

Place-making in Jerusalem: How place-making is finding a place in complex and contested urban environments in Israel

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This research seeks to describe and analyze **Placemaking** as a framework guiding projects of urban place-based interventions, used to identify the challenges, opportunities and partnerships that exist in urban spaces, and to initiate physical, cultural or social short and long term interventions (Hou & Rios, 2003; Nicodemus, 2013; “Placemaking assessment tool,” 2015; Rios, 2009). Inspired by a global discussion propelled by international organizations (Markusen & Nicodemus, 2014; “PPS website,” 2016; Silberberg, 2013), Israeli policy makers, practitioners, artists and activists are utilizing the Placemaking approach in diverse settings and for varying purposes, with the common goal of infusing a sense of place into underutilized or anonymous public spaces.

However, as some scholars note (Castello, 2006; Nicodemus, 2013; Wilbur, 2015), the concept of Placemaking is discussed in the western literature through multiple disciplines and receives different interpretations. Its ambiguity follows diverse paths of implementation in practice. Thus, while Israeli projects use similar language, and sometimes include common partners and shared events, their goals, tools and outcomes still appear fuzzy (Bar-ner, 2015), sometimes provoking a backlash of criticism towards what is viewed by some as an empty buzz word, perhaps not appropriate for public funding.

Thus, our first motivation is to advance a useful typology of Placemaking based on the goals, venues and tools described in the literature that will advance our understanding on Placemaking projects in the local and international context (see for example: “Placemaking assessment tool,” 2015). Our second motivation is to explore the ways in which Placemaking in a non-Western context, such as Israel, differs from the projects described in the Western literature. It examines two main factors driving the local interpretation of Placemaking: the local political context and the leading organization driving the project, and uses 6 case studies - a civic organization, a municipal corporation and a governmental pilot project – all conducted in 2015 in three cities, to show that the complicated and conflicted Israeli experience offers a challenge to the Western conceptualization of Placemaking.

The data collection is based on 13 semi-structured interviews conducted during 2015-2016 with experts on each case, such as professional planners and project leaders, together with background material and complimentary information as well as participation in four full-day workshops conducted by Project for Public Spaces in Israel in May 2015. Case selection was based on a previous series of 13 interviews conducted in 2015 as a probing exercise into Israeli Placemaking field.

The research offers three key findings. The first finding is a proposed typology of Placemaking, based on the goals, venues, tools and lead organization of the Placemaking project. The analysis distinguishes among five types of Placemaking: urban, creative, social, tactical and strategic and is used to offer a clear and useful description of the case studies. A second finding is that Placemaking cases in Israel, and specifically in Jerusalem, can indeed diverge significantly from the norms and values that appear in Western context. For example, our case studies suggest

that the fact that Ultra-Orthodox (fundamentalist) Jews hold very different values and attitudes towards public spaces, results in significant adaptations in Placemaking practice in Jerusalem.

The third finding addresses the identity of the lead organization. We hypothesized that Placemaking would look and act differently when the lead organization was from civil society, municipal government, or national government. In practice, we found that the *lead* organization was less important than the composition of the *partners*. That is, the type of Placemaking depended more on the full set of organizations taking part than on the lead organization. For example, in our case studies, civil society agents, predicted to focus on social tools such as public engagement and conflict mediation or use subversive DIY and temporary interventions, in fact selected a more Strategic approach, promoting cyclic cultural events and long-term physical installations when working in partnership with a municipality.

The research underscores the limitations of adapting western approaches, such as Placemaking, in non-Western settings. We propose that further research in diverse and conflicted regions, including the middle-east, could serve as an exciting and thought provoking research field for policy mobility and urban planning.

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