

Co-creative RETHINKing for **sustainable** cities



Co-designing urban spaces with High School students in Palermo

The Italian Case Study

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Version history

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What are the Case Studies?

These Case studies present under a methodological light the experiences of the local projects implemented by the Crethink project partners and their Change Agents. The idea is to use partners' experiences as testimonies, case-studies, practical examples of the application of co-creation methodologies in their different settings and with different targets. It's not just about telling the story of their project but also about providing a useful tool for other stakeholders who might want to adapt and use the same methodologies and/or work with similar targets.

Each case study includes an explanation of the processes triggered by the local project and of the methodologies and tools used, together with practical examples and/or templates as annex when available. Finally, they include recommendations and tips for practitioners who approach similar methodologies, contexts and/or target groups.

Introduction

This is a project that has to do with people, with sense of community

(Roberta – Student)

In order to respond to the Crethink project challenge to promote sustainable practices in Europe through co-creation methodologies, the Italian team in the city of Palermo decided to involve young high school students in a process of co-creation of a new pedestrian area. The stretch of the street located in front of the school entrance was pedestrianized and set up to become a square, **a safe area of socialization created by and for the students** of the school.

The Italian team guided by the Italian partner of the project CESIE and composed by a group of young professionals (Change Agents) in collaboration with some local associations (Tu Sei La Città and PUSH) designed and implemented a **participatory co-design process** that involved a group of students and produced a prototype of the square. The interventions designed are creative, low-cost, sustainable and easy-to-implement solutions based on the principles and tools of [Tactical Urbanism](#), a useful approach to bottom-up transformation processes of urban spaces like this one. As of January 2022, the street has been closed to traffic and the team is doing the preparatory work for the **co-construction labs** that will involve the students in the second phase of the project: the set-up of the square with the practical creation of the urban furniture, decorations and other interventions.

The following sections will explain the process and methodologies implemented in the **first phase** of the project: the co-design of the square. In the final section some tips and recommendations for practitioners and other stakeholders will be offered, with the aim to facilitate the adaptation and use of these methodologies in other contexts.

The Process

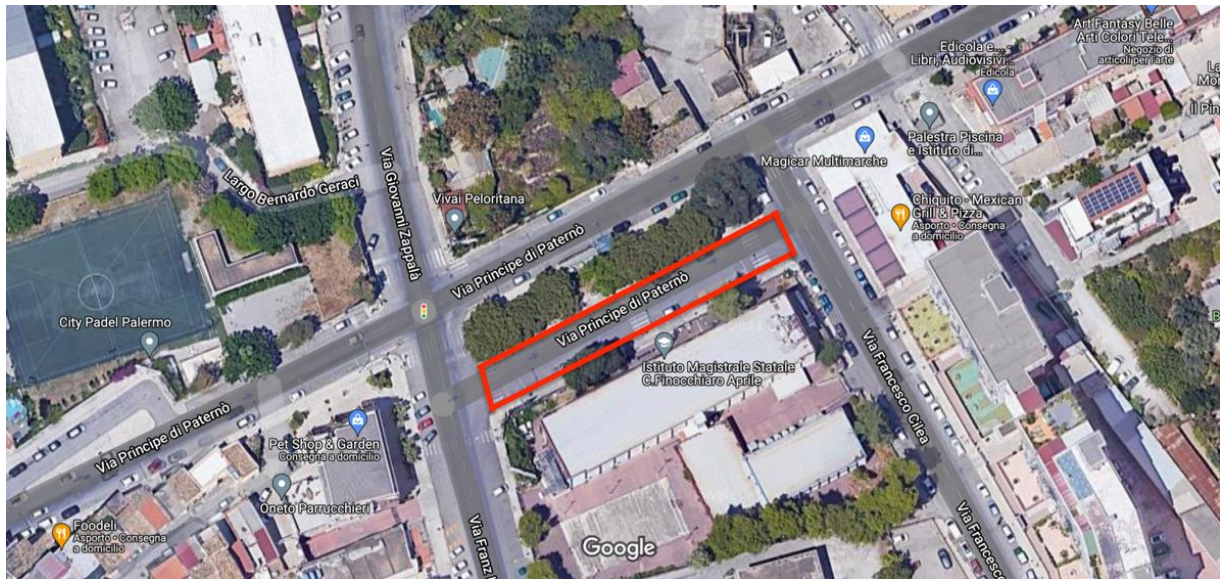
The Italian Change Agents Team, tasked with the conception and implementation of a local pilot project of co-creation for sustainability in the urban space, was chosen by the Italian partner CESIE on the basis of motivation and expertise. It was composed by 5 young professionals from different fields: architecture and engineering, communication and marketing, law, anthropology and management of participatory community projects.

In the first months, the team worked on the conception and planning of the pilot project, which since the beginning, aimed to contribute to two interrelated processes of transformation:

- (1) a process of **transformation of urban mobility** in a sustainable way, raising awareness around environmental sustainability and sustainable mobility, and providing citizens with safe infrastructures, also in light of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (2) a process of **transformation of citizens' participation in the design of urban spaces**, implementing an innovative model that takes into consideration the needs and prerogatives of those who inhabit the urban area, intensifying their sense of belonging to public places and social cohesion.

The choice to involve students was motivated by a wish to focus on the educational impact of the project. The team wanted to motivate young people to become active citizens and to advocate for environmental sustainability in their city. Students are also one of the social groups that was most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in their ability to exercise their right to an education.

A thorough Analysis of the Urban Systems (Annex 1 – Italian only), allowed the team to identify the school to involve in the project on the basis of criteria of feasibility and expected impact. The analysis took into consideration the mobility infrastructures available in the city, the mobility habits of the urban population, people's opinion on the creation of pedestrian areas and bike lanes. The initial idea indeed intended to also broaden the green infrastructures in the city by creating new bike lanes. This idea had to be restricted to only the creation of the pedestrian area due to time constraints conflicting with the bureaucratic red tape. In the end this proved to be the right choice.



Since the beginning, the team held conversations with multiple stakeholders: the school, the Municipality of Palermo, the borough presidency, and other local organizations active on the same topic. These conversations and the team's attention to cultivating relationships, allowed these stakeholders to develop a sense of belonging to the project and to increasingly take on some responsibilities. The multi-stakeholder approach can be seen as one of the main strengths of the project.

The co-design of the square was conducted over 9 online training sessions divided into three parts:

1. Introduction to concepts - sustainability, sustainable mobility, the urban commons, urban regeneration, Tactical Urbanism
2. **Co-design Workshop** - analysis and perception of the space, needs analysis and planning, design and prototyping
3. Communication and marketing - crowdfunding campaigns, digital communication.



In che modo si promuove la mobilità sostenibile?

- Adeguata **pianificazione** e **progettazione** della città:



Spazi pubblici



Trasporto pubblico

- **Incentivi** alla mobilità sostenibile
- **Disincentivi** all'utilizzo dell'auto privata



CRE THINK

The co-creation process was very well received by the students who participated with interest and commitment. As highlights of the project, they mentioned being at the centre of a process of transformation, feeling heard and taken into consideration. They mentioned that they had never had an active role in such a process before. The concreteness of the project was also underlined as a factor of interest and an element of surprise. They were skeptical of projects like these, being used to more theoretical and formal learning, but, in the end, it made them feel like they were making a real difference. They felt more inspired to be concerned about sustainability, and learned how hard but also important it is to give attention to the community. They gained more awareness of the world around them, and felt that they can change their future for the better.

The Municipality of Palermo, the School and CESIE finally signed a Memorandum of Understanding that will allow the street to be pedestrianized and the prototype transformed into a real square. The Municipality and the School also took the responsibility for the maintenance of the space and its sustainability over time. A Crowdfunding Campaign was launched to cover the cost of materials for the set-up.

The Methodologies and Tools

What follows is an overview of the tools and methodologies used in the three sessions of the **Co-design Workshop**, the second (middle) part of the training with the students. As mentioned, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sessions were conducted online (on *Zoom*), and therefore the tools presented here are digital tools that can be used for virtual co-design workshop.

Participants were divided into three groups in order to allow for an adequate level of participation in all activities and to ensure the right space for individual students to express themselves within group activities. To improve the level of socialization, the groups were chosen randomly and modified at each meeting. Groups were created through *Breakout Room* function of the *Zoom* platform.

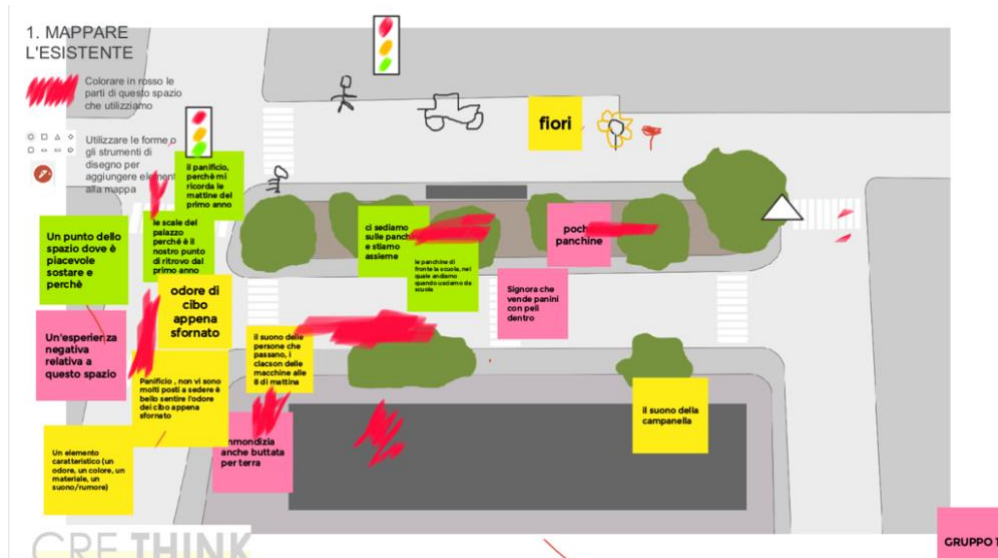
The main tool employed in the digital co-creation was *Google Jamboard*: an interactive digital board developed by Google, which allows a group of users to access the same board through a link and edit the canvas adding and moving elements such as lines, text, post-it and colors.

Analysis and Perception of Space

The first session was aimed at analyzing the space. It allowed to capture the use of the space and the perception of students towards it: the core problems (lack of space to socialize, danger, pollution, damage) and positive aspects (its potential as a space of socialization, the presence of services in the area). This was achieved during two exercises.

The first concerned the perception of space. The students were given a map of the space containing only the main references and were asked to complete it by adding post-its to:

- ❑ define the areas of the space they used
- ❑ add the missing elements
- ❑ write a positive experience and a negative one
- ❑ mention characteristic elements on a perceptive level (colors, smells, sounds ..)



The second exercise was instead a guided conversation aimed at analyzing specific problems or characteristics of the space around different themes:

- ❑ Image and Reputation
- ❑ Lights
- ❑ Paths and Movements
- ❑ Weather
- ❑ Stores and activities
- ❑ The space at night
- ❑ Urban furniture
- ❑ Transportation and connections
- ❑ Maintenance
- ❑ Game and recreational activities
- ❑ Events
- ❑ Recycling

The students were asked to add post-its describing the different themes.

This methodology was borrowed from the UN Habitat manual "[Her City - A Guide for Cities to Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Planning and Design together with Girls](#)".

Finally, the students were asked, as a task for the next meeting, to search for and upload examples of transformed spaces that stroke their attention, in order to start building a repository of images useful for the following phases of the workshop.

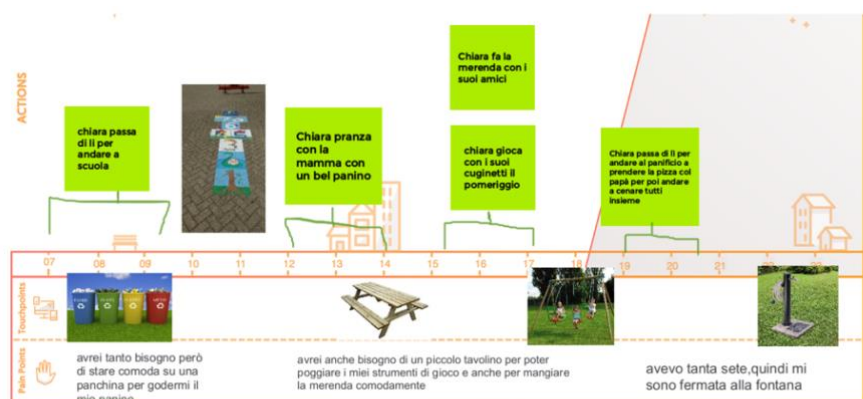
Needs analysis and planning

The second workshop session allowed to identify the future functions of the space on the basis of the needs of its different users. The students put themselves in the shoes of other users and this allowed them to consider new problems such as space accessibility and playground areas that had not yet emerged.

The students were guided through to the construction of three *personas*, that is, of three different types of users of the space. They chose a child, an old lady and a student. Each group was assigned one and built its character in detail, describing her characteristics, interests, dreams, problems and expectations regarding the space. In non-restrained conditions, a preliminary activity would be to go out, interview and interact with people in the neighborhood in order to build the personas on the basis of actual primary data.



In the following exercise, through a tool called *user day-parting*, they were able to imagine the functions and objects of the space in relation to each of their characters.

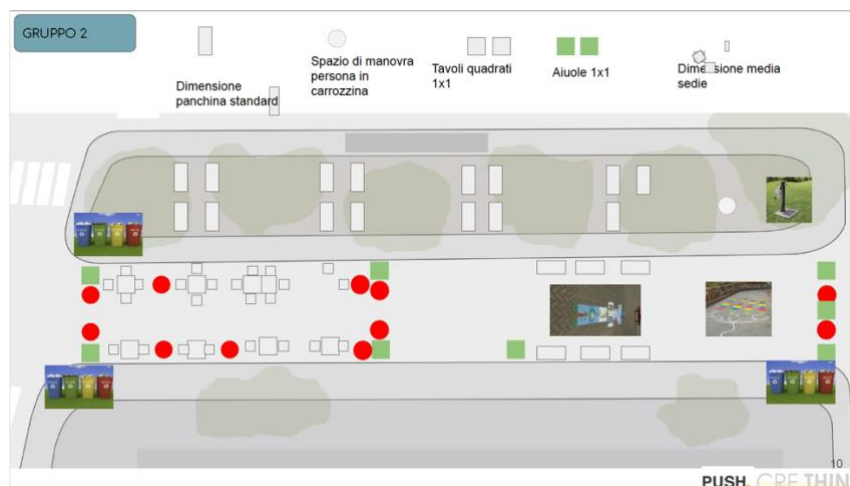


The image below shows some of the elements that they deemed important to be in the square:

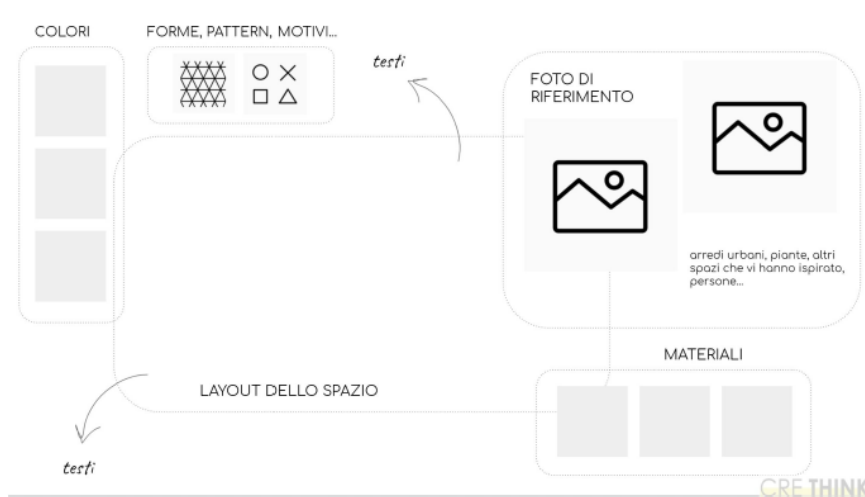


Design and prototyping

In the last workshop session, the students got to the heart of the design of the space. After a brief summary of the results of the previous days, each group made a prototype of the space using the same map from the first meeting, adding shapes that represented seats, vases, tables, and adding further elements as desired.



In the second part of the day, the students were asked to create a *Moodboard* of the space. On the basis of the diagram represented in the figure below, they research and pasted pictures describing colors, shapes, patterns, materials and objects they wished to see in their new square.



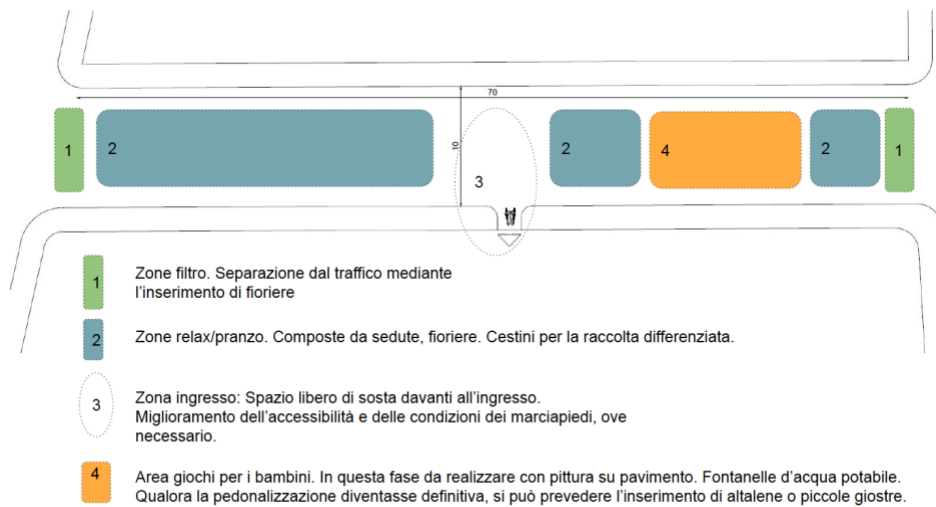
The three *Moodboards* were commented in a final discussion, from which some elements common to the different groups emerged:

- ❑ Bright colors and playful atmosphere;
- ❑ Durable materials;
- ❑ Presence of plants and flowers;
- ❑ Inclusivity of the space.



The final output of the workshop is represented by three possible layouts of the redevelopment of the space and three *Moodboards* representing the expectations of the students with respect to the functional distribution of space and the atmosphere that it will have to have once it has been transformed. A scheme of the functional distribution of the space was produced to guide the finalization of the executive project.

SCHEMA FUNZIONALE DI SINTESI DELLO SPAZIO



The interventions designed by the students will be turned into an executive project and co-created with another, larger representation of the student body on the basis of the principles and tools of [Tactical Urbanism](#), a useful approach to bottom-up transformation processes of urban spaces like this one.

Results, Impact and Tips for practitioners

The project had a significant impact on all stakeholders. Undoubtedly, it **consolidated the networks** at the local level between the municipality and the third sector organizations involved, improving their ability to influence local policies and projects. The project was also very motivating for both the implementing team and the students. Coming from educational and work environments that usually undervalue young people and make them feel inadequate, they found in being agents of change, at the centre of a process of transformation, one of the most valuable aspects of the project. This also made them feel encouraged to initiate similar processes in other settings and contexts.

The online implementation of the project due to the restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic was definitely a barrier that had to be overcome. Yet, it offered an **opportunity to test new tools** and methodologies like the ones shared in this document, which produced similar results to those that would have been produced in a face-to-face co-design process that can be replicated in other contexts. On a general level, when possible, it is better to work directly in the space to co-design, in order to have a more concrete idea and physical perception of the area. It also makes it easier for participants to keep focused, to cooperate and to ensure equal participation.

The cooperation process was the biggest challenge and the biggest reward. The slow bureaucracy was often demotivating and coordinating between many different actors with different schedules and needs wasn't always an easy task. Yet, the **desire to reach common goals** allowed for the cooperation process to be successful. In this regard it proved to be fundamental the choice to focus on something small but concrete in terms of feasibility, competences and means available.

One foreseeable risk in the follow up of the project is the criticism that often comes with projects like this one, that change the status quo. It is yet to see whether the attempt to respond to the needs of the widest possible part of the community was met. Probably interviewing and speaking directly the people of the neighborhood would have ensured a greater representation of different interests. But it's important to keep in mind that "making everyone happy" is a rather unrealistic goal and not the objective of this project. Rather here the goal was to motivate one part of the community, the students in particular, to develop a sense of belonging and ownership of a public space and to take care of it in a sustainable and inclusive way, as much as possible; to help them open their minds and be aware that they can create change. As their teacher said:

"This project was for them the confrontation with an idea that becomes reality"

Annexes

Annex 1 – Analysis of the Urban Systems (Italian Only)

Summary of the Project

The project "CRETHINK - Co-creative RETHINKing for sustainable cities" aims to promote sustainable practices in European cities through co-creation methodologies.

The project is a two-year Erasmus+ KA2 project which aims to foster citizens' active participation and influence in the local community and society. It achieves so by supporting adult learners within the public sector and the civil society in gaining competences, concrete methods and tools for co-creation and cross-sector cooperation towards sustainable development and complex problem solving.

With the UN SDG 11 as subject matter, the project is developing an online toolbox and recommendations on the use of co-creation methodologies, available on an open-access online platform. The toolbox contains training modules and curriculums, as well as sectors-specific guidelines and methodological documents, specifying how to implement the UN SDGs through co-creation and citizen participation. Its format allows individuals and groups to "self-learn" and implement the methods in their work or everyday activities.

Furthermore, in each partner country, local teams are implementing Pilot Projects that employ the aforementioned methodologies to create sustainable change in the urban environment. These projects are included as Case Studies in the project toolbox.

The project consortium comprises 5 partners from Denmark, Iceland, Slovenia and Italy. The project is coordinated by Vejle Kommune, which is the sixth largest municipality in the country and the capital region of South Denmark.



www.crethink.eu



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