

An Exploration of the Dimensions of Place-Making: A South African Case Study

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Abstract—Place-making is viewed here as an empowering process in which people represent, improve and maintain their spatial (natural or built) environment. With the above-mentioned in mind, place-making is multi-dimensional and include a spatial dimension (including visual properties or the end product/plan), a procedural dimension during which (negotiation/discussion of ideas with all relevant stakeholders in terms of end product/plan) and a psychological dimension (inclusion of intrinsic values and meanings related to a place in the end product/plan). These three represent dimensions of place-making. The purpose of this paper is to explore these dimensions of place-making in a case study of a local community in Ikageng, Potchefstroom, North-West Province, South Africa. This case study represents an inclusive process that strives to empower a local community (forcefully relocated due to Apartheid legislation in South Africa). This case study focussed on the inclusion of participants in the decision-making process regarding their daily environment. By means of focus group discussions and a collaborative design workshop, data is generated and ultimately creates a linkage with the theoretical dimensions of place-making. This paper contributes to the field of spatial planning due to the exploration of the dimensions of place-making and the relevancy of this process on spatial planning (especially in a South African setting).

Keywords—Case study, place-making, spatial planning, spatial dimension, procedural dimension, psychological dimension.

I. INTRODUCTION

PLACE-MAKING involves the deliberate interventions and actions through which actions, feelings, meanings and fabrics are manipulated and combined to develop a specific identity of place [1]. Interest in place and place-making in planning mainly originated as a reaction against modernism [2]. The main critique from a spatial planning perspective revolves around the influence of standardisation and sterilisation (products of modernistic planning and design) that contributed to the loss of uniqueness of places and their identity [3], [4]. Place-making is seen as a type of restorative tool in planning to address the numerous placeless landscapes created by modernism. Although place-making is central in planning [1], planners do not hold monopoly over place-making. Literature on place-making confirms that it is a multi-disciplinary concept [5] studied by a variety of disciplines such as landscape architecture, humanistic geography, architecture, spatial planning and art [5], [6]. This multi-disciplinary nature of

place-making suggests place-making as multi-dimensional. The different dimensions of place-making [7] includes (i) a *spatial dimension* [8], (ii) *procedural dimension* [9] and (iii) a *psychological dimension* [10]. Although a vast array of international literature exists on place-making, recent examples of place-making tend to focus on one of the dimensions.

Madureira's Swedish [11] case study in Malmö, focuses on the creation of visual excitement. Visual excitement, guided by official plans and expert intervention strategies, refer to physical change anticipated in a context-specific environment. Intervention strategies in this sense refer to the incorporation of symbolic values associated to a setting. Similar to this study, with the focus on the physical change (*spatial dimension*) Cilliers et al.'s [12] study relies on change within the spatial environment. Place-making is referred to as a broad concept which includes various dimensions (e.g. greening of the physical environment and related social constructs). This study focuses on the integration of the spatial dimension within the process of place-making.

Nirarta Simadhi's study [8] focuses on the need to incorporate Balinese Hindu belief systems in urban design processes in order to reconnect urban design with the cultural context. In this study the current urban design process is criticised for being standardised and top-down. Similarly, Germen's [9] study also focuses on the need for more inclusive context driven planning and design processes in place-making. The study uses the example of the Gezi Park resistance movement in Turkey as illustration of the consequences of following an oppressive process in which users are not sufficiently integrated into the making of their living places.

In other studies, such as that of [10] in which art-based practices are used as the basis for creative place-making, it is illustrated that a *psychological dimension* can emerge through place-making. The study, conducted in Memphis, Tennessee (USA) focused on the added values developed through place-making such as mutual understanding, group identity, dialogue and the appreciation of differences. With focus on unlocking values through place-making, a shift from the procedural dimension to a more normative orientated role of place-making in communities, is suggested. The before mentioned examples of place-making not only emphasises the multi-dimensionality of place-making, but highlights the potential role of place-making on various levels in society.

Place-making is currently propagated in South Africa as a key principle in settlement planning [13], [14]. However, planning research on place-making is limited in the South African context and is currently not integrated into spatial

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planning policy and legislation. Studies such as [15], [16] refer to place-making as a process through which local communities can be empowered to transform the spaces in which they live. In this sense, place-making may be a valuable concept for South African communities who were previously excluded from the planning processes. An increasing need for community participation and stakeholder involvement is currently emphasised in spatial planning literature [17], [18]. In South Africa, public participation is a constitutional right [19] that is enforced in the planning processes by legislation that regulate spatial planning and land use decisions [20]. Planning is regarded as a tool to enhance the goals of democracy [21]-[23] and is thus important in a country such as South Africa that recently [for 1994/22 years] turned a democracy. With the above in mind, place-making is a multi-dimensional concept that includes a spatial dimension that focuses on the improvement of the spatial environment, a procedural dimension that is inclusive and a psychological dimension in which values are unlocked in communities.

A South African case study of a place-making project (referred to as the Local Space Global Place project) conducted in a former black township under the Apartheid Group Areas Act (Act no 41 of 1950) [24] namely Ikageng (directly translated from Northern Sotho – means “*We built for ourselves*” [25]) was selected to develop insight into place-making as a multi-dimensional concept. The research was guided by two questions: (i) *What are the dimensions that emerge from this place-making case study; and (ii) (ii) What was the role of spatial planning in this case study?*

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POINTS OF ORIENTATION

The different dimensions of place-making form the theoretical points of departure to understand place-making in this paper. Place-making is an empowering process, which is used to shape an environment by facilitating social interaction and ultimately promoting inhabitants’ quality of life [26]. This process is specifically useful when teaching people to represent their daily lives and creating physical change [27].

The following section discusses the meaning of the various dimensions namely the (A) *spatial dimension*, (B) *procedural dimension* and (C) *psychological dimension* of place-making.

A. The Spatial Dimension

The spatial dimension is an explicit dimension that is the result (outcome or end product) of the place-making process. The spatial dimension manifests as the visible spatial expression of people’s involvement in place-making (a place). This spatial expression of place-making is not a neutral backdrop for people’s lives or a container of potentially malleable attributes of separable and independent elements. Through place-making people create meaningful and memorable places [28], [29]. Meanings (and the development of meaningful places) are not only physical constructs but also social constructs [30].

Various disciplines contribute to the understanding of the spatial dimension (including urban planners and architects) in

terms of physical components of the studied sites. The main aim of the spatial dimension is to create visual excitement for the site user and observer within a place [9], [28], [31].

B. The Procedural Dimension

The procedural dimension of place-making is emphasised in recent definitions of place-making that views place-making as an empowering process. This empowering process refers to the incorporation of various societal viewpoints. Active involvement of community members allows a design/outcome to represent the community/setting [32]. This dimension strives to teach community members certain skills to negotiate decisions made and participate in practices that will lead to a resolution in terms of the final product/design. Acknowledging the importance of the process in place-making e.g. inclusiveness ensure change with regard to the spatial as well as socio-cultural level [33].

C. The Psychological Dimension

A third dimension of place-making involves an implicit psychological dimension that develops as a result of the combination of the first two dimensions [10], [30], [34]. This implicit psychological dimension includes intra-psychic phenomena such as personal meanings and values that evolve during place-making. Values and meanings in place-making manifests through place attachment, place identity and place dependency. *Place attachment* refers to the emotional connection people have with a place. *Place identity* entails the individual psychological experience of place and its inhabitants. This describes the relationship and interaction of the site user with the site [35] and the collective feelings of site-users in a specific place and time [36], [37]. *Place dependency* reflects the synergy between the economic-, political and social context of a setting and that contributes to how the place ultimately functions [38].

Place-making seems to provide a platform to integrate and unlock multiple dimensions in practice. However, the practical usefulness of place-making seems less clear in spatial planning [5], [39].

D. Place-Making and Planning

The usefulness of place-making for spatial planning lies in the fact that place-making is much more than the construction of space. Through place-making, added value is generated apart from only creating or transforming the spatial setting. Spatial planners can benefit from place-making by *gaining an in-depth understanding of (i) the spatial setting and people involved, (ii) how to develop a plan/design based on a collective effort, (iii) the meaning of the process by reflecting on the process and (iv) the implementation of a plan/design through a joint initiative*. In order to illustrate these benefits of place-making a practical case study of place-making in planning will be discussed.

III. PLACE-MAKING CASE STUDY: THE LOCAL SPACE GLOBAL PLACE (LSGP) PROJECT IN IKAGENG, POTCHEFSTROOM, SOUTH AFRICA

In this section of the paper an introduction and background to the case study is discussed.

A. Case Study: Background

The paper focuses on the pilot study part of a broader umbrella research project called the *Local Space Global Place (LSGP) project*. The LSGP project was initiated by Urban and Regional Planning at the North-West University in Potchefstroom in 2012. The project (still ongoing) takes place-making as the overarching theoretical framework in order to help communities to transform local open spaces in their environment into vibrant public places [40], [41].

B. Research Approach

The LSGP project is based on a trans-disciplinary approach in which local lay knowledge is integrated with expert knowledge. Three academic disciplines (Urban and Regional Planning, Urban Ecology and Creative Art Education) were included in the pilot study (both academics and students) and worked in close conjunction with the City Council, community members and the private sector. An inclusive process was followed in which community members were pro-actively involved in all the stages of the project.

C. The Study Area

The broader research context is Ikageng, located in Potchefstroom in the North-West Province of South Africa (refer to Fig. 1).

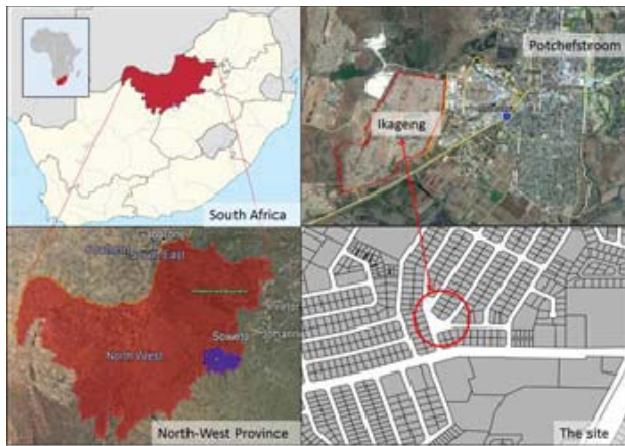


Fig. 1 The research site in Ikageng, Potchefstroom, North West Province, South Africa [42]

The research setting includes a small open space (approximately 1000 m² in size) located in a residential area of Ikageng. The site is officially part of a road reserve but is used by the community as a public space to socialise. The site was earmarked by the community as a priority area for revitalisation in their neighbourhood due to low maintenance of the area by

the local government (the site being used as a dumping site) and it being unsafe, especially for children.

D. Community Entrance

Entrance to the community in this case study was gained through a Ward Committee member of Ward 6. In South Africa, wards are geopolitical subdivisions within a municipality (governing body of a town/city) that plays a crucial role in governing and managing local society [43]. The role of the Ward Committee is to improve the level of democratic public participation within the jurisdiction of a local government [44]. Ward Committee members are democratically elected by citizens as representatives of the people living in the specific ward. In this case the community was contacted with the assistance of the Ward Councillor (head of the Ward Committee and one of the Municipal Councillors). An open invitation was given to community members to attend an initial on-site focus group to discuss the transformation of the open space appointed for revitalisation (Fig. 2 – Site before commencement of the research).



Fig. 2 Site before commencement of the research (Source: Photograph taken by researcher)

E. Approach, Methodology and Methods

Approach: The pilot study was *qualitative* in nature and was found suitable to explore unfamiliar research topics in an inductive, naturalistic way [45]-[47]. In qualitative studies such as these, the focus is on developing an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (place-making in this case) rather than presenting evidence in quantifiable terms and extrapolating it to other contexts [48], [49]. Understanding in this case was more important than examining or measuring factors in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency [50].

Methodology: The qualitative research approach and theoretical framework of place-making informed the choice of methodology. Participatory Action Research (PAR) was chosen as the methodological framework as it shares similar goals with place-making e.g. the promotion of empowerment [51]. PAR can be defined as a cyclical process which strives to empower members of a community. Empowerment in this sense, refers to the gathering and sharing of knowledge and wisdom related to a mutual concern. The most important goal of PAR is to eventually create change [52]. Change refers to physical- and social change. PAR is inherently driven by the aim to unlock values such as collaborative relationships, empowerment, mutual learning, social justice and equity and respect through the research process [53]- [56]. PAR serves the

place-making theoretical framework in this case study well as both PAR and place-making are inclusive processes.

Methods: Two methods were used in the case study, (i) focus group discussions and (ii) a collaborative design workshop. Focus groups are discussions that focus on a mutual concern/topic by a group of people that interact and share common viewpoints, characteristics or interests [57]. A collaborative design workshop entails a facilitated workshop where participants share individual input and discuss, negotiate and bargain an end product or outcome [58]. The methods were applied at various stages of the research process.

F. Research Process/Phases

Phase one: First focus group. The aim of this focus group was to gain a holistic understanding of how the research setting was experienced by the community (Fig. 3). The focus group consisted of twenty participants whose ages vary between twenty-five and sixty. This larger group was divided into two smaller focus groups led by two facilitators, an urban planner and an urban ecologist, both team members of the LSGP project. Questions posted to initiate further discussion included: (i) *how do you experience this site and surrounding area*, (ii) *how do you envision this site in the future*, and (iii) *based on the first and second question, how would you like to see the way forward?*



Fig. 3 On-site focus group 1 (Photograph taken by researcher)

Phase two: Second focus group. From the first focus group, a second core focus group was selected consisting of eleven participants between the ages of twenty-five and sixty and based on the following criteria (i) *daily interaction with the site*, (ii) *living adjacent to the site*, (iii) *have been living close to the site for longer than five years* and (iv) *being able to express themselves verbally in English*.



Fig. 4 Second focus group (Photograph taken by researcher)

The aim of the second focus group was to discuss the way in which the members of the community experienced the process, since the project was started (Fig. 4).

Phase three: Collaborative design workshop. According to [58] a collaborative design workshop can only be successful when interactive teamwork is followed. Interactive teamwork is firstly based on proactive collaboration where a better outcome is achieved by the group, compared to what is possible by individual effort [59]. Before commencement of the workshop community members (core participants) were requested to develop spatial ideas on how they would see the space being transformed. Using visual data in this case serves as a way for community members to express themselves in other ways than verbal expressions. The individual drawings served as a point of departure for the workshop. From the individual ideas, collective design elements were selected as guidelines to inform the concept plan/design. During the second stage of the workshop a communal plan was negotiated and developed in a collective manner (Fig. 5). The workshop laid the foundation for further involvement of stakeholders such as the local municipality, academic researchers and other community members. From here various plans and designs were negotiated until a final plan/design was agreed upon (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5 Collaborative Design Workshop (Photograph taken by researcher)

Phase four: Third focus group. The aim of this focus group was to develop a plan for implementing the community's plan/design. The implementation plan consisted of discussing the available resources for implementation (as this was a zero budget project), roles and responsibilities with regard to the implementation and a time frame for implementation. Using an inclusive approach in this phase ensured that community members shared in taking responsibility in the actual making of the place.

Phase five: Implementation. The implementation phase aimed to create physical change by transforming the space to a vibrant public place for the community (Fig. 7).

The implementation included the installation of a water connection on the site, cleaning and preparing the site, planting of trees (15 indigenous trees), paved encircling of some of the trees and planting vegetation around the trees, making play heaps for children from recycled tyres and defining the open space with recycled tyres that were painted (Fig. 8).

Phase five: Reflection. The overall aim of this phase was to give team members (who participated in the LSGP project) the opportunity to reflect on their personal experience with regard to (i) the pro-active and inclusive process followed and (ii) the product (spatial transformation) up until this phase (Fig. 9).



Fig. 6 Final design (Source: Composed by Centre of Spatial Planning (CPS))



Fig. 7 During implementation (Source: Photograph taken by researcher)



Fig. 8 The site after starting to implement the plan/design (Source: Photograph taken by researcher)



Fig. 9 Reflective focus group (Photograph taken by researcher)

G. Trustworthiness of This Case

Trustworthiness was established through triangulation in terms of how the data was generated. Multiple data was generated e.g. textual data (transcriptions of focus groups) and visual data (sketches, plans and photographs). A second way in which trustworthiness was established was through member checking. This implied that all findings that resulted from the various research phases were discussed with the community members to ensure that the interpretation of data was correct. Constant reflection on the process during the focus group discussions also assured that data was trustworthy.

H. Ethical Considerations

Ethical aspects were addressed through obtaining written consent forms from all community members in which the purpose of the research was explained, participants (community members) were assured of the fact that participation is voluntarily [60]; that no remuneration was supplied for their participation and that their identity will be kept anonymous [58].

IV. FINDINGS

In general, the findings of this case study revealed that all the dimensions of place-making (spatial dimension, procedural dimension and psychological dimension) emerged in the studied data.

A. Spatial Dimension

Spatial transformation (change) was established. A participant of the study mentioned: *"This is a park were the children can play..."*. This quote states that physical change was created. Initially, the park was deemed to be unsafe for children and site-users. By reflecting on the process, participants discovered that the open space was physically transformed into a safe place for children to play. This includes the physical upkeep of the research site as another participant in this study mentioned: *"I don't even want anyone throwing their bottles there..."*

B. Procedural Dimension

The LSGP project case study illustrated at least four principles in terms of a place-making process. Firstly, the process was *inclusive*. The trans-disciplinary point of departure that was adopted in the project ensured inclusiveness. The inclusive approach made provision for combining expert knowledge from team members (researchers) such as urban planners, an urban ecologist and an artist as well as lay

knowledge by including members of the community living around the site. Obtaining the input from local government officials, the Ward Committee, students and private sector individuals further enhanced inclusiveness. A second principle, was the *pro-active* way in which stakeholders, especially the community was involved. There was no pre-determined plan for the area but the community developed it with input from various experts. A third principle that was followed in terms of the process relates to the *interactive* nature of the process. The researchers facilitated the process instead of dictating it. Lastly, the overall process entails a *bottom-up* process in which the spatial transformation of the open space was built up from the ground instead of decisions made for the community.

C. Psychological Dimension

The case study illustrated a psychological dimension of place-making. Various values were developed such as empowerment, creation of strong social bonds, mutual learning and a strong sense of belonging. Some examples include: *"We were only neighbours... greeting each other... and passing by... Now, we... Participant x (older woman) can... can just call me... stand there and talk to me <laughter>"* this indicate that social change was created. The overall feeling of disregard initially experienced by participants (before commencement of research) change towards a positive direction (Participant: *"Let me say... we [community members] were all involved..."* and *"...we [participants] feels responsible for the upkeep of the site] don't want to see anybody throwing something bad there... We take care of the place..."*). Ultimately, the intra-physic qualities change unlocked a strong sense of place attachment among participants as a participant stated: *"I never took this 'parkie' [little park] into consideration anyway... nobody [community members] did... but ever since we [researchers and community members] met... it's like... I don't even want anyone throwing their bottles there [research area]"*

V. DISCUSSION

The LSGP research project served as a practical illustration of how a theoretical concept such as place-making unfolded in terms of various dimensions. The spatial (visual) dimension played an important role in transforming this lost open space [61] into a vibrant public place. Physical spatial planning and urban design elements were used as tools to create a different image and identity for this space. The visual design elements that were captured from the drawings done by community members were used as a catalyst to initiate group discussions as well as collaboration in terms of developing a concept plan/design in a bottom-up manner. Various visual elements were used to capture the community's vision for the future of the site: a clearly defined edge, made from recycled tyres and painted by the community; indigenous greening elements (plants and trees) used to sustain the ecosystem, create shade and beautify the space; the use of paved areas (a footpath and circles around the trees) to create spaces to walk and play; play apparatus for children (made from recycled tyres) in order to create a child-friendly space and a focus point (tree and paving)

in the centre to create spatial containment. The spatial dimensions played an important role in this case in the sense that it supported place-making by creating a new image and identity for the space [11]. Integrating the spatial dimension into place-making (e.g. by greening elements) is propagated in other place-making studies such [12]. We need to change space before we can change people's lives [62]. This suggests spatial planning (and design) as a critical component of place-making.

The procedure followed in this case study can be viewed as an important link between the spatial and psychological dimension. Through the inclusive and pro-active place-making process that was followed, psychological values were developed. The PAR method used in the case study supported place-making by providing guiding steps and tools to involve a community in an interactive manner [41]. This study further supports Friedman's view [16] that places are more than the physical outcome/product and should be created by using context specific elements (e.g. by planners and designers). Places are unique and context bound and intertwined with the community that uses them. Communities can provide valuable insight into the making and re-making of places. As informative for this specific place-making process, a participatory approach was selected due to its inclusive nature in terms of the planning, designing and transformation of public places [40], [41].

The third dimension, the psychological dimension, emerged from this particular case study as a spin-off from a combination of spatial and procedural dimensions. The process followed, led to the unlocking of personal and collective values such as empowerment, the strengthening of existing and new social relationships, mutual learning and respect for diversity.

The LSGP case study confirms that place-making is a multi-dimensional concept. Other studies referred to in the introductory part in this paper made important contributions to the various dimensions of place-making. This study suggests place-making as an integrated holistic concept in which the various dimensions are interrelated and interdependent.

An integrated approach to place-making (in which spatial planning plays an important role) provides a valuable platform for place-making in South Africa to empower communities and enhance democracy on a local level.

VI. CONCLUSION

By focusing on the multiple research phases of this case study, it is noted that all of the place-making dimensions (spatial-, procedural-, and psychological dimensions) emerged. Initially the focus was on mere physical change. Soon the procedural dimension (the most relevant dimension for this study) was noted. The procedural dimension revolves around the inclusion of participants' inherited and local knowledge in the final design/outcome. This knowledge is found to be context-specific and include creative initiatives/ideas of site users. In its end, this place-making process unlocked intra-physic qualities, which revolved around strong social relations and respect towards diversity (e.g. acknowledgement

of co-participants' ideas). This psychological dimension was conceptualised in the place attachment (memorable process which informed the final design) of participants with regard to the site. The place identity enhanced as physical and social change emerged but ultimately restored when a sense of community was unlocked due to the inclusive process. Thus, the spatial-, procedural- and psychological dimensions emerged in this place-making case study.

Place-making is a useful tool which can be incorporated in spatial planning. As place-making was initially a top-down concept, promoting this process to a bottom-up concept betters the level of democratic decision-making practices (important in a South African context). Learning from the systematic nature of spatial planning, the research phases could be discussed, negotiated and bargained in order to reach a suitable design/outcome. Therefore, this case study contributes to the field of place-making and planning due to the empowering process followed. This include the manner in which participants was empowered to represent, renovate and maintain the area in which they live. Spatial planning and urban design principles ultimately informed the process of place-making.

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