

Chapter 22

A New Model for Place Development – Bringing Together Regenerative and Placemaking Processes



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Abstract This paper describes the bringing together of two practices, placemaking and regenerative development. Placemaking is a relatively recent term, describing a city making movement focusing on the process of developing places through the active participation of the citizens that conceive, perceive, and live in that place. It aims to create place attachment, a foundational concept of environmental psychology linked to positive outcomes in health, community participation, civic behaviour, and perceptions of safety. Regenerative development is an approach to supporting design for place to focus on the delivery of vital, viable, and resilient places, able to evolve over time to support all human and non-human life. In this paper, these two practices are integrated under the ‘Place Agency’ model. This model harnesses the key strengths from both practices, while providing ways to address their limitations. The research approach used to integrate the models was discursive grounded theory; where each practice, its rhetoric, its tools, and case studies was looked at. The content was analyzed using inductive coding to identify potential synergies. The resulting model indicates that merging these two practices can deliver a place designed for both human and non-human participants, potentially shifting city making from a largely anthropocentric based practice. The combined approach supports the ability to look across history and its attributes to understand a place’s potential, while providing a method through which the community can actively participate in the city making process. Placemaking can thus become a strategy to bring forward this potential, test, play, and evaluate regenerative initiatives, in context of spatial, temporal, social, and ecological influences.

Keywords Placemaking · Regenerative development · Cities · Human and non-human agency

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22.1 Introduction

22.1.1 *Aims of This Paper*

More and more people are moving into cities. As such, it is important to create places that support the future of cities as places of living, working, creating and contributing. Designing for people is only one aspect of city making, though. Incorporating strategies for nature integration and the non-human aspects of life is also critical, not just for their own sake, but for the wellbeing of the whole system, including humans, who have an innate need to be connected to nature (Wilson 1984). This paper brings together regenerative development and placemaking to create Living Environments. In this paper, we define living environment as “a setting that is thriving, healthy, and resilient because its ecological, social, and economic systems are continually nourished.” (Plaut et al. 2016, p. 2). This paper outlines the two practices in question, then presents the methods used to bring them together, exploring their key strengths, concluding with a suggested integrated framework.

22.1.2 *What Is Placemaking Practice*

Placemaking is a worldwide practice focusing on the process of developing places through the active participation of the citizens that conceive, perceive and live in that place (Arefi 2014). It aims to create place attachment, a foundational concept of environmental psychology linked to positive outcomes in health, community participation (Anton and Lawrence 2014), civic behaviour, and perceptions of safety (Billig 2006). It is possible to conduct placemaking through formal (i.e. strategic placemaking) to informal (i.e. tactical urbanism) approaches. The key characteristics of a placemaking project are: (1) a process which puts emphasis on deep engagement with the community of an area; (2) the use of relatively small projects to trigger long-term benefits; and (3) the aim of improving life quality by developing social cohesion and place attachment that contributes to the planning and investment in public places (Kyle et al. 2004).

There is strong evidence (over five studies) that placemaking can foster place attachment in increasingly dense, diverse and mobile communities (Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001; Lewicka 2010; Scannell and Gifford 2010). The strengths of placemaking lie in its adaptiveness to context, its ease and often affordable ways to reimagine spaces (PPS n.d.). Successful placemaking efforts are often community-led or have undergone extensive community engagement, where the ‘placemakers’ take the time to build a relationship with the people of that area. In many ways, the placemaker role is to provide a safe space for the community to voice their opinions and needs, and subsequently work with them to come up with key initiatives.

Placemaking is simultaneously a process (of community engagement) and a product (which may or may not be a design). It can be a time-consuming practice in which trained facilitation, communication, and listening skills are critical. Because time is often limited, placemaking projects can easily be superficial in their engagement, and thus fail to achieve the intended long-term benefits and can contribute to inequality and gentrification across communities (Fincher et al. 2016). What is needed is a way to think long term to integrate the ecological, or non-human aspects, and to develop capacity over time for the place; to strengthen not only itself and its stakeholders, but the broader systems on which it relies.

22.1.3 What Is Regenerative Development

Regenerative development is an approach that applies the ecological worldview. Plaut et al. (2016, p. 2) defined it as “the process of cultivating the capacity and capability in people, communities, and other natural systems to renew, sustain, and thrive”. Simplified, our approach to regenerative development is to:

1. Understand the flows through a system that bring it to life, that create a living system. Flows are the various resources, including ‘intangibles’ like culture and social cohesion, that interact with the place.
2. Design place-based solutions that create multiple, mutual benefits between these flows by focusing on the opportunities for creating relationships.
3. Operate within the context of the place to ensure its relevance, resilience, and ability to adapt.

Though in its infancy in application, Regenerative Development is informed by systems thinking (see i.e. Meadows 2008), ecological thinking (see i.e. Du Plessis and Brandon 2015), and indigenous thinking (see i.e. Mang and Haggard 2016). Critically, regenerative development is about working within a system to enable the potential of the system to emerge, to co-evolve the aspects of the system so that it can constructively adapt to change and evolve towards increasing states of health and abundance. There are examples of the application of regenerative development ideas internationally, mostly related to reflections on specific projects and their outcomes (Mang and Reed 2012), and case studies found on practitioner pages such as Regenesys and the Institute for the Built Environment (IBE) at Colorado State University. While these provide insights into the outputs of regenerative development projects, there is a need to better understand the process that supports regenerative thinking and contrast it to ‘business as usual’. That is: how do we operationalize these abstract concepts of creating ecological, social, and economic benefit within a place? It is in the operationalization that the potential of bringing these two approaches together is born.

22.2 Methods

The research started with a literature review of both scholarly and practice-based publications of placemaking and regenerative development initiatives. The following section presents a summary of the key aspects that were revealed from the literature review. This literature was coded inductively, identifying where their approaches complemented or mirrored each other.

Inductive coding allowed us to convert papers, case studies, manuals, online content, and books into keywords, approaches, and concepts that suggested synergy between the two approaches. Inductive coding supported the research process, with continual revisiting of the codes allowing an unfolding or revealing of how the two practices can work together, and a sense of the synergistic potential. This is unlike deductive coding, where one is trying to prove a hypothesis and has pre-conceived ideas of the outcomes.

We used a ‘discursive grounded theory’ approach to bring this data together. Grounded theory is a systematic methodology in the social sciences, involving the construction of theory through the gathering and analysis of data (Martin and Turner 1986; Strauss and Corbin 1994). Grounded theory is a research methodology which operates inductively. For this research, we started with the question of the ability for regenerative development to contribute to the ecological potential of placemaking. We continually reviewed the data collected, repeated ideas, concepts, or elements through coding. These were grouped into concepts, categories and themes, resulting in the approach outlined herein. ‘Discursive grounded theory’ is the term we used, because this was a collaborative and iterative process of discussion, argument, deliberation, and negotiation between researchers and practitioners. This was not a single researcher and a computer using software; the ‘codes’ and their analysis were developed through consultation, conversations, and testing.

22.3 Outcomes

Much like placemaking, regenerative development is often regarded as a practice – one that requires co-creation between professional regenerative development practitioners and the users of the development project. Unsurprisingly, this is often centered around underlying connotations, experiences, stories, feelings, and values that the stakeholders hold for a place (Mang and Haggard 2016). Co-creating an understanding of place identifies underlying patterns of meaning and interactions, which allows for better integration of human social and economic processes with ecological processes and is something both practices aim for. In placemaking, it is also about co-creating an understanding of place, its values to the stakeholders, and what will contribute to the betterment of the stakeholders and the place. Thus, although ends differ somewhat, practitioners of regenerative development and placemaking often perform many of the same tasks.

Table 22.1 Differences and gaps between placemaking and regenerative development

	Placemaking	Regenerative development
Goals and place	Social	Socio-ecological
	Humans as beneficiaries	Humans as catalysts and co-evolving with environment
	Respecting meaning of place in and of itself place as final product	Meaning of place as means and agent of co-evolution Focused on potential-building
Scale of actions	Local, with consideration of wider geographical, social or policy context on occasion	Nested within local, proximal and global spheres of influence
	Cross-scale influence may be important to ensure sustainability of local places	Mutual cross-scale benefits are important
Orientation towards the future	Often neglected or assumed	Co-evolutionary responses shaped by pattern discernment
	Place-keeping to ensure longevity and periodic revitalization of placemaking uncertainty is something to be managed (if not neglected)	Lacks clear guidance on ensuring socio-ecological durability Respects uncertainty without guidance on what to do with it

We contend then that both practices can lead to long-term care and evolution of places and promote wellbeing of all stakeholders. Yet they approach a place differently spatially and temporally, in their understanding of the potential of a place and its ability to evolve. It is our contention that combining the two approaches creates the potential of a more holistic framework. This requires understanding and reconciling their different approaches with different practices, goals and visions (Table 22.1).

Importantly, it is the differences between approaches that offer the opportunity to investigate if their integration will provide a greater potential to create living environments. The following sections consider their ability to support the evolution of place, ability to integrate spatial and temporal aspects of place, and the ability to elicit the potential of place.

22.3.1 Evolution of Place

Living environments are resilient and respond to events and opportunities in ways that serve the whole system and make it more vital and viable. Therefore, looking at the way both approaches address evolution is critical. For a place and its stakeholders to be able to evolve constructively through change, it is important to support its ability to identify, respond and adapt to change.

In placemaking, the focus is usually on humans as the beneficiaries of a place, with the important requirement that such benefits should be tailored to how people make sense of the place. Thus, placemaking is most often conceived as activities that

develop or increase place attachment and place understanding (i.e. meaning) in addition to enhancing environmental quality and amenities. It is essentially anthropocentric, with the care for the ecosystem aspects of place being strongly related to the perception of the people involved in the value of the ecosystem to their thriving. Further, the support for the non-human aspects of place will reflect the values of the human stakeholders, meaning that sometimes what is perceived to be good for human stakeholders will have priority over the non-human. Examples include the recent push to continue mining and using coal because this results in jobs, or the strong views of wind power. Without a vision for the complexity of a place and all its human and non-human stakeholders, the opportunity to develop and address the place is reduced. Often it is the non-human that are the heralds of change (think the canary in the mineshaft). Therefore, being able to conceive place as creating mutually beneficial relationships between the human and non-human is critical in being able to identify and respond constructively to change.

Placemaking that leads to place attachment without the context of all the stakeholders of the place and its complexity also means that it can result in unhelpful outcomes; it can lead to conscious and unconscious bias that reduces the ability to evolve through change. For example, Devine-Wright (Devine-Wright 2014), suggests strong place attachment attitudes may actually make people more resistant to making changes. In worse cases, place attachment can result in self-segregation and the manifestation of xenophobia, as evidenced by residents in certain white neighbourhoods in South Africa bemoaning the arrival of black neighbors (Dixon and Durrheim 2000). Such negative consequences can become a profound limiting factor for the evolution of places, or otherwise drive places towards degeneration.

Therefore, to create a living environment, the ability to create a strong place attachment is an outcome that needs to be carefully planned into the process of working in that place. Creating a strong story of place that connects people to the benefits of the ecosystems and to their continued thriving in that place is critical, as is the ability to be invested in that place so as to understand it and be able to work with it as circumstance change.

This is the contribution that regenerative development can provide. Regenerative development seeks a co-evolutionary relationship between humans and the ecosystems of that place. As Mang and Reed (2012, p. 5) explain, regenerative development is “not preservation of an ecosystem, nor is it restoration. Instead, it is the continual evolution of culture in relationship to the evolution of life.” The philosophy of regenerative development is therefore neither anthropocentric, nor explicitly strictly ecocentric either. Rather, proponents of regenerative development envision a relationship where development and ecosystems are changing in response to one another, such that each ultimately benefits from their relationship with the other. Moreover, they argue that value-generating capacity is only possible by (re)growing such a relationship over time, which is not only distinctive to each entity but itself an agent of evolution within open systems (Mang and Haggard 2016).

To this end, regenerative development focuses on potential-building, feedback loops, and understanding the human and non-human aspects of place. Their relationship beyond the place therefore enables those involved to be more able to observe, plan, and respond to change. Mang and Reed (2012) describe regenerative

development as consisting of two central and interrelated endeavors: (1) choosing the right phenomena to work on so as to maximize the system's potential for evolution and (2) building capacity and a 'field of caring and commitment' among stakeholders. Doing so is not only accepting change but committing to a never-ending process of change and openness. Humans' role, then, in this co-evolutionary relationship is to be catalyzers and active participants, creating or contributing to processes with the potential to generate a healthy place without trying to tightly control the direction the system evolves in (Mang and Reed 2012; Hes and Du Plessis 2014).

From this point of view, place – more specifically, the storytelling of place – can be treated variously as a framework, a mechanism and a process, rather than as a final product (Mang and Reed 2012). As a framework, story of place helps humans learn how to understand and co-evolve with their environments better, provided such storytelling explicitly addresses the relationship between humans and the ecology/non-human they are enmeshed in. As a mechanism, story of place helps create the field of caring and commitment necessary for continuous potential building. As a process, place itself acts a change agent after design and construction, calling on human actors to respond and remake meaning as its potential is realized or changes with regards to wider systemic changes through placemaking.

In summary, regenerative development allows stakeholders to understand their place in context, and to think about how to support that place to become more vital, viable, and able to observe and respond to change. Placemaking allows the testing of this with the stakeholders in a point in time, in a specific place. It is these temporal and spatial aspects that are discussed next.

22.3.2 Temporal and Spatial Scale of Place to Enable Adaptation and Resilience

22.3.2.1 Temporal

As discussed above, placemaking is essentially an activity undertaken to connect people to a place with an endpoint in mind, for example, increased activation of a park, activating a dying main street, safety of a laneway, etc. As such, it is mostly short-term, with some placemaking practice such as tactical urbanism being temporary. However, only thinking in endpoints and solving single space related problems can be a limitation when working in an ever-changing and evolving place.

In contrast, regenerative development's focus is on fostering co-evolutionary relationships between humans and places, culture and ecosystems/non-human. It does this while looking across time, in some projects taking the native American Indian concept of design for 7 generations (learning from the past three, designing for the future potential of three and the middle one now). Its aim is to create greater vitality, viability and ability to adapt (Mang and Haggard 2016), by looking at what worked throughout history, and improving the relationships between aspects of the place, its stakeholders, and their ability to reach their potential.

Bringing placemaking in line with regenerative development practice provides a way to understand the place over time, to ensure that the making and management of the place aligns with the essence of the place, based on how it worked throughout history and using placemaking to test if that is still relevant now.

22.3.2.2 Spatial

Placemaking focuses primarily on the site itself, and rarely addresses the reciprocal impact that occurs between the place and its stakeholders across different scales; it merely acknowledges that this reciprocity can occur. Arguably, this may be due to its essential focus on place attachment and meaning. As discussed previously, place attachment can manifest as insularity if the local communities' understanding of their place and place identity do not mesh with external elements around them. Mere apathy, lack of understanding, time, or ability to support external elements may also prevent cross-scale or cross-place considerations (Dempsey and Burton 2012; Mathers et al. 2015).

Regenerative development practice recognizes that development projects are always limited in scale, regardless of how large they are. Thus, regenerative development takes a simple nested approach to the cross-scale interactions (think a village square, within a village, within a watershed). This nested framework considers three layers of influence: the project site itself, the proximate whole and the greater whole. The proximate whole refers to a relatively localized system that is immediately relevant to the project, as defined through an understanding of the natural flows in the system or through cultural and social agreement. The greater whole is the greater system that may affect and be affected by the project in more indirect ways or over longer periods. This may include entities at the city, regional, national, or global scales, such as the international market or global climate patterns. The result of this approach is that the project acknowledges its role to provide positive benefits for aspects beyond the site, and this becomes part of its essence and its story of place. It also means that its capacity to influence the other levels is explicitly part of the development process, it is explicitly integrated into the project. In regenerative terms, it 'does what it can' (Hes and Du Plessis 2014) to contribute beyond its boundaries through its design, so as to create a stronger whole. For example, the design of tracks of greenery in a housing development can provide a potential wildlife corridor.

In the process of bringing placemaking and regenerative development together, it is placemaking that provides place-based projects that can be 'acupuncture points' that catalyze a community engagement with the story of place and its potential. As Mang (2009) write, "Places, as attractor points, therefore, are evolutionary agents in that they become points within a larger system in which new life and new distinct patterns of existence can emerge" (p. 40). Additionally, whereas placemaking efforts can sometimes lead to communities responding to external threats by rejecting their influence, regenerative development's attention to the reciprocal nature of nested cross-scale interactions suggests a different response. Regenerative development gives a way to think of the proximate and greater wholes and their mutual

relationships to the project, while placemaking provides a way to test and refine ideas of what happens in the place to manifest these relationships.

22.3.3 The Ability to Elicit Potential

Thus far, this paper has outlined that both placemaking and regenerative development aim to create better places by working with its potential. A challenge lies in the amount of information required to elicit the potential of place, particularly if integrating all the aspects of the site. Placemaking elicits potential through a process of strong community engagement throughout the design and development of the project. This can then be tested through tactical urbanism and other temporary techniques, so that the lived outcome of the ideas can be experienced creating a stronger connection to the potential of the project. Yet, as outlined above, this is an anthropocentric approach, and ultimately may fail to lead to ongoing thriving and the capacity to evolve, because it overlooks the non-human elements of the ecosystem of which humans are an integral part. Therefore, all aspects of the ecosystem need to be incorporated. Yet, limitations on time, resources, and capacity might make the data needed to do this seem to onerous.

Regenerative development practitioners have a counterpoint to this: they argue that though data of a site is important, it is more critical to identify the patterns that this data reveal. The often-used example is that of knowing your life partner, or children: you don't know them by the state of their liver, or blood pressure, or ingrown toenail, you know them by the pattern of who they are, and how that reveals their essence. For a project, Mang and Reed (2012) advocate for the use of storytelling to create a 'story field' to focus practitioners' and stakeholders' attention towards evolving patterns in "the whole system and what [the system] is attempting to become" (p. 12). As the short story above illustrates, it provides for a practical course of action for coming to a decision about what phenomena to work on. It is a way to bring together the complexity of the assessments of physical assets, ecosystems, geology, history, hydrology, and so on. Again, placemaking gives the tools to engage people to work together at a specific point in time, at a specific place, while regenerative development provides the story and context of how this could be done to achieve greater potential.

22.4 Discussion: Integrating Placemaking and Regenerative Development for Continual Co-evolution

Placemaking and regenerative development have strengths and weaknesses that are complementary. Working together, these two frameworks have the potential to harness each other's strengths and use them to minimise their limitations.

Placemaking benefits from regenerative development through the systems approach, ecological considerations, nested thinking beyond the project boundary, long-term visioning and planning, and pattern analysis to identify potential. Regenerative development benefits from placemaking as it provides a way to test, refine, implement, and learn, based on creating relationships to a place in a specific point of time. This is the Place Agency model. When integrating both practices, placemaking then becomes an acupuncture point where the regenerative potential of a place manifests itself.

The active nature of placemaking implementation brings life to a site allowing the community to build a stronger relationship to the place (attachment) and providing opportunities to become active participants of its ongoing growth (stewardship). Meanwhile, the reflective nature of regenerative development allows the community and place experts to continuously analyse the flows that bring the system to life, find the new patterns, design new solutions that lead to socio- ecological benefits, and adapt the regenerative strategy in response to the acupuncture points.

The Place Agency model is a call for regenerative practitioners and placemakers to work together to integrate these complementary place-centric views. The collaboration process will harness the key strengths posed by each framework to deliver Living Environments that are constantly evolving. The process of integration would start as follows: (A) during the conceptual design phase, the Place Agency model proposes the regenerative development approach for site analysis based on system's thinking. This analysis will holistically integrate human and non-human participants in their analysis and identify key patterns of the area. Placemaking is applied as part of this analysis to develop the community engagement strategy suited to the project and to lead a process where the community identifies their values, their needs, and current perspectives of the site. This results not only in a design, but a whole strategy for the ongoing evolution and improvement of the site from a social, ecological, and economic standpoint. (B) During the consultation and detail design process, placemaking is used to deliver some short-term interventions, trialing different aspects of the design (e.g. using tactical urbanism techniques). These interventions constitute a quick and responsive way to observe the community response to the regenerative ideas, while keeping the interest going throughout the design and planning process of any project. (C) Finally, during the construction phase, the community engagement process is used to continue working with the community, design team, and regenerative practitioners to develop a place management strategy which responds to the ever-changing interests of the community, in celebration of the past and present of the place.

22.5 Conclusion

Placemaking and Regenerative Development are two approaches to design and project implementation aiming to deliver healthy built environments that are relevant to the unique attributes of each community and geographical areas. Both approaches

are place-centric, with placemaking also being people-centric while regenerative development represents a socio-ecological approach. These practices differ on three key elements:

1. Evolution of place: Placemaking has mostly grown as a social movement focused on delivering temporary or permanent people-friendly shared spaces. Regenerative development is a socio-ecological framework that brings in the importance of both social and natural systems to create vibrant and resilient places.
2. Temporal and spatial scale of place: Both frameworks comprise an ongoing and adaptable process constantly revisiting what is working and what is not. However, regenerative development works on much longer timeframes and detailed understandings of systems, while placemaking poses a much more flexible approach suitable for trial and error interventions, embedded in a specific space at a specific time.
3. Eliciting potential: While placemaking identifies opportunities through community consultation, regenerative development finds potential within a living system through observation of patterns.

These three differences are complementary and can support the alternative framework in moving beyond its limitations. This paper presents a new approach, the ‘Place Agency’ model, to harness these complementary aspects of placemaking and regenerative development. This model understands placemaking as a point of time, nested, within regenerative development path and allowing the potential of the place to manifest. It proposes placemaking as a fun, quick, and responsive approach to trialing key ideas considered for the long-term outcomes sought by regenerative development. Placemaking providing an ongoing catalyst, or acupuncture point to revisit, adapt and re-align the regenerative development journey. By implementing regenerative development and placemaking together, places can grow from an anthropocentric approach to one that considers the whole system. Together, both frameworks can successfully support a co-evolving process suitable to deliver Living Environments.

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