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Introduction

Placemaking – a concept, methodology and planning tool used to shape and reshape public spaces[1] – is an enduring element of urban planning. One of the earliest scholarly mentions of placemaking appears in Relph's (1976) *Place and Placelessness*, in which the geographer explores the urban conditions under which "places are made, and on what grounds these might be considered authentic or contrived" (Relph, 2016).

In this commentary, we provide a brief overview of placemaking, paying particular attention to the temporal and spatial evolution of placemaking as a planning concept that has circulated globally. Demonstrating ongoing interest in the value and possibility of placemaking, we delve into new directions in research and practice that touch upon the challenges and opportunities in placemaking as a result of four 'post' discourses: post-capitalism, post-liberalism, post-pandemic and post-truth. We conclude with a discussion of placemaking's relevance to the future of planning.

Placemaking spans disciplines, geographies, ideologies, and time. The term therefore defies definition, and is often referred to as a 'fuzzy concept' which is open to interpretation (Courage, 2021; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013). As a concept, it demonstrates resilience: it has survived decades of wide-ranging economic, social, cultural and physical urban change.

The meaning and value of placemaking is contextually charged. As Montgomery (2016) reminds us, it has been embraced by grass roots community actors, civic agencies, artists, market-driven developers and entrepreneurial local governments, albeit with different goals in mind. Placemaking is often, but not always, understood as a tool for engagement and collaboration, wherein partners spanning public, civic and private sectors work together for public good (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Placemaking has also been celebrated as a challenge to exclusionary planning processes through its emphasis on community co-production of public spaces for communal use (Barry & Agyeman, 2020). It is complex and layered, as illuminated though its ability to cross all manner of boundaries – political, cultural, market-driven, racial, grassroots, and more.

Despite these contested meanings (or perhaps because of them), from the time of its initial articulation in the 1970s to today, placemaking remains an example of a planning practice that

is considered to have the potential to help address urban crises and improve urban life. Importantly, while values and practices associated with placemaking have become an integral part of planning processes, thus blurring the lines between the two, the terms placemaking and planning are not interchangeable. First, placemaking is not necessarily the domain of professionals as mainstream planning tends to be, it can take the form of informal intervention led by activists; and second, placemaking refers to the distinctive process of shaping gathering places, which represents a component of the broader field of urban planning.

Placemaking initially arose in contrast to modernist planning, industrial capitalism, and the siloed urban management of cities. In response to a set of contemporary, uncompromising urban problems, placemaking as a concept and a tool is once again demonstrating its adaptability. To emphasize the transitions and challenges that placemaking now confronts, we discuss placemaking in the context of the four pressing 'post' discourses introduced above. These terms may appear to encourage binary thinking, suggesting that we once lived in a capitalist or liberal or conspiracy-free world, that does not prevail anymore. Our intent, however, is that by using them, we can highlight the challenges that placemaking now faces, and point to new directions that the practice enables us to envision and aspire to. Moreover, in our placemaking work, spanning both scholarship and practice, it is evident that placemaking's relevance persists, even as the needs of cities, governments, civic actors and urban dwellers continue to shift.

Rise of Placemaking: Temporal, Spatial, Layered

The ideas behind the practice of placemaking, first expressed by urban thinkers in the post-war era in the United States and Western Europe, were presented as a critique of the lack of attention to public spaces in the planning of new towns, suburbs and downtowns (Whyte, 1980). In encouraging placemaking, urban thinkers including Jane Jacobs, William H. Whyte, and Jan Gehl, directed attention to the value of leveraging crowdedness and density as assets to enliven urban spaces.

By the 1990s, placemaking ideals were being promoted by consultancies who aimed to both improve the quality of public spaces and address a range of opportunities for economic development and urban rejuvenation. The Project for Public Spaces in the United States, STIPO in the Netherlands, and Gehl Associates in Denmark are among the most prominent placemaking consultancies. Formed in 2018, PlacemakingX, a network supporting a global cohort of placemaking leaders, works with more than 100 leaders and 1500 advocates in over 85 countries.

As both a practice and planning tool, placemaking has spread and circulated globally. A search using Web of Science identifies scholarship originating from ninety-seven countries that includes the keywords 'placemaking,' 'place-making,' and 'place making,' spanning all inhabited continents. Furthermore, these terms continue to gain scholarly attention, with publications indexed by Web of Science expanding significantly since the early 2000s and peaking in 2020.

Over time, the concept of placemaking evolved to incorporate ideas related to supporting arts and culture, tourism, economic regeneration, the right to the city, and temporary placemaking interventions. Additionally, placemaking migrates between both the formal and the informal, and efforts are focused on public, semi-public, and private spaces. This leads us to understand that as the concept of placemaking evolved over time and circulated across destinations it absorbed various types of meanings and practices. These meanings do not necessarily replace one another, as paradigms or 'waves' of social movements typically do. Rather, they are layered, and co-exist or compete with one another, being utilized by actors to achieve different goals.

New Directions in Research and Practice

As placemaking continues to attract the attention of policymakers, planners, inhabitants and scholars, we turn now to examine placemaking in the context of four discourses: post-capitalism, post-liberalism, post-pandemic and post-truth.

Post-Capitalism

With a nod to post-capitalist practices, placemaking has the potential to support planning initiatives that are not reliant on circuits of capital accumulation, including initiatives that aim to support those who are on the losing side of the economic order. During the 1990s and the 2000s, placemaking became connected to economic changes derived from globalization and post-industrialization in the global north. As the urban labour force transformed from industrial to creative (Florida, 2002) and city management became more entrepreneurial (Harvey, 1989), municipalities began to see public spaces as amenities that could help attract tourists and creative class workers to the city – indirectly supporting economic development goals. The rebuilding of public spaces became a key component in urban redevelopment projects, and placemaking was often used as a tool by municipalities and private developers. At this stage of its evolution, intentional connections promoted place as a commodity and placemaking as a tool for economic development. However, the downsides of such initiatives also became apparent. The much-cited makeover of Bryant Park in New York City during this period, for example, has been celebrated for improved vitality and design but also critiqued for over-reliance on surveillance and facilitating corporate capitalism (Madden, 2010). Other placemaking initiatives during this time are criticized for displacing local residents and 'unmaking' their histories and traditions (Moran & Berbary, 2022).

Critical scholars challenge mainstream placemaking strategies (Carriere & Schalliol, 2021; Douglas, 2022; Toolis, 2017). They see them as focusing on generating trendy locations which reflect the unique history, heritage or aesthetics of a place, but obscure conflicts and power struggles. With the realization that municipalities see placemaking as an asset, critical thinkers ask how marginalized groups can also benefit from it in an attempt to disentangle placemaking from profit making. Efforts to mark this distinction, for instance, are evidenced by seeing the production of healthy food and other tangible goods as placemaking (Carriere & Schalliol, 2021), or by referring to settlements of un-housed people as another form of placemaking (Douglas, 2022).

Following these calls, as placemaking continues to grow as a movement, scholars and practitioners should emphasize the ways in which placemaking can better benefit marginalized socio-economic groups, how it helps legitimize a focus on the aesthetics of place that spans diverse communities, and more broadly, how it can contribute to meeting place-based goals including access, value and inclusion.

Post-Liberalism

Ideal images of public spaces inherent to placemaking are to a great extent molded by the histories of public spaces in liberal democracies (Ferdman, 2018). Inspired by the Greek agora and the Roman forum, public spaces aim to supply all inhabitants the infrastructure for the public sphere. Adapted from ancient democracies to modern liberal ones, placemaking interventions

often aim to allow people from all walks of life to express their views, interact as equals, and feel respected no matter their age, class, gender or ethnicity (Toolis, 2017). As placemaking circulated globally, with placemaking practices being adopted and adapted in cities across Africa, Asia and the Middle East, some of the underlying assumptions about who should have access to public space have changed. In a sense, placemaking now confronts a post-liberal and post-secular state. In cities dominated by non-secular and non-liberal groups, placemaking meets new rules that prescribe social behavior in general, and particularly in public spaces. These rules are defined according to hierarchies of age, gender, religion, caste and ethnicity, and describe who can do what and where in order to maintain rules related to modesty and honor (AlSayyad & Massoumi, 2011). Because of these rules, many of the activities that are often seen by place-makers as integral to public spaces and thus placemaking interventions aim to enhance, including picnicking, gossiping, sunbathing, consuming, performing and demonstrating, may be considered inappropriate when carried out in public in post-liberal societies (Hancock & Srinivas 2018).

As a result, placemaking in post-liberal contexts is often established in places of community gathering that are private or belong to the extended family (Braier et al., 2023), while attempting to cater to their particular needs and abiding by the norms they impose. In some cases, only group members, and not strangers, are allowed to enter (Nejad et al., 2020). In addition, the activity may be related to worship and praying (Lombard, 2014); or may be restricted to functional goals rather than leisure, as seen, for instance, in Jerusalem's ultraorthodox community, when some benches include a seat for only one person as a way to preserve norms associated with modesty (Rosner-Manor et al., 2020).

As placemaking practices reach post-liberal sites, some basic values, such as inclusion, are challenged. For instance, placemaking has helped A-Turi, a neighborhood in Palestinian Jerusalem, suffering for decades from a lack of planning and suitable infrastructure, to make the alleys of their neighborhood into more inviting meeting points for residents (Braier et al., 2023). Respecting the rules of belonging in these semi-public, communal spaces, this placemaking intervention is inwardly focused. In such post-liberal contexts, inclusion does not mean equal access for all but rather allows new forms of public gatherings that align with religious and traditional norms as part of an effort to address previous injustices. Placemaking is now at a stage of maneuvering between tradition and innovation, on the one hand giving up a few of its sacred values, and on the other, finding new relevancy.

Post-Pandemic

It has been suggested in this journal and elsewhere, that COVID-19 helped focus attention on the crucial role played by public and other spaces as spaces amenable to safe gathering and socializing (Lennon, 2021; Brail, 2022). Critical to supporting livability, improved mental health outcomes associated with access to greenery and opportunities for social, physical, cultural and economic engagement, renewed emphasis on the creation and support of placemaking initiatives ensued. At the height of COVID-19, placemaking efforts included both formal and informal initiatives. In Canada, for instance, $3.5 M CDN of federal government funding was directed to placemaking projects to support post-covid recovery efforts in southern Ontario, focused on commercial and community activities (Canadian Urban Institute, 2022). Informally, street and sidewalk gatherings, impromptu outdoor concerts, outdoor movie screenings and markets, and also tent cities, burgeoned. There is a downside to this attention however: the acceptance of

placemaking as a solution to accelerating the return of people to urban spaces (or bringing them anew), along with an infusion of public funding aimed at accelerating pandemic recovery, posed risks to the integrity of placemaking practices, leading to a sense that placemaking was being looted of its value. As we heard from placemakers, during the pandemic urban leaders were eager to adopt rapid placemaking interventions, but in the rush to implement, neglected key steps of placemaking practices, including an emphasis on community engagement. Thus, a key challenge of post pandemic discourse is to ensure placemaking adds meaning and value to communities and does not transform into an empty shell or a superficial practice.

The pandemic has demonstrated that places matter, and by extension, placemaking matters. COVID-19 has precipitated not only a resurgence of interest in placemaking, but also tremendous uncertainty with respect to the future of cities. Moving beyond the pandemic it will be important for planners to better understand the ways that placemaking opportunities can help to draw activity to neglected urban areas – working carefully to balance the need for supporting both marginalized and vulnerable populations who have grown even more vulnerable during the pandemic, while at the same time leveraging placemaking as a form of urban advantage and amenity. Post-pandemic discourse therefore may buttress post-capitalist discourse: reflecting a realization that quality spaces and places for gathering are essential and that cities perceive it as their responsibility to provide them.

We now understand COVID-19 as one of a long list of global crises. For even now that COVID-19 is no longer considered a public health emergency of international concern, planners are faced with climate crises, racial equity crises, and crises of housing affordability. We contend that placemaking, and a revival or resurgence of placemaking as a tool, portends the possibility of providing a lens through which to address inclusion, civic engagement, and bottom-up solutions to wicked challenges – both those we are familiar with, and those yet to unfold.

Post-Truth

Placemaking arose as a challenge to planning as an authoritative and prescriptive activity by rejecting the assumption that professional planners alone knew how to create successful places. However, placemaking, and planning practice as a whole, has moved into what is commonly considered as a post-truth era in which challenges to authority are commonplace, and communities of knowledge are severely fractured and polarized around political, environmental and health issues.

These fractures are echoed in controversies related to planning concepts, including placemaking. A recent (and surprising) example of a post-truth challenge towards placemaking was seen in the materializing of the 15-minute city as a conspiracy theory. The 15-minute city is a planning concept that emphasizes, in part, the importance of quality public space for people. It has been absorbed into placemaking practices. In conjunction with politicized views that consider climate change and COVID-19 as conspiracies, some conservative, populist politicians in both Edmonton, Canada and Oxford, England incorrectly suggested that the 15-minute city is aimed at curtailing personal freedoms such as the freedom to use one's private automobile or to travel between neighborhoods (Wainwright, 2023). These examples profile the social divides that have become more commonplace of late, creating an environment of acrimony in cities and city-regions among urban and suburban dwellers who value different urban amenities. Ironically, while placemaking is intended to build bridges within and across communities, in the case of

15- minute cities, placemaking has been framed as instigating rifts and deepening spatial cleavages.

Furthermore, careful examination suggests that the backlash against the 15-minute city dem- onstrates advancement of the crisis of expertise in the urban sphere, which describes how expert knowledge becomes more fragile and divisive in municipal politics (Keidar, 2023). According to Eyal (2019) the processes that led to the crisis of expertise include the democra- tization and politicization of expert knowledge which we in turn connect to the controversy sur- rounding the 15-minute city. First, since the 1960s, the public has increasingly become embedded in planning decision-making processes through public consultation and other forms of participation in planning, including placemaking. This engagement has blurred the bounda- ries between experts and non-experts. One consequence is that it is harder to differentiate between valid and invalid knowledge, between truth and conspiracy. In this context, placemak- ing is vulnerable to becoming a mistrusted practice, which can lead – for instance – to displace- ment and gentrification (Montgomery, 2016). Second, the power of expert knowledge in contemporary democratic settings is its neutrality and lack of bias. However, when experts are called to justify a policy, they lose their neutrality and instead, instigate politicization. A concept like the 15-minute city, which was politicized during COVID-19, became associated with contro- versy which has continued into post-pandemic reality.

Addressing dis/misinformation is not new to the practice of placemaking or planning for that matter. However, the story of the 15-minute city illustrates a sense of growing mistrust on both ends of the political spectrum. It portends further politicization of placemaking and raises new questions for how to build trust and bring people together. Here, placemaking and placemakers need to continue to prioritize the practices that enable the creation and animation of place. Namely, this means emphasizing consultation, civic engagement, grass roots activation, and the evolution of ideas, while at the same time developing strategies to navigate the political clea- vages that such efforts instigate.

Conclusion

Placemaking continues to evolve as both a planning practice and as a subject of scholarly inter- est and debate. As a term introduced nearly fifty years ago, its relevance remains in part because it presents an opportunity to build bridges across communities, ideologies and space. Conceptually, its endurance is connected to the fact that it is both flexible and fuzzy in terms of definition.

In summary, this analysis enables us to map out some key responses to progress placemak- ing. First, post-capitalism discourse highlights a continuing need to examine placemaking beyond capitalist approaches dominated by profit-seeking, acknowledging how it can address social vulnerabilities that manifest in place. Second, post-liberal concerns demonstrate a need to expand thinking about the intersections between place and tradition, and interpretations of pla- cemaking that value diverse populations and ways of life. Third, the pandemic afforded us refreshed insights of the value of public space, suggesting that placemaking presents an oppor- tunity to deal with evolving urban crises in a post-pandemic period. And fourth, a post-truth dis- course with respect to expertise constrains trust and trust-building, challenging placemaking to understand and span political cleavages.

Considering the four 'post' discourses addressed above: post-capitalism, post-liberalism, post- pandemic and post-truth, we demonstrate that even in the face of dramatic change, crises and

ongoing evolution, placemaking holds the potential for progress. While practitioners work to design appropriate responses, the role of scholarship becomes ever more urgent in untangling, interpreting and transmitting the lessons to be learned.

Note

1. While we recognize that placemaking is a term that has application beyond public space, including in the planning of private spaces that may mimic the appearance of public spaces, our primary focus in this commentary is analysis of placemaking practices in public and community spaces.

Authors' Contributions

This commentary was conceived of, primarily written and edited by Noga Keidar and Shauna Brail. This work is connected to a broader, collaborative research project on Placemaking. The following people contributed by reviewing and editing the commentary: Mark Fox, Odeya Friedman, Yair Grinberger, Tharaa Kirresh, Yang Li, Yaara Rosner Manor, Diego Rotman and Emily Silverman.

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