

2018 LGPRO ANNUAL CONFERENCE



How do we justify the intangible? Creating a love of Place Documentation report

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Local Government Professionals
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by Dominique Hes & Cris Hernandez-Santin

Event Background

Place making is a multi-disciplinary approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces. It is an approach Councils are paying more attention to. Despite place making meaning different things to different people across Councils, ultimately it capitalises on a local community's assets, inspiration and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health, happiness and wellbeing. The same can be said for the arts. Arts programs such as events, public art and cultural development projects play an important role in informing the identity of a place and people's connection to it.

However, the success of both creative and place-based initiatives is difficult to evaluate and may not necessarily have an immediately measurable impact. In an environment of competing priorities and limited resources where decisions are made on quantitative data the question that needs to be addressed is, how can we secure support for place-based creative initiatives, and how do we justify the seemingly intangible?

Represented by Thrive Research Hub's Dominique Hes and Cris Hernandez-Santin, this workshop explored key concepts of placemaking and the common reasons why embedding social-research

strategies to measure the love of place is critical to evaluating placemaking projects.

This workshop drew upon the work of the Place Agency program, an ongoing inter-university project working towards capacity development of placemaking across students and professionals in private and public practice. This training event attracted ~35-40 participants who were engaged in teams to co-create an 'ideal' place and evaluate each other's work.

Training Event Road Map

1. **WHY CREATE A LOVE OF PLACE?** – Exploring the benefits of engaging in place practice. Case study analysis:
 - o The Venny Adventure Playground
 - o Yarraville Pop-up park
2. **WHY IS IT SO INTANGIBLE?** – Principles of thinking ecologically, focusing in the potential and the Sandbox Methodology by Place Agency.
 - o The Newport Project
3. **WORKING ON POTENTIAL – EVALUATION MODEL** – Developing an evaluation framework that responds to place.
 - o The Living Stage



Figure 1: Training Event Road Map.
(Photo Credits: Core Team)

Justifying the intangible.

The session began by exploring key concepts of placemaking including what is place, sense of place and why participatory approaches are important to achieve place.

*“We can enjoy a place, but only by taking part in its processes can we meaningfully connect to it”
(Day 2012)*

We then presented the four dimensions of place; highlighting the desired relationships between individuals, community, built place and natural place. It is these relationships that you aim to strengthen when engaging in a best-practice place approach.

What we contribute to the place making discussion is how critical nature is. While social theories of place attachment, and social cohesion fully support the two social and physical dimensions of our framework, ‘nature’ has been largely ignored in place making practice. Yet, research has shown the benefits of nature for both physical and mental health due to the innate biophilic relationship we share with nature. Further, the research shows that connection to nature is critical to people’s connections with place; and the enhancement of the benefits of place making – increased physical and mental wellbeing and decreased social problems (crime, vandalism, etc.).

Place Agency’s four dimensions of place bring in ‘Nature’ as a critical component of place. It highlights the positive benefits accrued by developing strong relationships between self and nature as well as between nature and built space. The other, more well documented, elements of space also have relationships and these are between self and community, community and space, and between self and space. All of these together ultimately, enable a successful and thriving place to emerge.

At this point, two case studies were presented: The Venny Adventure Playground and the Yarraville Pop-up park. Lessons learned from these projects highlighted the following key characteristics of successful placemaking projects:

1. Place can emerge through community-led (The Venny) or a council-led approach. Regardless, the community is a strong part of the process (Yarraville Pop-up).
2. The process provides opportunities for the community to actively participate and ‘invest’ meaning to the place through co-design, participatory planning, etc.
3. It capitalises on local assets exploring what the community has to contribute.
4. Considers an ongoing system of ‘placekeeping’ with a clear strategy for governance, maintenance and continuous improvement.
5. Works on long-time frame allowing time to identify the legacy and values the stories of the community relating to said place.
6. Responds to the local needs and opportunities.

7. Encourages positive relationships between and within the community.
8. Leads to social change / not place wash

From problem based to potential based thinking

Shifting gears, the participants then explored the principles of ecological thinking and system thinking. They were asked to think in terms of the potential of a place and were then posed a question:

What does “a place where young people/women can have fun, feel safe, and make new friends” look like?

Divided into four groups, the participants engaged into a co-design activity through props, creating what these ‘ideal’ place, would look like. Common threads amongst the different groups included the importance of water, vegetation and heritage protection as part of these places. While the groups were not specifically asked to, all groups designed their own park. These parks often included: 1) Art sculptures, 2) Areas for music festivals or celebrations, 3) A children’s playground, 4) Water bodies or fountains.

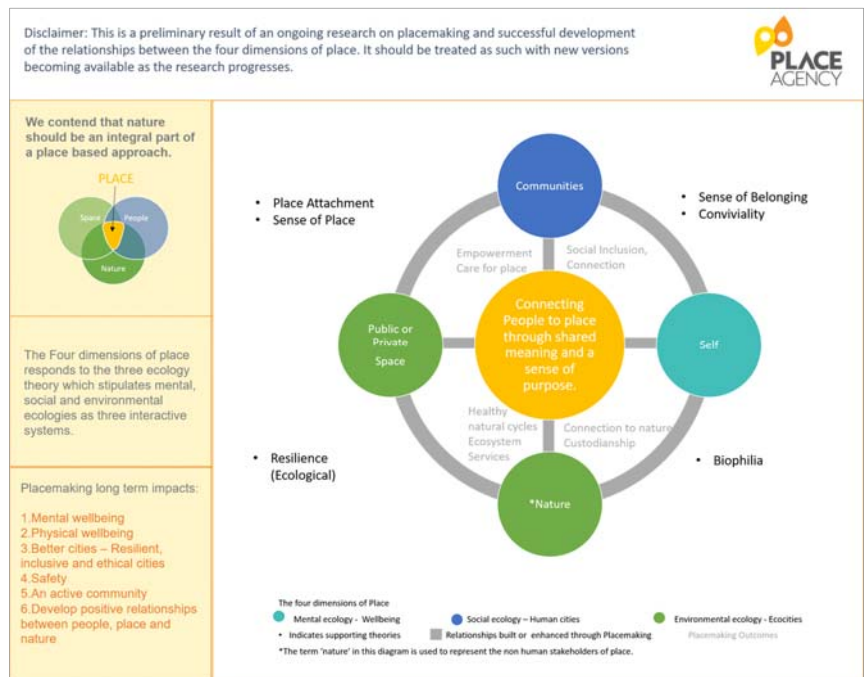


Figure 02: The four dimensions of place (Image Credits: Place Agency 2018)

In the last part of the workshop, each team was asked to design their own evaluation framework for their ideal place. They were asked to choose the attributes they sought and the stories they were looking for. Then, they were asked to go around and apply this evaluation framework to the work of the other teams. This exercise led to the realization of the importance of place based evaluation where, it is difficult to shift the indicators to other projects.

As a case study to reflect on this issue, the workshop presented The Living Stage, a project by Tanja Beer. It constitutes an edible stage built with and for the community. It is a temporary installation with long-term benefits for the people engaged in the process of co-creation and storytelling.

We then shared our work in progress research into existing tools for identifying the relationship between the four dimensions of place. This is part of an ongoing research into the best strategies for place evaluation as a contributive process. It is expected that this research will be informed by councils that have supported the Place Agency project and we are currently recruiting people interested in working with us to refine this approach.



Figure 3 Place Evaluation framework

Disclaimer: This is a preliminary result of an ongoing research on evaluation methods of 'place' and successful development of the relationships between the four dimensions of place. It should be treated as such with new versions becoming available as the research progresses.



Figure 4 Existing tools that can be used to infer healthy relationships between the four dimensions of place.

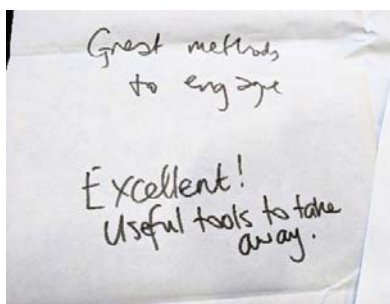
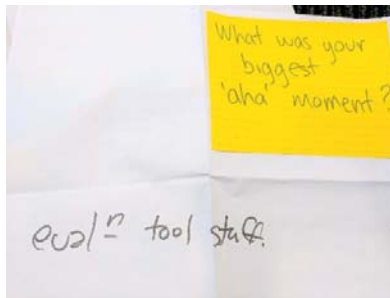
What did people think? Facilitator/Participant feedback

One participant shared:

"This just comes to show that I am in the wrong job, I am enjoying this workshop so much that I wish my job had more creativity to it."

One participant highlighted that it would have been nice to then negotiate between the four groups to merge the four 'ideal' places. This is what usually happens through planning processes.

It was also highlighted there was a need to spend longer time on the evaluation framework.



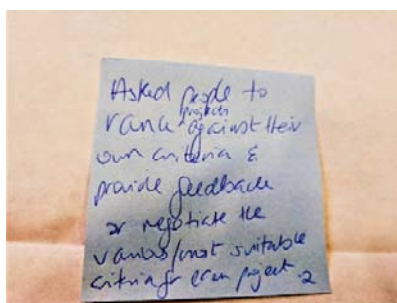
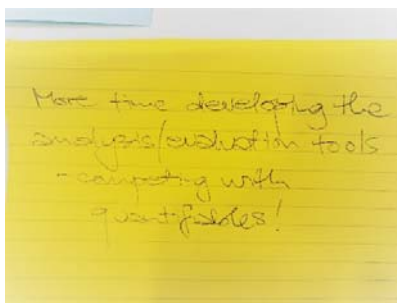
What worked?

- There was a lot of interest in placemaking, learning what it is, how to apply it and how to facilitate it.
- Participants and facilitators expressed an increased in awareness on placemaking. Participants felt that they have improved their collective knowledge about place/placemaking.
- Engaging through a fun and play methodology was useful in engaging individuals and groups, creating a platform where intercultural and intergenerational dialogue ensued.
- Case-study approach presenting great placemaking initiatives relevant to the area (Melbourne) was a great strategy to spark interest within councils.
- Reflections of each group validated the four dimensions of place (Figure 3), particularly the central role played by the natural environment in shaping and transforming places.
- The Place Diagram after the discussion proved to be a useful framework.

What can be improved?

We also received some great feedback that can help us improve place evaluation workshops in the future:

- ☑ **Negotiation between tables to create 1 ideal place**
- ☑ **Being succinct with activity instructions.**
- ☑ **Time duration.** Workshop program required more than the allocated hours. This would have allowed to spend more time on the evaluation process
- ☑ **Pre-prepared evaluation framework as basis.** Some participants would have liked to receive an evaluation framework and a written matrix for the activity.



The placemaking collaborative

Place Agency is a collaborative project focused on the theory and practice of placemaking. The project aims to build capacity, test theory, experiment with processes and identify methods to evaluate placemaking decisions to create vibrant, citizen engaged 'places' and ultimately, better cities. This project aims to transform placemaking teaching by combining theory and practice throughout a series of 'sandbox' studios where students get to actively engage in the art of making places by actively engaging with the community, asking for their feedback and designing to respond to the local needs, opportunities or assets. Simultaneously, we are expanding beyond the boundaries of the academic world and the interactions with our students to engage with industry and grassroots community groups enabling them to initiate the act of creating place, and discovering their own power (agency) to create change through place.

The Place Agency project, is an ongoing project exploring what we know about placemaking and what we think we know.

To achieve our objectives, we have created a consortium composed of five universities and 16 practitioner partners. Together we are developing a series of modules developing capacity through content and exercises to develop their placemaking skills (Figure 2).

As we find new ways of presenting information, it is important to it in and outside the classroom, observing how different groups respond to the ideas presented.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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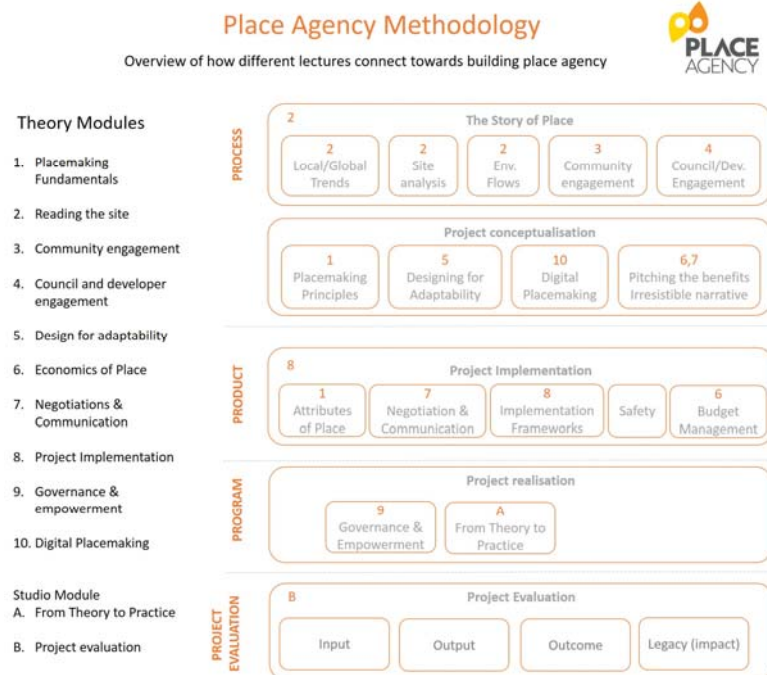


Figure 5: Place Agency Methodology

Facilitators

Dominique Hes. Director of Thrive research hub & Project lead of the Place Agency Program

Cris Hernandez Santin. Research Assistant and Place Agency Program Manager, Thrive Research Hu

