



# Impact of Asphalt Art on Public Space Activation: Prato, Italy

*January 2026*

For Bloomberg Philanthropies  
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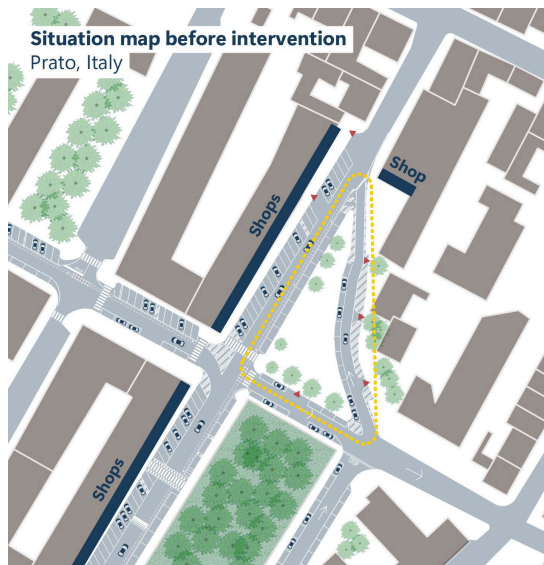
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## Prato, Italy - pavement art breathing new life into the market square (even on non-market days)

The intervention area is located in Prato's Soccorso district, a densely populated neighborhood long home to the city's largest ethnic communities. The site sits between the neighborhood and the "declassata" bypass. Despite its proximity to the city center, it faces significant infrastructural challenges and social pressures due to its diverse mix of residents. With nearby shops and a park to the south, the location has the potential to become a true community hub. Local volunteer and social associations have long worked in the area to promote coexistence and inclusion, often focusing their efforts on the few public spaces available.

The site was chosen for its central location, close to a well-visited park. It offers a large, well-maintained asphalt surface, ideal for low-cost painting interventions. The island also hosts the weekly Monday market. The absence of parking signage meant it was used daily as an informal parking lot for 20–25 cars, blocking safe pedestrian crossings. In recent years, the area has also seen growing activism around urban regeneration, social programming, educational initiatives, and green-space maintenance. Yet, outside of market days, it remained underused and disconnected, functioning primarily as unregulated parking.



### Aim of the project

The asphalt art project aimed to create a safe, inviting public space where residents of all cultural backgrounds could meet and spend time together. While establishing additional space near the adjacent shops and the park, it aims to help improve the overall image of the area, making it a more welcoming place, a natural extension of the adjacent park.

### Community engagement

The design was co-created through workshops involving residents, volunteers, and architecture and design students. The painting was done by a small group of volunteers. Bringing together the local community and participants from different backgrounds helped foster an environment where sharing and caring for public space became central themes.

#### Organisations involved:

Urban Planning and Territory - Comune di Prato;  
Mobility, Infrastructure and street furniture - Comune di Prato;  
Centre for Contemporary Art Luigi Pecci;  
Urban Center; ECÒL; Cieli Aperti

Size: 1200 m<sup>2</sup>

Date: 21 juni 2025

## Artwork

The installation added a black and white ground mural, creating a pattern of diagonal lines and shapes providing a more comfortable, lively setting for the weekly farmers' market. Created through public workshops, the project fostered community participation, with volunteers, residents, and design students helping paint and shape the space.

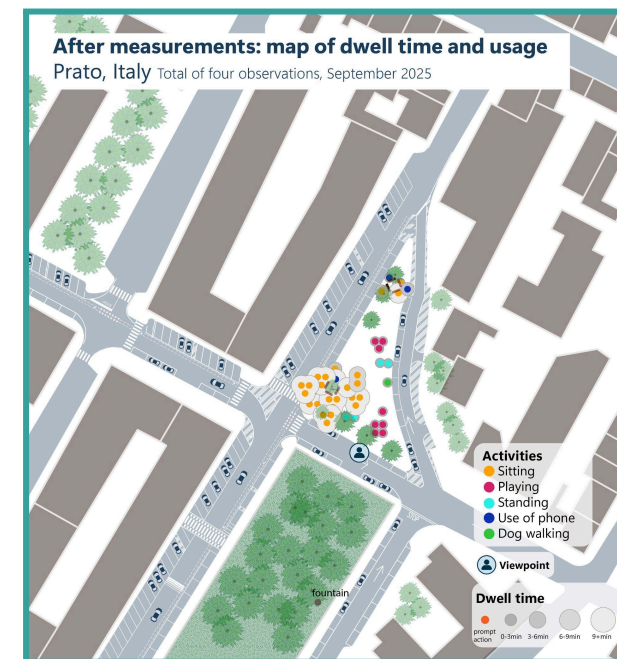
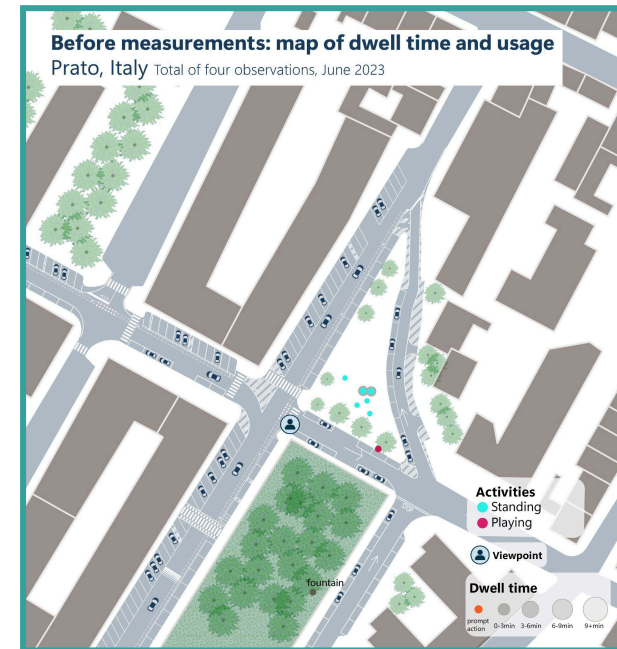
## The measurements

The area has several attractive features in the surrounding area, but these are not aimed at a specific target audience: in fact, the shops attract people of all ages, as does the well-equipped park, which appeals to children, young people, adults and the elderly alike. For these reasons, measurements were taken over the weekend, when there is the highest concentration of people using the area. The before measurements were held in the beginning of June, and the after measurements in mid-September, three months after the intervention. On all occasions it never rained, and during each measurement period the temperatures were pleasant. The maps summarize conditions before and after the asphalt art intervention, and detailed tables on the number of people, activities, group sizes, and dwell time are provided below.

|        | Date                  | Counting times | Observation Times | Weather        |
|--------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Before | 10.06.2023            | 11.00-11.15    | 11.15-11.35       | Light rain, 23 |
|        |                       | 18.00-18.15    | 18.15-18.35       | Light rain, 26 |
|        | 11.06.2023            | 11.00-11.15    | 11.15-11.35       | Sunny, 24°     |
|        |                       | 18.00-18.15    | 18.15-18.35       | Sunny, 28°     |
|        | User survey responses |                |                   |                |
| After  | 20.09.2025            | 11.00-11.15    | 11.30-11.50       | Sunny, 27°     |
|        |                       | 18.00-18.15    | 18.30-18.50       | Sunny, 32°     |
|        | 21.09.2025            | 11.00-11.15    | 11.30-11.50       | Sunny, 24°     |
|        |                       | 17.50-18.05    | 18.20-18.40       | Sunny, 30°     |
|        | User survey responses |                |                   |                |

## Before implementation

Before the asphalt art intervention, the area was mainly used for informal parking, leaving little space for people to move around. The presence of cars made it difficult to walk and cross the road due to reduced visibility at crossroads. We counted 185 pedestrians passing by.

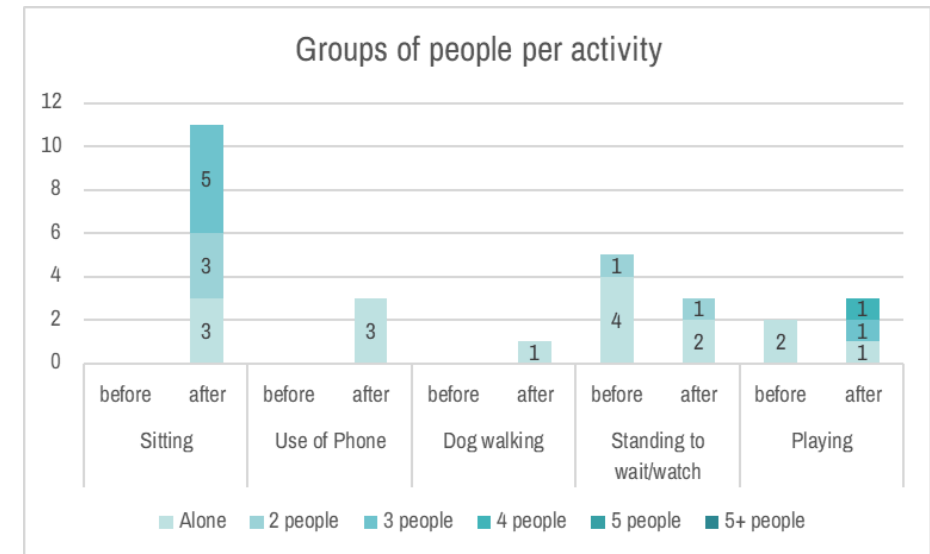
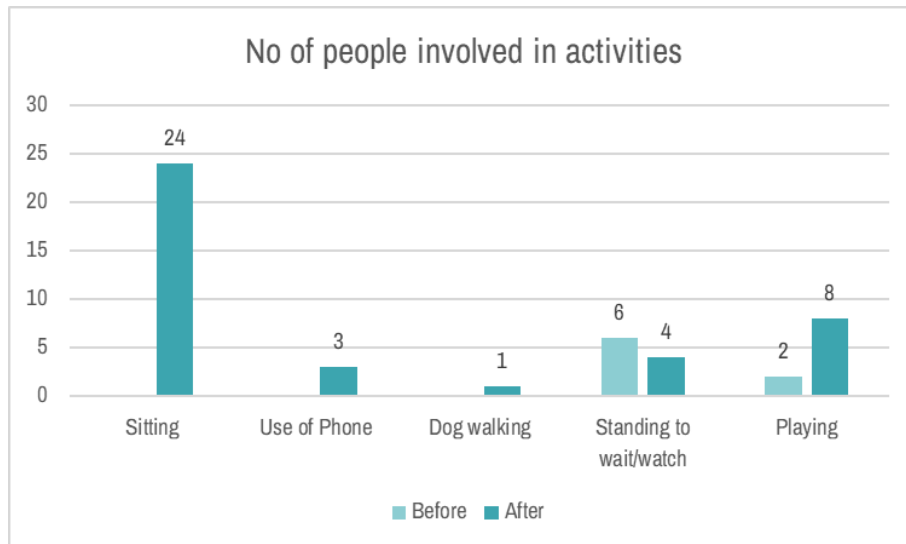
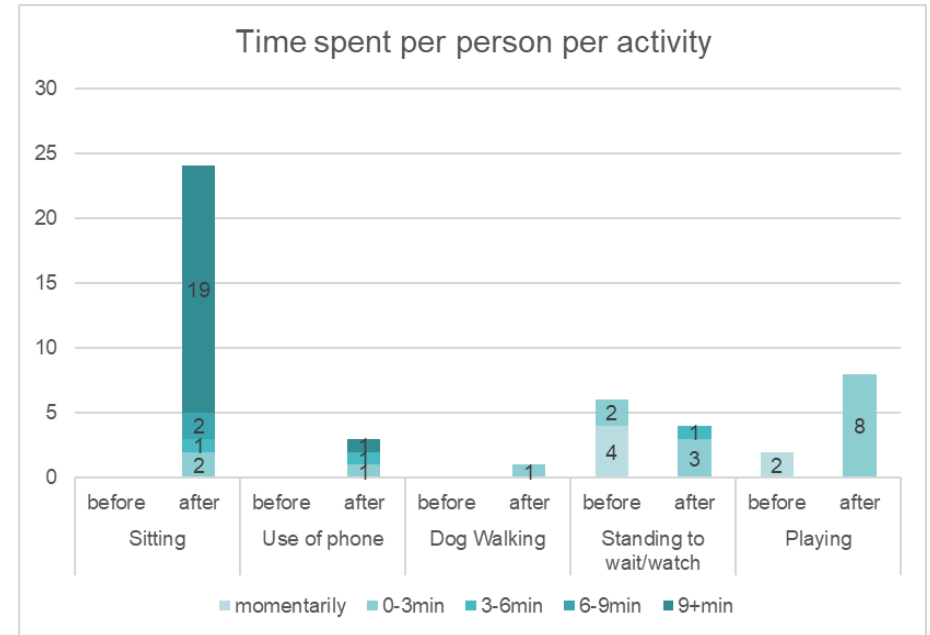


### After implementation

Through asphalt art pedestrian space was created, which facilitated completely new uses as observed during the after measurement. In fact the intervention, combined with the reorganization of the space and the addition of street furniture, transformed a previously underutilized and car-dominated area into a public space that is able to foster social interaction, play, and a greater sense of community. Although the space remained quite empty, the area now allowed people to move through easily from the adjacent park. The number of passers-by didn't change by the removal of carparking and the asphalt art.

We see a significant increase in the number of people seated as sitting elements were placed at two locations. They offered a welcome cool spot to rest or talk. Many of the people who stopped to sit down did so in groups, increasing the opportunities for socialising within their own cultural groups. Language barriers prevent people from making new social connections.

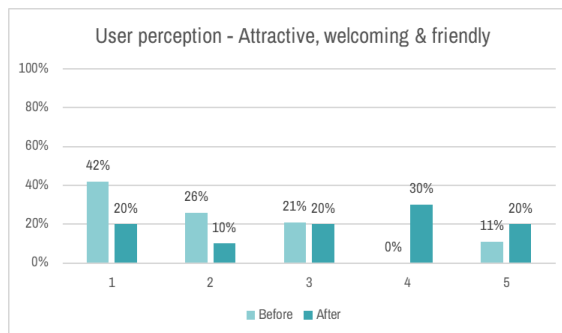
The nearby park—already heavily used both before and after the asphalt art intervention—is a great example of how different cultures and age groups can coexist in the same public space. To draw more people into the newly improved area, it may be helpful to organize activities that make use of the asphalt surface while appealing to a wide range of backgrounds, such as badminton, volleyball, dance, theatre or basketball.



## People's perception

In the case of Prato, it was particularly difficult to establish dialogue with people due to cultural and linguistic barriers. Passers-by who spoke either Italian or English were very willing to chat in general about the area and the type of intervention, in fact many useful insights were gathered. However, not many of them felt like filling out the questionnaire, preferring a freer conversation. Specifically, we had some interesting (and sweet) conversations with members of various groups and associations that have been working in the neighbourhood for some time to bring people from different cultural backgrounds closer to the city. These were fundamental to better understanding the soul of the place and its various complexities.

About 60 users were asked and only 19 users participated in the survey before intervention and 11 after. Before the Asphalt Art intervention, survey results indicated that the intervention area was largely perceived as unattractive and uncomfortable. 68% of participants rated it poorly in terms of appearance, and 95% considered it lacking in comfort due to insufficient places to sit and relax. Following the intervention, perceptions shifted significantly, with half of the participants rating the area as attractive and 70% finding it comfortable. This change was also reflected in how people used the space. While before the intervention only 47.4% of respondents reported visiting the area almost every day, this number rose to 80% afterwards. These results highlight the positive impact of the intervention in making the area more welcoming, comfortable, and socially vibrant.



## Final assessment Prato

Before the intervention, the Prato site functioned almost entirely as an informal parking lot, with cars filling the space and leaving little room for pedestrians. Observations recorded 185 passersby, but virtually no one stopped, and sitting or playing was nearly nonexistent.

After the intervention, the average dwell time increased by 413%, and the number of people in groups vs individuals increased by 800%. Despite being located next to a very active park, the space still appears relatively empty and underused. However, with community-led activities—supported by the highly engaged local organization—the space has strong potential to become a vibrant community gathering spot.

**“On some weekends, you can see groups of Chinese youngsters playing badminton, bringing their own net!”** member of the local NGO's working on the site