

Essay:

Young planners in a modern society are faced with numerous challenges. Challenges include unemployment, poverty, inequality, discrimination etc. These challenges lead to urban decay e.g. fragmented spatial arrangement, crime, poor health conditions, environmental pollution etc. William Whyte (Book: *City: Rediscovering the Center* (1989)) explored the impact of urban sprawl on human behaviour in an urban setting. In a modern society, humans are often alienated from their surrounding environment e.g. over-dependence on technology (smartphones and other mobile devices). People tend to spend more time on cyberspace than on experiencing, maintaining and/or upgrading their daily surrounding environment. An over-dependence on technology generates a lack of direct interaction. Interaction in this sense refers to human-human- and human-environment interaction. Jane Jacobs emphasised the importance of small-scale changes and its effect on the larger lived space (Book: *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961)). Small-scale changes acts as a catalyst in the spatial arrangement of a setting. Any change within the spatial arrangement have a similar adaptive effect on the spatial function. Spatial function includes economic, social, political and/or environmental activities practised within a setting. Small-scale changes are particularly important in low-income, high density neighbourhoods as it influences the quality of open spaces. Upgrading low quality open spaces may have the ability to combat urban decay.

Space transfers to place when infused with character, meaning and function. Public places in a modern society hold potential to limit challenges experienced in a modern society (i.e. unemployment, poverty, inequality, discrimination etc.). The potential of high-quality public places includes the (i) *higher aesthetic value*, (ii) *enhanced sense of place*, (iii) *attraction of economic investments*, (iv) *social integration* and (v) *environmental conservation*. The aesthetic value of a place often dominates the manner in which it is observed. However, cultural meaning and personal experience also influence the potential of a place. An aesthetically pleasing (not a prerequisite) coupled with a unique character holds the ability to boost the local economy through the creation of a market-place for economic interaction i.e. informal trade. Furthermore, places act as a platform for positive social interaction and the creation of strong social relationships. In its end, a vibrant public place holds the ability to protect and conserve indigenous culture, fauna and flora – especially in a setting which experiences rapid densification. Young planners in the Commonwealth can employ tools to create human environments that are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. An example of such a transformative tool is the process of place-making.

Place-making as a concept, is not exclusive to spatial planning as it holds significant value to multiple disciplines. Disciplines with an interest in place-making include architecture, human

geography, education, psychology, food industry, creative art, sociology etc. Place-making describe the manner in which inhabitants of a setting individually or collectively re-imagine their surrounding environment. Re-imagination includes initiatives to renovate, transform, upgrade and/or maintain their lived environment. These initiatives typically include multiple ideas by parties with an interest in the specific area earmarked for upgrade. Place-making as a process therefore creates a platform for idea-sharing and collaboration. As a process, place-making includes various dimensions. These includes the (i) *physical*-, (ii) *social*-, (iii) *psychological*-, (iv) *political*-, (v) *environmental*-, and (vi) *economic* dimensions. Often regarded as the starting point for a place-making process, is the *physical dimension*. The physical dimension includes the envisioning and the construction of the tangible end-product associated with the process. This dimension determines the aesthetic value of the place. However, the *social dimension* is important as it provides an opportunity for inclusive social bonds to be mended e.g. idea sharing and respect towards cultural diversity. This is particularly important in countries in need of social restoration caused by poor health conditions; racial divide; gender imbalances; contrasting economic income levels; oppressive past power relations etc.

Furthermore, place-making as a process has a *psychological dimension*. The psychological experience includes the subjective experience of individual site-observers (sense of place) coupled with their behavioural response towards the setting. This experience is often guided by personal value and/ or cultural heritage. The *political dimension* of place-making are often led by past power imbalances. Power imbalances refer to asymmetrical power distribution caused by ideologically loaded context previously experienced by some of the Commonwealth countries (e.g. South Africa's history of colonialism/Apartheid legislation). Asymmetrical power distribution resulted in limited community involvement in decision-making. However, the process of place-making aims at empowering communities to follow "bottom-up" (decision-making) processes. This is in-line with the idea of restorative justice as participants share responsibilities associated with the process. The sharing of ideas and responsibilities allows for collaborative relationships to be created. Collaborative relationships provide an opportunity for mutual learning and the development of a sense of community. In its end, the political dimension of place-making aims at liberating communities in order to reclaim spaces. Furthermore, place-making includes an environmental dimension.

The *environmental dimension* is often a response to problematic ecological conditions. In this sense, the process of place-making holds conservationist value as it aims to protect indigenous fauna and flora. Sustainability is a core principle of place-making as it highlights the importance of environmental management. Managing the environment allows for the natural heritage of a country to be conserved for future generations. Lastly, an important

dimension of place-making is the *economic dimension*. In some instances, a lack of funding for place-making initiatives may terminate the process. However, creative fund-raising ideas and the utilisation of alternative building materials i.e. use of recycled materials, are often the outcome of collaborative idea-sharing matched with limited financial resources. In its end, a vibrant public place holds the potential to attract investments which ultimately boost the local economy. Similar to the dimensions of place-making is the aims, vision and mission of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth aims at promoting democracy; celebrating diversity; creating prosperity; protecting human rights; boosting trade; strengthening governance; amplifying the voice of small states, and regenerating the environment. These aims are echoed in the process of place-making. Place-making generally highlights the importance of including viewpoints of all interested stakeholders in the decision-making process associated with the transformation of space. Following an inclusive process fosters respect towards diversity. The diversity of inhabitants of a setting is celebrated in the conceptualisation of a collaborative place design. A collaborative design process allows for skill-sharing which enables participants to be empowered. Empowerment of participants unlocks a sense of belonging and ownership towards the place.

This sense of belonging and ownership contribute to the creation of safe communities. When a community is directly involved in the making of places, native wisdom is shared regarding the background of the site. Native knowledge contributes to site-specific aspects and requirements e.g. walkability and accessibility, need for educative activities, critical information on healthcare etc. In addition to the increase in safety, native knowledge allows for the unveiling of important social-, cultural- and environmental heritage sites. These heritage sites need to be protected and preserved. By incorporating these heritage sites in the design of the earmarked setting, small-scale sustainability is achieved.

Multiple perspectives regarding the transformation of a specific site contribute to spatial resilience. Guided by the various dimensions of place-making, a public place loaded with value and meaning, will have the ability to recover from external events and/ or re-invent itself to develop an updated spatial function or meaning for site-users.

In a modern society, young planners in the Commonwealth should, therefore, act as the facilitator of the planning process rather than acting as experts from an academic 'ivory tower'. Small-scaled initiatives focused on stakeholder involvement and community engagement should be motivated. Such initiatives may act as a catalyst which in return may have a ripple effect on the greater human settlement. Therefore, the process of place-making is a tool which

may attempt to unite instead of alienate a community. With less time spent in the cyberspace, an inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable place can be created through small-scale changes.