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Place-Keeping: Open Space Management in Practice
Nicola Dempsey, Harry Smith & Mel Burton
Routledge

Journal of Housing and the Built Environment

What is the relationship between capital investments in and the long term use and benefits of open spaces? Well-intentioned expenditure on high quality design in our urban fabric has frequently provided short term results, but have often failed to maintain their impact over time. These bright new spaces have the habit of fading over time, sometimes into significant disrepair. Dempsey, Smith and Burton argue that an emphasis on place-making without full consideration of the long term management of these open spaces is misguided and may lead to long term costs in other areas such as health care in the opening and closing chapters of this edited volume. *Place-keeping* is an excellent attempt to address the shortcomings of place-making over time by creating a framework to think about long term maintenance and management. It is a well-illustrated, accessible and succinct book that provides a cogent introduction to place-keeping.

Building on work undertaken for an EU funded project: *Making Places Profitable – Public and Private Open Spaces*, this slight, edited, volume tackles the short-termism of capital investments in public spaces without planning for the long term social, economic and environmental management of the space. A new institutionalist perspective is adopted as the theoretical framework to understand the dimensions of place-keeping across different contexts in the EU and illustrative examples elsewhere. Resultantly there is a repeated focus on the resources, norms and ideas that determine forms of place-keeping. The framework is briefly explained in chapter two and addressed intermittently throughout the book, before being explicitly tied together in the final chapter.

More than a simple critique of place-making, *Place-Keeping* addresses a number of key questions including: who should be involved in it; where should finance come from; who shapes decisions; and, where do attitudes towards place-keeping come from? Place-making is not dismissed as insignificant, but is relocated within a long-term approach to open spaces, aimed at providing sustainable places for multiple generations. If place-keeping is considered as the primary process and product, then place-making is an internalized activity that should design open spaces to facilitate their long term management.

Six dimensions of place-keeping are developed in detail. The six dimensions include: politics, governance, partnerships, funding, connecting design and management, and evaluation. The complexity of each dimension of place-keeping is drawn out in each chapter respectively by the array of (primarily academic) partners in the project. The chapter on politics, for example, succinctly explores the multiple tiers of international to local scales of policy decision making which impact and conflict on a single site. Each chapter draws on multiple illustrative examples to draw out lessons for open space management and to explore aspects of the new institutionalist framework across each dimension. Each chapter therefore covers a discussion of the allocative structures, authoritative

structures and systems of meaning related to the dimension it considers. Most chapters clearly address the interrelationships between the principle dimension in focus in that chapter and some other dimensions, although the new institutionalist perspective is not applied mechanistically to the interrelationships between each dimension.

Examples are provided from across the globe, but there is an emphasis on evidence from the MP4 project, and is consequently overly euro-centric in places. The book critiques some aspects of New Public Management and partnership forms of governance whilst recognizing the contemporary questions about forms of open space management within constrained government budgets. These current challenges to the political and funding environment provide a clear rationale for place-keeping as an ongoing, iterative approach to place management.

The new institutionalist framework helps the authors avoid advocating a single universal management solution. They argue it is necessary to have a detailed understanding of the social, political and economic environment of the open space in question before attempting to identify practical solutions.

Addressing the myopia of place-making is well worth the extensive treatment that is possible in an edited volume. The holistic impact of the book provides sufficient evidence to firmly condemn place-making as an isolated long term solution. However, chapters are not equal. Some chapters are repetitive rather than building on previous analysis and adding sufficient depth to each dimension. Some chapters apply the new institutionalist framework more explicitly and with greater insight than others. Whilst this is an attempt to avoid repetition, the choice of interrelated dimensions appears ad hoc in places. As an application of new institutionalism the chapter conclusions tend to be descriptive analyses of structures, whether formal or habitual, and have little place for agency. Unsurprisingly these conclusions highlight the layered complexity of management, but offer little hope of change for the impassioned reader.

The book is more likely to appeal to students and academics interested in an introduction to the theme of long-term management of open spaces rather than those looking for a detailed explanation of the new institutionalist approach or practitioners looking for an off the peg management framework. *Place-Keeping* is an excellent introduction to key questions in open space management and will provide a solid grounding in key issues for those interested in living with, using and resourcing quality places for this and future generations.

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