



# Organic ‘folkloric’ community driven place-making and tourism



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Organic place-making is described under five different disciplinary perspectives.
- Some community-driven organic place-making results in new destinations emerging.
- Organic community-led place-making restricts tourism management to place-marketing.
- Relevant forms of creative tourism rely on community-driven place-making practices.
- Organic community-driven place-making enhances destination sustainability.

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## ABSTRACT

The term ‘place-making’ describes a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public places for improving urban environments and residents’ quality of life. Place-making has since become an institutionalized industry often supported by multi-million dollar budgets, but rarely are communities in control. The emphasis on improved welfare outcomes for communities has frequently omitted tourism benefits as an objective, although the tourism industry is often quick to exploit public space developments. Even though there is an emergent literature on place-making and tourism that has started to analyze this phenomenon, there is still little understanding of the role of place-making in tourism when place-making is the result of a community-led organic process. Five cases of place-making through emic, organic, folkloric, community-driven initiatives that differ markedly from the formal ‘industry’ of place-making that have achieved tourism-related outcomes even where tourism was not a primary motivation, are explored.

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## 1. Introduction

The genesis for this study came from awareness during a decade of accumulated visits to five small tourist attractions in Tasmania, of the phenomenon of place-making that seemed to be embedded in community, coupled with curiosity about how they developed as distinct places and were able to maintain their vitality. As an area of academic study, place-making is an evolving field of academic research and industry practice set within a dynamic social context that is interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary, and is influenced *inter alia* by geography, economics, public policy, political science, sociology, psychology, law, architecture, construction sciences, technology and marketing. Past research has attempted to view, explain and unpack the inherent complexities of

place-making through a variety of lenses, and in tourism it has often been restricted to image (re-)construction for marketing. The integrated synthesis across disciplinary boundaries that is utilized here thus denies a single paradigmatic approach although in broad terms it could be characterized as ‘complexity place-making.’

The beautification of public spaces through iconic architecture, monumental art works, sculptures and other artistic expression, has been a key factor in creating images of and identity for villages, towns and cities dating back centuries. This image creation has been an evolutionary process and the tourism industry is an avid consumer of such places. Highly distinctive and celebrated streetscapes of cities such as Rome, Paris, London, Athens, Istanbul, Bhaktapur, Suzhou, Kyoto and many more as highly attractive destinations, immediately spring to mind, their attractions sacralized through tourism (MacCannell, 1976). But these are places that have already been ‘made’ in the sense that they have had distinct, globally recognizable images/representations/signifiers for many

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years (e.g. semiotically, Paris equals the Eiffel tower and 'the city of romance') in contrast to the five places in Tasmania that are the object of this study and which have no such pedigree. In the 1960's and 1970's the term 'place-making' was coined in the USA to describe a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public places for improving the urban environment and the quality of life of communities, with aesthetics integrated into developments largely from architectural and landscape design perspectives.

Since then many urban jurisdictions have formally embraced the concept of public place projects and institutionalized moves to improve their urban environments by establishing bureaucratic structures and annual budgetary commitments to oversee grants, contracts and tenders, etc. for a wide range of place-making activities. The European Community (EC), for example, has adopted a common approach to work towards 'Sustainable Communities' through the Bristol Accord of 2005 by which member states agreed that such communities "should provide places (regional, local and neighbourhood) where people want to live and work, now and in the future ... that meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life" (ODPM 2005, p. 12). The accent is on livability issues that by definition inescapably incorporate place-making. The EC's *Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities* (2007), with its emphasis on the need for the Bristol Accord to achieve its economic, social and physical objectives through coordination of sectoral policies, strong horizontal partnerships, increased local responsibilities and the concentration of funding on selected target areas, and thus has urban governance processes of place-making lying at the heart of a European approach to sustainable communities (Jacquier, 2005; Kokx, 2011). Another recent, typical, example is *Hong Kong's 2013 'Signature Projects' grants scheme* of HK\$1.8 billion (US\$233.25 million)- HK\$100 million for each of its 18 districts "to initiate one to two signature projects to meet the needs of the District and be sustainable with lasting impact" (Home Affairs Department of Hong Kong, 2013, p. 1). Furthermore the *United Nations Habitat Commission* has been at the forefront of a global drive to promote the philosophy and process of place-making through its Sustainable Urban Development Network initiative and its 2011 *Transforming Cities through Place-making and Public Spaces Programme*. At the 23rd Session of the UNHC's Governing Council in Nairobi, Kenya, on 23 April 2011 it adopted the first-ever public space resolution which urged the development of a policy approach for the international application of 'place-making'. This was followed with a five year agreement between the UNHC and the US-based non-profit organization, 'Project for Public Spaces' (PPS): "Transforming Cities through Placemaking & Public Spaces," to harness the power of public space for the common good. It is multifaceted in its goals. *"It aspires to raise international awareness of the importance of public space; to foster an exchange of ideas among partners; and to educate a new generation of planners, designers, community activists, and other civic leaders about the benefits of the Placemaking methodology. The cooperation is global in scope, with activities at the city level, actively engaging local partners in the important work of improving their own communities"* (Project for Public Spaces Inc. 2012, p.1).

Inherent in this active verb, 'place-making', is the connotation of a process rather than a result. When one speaks of place-making, rather than places already made, interventions that seek to change the status quo are being described. Place-making is now a significant, institutionalized industry engaging professionals from a wide range of disciplines – architects, physical and urban planners, landscape architects, sociologists, economists, artists, and others -

often supported by multi-million dollar budgets, and while residents' views are (in western countries) now generally incorporated into the planning process, only infrequently are communities actually in control. However, in some other countries particularly where NGOs are active, such as in Nepal, Malaysia (especially in the World Heritage Site of George Town), Thailand, Fiji, Argentina and so forth, the practice of community-initiated place-making and the role of civil society forces in the make-over of public spaces is increasing (Hou & Rios, 2003), and this has sometimes led to 'pop-up' not-for-profit organizations to voice community concerns and aspirations.

In numerous instances the emphasis on urban renewal and revitalization for improved welfare outcomes has not included seeking economic benefits through tourism as a stated objective. It is essentially a process of evaluating an extant site from a variety of perspectives aesthetic, environmental, historical, cultural, socio-economic, and formulating a strategy to clarify, transform, and enhance that place in terms of a variety of enmeshed contexts: aesthetics, identity, and design integrity; integration with the surrounding built and natural environments; environmental sustainability; livability and local use value; accessibility and safety; cultural relevance to the community and extant place; and ultimately viability as an engine for local and regional economic development (Fleming, 2007).

The focus for the great majority of such projects has tended to be on urban community 'live-ability' benefits, and in many cases seeking economic benefits through tourism has been a fortuitous outcome rather than a specific objective. Often there has been no tourism outcome at all. For example, the movement of "New Urbanism", that initially arose in the United States during the 1980s, advocates for a more sustainable development of and for local communities (see *Congress for the New Urbanism, 1996*). For a long time, it omitted any mention of implications for tourism and almost blended out the visitor as part of a community's stakeholders (Specht, 2014). However, within the past years the movement started a tentative discussion about the significance of tourism for communities and, conversely, the dependence of tourism on the image of the community and the quality of place (Steuteville, 2016).

Tourism has co-opted the concept of place-making enthusiastically. The reason is basic. Place-making in its most striking forms creates an identity, an image, a difference from other places. And since tourism is based to a significant extent on difference - difference as between 'home' and 'away', difference between work and leisure, difference from familiar places, different experiences that are available in 'new' places, difference in culture and nature (Relph, 1976; Urry, 2002), place-making as tourism becomes a powerful tool for marketing a destination. In the context of this paper, we add as one objective of place-making its outcome sometimes as an attractor for tourism, following Greaves (2011).

Place-making however did not start with tourism, and indeed tourism is only a late-comer to the multi-faceted process that it has become in the past 50 years. The major function of tourism in place-making is using its outputs and outcomes to 'construct' (in marketing terms) a village, town or city as an attractive destination to visit, using the identity, images and experiences that place-making can create. At the same time, depending on who is exercising control, tourism might also assign further or new meaning to a place, which then has real effects on its local community (Human, 1999).

This paper examines place-making in tourism against a global backdrop of public space project development to explore the role of community and organic 'folkloric' expressions of their identity through community-initiated projects for public spaces in

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