in Shape Your School! and Child-Friendly City Vác also demonstrated how participatory design is a school for learning, empathy, and agency: through imaginative play, mapping, and exploration by nature, children developed from participants to co-designers and custodians of their environment.

These instances bring out that arts and design participation returns more vibrant, more level-playing-field participation than more conventional top-down methods. With the emphasis on process over product and the embrace of flexibility, art and design foster open, secure, and emotionally engaging arenas for dialogue and co-creation. These results are not just material ones—murals, gardens, rearranged schoolyards—but also immaterial ones such as confidence, ownership, and long-term social bonding. At a broader level, the inclusion of art and cultural practice into planning propels the concept of participation to an even broader context. Public art is civic dialogue; playability and gamification turn known spaces into arenas of discovery; and performative and digital strategies provide new means of accessibility and intergenerational connection.

Context remains important—each project is an expression of the surrounding culture, institutional environment, and social processes—but the general lesson is clear: participation will work best when it is innovative, continuous, and based in everyday life. In the end, the

nexus of art, design, and participatory planning is a paradigmatic change—to planning with communities and planning alongside them. Creativity is a form of governance, pedagogy of care, and source of more resilient and equitable cities. It is through imagination and co-creation that marginalized communities are not merely invited to urban change but made the co-authors of it.

## 7.2 The relevance of art and design in the given context and recommendations for future adapters

Based on the collective experiences from various participatory art and design projects and the few introduced here as case studies, several key principles emerge for the relevance of art and design for engaging vulnerable groups (especially children and young people). Special thanks to MUS-E Belgium and Playful Co-Design with Children and Youth Hungary to provide a comprehensive guidance and takeaways to this study.

1. The process should always take precedence over the result

The value of creativity and experimental methods and open dialogue exceed the importance of achieving a finished product. The open-ended approach enables participants to share their thoughts freely while building self-assurance through unstructured activities that avoid performance expectations.

2. The activities should begin with what participants already know from their daily lives

The activities should use materials and stories that participants recognize from their daily lives and cultural background. The connection between creative work and everyday life makes the process more relevant and increases both ownership and emotional investment from participants.

3. Establish environments that promote safety, inclusiveness while maintain a playful atmosphere

A non-judgmental environment that welcomes participants creates trust which enables them to become vulnerable. The combination of play activities and games and storytelling methods helps participants feel comfortable while strict rules protect their safety and equality and respect.

4. Adapt your world

The activities should follow the natural patterns of participants, especially children and their institutional requirements and personal interests. The process should follow participants' natural learning patterns and daily activities to create an organic experience instead of feeling forced.

5. Let them lead and share authorship

The participants should have the freedom to help develop both the creative process and the final results. Participants should receive complete control to direct creative decisions while handling full responsibility for their work. The practice of shared authorship enables participants to develop empowerment while building pride which leads to sustained involvement.

#### 6. Focus on what matters to people

The most important themes and spaces and issues which participants value most should become concrete and visible elements. People become more engaged when they see their essential concerns represented in creative work.

#### 7. Design the tools as co-designers

The development of creative and participatory methods requires joint work between all participants. The process of tool development should include participant involvement especially children, to create accessible formats which work for all ages and abilities and language levels.

#### 8. Stay flexible and responsive

Adopt for an adaptable approach. The personal and structural changes that vulnerable groups experience require facilitators to modify their methods and pacing and goals for sustaining accessibility and participant involvement.

#### 9. Collaborate across sectors

The organization should form alliances with educational institutions and cultural centers and social service agencies and municipal bodies. The combination of different sectors creates enduring connections which enables creative work to create lasting effects in multiple areas.

#### 10. Be clear and transparent

All participants need to understand the reasons behind their contributions to the overall project.

#### 11. Foster continuity and reflection

Long-term teamwork between participants enables activities and their specific roles and established boundaries. The process becomes more trustworthy when participants understand the value of deeper transformation to occur. The process documentation through photographs and journals and group discussions enables participants to track their development and share their collective accomplishments.

#### 12. Advocate for structural support

Participatory art requires institutions to establish proper funding and resources for its success. The arts need sustained financial backing and dedicated time in educational and community spaces and official recognition from policies to establish their role in promoting social change and inclusion. The essential approach involves moving at a relaxed pace while actively listening and working together to enable creativity which connects people through self-expression and transformation.

In essence: Go slow, listen deeply, work collaboratively, and let creativity serve as a bridge for connection, self-expression, and transformation.

Participatory planning becomes more inclusive through art and design which makes it accessible to vulnerable groups who typically do not participate in standard decision-making processes. The implementation of creative methods enables participation to evolve from a consultative process into an experiential collaborative practice which honors creative expression and personal experiences. The analyzed case studies including MUS-E and Shape Your School! and Child-Friendly City Vác and Solidarity Landscape Project and Openstreets used artistic methods to establish trust and emotional connections through drawing and mapping and performance and co-creation activities. The methods enabled participants to transcend language and cultural and educational differences which established protected spaces for everyone to share their voices to be heard. The practice of shared artistic work enabled all participants from different age groups to become active change-makers instead of being treated as mere advisors. The creative activities developed participant self-assurance while promoting teamwork and personal investment in both the development process and its resulting outcomes. The actual outcomes such as redesigned schoolyards and community gardens and temporary urban installations demonstrated participant agency while linking creative ideas to actual environmental changes. Art and design serve as common languages that unite people through their ability to uncover concealed wisdom and create empathy and build stronger community ties. The combination of social engagement with aesthetic exploration in these activities creates both interesting planning processes and develops essential skills for continued participation after the project ends. The core value of creativity exists to make planning more human-centered. The process transforms theoretical plans into real-life experiences which enable marginalized groups to become visible participants in the development of their residential environments.

While this summary captures the key potentials of integrating art and design into participatory planning, it is equally important to recognize the barriers that frequently constrain such practices. Common challenges include the absence of sustained institutional support, limited financial and pedagogical resources when projects are embedded in school contexts, and the persistence of tokenistic forms of participation that fail to translate children's contributions into meaningful planning outcomes. At the same time, broader urban drivers—such as the urgent need for climate adaptation, the promotion of walkability and accessibility through models like the *15-minute city*, and the pressures of growing socio-spatial inequalities—underscore the systemic relevance of embedding cultural and artistic practices in planning. In this sense, art and culture should not be regarded merely as supplementary tools, but as critical mediators that can foster imagination, resilience, and civic agency in the face of planetary challenges. Framing participatory art and design as part of a larger strategy for **systemic transitions** strengthens their real-world applicability and aligns closely with the objectives of **CONIFER**, which seeks to advance innovative, inclusive, and future-oriented approaches to urban development.

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