



The connection between placemaking and physical activity

Placemaking for
Active
Recreation
Kit



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Introduction

As human settlements become increasingly more urban, our blueprint and inner physiological need for movement remains untouched. From our position as citymakers and placemakers, we, from Placemaking Europe, identify the nuanced and intertwined nature of placemaking and practising physical activity in our public realm. Together, here, we explore why we should adopt placemaking to support physical activity and vice versa -- how embedding physical activity within community development advantageously supports great quality places.

Democratic space for movement

Intrinsically, there is a shared human need to move our bodies - regardless of background, age, race, gender, education, or ability.

As we progress, our human needs—however constant—are also able to expand for greater experiences. Namely, moving our bodies for physiological purposes evolves to recreation, leisure, exploration, enjoyment, connection and stimulation alongside the physical mechanism of movement. We recognise sport, movement and physical activity as a democratic and inclusive way everyone can take space and make place in their neighbourhood. In theory, regardless of one's economic background, one can step outside the home and use the outdoor-scape to walk, run, play etc. Unfortunately, this is not equally accessible for all persons. Those without stable housing or work, or that lack safety, must face intense life stresses that outweigh the daily need for a walk or physical play.

Through community participation and the co-creation of our built environment (both major foundations in placemaking), in terms of the hardware and more importantly the social norms and organisational governance; we can use our political will to motivate representational change for the better. In every neighbourhood this can materialise differently, but ultimately, through placemaking we can mitigate social cohesion with deep listening, implement a mentality of the commons, crystallise social infrastructures, and promote local economies so that residents may feel able and empowered to use the public space for their human wishes and needs - physical activity being a major one. In this way we are able to join the right to movement and the “right to the city.”



Healthy communities in a sustainable urban world

Obesity and related chronic diseases are now epidemic in cities. Today, urban design too often promotes sedentary rather than active daily lifestyles. Placemaking aims to reverse these trends, providing urban planning practitioners with tools to create healthier public buildings, streets and urban spaces. Placemaking uses active design to encourage stair climbing, walking, biking, transit use and active recreation. Drawing on the latest academic research, as well as best practices developed in the field, placemaking offers innovative ways to contribute to the vision of a more livable urban future. Placemaking promises benefits not only for public health, but also for the environment and social inclusion in the city. Design strategies that increase physical activity and improve health - for example, measures that encourage walking rather than driving, using stairs rather than

elevators - also tend to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, land use planning can help not only people who can climb stairs daily, but also users of all mobility, ages, and backgrounds. A diverse, active and healthy population and a sustainable planet are synergistic.



Community

We know humans are a social species and need to connect to one another, form attachments, and build a sense of belonging to pursue a healthy lifestyle. While we may not experience threats the same way our ancestors did, we continue to rely on and trust our neighbours for our well-being. We seek out eye contact in daily negotiations in micro-moments on the street level - stepping to the side, "after you", a kind hello.

In fact, these apparently small actions/gestures combined with physical activity, such as active commuting, indeed contribute to demonstrating that the city is a tool for human connection. And that physical activity practised in the public space enhances our attachment to that place and subsequently can lead to social mixing and thus, social cohesion, as well. In fact, a by-product of these social interactions oftentimes results in the creation of new and specific social norms around a place.

These, in turn, produce mechanisms of inclusions or exclusion for a particular social group. For instance, if only a group of people appropriates a public space for a specific physical activity that can result in other groups not feeling welcomed in that same context. On a more positive note however, the same process of space appropriation, if diversified, can lead to socialising and a social support base from the group itself. Therefore, people usually feel enabled to use a space if they perceive themselves as welcome, they will start to use it and build a sense of belonging and community around it.

Feedback loop

Similarly, the act of moving in a space, appropriating it, stimulating the senses within it has been growingly contributing to translate one's sense of space into place, enhancing one's sense of attachment to that space. For instance, studies related to city marathons underlined how the festification of the city during that specific marathon event, positively contributed to one's sense of belonging to that city.

Indeed, successful and user-friendly city designs bring these five characteristics to the fore: walkability, wayfinding, human scale, inclusivity, and ownership/sense of belonging. For this reason, placemaking applied to public spaces is a successful and sustainable practice which synergistically creates great quality places in which people want to keep coming back to—for health pursuits and ingrained into their daily life.



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our cities!**

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