

# HOW SPACE SHAPES THE EVERYDAY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS AT KRIŽANKE IN LJUBLJANA

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**Abstract:** *This article centres on place attachment and feelings of belonging of students and professors of the Secondary School for Design and Photography, Ljubljana (SŠOF). The school's educational practice is split between two locations: Križanke, a medieval complex in the city centre; and Roška, a renovated military barrack on Ljubljana downtown's periphery, which SŠOF shares with another school. Students and professors in my research described Križanke as a "creative", "free", and "democratic" space where they felt like they belong, especially in contrast to the second location. My objective here is to understand how much of a role the actual place has in shaping the relationships between school environments and their users (students, professors).*

*In the article, I present the historical context of Križanke and SŠOF's current spatial crisis (threats of eviction from Križanke), followed by a "walk through Križanke" to examine students' sensory perceptions of the building. This text analyses spatial elements like unique classroom set-ups, narrow corridors, and the labyrinthine construction of Križanke. These elements produce more informal and dynamic interactions between students and professors at SŠOF, which consequently enhance the students' feelings of belonging, acceptance, and creativity. Finally, I conclude by examining how a complex interrelatedness between a sense of place, narration of place, and attachment to place in a school context impact the everyday learning experience at SŠOF and Križanke.*

**Keywords:** *anthropology of place; place attachment; learning environment; Križanke; sensory ethnography*

## Introduction

In January 2020, a crowd of 400 people gathered in front of the Slovenian parliament in Ljubljana. Students, professors, and alumni of the Secondary School for Design and Photography, Ljubljana (SŠOF – Srednja šola za oblikovanje in fotografijo) organized a protest against a “sale” of Križanke, the building that hosts their school. SŠOF is set in a 13th-century monastery building that Jože Plečnik, a Slovenian architect who significantly shaped Ljubljana’s city centre, renovated into a space for a School of Crafts and cultural events in the 1950s (Malešič 2018). The anger and dissatisfaction of students and professors around the “sale” stemmed from the fact that the Municipality of Ljubljana was giving the school two years to move out of its headquarters without providing any suitable alternative premises (*RTV Slo* 2020). SŠOF suddenly faced the genuine possibility that it would simply stop existing due to a lack of space. This spatial institutional crisis was one of the key incentives for this research.

Many of the protestors in January 2020 were also at the parliament because they believed that SŠOF – one of the only Slovenian secondary schools combining art and design programmes – belongs to a place at Križanke, i.e., that there is a strong link between the school’s identity and the space itself.

This article is based on ethnographic research I conducted for my Bachelor’s thesis in 2021 (Babuder 2021). As a former student of SŠOF, I was aware of the significant feelings of place attachment among some students and professors at SŠOF (also because my school friends and I felt it, observed it, and talked about it during and after our school years in SŠOF), which is why auto-ethnographic observations also inform this work. My BA thesis thus focused on the place attachment and feelings of belonging of students and professors to their school environment, particularly to Križanke and comparatively to Roška, the second building where SŠOF carries out half of its curriculum. The objective was to understand how much of a role the actual space has in shaping the relationships between people and school environments. This article is embedded in an anthropology of space and place (Persson 2007; Lawrence-Zúñiga Low 2022), with some relevant conclusions also offered for pedagogy and anthropology of learning (Eisenhart 2015; Ingold 2018). So far, there have not been many significant anthropological studies of the sense of place and place attachment in school environments, although pedagogical and design theorists have started to cover some aspects of this topic (see Hertzberger 2008; Smith Taylor 2008; Byers and Imms 2014).

I first present the historical context of Križanke and SŠOF's current spatial dilemma in the following pages. Next, I offer a spatial description of the school grounds at Križanke and its geographic embeddedness in the Ljubljana city centre to provide a sense of the school's location. Next follows a section on methodology and theoretical foundation for this research and a discussion about sensory perceptions of Križanke, which are, according to my interlocutors, one of the crucial elements of the specific atmosphere at Križanke. I continue by comparing Križanke and Roška, showing how spatial elements like unique classroom set-ups, narrow corridors, and labyrinth construction of Križanke produce specific interactions between students and professors at SŠOF. I ask why exactly Križanke offers students a feeling of freedom and creativity, while Roška is associated with different spatial perceptions. At the end of the article, I bring together all the factors that create the sense of place and place attachment at SŠOF and offer some conclusions about how space impacts the learning experience.

## **Križanke through History, and SŠOF Today**

Križanke is an old monastery building in the southwest corner of the Ljubljana city centre. From the 13th to the 20th century, it served as a monastery, hospital, and school for the Catholic Teutonic Order. The order first built their residence in the 13th century, with the addition of the Knight's Hall and the Church of the Virgin Mary during the Gothic period. The latter was rebuilt in the 18th century and is today considered one of the most important Baroque monuments in Ljubljana (Šašel Kos 2018, 15; Klemenčič 2021). After World War II, Križanke and the church were nationalized, and the complex was left in a terrible and vacant condition (Šašel Kos 2018). In 1949, the Ljubljana municipality approved and started the construction of the extension of Križanke (Malešič 2018, 292) for the School of Craft, later renamed the Secondary School for Design and Photography, Ljubljana (SŠOF), which took up these spaces. In the following year, the municipality invited architect Jože Plečnik to lead the renovation of Križanke and transform the functionality of the whole complex. His plans led to the renovation of the complex and the creation of an outdoor amphitheatre space next to the school (see number 9 in Figure 2), which still represents a relevant music venue and event space in Ljubljana. This was Plečnik's last significant project, and his renovation placed Križanke on the map of "historical and architectural accomplishments" of Ljubljana (Malešič 2018). His renovation

of Križanke also presents a common argument today why the SŠOF school “deserves” to stay in its original location, with the implication that the art focus of the school should remain in direct contact with history (its own, and the city’s art history). After the renovation, in 1952, the newly established Festival Ljubljana event organization (Festival Ljubljana 2021) and the guesthouse Plečnikov hram joined the Križanke complex as well.

The municipality initiated the renovation of the monastery with the School of Crafts in mind. Still, the school administration did not consider the building a crucial part of the school’s identity until recent history and the threat of eviction (interview with prof. GM, 4 March 2020). They were aware that Križanke would soon become too small for the school’s capacities, which actually happened in the 1980s with the expansion of the school’s program. Part of the classes was then moved to the Secondary Economic School on Roška Street – in this text referred to as Roška (Kurtovič 2010).

Today, Križanke is partly owned by the Municipality of Ljubljana and partly by the Republic of Slovenia, while the space is managed by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport (Spatial Portal RS 2020). A professor of art history at the Faculty of Arts Ljubljana explained that in 2016, a group of art historians started advocating for the declaration of the Križanke Church as a monument of national importance (interview with prof. GC, 22 April 2020).

In 2016, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia also declared the whole of Križanke as a monument of national importance (Act on the Protection of Cultural Heritage 2016). However, SŠOF was not included in the Act on the Protection of Cultural Heritage and is barely mentioned in this document (ibid.). Therefore, the declaration of Križanke as a monument does not consider the school as a key part of Križanke’s identity or Plečnik’s legacy.

The announcement of the declaration itself did not have a significant impact on SŠOF. The problem, however, arose when the Municipality of Ljubljana and Festival Ljubljana began to use this announcement as an argument for the complete eviction of the SŠOF school from Križanke without providing suitable replacement premises (*RTV Slo* 2020). The school spaces at Križanke were to be taken over by the Festival Ljubljana, which, under the municipality’s funding, deals exclusively with cultural events such as concerts, shows, and events that attract tourists from Slovenia and abroad (*Mladina* 2021). The eventization of “high culture” by Festival Ljubljana and the prioritization of heritage as a marketable commodity over public education reflects the process of touristification of Ljubljana and the reorganization of its public life (see Bibič 2003).



Figure 1. The Križanke courtyard and the front of SŠOF school from the main entrance. The sign “NOT FOR SALE!” had been hung up as the form of protest against the move of the school out of Križanke. Photo by Ana Kovač 2019 (Libnik 2019). Used with permission.

This brings us to the turning point in the school’s history, when 400 pupils, students, and professors went to voice their disapproval at the Slovenian Parliament in January 2020 (RTV Slo 2020). In this public act of protest against the threat of eviction, SŠOF proclaimed Križanke as a critical element of its identity. According to the professors I spoke with, SŠOF also faced an eviction threat from Roška in spring 2021 (due to cracks in the building, which supposedly posed a danger that required the closure of half of the school premises). The school was therefore facing a considerable spatial crisis. Yet Križanke, with its central position in the city and due to its particular architecture, held a more symbolically significant value in this moment of crisis, which will be further explored below.

In summary, due to limited space at Križanke, SŠOF has been considering a relocation since its beginning. However, the government has never managed to provide new premises, so SŠOF gradually adapted Križanke for the needs of its curriculum (and later divided classes between Križanke and Roška). The school began to actively and publicly promote itself as a significant part of

Križanke's identity (as well as Križanke as part of SŠOF identity) since the threat of eviction, which can be understood as a strategy at the time of crisis. But there was more than a mere strategy in the school's public protest. As a former student of SŠOF, I understand what students and professors talked about, even before the crisis of eviction, when they described the "creative" atmosphere at Križanke and the strong connection between people and place there. As I determine through analysing my conversations with students and professors, my participant observation at Križanke, and retrograde autoethnography, standing up and protesting for Križanke was not only a protest against eviction, but also an expression of space attachment.

### **A Walk Through Križanke**

Križanke is a cold and stony complex building. It consists of a small church (Križanke Church), a restaurant, an outdoor music venue, and a branched building with classrooms and offices surrounding a large square courtyard. The latter serves for school outdoor events and presents a hang-out space for students during breaks (see space 4 in Figure 2). This courtyard also serves as the entry point into the Križanke complex. As my interlocutors maintained, it creates a great first impression of the place, and it often gets stuck in the memory: "Križanke is different, with this wonderful court and all these hidden classrooms, you know, all these hidden possibilities... [The students] feel different from other schools" (interview with prof. MR, 21 April, 2020).

Entering the courtyard from the street, we encounter a restaurant on our left and the offices of Festival Ljubljana (the Municipality's event organizer) on the right (see number 2 in Figure 2). Further into the courtyard, on the right, is a low wall and steps where students hang out during breaks (see number 3 in Figure 2). Across from the entrance into the courtyard, we see the school's front (see Figure 1 and 5). Its large windows offer a view directly into one of the school's hallways, where SŠOF usually exhibits large prints of students' artworks. The school's presence in the complex is therefore especially visible because of students' frequenting the courtyard and the public exhibitions of students' artworks visible there. As a former graphic design student remembered: "You were always in touch with art [in Križanke], and there were always events happening around us" (interview with student, 17 April 2020).

Below the large windows at the front of the complex (see Figure 5) is a small school cafeteria, and on the lower left corner of the courtyard is the



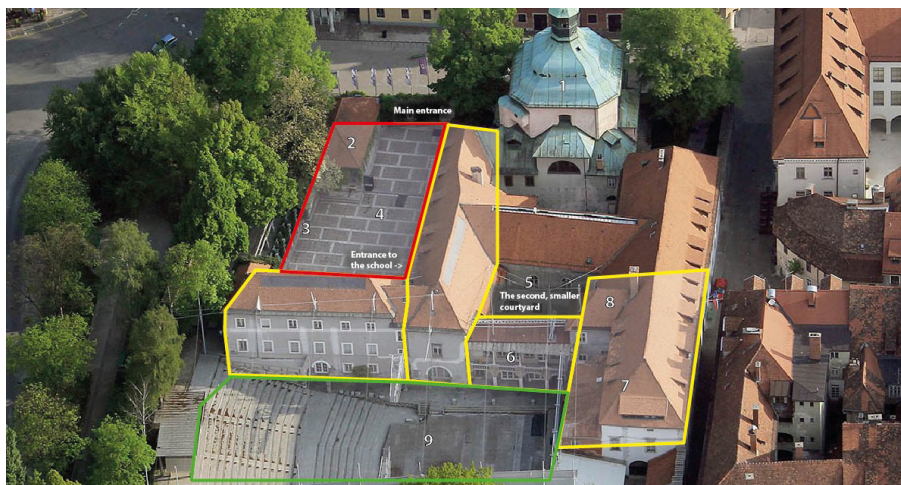


Figure 2. Križanke church (top, number 1), the central courtyard (top-left, red colour, number 2), and the outdoor music venue (bottom, green colour, number 3). The yellow line marks the parts of the building used by SŠOF. The entrance to the school's buildings is from the central courtyard. Author of mapping: Anuša Babuder, 2022. Source: Personal collection of Marko Gorenc, 2017. Used with permission.

main entrance to the school (one the right side of Figure 4). The door opens on into another small courtyard (see number 5 in Figure 2) with three entrances from there leading to different parts of the school. Another (fourth) door there functions as a special entrance reserved for professors. From this smaller courtyard, we can reach the school offices, the computer rooms for graphic and industrial design on the first floor, and fashion classrooms and studios on the second floor and in the attic (number 6 in Figure 2). Another door there takes you to an industrial workroom (number 8 in Figure 2 above), general classrooms (number 7 in Figure 2), a teachers' lounge in between (number 6 in Figure 2), and drawing ateliers and photography darkrooms on the second floor.

The most common word among interlocutors for describing the building was as a "labyrinth". There are barely any straightforward routes to any room, and the hallways are very narrow. A feeling of losing oneself in the school's passages and needing to search for directions can be present throughout all four years of study at SŠOF: "It felt like we discovered a new part of Križanke every year" (interview with former graphic design student, 26 March 2020). That is



Figure 3. Wall in the courtyard, where students spend time during school breaks. Source: Personal collection of Marko Gorenc, 2017. Used with permission.



Figure 4. Restaurant and the main entrance into the school in the courtyard (opposite to the wall on Figure 3). Source: Personal collection of Marko Gorenc, 2017. Used with permission.



due to the narrow corridors, (four) different entrances to the school premises, poor signage, and complicated classroom navigation (the school cannot afford much freedom to redecorate its interior due to a conservation protection of the Križanke complex). Thus, the Križanke/SŠOF building complex stimulated very different impressions of the place among participants, depending on which areas of the building they were moving through: “It was a completely different feeling if you entered Križanke from the courtyard or the professors’ entrance [from Križevniška street]. Like it was a completely different institution” (interview with former graphic design student, 23 May 2020). Students’ art works also hang on almost every wall around the school. On the ground floors, the sounds from the industrial workroom are always present, and in the summer months, it is also possible to hear the sounds of the lively city centre. As will be seen below, the building at Roška, which can be described as a model school building, is designed and decorated very differently.

## **Main Concepts and Methodology**

This research is ethnographic, with the main approach being participant observation at Križanke and Roška, along with open-ended and narrative interviews with students and professors. Part of the research consists of retrograde autoethnography, since I have graduated from SŠOF myself, and thus I explore my memories of personal feelings of attachment to Križanke and Roška. To surpass personal observations and gain proper ethnographic insight, I interviewed eight current and former students from SŠOF, mainly women (four from the graphic design program, two from the fashion design program, and two from the art gymnasium program), as well as six teaching professors. I gathered research participants with the help of my former professors at SŠOF and through the snowball method. With research participants (both students and professors), I talked and spent time at both school locations – Križanke and Roška – and covered topics like their memories of social situations and experiences at both locations, their impressions of these locations, and their feelings of belonging and non-belonging to SŠOF and Roška. I conducted participant observation by observing and walking along the two sites during school hours, alone or with professors, in the spring of 2021. The school was operating in both locations at this time (and still does, as I am writing this article).

Before I present Križanke (and then Roška) from my interlocutors’ point of view, I have to define a few concepts, such as the concept of “place” and

“sense of place”. According to a definition by Miriam Kahn, which I find adequate for my study, places are “complex constructions of social histories, personal and interpersonal experiences, and selective memory” (1996, 167) that are “continually created whenever meaningful social interactions take place” (1996, 194). “Sense of place”, moreover, as Matej Vranješ argues, emphasizes phenomenological, experiential, and often individual “construction” of a place (2002). What does a person feel when they come into direct or indirect contact with, for example, a building? This feeling is – at least to some degree – shaped by personal and social biography (Bergson after Feld 1996, 93), as there is no perception of the environment that is not loaded with memories, associations, and emotions (Casey 1996, 17). Both Edward S. Casey (1996) and Steven Feld (1996) argue that when we move through or live in a particular place, we constantly mark our present encounter of a place with our past and pre-established perception of it. For example, some professors and students I talked to knew Križanke before they started to study or teach there, which was enough for them to create an expectation, and in some cases, excitement and curiosity about the place:

I’ve taught at many schools already [...] and always, when walking past Križanke, I thought: “Wow, this is cool”. Students looked different than at other schools. I always felt jealous of my colleagues working at this school, and I really thought it was something special. [...] When I first arrived here [Križanke] my impression was only confirmed. [...] I really feel good here because this way of [creative] work and thinking is close to me (interview with prof. IP, 14 April 2020).

However, besides personal experiences that shape a sense of place, a place (a building) itself may embody something (e.g., in its architecture) that stirs specific feelings and affects. As I show below, my interlocutors themselves have pointed at this factor.

The second central concept of my research is “place attachment”, a process of affiliating to a place, which Setha M. Low defines as “the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space” (Low 1992, 165). However, in my view, the symbolic relationship does not cover all aspects of place attachment. Jennifer Eileen Cross (2015) provides a more nuanced version of the concept. As she argues, the relationship with a place changes through time and distance. Thus, considering how these affect different modalities of place attachment,

Cross defines seven “processes” (2015, 502) of place attachment, out of which the ideological, sensory, and spiritual processes are most relevant to this research.

The ideological process dictates the comprehension of the difference between “good and bad relationships between people and places” (Cross 2015, 510). In this modality, place attachment is shaped by morally charged messages about how to live, behave or be in a particular place. The place is associated with like-minded people, a social group or a community sharing specific values. In a way, this kind of attachment is somewhat similar to Low’s “symbolic relationship”. My interlocutors shared strong bonds (“good” and “bad”) with both SŠOF and Križanke.

The second relevant modality, the sensory process, complements Sarah Pink’s (2009) sensory ethnography. As Cross emphasizes: “One of the first ways that humans relate to place is through their senses” (2015, 501). As my interlocutors speak about below, they were strongly impressed by Križanke’s auditory, visual, and temperature qualities.

The third is spiritual attachment, which denotes an “ongoing feeling of deep ‘oneness’ with a place” (Cross 2015, 502). This strong sense of attachment does not fade with time. This relationship with Križanke was evident with many of the former students and professors I talked to, especially when we compared their first impressions of Križanke with their present feelings. A professor who has been teaching at SŠOF for almost 30 years said:

I have always felt that I need to come here [Križanke]. I knew that I had to go to SŠOF. I remember my first impression of these labyrinths. I said to myself: “I want to be at Križanke”. I have been here for almost 30 years, and I really feel that this is my place. [...] I knew this would be it (interview with prof. MR, 21 April 2020).

There is “a certain type of charm, which starts to show through time”, as one of the students said. In the cases I categorize as a spiritual attachment, my interlocutors did not point at something particular about Križanke, but rather to their feelings that this building is somehow unique. For example, acknowledging the historical and cultural significance of Križanke (more on this later) was significant in their articulations of attachment to this building.

Another concept that grounds my study is that of the “built environment”. I lean on Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga’s and Setha M. Low’s definition of “any physical alteration of the natural environment, from hearths to cities, through

construction by humans” (Lawrence-Zúñiga and Low 1990, 454). Križanke and Roška, as well as their material and architectural surroundings in the city of Ljubljana, are built environments. However, I did not pay equal attention to every part of these environments. Instead, I followed Amos Rapoport (1982) in selectively tracing meanings of the built environment and my interlocutors’ bodily and practical interactions with it. In the following chapters, I present Križanke from the point of my interlocutors’ bodies (see *Sensory Imprints of Križanke*), sociality (see *Making Bonds with Križanke*), and memories (see *The Impact of Stories about Place*).

### **Sensory Imprints of Križanke**

The sensory experience of the old monastery building was essential in my interviews, so I first examine this modality of place attachment at SŠOF. Thus, I also present the atmosphere of the place through the impressions of students and professors (cf. Stewart 2008; Abram and Bajič 2020). Based on the interviews and fieldwork, I divide the sensory imprints into first impressions, and into visual, auditory, and temperature senses (cf. Pink 2009).

The first time most students saw the interior of Križanke was on the school’s open house days (an event where high schools across Slovenia invite secondary school pupils to see and get to know their curricula). When I asked my interlocutors about their first impressions of Križanke, students and former students often described the large courtyard’s impact as the first thing they noticed when they entered through the main entrance.

Another impression that persisted through each conversation was an association of Križanke with a maze or a labyrinth. As mentioned, this is due to narrow old corridors, a plethora of different entrances to the school premises, and the complicated navigation system between classrooms. This connects to the feeling that you never really know the entire building. Due to technical equipment and spatial arrangements that different classes require, many classrooms at Križanke are only used for specific classes, which students attend within a particular year of study. Consequently, a student might not know that a specific classroom exists because it is hidden in one of the attics or has a separate entrance. In the words of a former graphic design student, “every year, we discovered a new part of Križanke” (interview, 27 May 2020). Another interlocutor, also a former student, mentioned that she felt like she had never actually seen the whole school.





Figure 5. Entrance to the courtyard and the view at school windows in front.  
Source: personal collection of Marko Gorenc, 2017. Used with permission.

Another former graphic design student pointed out that for her, each part of Križanke felt like it belonged to one of five curriculum modules.<sup>1</sup> This division influenced where each group of students spent most of the time during classes or breaks. She remembers how she visited the industrial design students during breaks at “their part” of Križanke. She also spent other breaks with her classmates on “their floor”, where she had drawing lessons at the ateliers. Hence, due to different programmes, not all students were navigating this built environment the same way, leading to unequal experiential and sensory imprints.

Another matter relevant for this study is auditory perceptions. As there is an outdoor music venue at Križanke, positioned behind the school, the sounds of preparation for events are well known to students and professors. A former graphics student described this spatial-auditory phenomenon as “backstage in the classroom”. My personal memories are similar. I still remember the rumble

<sup>1</sup> These are Graphic design, Industrial design, Fashion design, Photography, and The Art Gymnasium modules (Oblikovna 2019).

during classes that the workers caused by setting up the stages for concerts. I always felt that these sounds meant that we were at the centre of social and cultural life. To attend a class in this atmosphere always seemed more relaxed as this backstage atmosphere prevailed over the occasional monotony of the school lectures we listened to in classes. While my colleagues felt similarly, I doubt the professors would agree with my interpretation of the auditory disturbance perceived as relaxing background atmosphere.

The first impressions of teaching also illustrate the sound image at Križanke by prof. IK, who recalls that “the work was not easy due to such close contact with people [due to narrow corridors and classrooms] and the distractions I was not used to, from church bells to [the] many voices” of teachers and students from hallways and other classrooms (interview, 27 May 2020). In addition, in summertime, the windows at SŠOF are open everywhere, which means that in specific classrooms, you hear women walking in high heels on the cobblestones on the street outside the complex. In some classrooms, it is possible to hear the sounds of the restaurant below and the students hanging out in the courtyard. A graphic design student further highlighted the sounds of machines coming from the industrial design workshop in the building. Some also pointed out the everyday presence of the voice of school security guard Sonja, whom all students knew.

Another prominent sensory impression is the temperature in the classrooms throughout the year. Križanke is a medieval complex that has retained most of its built structure and insulation (Malešič 2018). In the winter, thus, the hallways and classrooms are cold. In the summer, they are hot, and in the attic, where the sewing ateliers are emplaced, it can be incredibly suffocating. A first-year student of fashion design commented: “The attic [where fashion students had their workshops] felt hellishly hot in summer, that’s why I don’t like it [the fashion classroom] too much” (20 March 2020). Besides, navigating between classrooms through various indoor and outdoor corridors and courtyards meant exposing oneself to outside weather conditions. Diverse temperatures stayed in students’ memories and marked their experiences of certain parts of the school. Therefore, not only visual and auditory perceptions play a role in shaping a sense of place, but also the temperature. Depending on the interlocutor’s perspective, and the position of the room, this can either be part of the school’s charm or a disadvantage.

To summarize, the presented visual, auditory, and bodily (heat vs. cold temperature) impressions of Križanke are an effect of its “dynamic” built environment: diverse areas and functions of the complex, multiple entrances

into buildings, labyrinthine connections and “hidden” areas. If we consider its embeddedness in the vibrant city centre, we can understand why all my interlocutors perceived Križanke as a dynamic, lively, and sensory-rich place (mainly in “good”, but sometimes also in “bad” ways).

## Making Bonds with Križanke

Elements of sensing Križanke described above significantly shaped my interlocutors’ feelings of attachment to it. Jennifer Eileen Cross argues that sometimes people instantly develop a “deep sense of belonging” to a place (Cross 2015, 508), with spiritual characteristics of the attachment that are hard to describe and articulate. Students and professors, who I talked to, had some trouble pinpointing what specifically were the elements that produced their strong feelings of belonging to Križanke. One of the interlocutors constantly asked herself during the interview: “Where is this infatuation with Križanke coming from?” (interview, 25 May 2020). In a similar state of uncertainty, one professor speculated about the nostalgia of former SŠOF students as the “first love” and “blind infatuation” with the place (interview, 24 May 2020). I felt all of these feelings during my time at the school and after graduation. People who felt this kind of belonging to Križanke described it as an “attraction” or a “pull”, mentioning that the place “drew them in” or “called them”.

Some former students described a feeling of immediate attraction to Križanke when visiting the location for the first time on the school’s open days (see above). One student mentioned that Križanke pulled her in instantly, and another gave this vivid first impression: “My first impression was, this is a most beautiful building, with an old door, which was falling apart a little, but right after that: “This will be my second home!”” (interview with former graphic design student, 26 March 2020).

As Keith H. Basso argues, sense of place possesses a “marked capacity for triggering self-reflection” (Basso 1996, 55), especially when we are in the company of other people and sense the place *together* (Basso 1996, 57). School as a particular social environment is one of the most crucial places for teenagers to engage with each other and where they can express feelings about various issues, including perceptions of space. Thus, Basso’s conclusions apply to the students’ self-reflection on their “dwelling” (Ingold 2000) at Križanke.

Making a community of students and professors was crucial for students’ place attachment. Long-term presence in a place certainly plays a significant

role in developing place attachment and community affiliation. Still crucial are the pivotal life events we experience in a specific place and the relationships we form with the people around us during and after these events (Humman 1992). Making a community of students and professors was stimulated at various SŠOF's events, such as the Light Guerrilla project (see below), freshman initiation graduation ceremonies, and informal social events (like Halloween or Pust [Slovenian Carnival]), which all took place at Križanke. However, bonds between students and professors and the environment of Križanke were also constantly shaped by daily encounters and socialization between classmates and professors during classes and breaks.

Another critical factor in making strong bonds with Križanke is its location in the city centre. Government and city planners have been criticized for making urban public spaces unwelcoming and inaccessible to young people (Loebach et al. 2020, 2). Similarly, schools often separate school grounds from outside spaces, using fences and walls, and prohibit students from leaving the school premises during breaks (most often the reason is a school's legal responsibility for students' "safety"). At SŠOF, this was not the case: the Križanke complex is a public space with a courtyard open to everyone, whereas during school time SŠOF students were allowed to go out of the Križanke space to observe and engage with the city centre (see Figure 6). Two of the professors I interviewed highlighted this proximity and interaction with historical elements of Ljubljana's city centre as the key to students' education in art history, which is an excellent example of the ideological process of place attachment – being included in the wider art community sharing specific space-related values (Cross 2015; see above and below). Professors also took advantage of this proximity for frequent museum and gallery visits with their students.

The boundary between Ljubljana's (public) urban space and SŠOF's (private) premises is relative and dependent on the context (Gal 2002, 80). At Križanke, the main courtyard is where the public "spills" into the school grounds, with workers and tourists coming in and out of this area. Still, students managed to create "their own" semi-private space (cf. Kozorog 2011) at the low wall on the side of the courtyard, used as a sitting area and a meeting point before or during class (see Figure 3). At the same time, they did not feel they owned it, but rather that it had to be open to the public, to other people who enter the yard and spend their time there next to them.

Parallel to the spilling of Ljubljana's urban public space into the SŠOF's grounds, it is also important to consider the inscription of the school's presence





Figure 6. Students drawing outside of Križanke. Author: Peunik 2016. Used by permission.

in a broader urban public space (Lawrence-Zúñiga and Low 2002, 185). On sunny days, SŠOF's drawing classes are in motion in various spots in and around Križanke (see Figure 6). The Light Guerrilla project, for which students design large light installations at Križanke and across Ljubljana, is one of the better-known projects on which SŠOF and Križanke have collaborated (Svetlobna gverila 2022). Upon entering the public space of Križanke's courtyard, a visitor encounters SŠOF students' hanging installations and drawings through the large windows on the first floor of the building: "Wherever you turn, there is some artwork" (interview with former graphic design student, 23 May 2020). Some students I interviewed felt that people on the street could also notice SŠOF students' presence at Križanke:

Anyone walking by can hear [students'] voices and chatter and know that there is something here [...] There are cigarettes on the floor, flyers and posters everywhere. You can always hear the machinery from the industrial workshop (interview with former graphic design student, 26 March 2020).

Moreover, students and professors often occupied cafes, streets, and squares around Križanke. With all this, the school left a particular mark in the public space of Ljubljana's downtown. Feeling an attachment to a place is sometimes hard to articulate for all of those involved, but it is clear that the bonds between Križanke and SŠOF students and professors are strong, with a deep sense of belonging, connectedness to the city centre and a sense of freedom and creativity being two of the main aspects of their attachment to place.

## The Impact of Stories about Place

Sense of place and feelings of attachment can also emerge through or with the help of stories. "The stories we tell ourselves and others are the basis of a meaningful world of life" (Fisher in Cross 2015, 504; see also Jackson 2013), and the process of telling and listening to stories about a place is integral to creating a connection to it. Storytelling can affect sensory perception and significantly enhances the experience and sense of belonging (ibid.).

Here I would like to highlight two storytelling directions, evident in my conversations with students and professors about Križanke: the transfer of knowledge through stories about cultural heritage and art history from professors to students and the stories about Križanke told by older students to the younger ones.

One of the professors I interviewed noticed that students' attachment to Križanke is passed along through students' storytelling and professors' teaching. The latter often emphasized Plečnik's legacy and highlighted the school's location in the building, considered an essential part of Slovenian art history. I remember a school tour from my first year at SŠOF. A professor took us on a walk around Križanke, where we listened about Plečnik's work and the importance of cultural heritage surrounding the complex. Professors accompanied this with a warning that went along the lines of: "You are now students and representatives of art and design, and you need to know who Plečnik is and what Križanke represents". I also remember the professor of art history, who delicately described Križanke as "our home" in a lecture. The school emphasises its long historical continuity at Križanke, he claimed, lasting almost 70 years. Professor MR explained:

We are influenced by the place where we feel free. But I am also convinced that this is a cultural monument, and we need to be aware of the monastery that was here

in the Middle Ages, a baroque monastery and then Plečnik's restoration. I think we feel the past, and it affects us. Every time I come here, I remember Plečnik's wonderful idea because he always said that we should have freedom [to create], but we are also the creation of the whole past. [...] Be modern, but you can't ignore the history. [...] History gives us a soul. Today, art is also a product of this development (interview, 21 April 2020).

The history of SŠOF at the location with a considerable "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1984) is via such narratives translated into personal biographies of students, who show pride that they were part of this environment. A former graphic design student mentioned:

I think you find it [Križanke] even more fascinating through the years since you grow up and learn more about its history. During the first year, I was amazed by these old thick walls and [modern] chairs that just didn't fit [stylistically, with the old building]. [...] I think the charm [of Križanke] comes with time (20 March 2020).

At the same time, students share stories about themselves as students of a particular school. One of the student interlocutors described that for her, the courtyard and the industrial workshop at Križanke were spaces for socializing between students of different departments and ages, which stimulated a feeling of community. In these locations, they exchanged experiences about various classes, professors, and life outside the school. While stories cannot completely alter the sensory experience of space, they can significantly impact it. Moreover, they also influence how one is supposed to act in a particular place as a student of a specific school; hence they stimulate an ideological process of place attachment (Cross 2015).

### **Comparing Križanke with the Second School Location – Roška**

As mentioned in the introduction, SŠOF holds part of its classes at another location, at a Secondary School of Economics Ljubljana, at Roška street, which by students is colloquially called "Roška". In my conversations with students and professors, Roška turned out to be a very differently perceived built environment from Križanke, a topic which I examine in this article. Besides, Roška served my interlocutors as a comparison, or the Other (cf. Barth 1969), that helped articulate their feelings towards Križanke, mainly because the students move

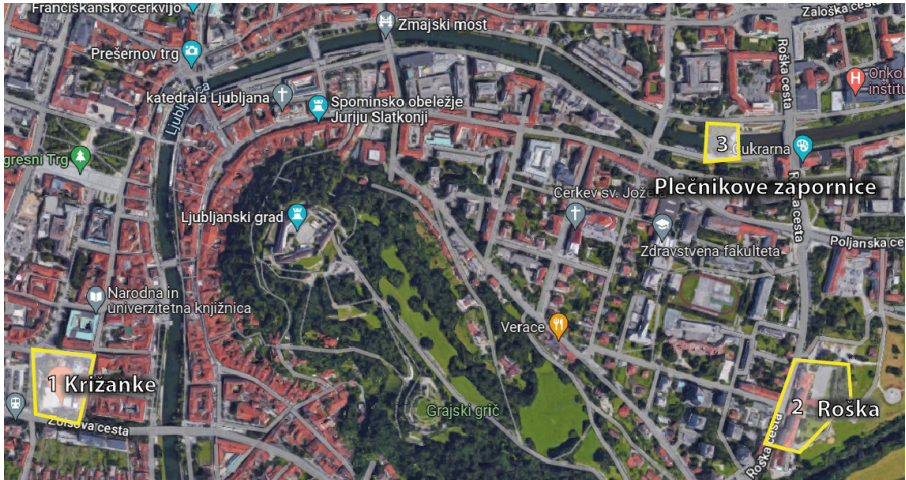


Figure 7. Map of Ljubljana with Križanke (number 1), Roška (number 2), and Plečnik's floodgates (number 3). Author of labels on the map: Anuša Babuder, 2022.  
Source: Google Maps 2022.

from one location to the other on a weekly, sometimes daily basis. In other words, since feelings of place attachment are sometimes hard to articulate (Cross 2015), Roška significantly helped with their observations because it provided a contrast.

Significant architectural differences exist between the two schools, and what students encounter at both locations has an essential role in their formation of place attachment. Križanke is a historical landmark of Ljubljana's city centre, a cultural event venue and a unique architectural complex, which gives it the above-examined vibrancy. Roška, on the other hand, is positioned on the other side of the city, outside the city centre (see space number 2 in Figure 7). In its vicinity are a high school dorm (Dijaški dom Ivana Cankarja), a few natural science schools, and Ljubljana's main medical centre and apartment buildings. The art restoration centre of the Public Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for the Protection of Cultural Heritage is 200 meters away, yet it does not contribute much in itself to the overall atmosphere of the location, although a few SŠOF students occasionally visit it as part of their classes. A former student of art studies described her contrasting feelings between the two locations in the following way:



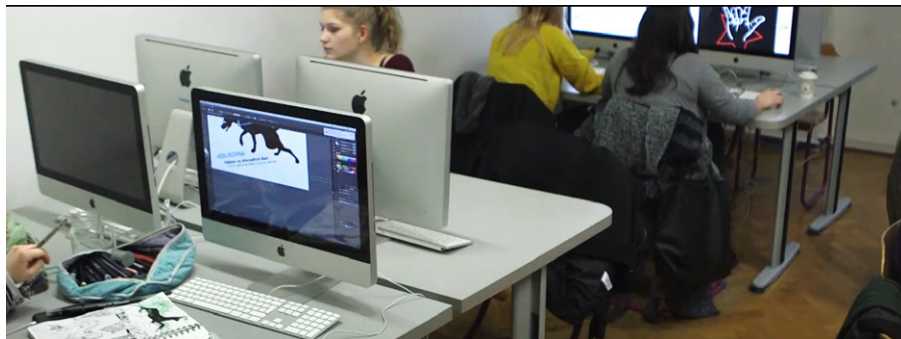


Figure 8. One of the computer rooms at Križanke, with tables set in groups of four. Caption from a YouTube video (“Grafično oblikovanje na SŠOF” 2018).

This probably goes for everyone who went to this school [ŠSOF], that Križanke feels incomparable [to Roška]. You just feel better when you have class there. It’s completely different to go to school when you know you’re going to Križanke, than when you have to go to Roška. Even the architecture at Roška ... it’s rectangular, completely ordinary. Križanke is a labyrinth. Completely different in every way. The classrooms are more spacious at Roška, but you cannot beat Križanke (interview, 20 March 2020).

Roška is a renovated military building from the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (late 19th century). It is a long rectangular building with identically shaped floors. Each floor has a long, spacious hallway running through it, with around 15 classrooms on one side and five classrooms on the other. These have high ceilings, are spacious, and nearly identical, with a typical setup of a blackboard, chairs, and tables for 30–35 students. Nevertheless, students’ artworks, either hung or painted on the walls, bring some colour to these classrooms. Only two drawing ateliers stand out from the overall monotony of the school. For comparison, classrooms at Križanke are generally smaller than those at Roška. There are only three or four identical classrooms with approximately the same dimension, and similar layout of the desks and chairs. Although small, classrooms at Križanke usually hosted a minimum of 30 students, which generated a crowded space, while Roška felt “spacious” to students. Classrooms at Križanke also differ in how they are used and equipped. A former graphic design student recalled that in a computer room (see Figure 8), desks were arranged so

that students could communicate: “I liked that we could face each other there, which means we could talk a lot and be more relaxed” (interview, 26 March 2020). At Roška, which in the students’ opinion is a more “typical” school environment, students found comparatively less flexibility with classrooms and layouts.

SŠOF was not the only school using the building at Roška: the Secondary School for Economics occupied the ground and the first floor, while SŠOF used the second floor. The presence of another school was a key factor in SŠOF students’ experience of Roška. As far as stereotypes go, the students of these two schools could not be more opposite: art and economics. Since my task is not to deconstruct this stereotype, I rather observed it in action during my fieldwork at Roška. For example, the class breaks were scheduled differently for the two schools, and it was hinted that this was partly due to the school’s efforts to avoid too much contact between the two groups of students. When the breaks did overlap, I observed that students of these schools occupied the space in front of the school differently and did not interact. Ljubljana can have pleasant weather in spring and autumn, so students at Roška often spent their lunch breaks outdoors. The area in front of the building included green surfaces with a basketball court, a few benches below trees, and a smoking area. The observations showed that the economics students mostly dwelled next to the school’s entrance, whereas SŠOF students sat around the basketball court. They sometimes mixed on the benches under the trees but avoided interacting.

How to explain this relationship of avoidance? The fact that SŠOF was a “guest” at Roška, while the Secondary School for Economics had “its location” there, certainly contributed to the feeling of SŠOF students that they did not belong there: “Because we shared it [Roška] with the economics students, it felt like: ‘Okay, we definitely do not belong here!’” (interview with a former graphic design student, 23 May 2022). However, this feeling of not belonging was also related to the space itself, whose stern military architecture was perceived by SŠOF students as strict and odd compared Križanke:

At Roška, I really felt like I enrolled in a standard high school, and I had to study, a very military feel, like an institution. [...] At Križanke it was, of course, completely different. Even when you first stepped in, it was like: “wow, art, inspiration...” It was just so much better. It felt more easy-going. You didn’t feel the pressure, you just enjoyed the school, as it should be (interview with a former graphic design student, 23 May 2022).

Roška sharply contrasted the unconventional and labyrinthine space at Križanke, to which students attributed feelings of freedom and creativity. In the words of a student: “There is no creativity [at Roška]” (20 March 2020). Professor IK, who spends a relatively equal amount of time at Roška and Križanke, described his impression of students’ relationship to one location and the other:

Students never really took Roška to their liking. As professors, we find this not as stimulating and inspiring as the environment of the old town centre. First, we are further away from institutions such as the galleries, which is very important. We find it harder to go to exhibitions. But we have these neighbours here [arts restoration centre – see above]. Instead of drawing the architecture of Križanke, which is very interesting, we go to the Ljubljanica River to draw the perspective of Plečnik’s floodgates [see number 2 in Figure 7). You know, we adapt. But the real spirit, the real one, has never been here. Also, this combination with the economics school is entirely different [from SŠOF]. [I think] it is because of all this history [at Križanke], probably some remnant, symbolism [...] of how this building was built, how these spaces were [used in the past] (interview with prof. IK, 27 May 2020).

Unlike students who, according to the collected responses, strongly feel the difference between the learning process and the sense of place between Križanke and Roška, some professors expressed the opinion that there is no difference at one location and the other because professionally there should not be one. Prof. AB and prof. IP emphasized that the integrity of imparting quality knowledge should not depend on location but on the teaching person.

In this section, we have learned that a significantly different school environment enhanced place attachment and belonging to Križanke. While Roška has a very classical, uniform school architecture, Križanke is an old and unique building in the city centre, surrounded by historically significant spots. At Roška, moreover, students felt like “guests” of a very differently oriented high school, while at Križanke, they felt “at home” and “accepted”. These also meant that as art students, they could appear a bit different in dressing and behaviour from the economics students, as doing so was more acceptable at Križanke than at Roška.

## Does Space Shape the Learning Experience?

Students and professors maintained that visual, sound, and other sensory experiences as well as the stories about Križanke made it for them a unique and creative learning environment. So far, the impact of formal education spaces on the learning experience has not received much anthropological attention. Outside anthropology (with the exception of Rainbow et al. 2008), issues like the effects of classroom design on learning have been covered mainly by pedagogy experts and design researchers (Hertzberger 2008; Smith Taylor 2008; Byers and Imms 2014), whose findings I will use to make sense of what teachers and students were experiencing at Križanke.

Professor MR has been teaching at the SŠOF school for over 30 years. Her mission has been to learn and connect with students with a great love for art and life. In our conversation, prof. MR instantly emphasized that the very shape of space transforms the learning experience and the “feel” of the school. According to her, spending time in the old corridors of Križanke, drawing in a small circle of students in the atelier, and the meeting and mixing of students from different modules of study in classrooms could not have happened if Križanke had a “uniform” shape (interview, 21 April 2020). She often used the word “democratic” when describing her perspective on the way Križanke functioned, which is, according to her, the necessary feature for the education of future artists and “free people” (ibid.). As was shown above, current and former SŠOF students also expressed that Križanke allowed them to be more creative. The school is made by people, not just space (Hertzberg 2008, 69), but how SŠOF used the space at Križanke was generally perceived by students as dynamic and unique. This experience was emphasized especially in relation to the architecture of Roška:

When you walk into Križanke, you know that this space is full of inspiration and creativity, where you can express yourself [...]. There was always a more relaxed feeling at Križanke [than at Roška], you never felt any pressure [...] (interview with a graphic design student, 17 April 2020).

According to prof. MR, the configuration of space at Križanke directly enables more open communication between professors and students, consequently creating a more relaxed learning environment. This was also an observation of prof. GC (a member of the school board who is also a former student of the





Figure 9. The computer room at Križanke is mainly used by the photography class students. Caption from a YouTube video (“Fotografija na SŠOF” 2018).

school). For him, Križanke disrupts the idea of what conventional teaching should look like, as it allows more dynamic and democratic interactions (interview, 22 April 2020).

Prof. MR gave an example of this spatial “democracy” with the ateliers (drawing rooms) where students placed their chairs and equipment in a circle, establishing a different type of communication between them and the professor. A former graphic design student offered a similar view: “I liked our ateliers because we sat in a circle, it felt freer, and I didn’t feel like we were being supervised or controlled by the professors” (interview, 26 May 2020). She felt similar about the computer classroom, where students sat around desks in groups of four (see Figure 8), which permitted easier collaboration among students. According to her, that kind of spatial arrangement created the “best atmosphere” (interview, 26 May 2020). Another example is the photography classroom, which has tables for students positioned only beside the walls, with one large common table for collaboration in the middle (see Figure 9).

Ateliers were also present at Roška, but the interlocutors rarely felt as good there as at Križanke. Students often complained about Roška's long high corridor connecting the entire floor. Since it runs straight through the building, students have described it as "unpleasant" and "uncomfortable". An association could be made to the (Bentham's) panopticon discussed by Michel Foucault (1977), with the Roška hallway's shape exposing students to professors and other students at any spot across the floor. In contrast, Križanke was valued as a labyrinth with twisted and narrow corridors, and probably nobody there felt exposed. A professor of art history sees this spatial quality that can be experienced at Križanke as an alternative to standard classroom designs:

The point is that the way schools are designed almost everywhere is a disaster to me. This [Roška school] square, uniform shape, where you enter, and already there are classrooms, has this strict order. Križanke offers something different. You need a free, playful space when you are an artist or a researcher. It is not a uniform space. And we always have a great time here, just because it's a space full of freedom, [but] it doesn't mean that we don't take things seriously here. A space like this [dynamic Križanke space] can significantly affect a person. You pleasantly cross between floors and hallways, as every one of them is entirely different. You just don't have that uniform geometry [like at Roška]. It seems to me that this would also be a task for the future, for schools to be designed a little differently (interview with prof. MR, 21 April 2020).

Comparing my ethnographic material with research focusing on the impact of space on learning, it becomes clear that SŠOF unintentionally achieved something pedagogy experts and designers have just started to experiment with. The above descriptions of Križanke fit into the definition of "studio space", a concept currently being introduced into some universities worldwide (Smith Taylor 2008). Namely, a "studio space" does not impose the hierarchy of the "front" (professor) vs. the classroom (students) but promotes a feeling of democracy and freedom (Dittoe and Porter 2007, after Smith Taylor 2008, 218), exactly like my interlocutors described SŠOF classrooms throughout our conversations. SŠOF spontaneously created such classrooms due to both Križanke's lack of space and its unique layout, both of which demanded experimentation with classroom setups.

Moreover, place attachment also contributed to the creative atmosphere students felt at Križanke. The feeling of being part of Križanke and thus connected to art history and cultural life in the city, the freedom to roam the

city centre and the embeddedness of school into the old built environment of Ljubljana – these were all factors that strengthened the students’ bonds with Križanke, which positively contributed to their learning experience there. They perceived it as *their* place (especially after the risk of losing it), which increased their engagement in the school’s activities.

Professors who argued that the quality of teaching should not depend on location (see above) may disagree, but in the end, it is difficult to deny the impact of the atmosphere created by Križanke space on students’ learning experience (Casey 1996, 24; Miller 1998). Likewise, the latest research on the effects of space on education confirms that: “physical space is directly related to human perception and well-being” (Gregorski, Nardoni Kovač and Zaviršek Hudnik 2019, 15; cf. Ingold 2000, 2018). This is why the professors did everything they could to bring Roška closer to students, to “make them feel more at home” (interview with prof. IK, 27 May 2020), but in the end only Križanke managed to create a distinct sense of place and belonging to the built environment among students and professors alike. Students clearly expressed a desire to learn and work at one location (Križanke) over the other (Roška).

Spatial factors that I have detected with this research impacted day-to-day life at SŠOF and the students’ overall learning experience. I demonstrated a complex interrelatedness between a sense of place, narration of place, and attachment to place in a school context. This allowed me to expand on the concept of place attachment, specifically through sensorial, spiritual, and ideological processes of place attachment (Cross 2015). For further research on this topic, I would explore the relationship between resistance to the powers that be and the place attachment of students and professors at SŠOF in the context of the heightened sense of threat of losing “their” place. In the future, a comparative analysis of different formal education spaces and their manifold impacts on learning outcomes and the well-being of students could be a critical anthropological contribution to the planning of education.

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