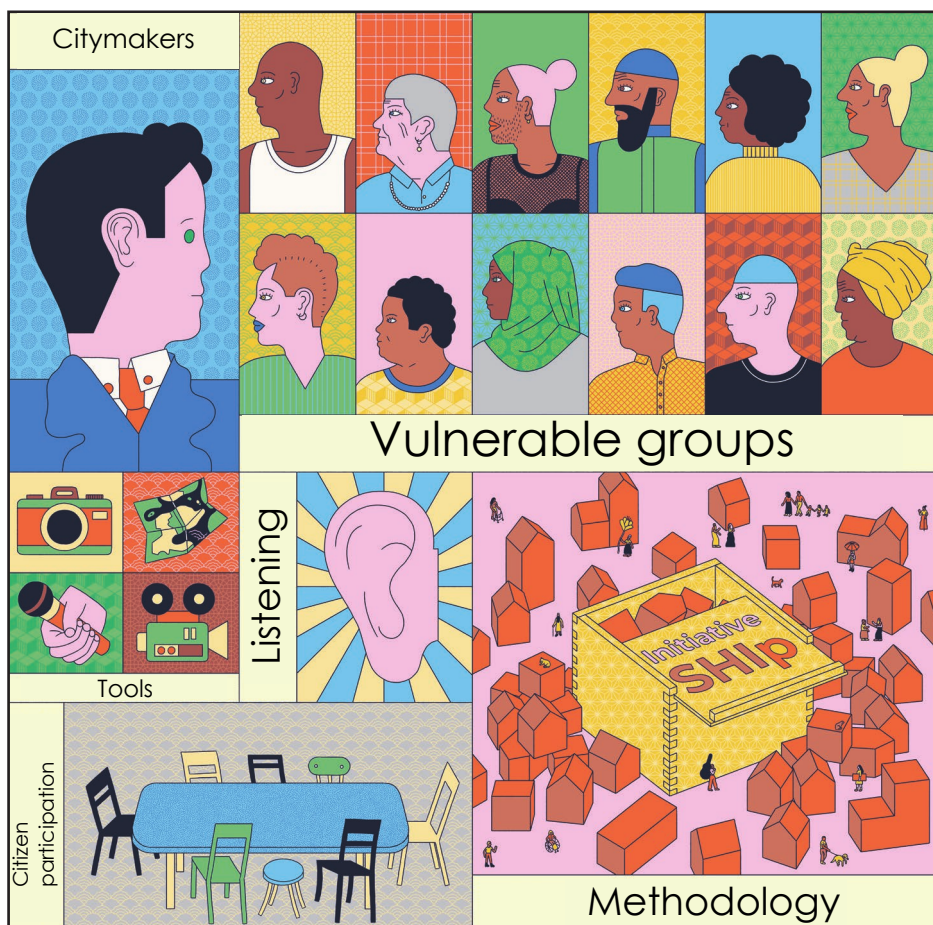




SHIP Initiative

Safe, Humane, and Inclusive Public Spaces

An introductory guide for city makers on how to tackle violence and make public spaces more welcoming by focusing on vulnerable groups, and by fostering participation.



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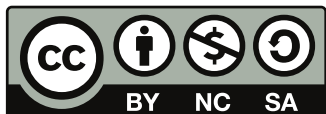
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Université Paris Cité

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As part of her doctoral research, Edna Peza has carried out an in-depth analysis of the link between public spaces, feelings of insecurity and everyday practices.

The study focuses on the perceptions of vulnerable populations in sensitive contexts. As a result, this approach calls into question current planning practices and citizen participation, namely: the dominant discourse around city-making, which focuses on making public spaces less criminogenic but not necessarily less violent.

Drawing on her findings, this booklet explores the direct link between feelings of insecurity, everyday practices and public spaces, and aims to share her urban planning research methodology, particularly for future urban planning and geography students, but also for city makers: students, activists, geographers, urban planners, artists, decision-makers, and so on.

The links between the academic and professional worlds have given the project a high profile and raised new questions, particularly around the transformation of scientific research into an applicable, accessible and practical tool for those professionally involved in citizen participation, safety and inclusion in public spaces.

The links between the academic and professional worlds have given the project a high profile and raised new questions, particularly with regard to the transformation of scientific research into an applicable, accessible and practical tool for those professionally involved in citizen participation, safety and inclusion in public spaces.

If our public spaces are welcoming and safe for the most vulnerable among us, then they will be so for each and every one of us.

This booklet is available free of charge and can be downloaded from <http://cityciteciudad.com>



Introduction



To answer these questions, let's explore the world of citymakers and decision makers who influence our daily lives. Unfortunately, the needs of the most vulnerable are often neglected in the process of decision making. This is where participatory sciences come into play: giving a voice to excluded groups, they allow to create spaces in which everyone's voice counts.

Feelings of insecurity

A low level of crime does not necessarily imply a positive perception of safety, and even less so for the most vulnerable populations. The feeling of insecurity is influenced by environmental characteristics, socio-demographic variables and social representations of places deemed dangerous, among others, and these perceptions have the power to affect physical and social mobility while modifying the geography of the city.

Feelings of insecurity go beyond fear: normalization is also a strategy to cope with violence and a lack of agency.

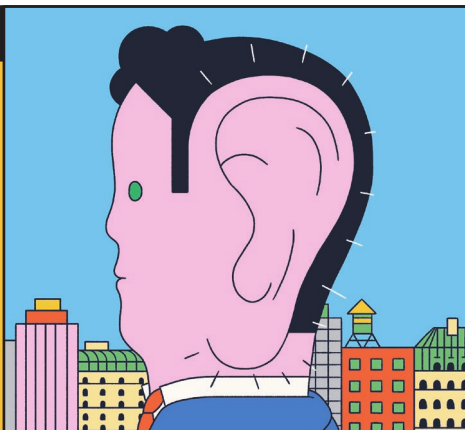
Intersectionality

The multiple forms of discrimination combine and reinforce each other, affecting first and foremost marginalized groups. This includes racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of oppression.



Citizen participation

Participatory processes involve the public in solutions to urban problems. They incentivize the collaboration between city makers and city dwellers, allowing for an empirical vision of urban realities.



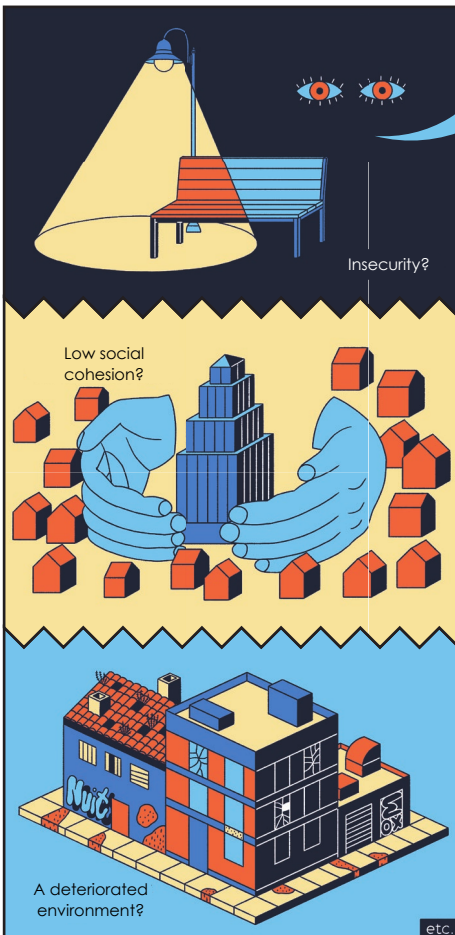


1. The problem

A problem in public space is identified.

KEY QUESTIONS

A What is the problem?



A person can be fearful of a neighborhood without having ever setting foot in it. Whereas, a resident of that neighborhood may express that “it is not that bad”: familiarity with a space is a key factor in how a space is perceived and the feelings it elicits.

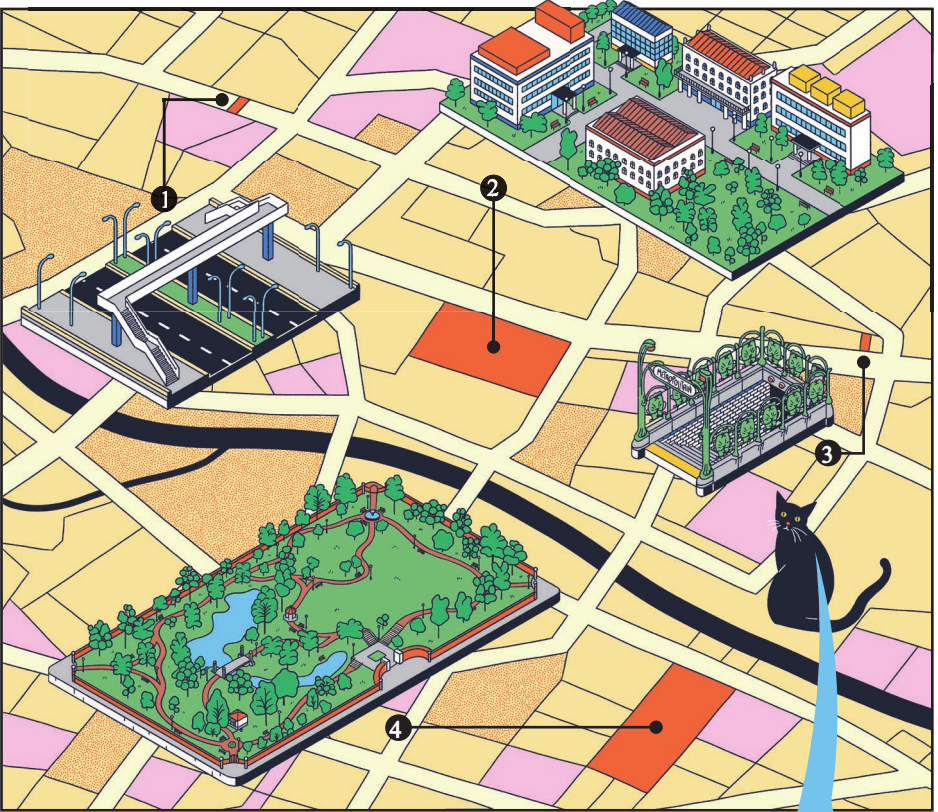
Crime and violence

The dominant narrative considers crime as the main factor of insecurity in public space, and equates “violence” to “crime”. However, not all crime is violent, and not all violence is categorized as crime. For example, street harassment: it has a considerable impact in how women perceive and use public spaces. But in many places this is not considered a crime, it is so commonplace that it is not reported by victims, and it is not taken seriously by law enforcement.

Violence goes beyond crime. It can be: direct, systemic or symbolic.

B Where is the problem taking place?

- ① a pedestrian bridge
- ② a university campus
- ③ a subway station
- ④ a park



C Why do we need to solve it?



It is important to understand who gets to define the problem, and why they think it is a problem in the first place, because not everyone is equally empowered to raise their voices, nor are they equally heard.



2. The context

Identify users, communities, and stakeholders involved, specific situations, expectations, and requirements. Then plan participatory actions to take in the future.

KEY QUESTIONS

A What actions have already taken place?



B Are there local associations of residents trying to tackle the problem?

C Who is feeling insecure in this public space?

D Who is using the public space depending on the day and the time?

E How are they using the space and for how long?

Sociodemographic variables

Oftentimes the male, white, and abled-bodied experience is considered as “universal” in studies of insecurity in the city. It is necessary to take into account the fact that the expression of feelings of insecurity varies according to socio-demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, class, age, among others). For example, a tangible and real source of danger for a woman can be imperceptible to a man. Likewise, less affluent classes are often signaled as the ones responsible for violence in cities, when they are the victims of direct and structural violence.

As citymakers, we must be aware our own biases and understand how they influence our perception of people and places.

Trust and durability: these are two crucial elements for effective solutions. Oftentimes, well-intentioned city makers arrive at a space and decide what to do and how to do it, disregarding solutions that users may have already put in place.

Likewise, considering we aim at centering the actions around vulnerable groups, trust is key. Vulnerable groups are frequently disregarded and this erodes trust. It is important to establish contact, for example, through local associations. This allows us to know a community through an entity that is well acquainted with local city dwellers and local issues.





3. Collaboration

Understand users of a public space by doing collaborative work with local actors and to put in place participatory actions and activities: exploratory walks, photography (photovoice), video making, collective mapping, interviews, etc.

KEY QUESTIONS

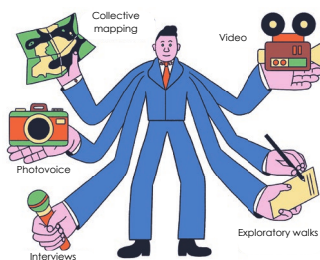
A How many residents are willing to participate in the actions?



B When is the best time to take the participatory actions in place and for how long?



C What are the best media, actions, and activities for my participants to use?



Exploratory walks

An exploratory walk is a walking tour of a neighborhood by a group of users, with the aim of identifying the physical and social characteristics that make it a safe or unsafe environment. They are an effective tool for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of an area, making a diagnosis and raising awareness of a problem.





As citymakers, we have much to contribute in terms of technical expertise, but we also have to listen to the experiences of others to fill in the gaps in our knowledge (especially of the everyday life of a public space).



Remember: different activities appeal to / are feasible for different groups.

For example: Exploratory walks are a good way to observe spaces directly with users. However, these are time-consuming for participants who may not have the free time to do them. Parents, for example, may find it difficult to participate in meetings or walks if they have to look after young children.

Photovoice allows participants to capture information at any time, however it is not as immediate as, say, an interview or an exploratory walk with the presence of a citymaker coordinating the activity, and it can be difficult to carry out due to privacy concerns.

It is important to diversify the activities to get insight from different groups.

A combination of activities is advised.

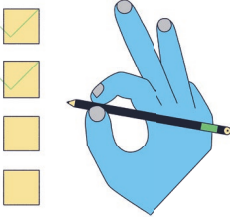


4. The plan

Based on the analysis and information gathered, we propose a custom-made action plan to test potential solutions, such as “prototype” spatial interventions, infrastructure, group activities, etc.

KEY QUESTIONS

A What are the problems to be addressed?



B How long will it last?



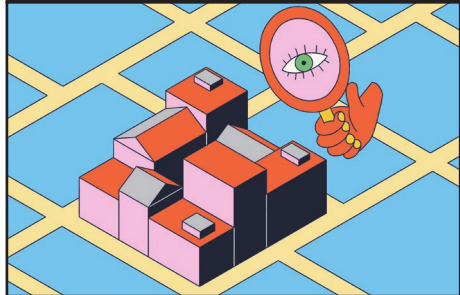
C Who are the actors involved?



Public space transformations

Often, in the face of insecurity, public spaces are modified to make crime easier to detect and harder to commit. However, these efforts vary greatly in their effectiveness, and have multiple consequences. In the name of safety, those in charge of the city risk having a negative impact on pedestrian traffic, privacy, accessibility and social cohesion.

Scale



It's important to work on a small scale. If the geographical scale is too large, the findings may lose relevance at smaller geographical levels. However, solutions are proposed - and have an impact - at a local level, based on these very general images of crime and victimization in a city.

D To what degree will city dwellers be involved?



It is better to create small, albeit effective and long lasting actions, than to promise a large-scale action that will not be achieved.

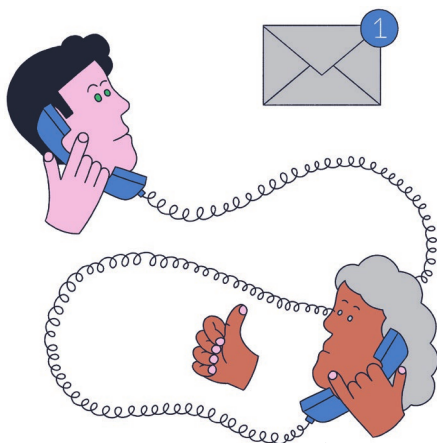


5. Results

Sharing of different results or tools with urban actors.

KEY QUESTIONS

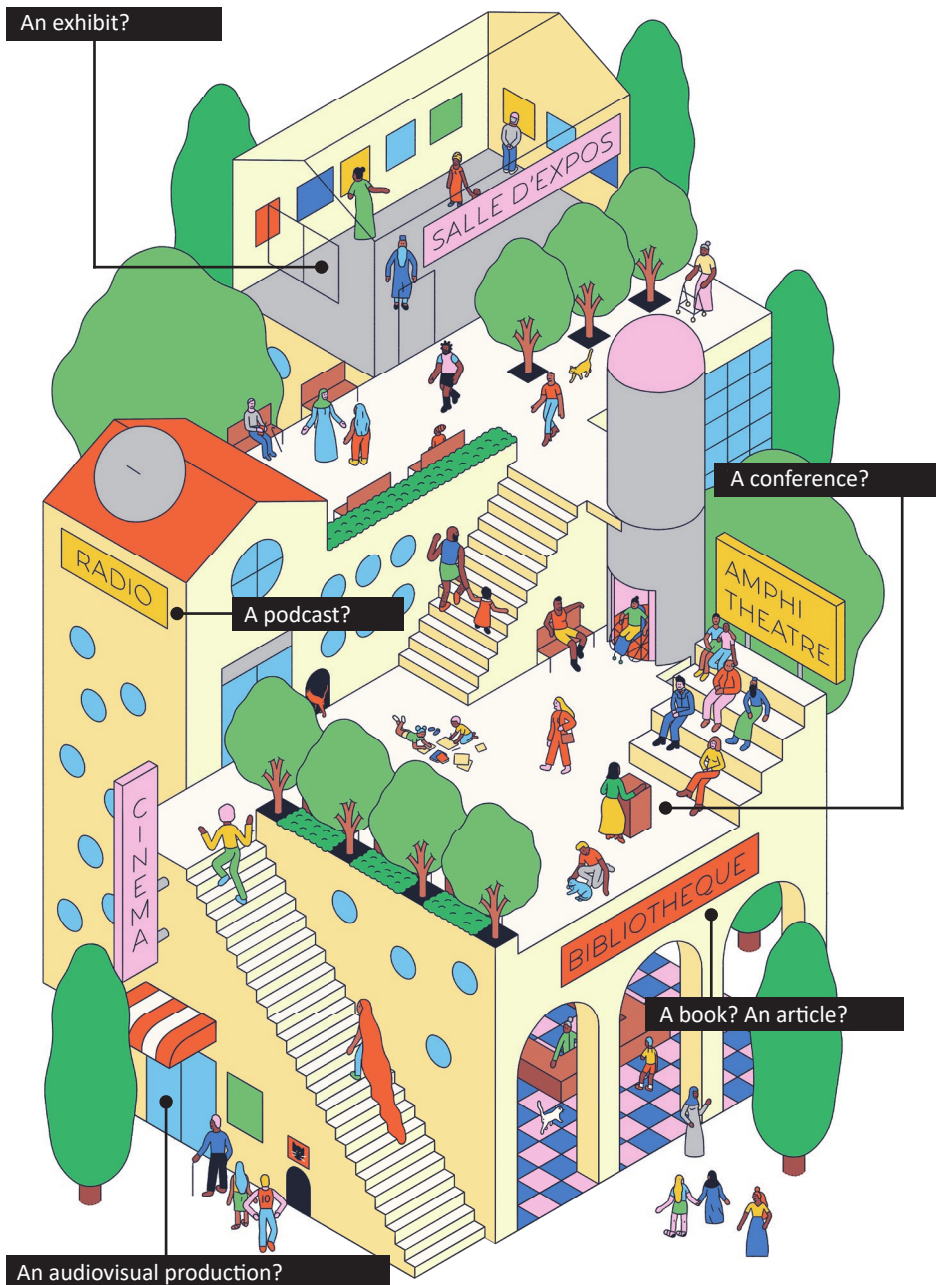
- A** What is the best way to keep the participants engaged and up to date on their collaboration?



- B** Lessons learned: share and document obstacles and shortcomings among professionals. What part didn't turn out as expected? What fell short?



Transparency: it is tempting, when sharing with other city makers, to tout only the successes of actions implemented. However, this limits our ability to question “well-established” methodologies. In the long run, as city makers, when we avoid a critical perspective of our own actions, it leads us to do more harm than good.



C What would be the best way to share and communicate our results?

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