



Placemaking Toolkit: **DESIGNING PEOPLE PLACES**

A toolkit for communities and designers to design
and implement public spaces and buildings in Palestine

2020



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The revised version of the toolkit was discussed with a group of planning experts and representatives of local government units, the Ministry of Local Government, academic institutions and the private sector through a consultation meeting held in February 2020 in Ramallah city. The meeting came out with valuable recommendations and lessons learned, which are summarized in Annex (1).

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Introduction

Palestine is blessed with a beautiful landscape; resourceful and resilient people and its towns and villages are the focus of a strong sense of community and belonging. This document seeks to provide those people with ideas about how they might make use of these assets and create ‘people places’ in towns and villages that contribute to improved living conditions for all people who live in these communities.

Placemaking is all about turning ‘public’ spaces into ‘living’ places that support the wellbeing of local communities and that can be managed and maintained by that community. In the context of Palestinian communities in the Israeli controlled Area C, placemaking is best realized as a DIY–Do It Yourself Urbanism approach to the planning, design, and management of public spaces to ensure they reflect a clear and broadly supported vision, organic orders, and proper functions. DIY is meant to reflect the principle of subsidiarity and promote any local Palestinian citizenry action that impacts public spaces, under a steadfastness framework that reciprocates with the practices of Israeli occupation authorities in Area C. Within the context of Palestinian communities administered by the Israeli authorities, DIY and ‘informality’ are interrelated, and the former could be regarded as a mode of the latter. It is argued that the informal mode of space production (informality), not only reflects a widespread mode of everyday life practices (DIY), but also could be considered a mechanism to unequivocally express the right to self-determination. This provides an important symbolism and this ‘rights-based approach’ to spatial planning and development is the takeaway for practice that is foreseen by advancing the concept of placemaking within the spatial planning practices of Palestinian communities.

Placemaking, as such aims at jumpstarting an engaged process to protect the rights and responsibilities of local Palestinian citizens. Working closely entails that participatory processes will be sustained, and citizens will be encouraged to partake in the local development processes, and the

authorities will be more responsive to future needs and aspirations of the citizens. This will result in improving the conditions of the built environment, foster social cohesion, build resilience and foster tenure security, and enable spatial development. This marks an amalgam between statutory and non-statutory approaches in realizing the National Policy Agenda 2017-2022, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the New Urban Agenda in Palestine, noting the prevailing geo-political context.

This document seeks to help communities to engage in the placemaking process and create surroundings that give you the best circumstances to flourish. It reflects the aspiration outlined in the World Charter on the Right to the City which resolves “that cities should constitute an environment of full realization of all human rights and fundamental liberties assuring the dignity and collective well-being of all people, in conditions of equality and justice, and that all persons have the right to find in the city the necessary conditions for their political, economic, cultural, social and ecological realization”.

Achieving this is as much a matter of cultivating change in people’s hearts and minds as on the ground. Placemaking is about enabling people to connect with their surroundings and feel empowered to fulfill their responsibilities to themselves, their families, their communities and the wider world.

This document is divided into three parts:

- Part 1 is an exploration of what placemaking, and people places are,
- Part 2 provides some insights into the people who need to be involved and the steps along the way to getting a people place designed and built, and
- Part 3 provides some insights into the components that one might find useful to create a people place and the principals needed to apply these ideas.

PART 1

What are people places?

Placemaking and People Places

Placemaking is a term that encompasses the diverse actions that seek to ensure people's surroundings offer them the best possible chances of thriving and fulfilling their potential in life.

This typically requires imbuing spaces in villages, towns and cities with characteristics that help their inhabitants meet the challenges they face, that reflect their values, nurture a sense of belonging and foster a sense of authentic human attachment.

There are many different people who can play a part in making this happen:

- Architects, planners, urban designers and engineers, etc. have particular skills in making physical changes in the built environment. They can be place-makers by ensuring their work has qualities that resonate with the surrounding community and provides those people (including those not yet born) with opportunities that contribute to their quality of life.
- Experts in managing spaces and education can help equip people with the skills and insights to make the best use of their surroundings.
- Administrators and government officers can guide necessary changes through the legislative landscape and can unlock resources by changing the rules governing development and launching programmes and initiatives that allow change to happen.
- Members of the community- to whom this document is aimed - have local knowledge, skills and existing social networks

unavailable to anyone else. Your surroundings matter to you; you can offer "emotional capital" in making changes which is every bit as important as the physical capital or financial capital that is also needed to make things happen.

People places are places that are shared by a community and valued by them because of the way they are designed, built and used.

This document is intended to provide all these diverse parties with a starting point to work together and achieve people places in their community.

What types of places can be people places?

These are the streets, parks, other open spaces and community buildings that are the focus for community life and are shared by everyone in that community. In many parts of the world these are collectively known as social infrastructure. Designed well they can be places not just where people have to go but where they want to go and can be enjoyed by many people. These places exist not just on the ground but in people's hearts and minds.

Some communities already enjoy many places that fit this description, but other communities are lacking them. The resilience of Palestinian communities being what it is, even where communities are denied these places a sense of community still thrives, bound by bonds of family, belonging, friendship and shared experience. People places are designed to meet multiple needs. They encourage people to enjoy a wide range of incidental social and recreational activities not

because they have to but because they will feel like they are missing out if they don't.

The diversity of people places

Every community is different. Each one comprises individuals who have their own way of seeing the world, their own aspirations, hopes and fears. Different communities occupy areas with a unique mix of challenges and assets; climatic, political, social. Add to this the diversity of streets, parks and public buildings and you will see there is no one recipe for a people place. The actual composition and look of a people place will be as varied as the communities they serve. However, they typically have a number of consistent characteristics.

The design process

The design process for a people place involves a broad cross section of the community as well as experts who can offer appropriate professional insights; People places are designed to be relevant to the values and needs of the people who share them, who live near them or pass by them. People places should also be designed for the people who will share it in the future, those people not yet born or are too young and who will inherit it from us. Consequently, a key component of a people place is making sure it is tailored to those needs that we know and is flexible enough to meet future needs we cannot yet identify.

This requires a commitment to community engagement: in designing the people place, using it, cultivating a sense of pride and ownership



Figure 1: Community Participation in sketching designs

of it and empowering people to make well informed decisions about its future. This also requires a wide section of the community participation in the process and low levels of education and traditional patriarchal values do not deter people from participating. This area is explored in more depth in the next section.



Figure 2: Participation of schoolgirls in one of the Placemaking workshops, Bruqin (Salfit), 2018

Multi-purpose places

People places make efficient use of space. Given the diversity of people's needs and the many demands placed on urban spaces people places are designed to reconcile many functions in the one space.



Figure 3: Example of Placemaking solution to serve two functions (vehicles and pedestrians' mobility)

This is an example of a street that was called upon to serve two functions; it had to allow vehicles to travel along it and allow pedestrians to cross it from the adjacent school to the park on the other side of the road. The placemaking solution illustrated here slowed down traffic to a safe speed by measures that also made it a more pleasant and safer place to cross and in doing so created the sense of a village square in this important location.

Places for everyone

Designing people places means that the things that get built can be enjoyed by as many people as possible and by extension as few people as possible are precluded from enjoying them. This means they are designed to ensure the barriers that sometimes inadvertently discriminate against certain groups of people are removed.

These barriers can be purely physical, such as places that can only be accessed by steps and that consequently disadvantage people in wheelchairs, or they can deter us because of how we perceive our surroundings, such as dark laneways that seemingly go nowhere that are often seen as unwelcoming and scary by many people, particularly women and older people.

Either way, such spaces are not people places as they do not welcome as many people as reasonably possible. Of course there will always be a need for some barriers for safety reasons, for example to protect people at abrupt changes of level or at places where children may play near busy roads, but where these barriers exist they should be consciously designed for a reason (e.g. safety) and not just be an accidental result of misguided design.



Figure 4: Example of an entry that combines steps, ramps and an informal waiting area to make sure no one is excluded from this school because of their mobility requirements

Why is designing ‘people places’ important?

A person’s surroundings will impact on what they feel they can and can’t do in their neighborhood. The design of a street, park or public building can have a significant effect on the ability of its surrounding neighborhood to nurture the people who live there and become the setting for a livable and sustainable community.

For example, a poorly designed street may make the people who live there feel unsafe and so deter them from leaving home or letting their children play outside. Poorly designed streets also limit the opportunities for the people living in the area to get to know their neighbors, experience nature and have fun. Likewise parks that are unattractive, unsafe or function poorly are unlikely to be visited and so will offer little to the people who live nearby.

Poorly designed community buildings can be grim and unpleasant places that people try to avoid. Conversely if any of these are well designed, they provide people with surroundings that allow them to simultaneously meet many needs without going out of their way, such as socialize, gain exercise, experience nature. In this way they provide people with surroundings that give them the best possible chances to fulfil their potential and thrive, individually and collectively, the hallmarks of livable and sustainable communities.

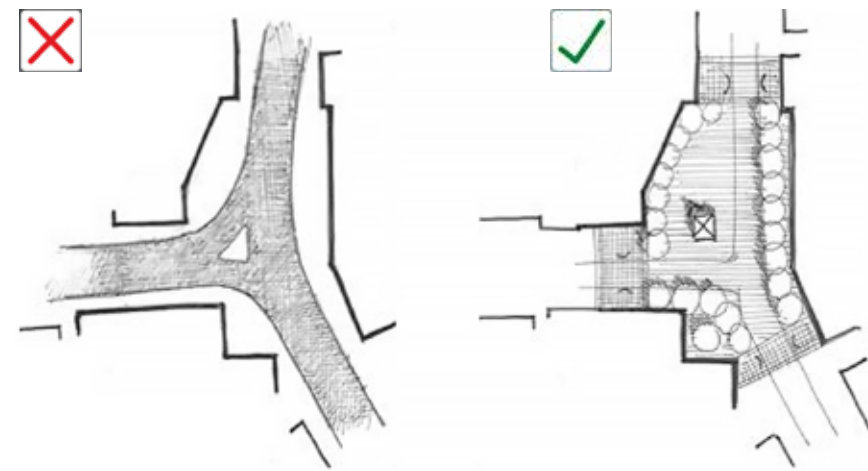
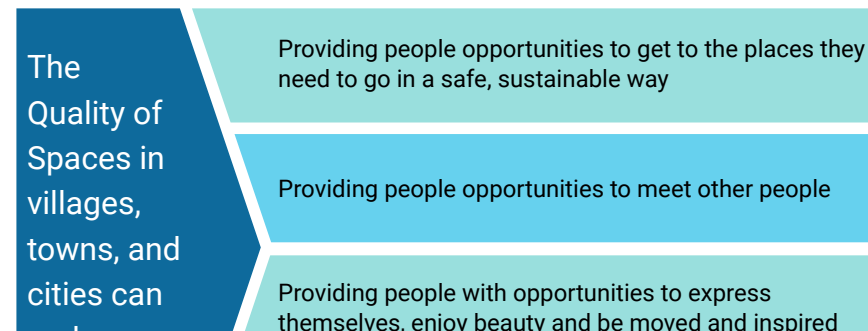


Figure 5: The way public space is designed will make a big difference to its ability to contribute to the quality of life of those people who live near it or pass through it



Different types of people places

Streets, laneways and footpaths

Streets are literally on everyone’s doorstep and streets that are pleasant, safe and attractive will invite people to walk, play, enjoy their surroundings and enjoy the company of their neighbors.

Research from Europe and Australia has found that people who live on such streets have found that their houses sell for more, enjoy a higher level of pride in their area and a greater sense of belonging to a community (Marcus and Sarkassian 1986) (Manzo and Perkins 2006) and children are more likely to play outside and be healthier (Homes and Communities Agency 2013).

Conversely people who have the misfortune to live on streets that are unsafe are effectively denied these benefits and are more likely to suffer from a sense of isolation, a lower level of participation in the community around them, a poor sense of connection to their neighborhood and be less healthy (Community Planning 2020).

Streets laneways and footpaths that are people places will feel like they are inviting places to be, rather than just spaces to pass through. They usually encourage motorists to drive with greater care and at lower speed in order to strike a balance between vehicular traffic and everyone else who uses the street, the pedestrians, cyclists, business people and residents.

Part of making a street a people place might involve “reclaiming” it from domination by cars. This can help improve safety and foster a sense of peace in neighborhoods that are becoming overwhelmed by speeding traffic.



Figure 7: Example of making a street a people place

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