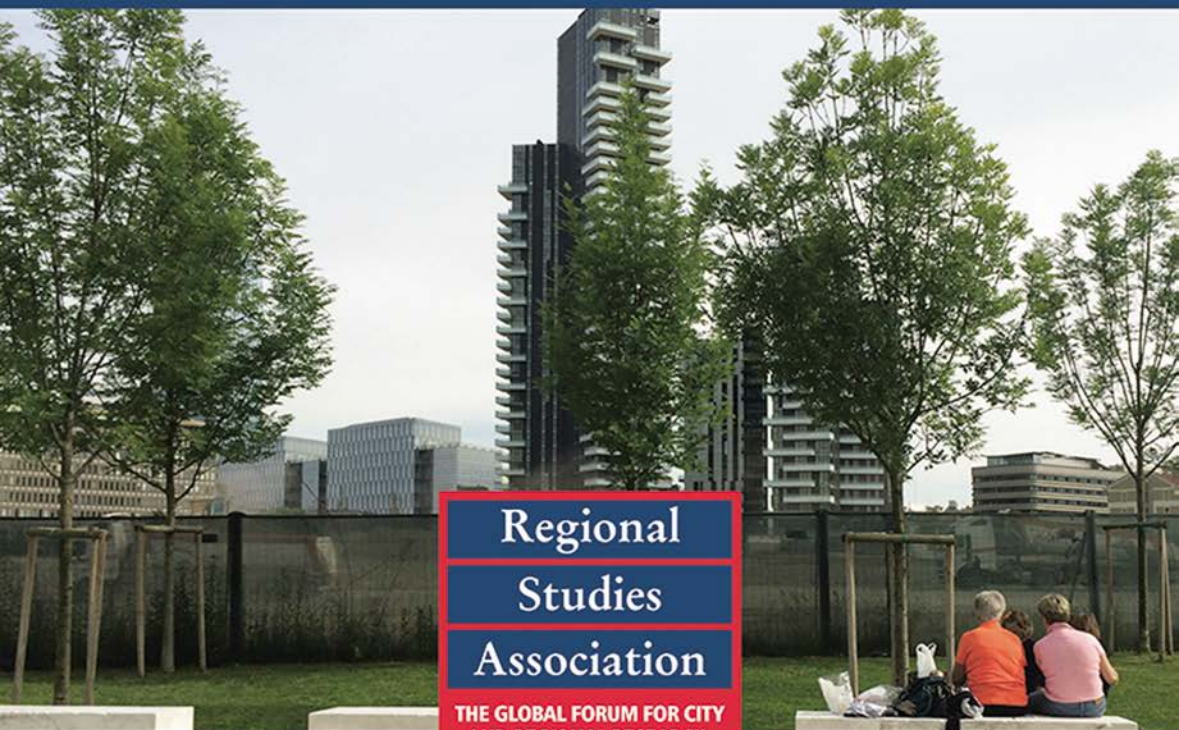


PLACE-MAKING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

NEW CHALLENGES FOR CONTEMPORARY
PLANNING AND DESIGN



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PIER CARLO PALERMO AND
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Place-making and Urban Development

The regeneration of critical urban areas through the redesign of public space with the intense involvement of local communities seems to be the central focus of place-making according to some widespread practices in academic and professional circles. Recently, new expertise maintains that place-making could be an innovative and potentially autonomous field, competing with more traditional disciplines such as urban planning, urban design, architecture, and others.

This book affirms that the question of “making better places for people” should be understood in a broader sense, as a symptom of the non-contingent limitations of the urban and spatial disciplines. It maintains that research should not be oriented only toward new technical or merely formal solutions but rather toward the profound rethinking of disciplinary paradigms. In the fields of urban planning, urban design, and policy-making, the challenge of place-making provides scholars and practitioners a great opportunity for a much-needed critical review. Only the substantial reappraisal of long-standing (technical, cultural, institutional, and social) premises and perspectives can truly improve place-making practices.

The pressing need for place-making implies trespassing undue disciplinary boundaries and experimenting with a place-based approach that can innovate and integrate planning regulations, strategic spatial visioning, and urban development projects. Moreover, the place-making challenge compels urban experts and policy-makers to critically reflect upon the physical and social contexts of their interventions. In this sense, facing place-making today is a way to renew the civic and social role of urban planning and urban design.

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Place-making and Urban Development

New challenges for contemporary
planning and design

**Pier Carlo Palermo and
Davide Ponzini**

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To Nina and Susanna, born place-makers
To my parents

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1 Place-making issues

1.1 What is place-making?

Polysemy

There is not a single and shared answer to this question. According to some interpretations, making urban places is a crucial goal in some influential urban planning/design traditions. In fact, the topic recalls some emerging challenges that have engendered controversial and evolving solutions in these disciplines. “Making better places” should be the focus of the planning project in the twenty-first century according to Patsy Healey, even if her approach does not attribute an influential role to urban design (Healey, 2010). On the other hand, urban design can be understood as “the art of making better places for people” (Carmona et al., 2003: 3). According to John Punter who, like Matthew Carmona, has undertaken important urban research, “the biggest challenge remains to convert the increasingly vacuous mantra of place-making into substantive corporate practices linking development management with housing, transport and community services provision” (Punter, 2010: 352). This view reveals a certain impatience with some of today’s place-making rhetoric, as well as the desire to anchor thinking to concrete urban development processes. These considerations indicate a degree of convergence between two major disciplinary traditions that have long remained separate and are often in competition. If they do share common goals, some criticism of the current disciplinary division is justified, as is the search for greater mutual cooperation between planning and design (Punter and Carmona, 1997, Wyatt, 2004, Vale, 2008).

Moreover, the most popular conceptions of place-making seem to move in different directions. This potentially radical innovation could open new prospects regarding issues of great civic and social interest. According to Project for Public Spaces, “place-making has the potential to be one of the most transformative ideas of this century” (MPC Chicago, 2008: 1). It is an original way of thinking about urban issues and their possible solutions. The approach is distinguished by precise features and has generated important work, and now seems to seek more advanced forms of institutionalization. In this sense, place-making could represent a potentially autonomous theory and practice, deserving special attention (Madden, 2011).

2 *Place-making issues*

Rarer are opposing positions that not only tend to question the topic's novelty but critically highlight the limitations of innovations that kindled great hope in recent decades. Allmendinger and Haughton reflect upon issues of spatial planning in Great Britain, "the dominant planning doctrine during the New Labour years"; they note that this planning framework "through multi-scalar and sectoral co-ordination and integration was envisaged as a form of meta-spatial governance or, in more prosaic terms, concerned with place-making" (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2011a: 184). This observation is interesting insofar as it aptly points out that the place-making scale is not only local. Unfortunately, it also indicates that this label can be associated with experiences that were recently considered innovative and influential but today are in crisis in certain important contexts (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009). This is the case of spatial planning in the UK. "In retrospect spatial planning was replete with overambitious statements and was not subject to sufficient critical engagement or challenge" (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2011a: 184). In this sense, the centrality of place-making for the spatial disciplines is highlighted; however, based on an honest appraisal, it can be argued that some institutional, social, and disciplinary difficulties are still unresolved. Considerable distance from the previously indicated celebratory positions still remains.

This variety of positions should stimulate reflection. Most likely, place-making could be considered a topic with which it seems impossible to disagree. But it is not the only one. Other trendy buzzwords seem doomed to the same fate. In fact there are "phrases such as sustainable development, urban renaissance and sustainable communities that everyone could sign up to – who could be for unsustainable development?" (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010: 327). However, virtuous intentions and overly vague interpretations cannot become alibis. Purely rhetorical positions can conceal a number of important problems and difficulties behind a veil of uplifting values (Wortham-Galvin, 2008). It is neither possible nor right to oscillate opportunistically between divergent visions. Responsibility must be taken by stating a position that clarifies a chosen point of view.

Trends and challenges

Based on these premises, it seems important to declare the book's underlying position. In our view, place-making should not be considered a mere professional practice nor a new disciplinary category. The concept alludes to an important topic – the production of *livable* and *sustainable places* – that should be included in the missions of the various disciplines that address the organization and management of the built environment. It also refers to a set of practices for achieving this goal through the application of rules and the use of appropriate tools. We do not believe that it is a priority to attempt to define a new field of ideas and experiences in relation to these issues, although similar trends can be observed on the international scene (PPS, 2012, Silverberg et al., 2013). It seems more important to reflect upon the ways in which this topic has been approached in different disciplinary traditions. This is a two-fold task: selection, since only some paradigms

can truly address this range of issues; and “trespassing” (in Hirschman’s view, 1981), since problems and approaches should not be confined to a single subject or professional field.

In this way, it might become possible to rethink how some key challenges are faced in different cultural traditions, and to explore the mutual intersections suggesting new developments that might be significant for the disciplines themselves (Palermo and Ponzini, 2010). These results seem potentially more interesting than institutionalizing yet another academic domain and creating specialized place-making handbooks – while not once foregoing the fact that these goals are important for professional practice (Pitchford and Henderson, 2008, Hamdi, 2010, Ellin, 2013).

There is no doubt that interest in the topic has been manifested among professionals and the public; it grew from a series of mostly local experiences concerning the quality of urban settlements and the meaning of the urban condition. The importance and timeliness of these issues seem to justify the idea of formulating specific professional circles or establishing a new disciplinary field (see, for example, the work by Project for Public Spaces [PPS], Resource for Urban Development International [RUDI], and similar references). However, these are not new issues, but rather fundamental questions for policy-makers, urban scholars, practitioners, and, especially, citizens. It is difficult to maintain that urban planning or design practices can substantially disregard problems and goals of this kind. Thus, it might be wise to explore the reasons why so many real planning and design experiences and, more generally public policy, have not been able to guarantee satisfactory results regarding such principles and criteria. Considerable communicative simplification prevails and, in many cases, any real reflection seems to be lacking. Instead of learning from specific situations, it seems easier to understand place-making as an innovative practice (as an alternative to the planning and design mainstream: Madden, 2011). This means underestimating the connections between emerging experiences, established disciplinary and professional fields (Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2011), and the non-contingent difficulties of any project whose goal is to improve the quality of urban life (well-documented by Carmona et al., 2003, Jenks and Dempsey, 2005, Punter, 2010, Healey, 2010, Calthorpe, 2011, Flannery and Smith, 2011, Sanyal et al., 2012, in their respective fields).

We believe that this point of view can lead to ephemeral outcomes and new disenchantments. It seems necessary to reject fashionable and simplistic place-making conceptions in order to think more deeply about the meaning and scope of this challenge within contemporary society and disciplinary culture. We need a solid conceptual framework and a rigorous critique of some trendy positions. In our view, the answer to the initial question can be found neither in alleged best practices nor in mere exhortations, however virtuous they may be. The question brings into play a number of critical factors regarding practices and thinking about the quality of spatial development and the creation of better conditions for urban life. The scope of this book is to attempt to reinterpret what is, in reality, a classic theme – “making better places” – based more appropriately on emerging challenges and past experience.

Key issues

If this is the premise, we must tackle some difficulties. For many years, the concept of “place” has appeared questionable on the local scale and even more so on the urban one. The city is no longer a place; it no longer manifests a unified and shared identity. Correspondence between space and society is more uncertain; spatial fragmentation – into separate and often precarious urban units – is growing and open and public spaces are likely to become residual or problematic (Roncayolo, 1985, Bridge and Watson, 2000, Soja, 2000, Zukin, 2010, Shane, 2011). A genuine community dimension may be missing even on the local level (Fishman, 1987, Calthorpe 1993, Beauregard 2006, Grant 2006) while the capacity of urban settlements to foster cohesion among its numerous social components is diminishing (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000, Bauman, 2003). It is more plausible to believe that socially and culturally uniform features are selected on the basis of contractual relations (see the case of “gated communities”: Fordvary, 1994, Beito et al., 2002, Nelson, 2005, Atkinson and Blandy, 2006, Glasze et al., 2006). The “spirit of place” (Norberg Schulz, 1979, De Carlo, 1992) is likely to become a rhetorical image alluding to a presumed tradition that has been lost and cannot find confirmation in real urban conditions and experiences.

In this context, current rhetoric reaffirms the priority of regenerating *urban places*. Place-making refers to goals that are of obvious symbolic, civic and social interest, but it could also open new opportunities for architectural and urban development. If quality of life improves, possibilities for the use of places become more diverse and profitable as does their ability to attract (Smyth, 1994, Ward, 1998, Anholt, 2007, Angotti, 2008, Porter and Shaw, 2009). Therefore, the prospect might seem worthwhile. The point is whether it is necessary to substantiate such assumptions, strategies and approaches. Do the factors that have undermined the notion of place in the post-modern city not constitute obstacles? The caveat applies to those who intend to establish a new professional, and possibly academic, domain which, moreover, could be added to the many already available (urban design, new urbanism, landscape urbanism, and so on) in a highly fragmented arena under pressure from professional competition rather than cultural identity. It also applies to those who only seek to overcome the limitations of traditional practices through improved capacity for integration between the physical and social dimensions of a given problem (Glass, 1959, Jacobs, 1961, Perloff, 1965, Gans, 1968, Whyte, 1980, Madanipour, 1996), and between expert and common knowledge (Friedmann and Hudson, 1974, Lindblom and Cohen, 1979, Schön, 1982, 1983a, Friedmann, 1987, Crosta, 1998, Fisher, 2009). At various times and in different contexts, similar topics have been explored by a number of urban design and planning schools. What are the innovations that could make the new direction successful? It is difficult to find any indication in this sense in trendy place-making communications. Each experience seems to be related to local and contingent factors and it does not seem necessary to discuss underlying reasons, principles and presumed innovations. Is it only a matter of waiting for the progress of good practices? This position seems simplistic and illusory and risks

becoming a mere ideological manifestation, like new rhetoric that accompanies practices that have not have been substantially renewed. In this way, the need for innovation and potential revision of some current experiences might be thwarted.

If this is the challenge, a dual line of investigation seems necessary: the study of the emerging place-making phenomenology and the exploration of the relationships among this set of practices, new reflections on the topic, and some design, planning, and policy-making traditions that are relevant insofar as they are interconnected or overlapping with such a field of experiences. The goal is not to invent new visions or practices but to seek more appropriate responses to long-term and still-unresolved problems.

1.2 Simplistic views and recurrent criticism

One fashionable topic

Over the past decade, place-making discourses have proliferated in the public arena and within the general population even before having reached academia. A survey of the most widespread media (more influential in terms of public opinion than specialized texts) shows increasing diffusion, which does not, however, correspond to mature conceptual thought (see Boyd and Chan, 2002, PPS, 2009, 2012, Grabow, 2013). The trend stems from extensive dissatisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of urban conditions. Contemporary society and politics continue to create settlements that lack meaning, where the “spirit of place” has become increasingly weak – fragile and uncertain or imaginary and imitative when the attempt is made to transfer general and preconceived settlement patterns to any given context (Fishman, 1977, 2011). At the same time, pervasive globalization and changing lifestyles undermine the cohesion of local communities (Nancy, 1986, 1999, Bauman, 2003, 2007) despite the confidence of new urbanism in being able to overcome these problems (Duany and Plater-Zyberg, 1991, Katz, 1994, Dutton, 2000). In this context, town planning or urban design practices regarding the physical transformation of urban contexts are not sufficient; the challenge is to improve the quality of life and the resulting effects on a community’s well-being and empowerment. The economic and social crisis that has been looming for years should stimulate environmental sustainability and social cohesion along with the economic attractiveness of urban places. “Soft place-making skills” are necessary for achieving these goals (Urban Design Forum, 2009:1). Here we are not alluding to a set of techniques but to a different approach that can ensure deep and positive innovation. At least this is the hope.

In reality, the list of available tools is short and well known. Current place-making experiences tend to improve livability and urban sustainability mainly through the modification or transformation of public space (Barnett, 1974, Gehl, 1987, Carmona et al., 2003, Madanipour, 2003). Projects take on juridical, planning, architectural, and economic characteristics, with possible social consequences. However, it is difficult to maintain that a dense and rich idea of the *public realm* is in question – even if John Dewey’s idea of “public” has been influential in

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international planning culture. In general, what is missing is thinking about how public space might generate common meaning (Bridge and Watson, 2000, Amin and Thrift, 2002, Dehaene and De Cauter, 2008) and social interaction between a plurality of subjects (Lindblom, 1990, Lanzara, 1993); also lacking is the analysis of the material consequences of these processes on social behaviors and public policy (Bianchetti, 2008b). The physical components of the interventions concern the technical design and construction of an urban structure. However, the symbolic, anthropological, and social analyses continue to be schematic or merely hypothetical.

In truth, the approach seeks to be innovative. Traditional relationships between settlement form and life experiences should be overturned – “First life, then space, then buildings” (Gehl, 2006: 75; see also Gehl and Gemzoe, 2003, Gehl, 2010). The possibilities for and quality of the urban experience should guide planning and architectural choices. Another innovative requirement, with respect to traditional practice, would be the participation of people in the construction of urban places. Participation is a challenging notion that should not be confused with generic consultation procedures. In fact, it might involve situations of involvement, engagement, or empowerment; the sequence itself indicates a crescendo of commitments and responsibilities (PPS, 2009, RUDI, 2014). Many participatory experiences have yielded disappointing results but these difficulties should not lead to cynical conclusions that consider participation to be an expensive and purely formal ritual adopted out of necessity or convenience and which does not produce any significant effects. The point is that people, with their life experiences, are experts: in meaning, needs, and possibilities for the transformation of urban space (Imrie and Hall, 2001, PPS, 2009, Madden 2011). Professionals need only provide the complementary resources useful for facilitating the process. This view contradicts the more widespread belief among scholars and practitioners insofar as the most common conceptions of urban design rely mainly – if not exclusively – on political will and professional expertise. It therefore becomes important to study everyday practices in order to investigate possible meanings and emerging needs with which design solutions should be consistent. The possibility for, and importance of, a bottom-up participatory approach seems to find confirmation in such recent trends as the aforementioned new urbanism, eco-cities (Heynen et al., 2006, Beatley, 2011, 2012, Wong and Yuen, 2011), or the smart cities movements (Heberle and Opp, 2008, Dierwechter, 2008, Duany and Speck, 2010) that have achieved fame and success – first in the US and later in Europe – as alternatives to traditional functionalist, normative, and technocratic urbanism (Sutcliffe, 1980, Perloff, 1980, Boyer 1983, Krueckeberg, 1983). The formulation of good practices and the selection of appropriate toolkits should derive from testing innovative participatory methods. Reference to specific contexts should be indispensable but practitioners tend to create, as far as possible, general professional handbooks (Wates, 2000, 2008, Pitchford and Henderson, 2008, Cooper et al., 2009, Hamdi, 2010, Sarkissian et al., 2010).

Traditions and experiments

One might object. “Participatory design of public space” is certainly not an unusual theme in urban design or planning. For some time, community design, new urbanism, advocacy planning (Davidoff, 1965, Peattie, 1968, Clavel 1994), transactive planning (Friedmann, 1973, Alexander, 1995), or collaborative planning (Healey, 1997, Innes and Booher, 2008, Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2011) have moved in similar directions in different ways, with varied and sometimes disappointing outcomes. How can we have greater hopes in this case? The emerging place-making movement seems to rely on reassuring rhetoric. The innovations are not quite as clear from the point of view of principles, tools, and techniques.

If we focus for a moment on *techniques* and *tools*, the proposals certainly do not appear original (Hall and Portefield 2001, Ellin, 2006, 2013, Walter, 2007, Silverberg et al., 2013). Transformation should ideally be driven by a master plan intimately related to a specific context. Urban settlements should ensure a sufficiently varied and balanced functional mixité. The priority should be the creation of a system of public places that promote social interaction with choices based on compliance with strict sustainability requirements. Observation, interaction, and listening are foundations for learning that helps the local community share and implement an integrated vision. Management of the process plays a key role and it is not only a matter of analysis, decision, and design: operational effectiveness becomes a crucial requirement. It is not a purely public function because partnerships with private or collective subjects become essential at this stage. In fact, government should focus its efforts on the redevelopment of public space, relying on the mobilization of private resources and initiatives to fully implement a shared vision. Architectural and urban form is an important issue but it is not a decisive one. In fact, it might even be secondary in relation to the previously mentioned factors. In any case, form should not be considered an independent variable.

These reasonable, but fairly obvious, indications could easily be shared by the traditional spatial disciplines. Even the way they are expressed is not problematic. Generally speaking, attention does not focus on possible critical issues: the inevitable mediation between the public good and private interests in the case of partnerships (Pierre, 1998, 2000, Osborne 2000, 2010, McCarthy, 2007); the influence of the design of physical form on the possible meaning of concrete life experiences (Bentley, 1999, Thorns, 2002, Dobbins, 2009, Knox 2011); and the paradoxes of collective rationality that make a synthesis increasingly difficult (Elster, 1979, 1983).

In terms of *principles*, elaborations are often superficial and some choices may even be surprising. In fact, it is widely believed that the approach must be holistic (MPC Chicago, 2008, PPS, 2009, 2012, RUDI, 2014). Does this mean taking into account the idea of comprehensive planning or integral design despite the fragmentation of contemporary society and a prevailing tendency toward incremental approaches? The ambition is to create settlements that are beautiful, safe, welcoming, and vital (but also engaging for people) by working on the multiple

dimensions of an urban place. However, it is never explained how and why this attempt might succeed today after so many past failures.

Another influential principle concerns the connections among the historical knowledge of a place, urban design, and intervention. If it is necessary to give voice to a population, it is plausible that its evaluations would be influenced by the context's evolution. The risk is that the creation of new places would be based on memories and the legacy of the past (Mumford, 1938, 1961, Samonà, 1959, Muratori, 1967), something that could also lead to conservative choices. The outcome might be paradoxical because, as we have already observed, the identity of urban places has been deeply challenged by long-term processes. Is it enough to start from inherited traces with confidence in regaining or reconstructing an authentic meaning that once was? The risk lies in confirming a presumed shared tradition that might appear outdated or merely ideological (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). In many cases, the very concept of shared tradition can be doubted because the urban and social framework is so fragmented and ambiguous that it cannot justify a unified vision (Grant, 1994, Putnam, 2000, Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones, 2006, Haughton et al., 2010). In conclusion, there is a danger of crystallizing memories of the past or underestimating the plurality of competing visions. Can there be a consolidated and authentic idea of urban identity in light of the variety of a population's interests and viewpoints? Are we sure that all interests – even those of minority groups – are properly represented in the process? Another thorny issue concerns these questions: To whom do places belong? Who must care for their fates? Is it legitimate to refer only to their temporary inhabitants? And so entrust only to local interests responsibility for, and care of, potential common goods whose management causes major effects on other scales and for other subjects?

One might hope that, in practice, the relationship between tradition and innovation could be more open. Original proposals for action – not necessarily predictable on the basis of initial conditions – can derive from a combination of multiple lines of action in the spheres of planning, design, governance, and local democracy. These observations introduce a dilemma that will deserve specific consideration. Must we understand place-making as deliberate design action in which the relationships between conditions, subjects, targets, and effects are clear and linear (see Dror, 1971, Chadwick, 1971, Faludi, 1973)? Or is “making better places for people” essentially the result of a set of conditions and interactions? In other words, is it an effect, with partially unexpected or unpredictable consequences, that can be generated mainly through indirect means (Boudon, 1977, Jullien, 1996, Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007)? The first position is the simplest and still the most common, but perhaps there are good reasons to seek a more sophisticated conceptual framework geared toward the latter. The fact remains that current place-making discourses do not address this crucial dilemma.

A third paradigmatic point regards the decisive role of partial actions – consistent with a strategic perspective – that should concretely demonstrate the chances of success and encourage more virtuous behavior. “True place-making begins at the smallest scale” (Lydon, 2012: 1). Paradoxically, this approach might

involve an incrementalist vision that also seems to be incompatible with the above-mentioned holistic aspiration (but disciplinary debate tends to gloss over the problem). The priority lies in identifying incisive partial actions that can produce positive and widespread effects. Patrick Geddes well anticipated the fertile nexus between small interventions and long-term vision (Meller, 1990, Ferraro, 1998). A crucial point is that it is not enough to conceive good niche projects inspired by purely local interests and goals. The coherence of such measures with a large-scale sustainable vision is decisive. That vision needs to be shared and legitimized by an open community that includes influential networks of large-scale dynamic relationships, not always regulated by a clear, legitimate, and unitary institutional framework (the problem becomes even more serious if the outlook is cosmopolitan).

On the whole, standard discursive forms do not permit the identification of the paradigmatic features of current place-making theory and indeed may give rise to doubts of inconsistency or superficiality. The rhetoric is as elementary as it is assertive. Current divulgation offers the public a radically dualistic vision. On the one hand, a rich and varied set of positive values is extolled: the place-making perspective would, by definition, be “visionary, aware, context-sensitive, community-driven, inclusive, collaborative, sociable, transformative, and adaptable” (PPS, 2009: 1). Focus on life experiences should guide functional choices and prevail over purely formal considerations because the focus is on creating truly livable places through a multidimensional approach. On the other hand, a negative model of traditional practice would be conditioned by serious limitations such as projects “imposed from above, reactive, exclusionary, dependent on regulatory control and design-driven, and project focused” (*ibidem*) in which a project-led approach is understood as the expert formulation of technical solutions imposed on a place with political support. In these cases, the adopted solutions would be technocratic, rigid, and related to a reductive view of urban development assimilated to mere real estate development. In these terms, it is difficult to open a discussion on the merits of the topic. There is only room for partisan evaluations. The contrast between the two points of view seems obvious and the truth seems to lie only on one side. But real situations are more varied and controversial than these schematic representations.

Open issues

Some critical elements should be obvious. The right to participate is usually granted to a place’s inhabitants but other indirectly involved subjects have no voice in processes that tend to be managed on the local level without taking into account direct or indirect broader-scale effects. A place is likely to become an enclave where local will prevails regardless of the importance of the long-distance relationships involved. Yet urban planning has become an institution precisely because institutional mediation is indispensable between divergent viewpoints and conflicts of interest on different scales but interdependent in space and time (Haar and Kayden, 1989, Cullingworth, 1993, Mazza, 1997).

However, the place-making approach is not convincing even on the local scale because two key issues are misjudged. The first regards whether or not the interests involved in a decision-making process are representative (is the process truly inclusive?) and the possibility of creating a legitimate and shared synthesis in a given context. Methodological problems and the legitimacy of the community deliberation process are not addressed – treated as though they were irrelevant; this also raises dilemmas and paradoxes, demonstrated by the evolution of the debate regarding deliberative democracy that has grown increasingly sophisticated over the last two decades (Dryzek, 1990, Bohman, 1996, Elster, 1998, Parkinson, 2007, Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010). The resulting gap between available resources, stated goals, and the tools' effective potential is difficult to bridge. The prevailing approach is pragmatic and experimental. Questions regarding analytic and methodological accuracy remain and there is no trace of critical thinking. This conclusion is somewhat embarrassing because the criticism of the traditional discipline by place-making proponents is peremptory. The risk lies in ignoring the level of awareness, commitment, and maturity of some noteworthy planning and design experiences from the past while overestimating, instead, the importance of recent trends that are perhaps more instrumental and ephemeral than their promoters maintain.

These considerations bring us to the most critical point. Perhaps it is not enough to encourage the creation of a plurality of spatial enclaves – whether they are neighborhood units, new urban centralities, or mere architectural icons. At stake is an idea of the city as a network of places or as a place itself – an idea opposed both to the emerging “generic city” notion (Koolhaas, 1996, 2001) as well as to the simple accumulation of a number of weakly connected place-making situations (Soja, 2000, Ingersoll, 2006, Shane, 2011). In addition, the idea of a community that is entrusted with a crucial role in creating a vision and constructing a project must be questioned. Ambiguity increases if this notion is equated with, or substituted by, that of “local society” (Bagnasco, 1999, 2003).

So, *which urban place*, and for *which local society*? If these radical issues are not addressed, the meaning of place-making – as a movement of ideas and experiences – remains weak and ambiguous. On the contrary, if properly understood, the challenge of place-making can become not just another attempt to create a new and more promising disciplinary or professional area, but rather a strong practical and conceptual stimulus for innovation and even better integration of some traditional design, planning, and policy tools. However, criticism regarding current place-making positions has already emerged in these contiguous fields, giving rise to significant innovations. Instead of looking to tradition as a uniform and inert field, it seems interesting to reflect upon those experiences which, in recent decades, anticipated such crucial problems as the geographic, architectural, and sociopolitical conception of urban places (in relation to the question *which place*, see paragraph 1.3) and the disciplinary and cultural movements that have explored relationships among place, community (or other forms of social relations), and urban development: community planning, landscape

urbanism, deliberative planning (for the question of *which local society*, see paragraph 1.4). We believe that these views will be useful in highlighting some of the non-contingent difficulties with the more simplistic place-making positions. These critical reflections will allow us to reframe the issue in relation to the most significant ideas of the city and local society.

1.3 Making places in the “generic city”

What urban places

The urban space of place-making generally represents specific settlement situations in relation to a variety of contemporary urban conditions (Soja, 2000, Font, 2004, Charlesworth, 2005, Bell and Jayne, 2006, Hall and Pain, 2006, Shane, 2011). Among the many possible forms, reference to the Garden City or its suburban variants emerges clearly (Calthorpe and Van der Ryn, 1986, Ward, 1992, Calthorpe and Fulton, 2001, Beauregard, 2006, Gillette, 2010). In addition, many formulations and proposals tend to ignore the radical transformation of the notion of urban place which, over time, has challenged its original meaning, giving rise to justifiable doubts regarding certain uplifting ideas that are still in vogue. There is no doubt that, in the long run, the radical secularization and specialization of the notion of place has come about. In the classical world, the oracle of Delphi or newly founded cities were places. Today, we refer to the gated community, the shopping mall, or the theme park. The Greek polis and the medieval city were considered places. Today, it is difficult to consider anything more than an urban fragment or a potential enclave. Can we assume that this enormous transformation is unrelated to place-making ideas and proposals? Without any pretence of reconstructing the complicated history of human settlements, we would like to recall some passages that are particularly germane to the scope of the book.

Founding places

The classical world handed down some ideas regarding the notion of place as a space that played a founding role in the organization and development of human life. This is the exemplary case of Delphi, a place privileged as the access to truth, as the home to an oracle where divine truth could manifest itself to humans, revealing an established and immutable order that a person was obligated to respect in order to live in harmony with the cosmos (Ferraro, 2001). Living in that kind of place consequently implied adherence to a virtuous and preconceived model of human life.

Another tradition recalls the influential concept of *locus*, like a clearing that has been rescued from *ingens sylva* through cooperative human action (Esposito, 2010, Consonni, 2000, 2008, 2013). This idea of place is a collective construct that can enable individuals to find protection from environmental threat and at the same time help them clarify their relationships. This image is evoked by the

modern metaphor of “public space” charged with the task of shedding light on human affairs: a shared space in which people can actually show who they are and what they are capable of, both in the positive and the negative – even if today (as Hannah Arendt observed in 1955: 1) “humanity is living in dark times.” Therefore, *locus* performed functions of protection and transparency in relation to a community and required both ethical behavior from its inhabitants, in the name of common solidarity, and communications and interactions that were not mystifying.

Of course, only ruins or traces remain of these visions. Places of total truth and clarity are now only ideal-types – not available realities, if they ever were. The distance from current conditions is unbridgeable. The original notion could only be a benchmark against which to measure the real distance of today’s settlements, which are generally more opaque and controversial. However, what remains can be useful – like any reference to the *classic* (Settis, 2004) – for rethinking current problems. This concept is not to be understood as a given and unchangeable precondition – as if it were possible to ignore the historical process that determined its forms. Instead, it is always a vision projected toward the future, requiring new interpretations, generating the possibility for change, and constantly subjected to the test of experience. Therefore, it should not be seen as a predetermined and unchangeable cultural and historical monument to a system of universal values and exemplary identity. Instead, it is an inherently hybrid, open and dynamic matrix to be compared with other images because it can help interpret and evaluate them; and from the dialogue, some impetus to renew the representation itself can be found. According to Salvatore Settis, the classical world should not be understood as a finished tradition to which we happen to belong but rather, first of all, as a potential to enhance and renew, continuously opening new prospects for the future (Clementi, 1990). Of course, this possibility is not a value in itself. It could be reduced to the ironic or opportunistic linkages that tend to engage formal elements of pre-modern architecture within the modernist tradition, subject to harsh criticism (Rossi, 1966, Rowe and Koetter, 1978, Jencks, 1984, 2007), or it can enable a critical review of the present and radical innovations for a possible future (Gregotti, 2004, 2011).

This perspective illustrates the crucial role of traces that are inherited from the past. Every ruin – as a fragment that emerges from the rupture of a preexisting order – has generally lost its original function and tends to take on enigmatic meaning. But it can help open new possibilities, as Simmel (1913) and Benjamin (1939) noted during the most intense phase of the transition to modernity (Berman, 1982, Frisby, 1985). The ruins of classical monuments bear witness to the end of a world now marked by an inexorable process of decay. At the same time, they can become the seeds of a potential rebirth of meaning, in new form. Ruins and fragments can take on great generative value that is more fertile than a ritual appeal to a remote tradition. These considerations confirm the fragility and probable irrelevance of place-making’s presumed holistic assumptions. In any case, today these visions cannot be the ideal cornerstones recognized in places of the classical world.