

Connecting places, connecting people: a paradigm for urban living in the 21st century.

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Placemaking is being increasingly recognised as a strategy to improve the quality of urban public realm. Placemaking helps to build better communities with an important role to play in achieving sustainable urban development. According to the Project for Public Spaces (2007), strengthening the connection between people and the places they share is central to placemaking. Although there exists a heaps of literature on placemaking, this core idea of placemaking has not been covered so much in literature. Reena Tiwari's *Connecting Places, Connecting People* is a timely response to this need.

Tiwari's take on placemaking is unique. She has set out to distinguish her ideas from others and claims in the book that "a key distinction between this book and others in the same field is the perspective of placemaking" (p. 1). Indeed, the book offers a new perspective on placemaking with an emphasis on better connection of urban locations. The author is very loud and clear about the fact that car-based planning has led to the disconnection of people and place. This issue is raised early in the book with an intriguing and very interesting start by referring to a short narrative about a person who gets arrested and taken to the Psychiatric Centre for "walking" on a street full of cars. It can be argued that the rise of automobiles in cities was a concern among scholars as early as the 1970s when Richard Sennett in his book *The Fall of Public Man* (1977) wrote about the experience of vehicular motion, which is "unknown to any prior urban civilisation, and yet [the] motion has become the most anxiety-laden daily activities" (p. 14). Sennett (1977) also warned that "the technology of modern motion replaces being in the street with a desire to erase the constraints of geography" (p. 14). In the same tone, *Connecting Places, Connecting People* raises an important question: "Will the supremacy of the automobile make the practice of walking a prohibited act in the not so distant dystopian future" (p. xii)?

The book is organised into four parts and each part has two chapters. The first part tries to set the context of the study, with the opening chapter claiming the emergence of "urban crisis" as a result of the growing use of automobiles. It also points out at a need for reconfiguration of urban areas to cope with the crisis. Chapter 2 discusses what better communities are and how connected places can lead to better communities, discussing the notions of safe, healthy, prosperous and equitable communities. The second part highlights urban reconfiguration techniques, dealing firstly with reconfiguring movements systems for better connection in Chapter 3 and with reorganising urban areas to achieve a better placemaking in the fourth chapter.

The third part is about how to make the connection between people and place happen in the right way. The chapters in this part deal with engaging the community in placemaking and introduce an audit tool to evaluate connectivity, with an aim to put "theory into practice". The tool has been developed based on the key findings from the previous chapters. The final part of the book deals with the future of connectivity and placemaking. It highlights the challenges that are emerging in the two different contexts. First, the current population growth trend coupled with economic growth and opportunity is discussed with a focus on the cities of the Global South. Secondly, in the final chapter, emerging forms of technological advances are introduced that have a potential to lead the world into the era of hyper-connectedness with a significant impact on mobility and socialisation.

In each chapter, the book offers a very good coverage of literature based on which the author develops arguments and makes claims. Some chapters of the book present highly relevant case studies and examples of best placemaking practices from around the globe. Throughout the book, the author constantly advocates for a need to put to an end the era of car-based planning of modern cities because of the degrading the quality of urban life and place. The notion of emerging urban

crisis appears appealing to the readers in the first chapter but given the gravity of the issue, this section demands more in-depth discussions of the emerging problems and issues. Tiwari argues in the book that if we are to think of placemaking in a new way and wish to improve place quality then we must rethink of how we connect. The notion of mobility versus accessibility that the author raises is critical in this sense that also helps in reconsidering movement systems from the perspective of creating a better connection. Walking is thus presented as a key idea in the book with some excellent views on how to facilitate it as a means of connecting urban places.

The audit tool presented in Chapter 6 is particularly helpful in this matter that could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of people, place and transport connectivity (connectivity attributes). As the author claims, the tool is the main outcome of the study and also an important contribution to building new knowledge in the field, with direct practical implications. The author also claims that the tools emerged from the review of global best practices. However, is the current study adequate enough or does it have a required depth to develop a tool for evaluation? The answer is not so clear in the book. Such a tool perhaps needs to be developed based on a more rigorous theoretical review and precedent studies in order to achieve a wider applicability.

The examples of placemaking (or lack of placemaking) presented to discuss the emerging challenges of urban population growth in Chapter 7 is interesting and well depict the local contexts. However, this also raises some questions. First, as the last two chapters engage with the future of connectivity and placemaking, these have been essentially written as a conclusion of the study. But a focus only on the examples from the Global South appears to be less appropriate because the book covers an overwhelming number of case studies and examples from the US and Australian cities in the previous chapters. In other words, there is a flaw in treating place connection issues as the challenges of the Global South only. One could argue that such challenges are still alarming in the Global North and it will remain so if people must travel hours to get to workplaces or to meet friends and family due to the relentless growth of suburbs.

The epilogue of the book is as interesting as the prologue, which takes the readers to the year 2050, where the urban environments have been reorganised to achieve the high quality and connected urban places. The author thus offers an optimistic view for the future growth, with a message that we need to work together to achieve this vision. *Connecting Places, Connecting People* highly prescribes for a shift in paradigm from car-based to place-based urban planning, which could lead to an urban condition where people have a better connection with each other and with the places in which they live. Tiwari is fairly successful in getting this message across the readers with a recommendation of strategies for achieving such a condition. As the author claims, the later chapters of the book “collectively provide an implementation framework for a new paradigm of living in the twenty-first century” (p. 9). This is a significant contribution the book makes in the discipline, yet the notion of “new paradigm” for urban living could still be more comprehensive and better theoretically supported.

(1259 words)

References

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