

Proof of Residence

A selection of poems
for Placemaking Week Europe
2026 in Wrocław

by Ramon Marrades

placemaking ■ europe

Wrocław *the meeting place*

These words were written for the plenaries of Placemaking Week Europe 2026 in Wrocław. Together, the six spoken pieces follow a human journey through a city: arriving without knowing its codes, growing curious, experiencing friction, trying things out, putting down roots, and wondering what it means to belong.

Four extra unpublished pieces extend that journey through language, friendship, loss, and the pleasure of seeing a city from the water. I hope this collection holds a memory of our time together in Wrocław and opens more conversations about how we live in common.

Ramon Marrades,
Wrocław, September 2026

Arrival

Nothing is given.
Not the bus stop,
not the joke,
not the right way to say sorry
when your mouth is still carrying
another city.

You learn the way first
by watching.

How close to stand.
Which door opens.
Who looks away.
How long a silence can last
before it becomes rude.

At the counter
you count coins too slowly.

Behind you
someone sighs
with the full authority
of the queue.

You smile too much.
Then not enough.
Then at the wrong dog.

The street keeps testing you.

A woman with shopping bags
moves her elbow
so you can pass.

A man selling empanadas
explains the price twice,
not angry,
just tired of being misunderstood
in three languages before lunch.

And somewhere
a child translates for his mother
with the serious face
of a tiny lawyer.

You arrived.

By the third week
you know the cheap dinner.

Seven euros.

Chicken, bread,
a plastic chair,
a television shouting
above everyone's heads.

You eat slowly.

Around you,
mostly men with missing teeth.

They nod as if allowing you
to be hungry
in peace.

Curiosity

I have started smiling at dogs before people which may be a failure of politics
or just the easiest way to practise tenderness in a neighbourhood
where nobody owes me a story and every sunny spot is busy
with men outside on a Tuesday leaning into the day
as if all the watches were broken

There is a bike repair shop run by a man who looks angry at bicycles
and two carpenters beside a boxing gym and bakeries so good
that bread is what it used to be before counting calories
and not a single decent kebab which is a problem but not the main problem

The parks are beautiful from a distance and the playgrounds are broken up close
which is maybe one way of describing a city that has forgotten how to repair itself
children still run through the dark between benches and scooters
their shouting rising over the traffic
something nobody has managed to privatise yet

I keep counting bingos and evangelical churches and I am not sure who is winning
or if winning is the wrong word for places where people go
when money and salvation have both become local services
there are shops missing signs
and women carrying bags with the patience of bridges

I walk slowly because curiosity is only decent when it is unarmed
when it knows it can be wrong about what it sees
when it lets the neighbourhood remain more than evidence
more than decline or colour or authenticity or warning
just this street

A Ferry

A ferry is public transport
with imperial dignity.

Between two nodes
of a metropolitan area
there are firs,
cedars,
coves,
bridges,
a military ship,
three houses
that seem to have chosen
the wrong century.

The route is not drawn
on asphalt.

It leaves and disappears.

A ferry carries
cars,
bicycles,
children,
commuters,
shopping bags,
a man asleep
before the engine starts.

So much weight
moving so slowly.

You wait.
You board.
You wait again.

No traffic light.
No tunnel.
No lane
cut through the forest.

Just a device
moving between stations
through an ecosystem.

For forty minutes
the transport map
and the landscape
are the same map.

So inefficient.
So efficient.

It carries a city
slowly enough
to let you see
where the city is.

Friction

Why is the weather the only decent thing to say in an elevator
as if the sky performed only for people trapped between floors
shoulder to shoulder with their keys in their hands
all of us pretending the mirror has not made the tiny room worse

In the metro you learn the city by colour or by number
by where to stand and where not to put your bag
by the woman who gives up her seat before anyone asks
and the man who looks away so hard it becomes a second body

At the municipality office you learn stamp by stamp
by forms with no shape and questions with no answer
by the civil servant who says system without looking up
as if the system was a weather event passing through his mouth

You bring your body your rent your name your voice
and still the city asks for another paper
another appointment another morning removed from your life
very little service very little civil very little civilisation

A baby cries and I do not mind
a tired man coughs into his sleeve and I do not mind
someone's phone starts screaming a song then a voice then a laugh then a war
every five seconds another private room spills open into ours

I want to ask when everyone forgot their headphones
when did the small mercy of not being heard become optional
when did your scroll become weather
when did my nervous system become part of your contract

Still we keep moving closer and away from each other
with bags and elbows and apologies we do not always mean
the old work of sharing air
without becoming family

Jurisdictions

Some languages arrive before you choose them. One from home.
Another from school. One you learn in a city you are only passing
through. Then one for work. Another for love.

At first, a sentence has a layover inside your head before
it reaches your mouth. It loses its luggage. Changes gates.
Sometimes it arrives late to the conversation.

Then you stop translating
and start making mistakes directly.

The accent stays. So do some prepositions. One consonant
refuses the new passport, but the language can now enter
without showing papers.

The strangest thing is not being able to think in three languages.

It is being subject
to three jurisdictions.

In one language, you never swear. In another, sweetness only
comes out disguised as a joke. In one, you are patient with
waiters and excessively polite with people at work. In another,
you interrupt, exaggerate, and place your hand on the arm of
whoever is speaking.

Only in one language
do you know how to apologise sincerely.

And in another
how to explain the optimisation
of a bus line's frequency.

The language of work granted you action verbs, deadlines, and a
voice that does not hesitate at the end of sentences.

The language of home still asks
why you are back so late.

In one, you are a gentleman.

In another, a miserable man.

They live in the same mouth
without ever having met.

Trying

Try the soup.
Too hot.
Too sour.
Too full of herbs
you do not know
by name.

Try again.

Try the word.
Put it in your mouth.
Move it around.
Spit it out badly.
Laugh.
Let them laugh.

Try again.

Try the new friend.
Not the best friend.
Not the life witness.
Not the person
who will understand
your childhood
by instinct.

Just coffee.
Just a walk.
Just someone
who also came
because the city
had one more chair.

Try the new skin.
The coat
you would not wear
back home.
The haircut.
The shoes.
The face
that appears
after three months
of being misunderstood
and does not apologise
as quickly.

Try the job.
The desk.
The apron.
The badge.
The password.
The boss
who says team
and means hurry.

Try the small lie:
yes,
I know how this works.

Try the truth:
no,
I do not.

Try the food again.
This time
with your hands.
This time
without asking
what is inside.
This time
because hunger
is older than fear.

Try the city.
Not all of it.
Not forever.
Not to prove
that you are brave.

Just this door.
This plate.
This name.
This person.

Rooting

You do not plant a root.
You repeat a route.

The same corner.
The same shop.
The door that sticks.
The bar still loud
when the shutters come down.

You acquire a key,
a shortcut,
an opinion
about the square.

Then someone asks for directions.

You point
before they finish.

Emergency Contact

There is very little literature about divorcing a friend. In literature, friendship rarely has texture or temperature. No one remembers a friend's perfume or notices that their voice has dropped a semitone.

Friendship seems like affection after an audit: sober, reciprocal, reasonable.

Whatever you need.

Most of all, that.

Whatever you need.

Closeness without presence.

For years, you were the emergency contact. A role with no salary, no hours, no selection process. There is no notification when you stop performing it.

You still appear somewhere between blood type and allergies, while the friendship is kept up to date with a meme every three months.

Then a partner arrives.

With a toothbrush, a charger, and first claim on your time.

The friendship does not complain.

It waits.

Like a cactus.

A cactus does not live without water. It survives by slowly using up what it stored the last time it was watered.

Up for a beer today?

There is no need to mention the breakup. You can hear it in the urgency with which the plural returns.

Eighteen months.

In that time: an album, a move, and three hospital visits they know nothing about.

Up for a beer today?

Load the saved game.

Press continue.

Opting Out

Proof of residence
and your name on the mailbox.

And still,
you keep opting out.

First, of a friend.

No lawyers.
No dividing up the Saturdays.

Each of you keeps
your version of events
and a proportional share
of the friends you had in common.

Divorces of speech.

A language you still know,
but keep on airplane mode.

It could still find you,
but its messages
no longer come through.

It keeps the last version
of you it managed to download.

You also cancel
dozens of songs.

Not because of the lyrics:

because of the pieces of yourself
you keep insisting
you no longer are.

And there is a street
your phone keeps suggesting
as the shortest route.

You go around it.

You add seven minutes
to the journey.

Seven minutes
to avoid another life.

All your weight
on the pavement.

So little of you
left in public

Belonging

You walk a little lighter.

Strange,
how the surest step
can weigh the least.

There are songs in your head.
Nothing important.
Something you forgot you knew.

The trees look like tall dancers.
Rain no longer threatens.
It feeds things.

Even the grey
seems to know when to leave.

You notice things now.

A tram arriving
when the screen says it will.

A bench
where someone might need a bench.

Enough earth around a tree
for it not to look apologetic.

Perhaps rooting
is not growing down
but needing less
to leave.

At home
we would have parked on this.

At home
someone would have paved over that.

At home
four minutes late
does not qualify as late.

We should copy this.
And this.
Almost all of it.

You begin collecting evidence
against the place you came from.

Then,
somewhere between admiration
and complaint,
you say
at home
and have to think
which one.



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