

Case study ID

CY_04

STREET FOR CITIZENS PROJECT

CASE STUDY SHORT SUMMARY REPORT

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STREET FOR CITIZENS PROJECT

Project at a Glance

The *Street for Citizens* project, led by the Nicosia Development Agency (ANEL) in collaboration with the Society and Urban Form Research Lab (SURF) of the University of Cyprus, explores how civic-academic partnerships can strengthen urban resilience through participatory, evidence-based design. Implemented in the peri-urban municipalities of Latsia and Geri, the project addressed spatial challenges related to walkability, public space fragmentation, and car dependency. SURF applied a three-tiered methodology combining spatial analysis, experiential tools like City Walks, and co-design workshops. The aim was to empower local actors, build advocacy for inclusive design, and experiment with low-cost tactical urbanism. Although embedded within a formal institutional framework, the project also stimulated informal civic action and local awareness. Outcomes included the co-creation of temporary spatial interventions, the development of participatory planning tools, and increased civic capacity. The project demonstrates how academic actors can act as mediators, helping civil society navigate urban processes and promoting scalable models of resilient neighborhood design.

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Case Study Profile

Topic

- ☐ Community Gardening & Urban Agriculture
- ☒ Community Hubs & Cultural Activities
- ☒ Urban Design & Planning Processes
- ☒ Public Space Development & Management
- ☐ Local Economic Development
- ☒ Urban Regeneration & Rehabilitation

Scale

- ☐ Metropolitan / city region
- ☒ City scale
- ☒ Neighbourhood scale
- ☒ Block scale
- ☐ Building scale

Resilience Challenge

- ☐ Environmental and ecological resilience
- ☐ social & cultural resilience
- ☐ Infrastructure and technological resilience
- ☐ Economic & livelihood resilience

Duration

- ☐ Immediate (less than 1 month)
- ☒ Project-Based (1–12 months)
- ☒ Programme-Based (1–3 years)
- ☐ Strategic (3–5 years)
- ☐ Structural / Transformative (more than 5 years)

Stakeholders

- ☒ Community members
- ☒ Local government
- ☒ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- ☐ Private sector
- ☒ Academic and research institutions

Type of Civic Engagement Supporting Neighborhood Resilience

- ☒ Resident-led and grassroots initiatives
- ☐ Collaborative planning projects or processes
- ☒ Advocacy and capacity building
- ☒ Volunteer and community service projects
- ☒ Short-term, more flexible project-based engagement
- ☒ Long-term, more institutionalized engagement (development of stable structures, etc.)
- ☐ Protest and resistance mobilization
- ☐ Art-and culture-based civic Engagement

Level of Civic Participation

- ☐ Information
- ☒ Involvement or participation
- ☐ Collaboration or co-creation
- ☒ Empowerment
- ☐ Resistance and protest-based empowerment

Empirical Basis and Methodological Approach

The STREET FOR CITIZENS PROJECT case study was explored through a participatory action research framework combining qualitative interviews, spatial analysis, experiential tools, and co-design activities. Empirical material included workshop outcomes, participatory mapping exercises, City Walk documentation, tactical urbanism interventions, and project dissemination reports produced throughout the initiative. The methodological approach emphasized the interaction between civic participation, academic mediation, and urban design practices. Particular focus was placed on understanding how participatory and experiential planning methods can strengthen walkability, civic capacity, and neighborhood resilience in peri-urban contexts. The study also examined the role of academic institutions in facilitating collaboration between communities, municipalities, and civil society actors.

Compendious summary

Introduction

The *Street for Citizens* project, coordinated by the Nicosia Development Agency (ANEL), is a civic-academic collaboration aimed at fostering more resilient and inclusive public spaces in the peri-urban areas of Latsia and Geri in Nicosia. Led by the Society and Urban Form Research Lab (SURF) of the University of Cyprus, the initiative applied evidence-based and participatory urban design methodologies to address fragmentation, car dependency, and the lack of walkable infrastructure. Through a four-phase process—spanning spatial analysis, City Walks, co-design workshops, and tactical interventions—the project actively involved residents, youth groups, and civil society actors in identifying problems and shaping low-cost, context-sensitive improvements to the urban environment. By combining civic engagement with participatory action research, the initiative strengthened community capacity, supported advocacy for more walkable and sociable public spaces, and contributed to empowering citizens through shared decision-making processes. The project offers a replicable model for aligning academic research with local urban challenges, emphasizing the importance of co-creation, capacity building, and institutional learning for sustainable urban transformation.

Neighborhood Challenge

The case reflects a common challenge in many European peripheries: rapid urban development without corresponding social infrastructure or pedestrian connectivity. Latsia and Geri are southeastern districts of Nicosia undergoing suburbanization, shaped by low-density expansion, car-oriented planning, and limited civic infrastructure.

The project was implemented in the peri-urban districts of Latsia and Geri, located in the southeastern periphery of Nicosia. These neighborhoods are defined by low- to medium-density housing patterns, fragmented land use, and a predominance of car-dependent infrastructure. The neighborhoods host a socially mixed population, including young families, older residents, and migrants, with a growing proportion of youth due to recent residential developments. Despite relative affordability, the area lacks cohesive social infrastructure, and everyday life is shaped by automobile dependency, limited intergenerational public spaces, and reduced opportunities for informal social encounters. These conditions inhibit social inclusion and diminish the potential for spontaneous civic interaction. The area suffers from limited access to well-designed pedestrian environments and multifunctional public spaces, which in turn undermines walkability and public life. The main resilience-related challenges identified include a lack of active mobility infrastructure, insufficient civic involvement in urban planning processes, and a scarcity of shared, sociable spaces that encourage interaction. These spatial and governance issues contribute to weakened social cohesion and a reduced capacity for collective action and resilience in the face of urban pressures.

Response to the challenge

Following an invitation from ANEL, the SURF Lab took a central role in shaping and responding to the identified urban challenges through a participatory and iterative research process. The project set out to enhance pedestrian infrastructure and promote social interaction in public space by testing context-

sensitive solutions. The goals centered on strengthening walkability, fostering urban sociability, and piloting tactical urbanism interventions that are low in cost but high in visibility and impact. The implementation was structured in four key phases: initial spatial analysis and field mapping in spring 2023; City Walks and perception studies with residents in early summer; a series of co-design workshops and tactical interventions carried out in the fall; and finally, an evaluation and dissemination phase in winter 2024. These steps enabled a seamless translation of academic knowledge into tangible urban change, rooted in local experiences and needs.

Mechanisms of civic engagement

The project adopted a layered and inclusive civic engagement strategy that integrated both formal and informal participation mechanisms. Participation methods ranged from perception-based tools—such as City Walks that captured residents’ lived experiences—to more interactive formats like participatory design workshops, co-creation sessions with municipal stakeholders, and student-led urban design projects that bridged academia and the community. These were complemented by tactical urbanism interventions, which offered low-cost, visible opportunities to temporarily reshape public space and test design ideas in situ.

The stakeholder network encompassed a diverse spectrum of participants, including residents of all age groups, school communities, youth organizations, representatives of local government, and civil society groups such as cultural associations and environmental initiatives. While individual residents contributed primarily through experiential and co-design activities, civil society actors played more strategic roles in mobilizing participation, co-organizing events, and amplifying the project’s visibility and impact. Their motivations spanned from improving everyday urban conditions to advancing spatial justice, youth inclusion, and broader community-building goals.

Despite the inclusive design of the engagement process, the team faced several barriers to broad participation. These included limited visibility of events, short notice periods for recruitment, and unequal access to digital communication tools. In response, outreach strategies were adapted in later phases, experimenting with alternative formats and targeted communication approaches to improve accessibility.

The project carefully balanced participatory action research—driven by the SURF Lab—with citizen involvement and civic engagement. This structure enabled the lab to operate at both micro and meso levels of participation: treating individual residents as knowledge holders, while also supporting collective civic agency. Although coordinated within a formal planning framework led by the Nicosia Development Agency (ANEL), the initiative succeeded in stimulating informal civic action that extended beyond the project’s official scope. Examples included youth-led clean-up actions, neighborhood events, and the continued use and adaptation of co-designed street furniture—illustrating how academic-civic collaboration can serve as a catalyst for sustained community activation and strengthened civic capacity.

Case study findings and lessons learned

The project’s civic-academic model had a measurable impact on both spatial quality and social resilience in the neighborhoods of Latsia and Geri. Through a context-sensitive and participatory planning

approach, the SURF Lab successfully developed and tested tools that enhanced civic collaboration and fostered a stronger sense of collective ownership over public space. One of the project's key achievements was raising awareness among residents about the value of walkability, inclusive design, and public space as a shared resource.

Among the most effective practices were the use of experiential tools—notably the *City Walks*, which helped foster empathy and uncover lived experiences; tactical interventions, which provided real-life demonstrations of proposed changes; and participatory mapping workshops, which made community input visible and actionable. These methods contributed to tangible design outcomes, including temporary street redesigns to prioritize pedestrian movement, co-created seating and shading structures, and wayfinding signage shaped by local narratives.

Despite these successes, several challenges emerged. Mobilizing participants in the early stages proved difficult, and there were occasional tensions between community aspirations and technical or regulatory limitations. Furthermore, limited funding restricted the long-term implementation of some interventions, underscoring the need for institutional support mechanisms to sustain civic innovation.

One of the most significant results was the emergence of new alliances among residents and civil society groups. In some cases, participants took ownership of temporary installations, made independent design suggestions, or organized small-scale follow-up actions. These ripple effects signal a broader process of civic empowerment, enabled by a participatory framework that encouraged shared responsibility and long-term engagement beyond the scope of the project.

A key contribution to neighborhood resilience was the project's role in facilitating knowledge exchange and co-learning across academic, civic, and public-sector stakeholders. Participatory tools like the City Walks and mapping exercises enabled residents to articulate spatial needs, while also building mutual understanding and trust between different actors. Although the project was institutionally anchored and publicly funded, it created space for informal experimentation, allowing residents to test ideas and engage in low-risk, visible forms of civic action.

This dual character—formally structured yet open-ended—allowed the project to act both as a planning initiative and a civic catalyst. For similar efforts to scale up, closer institutional alignment with municipal planning departments is needed, along with clearer regulatory pathways for adopting co-created designs in public spaces.

Finally, the project underscored the potential of academic actors as mediators between emerging civic voices and established institutions. By offering structured yet adaptable engagement methods, the SURF Lab helped facilitate communication across diverse groups, amplified often-overlooked perspectives, and built trust within a complex stakeholder landscape. In this way, academic institutions can play a critical bridging role in advancing more inclusive, informed, and participatory urban governance. The project illustrates the importance of creating hybrid spaces—where formal mechanisms and informal civic action intersect—as fertile ground for co-producing resilient and just urban futures.

Conclusion

This case study highlights the transformative potential of academic engagement in shaping resilient neighborhoods when combined with participatory and experiential planning practices. The *Street for Citizens* initiative demonstrates how civic-academic partnerships can enhance transparency, inclusiveness, and contextual sensitivity in urban design. By institutionalizing participatory action research within municipal processes, such collaborations can contribute meaningfully to spatial justice and neighborhood resilience.

A key strength of the project was its use of low-cost, iterative interventions—such as tactical urbanism—that made community participation tangible and visible. The SURF Lab’s three-tiered framework—encompassing spatial analysis, experiential engagement, and co-design—offers a transferable model for other academic institutions seeking to bridge research with practice.

To build on these insights, future policy efforts should prioritize the creation of robust frameworks for civic participation within local governments. This includes allocating sufficient time and resources for engagement processes, training municipal staff in participatory design methods, and supporting long-term, trust-based collaborations between universities, civil society organizations, and public institutions. Academic actors, in particular, can serve as mediators—translating community needs into spatial strategies and helping to ensure diverse voices are heard throughout the planning process.

Finally, enabling cross-sector collaboration between public, private, and civic actors is essential to foster shared ownership, collective stewardship, and more inclusive urban transformation. The *Street for Citizens* project underscores the importance of designing not just better spaces, but better processes for co-creating the cities we want to live in.

Attachments

References

[Community workshop in Latsia - Geri Municipality - ANEL](#)

['Streets for Citizens' City Walks: Latsia - Geri - ANEL](#)

Photos:







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