

Creating Common Narratives for Uncommon People

The case study of a community event in Kaimakli; an isolated and contested neighborhood in Cyprus

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Abstract

The commons is becoming increasingly popular as it provides a way to envision new positive futures and inventing new promising modes of cooperation (Huron 2015, Ioane and Foster 2020, Stavrides 2016). This study examines how urban collectives engage in subtle activist actions to nurture the idea of urban commons in neighborhoods and communities. It explores relationships between artistic and spatial practices, community engagement, as commoning approaches to reimagining urban places in isolated neighborhoods. We examine the framework of these commoning practices to understand the role of the mediators or initiators and illustrate how subtle, humane activism can nurture an awareness of our urban commons. The study argues that these commoning practices propose scenarios for resilient communities that can share common stories besides their profound differences. As a case study, we examine an annual neighborhood festival "Pame Kaimakli" ("Let's go to Kaimakli") taking place in Nicosia, Cyprus. Kaimakli is an isolated and contested neighborhood located along the buffer zone dividing the city center. "Pame Kaimakli" a community event initiated in 2012, aims to revive and transform places and social relations in the neighborhood by making arts and culture open and accessible to the wider public. Keywords: urban commons, collective action, ngo's, commoning, community festivals, temporary urbanism.

Methodology

Using mixed-qualitative research methods and documenting input from residents and visitors - (via a survey of 101 respondents, onsite interactive research and focus group) festivals organizers and public officials including the mayor of Nicosia- the paper offers a comprehensive perspective on how urban communities can be activated to become engaged actors in their urban environment.

Novelty

- It presents a unique case where we document iterative design actions and community engagement modalities through the festival organization that lead up to the production of urban commons
- Presents a new perspective of the urban commons, which looks into how these creative actions can first cultivate an understanding of the commons, and create awareness for citizens in what we commonly shared.
- We argue that these practices can be adopted as an alternative to urban activism as they can engage, educate and cultivate a wide and distinctly different audience about our urban common spaces.

Findings

- Commoning practices can be used as an effective urban practice in creating social capital on the neighborhood level by identifying critical characteristics and design processes that connect people with their urban environments.
- Through the research project we conclude that these activities can cultivate the urban commons and create an unprecedented urban intimacy

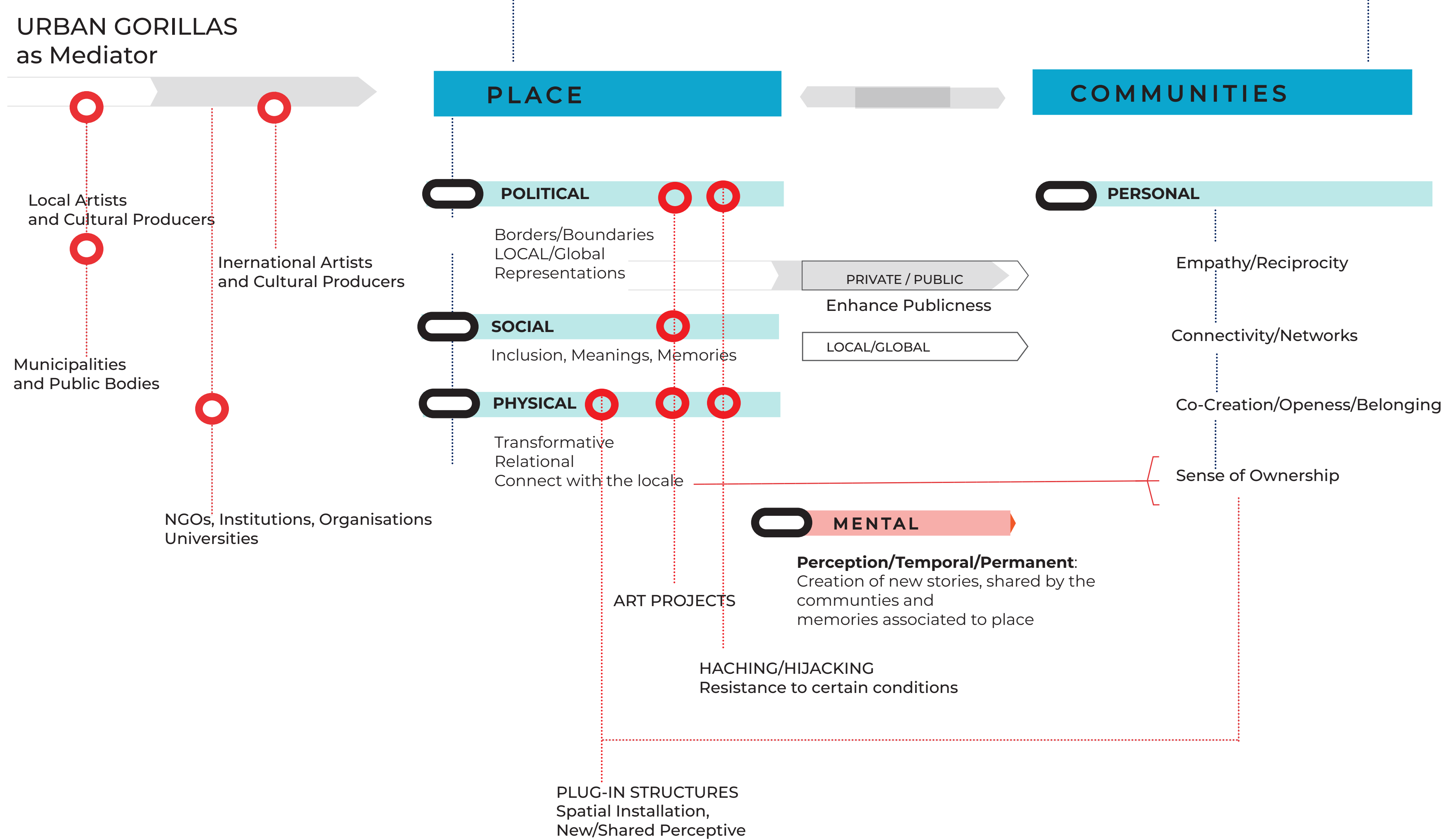
Quotes From Interviews

- "This is really a neighborhood festival, there was a high level of intimacy evident in the activities."
-Interview with resident
- "This festival is different from the festival I am organizing which is more institutional. In Pame Kaimakli, we would not distinguish between the organizers, the volunteers, the residents and even the visitors. These people are doing it, all together!"
-Festival organiser in Round table discussion

Conclusion

We have highlighted the transformative role of the middleground as experienced through the work of Urban Gorillas where collective actions undertaken in Pame Kaimakli Festival. Despite the recent surge in publications on urban commons, there have been little references that identified the role of these mediators and the tools undertaken to reclaim the urban commons. Based on our case study, we have observed that the organizational capacity of mediators and the networks they bring together play crucial roles in the success of community events. It is essential to institutionalize the role of intermediary organizations that facilitate the sharing and connection of urban spaces, as they contribute to reshaping our urban experience and fostering the concept of commons. As Luis Volont (2022) asserts, cultural organizations, for example, provide an opportunity to resist the influence of planners, real estate developers, and city marketers, allowing for alternative narratives and practices to emerge.

Commoning Practices: Analysis of the characteristics of the activities at Pame Kaimakli Festival



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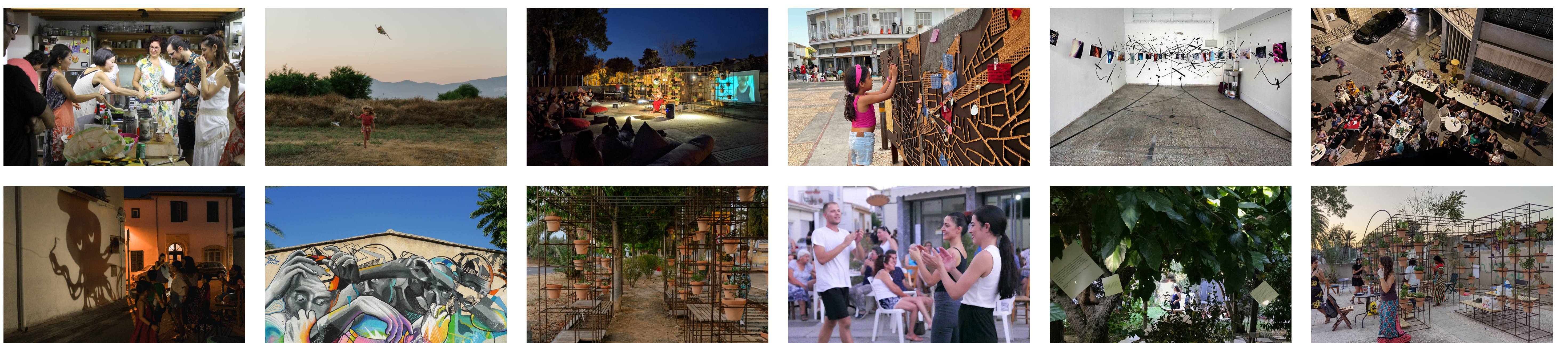


Photo Credits- from right to left

- 1- "Open Kitchens" 2019, 7 dinners in 7 houses with 7 chefs from 7 countries
- 2- "Urban Playground" 2022, Kite making workshops by OBI, Japan
- 3- "A Delicious Place" 2020, Urban Installation and Theatrical performance Popi Avraam and Costas Manouris
- 4- "Urban Playground" 2022, Interactive Research Community Board
- 5- "Adopt an Artist" 2018, Transforming empty shops into exhibition spaces
- 6- "Urban Playground" 2022, Theatrical performance at the local coffee shop by Yiasemin
- 7- "Urban Playground" 2022, Puppets making workshop by Aggela Stavrou
- 8- "Adopt an Artist" 2018, Mural "Refugees welcome" by Elias Zaarour
- 9- "Urban Playground" 2022, Urban Installation of a structure holding plants
- 10- "Adopt an Artist" 2018, Interactive Performance at the square by Enact and Demetris Chimonas
- 11- "Adopt an Artist" 2018, Transforming Houses into exhibition spaces/Poetry Installation
- 12- "A Delicious Place" 2020, Urban Installation at the Church square

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