Theorising Placemaking in Lost Spaces: A Critical Approach to Reclaiming Urban Public Spaces

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Introduction

Urban growth continually reorganises the geographical landscape in political, economic, and social ways. However, uncontrolled urban expansion has resulted in many unremarkable and unappealing representations of cities, which include underutilised, abandoned, or neglected urban spaces. These spaces fall under many terms, including urban voids, forgotten spaces, leftover spaces, or wasted land. What unites them is their lack of distinctive shape and definition, with hardly any measurement. In *Finding Lost Space* (1986), Roger Trancik defines them as *lost spaces* that disrupt the continuity of the urban structure, resulting in inconsequential unstructured landscapes. Trancik further emphasises that lost urban space signifies unacknowledged land requiring redesign; its importance stems from its potential to vitalise and link with the broader urban context.

Thesis Statement

This dissertation aims to conceptualise and determine the potential for repurposing and revitalising neglected urban spaces, often labelled as 'lost spaces', into dynamic and engaging areas through strategies that emphasise social involvement. This dissertation addresses the impact of reclaiming lost spaces and examines approaches for a more holistic urban design framework that reimagines these areas as integral to community life.

Methodology

Lost urban spaces are significant assets in urban design that present distinctive opportunities for rejuvenation and civic engagement (Trancik, 1986). However, this dissertation hypothesises that not all principles for development approaches for lost urban spaces are universally applicable; this is to say that the principles and strategies applied must be tailored to the specific social, cultural, and environmental contexts in which they exist. To thoroughly

examine this hypothesis, the study employs a comprehensive literature review to create a theoretical foundation for analysing lost urban spaces. This foundational framework is then tested through comparative and qualitative analyses using two case studies to examine how various principles apply across diverse settings.

Limitations

The literature review for this dissertation uncovers the deficiency in scholarly inquiry regarding the revitalisation and repurposing of urban lost spaces. While present research concerns urban renewal, there is a substantial lack of studies exploring these lost spaces' unique potential to promote social engagement and enhance community well-being. Furthermore, a significant amount of the existing literature emphasises the overarching principles of urban design while offering scant consideration of the distinctive characteristics and challenges inherent in underutilised spaces. This disparity becomes evident when examining the changing requirements of urban settings, where spaces are increasingly valued for their adaptability and potential to serve diverse functions.

Overview of Chapters

This dissertation is organised into four thematic chapters, exclusive of the Introduction and Conclusion, to examine the complexity of lost urban space.

Chapter 1: Background and context

This chapter provides historical context for the concept of lost urban space, tracing the evolution of urban architecture design practices and examining how industrialisation and modernisation have facilitated the formation of lost space.

Chapter 2: Theory

This chapter pertains to relevant literature on theories of space and place through a philosophical and phenomenological lens. It examines the presence of lost space in architecture, particularly concerning spatial experiences within the built environment.

Chapter 3: Placemaking

This chapter delves into placemaking theory and establishes qualitative criteria for assessing the value of place. It focuses on synthesising key elements of sociability, uses and activities, access and linkage, and comfort and image to examine this multifaceted design approach as the foundation of transforming lost spaces and improving the liveability of cities.

Chapter 4: Case studies

This chapter justifies the selection of case studies that address the central thesis - revitalised lost urban spaces. This analytical decision aims to offer a foundational comprehension of the placemaking design principles examined in the preceding chapter, emphasise the deficiencies of traditional urban design, and establish a qualitative criterion to find potential for inclusive improvement.

Chapter 1 Background and Context

1.1 Define Lost Urban Spaces and Modernist Urban Planning Mode

The emergence of lost urban spaces is a cumulative process. Two key phenomena have led to this: first, urban planning evolution and development left certain parcels of land vacant as surrounding areas were developed; secondly, areas originally designed as part of the urban fabric have been gradually neglected or underutilised as a result of changes in the surrounding environment or historical events.

The growth of modernist urban planning is closely associated with the acceleration of urbanisation after the Industrial Revolution. Rising factories and job opportunities led to the agglomeration of people in cities, resulting in the expansion of cities, traffic chaos, urban-rural disconnection, and deterioration of the living environment (Monclús and Medina, 2018). Such conditions catalysed the emergence of modern urban planning and functionalism in response to the management needs of dense urban populations through functional zoning and efficiency optimisation (Monclús and Medina, 2018). However, in the pursuit of efficiency and functional zoning, the modernist urban planning model overlooks the diversity of urban spaces and the importance of interpersonal interaction, resulting in the creation of 'lost spaces' (Trancik, 1986).

Urban sprawl and zoning regeneration have proliferated underutilised and functionally monotonous spaces, such as neglected unstructured landscapes at the base of high-rise towers and unused sunken plazas away from the flow of pedestrians (Trancik, 1986). To better understand these causes, Trancik summarised five major factors: (1) an increased dependency on automobiles; (2) the attitude of architects of the Modern Movement towards open space; (3) zoning and land-use policies of the urban renewal period that divided the city; (4) an unwillingness on the part of contemporary institutions - public and private - to assume

responsibility for the public urban environment; and (5) an abandonment of industrial, military or transportation sites in the inner core of the city.

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, urbanologist Jane Jacobs (1961) criticises functional zoning in urban design, arguing that it was fundamentally incompatible with urban configurations, resulting in the deconstruction of the city as a living community. Jacobs asserts that the functional zoning strategy segregates different activities in the city into isolated zones and weakens the organic interactions that sustain vitality and development in the urban environment (Wickersham, 2022).

In summary, ‘lost spaces’ are counter-functional spaces that do not positively affect the surroundings or users and thus necessitate redesign. Urban spaces have become more fragmented and divided with the rising dependence on automobiles and the modernist movement’s attitude towards open space. Furthermore, zoning and land-use policies from the urban renewal era further fragment cities. All of this stems from the modernist urban planning model, in its pursuit of efficiency and functionalism, neglecting the diversity of urban spaces and the importance of human interaction, thus triggering the formation of ‘lost spaces’.

Chapter 2 Theory

2.1 Urban Space and the Notion of Place

Martin Heidegger's exploration of the concept of place in *Bauen Wohnen Denken (Building Dwelling Thinking)* significantly shaped architectural theory in the late twentieth century. Heidegger's ideas on place were notably integrated into Peter Zumthor's *Atmosphere* and Christian Norberg-Schulz's works, *Architecture: Meaning and Place* and *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. These works all directly absorbed the ideological nourishment of Heidegger's theory of place and attempted to combine his philosophy of place with their own (Heidegger for Architects, 2008).

Heidegger initially differentiates between "space" and "place," characterising space as a system of abstract mathematical relations, whereas place arises from a connection to human experience, evolving into a being of presence (Malpas, 2012). He delineates a distinct boundary between spatiality and the mathematical interpretation of space, characterising spatiality as a concrete notion that includes the components that form an individual's dwelling environment (Holst, Jørn Utzon and Holst, 2014). Heidegger contends that space attains meaning as a place only when it is infused with profound symbolic significance. He employs the metaphor of a bridge to demonstrate the process of place creation. The bridge's significance is shaped not just by its spatial location relative to other structures, thoroughfares, and landmarks, but also by the memories and imaginations that individuals associate with it (Heidegger, 2001). When individuals perceive the bridge as a distinct entity, it transcends its classification as a mere object, evolving into a repository of personal memories or narratives linked to it. The borders of the bridge's location do not strictly correspond to the physical construction but rather are influenced by a continuous negotiation between the actual bridge and the conceptual bridge moulded by individual experiences (Dekkers, 2011).

In *Atmosphere* (2000), Zumthor explicitly addresses specific elements of Heidegger's philosophy, recognising that his expansive interpretation of dwelling and thinking in relation to place and space directly informs his perspective of the importance of reality and existence. Zumthor's reaction to Heidegger's focus on experience and emotion as cognitive instruments in placemaking can be encapsulated in three principal points.

The initiation of 'placemaking' is creating quality places through a collaborative process of leveraging ideas and contributions from the people who inhabit and use them (Project for Public Spaces, 2024b).

Zumthor emphasises the significance of sensory experience and intuitive assessment of the environment and responds to and expands on Heidegger's emphasis on the importance of experience and emotion as cognitive tools in placemaking. Firstly, he contends that genuine, individual sensory interaction with building materials elevates architecture beyond a simplistic perception of simple 'things', fostering settings that elicit emotional resonance (Zumthor, 2000). This attitude is clearly exemplified in his design for the Vals Thermal Baths (see figure 1), where the tactile characteristics of materials foster a significant spatial experience (Soltani and Kırcı, 2019).

Figure 1 Vals Thermal Baths. Fabrice Fouillet, (2018)

Secondly, Zumthor perceives architecture as a means to evoke a shared memory of the surroundings (Zacca, 2023). He reminisces about his aunt's kitchen, which, despite its ordinariness, had a profound impact due to its archaic and indelible quality that shaped his design philosophy (Saieh, 2010). This indicates that locations, as gathered and energised by architecture, are interconnected with significant traditions anchored in particular personal life experiences (Zacca, 2023). This authenticity offers individuals a source of motivation for self-identification and living.

Thirdly, the authenticity of place experience is anchored not only in individual life imagery but also in a wider cultural and historical framework. Zumthor values not only the local procurement of materials but is profoundly influenced by the old traditions they represent. The distinctive architecture of the Vals Thermal Baths elicits a profound sense of religious mysticism, akin to ancient bathing rites observed in Turkish and Japanese traditions (Soltani and Kırcı, 2019).

On the other hand, Norberg-Schulz utilised Heidegger's philosophical notions of being and dwelling, substituting "space" with "place" in his urban studies to investigate the interplay between individuals, architecture, and urban environments through architectural phenomenology (Hendrik Auret, 2018). He formulated the significant concepts of place phenomenology and genius loci (spirit of place), perceiving place as a qualitative, holistic reality rather than just an abstract location. This method maintains the distinct attributes of each locale, enabling metropolitan areas to be perceived as particular contextual situations where individuals can attain a sense of orientation and identity, essential components for establishing one's existential foothold (Hendrik Auret, 2018).

According to Norberg-Schulz (1980), clarity of spatial structure offers orientation, while comprehension of one's relationship with a particular location cultivates identity; the

authentic spirit of place manifests only when both aspects are thoroughly realised. The sense of alienation in modern urban environments, he says, arises from an over-focus on spatial arrangement, neglecting identity and character—elements crucial for urban design.

Studies on the perception of place encourage individuals to investigate the intricate and obscured dimensions beyond the tangible characteristics of space, thus allowing for enhanced comprehension of human existence in urban environments. Cities are inherently human constructs that acquire significance through activities and lived experience, evolving into places. The distinctive importance of a city typically arises from its localised history, encompassing personal recollections associated with a site, narratives of its inhabitants, or collective memory documented through official records and monuments. These elements may be very personal or indicative of collective consciousness through shared experiences, emphasising the vitality of local history in converting geography into a culturally symbolic entity.

Reconceptualising urban environments through the lens of the city as place highlights multiple facets of urban existence. This approach prioritises personal and public life over economic or geographic issues while highlighting individuals' connection to and identification with specific locations. Understanding the "city as place" rather than "city as space" is crucial, as it provides significant insights for the cultural revitalisation of urban areas. This perspective enhances relationships between individuals and their environments by exploring the fundamental nature of daily life in urban settings. It rejuvenates the integrity and vitality of urban environments by revealing the essence of place and fostering attachment.

2.2 Transformation from "Space" to "Place" and Its Implications

Urban research that perceives cities solely as space neglects the complexity of urban life and the intricate link between individuals and cities – a subject that has garnered increased attention from researchers. The order present in the spatial realm is merely partial; it is the interconnection of human experiences within this order that imparts depth and importance. In the absence of this distinctive component, space is reduced to a mere container, an insufficient vessel for human experiences, which numerous experts examining human-environment interactions deem inadequate (Milad Abassiharofteh et al., 2022).

Urban revitalisation initiatives driven solely by a spatial perspective frequently face criticism for their technical, impersonal, and uninspired characteristics. Landscape architect James Corner criticises the abstract methodology towards urban landscapes that simplifies intricate urban environments into indistinct formal structures and exacerbates the disconnect between landscape design and human experience (Corner, 2011). In this context, introducing the idea of "place" provides a novel perspective for comprehending the multi-faceted nature of urban environments and the intricate relationship between individuals and space.

Firstly, physical space, events, and significance are the three essential components that constitute a place. Place does not exist in any particular component of these elements; instead, it arises as a collective outcome of their interactions (Foote et al., 2009). Consequently, the establishment of place should not be limited to any aspect or combination but rather should consider the synergy of diverse aspects. The significance of place is not merely contained inside the city's physical structure or superficially appended to it but rather interwoven into the entirety of the assemblage. Perceiving place as an ensemble prevents its reduction to mere language, materiality, or subjective experience. The term "sense of place" denotes a phenomenon that links and transcends both material and expressive dimensions (Foote et al., 2009).

The formation of place necessitates a thorough comprehension of the city as a synthesis of material space, focused on structures and communal areas, lived space, grounded in daily existence and cultural customs, and imaginative space, derived from experience, memory, and metaphor (Lefebvre and Goonewardena, 2008). These characteristics create a symbolic environment that is as crucial, if not more so, than the physical elements frequently overstated in urban revitalisation initiatives. This symbolic dimension originates from cities consistently obtaining profound significance and proliferating in numerous ways. In *The Poetics of Space* (2014), Gaston Bachelard articulates the continuous process of enhancing urban significance: "Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination." The relationship between the external environment and the internal self in the domain of images is markedly unbalanced. Images are incompatible with static concepts, much less with immutable ideas. The imagination perpetually reinvents itself, augmenting itself with novel pictures (Bachelard, 2014).

Effective placemaking relies on a nuanced comprehension of the interrelatedness and coexistence of all urban components. Space can only be fully understood when integrated into the intricate relational framework of location. A singular approach to urban revitalisation is prone to superficiality, as it neglects the layered complexity vital for the essence of urban character (Project for Public Spaces, 2024b). Ultimately, place serves as the tangible manifestation of quotidian experiences in urban environments, acquiring significance only when enriched with authentic life elements and vibrant relationships. Individuals' affinity for a location is frequently established through consistent, affirmative interactions in daily life, making the location a fundamental component of routine existence. The reciprocal influence between individuals and their environment, where the environment affects the inhabitants, promotes a perspective on urban revitalisation that prioritises everyday urban existence. In

Everyday Urbanism, John Kaliski (2009) asserts that the city comprises a compilation of spaces and structures pertinent to daily existence. Simultaneously concentrated and dispersed, tranquil yet cacophonous, structured yet chaotic, it embodies a paradoxical amalgamation of socialised areas encircled by edifices. The diversity of daily interactions should be regarded as a continuous story for urban inhabitants and designers, which must infiltrate the entire planning and design process. This indicates that the rejuvenation of urban space is inherently connected to the revitalisation of urban life.

Numerous modern urban environments are, however, constructed primarily as attractions for tourists rather than as habitats for local inhabitants. Daily, weekly, and annual routines, which possess substantial social, spatial, and aesthetic importance, are frequently neglected in reconstruction, resulting in urban environments that either disregard the reality of everyday life or inadequately replicate its vibrancy. In contrast to expansive public areas in urban design, daily spaces facilitate different encounters that generate layers of meaning and constitute the city's most vibrant zones.

Revitalising urban space necessitates a targeted design that integrates the quotidian aspects of local life to maintain a place's vibrancy. This also fosters a revitalised viewpoint on urban redevelopment, emphasising the daily experiences of city inhabitants as the primary element in developing vibrant, significant urban environments.

Chapter 3 Placemaking

Placemaking is a practical approach guided by place theory that emphasises empowering communities through a collaborative, bottom-up, people-centred approach to redefine and revitalise the significance of public space in terms of its physical, social, and economic functions (Project for Public Spaces, 2024b).

Urbanists such as William H. Whyte and Jane Jacobs advocate for transferring decision-making authority regarding urban development from architects and planners to local users, emphasising the importance of respecting public agency and needs in shaping urban spaces (ELSHESHTAWY, 2015). Their ideas lay the theoretical foundation for placemaking practices focusing on urban daily life, cultural identity, communication, and social interaction. The rise of this concept marked a shift in urban planning from macro-level, infrastructure-oriented design to micro-level interventions aimed at revitalising public spaces. Whyte's research on urban spaces was further developed through the efforts of his protégé, Fred Kent, who founded the Project for Public Spaces (PPS). PPS expanded upon Whyte's work by using placemaking strategies to transform spaces into places imbued with a sense of belonging and public significance, thus reclaiming 'place' for the public.

The main goals of placemaking include reconstructing the identity of a place, conveying its meaning, and shaping its identity, where people and experiences are always the core drivers in constructing the concept of an ideal place. As Kent and Madden (2016, p. 27) assert the community is the core of the placemaking process.

The PPS (2009b) developed a model that outlines the qualities of successful public places in four main attributes: "*Access & Linkages, Uses & Activities, Comfort & Images and Sociability*" in the application of placemaking (see figure 2).

Figure 2 Placemaking model and criteria required to create successful places. Project for Public Spaces, (2024)

The first attribute is Access and Linkages, which measures the degree to which a public space is visually and physically connected to its surroundings. A successful public place should be readily accessible and navigable, with clear pathways inviting pedestrians and cyclists. The layout of the roads and pathways should match the routes users would naturally take when heading toward their desired destinations. The space should be accessible through multiple modes of transportation, such as buses, trains, cars, and bicycles. Also, the visual connection from afar means the space is inviting, not isolating.

The second attribute of Comfort and Image includes various considerations, such as the overall atmosphere of the space, maintenance of the space, and the user experience. Good public space should create positive awareness about its presence and openness, thus giving a good impression. In addition, different types and arrangements of seating offers individuals varied choices. Safety is yet another fundamental element: the site design should adequately integrate visible and passive security and surveillance, so users feel comfortable.

The Uses & Activities attribute highlights that a wider range of interactive and stimulating opportunities can attract varying types of users. This makes it all the more important for the space to create opportunities for activity at various times of day in order to be a successful community space. Different social dynamics add to the polychromy of a space. Whether by an individual or small group, it demonstrates that the area encourages both solitude and group use. A successful public space serves a range of social experiences, from quiet contemplation to socialising, recognising its place as a shared community resource.

The last attribute, Sociability, is perhaps the most challenging to achieve but also the most prominent indicator of a successful public location. A space that facilitates usage with friends, in impromptu chats, and where you run into familiar faces also indicates its worth as a gathering place in the life of the community. This emphasises the importance of considering inclusiveness and social interaction between different demographics in the design of the space.

Chapter 4 Case Studies

This chapter reports on neglected and underutilised 'lost spaces' in existing urban areas and analyses how the placemaking model can mobilise these areas to increase urban vitality and further sustainable development. This section argues for choosing case studies broadly opposed to the thesis — if nothing else, valorisation of lost spaces not only enables spatial redefining, but reshapes the value through placemaking practices.

The selection of case studies is based on three major criteria, namely: (i) the selected spaces should have undergone a significant period of neglect or marginalisation within their urban context; (ii) the interventions implemented should exemplify principles of placemaking, centred around inclusivity, community engagement, and multifunctionality; and (iii) the case studies should include extensive documentation of their interventions, such as architectural drawings, photographs, and contextual analyses.

This chapter comprises in-depth analysis of two projects: *Folly for a Flyover* by Assemble Studio in London, UK and *The Bentway* by Public Work Architects in Toronto, Canada.

4.1 Case Study 1: Folly for a Flyover

Folly for a Flyover was a 2011 temporary cultural intervention by the group Assemble, transforming an under-used area beneath the A12 in East London's Hackney Wick. Understanding its design approach and impact on the urban environment, as well as how it adheres to placemaking's key criteria, is essential for analysing its successes and shortcomings.

4.1.1 Design Approach

The design of Folly for a Flyover was notable for its imaginative yet pragmatic approach. Assemble built a structure that resembled a house out of interlocking wooden bricks to create a playful aesthetic that was an immediate antithesis to the surrounding brutalist architecture (see figure 3). This sharp contrast in visual perception was intended to make the space more welcoming, compensating for the lack of warmth that is inherent to underpasses.

Figure 3 Folly for a Flyover. David Vintiner, (2011)

In spite of its aesthetic appeal, the structure's open-air format did not do much to shield audiences from harsh weather, which may have dampened attendance when it rained, or during the colder times of year. Moreover, despite its cost-effectiveness, the project embraced the "lighter, quicker, cheaper" (LQC) approach, relying on temporary materials that necessarily limited both the structure's useful lifespan as well as its appearance for permanence within the cities in which it operated.

4.1.2 Impact on the Urban Environment

Folly for a Flyover managed to convert once-isolated, underused space to a cultural destination that drew an estimated 40,000 visitors in nine weeks (Assemble, 2011). Through a programme mix that included film screenings, performances and workshops the project made a site for dynamic connections in an urban environment divided by transport infrastructure.

But the limited duration of the intervention calls into question the sustainability of such temporary projects. After the installation had been taken down, the place returned to its original condition, highlighting the difficult task of maintaining the energy created by temporary cultural interventions (see figure 4). The failure to develop a long-term strategy for sustaining the positive effects of the intervention demonstrates a crucial shortcoming in the tactical placemaking process—that it can produce a meaningful but largely symbolic impact, without any institutional follow through.

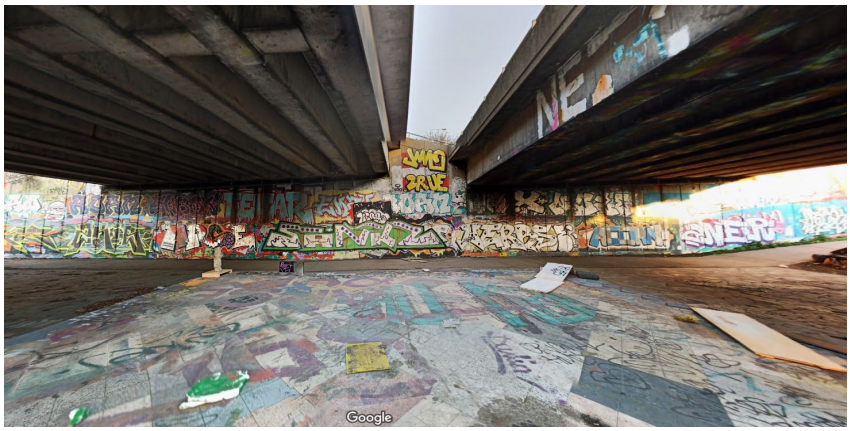

Figure 4 Hackney Wick in 2020. Ma B, (2020)

4.1.3 Placemaking Criteria Analysis

Evaluating Folly for a Flyover against the four key placemaking criteria, established by the Project for Public Spaces, leads to the following observations:

Sociability:

The project performed well in terms of creating sociability through enabling social behaviour and community ownership and idea-formation. The use of local volunteers to assist in the construction process emphasised a bottom-up philosophy that helped strengthen community spirit and engagement. The diversity of cultural framing served this goal of social cohesion by appealing to a wide audience. Because the intervention was by nature a temporary installation, the relationships created as part of the project were themselves temporary, preventing the potential of the long-term social and economic aspects associated with permanent public spaces.

Uses and Activities:

The multi-functional design of the space and an adaptive programming played a significant role in its success as an active public space. By day, the space operated as a café and meeting spot; by night, it opened up for outdoor film screenings and performances.

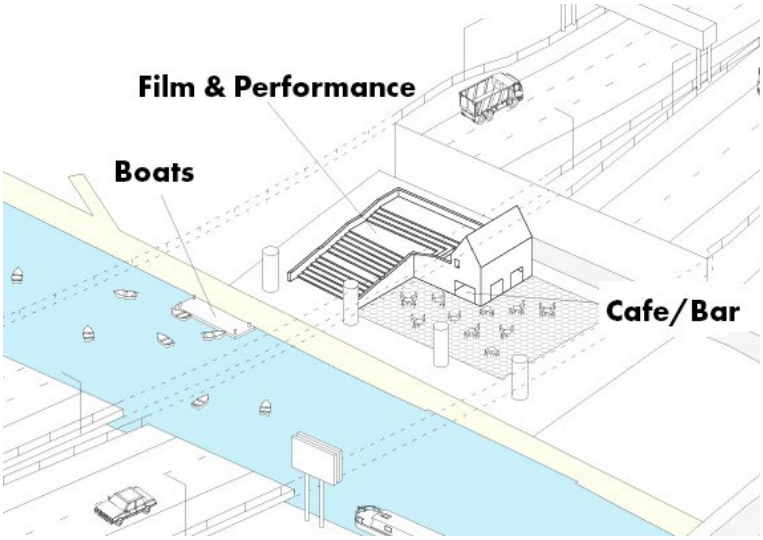

Figure 5 Isometric Diagram of Folly For a Flyover. Assemble, (2021)

Access and Linkages:

Although the intervention enhanced the site's visual and social accessibility, the site's physical location underneath a major road presented challenges. The design barriers of

surrounding high-traffic areas and limited pedestrian pathways made it difficult to access, especially for families with children or mobility issues (see figure 6). Even with signage and visual markers that improved wayfinding, the site location at the edge of the urban fabric nevertheless limited its access for a wider demographic.

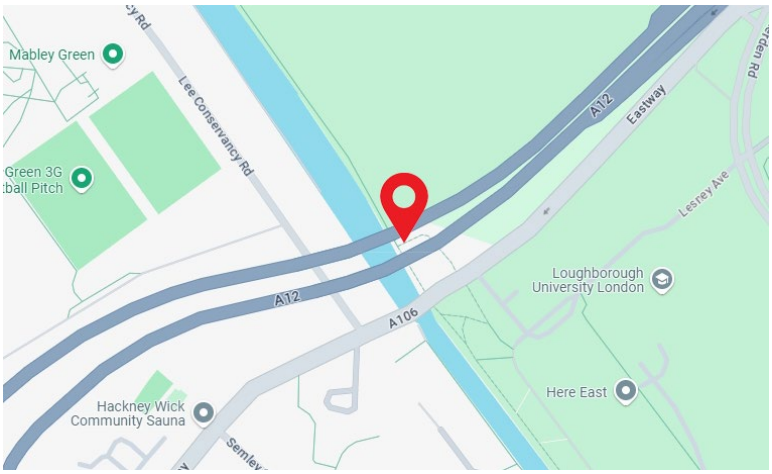

Figure 6 Map of A12 Motorway and Hackney Wick. Google Maps, (2024)

Comfort and Image:

The project vastly improved the perception of the space, turning a dark, withered underpass into a compelling area. The playful design details, spacious seating, and natural materials made things feel much more inviting (see figure 7). But while the open-air structure did enhance comfort, the lack of any protection against the weather and the relentless noise from the motorway above compromised overall comfort in the space. Aesthetic perception of the site was altered, but the project ultimately cannot be considered successful because it fails to address subjective use and environmental determinants of comfort.

Figure 7 Film Streaming at Folly For a Flyover. Morley von Sternberg, (2021)

4.1.4 Limitations and Future Considerations

While Folly for a Flyover showcased the potential for creative placemaking to temporarily transform vacant sites, its ephemeral nature constrained its capacity to create lasting effects. There was no follow-up plan to keep the building there and the social and cultural benefits of the intervention were only temporary. This reinforces the significance of functionalising temporary interventions as part of a larger urban strategy – complete with collaborations with local authorities and stakeholders to sustain the effort – especially in this context of shrinking public space.

Finally, the use of temporary, low-cost materials on which the design is based, while still coherent with the philosophy of LQCs, represents an intrinsic limitation regarding its durability over time. If spatial responses for adaptation rely on temporary moves, then future work could also consider hybrid solutions that combine the experimental impulse of temporary works with semi-permanent or modular elements that can adapted for continued use.

4.2 Case Study 2: The Bentway

The Bentway is a large-scale placemaking project in Toronto that takes advantage of the unused spaces beneath the Gardiner Expressway and revamps it into a multi-use public corridor. This 2018 project is remarkable for incorporating recreational, cultural, and social programming in a previously abandoned urban gap.

4.2.1 Design Approach

The Bentway is designed according to the principles of adaptive reuse, an architectural concept that reinvents existing structures into new forms, as evidenced by the 1.75-kilometre stretch of underpass-turned–year-round public space that is suitable for various activities. The project includes a skating trail, performance spaces, seating areas, green spaces, and art installations (see figure 8). Retaining the industrial character of the Gardiner Expressway, the design uses the existing structure of the concrete slab to introduce soft landscaping and modern urban furniture to make the area more functional and enjoyable.

Figure 8 The Bentway Open-air Amphitheatre with Art Installations. Nic Lehoux (2018)

One of the strongest design strategies employed by The Bentway is its modularity, from festivals to fitness classes, supporting all types of ongoing adaptability (see figure 9). But the

linear arrangement of the site presents challenges to spatial coherence. Hallways are long and narrow, which can break up the user experience and restrict impromptu socialising. Moreover, the overhanging expressway creates an undesirable ceiling that blocks natural light and generates noise pollution, likely making the space less attractive outside of programmed hours.

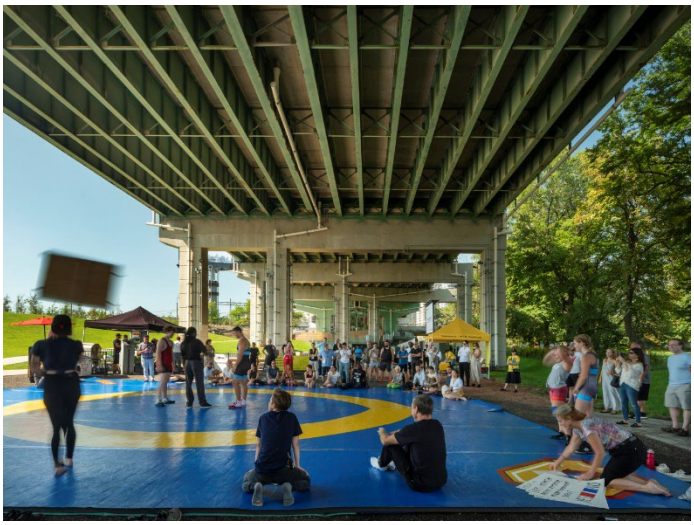

Figure 9 Fitness Class at The Bentway. Nic Lehoux, (2018)

4.2.2 Impact on the Urban Environment

The Bentway overhauled Toronto's urban impact by taking back an overlooked infrastructure space and turning it into a hub of public life. The project has improved the connection between previously disconnected neighbourhoods through a continuous pedestrian and cycled route underneath the expressway. This enhanced connectivity is in keeping with larger trends in cities toward making them more walkable and accessible.

Figure 10 Pedestrian Pathway and Cycle Route. Nic Lehoux, (2018)

Aside from its physical connectivity, The Bentway is a site for community, identity, and culture, with all manner of events, public art displays, and performances. The project's central positioning and large-scale programming have prompted concerns about commercialisation and gentrification, though. Highly curated events and corporate sponsorships might benefit upscale urbanites, some critics say, rather than serve marginalised communities (Mekonnen and Amberber, 2020). This prompts the question of whether The Bentway is actually an inclusive public space, or just perpetuating socio-spatial inequities.

4.2.3 Placemaking Criteria Analysis

The evaluation of The Bentway against the placemaking criteria reveals the following:

Sociability:

The project encourages sociability by providing a variety of shared activities and spaces for the public. A mixing pot of activities, such as the winter skating trail, for example, attract a diverse audience and open the doors to socialisation. However, some academics have

suggested that rigid programming may stifle spontaneous, informal usage of the space. Corporate sponsorships, curated events, and a focus on nightlife can create barriers to a more organic, unprompted social environment.

Uses and Activities:

The Bentway is particularly successful in creating a multi-functional space for recreational, cultural, and social activities. The adaptable design makes programming possible throughout the year, ensuring the site is constantly occupied. However, such a high dependency on planned events may call into question the site's usability when there are no such activities. In the absence of crowds and a high level of organisation, the linear site can be perceived as empty and less attractive, especially given the busy highway above.

Access and Linkages:

One of The Bentway's significant successes is its increasing connectivity across Toronto. The uninterrupted path running below the elevated roadway allows pedestrians and cyclists to move through neighbourhoods that were formerly cut-off from one another, in a city that has struggled with urban fragmentation due to the Gardiner Expressway. Even with these improvements, the proximity of the site to bustling crossroads, as well as a lack of seamless pedestrian crossings at certain locations, could create challenges for the safety of users. In addition, while accessibility has been enhanced, the archetypal threatening space associated with the underpass after dark has the potential to disadvantage women and other vulnerable groups.

Comfort and Image:

The Bentway's design has successfully re-imagined the perception of a space that is traditionally characterised by neglect and disuse. Adding plants, seats, and elements of art makes for a less intimidating, more visually enticing space. However, there are some challenges in such an industrial setting, as user comfort is a major concern in terms of noise

level and absence of natural light. Given that some of these issues are inherent to the location of the site, however, further interventions – such as sound barriers and additional lighting – might improve the comfort and safety of the space.

4.2.4 Limitations and Future Considerations

While The Bentway has won accolades as a model for large-scale placemaking, its design and governance pose significant challenges. The reliance on formal programming and sponsorships raises concerns about inclusivity and the commercialisation of public space. To address these limitations, future project iterations could incorporate more community-driven initiatives that allow more organic use of the space. For example, community farms, temporary vendors, and pop-up workspaces.

Moreover, despite improvements in urban connectivity, the site's physical conditions remain a limitation. Noise pollution, lack of natural light, and extreme weather conditions decrease its appeal, especially during non-programmed hours. Semi-enclosed sections, extra sound-absorbing materials, and similar strategies may improve the site's environmental quality and enable relatively comfortable, spontaneous use.

Comparative Analysis of Folly for a Flyover and The Bentway

Folly for a Flyover and The Bentway demonstrate the potential of placemaking to repurpose neglected urban spaces, but they differ in scale, duration, and lengths and use different styles of civic engagement. Folly for a Flyover presents a tactical, temporary intervention based on low-cost, community-driven engagement that embraces a "lighter, quicker, cheaper" (LQC)

methodology model. On the other hand, The Bentway represents a permanent, large-scale initiative with sustained investment and formal programming aimed at long-term urban integration.

While Folly for a Flyover excelled at fostering sociability and community ownership through ground-up cultural lifeways, its transient quality limited its potential to embed urban habits. The Bentway, for its part, bolsters citywide connectivity and multifunctionality but is highly dependent on curated events and corporate sponsorships that may limit unstructured, community-driven uses.

In terms of design, it was Folly for a Flyover's malleable, volunteer-constructed form that beckoned the public to engage but lacked durability and weather protection. The Bentway's construction of adaptive reuse of the space beneath the Gardiner Expressway is both permanent and substantial but will be inherently noisy with limited natural light. Both initiatives managed to redefine the perception of neglected spaces but function differently in terms of inclusivity: The Bentway, which cuts through disconnected areas, was an exclusionary process of design and administration, while Folly for a Flyover, though an effort for deep local engagement, didn't live long enough to penetrate the urban fabric.

The two case studies highlight the trade-offs between temporary and permanent placemaking. Temporary projects like Folly for a Flyover inspire innovation and foster community ownership but require follow-up strategies for sustained impact. Permanent interventions like The Bentway achieve long-term urban integration but must balance formal programming with informal, everyday uses to avoid becoming overly curated public spaces.

While the comparison of the case studies illustrates the potential of placemaking to revitalise lost spaces, both projects focus on flyover spaces. Thus, raising the question to what extent can these two projects represent broader discourse of placemaking on urban lost spaces? The

relatively structure nature of flyover spaces allows designed interventions within the pre-existing framework, however, this is not the case for other lost spaces, such as abandoned industrial, vacant plot, or fragmented urban edges.

This prompts broader on the scalability and adaptability of placemaking strategies. By acknowledging the typological specificity of these case studies, this analysis emphasises the importance of expanding placemaking research to a wider range of lost urban. This not only diversifies the understanding of what constitutes lost spaces but also helps to optimise placemaking strategies that respond to varied spatial, social, and environmental contexts. Ultimately, the adaptability of placemaking depends on recognising the limitations and potential of each unique space, which requires approaches that balance structure with flexibility, permanence with experimentation, and design with lived experience.

Conclusion

This study emphasises the importance of recognising and addressing the potential of neglected 'lost spaces' through placemaking strategies that foster urban vitality, inclusivity, and cultural identity. Both temporary and permanent interventions, as demonstrated by Folly for a Flyover and The Bentway, highlight the transformative power of creative design and community engagement in reimagining underutilised urban spaces. However, they also expose the complexities and trade-offs inherent in different approaches.

As noted by urban theorists namely William H. Whyte, placemaking is not solely about aesthetic improvements but about creating meaningful public spaces that reflect the identities and needs of diverse urban populations. Projects such as Folly for a Flyover defy the assumption that major urban transformation comes with larger budgets or permanent infrastructure, showing instead how small-scale, community-driven programming can have an effect. Meanwhile, The Bentway exemplifies the potential of large-scale adaptive reuse to reconnect fragmented urban areas and to provide year-round public amenities, while also posing important questions about the balance in public life between formal programming and the organic use of public space.

One key objective of this research was to provide a deeper understanding of how placemaking attributes—sociability, uses and activities, access and linkages, and comfort and image—can be used to evaluate and optimise the design of urban spaces. Analysing these case studies reveals both successes and areas for improvement, such as the need for sustained community partnerships, flexible design elements, and mechanisms to ensure that public spaces remain inclusive and accessible over time.

The results of this study illustrate that placemaking is not a prescriptive process. Instead, it needs a context-sensitive equilibrium between short-term trial and error with long-term design

to make sure public spaces are maintained and attractive. Though both methods have limitations – tactical with less permanence and large-scale with greater distance from context – it is essential for designers and urban planners to embrace a more critical and reflective practice where public space design favours not just a physical change but also a more socially cohesive and culturally representative process of inclusion. Building on the concept of temporary ownership, it is anticipated that these projects will foster the emergence of a more human-centred approach towards urban development, ensuring that even the smallest or least valued parcels of land can be utilised within the city, either socially or environmentally.

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