

Planning for lively spaces: Adding value to old spaces

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Abstract

The complexity of the spatial planning process has increased because the modern, highly-developed society is becoming increasingly dynamic with regard to social, sustainability and economic issues. The society wants its urban environment to be a reflection of its needs, demands and preferences. Planning for space implies planning for people, whose needs are constantly changing. Places are frequently valued for several intertwined reasons that can coexist and complement each other, but also compete and cause conflict. Identifying the reasons why the place is valued is essential in planning for the space.

Planners need to turn the conventional way of planning up-side down and introduce a more controversial planning process, focussing on the people and the life of the cities and public spaces, in order to enhance the value of spaces which already exists, and adhere to the needs of modern societies. Lively planning is introduced in this paper as the controversial planning process. Lively planning focuses on the inclusive public realm, creating versatile public spaces to celebrate the uniqueness of a place, encouraging alternative uses of the space and improve possibilities within the space. Lively planning transforms locations that people inhabit, into the places they live in. This paper will evaluate case studies where lively planning was introduced to transform the area and enhance the value of the space. Two specific case studies, namely Louvain-La-Neuve (Belgium) and Doornakkers (The Netherlands) will be discussed and evaluated to determine the added value brought along by the lively planning processes. The paper will conclude with initiatives to transform the current planning approaches in an attempt to add value to spaces that already exists.

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1. Introduction to lively planning

Lively planning aims at creating lively spaces and public places for all citizens. Lively planning thus focuses on the social dimension of planning and the people that will inhabit the spaces. Soholt (2004:8) states that “Planners and architects ought to turn the conventional way of planning up-side down and introduce a more controversial planning process with the people and the life of the cities and public spaces in focus. Instead of starting with the buildings, we need to envision the future life of an area first. This way we can form nice spaces that are inviting for people and take in consideration people’s needs and behavioural patterns, and when the spaces are formed we can develop guidelines for planning of buildings.” This is the aim of the lively planning approach, substantiated by Hobart City Council (2011:1) whom regards a place as ‘lively’ when the focus is on the public grounds; being inclusive for all and open for a wide range of user groups.

Lively planning focuses on the inclusive public realm, creating versatile public spaces to celebrate the uniqueness of a place, encouraging alternative uses of the space and improve possibilities within the space. Lively planning transforms locations that people inhabit, into the places they live in. The challenge of the lively planning approach is to create spaces for people whose needs are constantly changing (Cilliers *et al.* (2012:13) and for society who is becoming more dynamic. The urban environment and public spaces should thus continuously address the needs of the community. This poses a further challenge as the changes in the urban environment are much slower as opposed to people’s needs (Barendse *et al.*, 2007:3), as illustrated in the following figure.

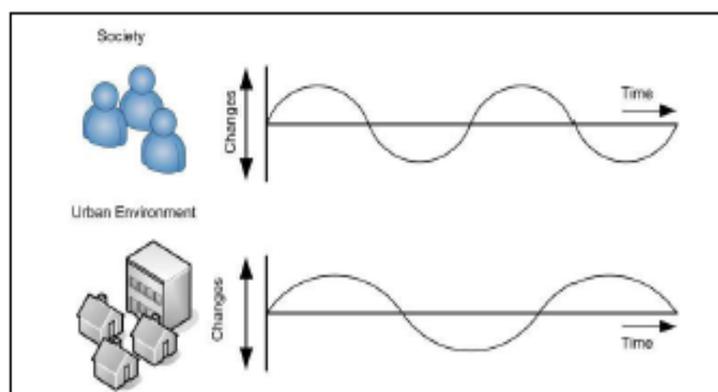


Figure 1: The change of society versus the urban environment

Source: Barendse *et al.* (2007:3)

The tension between the slow changing environment and the dynamic society can be minimized through comprehensive public participation processes (Soholt, 2004:8), where people’s needs and behavioral patterns are prioritized in order to plan for and create lively places, not only for present use, but future usage as well and thus adhere to sustainable planning initiatives. Another attempt to bridge the gap between the fast changing social needs and slow changing environment is by means of green-planning initiatives, using the natural environment to create places for social interaction and function.

When bringing lively-planning approaches and green-planning initiatives together, versatile public spaces can be created that celebrate the uniqueness of a place, while encouraging alternative uses of the space and improving possibilities for staying in the space (Hobart City Council, 2011:2). This integrated approach seeks to turn the conventional way of planning up-side down and introduce a more controversial planning process, focusing on the people-scale and actual users of the space.

Gehl (2004:31) supports the shift to site- and people-scale planning where the flow of natural life and movement trends are interpreted in order to create spaces that enhance these movements and functions and to, subsequently, create buildings and environments that will support these spaces. The execution of a lively planning approach is therefore made up of high density, integration, diversity, good public spaces and active ground floor facades (Gehl, 2004:37).

2. From spaces to places

Lively planning is based on the concept of place-making, aiming to transform spaces into places characterized by functions of activity and use. According to Harrison and Dourish (1996:67) space refers to the structural and geometrical qualities found in any physical environment whereas a place is a concept that also includes the dimensions of lived experience, interaction and the use of a space by its inhabitants. A place can be regarded as a space with function and meaning.

In this sense, a successful public space is a lively place that is secure and distinctive and contributes to the needs of the people who use it (Harrison and Dourish, 1996:67). Cowan *et al.* (2006:23) agrees that the process of successfully transforming a space to a place is based on the inputs of the people inhabiting the space, again stressing the importance of participatory planning processes as part of the place-making and lively planning approaches.

Cilliers *et al.* (2012:11) refers to successful places as a space enriched with the presence of numerous functions and activities regarding community life, where people inhabiting this place possesses a feeling of ownership and connectedness. The creation of place is therefore rooted in the process of integrating and delivering a variety of functions and activities within a mere space. The following figure illustrates certain measurements, intangibles and key attributes that should form part of the place-making process.



Figure 1: Place-making elements

Source: Adopted from Baltimore City Department of Planning (2010:90)

There are furthermore various factors that determine the success of a lively public space, captured in Table 1. These are broad principles that places should be measured against in order to determine their success in terms of the public sphere. These factors determine successful places that share a host of factors extending beyond mere physical dimensions, but incorporate the necessity of lived experience (Harrison & Dourish, 1996:67) and human connectedness (Cilliers *et al.*, 2012:9; Cowan *et al.*, 2006:24). The presence of these factors therefore ensures liveliness within a space, and the transformation of old spaces into lively places.

Factor	Description of successful public space
Identity	Historically, public spaces were the centre of communities; traditionally it helped shape the identity of entire cities by their image.
Attractions	Great public spaces have a variety of smaller “places” within it that appeal to various people. Functions create attractions.
Amenities	A public space should feature amenities that make it comfortable for people to use. A good amenity will help establish social interaction.
Flexibility	The use of a public space naturally changes during the day, week, and year and to respond to natural fluctuations. Flexibility needs to be built in at the outset.
Seasonal	Successful public spaces need more than one design, which can change with the seasons. Adaptive usage.
Access	A civic destination needs to be easy accessible, including crosswalks, lights timed for pedestrians, slow moving traffic and proper signage.
Visibility	The elements within space should be visible from a distance, and ground floor activity of buildings surrounding it should entice pedestrians to move.

Table 1: Factors of successful public places

Source: Adopted from Baltimore City Department of Planning (2010:170)

These aspects were all carefully studied and included in the conducting of the Baltimore Downtown Strategic Plan in which one of the goals was to improve existing public spaces and creating new open spaces to attract and retain businesses and residents in Downtown (Baltimore City Department of Planning, 2010:3) based on these abovementioned factors of successful public places (Table 1) and place-making elements (Figure 1).

The open space planning process included an assessment of open spaces within the study area and included stakeholder input in identifying five focus areas to study in more detail with a series of place-making workshops to evaluate and discuss potential physical improvements to each of these five areas. Within these processes and evaluations aspects like networks, sustainability, transportation and place-making was grounded as “guiding concepts” around which specific recommendations are based (Baltimore City Department of Planning, 2010:4).

Based on the simultaneous recognition and implementation of these guiding concepts and the abovementioned factors and elements, general recommendations were provided aimed at including these factors and elements in the current “deficient” open spaces in the West Side (Baltimore City Department of Planning, 2010:4).

The following table summarizes the approaches used to redevelop these open spaces along with the specific factors and/or elements that were included.

Recommendations	Description	Elements or factors included
Sustainable practices	Street tree plantings; utilizing signage and display panel; using of solar structures for water features and lighting.	<u>Flexibility; Seasonal planning; visibility.</u> Image – clean, “green”, attractive. Uses – indigenous, sustainable.
Transportation and Mode-Sharing	Accommodating bicyclists and considering short and long-term bike parking; converting non-arterial streets to two-way traffic flow to improve pedestrian environment and motor circulation.	<u>Access; Visibility.</u> Access and Linkages – connected, walkable; convenient, accessible.
Red Line and Metro Station Areas	Give function and presence to stations; capturing their unique identity; equal design consideration for pedestrians and accommodating pedestrian access by maintaining direct sight lines to stations.	<u>Access; Visibility; Identity.</u> Image – safe, clean, attractive, historic. Access and Linkages – connected; convenient.
Streetscape Enhancements	Utilize “shared space” to maintain vehicular traffic but emphasize pedestrian environment; creative ways to introduce shade, scale and color where street trees are not possible.	<u>Visibility; Attractions; Amenities; Identity.</u> Access and Linkages – pedestrian activity. Image – walkable, attractive.
Temporary Enhancements	Utilize pavement striping before investing in permanent solutions; utilize pots and planters able to be moved to different locations and “pop-up-cafes” where sidewalks are too narrow for outdoor dining.	<u>Amenities; Attractions; Flexibility; Visibility; Identity.</u> Sociability – diverse, street life, welcoming. Image – “green”, attractive.
Public Art	Develop solutions for blank walls (local artists); rotate art to keep space fresh and give people additional reasons to return.	<u>Seasonal planning; Identity; Attractions.</u> Image –attractive, charming; Uses – indigenous, real, special.
Availability of Refreshments	Consolidated and managed vending operations; recruit and locate restaurant uses to activate spaces.	<u>Amenities; Identity; Attractions.</u> Sociability – neighborly, diverse; Uses – local business ownership; property values. Image – Suitable, attractive.
Partnerships	Property owners, Downtown institutions, foundations and a residential base for stakeholders.	<u>Identity</u> Uses – property values, local business ownerships, rent levels; Sociability – neighborly, pride, friendly, stewardship.

Table 2: Baltimore open space plan – summary of recommendations

Source: Own creation based on Baltimore City Department of Planning (2010)

The following images provide visual representations of potential open space development based on the abovementioned recommendations:



Figure 2: Visual representations of Baltimore open space recommendations

Source: Adopted from Baltimore City Department of Planning (2010:12)

2.2 Creating a lively public place

As described previously, it is evident that lively places and public places are similar concepts, as both focus on the public realm and social functions. Both concepts need a people-focused approach (Cilliers *et al.*, 2012:16) and dimensions of lived experience, interaction and use by inhabitants (inhabitants in this context defined as 'public'). Both focus on public grounds, being inclusive for all people and open for a wide range of user groups.

Loudier and Dubois (2001:1) define a lively public place as a meeting place, a place for debate, controversy, discussion; a place that is accessible to all and that everyone is able to use. Lively planning seeks to plan for people, their needs and their constantly changing and evolving desires (Cilliers *et al.*, 2012:13).

Public places therefore need to constantly be regenerated (Loudier & Dubois, 2001:17), well and transparently managed (Philips, 2010:14) and well maintained (Baycan-Levent, 2007:11) in order to constantly adopt and comply with present human needs. Spaces should be versatile in order to ensure possibilities of change.

The following pilot studies illustrate the linkages between place-making approaches and green-planning approaches, where green-planning initiatives were used to transform a public space into a meaningful public place. The lively planning approach in creating public places in each of the case studies was discussed along with the lively attributes and public place-making factors. It seeks to identify initiatives used to transform the old spaces into vibrant, lively public places, by adding value to spaces which already exists.

3. Lively planning case studies

3.1 *Louvain-La-Neuve (Belgium)*

Place des Wallons in Louvain-la-Neuve, Wallonia, Belgium, is an urban space that has been built 40 years ago as a university city. Figure 3 illustrates the current open space, characterized as a neglected space with no function. As part of the LICl lively cities Interreg EU project, this public space in Louvain-La-Neuve in Belgium (Figure 1) was redeveloped to address this problem and add value to the space and enhance user function by introducing lively-planning approaches supported by green-planning initiatives, and transform the space into a destination where the public would choose to spend their time (illustrated by Figure 3).

An analysis was conducted within the space, comprising of movement within the space, actor-analysis, natural environment-analysis, as well as day-night functions. The analysis identified scattered routing within the area as the core issue to address in order to transform the old space into a lively public place. The lively-planning approach introduced recognizable entrances, guided walking routes, and more places to sit and socialize, as part of the transformation. These initiatives contributed to the sense-of-place of the area, the movement patterns and overall functional use and sustainability. Further green-planning initiatives were introduced to support the lively-planning concept, including city-trees, green roofs, green graffiti and public furniture (refer to Figure 3).

The city-tree initiative was based on the fact that trees are not fond of cities, but people love trees in the city as trees create a sense of place. In order for a tree to grow and be healthy it needs the same circumstances as it would have in its natural habitat. The city-tree initiative was introduced to help sustain the tree life within the case study area, based on implementing artificial habitats for city trees (such as tree boxes, permavoid boxes and tree sand (refer to Cilliers 2012 for details)).

The green-roof initiative included plants in the form of grasses, shrubs and even trees which was literally lifted up to the next level (Jansen and Ruifrok, 2012a: 17).

The green-graffiti initiative introduced moss graffiti (also called eco-graffiti or green graffiti) intended to replace spray paint, paint-markers or other such toxic chemicals and paints with a “moss-paint” that can grow on its own. The idea of making living, breathing graffiti has become a green-initiative and creative outlet for graffiti artists, especially since people became more eco-friendly and environmentally aware. It can also be considered another form of guerrilla gardening (Jansen and Ruifrok, 2012a: 18).



Figure 3: Re-development plan for Louvain-La-Neuve

Source: Adopted from Jansen and Ruifrok (2012b: 1).

The most contributory aspects included in this case study with regards to lively public place planning was the shaping of movement patterns within the space and introduction of green-initiatives which contributed to the creation of a sense of place within this area. These initiatives enhances place-making within a public space (i.e. transforming a 'space' into a 'place'), as it creates a quality environment in which social and environmental needs are simultaneously addressed (i.e. the focus on people-scale of planning in order to create PUBLIC lively places).

3.2 Doornakkers (The Netherlands)

Another redevelop project was located in Doornakkers, a residential neighbourhood in Eindhoven (The Netherlands), characterized by the "normal" problems and urban complexities of degeneration and neglectance of older urban areas, and shortage of qualitative social and public space. The other problem of this area was in terms of the lack of green spaces. The aim of the redevelopment project was to re-plan this area by means of lively-planning approaches supported by green-planning initiatives, to develop a qualitative green environment a network of green spaces, whilst providing adequate qualitative social public spaces and redeveloping the urban space of Doornakkers.

In an attempt to enhance the lively-planning approach and create lively public places within this area, green-planning initiatives were introduced. The aim was to create a "green-heart" within the area, combining social and environmental functions.

Various analyses was conducted, including professional analyses to determine environmental constrains and possibilities, stakeholder analyses to identify actual stakeholders and users of the area, risk analyses and SWOT-analyses to evaluate the places and their possibilities, strengths, weaknesses and threats, green analyses to quantify green values and identify gaps, and site analyses to determine micro and macro impacts. Two core green-initiatives were introduced to support the lively-planning approach, namely green walking routes, and green impulses.

The green walking routes initiative focussed on landmarks within the broader residential area, with the objective to design a space that will ensure residents to interact more with their direct environment. The social interaction and cultural significance where the main driving forces considered in the planning of the green walking routes, along with spin-offs such as recreation possibilities and a qualitative, usable environment. In terms of environmental quality, the expansion of current tree structures in the area where enhanced, along core corridors of movement (Boogaards, 2012:71). The current green networks (Figure 4a) was thus re-planned to be more integrative, connected by means of the green walking routes (Figure 4b).



Figure 4: Current green network versus expansion of green structure along core corridors
Source: Boogaards (2012:70-71)

The green-impulse initiative was a creative approach to the planning of lively public green spaces, focussing on children-friendly spaces and the development thereof by means of a design-competition among residents. The green-impulse pilot raised awareness amongst residents (stated as a green heart beat), where social capital and public interest were enhanced as a result of an integrated green-planning initiative and holistic place-making approach. Concept designs were implemented in practice, transforming old spaces to lively public places.

The introduction of the green-planning initiatives as part of the place-making process in the public spaces in Doornakkers in the Netherlands, created a strong “green-identity”, while enhancing social functions in the area. The initiatives enhanced social awareness and green-planning among users of the space and community members, having a multi-dimensional impact.

4. Conclusion

Planning is a continuous process of anticipating and preparing for foreseeable future changes (Cilliers et al, 2011). Lively planning is a bottom-up planning approach, focused on the people-scale and aiming to transform old spaces into vibrant, lively places, constantly trying to address the social changes and needs. Green-planning initiatives assist the lively-planning approach by transforming old spaces by means of green networks that enhance the social and environmental function within an area.

The green-planning approaches described in this paper (such as city-trees, green roofs, green graffiti, green walking routes and green impulses) were specifically focused on the social and environmental benefits of a space. The case studies captured initiatives to transform the current planning approaches in an attempt to add value to spaces which already exists and address the gap between environmental planning and planning for the people (i.e. the changing society).

Lively planning approaches as captured in the case studies enhanced the identity of the place, focussed on the social dimension and social functions within the space and the natural environment (green-initiatives) that support the lively-planning approaches. These green-planning initiatives were found to enhance the value of the current spaces, acknowledging the dynamic and constantly changing social needs.

It was concluded that green-planning initiatives does not only enhance lively-planning approaches, but gives a space function. It creates a quality environment, addressing social and environmental needs simultaneously. There are various spin-offs for introducing green-spaces in our cities. Urban Planners, authorities and decision-makers should be the drivers of change in our cities, creating a sustainable, green environment for all residents. "To change life, we must first change space" (Lefebvre, 1991: 190).

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