



A Study of Placemaking for Urban Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Urbanization presents challenges such as sustainability and urban development including social equity, environmental degradation, declining community engagement, and livability. Placemaking has developed as an effective approach to enhance the quality of public spaces by making them more inclusive, usable and relevant to the community. This study investigates how placemaking promotes urban sustainability by discussing its core principles, approaches, and results. Using a descriptive exploratory research design, the study conducts a thematic literature review of key publications from 2010 - 2024, focusing on placemaking principles, strategies, and outcomes. The key findings indicate that while placemaking fosters social cohesion, local identity, and ecological adaptation, its success in inclusive participation and community relationship. The study identifies strategic, creative, and tactical placemaking as critical frameworks with effectiveness that contributes to the disclosure of future urban development toward resilient, vibrant, culturally rich urban systems.

Keyword: Placemaking, Urban Sustainability, Community Engagement, Public Space

ABSTRAK

Urbanisasi menghadirkan tantangan seperti keberlanjutan dan pembangunan perkotaan termasuk keadilan sosial, degradasi lingkungan, menurunnya keterlibatan masyarakat, dan kelayakan huni. Placemaking telah berkembang sebagai pendekatan yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kualitas ruang publik dengan membuatnya lebih inklusif, fungsional, dan relevan bagi masyarakat. Studi ini menyelidiki bagaimana placemaking mempromosikan keberlanjutan perkotaan dengan membahas prinsip-prinsip inti, pendekatan, dan hasil. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian eksploratif deskriptif, studi ini melakukan tinjauan literatur tematik dari publikasi utama dari tahun 2010 - 2024, dengan fokus pada prinsip-prinsip placemaking, strategi, dan hasil. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa saat placemaking mendorong kohesi sosial, identitas lokal, dan adaptasi ekologis, keberhasilannya bergantung pada partisipasi inklusif dan hubungan masyarakat. Studi ini mengidentifikasi placemaking yang strategis, kreatif, dan taktis sebagai kerangka kerja penting dengan kontribusi efektivitas terhadap pengungkapan tentang pembangunan perkotaan masa depan menuju sistem perkotaan yang tangguh, aktif, dan kaya akan budaya.

Kata Kunci: Placemaking, keberlanjutan Kota, Keterlibatan Komunitas, Ruang Publik



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1. Introduction

The rapid urbanization has led to numerous challenges in urban development. It includes the need to ensure urban environment sustainability and residents satisfaction in the urban livability (Gets et al, 2020). This includes issues of social equity, environmental degradation, and diminishing community engagement in urban development. The concept of placemaking has garnered substantial attention as a strategic intervention aimed at enhancing urban spaces through the cultivation of community engagement, promotion of cultural vibrancy,

and reinforcement of environmental resilience, emphasizing the creation of public spaces that are not only functional but also deeply meaningful and reflective of the unique identity of the communities they serve (Strydom et al., 2024). Placemaking has emerged as a promising framework to counter those challenges. This is by promoting active community engagement, reinforcing local identity, and enhancing the meaning and function of public spaces. Placemaking, in this context, emerges as a critical concept in the broader pursuit of achieving comprehensive urban sustainability (Castello, 2011; Deep, 2023). Placemaking has manifested as a transformative strategy within urban development, with the core objective of creating urban environments that are more vibrant, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable (Strydom et al., 2024). As cities grapple with increasing pressures stemming from rapid urbanization and the escalating impacts of climate change, placemaking offers a pathway to foster a stronger connection between people and their environments by establishing public spaces that serve as a central hub for the community, consequently improving the quality of life for urban dwellers (Ellery & Ellery, 2019).

This study aims to examine how placemaking contributes to urban sustainability, by exploring its principles, applications, and outcomes. The focus questions in this study are how does placemaking intersect with urban sustainability and what principles and methods make placemaking effective in fostering sustainable urban environments. The contribution of this study lies in an extensive literature review to analyze and synthesize existing knowledge from scientific journals and reference book seminal reference books that are relevant to the fields of placemaking and urban studies. It addresses a gap in existing literature by clarifying how placemaking principles translate into measurable outcomes for urban resilience and community well-being.

The findings of this research are anticipated to significantly contribute to the evolving discourse on urban sustainability, by providing critical insights into how placemaking practices can inform and shape urban planning and design strategies.

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive exploratory approach, using a literature review to analyze the role of placemaking in urban environment sustainability. Data were collected from scientific journals and reference books, focusing on concepts and strategies of placemaking and sustainable urban development. The review process was structured as identification of relevant studies from academic databases using keywords ‘placemaking’, ‘urban sustainability’, and ‘community’; selection based on relevance, published between 2010 - 2024; and thematic analysis (Table 1.) align with the core concept of study. The review process involved identification of relevance, thematic coding to extract key concepts, principles, and strategies, also illustrative case example integration. The selected case examples from credible secondary sources were incorporated to support theoretical insights. This method provides a theoretical foundation for understanding placemaking’s potential in creating sustainable urban spaces.

Table 1. Thematic Literature Review Matrix

Author(s)	Year	Region/Case	Focus Area	Key Principles Identified	Relevance to Urban Sustainability
Castello	2011	Europe	Identity & urban form	Local identity, spatial coherence	Enhancing cultural sustainability and sense of place
Ellery	2019	Australia	Social capital & well-being	Placemaking as social infrastructure, inclusive public space	Social cohesion, public health
Deep	2023	South Asia	Environmental sustainability	Green infrastructure, water sensitive design, tactical	Ecological restoration, climate adaptation

				placemaking	
Strydong et al.	2024	Global	Placemaking frameworks	Standard, tactical, creative, and strategic placemaking	Placemaking as a strategic tool for sustainable urbanism
Gets et al.	2020	Eastern Europe	Resilient cities	Community-based regeneration, adaptive reuse	Resilience and local empowerment
Project for Public Spaces	2020	Global	Public space quality	Sociability, access & linkages, uses & activities, comfort & image	Human-centered urban design
Montgomery	1998	UK	Urban vitality & culture	Urban narrative, creative economy, placemaking through cultural assets	Cultural resilience and urban vibrancy
Carr et al.	1992	USA	Public space experience	Accessibility, meaning, comfort, and sociability	Inclusive and livable public environments
Jacobs	1961	USA	Eyes on the street, mixed uses	Diversity of uses, organic growth, small blocks	Safety, interaction, walkability
UN-Habitat	2022	Global	Sustainable urban development	Community empowerment, spatial justice, participatory design	Integrated development goals, equity in urban spaces

3. Discussion

3.1. Placemaking and Urban Sustainability

Placemaking as a concept has evolved by early urban thinkers and was popular in the mid-1990s. Some thoughts about placemaking emerged in the 1960s. Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte introduced innovative ideas about designing cities for people, emphasizing human-centered spaces over functionalist planning. Previous works highlight placemaking's potential in revitalizing urban environments (Kumar & Janardhan, 2023; Dash & Thilagam, 2023). This reaffirms placemaking's role in revitalizing urban environments. However, despite the common consensus on its potential, placemaking strategies often differ in terms of their intensity of community engagement and the capabilities to address urban sustainability goals.

The concept of placemaking in urban studies emphasizes the transformation of spaces into meaningful places through community engagement and design. It integrates various disciplines to enhance urban identity, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability. This multifaceted approach is crucial for addressing contemporary urban challenges and improving the quality of life in the cities. While placemaking distinguishes between space both physically and socially (Li Xie, 2022). This emphasizes placemaking distinction between physical and social dimensions, and underlines that it fosters urban identity by reflecting local culture, traditions, and community values (Mikaeili & Müftüoğlu, 2024). Yet, current literature tends to assume that placemaking automatically leads to sustainability without critically addressing conditions under which it may fail, particularly in the context of informality and socio-economic inequality (Mehanna & Mehanna, 2023). Therefore, a deeper understanding of how placemaking adapts across diverse urban conditions is essential for its strategic application toward sustainability.

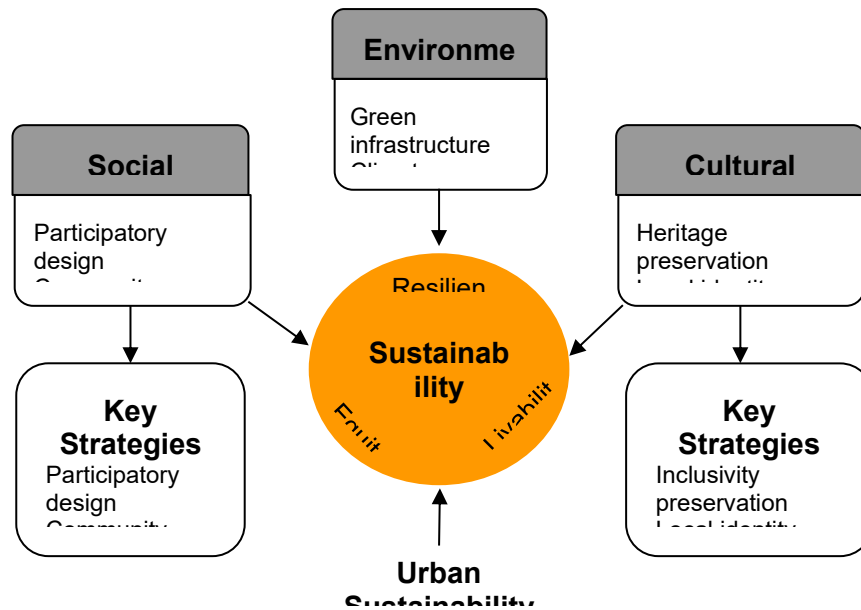


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Placemaking for Urban Sustainability

3.2. Principles of Placemaking in Urban Sustainability

The principles of placemaking in urban sustainability emphasize collaborative design processes that engage communities and address their diverse also essential needs. As Menezes et al., (2023) highlight the importance of stakeholder participation, yet few studies critically examine the challenges of achieving genuine inclusivity, particularly in socio-economic fragmented cities. Community engagement is often structured as a direct path to achieve sustainability (Sharma, 2022; Koh, 2024). However, empirical evidence suggests that the equality of social relationships, including respect and trust (Carmen et al., 2024) is crucial to interpret engagement into effective outcomes. Without strong social connection, participatory process risk being superficial, and leads to un-sustain results. Treija et al., (2023) emphasized that collaborative governance depends not only on participation and engagement of community but also on trust that is built. Thus, while the participatory principle is a core of sustainable placemaking, a critical analysis reveals that success depends on relational quality and the capacity for collective problem solving, not merely the presence of community engagement mechanisms.

Building on this, participatory approaches in urban planning have been shown to yield outcomes that are more socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable (Deep,2023). Community engagement and participation initiatives empower local populations to take active roles in environmental stewardship and sustainability efforts. These bottom-up schemes enhance the sense of ownership and responsibility among residents, fostering environmental justice and long-term improvement (Eslit, 2023). Therefore, while community participation remains a central part of sustainability, its effectiveness depends on the quality of relationship and the community willingness to co-create solutions beyond the mere presence of engagement platforms.

3.3. Placemaking Strategies and Sustainability Impact

Placemaking strategies can be broadly classified into tactical, creative, and strategic approaches. Tactical placemaking emphasizes quick, low-cost interventions (Kudla, 2024), while creative placemaking leverages art and culture to foster identity (Sarı & Mengi, 2022). Strategic placemaking seeks systemic, long-term transformation (Daniel & Kim, 2020; Chang, 2022).

Although each strategy contributes to sustainability, their impact varies considerably. Tactical interventions, while effective in immediate revitalization, often lack sustained community ownership unless integrated into broader strategic frameworks. Creative placemaking can enhance identity but risks aestheticization without addressing deeper structural issues, such as housing insecurity or unequal access to public spaces. Strategic placemaking offers the most comprehensive approach, aiming for systemic change, yet it demands complex coordination across sectors, which can be challenging to sustain over time (Healey, 2009).

Therefore, rather than viewing these strategies as equivalent, it is essential to critically assess their limitations. Placemaking strategies must be adapted to local contexts, balancing short-term activation with long-term urban transformation goals to avoid undermining the authenticity and inclusivity of urban spaces (Ghavampour & Vale, 2019).

3.4. Placemaking as a Tool for Urban Sustainability

Placemaking is often portrayed as a complementary approach to traditional urban planning by promoting community engagement and enhancing urban livability (Antonić et al., 2023; Fingerhut & Alfasi, 2023). However, this view can be overly optimistic. Without critical management, placemaking risks reinforcing existing inequalities, particularly if certain groups dominate the participatory process.

While successful cases demonstrate placemaking's potential to transform underutilized spaces and foster social cohesion (Dash & Thilagam, 2023b), failures also reveal that placemaking initiatives can be co-opted by commercial interests, leading to gentrification and displacement. The everyday practice of placemaking, emphasizing shared responsibility and inclusivity, must be carefully nurtured to ensure that benefits are equitably distributed.

Hence, while placemaking offers promising avenues toward sustainability, it must be critically implemented with an acute awareness of local dynamics, power relations, and the need for continuous community stewardship.

4. Conclusion

This study highlights placemaking as a key strategy for promoting urban sustainability. Through an integrative literature review and case study, the study identifies that effective placemaking is characterized by inclusive, participatory, and culturally based practices. These approaches foster stronger community identities, improves public spaces, and greater environmental awareness.

The findings suggest that when placemaking is implemented thoughtfully, it can mitigate urban challenges including social fragmentation and ecological stress. However, the study acknowledges limitations. It includes reliance on secondary data and conceptual rather than empirical nature insights. Future research should explore primary case studies and quantitative evaluations of placemaking impacts.

This study contributes to the urban planning discourse by offering a synthesized model of placemaking principles and practices. It provides practical guidance for policymakers, planners, and communities seeking sustainable and inclusive urban development strategies.

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