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PLACEMAKING

Buzzword

OR

Brand builder ?

About Infinite Global

We are an international communications consultancy which enhances and defends real estate brands in a competitive and disrupted global market.

We do this through a bespoke blend of PR, Branding and Content. We understand the complex issues facing businesses and advise them on how communications maximises opportunities and mitigates risk.

Our clients are typically complex organisations appealing to sophisticated audiences. In addition to real estate, our sector expertise extends across legal, financial and professional services, corporates, SMEs and their related partners.

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Placemaking in the development cycle

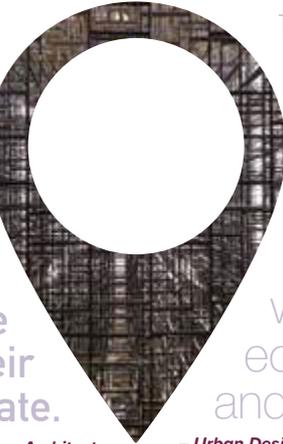
Placemaking does not belong to the built environment. Very clearly, places ‘exist’ before a developer moves on site, and even before an architect’s pencil has touched paper. They will continue to exist, integrating with the people and communities that inhabit them, often far beyond the lifespan of most development schemes.

That being said, built environment professionals have a key role to play in the stewardship, or the orchestration, of place.

But, in an age of technological disruption and convergence, where digital is increasingly the true public realm, people and communities are increasingly more intertwined with their environments, and with the operators that create, manage and sustain these environments.

As we move towards a new definition of place, ever more closely integrated with people and communities, the role of communications – from place identity, brand and storytelling to stakeholder management and community engagement - becomes increasingly important. The challenge inherent in placemaking communications, though, is navigating both the multiplicity of understandings of placemaking and the vast cast of characters, identifying responsibility, and aligning stakeholders behind the story of a place – particularly in the traditional three-phase nature of developments.

“Closer and more creative collaboration between government and the real estate industry is essential. But bold public-sector leadership must be the starting point for success. Civic leaders should be judged on the quality of the places their policies create.



– Architect

“There isn’t a toolkit for place, but I think we can learn from places which work; places which are very well used, places which are healthy, have higher well-being, are economically vibrant and are diverse.”

– Urban Designer

Pre Development

Very often, the placemaking debate is considered the purview of planners, architects and local authorities. Quite rightly, the thinking about place starts before a shovel hits the soil on site, in order to help ensure that the end ‘product’ is delivering social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts for communities and stakeholders.

According to a 2016 DCLG report, “... A placemaking approach to design can create value for all involved, including the occupants, the wider community and the developer, by delivering more diverse and inclusive neighbourhoods.” The tension comes when we delve deeper into who has responsibility for placemaking within a location.

Who's responsible?

On the one hand, local authorities and planning officers have a central role to play in setting out the vision for a location, through a local plan within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, published 2012).

On the other hand, clearly developers and their advisers, as the on-the-ground specialists creating the built environment we live, work and play in, are critical to the programme of delivering great places.

According to Lucy Greenwood, Associate, Residential Research and Consultancy at Savills, “One of the big issues is that when it comes to placemaking there’s no one party actually responsible. The local authorities, while they have a role to play in terms of setting the local plan, don’t have the on-the-ground experience and knowledge of what that actually means and looks like.”

This, arguably, has manifested itself in the reported struggles of local authorities to develop local plans, with research from Lichfields finding that, as of April 2017, fewer than 4 in 10 local planning authorities had seen a ‘strategic-level’ local plan through examination to adoption. The importance of a robust local plan should not be underestimated, with DCLG stating that engagement with strategic plans not only builds community ownership, but also “builds private sector confidence that any development proposals which align with the strategy will attract support and be easier to implement.”

Evaluating place

The problem is potentially one of resourcing, but also one linked to the multifarious nature of placemaking and the difficulty of building a framework for evaluating what makes a good place. **“Local authorities are constantly having funding cuts to different services and they just don’t have the skills in a lot of cases to really engage with placemaking...” says Lucy Greenwood. “One of the issues is that it’s not clear what’s good and what’s not. Evaluation tends to be through qualitative evidence, but that can be really difficult when you are dealing with stakeholders who perhaps do not have the requisite skillsets or resources. There have been efforts to put together frameworks for assessing what makes a good place, but there’s definitely room to improve and do more.”**

Hiro Aso, Head of Transport and Infrastructure at Gensler is more forthright regarding the centrality of local authorities and policy makers in ensuring the creation of good places. “Closer and more creative collaboration between government and the real estate industry is essential. But bold public-sector leadership must be the starting point for success. Civic leaders should be judged on the quality of

the places their policies create. Good place-based policy and placemaking leadership will shun the reductive binary debate of growth versus nimbyism and recognises the good that comes from good placemaking, and has an honest discussion about the trade-offs around planning decisions is also a necessity. The other, constant, challenge is that the danger that quantity takes precedence over quality, especially in an environment where local government budgets and resources are under threat.”

Euan Mills, Urban Design and Planning Lead at Future Cities Catapult reflects that we shouldn’t let the pendulum of criticism of local authorities swing too far, though and we should bear in mind the difficulty inherent in the term placemaking in itself. “Local authorities may not have the skillset and resources to take a leadership role in seeking to create places, but we have to be careful not to ask too much of them. We cannot expect the local authority planners to be place makers – mainly because no one really can be a place maker – but there are efforts in place to bring placemaking skills into councils.”

While some, such as Berkeley Group, have valiantly sought to develop a toolkit for successful places, the challenge of subjectivity remains. **Hiro Aso agrees, noting “...There is no silver “design” bullet for successful placecuration or placemaking. It’s all context dependent and we should certainly be cautious about trying to simply ‘recreate’ successes from other locales – that don’t align with the community’s needs or the local environment. The ultimate challenge is creating a framework that balances the planned and the unplanned, allowing flexibility to change.”**

Euan Mills goes further. “There isn’t a toolkit for place, but I think we can learn from places which work; places which are very well used, places which are healthy, have higher well-being, are economically vibrant and are diverse.”

The case for collaboration

On the other side of the fence, of course, sits the private sector – represented by the developer and the design team of architects and planners. A key part of the pre-delivery process from this perspective utilises placemaking to present the ‘business case’ for and community impact of a development. Indeed, successfully articulating the vision of a place in a location can play an important, if not critical, role in helping progress a development through the planning permission process. **As Dr. Jo Morrison, Programme Director: Digital Innovation at Calvium, notes when discussing digital placemaking, “...There is no one**

stakeholder that would have primary responsibility across the development cycle. For instance, at the master planning stage it could be the developer who is taking a primary role in employing digital placemaking to enable more effective and productive stakeholder engagement to build consensus and speed up planning...”

The prevailing challenge of placemaking from the design and planning stage is that, on the one hand, while there may be no objective measure of what is good, everyone is broadly in agreement that certain ingredients that constitute a successful place are critical. On the other hand, the general lack of ownership of placemaking leads to not only challenges in terms of communicating the role and value of a prospective place, but also in joining the dots between people, community identity, and the vision and purpose of the built environment.

According to Hiro Aso, “Placecuration is a collaborative exercise – even where there is single ownership there will be multiple stakeholders who need to work together to create the vision. Ownership/stewardship is often the reason that places which looked great at the design stage fail in practice.” Dr Julie Grail, MD of the BIDs Business, agrees, and pin points the ‘too many cooks’ problem which dogs not only public vs private, but private vs private. “The biggest challenge is fully having the command over the space to really ‘create’ something desirable. When in single ownership and investment funds are available this is reasonably easy but when in multiple ownership and/or public ownership it can be challenging to create a holistic approach... ultimately the investors need to want to be creative and the planners need to be willing to be receptive.”

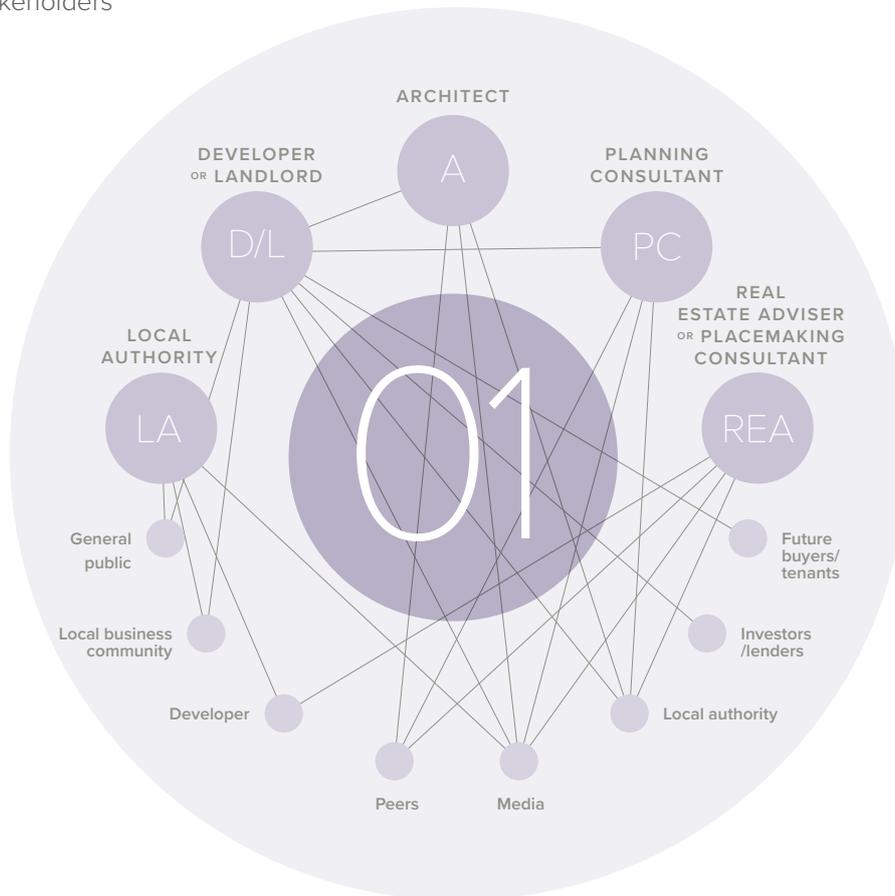
Lucy Greenwood notes that this is an issue for developing the identity of a place, as well as building the physical environment. “I think the difficulties come when you’ve got multiple developers on a site, like a consortium, and they don’t necessarily all want to sacrifice their own individual visions and identities. Sometimes there have been successes where multiple parties have come up with one common brand and identity but it’s generally not as common as opposed to when there is just one landowner controlling a development.”

Critically, placemaking, while it should form part of the initial strategy for a development, extends far beyond the design and planning phase of a project – in both directions. The challenge for placemakers in this landscape is to identify and implement a vision of place that resonates with communities, and effectively

communicate that message, that story, to the audiences that matter. Whether or not the term ‘placemaking’ is used as the vehicle to facilitate this is negligible – what matters is authenticity and engagement.

Placemaker and audience maps

- Placemakers
- Audiences/stakeholders



“The biggest challenge is fully having the command over the space to really ‘create’ something desirable. Ultimately the investors need to want to be creative and the planners need to be willing to be receptive.”

– BID specialist



“One of the issues with placemaking is that it’s not clear what’s good and what’s not. Evaluation tends to be through qualitative evidence.”

– Property Research Analyst

The challenge for placemakers

Establishing roles and responsibilities:

Placemaking succeeds when the public and private sector collaborate in developing a compelling vision and distinct set of values for a place, which is in turn reflected in and complemented by the built environment. Developing clear lines of communication and resilient partnerships is therefore key.

Identifying the identity:

The identity of a place will evolve over time; places have a history and a future. In strategic and practical terms, the brand of a place must seek to reflect this fluid reality. Branding professionals can help articulate the identity of a place in relation to both its heritage and its aspirations, helping embed a development within the local area.

Telling the business case:

Placemaking is often centred on projecting the business case for and community impact of a development. Successfully articulating a place's aims and aspirations, in line with community needs, plays a critical role in helping navigate the planning permission process. Developing an engaging 'story' for place is central to attracting and retaining investor buy-in.

Engaging communities:

The end-user, the real people who will live and work in a place, are too often left out of the placemaking conversation, or seen as a hindrance to a development's progress. It doesn't have to be this way. Working in partnership with local communities from an early stage will create a place that reflects its people's values, needs and aspirations. Whether or not the word 'placemaking' is used explicitly as a term to guide this partnership is less important. Authenticity is key; listen to and be guided by local feedback.

Media watch

Local media coverage will shape public opinion, helping make or break a proposed development's progress through the planning phase and into construction. Local media interest must be managed carefully and respectfully. Having effective messages that reflect a place's story, and empathetic spokespeople capable of communicating that message in a way that reassures and engages local communities, will significantly influence local buy-in and help mitigate risk of negative press coverage. Local media need not be your enemy.

"THERE SEEMS TO BE A REAL DISCONNECT IN THE TRADITIONAL ROUTE OF DELIVERING PLACES... AND THE PROCESS CARRIES ON IN SILOS WHERE NOT ONE PARTY IS WORKING COLLABORATIVELY TO BUILD INFORMED, PEOPLE-CENTRIC ENVIRONMENTS."

– Placemaking professional



“Placemaking needs to think about the brand in terms of a vision, and how that is going to be communicated to people. It is about bringing people along as partners in the creation of a place”

– Cultural strategist

During Development

While there are inherent challenges for placemaking and placemakers in the design and planning phase of a development, the underlying premise of placemaking as a strategic priority at least sits logically during the pre-delivery stage. The delivery phase itself, on paper, is therefore the implementation of a place strategy – bringing the vision to life. However, the movement from vision to reality is very often where risks and challenges creep in – particularly in relation to brand identity, communications and engagement with communities. **According to Denizer Ibrahim, Director, Special Projects and Placemaking at BNP Paribas, “...There seems to be a real disconnect in the traditional route of delivering places, often seeing a landlord receiving a set of drawings for a development with little dialogue with the business who has to sell/lease it and the process carries on in silos where not one party is working collaboratively to build informed, people-centric environments.”**

Building the vision

There is the slight danger that once a vision has been created, the people who are invested (financially and culturally) in a place are not brought along on the journey as that place takes visible shape. **As Cultural Strategist Rosanna Vitiello notes, “Placemaking needs to think about the brand in terms of a vision, and how that is going to be communicated to people. That communication is about bringing people on board not solely to sell the place but to bring them along as partners in the creation of a place.”**

Much in the same way that, in order to be authentic, a brand must be actualised through communication and action, a place’s identity must be experienced, and lived.

The question of placemaking responsibility emerges here, too, with the developer shouldering a greater share of responsibility for place storytelling as a project begins to take shape. **There are positive examples, though, with Lucy Greenwood Associate Residential Research and Consultancy at Savills pointing to Urban & Civic’s work at Alconbury Weald. It is she says, “a very isolated location where the developers have started completely afresh. A huge amount of money has been invested to do community access... if you drive into the scheme you don’t realize it’s a building site. They have been very careful to make it feel like a finished place is there and you are not living on a building site. They have put a lot of money into the local community to get them engaged from the outset.”**

We should perhaps not be too quick to level blame at developers who don’t look to go on the front foot with this level of long term community engagement, which requires a significant investment of time and resource. To take residential developers as an example, it is important to note that there are different models of developer who have different, and legitimate, economic strategies. **“On the one hand” says Lucy Greenwood, “you’ve got some house builders whose economic model is that they can only be there short term, build units leave and be done. However, if you’ve got patient capital in a scheme, so a long-term landowner or someone controlling the wider site, they will more likely have an interest in longevity of it because they want to see that value retained and enhanced over time...”**

Invention vs Reinvention

These challenges become more pronounced, when considering the disparity of inventing of a wholly new place or reinventing an existing place. On the one hand, fashioning an identity from scratch, say, a new town or

a new greenfield development, is a different ball game to working within a location to fashion a place that complements the existing parameters of an incumbent social and cultural milieu. Clearly, what type of identity, or brand, works requires a different approach in each scenario, and the audience, along with the communications that will resonate with them, need to be carefully assessed.

As Dr Julie Grail, MD at the BIDs Business, highlights, “It comes back to the authenticity piece – a consumer accepts the parachuting in of a ‘Westfield-style’ place on a greenfield site but won’t so easily accept a ‘new brand’ into an existing/historic centre. Taking account of the many complex layers of ‘ownership’ of the space over history is critical to getting acceptance.” Denizer Ibrahim agrees. “It is sometimes a bit more challenging when you’re talking about the re-invention of a place” he says, “as a consumer, when you already have a pre-conceived perception or identity of a place, bringing in something new needs to work harder to really relate”.

There are clear practical steps to take to help mitigate any risk of cannibalising an existing identity, or being perceived as riding rough-shod over heritage and culture. Many of these steps are in a similar vein to those taken in the branding process, including identifying the various components and stories inherent in an identity and developing a narrative from those elements that articulates value and purpose to key audiences. **As Lucy Greenwood notes, “...Some of the strongest placemaking developments, for example Berkeley Group at Woolwich Arsenal, seek to retain the character, cultural icons and identity of an existing location, so you are not having to re-create that. That is one of the key things to consider, drawing on that heritage and provenance of a site that connects with people on a human and cultural level.”**

The evolution of identity

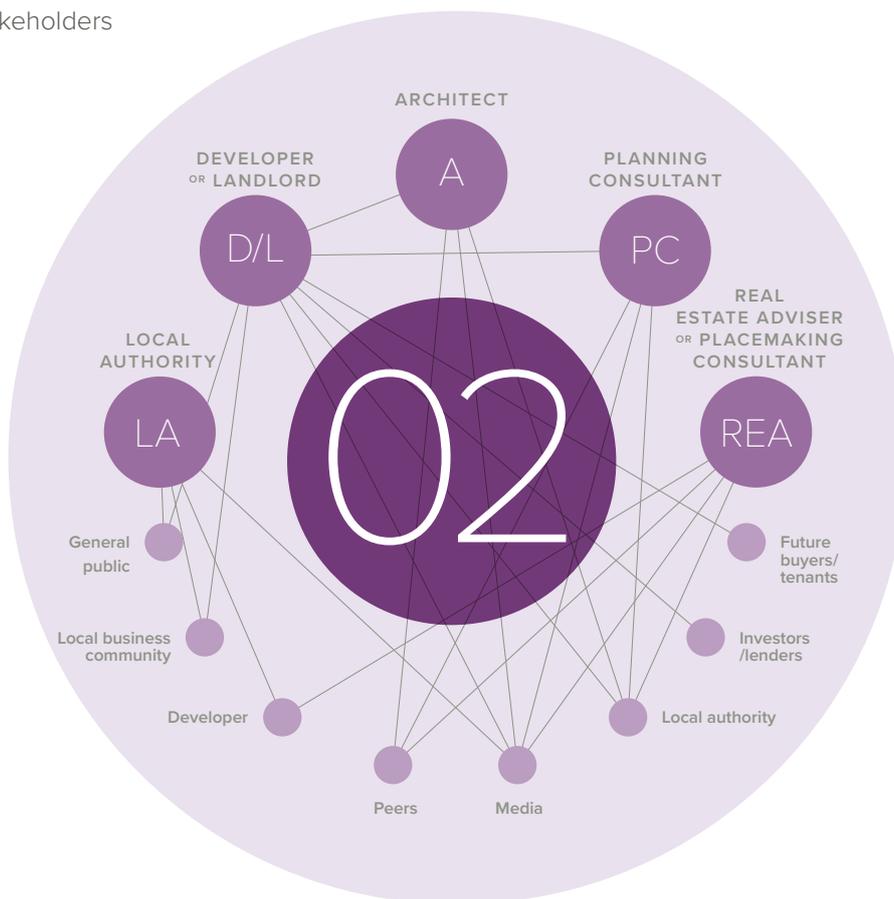
For Hiro Aso, Head of Transport and Infrastructure at Gensler, “...At one extreme, placemaking means the comprehensive redevelopment of a whole neighbourhood; at the other, it involves a series of tactical interventions that enhance what is already there. At whatever scale, it is an iterative and consultative process.” This consultative process helps to ensure embeddedness with current cultural conditions, but there is a more forward-looking point too. Just as corporate entities may go through a rebrand to tell a different story about itself, places inherit and develop multiple identities over time. Placemakers should be savvy to the fluidity of identity,

and not seek to create a built environment that inhibits the emergence of new stories, new narratives and new identities – including during the construction phase itself. **As Dr. Jo Morrison, Programme Director: Digital Innovation, Calvium explains, “In terms of a large scale urban development, which takes a long time to deliver, a place’s ‘brand’ will inevitably change over that time, and continue to do so. What’s important is that all the stakeholders aim to create a great place. By creating a great place - and by that I mean an inclusive place where diverse people genuinely want to spend time living, working and playing - the public’s perception of that location, will be its brand.”**

The importance of longevity, however, goes far beyond the length of time it takes to actually construct a physical environment, though. **For Euan Mills, Urban Design and Planning Lead at Future Cities Catapult, “the most intelligent built environment professionals and developers are a lot more humble about approaching place making. They are trying to learn and create places which are flexible and can accommodate different identities overtime because they know the places they are going to build are going to go through a number of different iterations in terms of identity and sense of place, and that’s going to change subject to economic factors other kinds of wider meta-narratives.”**

Placemaker and audience maps

- Placemakers
- Audiences/stakeholders



The challenge for placemakers

Making the vision a reality:

The movement from the planning to the construction of a development is often where risk creeps in. Placemaking does not end once planning approval has been granted; the people who are invested (financially, socially and culturally) in a place should be brought on the journey of physically building the place. Creating opportunities to experience and understand the place and its story through live events, interactive experiences and creative communications, will help engage all stakeholders in the co-creation of an authentic place.

Invention vs Reinvention:

Fashioning a place's identity or brand from scratch is a different task to working within a location to create a place that complements the existing social, cultural and environmental landscape. Different approaches to branding are required in these circumstances. The audience, along with the communications that will resonate with them, need to be carefully assessed against the reality of the place 'on the ground'.

Maintaining existing place culture:

Being perceived to ride rough-shod over a place's existing identity, heritage and culture is a real risk for placemakers once shovels are in the ground. Developers should be wary of 'parachuting' in a new brand which does not connect with the area. Such an approach can prompt local backlash, including accusations of gentrification.

Ensuring place flexibility:

Just as a corporate organisation may rebrand in order to tell a different story about itself, places develop multiple identities over time. Placemakers should not create a physical space that inhibits the emergence of new stories, new narratives and new identities. Today's millennial and Gen Z audiences require flexibility from their environments. Accommodating this fluidity is a challenge for brands and communicators; listen to and be guided by local feedback.

Media watch

The construction phase is often when a development is most at the mercy of the media. Projects can last for many years and local attitudes – socially and politically – can change over time, just as communities begin to feel the impact of a new development on their day-to-day lives. At the same time, the building phase brings with it a host of hazards, many unforeseen, ranging from supply chain disruption to on-site incidents, which the media will scrutinise. Having a robust crisis response plan in place is vital. At the same time, consistently developing goodwill through communications and local engagement from the outset will be paramount for 'rainy day' situations.

"Digital is now the extension of the public space of the city, where people meet, talk, eat, shop and date... However, on the flip side, we will likely also see a real revolt, with pockets of the city which are completely disconnected and celebrate 'human time'"

– Placemaking Professional



"Often marketing and branding is seen as being about a development's logo and name, or defined as selling flats or leasing shops, which is a very narrow view... We need to actually consider what it is that is being talked about; not only the physical thing that we are selling but the fabric of a development, and that should be happening right at the beginning of a project."

– Placemaking professional

Post Development

While placemaking plays an incredibly important role in the design and delivery of a development, the challenge doesn't end once the project has 'completed'. Indeed, the communications challenges are magnified as, very often, stakeholders do not seriously begin to think about brand and storytelling until the marketing and sales process becomes front of mind.

As Lucy Greenwood, Associate, Residential Research and Consultancy at Savills observes, "Generally, what we have seen in the market is that it is only really at the selling or renting stage, or when there is a need for engagement with the wider community, that creating that sense of brand in a place is considered."

Brand: not just about sales

This is a risk. The narrative, the value, the identity of a place needs to be curated and enhanced over time – cognizant of the past and future. Communications is not (entirely) about driving sales post-completion. Integrating a brand and communications strategy from the outset of a project, one that helps embed a place within a community and develop a story that complements the identities of its constituent people will better prepare a place to create ongoing value, and be resilient for the long term. Some projects do look to integrate communications earlier in a process, such as to secure buy-in from investor groups or to help smooth the path to planning permission, though this is rarely a joined up exercise with creates a robust and compelling story for place. For Rosanna Vitiello, **“I don’t think PR is really thought about until typically the marketing and sales stage. Though I think if you are talking about a really large-scale project that involves investor relations then it can start to come in right at the outset. However, I do think it would be interesting and worthwhile for a developer or for councils or for architects even internally to have a PR person in on the design stage and start thinking from the off about how to communicate the project.”**

BNP Paribas’ Denizer Ibrahim goes further, noting that brand, communications and PR is not only an imperative for external engagement but also internally – to ensure all stakeholders are brought along in a place’s journey. **“We need to consider what it is that is being sold and packaged. Not only representing the physical things that we are selling or leasing - for instance the flat, shop, park, car park, railway station by ‘badging it’ with a logo or name with little soul or relevance - but actually intertwining it within the whole process by selling the soft stuff in-between that truly defines the identity and fabric of this new place. That’s what people buy into and this should be happening from the onset of any project.”**

Complementing communities

The challenge is in creating a vision, a brand, for a place that does not jar with or seek to impose itself at the expense of real communities, or result in a built environment that is rigid and at odds with the flexibility of true lived identities.

Euan Mills, of the Future Cities Catapult explains this - “The concept of brand and marketing I think has more of an influence [on place] than actually a lot of the built environment industry – it is about the idea or the image or the identity of a location. But that influence is one that isn’t yet fully grasped by the industry, and I think the risk is that this goes too far and influences what the built form is. The built form

will last longer than the identity.” Cultural Strategist, Rosanna Vitiello agrees, noting that “there is a danger in over branding places and losing touch with the locality or losing authenticity.”

Just as with the early stages of a development, the multiplicity of stakeholders and voices can complicate the placemaking process even after the ‘construction’ has finished. This point is sharpened when looking at mixed-use scheme or a wider urban development which not only seeks to cultivate a sense of identity as a place in-and-of itself, but then has to manage the impact of incoming occupiers – both commercial brands and residents. This is the challenge taken up by Dr Julie Grail, MD of the BIDs Business, who says that **“...a lot of work being done by BIDs is focusing on coordinating a sense of place brand across a disparate area in multiple ownership. The brand needs to be an early intervention to set the tone for change but it must be a brand that has been developed from within with a sense of authenticity. Trying to parachute a copycat brand that doesn’t feel real to the place is a mistake.”**

Moving towards the digital place

One of the key factors that is disrupting the traditional vision of placemaking is technology and digitalisation, which is impacting on not only how a place engages with and continues to cultivate communities but challenges the very definition of place itself. For Euan Mills, “...technology is radically influencing how we think about cities. Tech is making cities a lot more fluid for example, so notions of identity and place making are becoming more prevalent and challenging because a place can have one identity one month and then can change radically within in the next two or three months...”

As technology continues its pervasive creep into 24/7 life, blurring the lines between home life and work life, we are seeing the traditionally siloed nature of real estate beginning to break down. For example, retail spaces are no longer created purely with customer transactions in mind. They are holistic places developed to integrate with customers both digitally and socio-culturally. This might mean the creation of a connected showroom linked to an eCommerce transactional platform, or a retail developer embedding residential units into a scheme to push up values and drive footfall to stores. This has significant knock-on effect for landlords, who increasingly need to be ‘live’ placemakers continually attuned to moods and motivations of their audiences and consumers. **“The landlord in a retail environment for instance” Says Denizer Ibrahim, “has to see themselves similar to a magazine editor or gallery curator where the content has to be relevant enough to support**

their 'permanent collection' of shops and keep their customers coming back."

This convergence between people, places and culture, driven and facilitated by technology is the next horizon for placemakers, and a critical communications factor for all placemakers to consider.

"Previously we've talked about the notion of third spaces – the term coined by Ray Oldenburg - which explores the environments of the home, work and play. But we are now seeing the evolution of a 'fourth place', which we see as the digital realm, that Placemaking needs to be cognizant of." Says Denizer Ibrahim. "It's not one app, it's not one bit of technology. It will be integrated within the wider urban realm..."

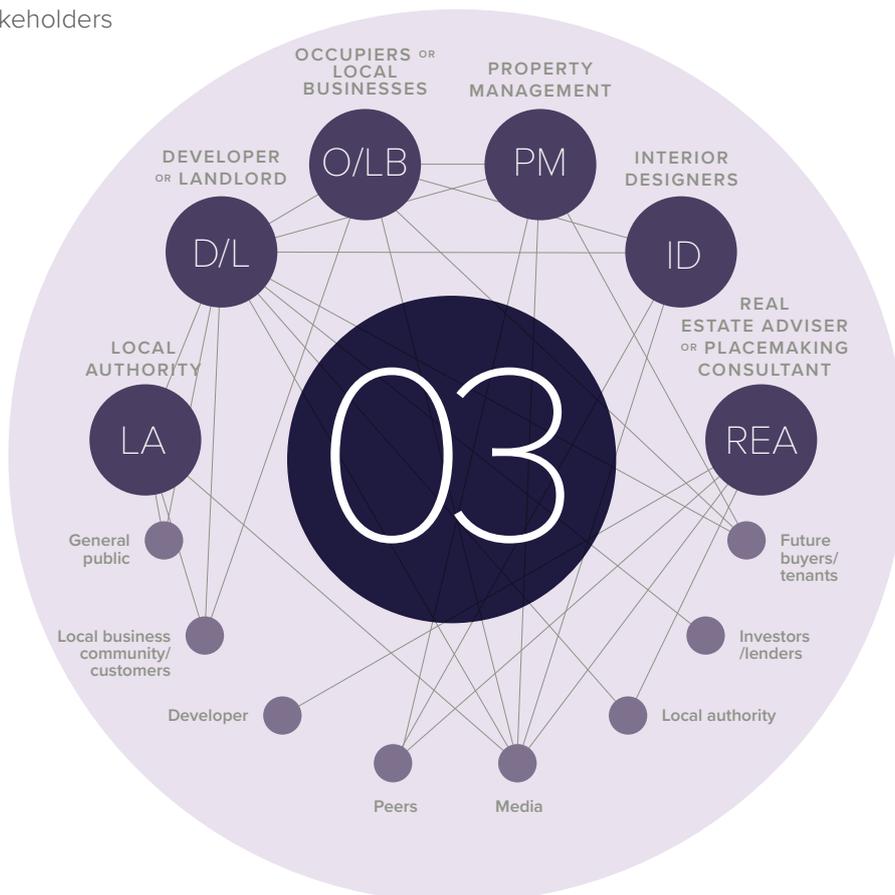
For Dr. Jo Morrison, Programme Director: Digital Innovation, Calvium, **"...Digital placemaking is central to urban innovation and increases the opportunities for communities to connect meaningfully with a place – strengthening the social, cultural, environmental and economic prosperity of a location, thereby enhancing the quality of life of its stakeholder communities.... To be successful**

and relevant, placemaking has to understand and anticipate people's digital culture..."

The experience of retail, though, has shown that the digital pendulum can swing too far, with physical space and connectivity continuing to play a significant, if not the most significant, role in the consumer journey. Further, increased connectivity and reliance on tech has the potential to isolate communities rather than bring them together. Communities need to be cultivated both online and offline and communications strategies across the piece need to mirror this. **There is a lesson here for placemakers, as Dr Morrison points out; "the key is for placemakers not to be led by the technology but by the needs and desires of citizens."** Denizer Ibrahim can see something of a digital plateau on the horizon... **"Digital is now the extension of the public space of the city, where people meet, talk, eat, shop and date. As our cities are growing rapidly, the digital realm is also working to 'shrink' our cities to feel ever-more connected and accessible. However, on the flip side, we will likely also see a real revolt, with pockets of the city which are completely disconnected and celebrate 'human time'".**

Placemaker and audience maps

- Placemakers
- Audiences/stakeholders



The challenge for placemakers

Communications does not just mean ‘sales’:

Too often, placemakers do not begin to think seriously about brand and story-telling until the marketing phase of a project, as they seek to engage with buyers or tenants. This is a risk. Communications plays a vital role in driving ‘sales’, but this should be part of an ongoing conversation with key stakeholders and audiences from the outset of a project. Building and enhancing a brand and its value proposition is not a bolt-on.

The brand balancing act:

The multiplicity of stakeholders can complicate the placemaking process even after construction has finished. For instance, when looking at a mixed-use scheme or a wider urban development, a balance must be struck between a place’s identity, the vision and brand of its placemakers, and the brands or identities of end-users, from commercial brands to residents. Collaboration and local partnership working is key to ensuring this melting-pot environment is a driver of success.

Placemaking in the fourth space:

Tech-driven convergence between people, places and culture is the next horizon for placemakers and a critical communications factor for all placemakers to consider. Communities need to be cultivated and engaged both online and offline, including as part of an ongoing conversation that creates and curates a shared sense of place. Communications strategies must mirror this, seizing the opportunities that tech solutions provide – from Augmented Reality to social campaigns - and addressing the needs and habits of digitally-native audiences.

Reputation and legacy:

A place’s brand, identity and supporting communications will inevitably evolve over time, as issues emerge to impact its reputation. Meanwhile, technology and public attitudes towards transparency are empowering communities to play an increasingly active role in the scrutiny of place’s legacy, assessing its impact against its stated vision. Reputation management requires a considered and holistic approach, building in various elements from social responsibility to crisis preparedness.

Media watch

Are you launch-ready? While brand, communications and public relations should be embedded at the start of a project, it is invariably an afterthought, addressed too late in the day when a development is ready to be launched to end users. As part of the wider marketing mix, media profile can play an incredibly important role in reaching target audiences, lending third-party validation to a place’s offering. Media interest can be cultivated through a variety of tactics, from launch stunts and promos to creating stories that latch on to current affairs and market developments.

Conclusion

The new landscape of Place is both on and offline, connected via location, data and diverse, digitally native communities. It is simultaneously increasingly urban, and increasingly cloud-based. The critical factor that placemakers must not forget is the centrality of people and communities to place. Authenticity in communications is demanded, and placemakers need to take communities – both internally focussed stakeholders to the general public and potential sales targets – on a journey which engages and narrates the vision and value of a place.



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