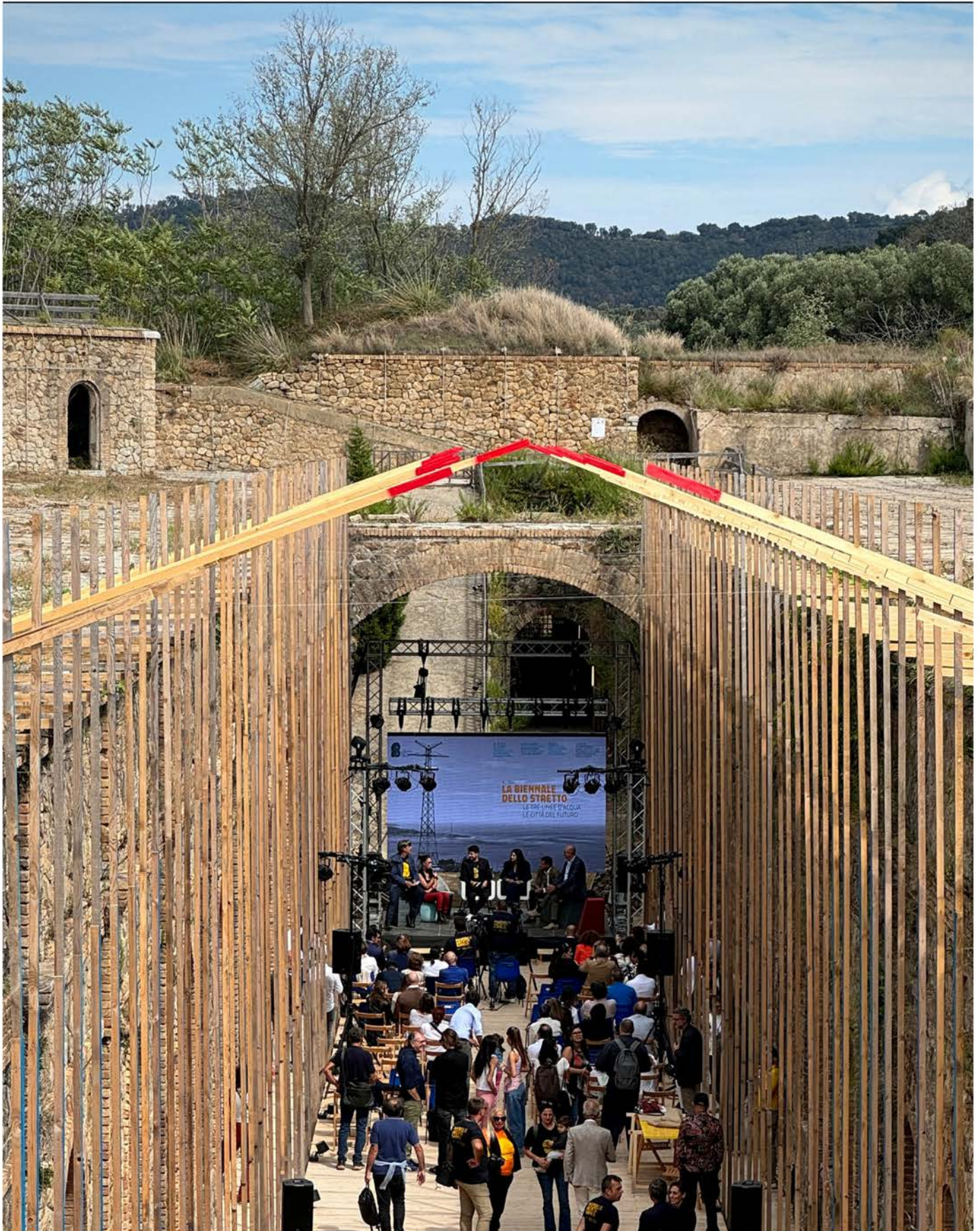


# REIMAGINING CITIES THROUGH CLIMATE AND COMMUNITY DESIGN



# GREENING AND DEMOCRATIZING CITIES

Bridging Climate Resilience and  
International Innovation



In Fall 2024, PlacemakingUS, a project of Social Environmental Entrepreneurs and a regional network of PlacemakingX, partnered with the U.S. Embassy - Mission to Rome to bring American perspectives on urban development, climate resilience, and public space activation to Italy.

Through a series of events spanning Bologna, Messina, Reggio Calabria, and Cortona, this initiative aimed to foster cross-cultural dialogue and share innovative approaches to making cities more livable, inclusive, and ecologically sustainable.

The collaboration reflects a shared commitment to addressing global urban challenges by emphasizing the role of public spaces in promoting social cohesion, environmental stewardship, and civic engagement. By engaging local governments, regional stakeholders, and the broader public, PlacemakingUS sought to not only showcase successful U.S. models but also learn from Italian and global experiences, creating a dynamic exchange of ideas and practices.

This report details the outcomes and insights from the three cornerstone events: the International Parklet Symposium in Bologna, La Biennale del Stretto in Messina and Reggio Calabria, and the Making Cities Livable Conference in Cortona. Each event highlighted unique intersections of climate action, urban design, and community-driven placemaking, contributing to a growing transatlantic dialogue on the future of cities in the face of environmental and social challenges.



*International Making Cities Livable  
Conference in Cortona*

*On the Cover: La Biennale del Stretto  
in Reggio Calabria*

# EVENT SUMMARY

SEP  
18-20

## INTERNATIONAL PARKLET SYMPOSIUM **BOLOGNA**

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Hosted at Biblioteca Salaborsa, Museo Spazio Pubblico, and in a street parklet, this symposium drafted an EU-centered declaration prioritizing pedestrian-friendly streets over car dominance. Supported by local and regional governments, the event attracted media attention and showcased innovative parklet models from San Francisco, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Egypt, India and Bologna.

SEP  
21-22

## LA BIENNALE DEL STRETTO **MESSINA & REGGIO CALABRIA**

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This public event examined the environmental and social impacts of a proposed bridge between Sicily and mainland Italy. U.S. experts from San Francisco and Los Angeles demonstrated how public spaces can foster dialogue and community, with exhibitions and talks at the University of Messina and Fort Batteria Siacci.

OCT 29  
- NOV 1

## INTERNATIONAL MAKING CITIES LIVABLE CONFERENCE **CORTONA**

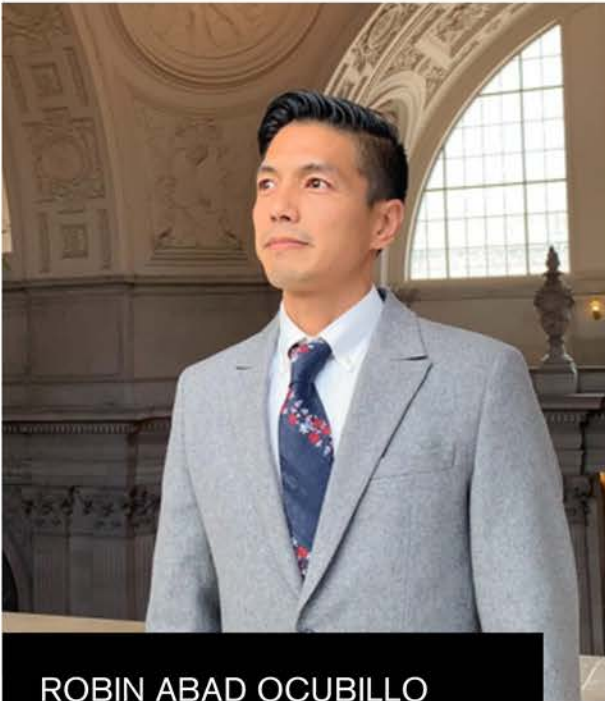
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PlacemakingUS partnered with this conference to host a free workshop on placemaking, emphasizing ecological sustainability, diversity, and inclusion in urban development. The conference facilitated international dialogue on climate-responsive urbanism, social equity, and the role of public spaces in sustainability.

*Porticoes in Bologna*



# ABOUT THE INITIATORS AND CONTRIBUTORS



ROBIN ABAD OCUBILLO

Civic innovator and former Director of Shared Spaces San Francisco, where he transformed temporary public spaces into permanent city assets. He now works in Oakland's City Administrator's Office.



ILARIA SALVADORI

Urban designer with San Francisco's Planning Department, leading the Groundplay program. Originally from Milan, she specializes in community-driven urban design.



MADELEINE THÉRÈSE SPENCER

Co-Director of PlacemakingUS and founder of Diamond Heart Enterprises. Her work focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion in urban spaces.



MICHAEL WEST MEHAFFY

Executive Director of the Sustasis Foundation and advisor to King Charles III on sustainable urbanism. He has contributed to the UN-Habitat New Urban Agenda and authored Cities Alive.

# ABOUT THE INITIATORS AND CONTRIBUTORS



JOHN BELA

Urbanist and co-founder of Rebar, the creative force behind Park(ing) Day (2005). He leads Bela Urbanism, focusing on the intersection of art, ecology, and urban design.



RYAN SMOLAR

Co-Director of PlacemakingUS. He has led initiatives promoting parklets, securing \$1.9 million for small business parklets, and building equitable parklets with vulnerable communities. Ryan also transforms gardens and markets into social centers, fostering food placemaking that connects communities. He actively fosters international collaborations through PlacemakingX.



LUISA BRAVO

Founder of City Space Architecture and a global advocate for public space culture. She curates Museo Spazio Pubblico and co-edits The Journal of Public Space.



## SUMMARY

# THE INTERNATIONAL PARKLET SYMPOSIUM

Bologna & Online | September 18–20, 2024

The International Parklet Symposium, held in Bologna and online, brought together global experts, city officials, and community leaders to explore the evolving role of parklets and shared public spaces in promoting sustainability, social inclusion, and climate resilience. The event, organized by City Space Architecture and Museo Spazio Pubblico, was supported by the U.S. Embassy in Rome, the Italian Government, and local institutions, and aligned with European Mobility Week and Park(ing) Day celebrations.

## Key Highlights and Outcomes

### Exploring the Future of Public Space

The symposium tackled key questions about the nature of parklets as public, private, or hybrid spaces, especially in the post-pandemic era. Discussions addressed the balance between commercial uses (like outdoor dining) and community access, highlighting innovative parklet models from cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Bologna.

### Cross-Cultural Knowledge Exchange

The event featured international case studies from Nigeria, New Zealand, Austria, Japan, Mexico, and beyond, providing a rich dialogue on how diverse communities are adapting curb spaces to foster climate resilience and social cohesion. U.S. contributions included insights on parklet governance and placemaking policies from Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.



### Promoting Climate-Responsive Urban Design

Sessions emphasized how parklets can contribute to sustainable mobility, urban greening, and climate adaptation. Case studies showcased the transformation of car-centric spaces into community-focused environments that support biodiversity and reduce urban heat islands.

### Drafting the Parklet Manifesto for the EU

A major outcome of the symposium was the collaborative effort to draft a Parklet Manifesto, aimed at guiding European policies on curb space use. This document synthesized global best practices and outlined principles for equitable, sustainable, and people-centered public spaces.

### Equity and Accessibility in Public Space

A recurring theme was the importance of ensuring social and geographic equity in the distribution and use of parklets. Discussions explored strategies for inclusive placemaking, ensuring that these public spaces serve diverse populations and reflect community needs.

### Celebrating Public Space Innovation

The final day coincided with Park(ing) Day, featuring the inauguration of a new parklet in front of Bologna's Urban Biodiversity Garden. This space, designed in partnership with local organizations, symbolized the fusion of environmental stewardship and community engagement.





## SUMMARY

# LA BIENNALE DEL STRETTO

Messina & Reggio Calabria | September 21-22, 2024

La Biennale dello Stretto brought together artists, urbanists, architects, and civic leaders from around the world to explore the cultural, environmental, and social dynamics of the Mediterranean, particularly the unique landscape of the Strait of Messina. Attended by our cohort with support from the U.S. Embassy - Mission to Rome, the event fostered cross-cultural dialogue on placemaking, public space innovation, and the intersection of climate resilience and cultural heritage.

### Key Highlights and Outcomes:

#### Reclaiming Urban Space: A Call for Parklets

On the main stage, John Bela and Luisa Bravo presented a powerful declaration advocating for 1% of city parking spaces to be transformed into parklets—vibrant public spaces for rest, respite, and community gatherings. This proposal emphasized the need to rethink urban infrastructure to prioritize people over cars.

#### Showcasing American Expertise Across the Strait

At the historic fort, American placemaking experts presented a series of exhibitions. Ryan Smolar focused on gardens and farmers markets as third spaces, sharing global strategies for transforming these spaces into social and cultural hubs. Ilaria Salvadori, Robin Abad Ocuillo, and John Bela showcased their work on parklets and activating street life through youth engagement. Ilaria's dual U.S.-Italian citizenship provided a meaningful bridge between American and Italian approaches to urban design.





### **Exploring Public Space through Art and Scholarship**

Luisa Bravo presented an exhibition on the Museo Spazio Pubblico and The Journal of Public Space, highlighting the role of public spaces in fostering civic life. Throughout the event, we engaged with Italian scholars and architects, exchanging ideas and exploring each other's exhibitions, deepening the transatlantic conversation on placemaking.

### **A Fusion of Art, History, and Urban Innovation**

The Biennale's integration of art, historic sites, contemporary discussions, and design created a vibrant, multi-layered dialogue. Conversations spanned topics like infrastructure, landscape, culture, preservation, and nature, grounding our work in themes that resonate deeply both locally and globally.

### **Looking Ahead: California Parklet Symposium**

One of the major outcomes of the event was the announcement of a California Parklet Symposium to be held in April 2025. This follow-up event will continue the dialogue started in Italy, focusing on how parklets and public spaces can advance sustainability, social inclusion, and community resilience in urban environments across the U.S.





## SUMMARY

# INTERNATIONAL MAKING CITIES LIVABLE CONFERENCE

Cortona, Italy | October 29 – November 1, 2024

The **International Making Cities Livable (IMCL)** conference in Cortona, Italy, provided a dynamic platform for international dialogue on the intersections of **climate change, sustainability, and social inclusion** in urban development. Bringing together urban planners, policymakers, architects, and civic leaders from around the world, the event facilitated the exchange of innovative ideas and best practices aimed at creating cities that are environmentally resilient, culturally rich, and socially equitable.

The Cortona conference underscored the vital role of international dialogue in addressing shared urban challenges, blending global best practices with local insights to inspire more sustainable, inclusive, and culturally vibrant cities.

## Key Highlights and Outcomes

### Global Perspectives on Climate-Responsive Urbanism:

The conference featured a range of sessions addressing urban responses to climate change, from *sustainable transportation models* and *ecological placemaking* to *climate-adaptive architecture* and *urban form's role in reducing emissions*. These discussions highlighted diverse approaches to environmental challenges, drawing on examples from both the U.S. and abroad.



### **Inclusive Placemaking and Social Equity**

A strong focus on inclusivity was evident throughout the program. Workshops and panels explored how public spaces can foster social cohesion and community resilience, with case studies from San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Johannesburg showcasing strategies for engaging marginalized communities and supporting equitable development.

### **Exchanging Ideas Across Cultures**

The event fostered rich cross-cultural exchanges, with American practitioners sharing innovative urban projects alongside counterparts from Italy, France, Uganda, and Costa Rica. Presentations on parklet programs, heritage preservation, and polycentric urbanism illustrated how blending historical context with contemporary solutions can lead to more sustainable, livable cities.

### **Highlighting the Role of Public Space in Sustainability**

Several sessions emphasized how public spaces contribute to environmental goals, from reducing car dependency to promoting local food systems and enhancing biodiversity in urban settings. Discussions illustrated how thoughtful public space design can be both an environmental strategy and a tool for community empowerment.

### **Building Lasting Connections**

The conference helped strengthen international networks among professionals committed to sustainable urbanism. Relationships formed during the event are expected to inspire continued collaboration and knowledge-sharing across borders, contributing to global efforts in urban resilience and inclusion.



# SUMMARY

# PLACEMAKINGUS: TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SPACES, EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

## About PlacemakingUS



*PlacemakingUS visiting Bangkok, Thailand - Lecture to Architecture Students*

PlacemakingUS is a national network dedicated to helping communities across the United States transform public spaces into thriving hubs of connection, health, prosperity, and joy. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit project of Social Environmental Entrepreneurs, we provide tools, resources, and partnerships to empower local efforts in building vibrant, interconnected places that address the challenges of the 21st century.

### **Our Mission**

Our top priority is supporting frontline communities that have been uprooted and underserved by destructive urban planning, auto-centric development, racist policies, and unequal investment. Through our flagship “United Streets of America” program, we collaborate with these communities to rebuild neighborhoods as complex, resilient systems that tackle critical issues like climate change, social isolation, economic inequity, and public health disparities.

### **Our Work**

PlacemakingUS connects people and places through national and international learning opportunities, trainings, and global discussions. We've led initiatives and exchanged ideas in cities like New York, Bologna, Oaxaca, Los Angeles, Tokyo, and Sydney, fostering a global dialogue on the transformative power of placemaking. Our programs equip communities with the knowledge, relationships, and funding they need to create spaces that reflect their unique identities and aspirations.

### **Our Story**

Placemaking is a humanistic and multidisciplinary approach to urbanism, rooted in the ideas of American pioneers like Jane Jacobs, William Whyte, and Margaret Mead, and championed globally through initiatives like the United Nations' New Urban Agenda. Inspired by these legacies, PlacemakingUS was launched in 2019 at the Project for Public Spaces' US Placemaking Week. Since then, we've grown into a thriving network uniting individuals and organizations committed to creating better places together.