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The story behind the place

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Placemaking and Storytelling

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PLACEMAKING AND STORYTELLING

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Preface

It is often said that green spaces are good for people and society in general. That includes green spaces in cities. For a long time, green public spaces were seen as a decorative element in the city, the finishing touch to buildings, the icing on the cake. However, urban greenery has gone through a process of emancipation in the past fifteen years. There is growing realization that the city parks, the grass verges and even the weeds between the paving stones are not just green edging in the urban patchwork; rather, this greenery is part of a wider ecosystem and constitutes added value in the complex system of the city itself.

This emancipation has led to an awareness that urban greenery is about more than just ecology and biodiversity. That is because it has social and economic consequences for a city's fortunes. It has a function in the complex system of a city because greenery affects the city's performance at various levels and affects the living conditions for city dwellers. It is clear that green spaces do not stand alone: they are part of a complex urban system, and the use of green spaces in this complex system has immediate repercussions for how the city functions.

That awareness is not yet commonplace in modern-day parks management. That is why we are aiming to show in this book what options parks management has for the strategic use of greenery in cities and the skills parks managers need for doing this. We draw on the experience of the Van Hall Larenstein university of applied sciences, invoking experiments in our own teaching practice, national and international research projects

and the illuminating concepts of placemaking and storytelling. We are convinced that the strategic deployment of greenery in cities will get residents, businesses, users and visitors more involved with places in the city - placemaking - and that the narratives being told and retold in connection with those places will ensure that strategic interventions using greenery also stick in people's minds - storytelling. Our experience in the field shows that parks managers need different skills to achieve this, often social and organizational skills. We plan to focus on this in our future teaching and research.

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1 Urban parks management

Urban parks management has its roots in the nineteenth century. The inhabitants of the fast-growing cities had a need for green public spaces but there was hardly any greenery in the cities and most of the greenery that was available was owned by private individuals. So a lot of green spaces were developed in cities towards the end of the nineteenth century. Old city fortifications that were no longer needed were demolished to make way for parks in which people could stroll. Many new parks were also created in the period up to the Second World War. For example, the former gardens of St. Martin's Abbey in Tournai were turned into a city park in 1821, Duthie Park in Aberdeen was donated by Miss Duthie in 1880 and opened to the public in 1883, Eindhoven created its City Park in the 1930s and Lille has a fifty-hectare Bois de Boulogne within the citadel walls[1].

Attractive, comfortable living environment

The aim of urban parks management was to make cities more attractive and encourage the use of the public parks. This remained the primary goal for a long time. It was important that people used and appreciated the green spaces and it was important that urban dwellers should find their city an attractive, comfortable living environment thanks to the green spaces. Ecological objectives were added at the end of the twentieth century, influenced by the rise of the environmental and nature movement in the 1970s and 1980s. There was

growing realization that cities were not necessarily a threat to biodiversity; they could also have a positive effect on biodiversity and could even become significant habitats for many plants and animals. A new form of urban parks management developed that was geared to ecological management, involving a substantial reduction in the use of chemical pesticides and the incorporation of flowers and herbs in verge greenery to attract insects, for instance.

Urban parks management changed considerably in the second half of the twentieth century. Cities were expanding fast everywhere. New suburbs were built, with green spaces being included as a key element in the spatial design. But green public spaces were also coming increasingly under pressure due to the fast-growing urban population. In addition, the changing composition of the urban population in an increasingly multicultural society meant changes in how these green public spaces were valued and used. This gave a new interpretation to the requirement that green public spaces in cities should be usable and appealing. The emphasis was more on the question of what purpose green spaces could serve for a district or quarter and the indigenous or immigrant people living there. More attention was also paid to the accessibility of green public spaces.

Quantitative standards

This led to a form of urban parks management that was still focused on the usability and attractiveness of green public spaces but that also recognized their ecological qualities and

their significance for the people who use them. Under pressure from the growing urbanization, urban parks management made efforts to upgrade the greenery in cities. Initially this was done using quantitative data. Parks managers determined the quality of the urban greenery by measuring the quantity of greenery, for example using the quantitative standard of 75 square metres of greenery per dwelling. The problem was that those square metres were not all of equal value to the city's inhabitants. Small green spaces were created that the city dwellers could scarcely even use. Over the past fifteen years there has been growing criticism of this quantitative, technocratic approach to green public spaces. The essence of the criticism was that the green spaces were reduced to numbers so that they could be incorporated in the municipal accounts, purely in order to enable transparent reporting on expenditure and activities, without any thought for the usability or attractiveness of the green spaces. Managers might be able to justify their actions from a financial and organizational point of view with 75 square metres of greenery per dwelling, but they were not delivering the quality people expected from public green spaces.

The 1990s saw increasing criticism of this quantitative approach, which did not fit in well with the main social issues of health, recreation, the economy, living conditions and the environment. The argument went that greenery could be used to make cities a better place to live. Green spaces had a positive effect on health as they encouraged adults and children to exercise, filtered fine particles out of the air and provided

a place for relaxation. Looking out over green spaces reduced stress. Green spaces made for an attractive location for businesses and were linked to higher house prices. Furthermore, urban greenery had a range of positive effects on the environment, curbing the increase in temperature during heatwaves and storing moisture. Green spaces in a city made it pleasanter to live in and could also act as a link with the greenery in the countryside. In addition, green spaces bring people together and get them talking to each other as a city's green areas are often used for recreation and as meeting points.

Social objectives

Within urban parks management, there was greater recognition of the urban functions that green public spaces could fulfil. For example, the Dutch government's *Greenery In And Around The City* (GIOS) programme involves working with parks managers on greenery projects geared to such urban functions. In line with this view of things, researchers, policymakers and managers describe the green spaces based on quantitative norms as non-functional greenery: 'front-door greenery', 'decorative greenery' or 'fig-leaf greenery'.

The result is a more qualitative approach to urban parks management, whereby green spaces are a strategic tool in the effort to improve urban living conditions and achieve social objectives. Even so, parks managers still have a strong tendency to control and monitor the care of public spaces. One example is the classification of green public spaces developed in 2010 by the Green Public Spaces Quality Standardization

Project Group set up by *Stadswerk*, an association for professionals working on the living environment. This classification consisted of no less than six aspects of green spaces and their associated functions - nature, recreation, the environment, experience, culture & history and spatial planning - and seven categories of green spaces - street trees, decorative greenery, gardens, local parks, district parks, city parks and public green structures. Once again, everything was specified and documented without any consideration for the urban and functional qualities of the public greenery, ignoring in particular the value of this greenery for residents and businesses.

Negative image

Traditionally, the main aim of parks management was to facilitate the use of the city and make it a pleasant place to live in. We have seen how parks management deviated from these social objectives in the course of the twentieth century. Over the past few decades, the management of public green spaces has broadened from taking a purely quantitative approach to a more qualitative modus operandi. Even so, there is still a certain tendency towards technocracy and control. Within parks management, having green spaces has remained an end in itself, whether this involves the quantitative objective of 75 square metres of greenery close to every dwelling or the qualitative goal of making the city healthier, cleaner, more friendly, more profitable, more attractive to tourists, more socially responsible - in short, a better place to live in. In both cases, parks management has been more about controlling the green

spaces by establishing their purpose and functions than about achieving social objectives.

As a result, parks management has developed a poor reputation, as lecturers and students at Van Hall Larenstein have noticed. The practice many students end up in is one in which parks management is strongly focused on financial and organizational control, and where management is largely technocratic and based on quantitative information. As a result, parks management in cities is out of touch with city dwellers and their daily lives. Urban parks management was starting to resemble the concierge who checks and reprimands users but only ever carries out the most essential repairs. However, there is growing realization among both parks management departments and the educational institutions for the profession that there is an alternative.

Green intervention

A new movement can be discerned in urban parks management that focuses on civic participation as well as the strategically important position green public spaces occupy in the urban patchwork. The idea is that instead of seeing green spaces as the end goal, you can also use them as an instrument, in town planning for instance. Green spaces are ideally suited for use as a tool in a strategic intervention aimed at breathing new life into a city or area. The practice of both parks management and teaching demonstrates that parks managers can develop a wide range of interesting, inspiring initiatives to get people more involved in their city and their part of the city. This ties

in with the current growing focus on civic participation at a time when government organizations are increasingly withdrawing from the social arena. Parks managers need different skills for this: social and communicational skills in addition to the more technical and ecological expertise that forms the basis for their profession. When you are undertaking something inspiring with other people, a lot depends on your personal attitude and interests.

Within Van Hall Larenstein, there has been some deliberate experimenting over the past few years with civic participation, social media, interaction and surprises to investigate how green spaces can be used as distinctive points in a city's complex urban patchwork. Van Hall Larenstein is doing this in response to the recognition that while green spaces may serve a purpose in the complex urban patchwork, new methods are needed to enable parks managers to make optimum use of the functions of green spaces.

While this approach does draw on the tradition of parks management with its quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques, the focus is on finding ways of getting people more involved in parks management. This is done in the knowledge that green spaces have the power to unite people and bring them together. This also makes it possible to see the green spaces in the city not just as an end in themselves but also as a means of getting people to feel they belong to their city, district and place. To do this, new concepts have been adopted but the main emphasis has been on experimentation.

New skills

The approach adopted at Van Hall Larenstein is to let the students learn through motivation. That started with a number of experimental interventions in the green spaces in the immediate vicinity of the school - as described in Chapter 2. This then led to participation in the EU *Lively Cities* programme (Chapter 3), in which students and lecturers elaborated on the experiences acquired in the Arnhem region for use in the wider European context. Two concepts emerged from this that can help in strategic interventions involving green spaces: 'placemaking' (Chapter 4) is a concept for organizing the interventions while 'storytelling' (Chapter 5) is a tool for safeguarding new urban qualities. This book relates the search for these new skills and the concepts that can be used to help deploy green spaces as a strategic instrument in urban planning. The book can be read as a voyage of discovery by students and staff at Van Hall Larenstein, but also as a visionary text about the use of strategic interventions using green spaces in cities. That starts with the realization that green spaces are part of the complex system that makes up the city and that you can use green spaces to propel that urban system in a particular direction. The premise here is that the green interventions can make city dwellers aware of the qualities that a street, square, park, district or city can offer them. However, the key message for parks managers is that these qualities are always accompanied by the story the city dwellers themselves tell about that place. This philosophy will be the dominant theme of the book's conclusion in Chapter 6.

[1]These examples of parks are taken from cities participating in the EU *Lively Cities* programme; Van Hall Larenstein was also a partner in this programme. Much of the information in this book comes from that programme, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

2 Interventions using green spaces

In recent years, students at the Van Hall Larenstein university of applied sciences have increasingly been doing unusual experimental projects as part of their degree programme. The key idea here is that students apply what they have learned for the purpose of urban renewal, in collaboration with residents. This way, the know-how about green spaces within the university is put to use via the teaching programme to make the urban environment greener and more sustainable. The students are those taking the Open Spaces Management major.

There are many options within parks management for doing interesting things with green spaces that also have a positive impact on the complex urban system that includes those green spaces.

The trick is to target the interventions so that they are made at the points in the complex urban patchwork with the most energy. A great deal depends on the personal interest and attitude of the parks manager, or the students training to be parks managers in the case of the Van Hall Larenstein experiments. That is why an effort was made in the experiments to find methods that would get students working on the basis of their own motivation and intuition.

After all, interesting things can also be fun, both for students and residents. Five examples are described briefly below.

Nature seen from a cherry picker: a different perspective

A standard component of parks management is the visitors' survey. Visitors are often asked about their experience with the green space in a questionnaire of in qualitative interviews. In the case of the Staelduinse Bos, a woodland area in 's Gravenzande near The Hague, lecturers and students at Van Hall Larenstein wanted to do something entirely different. But that was not as easy as it might sound. The lecturers put considerable pressure on the students. First they had to come up with twenty ideas in the space of half an hour. Anything was possible. Next, short five-minute brainstorming sessions were organized to find the most unusual and interesting idea.

One of the students' most appealing ideas was to hire a 'cherry picker' (a hydraulic platform) to give visitors a completely different view of the wood they were visiting. To the students' amazement, they were actually allowed to put this unconventional idea into practice. So the students hired a cherry picker and made arrangements for giving the waiting visitors something to do, as the cherry picker could only take two visitors at a time. Students served warming Dutch pea soup and hot chocolate to the waiting visitors. There was also an ideas book in which people could record their wishes.

The reason for the visitors' survey was the planned felling of a number of old trees, which had sparked off considerable unrest and indignation among local residents. People had turned against the nature organization, Zuid-Hollands Landschap, and a kind of trench war had developed as a result. Taking the

people up in the cherry picker let them see the wood from a completely different perspective. This caused many people to relax their rigid views and develop more understanding for the nature organization's arguments. The result was a new dialogue between the two parties.

ACTIVITY TRAIL: OUT OF THE BOX

Young people are an important target group for green public spaces but they are difficult to reach and often ignored. The municipality of Duiven and the housing corporation Vivare wanted to get young people involved in the park-like surroundings around the centre and the 'accommodation service area' Droo-zuid. The students at Van Hall Larenstein were asked to develop an activity trail through the area together with pupils from the top class of local primary schools and the Candea College, a secondary school. They had the pupils take photos of the greenery in the local area, both the green spaces they liked and the less pleasant spaces. This served as the basis for the design of something the pupils would like to see in their neighbourhood.

The students came up with an 'inspiration circle' to help the pupils in this creative process. This is a circle of colours that are linked to the feelings and emotions you might have with regard to green public spaces. Red means danger, green feeling safe, blue openness and air. This took the pupils away from their day-to-day lives, as it were, and encouraged them to use their imagination. To use a jargon term, they started thinking out of the box. This, in addition with the close collaboration

with municipal councillors, local government officers, the housing corporation, schools and an artist, turned the project into a real experience for the pupils. The activity trail based on the pupils' designs was completed in June 2010.

Guerrilla gardening: just do it

Young people in Presikhaaf (a district in Arnhem) seem to have little interest in the green spaces in their neighbourhood, which lose out to the great rivals: computers and television. The local youth prefer to spend their time at home, at clubs, at school or hanging out somewhere. So two Van Hall Larenstein students thought up a guerrilla campaign. Against all the rules, policies and agreements, they got together with young people to plant trees at spots the young people thought most appropriate. The procedure was simple. The students cycled through the district, found some young people and asked them: "Would you like to plant a tree?" The reactions were put on YouTube[2].

The young people responded positively to the two students' guerrilla gardening campaign. They often found it rather exciting that they were actually doing something illegal by planting a tree in the spot they found most appealing. The students also made direct contact with the young people in this way, without endless discussions. The local youth liked the fact that the project was so different to the standard participation projects organized by the parks management, which often seem bureaucratic. With this guerrilla gardening, it is clear to them at once what greenery has to offer them, and

they can share the experience with their online friends via YouTube and social media.

Meet My Street: the camera as a magnet and mirror

Residents often have different views about the local green public spaces to professionals. In the Meet My Street project, students from Van Hall Larenstein went out armed with a camera to get local residents to give their account. The camera turned out to have an important role to play as it acted like a magnet. This made it easy for the students to come into contact with the residents, who were only too pleased to talk about their experiences with the green spaces in the neighbourhood. They often got into discussions with each other too. The role of interviewer - asking questions and treating the people they were interviewing with respect - put the students in direct contact with the residents. That was nerve-racking but it was also highly appreciated. The camera also functioned as a mirror. The students made film clips about the perception of the facilities for recreation or the ecological water system, but they soon discovered that this professional perspective from the point of view of parks management meant much less to residents than their personal perceptions. As a result, the interviews helped the students and parks management people see things from a new perspective. For instance, the largely unused green space known as Kinderkamp turned out to be highly valued by residents in the direct vicinity because of the calm it brought to the district.

Participation @ green space

The students' experiments with urban greenery prompted Van Hall Larenstein to make a list of all the options for getting the general public involved in a city's green spaces. Frans van den Goorbergh and Juul Scheffers wrote the book *Participatie @ groene ruimte* (Participation @ green space). In this book, the various experiments are used as examples for a more systematic approach to projects of this nature, including a plan of action. This plan of action was used in a number of student projects, but in practice students often discarded it early on, working further entirely on the basis of their own motivation and intuition.

Participatie @ groene ruimte is now being used as a course textbook. The aim is to highlight the options for getting people involved in the management of public green spaces. It is also good to give students an idea of how such projects can be structured. However, the lecturers emphasize that getting people involved in green space management requires an open attitude. Too much structure can also be counterproductive. A plan of action is good for deciding what might be needed, for instance, and is fine for using as a guide to start with. But there must also be creativity and a willingness to experiment, among both students and parks managers. We will return to this again in Chapter 5.

[2]All the videos can be found at *www.youtube.com/user/WildMines/videos.*

3 Lively Cities

Green spaces are an important factor in the city marketing and urban renewal of the metropolises and major cities of Europe. Many European towns and cities have been the setting for urban renewal projects in the past few decades. These projects were generally aimed at upgrading the city and improving its competitive position as a place to live and work. Entire districts, old port areas and industrial sites were converted to residential areas and offices that met the increasing demand for high-quality facilities in inner-city areas.

Green spaces played an important part in such developments, the main motivation being that greenery helps create a pleasant environment for businesses and homes. Cities increasingly see each other as rivals in the effort to provide facilities to attract companies, including a suitable residential environment for these companies' employees. Examples include the many 'docklands' with new high-rise buildings in cities such as London, Liverpool or Dublin, the historic warehouses converted into flats in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Antwerp, and the new green districts combining living and working on former industrial sites in the Ruhr in Germany.

Unused parts of the city

The big question is what happens to such inspiring, lively initiatives in cities that are not an international hot spot or a cultural centre. Medium-sized cities such as Eindhoven, Tournai or Aberdeen have a significant regional function but they

do not have the appeal of major cities with an international profile such as Amsterdam, Brussels or Edinburgh. Even so, these cities are also in the race to market themselves as good places to set up a business and green public spaces can be a unique selling point for them too. This is usually tackled within urban planning and parks management. This approach fits in with the global interest in a healthy future for cities and the welfare of city dwellers against a background of rapid urbanization throughout the world.

The EU programme *Lively Cities*[3] was set up in response to this development. It ties in with the Van Hall Larenstein students' experiments as it focuses on the relationship between people and the environment in which they spend their day-to-day lives. *Lively Cities* arose from the idea that precisely the unused parts of the city offer all kinds of opportunities for making cities livelier. By turning empty places into lively places, you get a city where people feel more involved and a living environment where people feel at home. *Lively Cities* is a collaborative venture between five European municipalities, a public-private partnership, a city centre management organization and Van Hall Larenstein[4]. The project aims to rebuild urban spaces that are misused, little used or unused, turning them into new recreational places for city dwellers.

Within the *Lively Cities* project, Van Hall Larenstein is focusing on green concepts as strategic instruments for making people more aware of their place in the city and the stories that can be linked to that place. This involves collaboration between researchers, lecturers, students and people in the field, as in

the experiments described in Chapter 2. Three examples of such an approach are described below.

Eindhoven, Doornakkers: Social sofa[5]

Doornakkers is a district in the east of Eindhoven and one of forty 'krachtwijken', a Dutch term for disadvantaged districts identified by the government in 2007 as requiring extra attention. It has little greenery and numerous small unused spaces, mostly alongside the roads. New district centres have resulted in a natural route through the district, known as De Omloop (the circuit). Students got local residents and businesses involved in the setup for the green public spaces and the general layout of the greenery in the district. They also applied the concept of placemaking (see Chapter 4) via the *Lively Cities* programme.

Through placemaking, the students came up with a range of ideas for increasing the value of the public spaces for local people. For example, local residents headed by local entrepreneurs designed and created two 'social sofas', on the initiative of the locals themselves. The students developed three signposted walks, created a tea garden and came up with the idea of offering free Wi-Fi in a school playground. The social sofas in particular got an enthusiastic reception from local residents and served as a good instrument for letting people show their appreciation for their local area by redesigning public spaces.

Lille, Place François Mitterrand: food stall

Place François Mitterrand is a grey square near the station

in Lille, on the edge of the city centre. Many passengers passing through the stations do come to it, but people mainly use the square as a thoroughfare. The *Lively Cities* programme produced the idea of putting up an artistically designed food stall in the square to get people to spend longer in the square relaxing. Next to the stall came comfortable seats, protection from the rain and sun, picnic tables and bookcases with books for the general public. The intention was to see what strategic intervention in the square would work best at giving Place François Mitterrand more value in the lives of the people who now just walk through it.

Louvaine-La-Neuve, Place des Wallons: Green graffiti

Place des Wallons was once one of the main meeting points in the town of Louvain-La-Neuve, but in the course of time it has turned into a thoroughfare, taking people from the university area to the town centre. A user survey carried out by Van Hall Larenstein students revealed that the square had little value as a place in the town, despite its central location, its size that made it suitable for putting on events, its accessibility for pedestrians and its closeness to key stakeholders. People saw the square primarily as a place where pub goers would congregate late at night having had too much to drink.

The students used temporary furniture, including the eye-catching seat known as The Snake, to keep changing the layout of the square. By continually moving temporary plants and street furniture to different positions in the square, they

made people think about how they used the square. This gave a *sense of place*, engendering a new feeling of appreciation for the square. Based on interviews, the students reached the conclusion that the square needed to have a stronger identity as a green space. So they came up with the idea of using green graffiti and green roofs to draw the square's users' attention to its value as a place.

4 PLACE MAKING

The focus of both the experiments in Chapter 2 and the Lively City projects in Chapter 3 is on the place. The strategic interventions using greenery in a place are aimed at changing the meaning and value of that place for local people. This approach has its roots in the 'placemaking' tradition. This dates from the 1960s and refers to the ideas of urban planning theorists such as Jane Jacobs and William Whyte. Even back then, they were pointing out the importance of having lively districts and public places that were inviting, of having cities geared to the welfare of people. The guiding principle was that people do not reside in cities, they live in them. Since then, an entire theoretical framework has been developed for placemaking together with working methods centred on people who live in cities.

The concept of placemaking is based on the premise that successful public spaces are lively, safe, distinctive places, places that serve a purpose in the complex urban patchwork for the people who use them. In the *Lively Cities* programme, placemaking is seen as the process whereby people transform forsaken, little-used places into lived-in places that people enjoy spending time in. Placemaking is geared to public space as a whole rather than individual buildings, structural items or green elements. The key thing is to create places that are an integrated whole made up of buildings, structures and greenery, where people meet up and socialize. Strategic interventions may be used to achieve this, for example with

greenery or street furniture, or alternatively with stories (see Chapter 5). The assumption is that public spaces act as an extension of the community. And if cities, districts or places have flourishing communities, the residents will have a strong sense of belonging together. The aim of placemaking is to create such places.

Spaces and places

Everything centres on the place in placemaking. The starting point is not a building, a road or a greenery element - it is the place as a whole. It is important here to distinguish between space and place. Space is a valuable resource. Space is limited. Consequently the use of space needs to be carefully planned in line with a comprehensive, holistic vision. A place is a usable space, a space that serves a real purpose, has real value and lots of human energy. Many places have a personal significance for people but research shows that people prefer to put their effort into places that have a public, shared significance. The value people attach to places is often diverse, mixed and complementary. We will come back to this in Chapter 5, as this is where planning merges with the everyday lives of people and the associated stories.

Because everything is centred on the place, the starting point in placemaking is people - in their capacity as city dwellers, users, visitors, idlers, spectators and so on. The place and the life in that place are seen as more crucial than the buildings and the physical environment, including the ecological approach taken by parks management. The focus is on the everyday

living environment and how city dwellers experience different places in the city. Placemaking is aimed at getting a feeling for this, understanding this. This is possible using the methods used in the experiments with participation described in Chapters 2 and 3, for example.

Quantifiable and unquantifiable

So placemaking starts with the place and the value people attach to that. That is difficult to establish, as by no means everything people value can be quantified and measured. That is why placemaking requires a combination of quantitative and qualitative research. In the placemaking literature, public spaces are described along four dimensions: in terms of their sociability, on the basis of their use and the activities, by looking at accessibility and connections, and in terms of comfort and image. These dimensions all have measurable, relatively quantitative features but also qualitative features that cannot be measured (see table).

Features of a place		
Sociability		
Unquantifiable	Diversity, stewardship, cooperation, neighbourliness, pride, friendliness, interaction, welcome feeling.	
Quantifiable	Number of people, social networks, volunteers, use in the evenings, street life.	
Use and activities		
Unquantifiable	Pleasure, active, vitality, special, genuine, usable, indigenous, sustainable.	
Quantifiable	Ownership of local businesses, land use, house prices, rents, shop sales.	
Access and connections		
Unquantifiable	Continuity, closeness, connectedness, readability, suitable for walking in, easy, accessible.	
Quantifiable	Traffic data, transport flows, through traffic, pedestrian activity, parking data.	
Comfort and image		
Unquantifiable	Safe, clean, 'green', suitable for walking in, suitable for sitting in, spiritual, charming, appealing, historic.	
Quantifiable	Crime statistics, health statistics, condition of the buildings, environmental data.	

DYNAMICS AND VARIETY

The above table with its subdivisions of features people find important in a place can be used to establish what people think of a place. This in itself is a complex aggregate of qualitative and quantitative data, but even so it is only a snapshot. Places and people change. That is why you also need an idea of the dynamics and variety that can be found in a particular place. A key concept in placemaking is the 'power of 10'. The idea is that you need at least ten valuable places in a district and that you need at least ten things to do or reasons to be at each of those ten places. Together, the ten places that each give people ten things to do or ten reasons to be there form people's experience of a city. To make that experience successful

and valuable, you also need to ensure vibrancy and variety at those ten places in the ten activities and reasons. Consequently, the value of a place is a complicated formula involving the appreciation of various aspects in a dynamic and changing context. This is already close to the city as a complex system, which is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Placemaking is therefore about creating lively places by integrating multiple functions in a single place, and organizing vibrancy and variety in those functions. To achieve this, a top-down planning approach will not work but neither is a bottom-up approach appropriate. That is because both forms of planning are based on the traditional planning sequence: first you build buildings, then you give shape to places and public spaces, and only then do you consider how to attract people and life. The new approach to placemaking starts by recognizing the liveliness and vibrancy in the urban patchwork. Only then can you create places that bolster that liveliness and vibrancy and can you consider how buildings and greenery can be used in support of those lively places. This means it is a reversal of the traditional planning sequence as everything starts with the acknowledgement of the energy residing in a place.

Checklists and action plans

So placemaking starts by mapping people's lives in the city, the daily business in and around a place. For people do not reside in a city, they live there. This idea of Jane Jacobs caught on in the English-speaking world in particular, from the United

States to Australia. In these countries, placemaking has been implemented in a very pragmatic manner, with a great emphasis on participation. If you search for 'placemaking' on the Internet, you will soon find various action plans and checklists to help you put the concept into practice and start working with city dwellers and users straight away. A checklist was also drawn up in the *Lively Cities* programme to evaluate the value that a place has for a city and its inhabitants. This involves considering the accessibility, the use of the place and the activities, comfort and image, and the degree of sociability and social cohesion.

At this point it is good to return to the core idea behind placemaking, i.e. that people live in the city. We have seen that this life consists of quantifiable and unquantifiable aspects and that this life is full of the vibrancy of people and places. At the same time, the practice of parks management and city management is such that the concept of placemaking tends to be tackled in a pragmatic manner emphasizing participation. It all seems rather straightforward if the many checklists and action plans on the Internet are to be believed. However, the experiments described in Chapter 2 quickly showed that these types of fixed approach are no guarantee of success. The Van Hall Larenstein students used a plan of action as a guide in their experiments with participation, but they soon deviated from the plan.

Documenting the placemaking methods and techniques used for getting people involved in their city and place is both worthwhile and necessary. Even so, this turns out to have a

downside (as do other participation projects as well) in that it fosters a technocratic approach to placemaking. This is comparable to the trap that parks management falls into of dividing up the value of green spaces into a range of different aspects, with a preference for quantifiable aspects. It seems managers and administrators have a strong tendency to keep control over a situation or place, but that detracts from the life in that situation or place. That life is first and foremost a complex function of quantifiable and unquantifiable data, of qualitative and quantitative aspects and of the constant dynamism of human and physical elements, because it is not just people who change; the physical environment changes too. Greenery grows, buildings become run down or acquire a different value, roads become clogged up or turn into pedestrian zones. It is this interaction that is not taken into account sufficiently in placemaking at present. That is why it is a good idea to consider the stories people tell and gain an understanding of that interaction.

5 STORYTELLING

People are all attached to particular places, each in their own way. They may not only have personal experiences, emotions or memories of a place, but can also share many common experiences and histories. In Chapter 4 it was shown that the value people assign to a place has both quantifiable and unquantifiable aspects and that the use of a place is dynamic and varying. However, this focuses on a place's physical, observable reality. Places also have a social reality, a psychological reality, perhaps even a mythical reality, consisting of past events, images, stories and various other aspects that are difficult to pin down. Yet it is precisely these aspects that provide an opportunity for improving the reception of strategic interventions involving greenery

STORIES

Stories play an exceptionally important role in how people assign value to a place. People have both personal and common stories about places, which they then share with neighbours, friends, relatives and strangers. Taken together, all those stories essentially give a place a kind of personality, an individuality, an identity. Every city has its special places, connected to exceptional people or where unusual or perhaps even inexplicable incidents took place or where a historical event made its mark. Those places in combination give the city its identity. That is also evident in the cities that are involved in the *Lively Cities* programme. For instance, Eindhoven has

many places referring to its past as the City of Light, the birthplace of the electronics conglomerate Philips. Lille has the Maison Natale Charles de Gaulle, a museum and centre dedicated to one of France's most important presidents. Brighton's famous pier is a reminder still of the early days of tourism. Aberdeen has the urban legend about Sam, the crisp-stealing seagull with his preference for cheese-flavoured Doritos.

So stories give places a certain value, and even less well-known places in a city can be associated with a story. For instance, local residents can talk about why certain speed bumps bring back pleasant memories for them because their children helped design the colourful mosaic pattern on the speed bumps. A square or park bench can serve for many years as a meeting point for fishermen, factory workers, artists or others who have developed a collective memory about that spot as a result, in a way comparable to a local pub. Dog lovers who take their dogs for the same walk every day also acquire a variety of associations, memories and stories as a result. In sum, people use a place in a particular manner for a particular period of time, which means the place takes on a different value for them compared to other people who do not use that place or use it in a different fashion. Such places have a narrative value. This value is then converted by people into norms and standards, and also into emotions and dynamism, and this therefore affects the way people respond to a place. This narrative value ties in well with the interaction between people and their physical environment, something that was lacking in the concept of placemaking

Love as a reference

The narrative value of a place is not only important because a story or history can easily be passed on but also because it is very easy to sketch a positive or negative picture of a place using stories. So stories are important in revealing the relationship people have with a place. A comparison with love is a good way of showing how stories tie in with the value of a place, as people can develop a relationship with a place in the same way as they develop a relationship with another person. They can flirt, approach someone, make a date, fall in love or go steady. Flirting is courting free of obligation whereby people look for relaxation and amusement, for example a place to idle around in. If you are looking to make a connection you are looking for diversion, so you need a place that invites a dialogue, has a certain intimacy and offers the scope to make discoveries. Making a date means you are interested: people are open to stories, want to read about the stories connected to the place on plaques and discuss them with other people. Falling in love is sublime excitement, enjoying the surroundings, which can also be just a stretch of grass or small deer park. Going steady is the institutionalization of love. It works the same way with places: people develop fixed habits in the park where they let their dogs out, feeling very much at home but also with a strong sense of belonging to such a place.

The above five perspectives on love can also be used to give an idea of the kind of relationships people could develop with a place. It also gives an indication of the value people attach to a place and the energy they are likely to be prepared to put

into that place. In the case of flirting, what matters is the experience; the surroundings, the place itself, are scarcely of any importance. In the case of going steady, people have appropriated that place totally and see it as an extension of themselves. The analogy with love is interesting in this context as it gives an indication of the chances of success in getting people involved in a place. If people have a long-term relationship with a place (they are going steady) they will also have fixed ideas about it and the relationship will be clear. However, if the relationship is less established, more effort will be needed to get them involved in the place, and new stories may need to be told to make the place more interesting for them.

City marketing

The reference to love may seem like a diversion but in practice city marketing has put a great deal of effort in recent decades into getting people to feel a certain love or affection for a particular city. City marketing took off in the 1990s when the economy was booming and competition between cities was growing. This was partly because urban dynamics were becoming increasingly complex. There was a growing realization that cities were just one element in bigger networks or metropolitan areas, and that cities had to stand out in their urban network. Some well-known metropolitan areas are the Randstad in the Netherlands (encompassing the four biggest cities: Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht), Brabantstad in the Netherlands (encompassing the cities in the province of Brabant), the Ruhr in Germany and the Flemish Diamond

in Belgium (formed by Antwerp, Ghent, Brussels and Leuven). Cities in these metropolitan areas do not just compete with other cities in the same conurbation, they also compete with cities in different metropolitan areas. For example, Eindhoven competes not only with Tilburg (another Brabantstad city) but also with Ghent in the Flemish Diamond and Duisburg in the Ruhr area.

All those cities tell stories to develop a bond with people and companies. These days, every self-respecting city has an advertising slogan promoting it while millions of euros are spent on attracting visitors to the city and getting companies to set up premises there. The city's identity is used in city branding. This can take the form of slogans such as I Amsterdam or Visit-Brighton, but consists primarily of strategies aimed at raising a city's profile in the market for businesses, residents and tourists.

That is also the case for the cities involved in the *Lively Cities* programme. For example, Eindhoven presents itself as a 'creative innovation region' for technology, design and knowledge; Brighton markets itself as a 'free-thinking city', creative, energetic, liberal and European; Lille presented itself as a cultural centre when it became European Capital of Culture in 2004. City marketing is nothing more than an attempt to give cities a more clear-cut profile and more clear-cut identity in the context of growing competition and the growing complexity of the international network of urban centres. Cities do generally focus their marketing efforts on the same things. Marketing techniques are used to position the city as a 'product' in the

market for tourism, businesses, residents, cultural events, commercial activities and investment.

Greenery as intervention

Greenery plays a subservient role in city marketing, but green spaces are particularly important in the branding of regions as the antithesis to the urban environment. One example is the branding of the Het Groene Woud (literally 'the green wood') as a region, an official Dutch National Landscape. This nature area at the heart of Brabantstad is presented as a green space on the outskirts of the five Brabant cities that enables residents, businesses and tourists to enjoy the countryside and recreational facilities. The branding of Het Groene Woud is then used in the city marketing for the Brabant cities to position them as healthy, natural, environmentally friendly places in which to live. Here, green spaces have the same function in the city marketing as the 'front-door greenery', 'decorative greenery' or 'fig-leaf greenery' in parks management. The green spaces do not have an urban function or a value for residents and businesses; instead, attracting people and businesses is an end in itself.

The interesting thing about the experiments by Van Hall Larenstein in the Netherlands and internationally through the *Lively Cities* programme is that greenery is used as a means of telling stories. In projects such as Guerrilla Gardening or Nature seen from the Cherry Picker, or the green graffiti in Louvain-La-Neuve or the food stall in the Place François Mitterrand in Lille, greenery acts as a cohesive force in the intervention,

showing residents and businesses that it is possible to tell new stories about their place, their square, their neighbourhood or their city. The young people who planted their own trees in a place of their choosing in Guerrilla Gardening were effectively starting a new story about that place. The people who were looking down on the woodland from the cherry picker were creating new stories about the nature area. The people using the square in Louvain-La-Neuve were constantly being forced to create new stories about their square due to the continually changing layout of the temporary furniture and greenery. And the food stall in Lille can ensure that people take the time to tell stories about the little used, dull square of Place François Mitterrand.

Stories stick

Storytelling is an important addition to the concept of place-making, which was explained in Chapter 4. The aim of placemaking is to ensure that the people using a place can appropriate that place - the place in its entirety, not the individual buildings, structures or greenery objects. The use of green interventions lets people look at that place in a different way. That changes, and hopefully improves, the value the place has for residents and businesses. In the end, such places with their higher value and greater vibrancy ensure that the city has a greater diversity of qualities and takes on a more varied and immediate value for residents, businesses and visitors.

Stories help the new values assigned to a place to stick. While a green intervention may end with the planting of a tree, it

lives on in the stories of the people who planted that tree. An experiment with temporary street furniture may result in a new layout for a square but that result only has a value if people tell stories about it, if people talk about the experiment that inspired them to create that new layout. Stories change people's appreciation of places and change the way they feel about places. Flirting with a place may change into a steady relationship, whereby the place belongs to the people, but it is the stories that let people appropriate the place. New narrative values make people look at places differently and stories are obviously the ideal way to pass on such values.

6 CONCLUSION

This book is the account of teaching practice linked to research projects, a practice that is able to create new, unexpected values in the complex patchwork of the city through experimental and strategic interventions with greenery. That the interventions involve greenery is obviously linked to the fact that the Van Hall Larenstein university of applied sciences specializes in nature and agriculture, but there is also a practical reason. Green spaces act as a cohesive force, as is shown again and again in the Netherlands and in the *Lively Cities* programme. Particularly in the urban context, green spaces have a distinctive and perhaps even emotional value that encourages people to pause there and makes them think about their appreciation of a place. Greenery triggers people to take part in social experiments. But that is just the beginning.

Cohesive force

Over time, practical and theoretical evidence has been accumulated supporting the view that greenery acts as a cohesive force. The link with research within Van Hall Larenstein helped provide a sturdier framework for the experimental strategic interventions with greenery, which were largely carried out by students. The experience with the participation projects in the Netherlands was used in the book *Participatie @ buitenruimte*, which can serve as a guide and a mirror for people who would like to set up their own versions of such experiments. The involvement in the *Lively Cities* programme

resulted in a conceptual basis for the experiments using the concepts of placemaking and storytelling. That conceptual framework has been worked out in more detail in this book.

Chapter 1 showed how the profession of parks management scarcely ties in at all with the social issues facing cities. In parks management, green spaces are largely seen as an end goal that needs to be achieved by adopting a systematic approach, rather than as something of qualitative and quantitative value for the city, as an instrument that can be deployed strategically in the search for better urban living conditions. It is true that there is an increasing emphasis on the qualitative, functional aspects of parks management and on how to get the users of green spaces involved. But at the same time, parks managers focus very much on controlling financial and organizational aspects while persisting in a quantitative, technocratic approach to the management of green spaces. It would appear that the skills parks managers have are most suited to this approach, although this does not fit in with the trend of using green spaces in a more functional, qualitative and social manner.

New skills

In this context, Van Hall Larenstein's experiments with greenery should therefore be seen as a search for the new skills parks managers need in order to deploy green spaces in a more functional, qualitative and social manner in the complex urban patchwork. The starting point here is the combination of participation with placemaking and storytelling. The

underlying idea is that the city is a complex system where small changes can have big effects and where it is usually difficult to predict the consequences of any action. Making plans for green spaces in cities therefore requires an interest in and a feeling for the complexity of the urban system that is so difficult to comprehend.

Parks managers need more skills, and different skills to their purely technical or ecological professional expertise. What is required in particular are social and strategy-related skills as well as personal characteristics such as the courage to take risks. In carrying out their experiments, the Van Hall Larenstein students learnt how to take risks as well as what is needed to get people to participate in a project, how you can get people to view green spaces and the city itself differently and how you can get people to feel involved with the green spaces and the city. The approach taken here is in line with what is starting to be known in teaching circles as 'the new way of learning'. The university and the lecturers provide a context-rich, stimulating learning environment in which students carry out a range of field projects that let them discover and learn things for themselves. This method is ideally suited for teaching students the social, communicative and strategic skills that they will need in addition to their technical and ecological expertise.

North West European Lively Cities Placemaking Tour

This book describes a voyage of discovery by students, lecturers and researchers at Van Hall Larenstein. It started with a few student projects in and around Arnhem, while theoretical and practical substantiation was obtained through participation in the international *Lively Cities* programme. That voyage of discovery has led to an entire account of a reasonably flexible methodology for interventions using greenery to get people more involved in their city, their district, their neighbourhood, their square, their place. This gives the profession of parks management a new boost in the use of greenery as a strategic, participational instrument, using new social, communicative and strategic skills.

This is not the end, it is a beginning. What does the process described in this book imply for the degree programmes at Van Hall Larenstein? And what are the implications for the profession of parks management? Van Hall Larenstein wants to spread the message about the ideas presented in this book. This summer, a group of students will be taking a caravan painted bright green on the North West European *Lively Cities* Placemaking Tour. They will be putting these ideas into practice in the summer of 2013 in a tour of a number of the partner cities in the *Lively Cities* programme.

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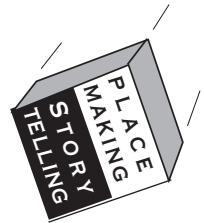
IN CARRYING OUT THEIR EXPE-
RIMENTS, THE VAN HALL LA-
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HOW TO TAKE RISKS AS WELL
AS WHAT IS NEEDED TO GET
PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN A
PROJECT, HOW YOU CAN GET
PEOPLE TO VIEW GREEN SPA-
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FERENTLY AND HOW YOU CAN
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WITH THE GREEN SPACES AND
THE CITY. THE APPROACH IS IN
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TEACHING CIRCLES AS 'THE NEW
WAY OF LEARNING'. THE UNI-
VERSITY AND THE LECTURERS
PROVIDE A CONTEXT-RICH, STI-
MULATING LEARNING ENVIRON-
MENT IN WHICH STUDENTS CAR-
RY OUT FIELD PROJECTS THAT
LET THEM DISCOVER AND LE-
ARN THINGS FOR THEMSELVES.

PLANNING BY SURPRISE

Just do it!!

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PLACE MAKING STORY TELLING

The best is yet to come! Happy 2013 livelycities

Bring back to life unused public space

Jardin de la Maison de la Culture, Namur

Give life back to an empty space

Place Maugrétout, La Louvière

Have a break in the city centre

Place des Carmes, Liège

Prepare for change

Jardin Urbain, Wavre

VIVRE EN BRABANT

Place des W à vous de de

PLACEMAKING
Une belle place, oui mais pourquoi ?

...ut en Europe du Nord Ouest, partons à la reconquête des espaces publics

...hoven, NL

Liege, BE

Tournai, BE

La Louvière, BE

STORYTELLING

PLACEMAKING

6. La réflexion de deux étudiants en aménagement du territoire

RÉFLEXION → IDÉE POSSIBLE? → CONCEPT

« Ville végétalisée »
« La cité de Babylone »
« Une ville qui tient compte de la nature »

« Points de rencontre »
« Un endroit riche en couleurs et en nature »
« Du végétal parmi le minéral »

Vous avez des idées ? Placez-les sur la page Facebook (facebook.com/PlaceDesWallons)

7. Quelques aménagements possibles...

Votre avis nous intéresse !

👍 **Like?**
Collez une gommette orange à côté de chaque élément qui ne vous plaît pas.

👎 **Dislike :**
Collez une gommette verte à côté de chaque élément qui vous plaît.

DU MOBILIER ? Chaises, tables, bancs...

DE LA VERDURE ? Mur végétal, arbres, gazon...

UN JEU DE LUMIÈRES ?

DE LA LECTURE À DISPOSITION ? Magazines, revues, journaux...

UN ACCÈS GRATUIT AU RÉSEAU ? WiFi

UNE ZONE DE JEUX ?

DES TABLES DE JEUX ? Backgammon, échec, dames...
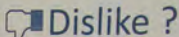
8. D'autres amenagements possibles..

STORYTELLING
Votre avis nous intéresse !

👍 Like?

👎 Dislike ?

COLLEZ UNE GOMMETTE ORANGE •
À CÔTÉ DE CHAQUE ÉLÉMENT
QUI NE VOUS PLAÎT PAS.

COLLEZ UNE GOMMETTE VERTE •
À CÔTÉ DE CHAQUE ÉLÉMENT
QUI VOUS PLAÎT.

UN PREAU, UN ABRI ?

UNE ANIMATION REGULIERE ?
MARCHÉS BIO - FLORAL - ARTISANAL...
CONCERTS, EXPOS....

UNE PISTE DE PETANQUE ?

TERRASSES HORECA EN HARMONIE ?

GRAND PLACE, MONS   GRAND PLACE, LEUVEN

UNE FRESQUE MURALE ?

DE L'EAU ?
UNE FONTAINE, UN MUR D'EAU ?

UNE SCENE PERMANENTE ?

CréaJOB

PLACEMAKING

STORYTELLING

LECTORAAT GROENE LEEFOMGEVING
VAN STEDEN

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