

Placemaking Review

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Placemaking

Placemaking is a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public space. It capitalizes on the local community's assets, inspiration and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health, happiness and well-being. In many cases public, private, non-profit, and a community all come together to shape a neighborhood, town, city or region that facilitates a creative pattern of activities and connections as cultural, economic, social and ecological that define a place and supports its ongoing evolution. (10) Reimagining a public space as the heart of a community strengthens the connection between people and the places they share. (2)

Placemaking really got started in the 1960's with idea of designing cities that catered to people, not just cars and shopping centers with focus on lively neighborhoods and inviting public spaces. The Project for Public Space (PPS) Placemaking process evolved out of their work with William "Holly" Whyte in the 1970s in New York City and still involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space, to discover their needs and aspirations. This information is then used to create a common vision for that place. The vision can evolve quickly into an implementation strategy, beginning with small-scale, do-able improvements that can immediately bring benefits to public spaces and the people who use them. Once you mention the term "Placemaking" it allows people to look with fresh eyes at the potential around them of their parks, downtowns, waterfronts, plazas, neighborhoods, streets, markets, campuses and public buildings with new excitement. (1)

Common problems like traffic-dominated streets, little-used parks, and isolated, underperforming development projects can be avoided by embracing the Placemaking perspective that views a place in its entirety, rather than zeroing in on isolated fragments of the whole. A Placemaking approach provides communities with the building blocks they need to revitalize their communities. (1) Native landscape often plays an important role in the design process. The public's attraction to the essential qualities of Placemaking will ensure that the place does not lose its original meaning. Making a place is not the same as constructing a building, designing a plaza, or developing a commercial zone. When people enjoy a place for its special social and physical attributes, and when they are allowed to influence decision-making about that space, then you see genuine Placemaking in action.

There are 11 key principles to transforming public places into community places set by PPS that are as follows: (3)

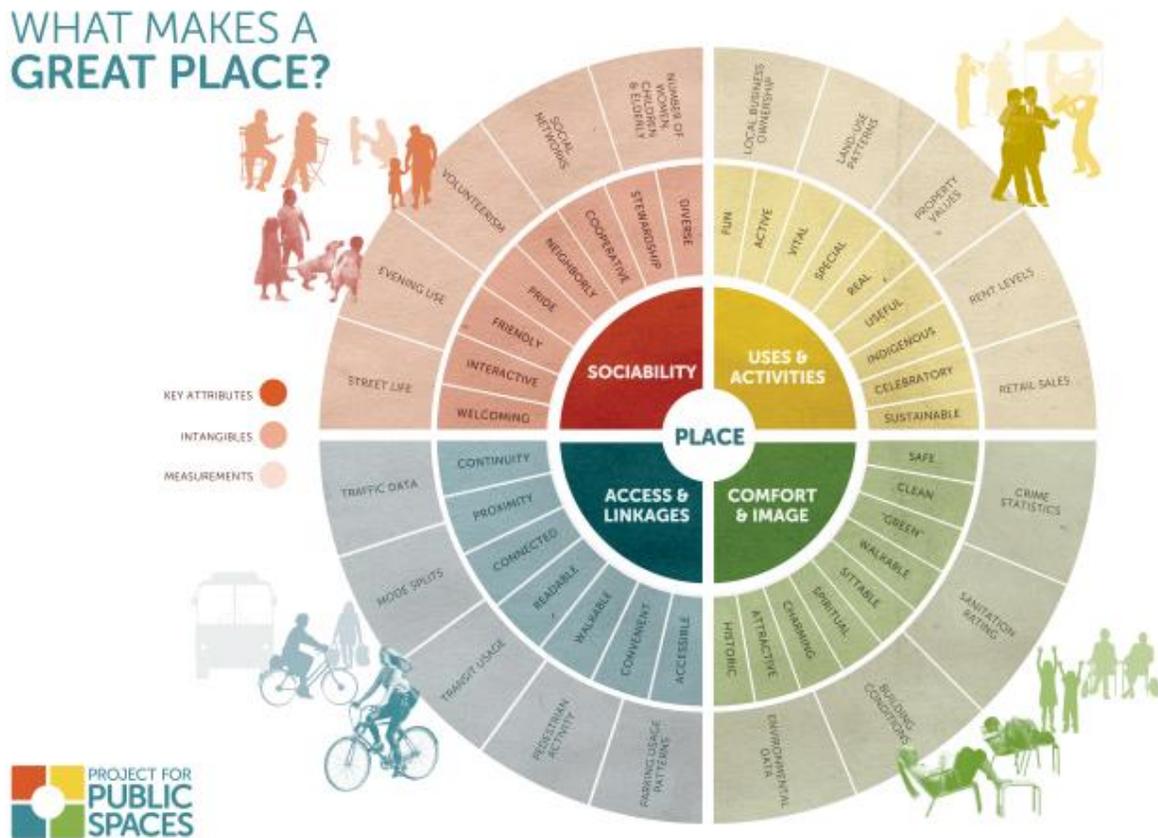
1. *THE COMMUNITY IS THE EXPERT.* The important starting point in developing a concept for any public space is to identify the talents and assets within the community. In any community there are people who can provide a historical perspective, valuable insights into how the area functions, and an understanding of the critical issues and what is meaningful to people. Tapping this information at the

- beginning of the process will help to create a sense of community ownership in the project that can be of great benefit to both the project sponsor and the community.
2. *CREATE A PLACE, NOT A DESIGN.* If your goal is to create a place, a design will not be enough. To make an under-performing space into a vital “place,” physical elements must be introduced that would make people welcome and comfortable, such as seating and new landscaping, and also through “management” changes in the pedestrian circulation pattern and by developing more effective relationships between the surrounding retail and the activities going on in the public spaces. The goal is to create a place that has both a strong sense of community and a comfortable image, as well as a setting and activities and uses that collectively add up to something more than the sum of its often simple parts. This is easy to say, but difficult to accomplish.
 3. *LOOK FOR PARTNERS.* Partners are critical to the future success and image of a public space improvement project. Whether you want partners at the beginning to plan for the project or you want to brainstorm and develop scenarios with a dozen partners who might participate in the future, they are invaluable in providing support and getting a project off the ground. They can be local institutions, museums, schools and others.
 4. *YOU CAN SEE A LOT JUST BY OBSERVING.* We can all learn a great deal from others’ successes and failures. By looking at how people are using (or not using) public spaces and finding out what they like and don’t like about them, it is possible to assess what makes them work or not work. Through these observations, it will be clear what kinds of activities are missing and what might be incorporated. And when the spaces are built, continuing to observe them will teach even more about how to evolve and manage them over time.
 5. *HAVE A VISION.* The vision needs to come out of each individual community. However, essential to a vision for any public space is an idea of what kinds of activities might be happening in the space, a view that the space should be comfortable and have a good image, and that it should be an important place where people want to be. It should instill a sense of pride in the people who live and work in the surrounding area.
 6. *START WITH THE PETUNIAS: LIGHTER, QUICKER, CHEAPER.* The complexity of public spaces is such that you cannot expect to do everything right initially. The best spaces experiment with short term improvements that can be tested and refined over many years! Elements such as seating, outdoor cafes, public art, striping of crosswalks and pedestrian havens, community gardens and murals are examples of improvements that can be accomplished in a short time.
 7. *TRIANGULATE.* “Triangulation is the process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other” (Holly Whyte). In a public space, the choice and arrangement of different elements in relation to each other can put the

- triangulation process in motion (or not). For example, if a bench, a wastebasket and a telephone are placed with no connection to each other, each may receive a very limited use, but when they are arranged together along with other amenities such as a coffee cart, they will naturally bring people together (or triangulate!). On a broader level, if a children's reading room in a new library is located so that it is next to a children's playground in a park and a food kiosk is added, more activity will occur than if these facilities were located separately.
8. *THEY ALWAYS SAY "IT CAN'T BE DONE"*. One of Yogi Berra's great sayings is "If they say it can't be done, it doesn't always work out that way," and we have found it to be appropriate for our work as well. Creating good public spaces is inevitably about encountering obstacles, because no one in either the public or private sectors has the job or responsibility to "create places." For example, professionals such as traffic engineers, transit operators, urban planners and architects all have narrow definitions of their job – facilitating traffic or making trains run on time or creating long term schemes for building cities or designing buildings. Their job, evident in most cities, is not to create "places." Starting with small scale community-nurturing improvements can demonstrate the importance of "places" and help to overcome obstacles.
 9. *FORM SUPPORTS FUNCTION*. The input from the community and potential partners, the understanding of how other spaces function, the experimentation, and overcoming the obstacles and naysayers provides the concept for the space. Although design is important, these other elements tell you what "form" you need to accomplish the future vision for the space.
 10. *MONEY IS NOT THE ISSUE*. This statement can apply in a number of ways. For example, once you've put in the basic infrastructure of the public spaces, the elements that are added that will make it work (e.g., vendors, cafes, flowers and seating) will not be expensive. In addition, if the community and other partners are involved in programming and other activities, this can also reduce costs. More important is that by following these steps, people will have so much enthusiasm for the project that the cost is viewed much more broadly and consequently as not significant when compared with the benefits.
 11. *YOU ARE NEVER FINISHED*. By nature good public spaces that respond to the needs, the opinions and the ongoing changes of the community require attention. Amenities wear out, needs change and other things happen in an urban environment. Being open to the need for change and having the management flexibility to enact that change is what builds great public spaces and great cities and towns.

The critical attributes to a great place are it should be have easy access and linkage through a variety of transportation methods. Second it should be comfortable, clean and safe environment. Third it needs to provide a variety of uses and activity to draw in local and outside

visitors. Fourth is sociability, when people see their friends and neighbors in the space and feel comfortable interacting with strangers they tend to feel a stronger sense of attachment to their community. The space should attract all people of ages, race and gender. For reference the image below shows how these components work together.

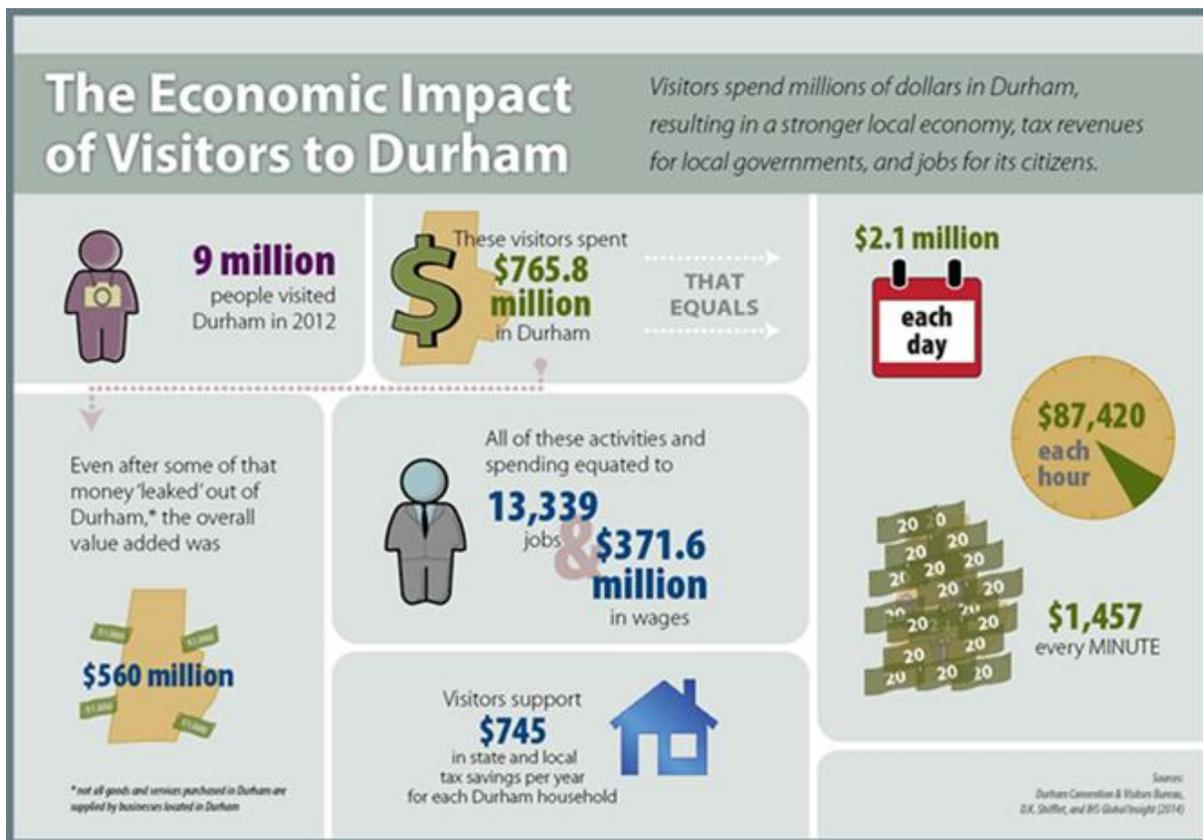


People naturally gravitate to beautiful urban parks for leisure, recreation and an escape from city life. This is reflected in the marketplace as increased property value, with those closest to the park being highest. Quality parks have the potential to move the commercial and residential markets and provide significant benefits for surrounding property owners, businesses, neighborhoods and cities as a whole. This jump in value can incentivize municipalities to build and maintain great city parks. Other benefits are realized through the increase of local services, payroll expenses, real estate transfers, sales taxes, wages and benefits. According to a new report from Public Sector Consultants (PSC), welcoming and diverse communities attract venture capital and create jobs. For example, the report found mixed-use, walkable developments generate 10 times as much tax revenue per acre, save almost 40 percent on up-front infrastructure costs, and result in about 10 percent lower service delivery costs than sprawl development. A reviewed study revealed properties in Delaware within 50 meters of a bike path averaged \$8,800 (about 4 percent) more than similar homes

further away.(5) Research shows that educational attainment is the strongest predictor of regional success. One study found that increasing four-year college attainment by one percent in the nation’s 51 largest metropolitan areas could increase the national per capita income by \$124 billion a year.(7) Evidence also shows that dense communities with talent can quickly attract more talent. A recent Brookings Institute study reports that between 2000 and 2009, the population of college educated young adults living near central business districts in the 51 largest metropolitan areas grew by 26 percent, which is double the growth of educated adults in other areas.(8) Similarly, downtowns with mixed-use, live-work development grew 77 percent faster in 2013 than the country as a whole.(9)

Great places draw people to them and spurs economic development attracting private investment both residential and commercial. Great parks attract people who bring money for entertainment and investment.(2) Tourists who visit a city for cultural activities spend more and stay longer than non-cultural tourists.

Illustration from Durham, NC below



Economic Development quickens because of arts and cultural investments, help a locality capture a larger share of expenditures from local income. (10) Instead of traveling elsewhere residents are patrons of local talent and venues earning that re-circulate at a higher rate in the local economy. These Placemaking projects also fosters entrepreneurs and cultural industries

that generate jobs and income, spin off new products and services and attract and retain unrelated businesses and skilled workers. (10) The big payoff is livability, diversity, jobs and income produced by Placemaking.

Cities all over the country and world participate in Placemaking. Some North Carolina cities that have focused on Placemaking are Chapel Hill, Fayetteville, Wilson and Durham are among a few. Greenville has Town Commons a natural landscaped area with waterfront, where investments may attract locals and tourists with culture, music, arts as well as spur further private development in our Uptown bringing new vibrancy and life to our city. More people will want to work, live and play in our Uptown making it the strong heart of our city.

While the debate about the economic value of Placemaking varies greatly, one particular commonality is that Placemaking does positively impact the community and in many cases has a positive impact on the local economy. Here are a few specific examples that illustrate positive impacts in other locations.

In Discovery Green (park in Houston, TX) as soon as plans for the park were announced, a new high-rise residential building, One Park Place, was proposed by a local developer. The building, with 21,000 feet of retail and 345 apartments, represents approximately \$145 million of new investment. Last March, a new \$300 million office building and retail center, Discovery Tower, broke ground on the north side of the park. Further, the city and Houston Endowment are partnering on an RFP for a new convention hotel on the last remaining empty block alongside the park, opposite the existing Hilton Hotel. Current estimates are for a project that will be in the \$350-400 million range.(6)



Jackson Square (park in New Orleans, LA) is the centerpiece of New Orleans' French Quarter. Bordered on one side by the main street of the historic district and surrounded by a



mix of uses—including restaurants, retail, offices, residences, and a church—the park manages to retain its grace and calm amidst all the surrounding activity. In fact, the park’s periphery, or “outer park,” is what successfully integrates the inner park into the city fabric. (4)

Though in some areas with developing a park into a Placemaking spot comes concerns from longtime residents of the

surrounding areas about the economic impact it will have. In Chicago they turned an old rail line into a trail known as the 606 or Bloomingdale Trail, it stretched by some low to moderate income neighborhoods raising concerns of gentrification. In a brief interview when the 606 opened, with Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel focused on how the new trail would unite four neighborhoods that have been historically divided by the defunct rail line corridor. In terms of economic impact, the mayor said property values near the trail were already rising three years ago. "For the people who have property there, that's a good thing," Emanuel said. "Increased housing values are not a bad thing." Still, the mayor acknowledged residents' concerns about



being priced out of their neighborhoods. (11) In a more recent study published in the journal *Environment and Behavior* of the 606 and helped reduce crime in neighborhoods closest to the trail. (12). Even with public concerns The 606 had a positive impact on the surrounding neighborhoods and residents in the long term.

In closing Placemaking has a positive impact on community

development and oftentimes economic development.

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