

TEMPORARY SPATIAL SOLUTIONS TO CREATE BETTER URBAN SPACES FOR CHILDREN: The Case for Balat Istanbul

Yasemin Albayrak Kutlay^{1,a,*}

¹Izmir University of Economics, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Department of Interior Architecture and Environmental Design, Izmir, Turkey

> *Corresponding Author: E-mail: yasemin.albayrak@ieu.edu.tr

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a: ORCID: 0000-0002-7168-5735

ABSTRACT. Creating temporary and pop-up designs with community engagement is gaining attention every day as an effective strategy to design the urban environment. Re-conceptualizing neighbourhoods centred on the efforts of creative and productive individuals with limited resources is now a mainstream action for creating liveable neighbourhoods and encouraging citizens to participate in decision-making processes in order to reclaim control of the public domain. This study examines how urban spaces are becoming more temporary, adaptive, and fluid, in order to provide an encouraging environment for innovative and inspiring community activities that stimulate spontaneous human collaboration and relationship between individuals and their spatial setting, is critical in creating a sense of place that promotes individual and community well-being. This paper's objective is to point out the possible opportunities to arising challenges and create a positive change in cities through innovative design solution in the contemporary age. Therefore, to review this subject, tactical urbanism, placemaking and pop-up interiors are examined as possible design implementation approaches through an extensive literature review. Additionally, the novel approach of Gehl Institute is investigated to offer better ethnographic research and a more participatory design approach. In this context, this research concentrates on Istanbul's Balat-Fener District and investigates how to create ephemeral indoor and outdoor spaces for the local Minik Kalpler community in Balat and how can these temporary spatial solutions contribute to the neighbourhood and offer a community of underprivileged kids and individuals creative understanding to address the problems that they face in Balat.

Keywords: Collaborative Communities, Children of Balat, Gehl Approach, Tactical Urbanism, Popup Interiors

INTRODUCTION

Design practice has been affected by the changing climate of human-centred design research decades ago. However, it is becoming evident that the human-centred approach in design can't address the scope or difficulty of the challenges we face currently. We are not just creating spaces, products or services for users any further. We are designed for the possible future experiences of people, communities and cultures that are now interconnected and aware in ways that even a decade ago were unknown. The emerging design practices will transform what we design, how we design and who designs and the impact of the designers and their methods or approaches will be profound.

The attributes that differentiate contemporary society and the objects of temporary spatial solutions, communities in the neighbourhood scale and the ways of creating a positive change through design for underprivileged children living in Balat will be addressed in this paper including a series of methods and perspectives.



Fig. 1. Pop-up chest on the street for Minik Kalpler to collect second hand clothes, toys, stationaries etc. that people would want to donate.

To begin with, I would like to stress the emerging collaborative activity for children in Balat that is fostered by the Minik Kalpler organization on a local scale. The people of Balat are experts in what they do; they are innovators in their area already and have built or taken part in few collaborative solutions. They placed pop-up donation chests around the neighbourhood to collect unutilized or excess items of clothing or toys for the kids, and claimed some of the fractional urban spaces and adapted them for specific solutions such as creating their own garden from upcycled materials, designing their public living room on the doorstep by putting indoor furniture or building mini nests for street animals.

This approach proposes learning from these active communities and enhancing encouraging ideas through collaboration and commitment. Evidently "ordinary people" can if provided the opportunity, create the extraordinary possible. Meroni [1] has often named these individuals "heroes" of everyday life in the context of her studies. As she stated; "Citizens are the leaders of the new design era that is experiencing the rise of the creative communities: "individuals, who cooperatively invent, enhance and manage innovative solutions for new ways of living" [1].

Designers may participate in co-design activities, enhance their strategies, make them available for others and invent new ones with their unique knowledge and expertise. Finding, enhancing, and promoting relevant ideas by local communities have evolved to establish more productive and contemporary ways of living and working; what is known as creative communities [1]. Collaboratively designing the coherent systems of services, products and spaces depend on collaborations between a variety of social actors (local communities and entrepreneurs, institutions and research centres) and participation in the creation of shared goals and scenarios.

The collaborative attitude of people has been gaining much attention, as well as the arising temporary implementations in the neighbourhood scale promising positive change. Design-led innovations and practices such as co-governance, co-design or co-production, whereby citizens, professionals and governments are able to work closely to offer better public services. A new connection with people means a new method of creation that changes the relationship between the system of public service and citizens. New media and technologies have in fact given simple ways for some organizations to interact, construct online communities and create self-defined channels of data and collaborative spaces [2]. In the following, this study will be discussing the production of such spaces where the different participants brought to the table different disciplinary viewpoints, insights and approaches to improve the connection between people and generate a solution for contemporary issues.

METHODOLOGY

In recent years, there has been considerable interest in Gehl approach of changing the paradigm in planning and design towards cities that are made for people. According to their own demonstration, Gehl focuses on the relationship between the built environment and people's quality of life. It is based in Copenhagen, New York and San Francisco; they create 'cities for people' [3].

Gehl is a global urban research and design consultancy. They address urban planning with a people-focused approach. They apply strategic planning and human-centred design to empower citizens, decision-makers, company leaders and organizations [3]. Gehl Architects' unique methodology is founded on the principle that people are the most significant concern of public space in the urban planning process. Public spaces ought to be a place for all, with distinctive qualities, advantages and possibilities of the particular urban environment that is open to a variety of activities and opportunities. Their principles on implementing a design solution and a strategic plan depending on quantitative and qualitative analysis into the use of the social environment and public life. In this sense, guidelines and strategies on enhancing individual potential and advancement are premised on a broader understanding of cultural and geographical particularity [4].

Gehl uses architectural ethnography as an instrument for understanding people's context, culture, and behaviour in the cities with which they work. These discoveries shape the framework of their project. For them, co-creation is a key principle. They promote and allow project owners to meet the requirements of their cities and citizens through discovering solutions to complicated urban problems [3]. Public Space Public Life Survey (PSPL) is the primary method used by Jan Gehl to investigate the relationship between public space and public life along with its use. It proposes to distinguish and comprehend the activities and behaviour patterns of people in the public sphere. Moreover, its findings, described in quantitative and qualitative analyses support the construction and renovation of urban public spaces which contribute to high public-space quality for the use of the people [5]. Their "tools" are the research techniques that Jan Gehl, the Gehl Institute have created and implemented.

The objective of the Gehl Institute is: providing cities with tools for observing public spaces, collecting insights and implementing them for better places and strategies. Therefore, they generated the Public Life Data Protocol, a new open data standard for observing how people use public space [6].

According to Gehl studio and J. Max Bond Center [7], four methods can be used to observe functionality, behaviours and conditions and those can be listed as;

- 1. Desktop Research,
- 2. Observational Surveys,
- 3. Intercept Surveys,
- 4. Interviews with Stakeholders.

Those studies have been conducted on understanding people's use of public space by Gehl Institute and they can be carried out specifically, considering the several metrics. We can definitely work on developing a direction of thinking through Gehl's approach: humans first, then the environment that would be tailored according to their needs. Moreover, Gehl has already provided a comprehensive study about the historical centre of Istanbul and continue working with the Municipality of Istanbul and the Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu and the Istanbul Planning Agency to foster discussions and point out the solutions together via online platforms.

As a result, in this paper, Public Space Public Life Survey (PSPL) is considered the primary method that can be used to investigate the relationship between public space and public life in Balat.



Fig. 2. Scenes from Balat District, Istanbul, 2019

The old Jewish quarter of Balat, which stretches along the Byzantine sea walls on the shore of the Golden Horn, is one of the attraction locations currently in Istanbul due to its unique and conserved neighbourhood culture. Moreover, to understand the latest gentrification phenomenon that Balat has undergone recently one just need to take a look at the demographics of Balat. The district became a place where minorities, particularly the Jewish people, lived throughout the Republic of Turkey's early years. The neighbourhood was one of the first destinations for those who migrated from rural

regions to Istanbul 10 years ago, due to its high proximity to commercial areas downtown. Currently, it has become one of the favourite areas of young entrepreneurs and artists searching for new addresses... [8] Fener and Balat are experiencing disruption with a new wave of youth initiatives. Regions covering Vodina and Yıldırım Streets are subject to new and younger businesses [9].

On the other hand, every development that promised to benefit the people has made the people even poorer. There is a non-negligible fact that the great distinction between people living, working and staying in the Balat-Fener district. This causes a lack of communication and cooperation between citizen spending time at the same place yet the world apart. As though two distinct worlds crashes and people living in Balat suffers the most [9].

Despite the great changes over time, Balat is a place of peace where people of different beliefs, cultures and ethnic backgrounds reside by establishing neighbourly relations. It is a lively and vivid "ghetto" with its market, street, mosque, church, school, hospital and children that are still running around and playing on the streets happily. Balat is profoundly famous for its children from different backgrounds playing in the neighbourhood.



Fig. 3. Minik Kalpler, Founder and children, Balat District, Istanbul, 2019

Furthermore, I would like to mention a civil organization called Minik Kalpler in the neighbourhood. Minik Kalpler is an Open House that supports the children, foster community engagements around the neighbourhood, and provides opportunities, food and academic materials to children. The economic and social limitations of these children have to prevent them to have a proper education, experiences that will improve their mental and physical wellbeing and abilities and contemporary opportunities. They have been struggling to find proper meals and educational tools already before the help of Minik Kalpler and its benefactors arrived.

There is potential for this organization to become an inviting place to share, accessible and welcome to all by the effort of several different stakeholders, social innovators and collaborators in Istanbul. As a consequence, this organization can turn into a place where residents and visitors can co-exist where set in a unique design with several opportunities and fosters innovation primarily for kids.

Spatial Solutions

Contemporary cities could be more flexible and adaptable to the needs and desires of their locals and visitors through interactive prompting. Inspiring cities should premeditate their locals to interact with their habitats creatively and collectively by breaking down the traditional barriers [10]. Regarding this issue, this research questions the way we build our surroundings and explores new ways for better by stimulating temporary pop-up initiatives in urban areas as I called it temporary spatial solutions.

A movement is needed for a process of urban activation and revitalization for the emerging needs of urbanites. Short term and often unsanctioned urban actions manifest the need for long-term policy or physical change. Tactical Urbanism is a way of thinking to improve the urban liveability of actors from different sectors by addressing several challenges and seeking ways to achieve more with less. A list of tools to reinforce the built environment through quick, temporary, inexpensive and easily scalable urban interventions; tactical urbanism aims to long term impacts and policy reform mostly in neighbourhood scales [11]. Moreover, according to Cara Courage who is an art and urban consultant, writer, and curator, ''the objective of Tactical Urbanism is to improve the urban experience through incremental enhancement strategies'' [12].



Fig. 4. Tactical Urban living room space on the street of Minik Kalpler with the furniture discarded from homes later turned to urban furniture and coloured floor surface treatments.

However, some series of criticism about tactical urbanism has been recognized which need to be confronted as a challenge since the projects do not last for long and temporary in nature and the concerns about the long-lasting effect for a real change of environments. In her overview of Tactical Urbanism, Hartley [13] admits that fact, the fading nature of this particular pop-up trend. Nevertheless, significant elements of this approach aim to establish an entirely new point of view for more liveable and connected neighbourhoods by offering horizontal, peer to peer exchange of knowledge. She claims it is possible to overcome these risks or challenges by efficient collaboration with citizens and community groups before and during the temporary experiment in the neighbourhood to improve the liveability for common good [13].

Another solution can be suggested as placemaking which encourages individuals to collectively reinterpret and reinvent civic spaces as the core of every community. Placemaking contributes to a creative approach through which we can form our public sphere to improve shared value by strengthening the interaction among both individuals and the environments they share. It enables inventive patterns of use, not even just fostering a better-built environment, but nonetheless, referring to the physical, cultural and social identities that define a place and advocate its ongoing development. A public space can be considered as a medium for creativity, experimentation, and expression [14].

Once PPS (Project for Public Spaces) mentors like Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte launched pioneering theories on designing people's cities, not even just cars and shopping centres. Their research is based on the social and cultural significance of vibrant neighbourhoods and attracting the attitude of public spaces: through the nowadays acknowledged concept of "eyes on the road," Jacobs prompted ordinary

people to take possession of the streets, whereas Holly Whyte indicated important aspects to establish active social life in public areas [15].

With community-based involvement at its heart, an adequate placemaking approach puts emphasis on the strengths, inspiration, and opportunities of a local community as well as contributes to the implementation of quality community spaces that enhance the health, satisfaction, and well-being of citizens [14].

Regarding the children, there is a seminal study of Superpool that we can acquire relevant information for this study. In particular, cities are now the habitat of humans and of children, which is why cities must fulfil the need for play. For instance, being outside is an important way for a kid to experience the world and to develop their skills. Neighbourhoods that allow children to explore experience and play with new things, enable them to learn through observation and socialization. When we take a first look at the main public areas for children and ask: Do the playgrounds stimulate children's creativity; motivate their caretakers to have great times? Do they speak of the children? In playgrounds, children's development is facilitated in their early stages [16].

Parks and playgrounds are places where both the neighbourhood and the community interact highly. Children can communicate, set up games and play with each other in playgrounds. When well-built places are accessible for everyone, they can also enable adults to socialize. In residential areas, playgrounds might be a nice place within walking distance without the need to cross crowded main roads. Slowing down vehicular traffic, providing larger sidewalks or pedestrian and bicycle paths to parks, play spaces are practical improvements to an urban design that is child-aware. Playing in urban spaces encourages the growth of cognitive skills such as evaluation, comprehension, communication; ability to be innovative and creative, logic, reasoning and problem-solving as well as it is beneficial for children's physical skills [16].

For instance, Atmakur-Javdekar provides us with a glimpse into probable future possibilities for children's play by investigating children's free and manipulative play in metropolitan environments. Acknowledging that play is essential to a child's development and that it has value when it is led voluntarily and spontaneously, children's free play that stimulates exploration, curiosity, and imagination is examined in his seminal work. Providing children with easy access to a diverse range of materials, heights, and textures, encouraging them to control and make sense of their surroundings via play is another crucial aspect that nature provides to the kids as urban spaces have the potential to offer [17].

The final solution for this paper offers is temporary interiors also known as pop-up interiors. Such once-in-a-while spaces create an atmosphere where people could get a more unique and expressing experience. Pop-ups stand out for their ability to demonstrate the products, services, models or spaces creatively, and since they don't happen quite often, they remain unusual and exclusive. Cultivating this authentic atmosphere is one of the strongest ways to engage your user base [18]. The main objective of these projects is to unlock empty spaces in the city and revitalize areas that otherwise would appear abandoned and, of course, empowers the innovative enterprise to bloom. It offers the communities an opportunity to interact with arts and culture, promotes ideas and innovations, and certainly, supports the local creatives with an open platform for their practice [19].

Given the fact that currently changing the way of building interiors and making them better with temporary pop-up initiatives prompting cities to become more responsive and adaptable to the needs and desires of the people. Pop-up physical and virtual spacemaking regenerates the community with communication and experience, re-actives neighbourhoods and innovation processes, and provides platforms for experimentations.

CONCLUSION

The next decade is likely to see a considerable rise in temporary spatial interventions to overcome certain problems, adopt the needs and desires of the urbanites, increase the liveability and mental and physical well-being of the people, promote a sustainable lifestyle and develop environmentally-minded progress. Therefore, pop-up spaces are combined with a concern of providing a unique service for the interiors to foster community engagements, balanced and stress-free living in urban areas, or several other reasons. Those are the spaces that can change their function based on time and demand.

Hereby, this study offers two potential strategies to address larger societal needs for Minik Kalpler Community in Balat with correct research that is developed inspiring from Gehl approach. After the ethnographic research, observational and intercept survey and interview (with an interactive annex) with stakeholders and people relevant spatial solution could be generated. For instance, while one proposal will be looking into participatory pop-up community interior interventions in the neighbourhood's vacant and unused spaces. The other one involves temporary urban places made for kids to play and outdoors that is constructed collaboratively by the community and volunteers.



Fig. 5. Conceptual Image, Proposal for the Pop-up Interiors revitalizing an empty shop in the neighbourhood to a community space

A particular ephemeral aesthetic that traps the users into a new experience and dimension is aimed for the pop-up interiors. These temporary spaces that can change according to the functions based on that time or the need to host Minik Kalpler's Open House activities, workshops and lectures for kids. For designing this flexible space

typology numerous materials and products have been selected according to their potentials to fit a community hub and transform when needed. These empty shops and vacant places become a breeding ground for creatives and the community. Pop-up interiors provide shelter for more responsive and adaptable to the need and desires of the locals and visitors alike. Those interiors will be intense sites of activity and innovation while contemporary societies are becoming more flexible and mobile.

Participatory pop-up community interior interventions aim to facilitate innovations that are good for society and enhance the community's capacity to act. New ideas that meet social needs of children in Balat and create new social relationships and collaborations can take place into temporary community spaces by revitalizing the neighbourhood's empty shops or vacant spaces. Increasing the everyday sense of wellbeing of the mini-community in Balat with the help of social innovation, driving positive change with small temporary spatial footprints the aim of these projects. Inspiring cities should premeditate their locals to interact with their habitats creatively and collectively by overthrowing the traditional barriers.

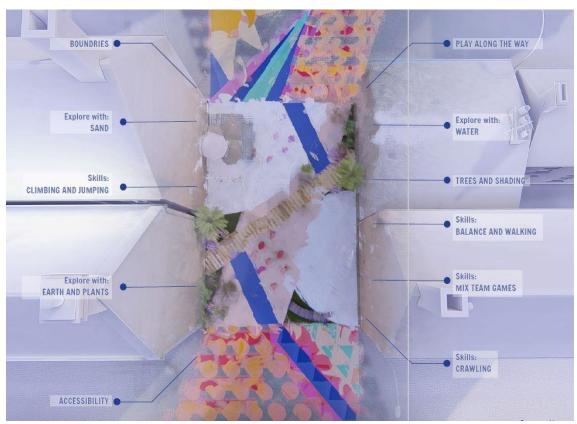


Fig. 6. Conceptual Image, Proposal for the Tactical Urban Space revitalizing a vacant space in the neighbourhood

The other proposal is for the children living and spending time in urban areas of Balat, vacant spaces can be revitalized by temporary urban designs as this study proposes. Considering the vehicular traffic how intense it is in streets in terms of their size and the lack of presence of well-maintained walkways for pedestrians and children that are mostly prefer to play. The study offers a pop-up crosswalk and a pocket space created by frustrated residents, children, volunteers or activists. Additionally, they may be sponsored municipality or some other stakeholders that acknowledges the value of

creating a change for underprivileged children. Whether officially sponsored or not, short-term projects as a tool to accomplish the outcomes that are mentioned throughout the research and they are typically heavy on volunteers and collaboration and light on the budget. It aims to inspire action, draw attention to a shortcoming in the Balat, encourage people to work together for children and test the idea of having better designed public places for the children and their physical and mental development and wellbeing.

For the revival of Balat's community, tactical urban regenerations can be applied to experiment and overcome the everyday challenges children have. These temporary leisure areas and playgrounds for underprivileged and stressed children that fit the strategic spatial visioning of the district for a place-based approach. Therefore, to create room for social experiments of Balat's Minik Kalpler community and increase liveability with co-creating a tactical urban solution will be projected. While making this place the characteristics of the neighbourhood examined, financing for this bottom-up governance strategy needs to be controlled. For this particular reason, some low-cost but multifunctional materials are selected to create both a new aesthetic experience and functionality for the usages planned by their forms, nature and material quality. Some of the upcycled materials that will be transformed into desirable elements for the design and the particular graphic language which also represents Balat's historical colourful Jewish Houses in a contemporary way. These public spaces which are created collaboratively to overcome some particular challenges they face in the Balat.

The shortcomings of the resources and the skills to create great community spaces could have been solved with such interventions that are ready to construct and fit in much different space. The proposal provided to achieve a certain goal that can be realized in the neighbourhood and to guide the creatives and community members without over-frustrating them while building their spaces.

The current and future contributions, presented in different contexts and forms, have begun to attract the attention of people with different but co-existing concepts such as the "creative-design-neighbourhood-street" of Balat. Undoubtedly those other aspects should be taken into consideration. Social participation and integration and stability of social connections which can stand as sustainable and supportive local social environments or neighbourhoods that we live and work has a significant impact on the well-being of communities. Neighbourhoods may be the centre of intense activity and innovation sites for re-activation processes. However, urban planning fails to correspond to the requirements of unique and creative activities and new users. Placemakers are interested in new characteristics of the city for urban spaces to solve particular problems. This reformed kind of placemaking discovers the needs for multifunctional places that can adopt unexpected uses of inhabitants. Today, the stakeholder is the new city-makers with hyper-temporary spaces which allow them to experiment with innovative services and offerings. These collaborative services which are designed by citizens help to offer a more useful and effective environment for neighbourhoods.

I hope that public authorities and creatives who read this paper will believe that accommodating children in playgrounds and several other people of all ages in public and social spaces is not difficult at all as soon as the designers are confident that they can come up with better designs. Moreover, the pop-up interiors generate a considerable amount of interest among communities and creatives to overcome the problems and addressing the needs of the contemporary societies living in cities.

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