

PLACEMAKING IN DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract:

The widespread use of modern technology has transformed the way people interact with their local communities and surroundings, often leading to a detachment from physical places and communities. As a result, there is a risk of losing a sense of belonging and identity, and this can have long-term implications for the unification of values. Therefore, it is essential to involve local communities in identifying and preserving their historical heritage and community values, which can promote local tourism and attract people to specific places.

Digital placemaking is a promising approach to achieve this, as it involves the use of GIS-based platforms and other digital tools to blend the physical and digital environments and involve local communities. However, the implementation of digital placemaking strategies must consider the unique local circumstances of each community to be successful.

This article examines the key characteristics and configurations of digital placemaking tools in three historical districts of Taipei, Riga, and Kaunas. The aim is to test the effectiveness of digital placemaking in engaging and empowering local communities to preserve and promote their heritage and values. By

doing so, the article aims to demonstrate the potential of digital placemaking in preserving local identity and promoting tourism.

In summary, the article emphasizes the importance of preserving historical heritage and community values, especially in the context of the increasing use of modern technology. It highlights digital placemaking as a potential solution to this issue and underscores the need for customized approaches that consider the unique characteristics of each community.

Introduction:

In recent years, placemaking projects have emerged as collaborative efforts to enhance urban environments by fostering a connection between people and the spaces they inhabit. Public spaces are central to these initiatives, as they serve as a hub for community interaction and activity. The design of physical space has always been recognized as a factor influencing social dynamics. Research has shown that the layout of cities, neighborhoods, public spaces, and buildings has a direct impact on how different communities interact with one another.

In today's digital age, technology has transformed the way in which societies experience physical spaces and has the potential to influence placemaking processes. Smartphones and other technologies have made it easy to access data about a place and facilitate instant communication across the world. Social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook have significantly impacted social behaviors and created new cultural norms at various scales. Scholars suggest that digital technology's portrayal of a place can determine its development direction.

This paper examines how placemaking is influenced not only by a space's physical characteristics but also by its presence on digital media, such as social media. Places are continuously observed and represented on open-source platforms like Instagram, making them significant sources of information for placemaking processes. The paper discusses ways in which the embedded physical-digital features of public spaces can help architects, urbanists, stakeholders, and communities develop successful approaches to placemaking.

The Idea and Challenges of Placemaking in the Twenty-First Century

The concept of placemaking has emerged as a process to improve the quality of life in urban environments by encouraging community interaction and shaping the physical environment. It involves collaborative,

multidisciplinary processes that aim to revitalize communities and their built environments, but has also received criticism for potential gentrification. However, with well-thought-out socioeconomic and planning measures, placemaking can improve the quality of the environment and the lives of its inhabitants without displacing communities. Methodological frameworks for placemaking initiatives have been developed based on scoring tools that measure different environmental, social, and economic indicators. The influence of physical design and digital media on the movement and interactions of people in urban environments remains relatively unexplored within these frameworks. The Project for Public Spaces (pps) has developed a relevant framework for this study that takes into consideration social indicators of success such as activities, linkages, comfort, and sociability of public spaces.



The Relevance of Physical Space in a Digital Era

Numerous studies have emphasized the importance of physical space in shaping social interactions in urban and architectural environments. This is because people tend to exchange meaningful ideas with each other in environments that are meaningful to them at an intuitive level. Placemaking initiatives aim to improve

community practices by redesigning the physical infrastructure of a place, which can generate description retrieval and enhance attachment, emotions, and social collaborations among people. It is important to note that places are not isolated entities, but are influenced by larger systems such as urban neighborhoods and the whole city. Therefore, characteristics such as the mixture of morphology, functions, and socioeconomic features in certain urban areas have a direct impact on the production and reproduction of different social practices. At a micro scale, the design layout of specific public spaces and buildings also has significant relevance in strengthening a community and promoting interactions among its members. For example, inclusive urban furniture that allows for a range of different uses and activities can alter how communities perceive and engage with the place and each other. Design configurations at both macro and micro scales can generate various interpersonal encounters, which have a significant impact on people's movements and interactions and the environmental quality of urban spaces. Therefore, physical space should always be considered an essential feature for successful placemaking initiatives.



Granary Square , London , United Kingdom

The Role of Digital Media in Urban Processes

The increasing prevalence of digital media and devices must be taken into account when studying urban processes, as they are generating new forms of social dynamics in the built environment. Digital urban media refers to media technologies that can influence the experience of a physical location, and smartphones are a prime example of this, as they modify human routines and allow for faster and broader communication beyond physical interaction. Although some argue that digital devices do not change the physical environment, they allow for the sharing of information, which can influence social actions. Moreover, digital media and physical space have a continuous dialogue, as seen in the concept of "smart cities," which combine information technology with infrastructure to address social, economic, and environmental problems. Digital media technologies are considered vital features in creating opportunities for social contact and researching the key social processes of cities in real-time. However, it is debatable how useful digital media is, but it does allow for more immediate access to communication channels and multiple sources of geolocated information, which can reinvent urban settlements from the bottom up. Urban media is a multiplier in micro-scale community processes, and the ways in which digital media influences a place can determine its development. Therefore, it is essential to consider digital media as a feature embedded in any placemaking project.

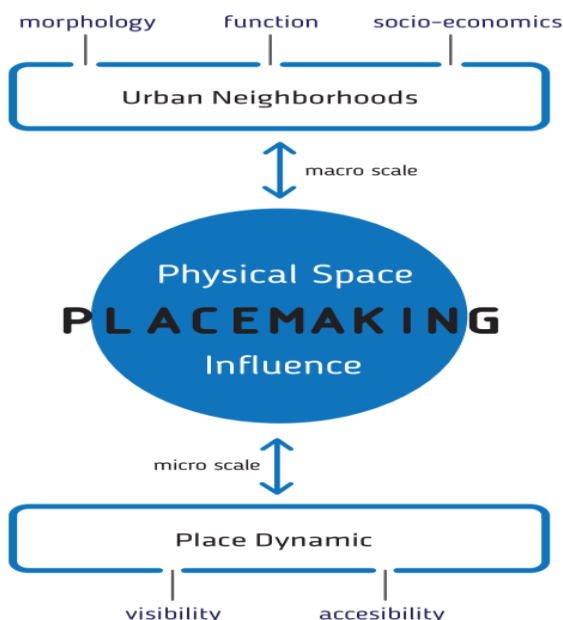


Diagram of the influence of physical space in placemaking

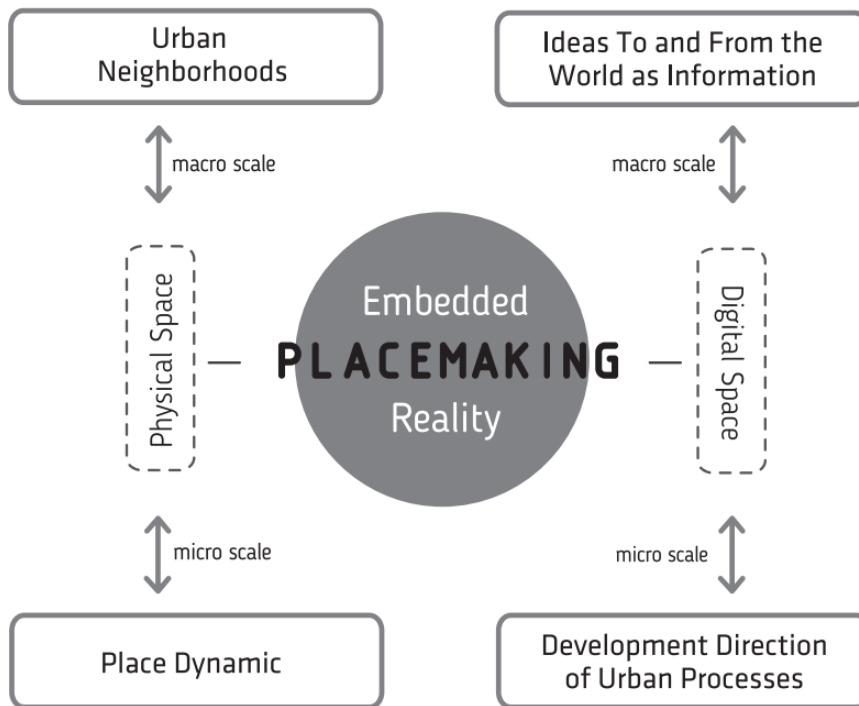


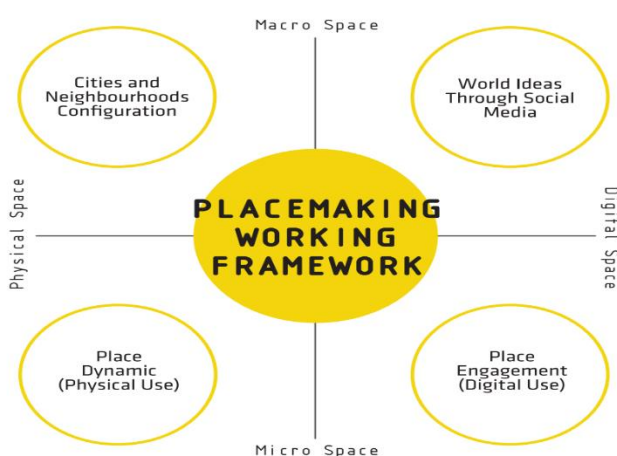
Diagram of the influence of physical/digital embedded space in placemaking

The Opportunities of Social Media for Placemaking

Digital media and devices are having a significant impact on urban processes, generating new social dynamics within the built environment. Smartphones are a prime example, allowing people to modify their everyday routines by searching for, receiving, and sharing information about their urban surroundings. The influence of digital media on the physical environment is not yet widely studied, but it is clear that these devices allow for the sharing of information and ideas, influencing social actions. Digital media has recently been considered at a macro city-scale with the concept of "smart cities," where information technology is combined with infrastructure, architecture, and everyday objects to address social, economic, and environmental problems. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok are especially effective in placemaking. They allow people to exchange information about urban and architectural environments, mobilizing their activities without physical support and influencing cultural and economic actions. Social media works as an interface to provide aggregate social power and significance to the community during the process of sharing ideas. Instagram, with its emphasis on visual communication through images, provides insights into what people find culturally interesting in urban settings. It exemplifies the argument that placemaking happens not only through physical experience, but also through the way these urban places are visualized on social media platforms.

Digital Urban Strategies for Placemaking Projects

Urban design projects have implemented innovative communication methods between physical and digitally-mediated spaces. These projects have been initiated by entrepreneurs, tech startups, universities, local authorities, and even residents of small communities. The goals of these urban strategies are two-fold: to direct urban settlements more efficiently through top-down strategies, and to empower citizens with new technological forms of cooperation through bottom-up strategies. Placemaking projects have incorporated embedded digital technologies, such as media architectural interfaces, which are digital screens located on building facades or entrances. These screens interact with urban users through digital interactions and change urban environments according to an event or day of the year. For instance, the Viva Cidade Festival in Sao Paulo created a digital screen installation known as the Smart Citizen Sentiment Dashboard (scsd), which allowed city dwellers to express their feelings about urban problems through an interactive device on the street. The project generated a space for social expression and encounters and encouraged citizens to discuss the challenges of the city through a bottom-up digital strategy. Additionally, free wireless access points, Facebook, and Twitter channels were utilized as tools for people to share, inform themselves, and reflect on different interventions taking place across the city during the Brisbane ur[bne] Design Collective and Festival held in 2012. Social media added significance to the placemaking initiative during the festival by encouraging new face-to-face encounters and generating insightful digital connections between built environment professionals and residents who were not present during the events but were facilitated in real-time through the internet. These types of digital urban strategies reinforce the sense of community in the area or event for people with similar interests who are physically present as well as digitally connected.



Framework for the spatial study and planning of placemaking processes in the digital era

Conclusion

Placemaking is a collaborative process that involves transforming public spaces into vibrant and attractive places that enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors. It is a holistic approach that considers the physical, social, and cultural aspects of a place, with the goal of creating a sense of identity, belonging, and community. Placemaking involves engaging and involving the community in the design and development of public spaces to ensure that they are tailored to the needs, aspirations, and values of the local community.

Placemaking is not just about designing and building physical spaces. It is also about creating social connections and fostering a sense of community and ownership among the people who use and interact with those spaces. The success of placemaking initiatives is measured not only by the quality of the physical space but also by the vibrancy and diversity of the community that uses it.

Placemaking initiatives can take many forms, from small-scale community-led projects to large-scale urban redevelopment schemes. They can involve the creation of new public spaces or the revitalization of existing ones. Placemaking projects can also involve a range of stakeholders, including local residents, community groups, businesses, and government agencies.

In recent years, the role of digital technology has become increasingly important in placemaking initiatives. Digital technology can be used to enhance the physical space and provide new ways for people to engage with and experience public spaces. For example, digital screens and interactive displays can be used to provide information about local events and activities, while social media platforms can be used to connect people with similar interests and facilitate community engagement.

Overall, placemaking is a powerful tool for creating sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant public spaces that reflect the unique character and identity of the communities they serve. By involving the community in the design and development process and considering the physical, social, and cultural aspects of a place, placemaking can help to create places that are not only functional and aesthetically pleasing but also meaningful and engaging for the people who use them.

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