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## **INVESTIGATIONS OF PLACE ATTACHMENT IN PUBLIC SPACE**

**MARIA EGGERTSEN TEDER**

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### **Abstract**

Place attachment – an affective bond between people and specific places – makes people want to stay close to and care for certain environments. Originating in environmental psychology, the concept also appears relevant for architecture and urban design, although to date it is not commonplace within the literature in those fields. Psychologists Scannell and Gifford (2010) sketch a tripartite, theoretical model with people, place and psychological process as the main components of place attachment. A number of scholars have since suggested that the place component needs further investigation. This paper explores relevant theoretical concepts to be used as analytical tools in such an investigation. Various definitions of placemaking and place attachment and Relph's (1976) categories of place outsidersness and insidersness are discussed. Distinguishing material features and the creation process for a public space improvement programme in San Francisco (Pavement to Parks) are then explored in a qualitative case study. Analysis of the empirical material revealed the presence of place attachment in different phases of the placemaking process and how place attachment is related to the materiality and use of the resulting places.

Keywords:  
placemaking, place attachment,  
place outsidersness/insidersness,  
place-shaping continuum

## Introduction

Place attachment signifies an affective bond between people and specific places. The bond makes people want to stay close to, and care for, the places in question. Place attachment thus appears to be a promising concept for architects and urban designers to work with when developing public space. However, this concept is currently not commonplace within the literature on architecture and urban design. Psychologists Leila Scannell and Robert Gifford (2010) present a tripartite, theoretical model of place attachment, with people, place and [psychological] process as the main components. In an extensive literature review of research on place attachment performed during the past two decades, Maria Lewicka (2010) points out that both the place and [psychological] process components of the model are in need of more attention and investigation, in order to advance place attachment theory. She and others (e.g. Hernández, Hidalgo and Ruiz, 2014) therefore suggest investigating the character of places generating place attachment. By exploring distinguishing material features of such places and their creation processes, this article aims to provide valuable, new knowledge within the fields of architecture and urban design and environmental psychology.

The work is part of a PhD project exploring placemaking as “places in the making”<sup>1</sup>, i.e. as iterative processes of interplay between people, their feelings and actions, and built structures. Two empirical research questions were the main focus of this study: 1) Which parts of a placemaking process in public space particularly stimulate place attachment? 2) How does place attachment relate to the materiality and use of the resulting place? Starting with a literature review, relevant theoretical concepts were explored. A case study was then conducted on the Pavement to Parks programme in San Francisco, to provide empirical material for analysis. Finally, place attachment, materiality and use were assessed based on geographer Edward Relph’s (1976) notions of place insideness and outsideness.

1 See further in Silberberg, et al. (2013)

## Placemaking – shaping the public realm for and through use

In his quest to promote urban design as an independent discipline, architect Matthew Carmona calls for an increased focus on process. By comparing built environments with their processes of delivery, he seeks new knowledge about what is unique for urban design (Carmona, 2014, p.4). According to him, contexts, processes and power relationships form a place-shaping continuum (ibid., p.6). He defines four place-shaping processes influencing a built environment; design, development, space in use and management. These should not be considered a series of isolated activities, but one integrated process through time. Places are shaped for and through use, and the place-shaping continuum has different phases; designing, building and using/managing a place (ibid., p.33).

The place-shaping continuum can also be called placemaking. Architects Lynda Schneekloth and Robert Shibley suggest that placemaking is as old as human society itself. It is about transforming places in which we are into places in which we live. It can be spectacular, or pass almost unnoticed: “Placemaking consists both of daily acts of renovating, maintaining, and representing the places that sustain us, and of special, celebratory one-time events such as designing a new church building or moving into a new facility.” (Schneekloth and Shibley, 1995, p.1). Susan Silberberg and colleagues trace the academic origin of placemaking back to the writings of Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch and William Whyte (Silberberg, et al., 2013, p.2). Starting as a reaction against auto-centric planning in the 1960s, placemaking has grown into a practice of creating environments for social interaction and for improving the quality of community life (ibid. pp.1–2). Designer Ezio Manzini describes placemaking as a process that “produces a new (or renewed) sense of place by connecting a space with the communities that inhabit it” (Manzini, 2015, p.122). Hence, placemaking is about the social building of places, about connecting people with their close surroundings.

The creation process is an essential component of placemaking. “[...] the most successful placemaking initiatives transcend the ‘place’ to forefront the ‘making’” (Silberberg, et al., 2013, p.3). Anyone involved in any of the phases identified by Carmona (designing, building or using/managing a place) can be denoted a placemaker. Schneekloth and Shibley (1995, p.2), and Manzini (2015, p.37), differentiate between professional and non-professional placemakers. Manzini describes “expert design” and “diffuse design” as being two poles with a field of design possibilities in between. Expert designers (i.e. design professionals) and “diffuse” designers naturally have different approaches to a design process, and the dynamic between them is decisive for the outcome.

## Place attachment – an affective bond formed by interplay of actions and emotions

*A place makes impressions, but it also has to be possible to make impressions on the place. ‘Monumentality’, in the negative sense, implies physical premises that make impressions but do not take them, premises that reduce their inhabitants or visitors, premises that are intended for spectating, not for participating. (Asplund, 1983, p.182, translation by the author)*

As mentioned above, a placemaking process can be described as a series of place-shaping actions performed by one or more individuals. These actions connect people and places and, according to place attachment theory, can produce spatial meanings: “Spatial meanings are found in the generative principles of action rather than being attached to place



as an object; place and its meanings are produced through practice” (Altman, Altman and Setha, 1992, p.215). Although originating in environmental psychology, place attachment is an interdisciplinary concept with various definitions (Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2014, p.2). Involvement and a sense of belonging are central for the understanding of place in environmental psychology and are fundamental for the notion of place attachment. In environmental psychology, place attachment is defined as an affective bond between people and certain places (Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001, p.274). The attachment has both social and physical dimensions and creates a tendency to stay close to, and care for, the valued environment. Place is a space that has been given meaning through cultural processes (Altman, Altman and Setha, 1992, p.5). Place attachment involves “an interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviours and actions in reference to a place” (ibid., pp.4–5; see also Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff, 1983). Thus, place attachment can arise on both individual and community level and involves interplay of emotions and actions.

The need for “true places”, as social psychologist Johan Asplund calls them (see quote in the beginning of this section), to “take impressions” could be interpreted as letting users interact with the built environment, making it possible for them to somehow adapt it or leave their mark on it. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan claims that there is a greater awareness of built forms and space in traditional societies, due to a higher level of active involvement in the creation of their close environments. In modern societies, he argues, this awareness is much reduced, as people are no longer involved in building their own houses or public monuments (Tuan, 1977, pp.104, 116–117). Using Altman and Low’s vocabulary, one could say that in modern societies the affective bond between people and the built environment fails to form, due to lack of engagement in creation of these environments. Although the term place attachment is less frequent within architecture theory, the need for user interaction in order to create “true places” has been recognised by some, e.g. Jonathan Sime: “Architecture, in concentrating on the physical dimensions of space and form, is in danger of neglecting the patterns of behaviour and experience which imbue buildings with meaning. [...] An individual, in creating a place, is involved by definition in the appropriation and personalization of a physical space through thought and action.” (Sime, 1995, p.38).

### Self-conscious and unselfconscious placemaking

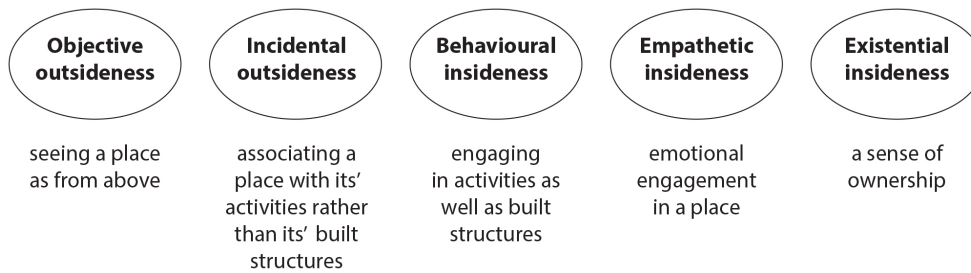
Involvement in a place can be either self-conscious or unselfconscious. If we return to Carmona’s place-shaping processes, he differentiates between “knowing place-shaping” (the design and development phases) and “unknowing place-shaping” (the place management and space-in-use phases) (Carmona, 2014, p.33). According to geographer Edward

Relph, the intentions of individuals regarding a place position them as either outsiders or insiders in relation to that place. This position, he claims, can be either self-imposed or unselfconscious, and is closely related to the sense of belonging: “To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is the identity with this place. [...] In short, as our intentions vary, so the boundary between inside and outside moves. In consequence there are possible levels of insideness” (Relph, 1976, pp.49–50). Relph regards placemaking as a continuous process where places gain authenticity by being modified and dwelt in (ibid., p.146). He proposes multiple levels of place insideness and outsideness. Below, the levels most relevant for the scope of this paper are presented (see also Figure 1).

Objective outsideness suggests a self-imposed distance to a place, considering it merely a geographical position where objects and/or activities are located. According to Relph, this attitude is adopted by many planners when making proposals for reorganisation of places. Objective outsideness makes it possible to separate oneself emotionally from a place, in order to restructure it based on logic, reason and efficiency (Relph, 1976, pp.51–52). Objective outsideness can be viewed as intentionally zooming out and viewing everything from above, which is the outermost form of outsideness. Incidental outsideness is the most common relationship that people have to public space. A place is then associated with the functions and activities that are going on there, rather than with its built structures. Incidental outsideness is “a largely unself-conscious attitude in which places are experienced as little more than the background or setting for activities and are quite incidental to those activities.” (ibid., p.52).

Behavioural insideness means being in a place and attending to both its built structures and activities, but without emotional engagement. Thus it involves being in a place and recognising a set of objects, views and activities with observable qualities (Relph, 1976, p.53). If emotional engagement is involved, the relationship is defined as empathetic insideness: “To be inside a place empathetically is to understand that place as rich in meaning, and hence to identify with it, for these meanings are not only linked to the experiences and symbols of those whose place it is, but also stem from one’s own experiences.” (ibid., pp.54–55). The outermost form of insideness is called existential insideness and occurs when a place, without deliberate reflection, is experienced as full of significance. This is the insideness that most people feel in their homes or hometowns (ibid., p.55).

These levels of outsideness and insideness categorise how people engage in places. All levels except incidental outsiders engage in the built structures of a place. However, objective outsiders and behavioural insiders do so without emotional engagement.

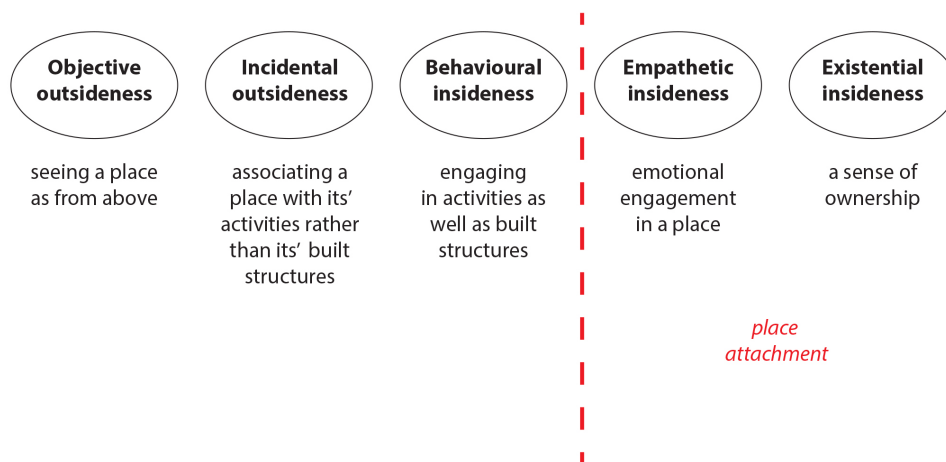


## Theoretical concepts applied as an analytical tool

Relph's levels of outsidership and insidership indicate how people's place intentions determine their actions in relation to a place (Figure 2). A common approach among architects appears to be behavioural insidership. They consider both built structures and activities, but without emotional engagement, or have a very "professional" attitude in other words. Empathetic insidership, where emotions become involved, is interesting. Emotional engagement is, as we have seen in previous sections of this paper, immanent in place attachment. The emotional bond grows stronger with action, by involvement in shaping built structures. Using Relph's concepts, place attachment is thus something that originates in, and is experienced by, insiders directly. Insidership (and outsidership) is an indicator of how people will relate to a place in the future and how they will use it and care for it. Empathetic insidership does not signify ownership, but rather personal experience of a place and feelings of connection and concern for it.

Relph concludes that empathetic and existential insidership are the levels that generate robust, long-term engagement in a place. The most extreme form, existential insidership, which is related to a sense of ownership, marks the point where, in the context of public space, there is a risk of excluding other users. A crucial task for a "true" placemaking process in public space thus appears to be how to involve empathetic insiders, i.e. future users to whom it seems important, in a direct and concrete way in design and development, and in place management and use. Using Carmona's categories, active user involvement in the shaping of places implies converting management and use from unknowing into knowing place-shaping, turning everyday processes into conscious place interventions.

Figure 1  
Overview of the different levels of outsidership and insidership as interpreted by the author. Adapted from Relph (1976, pp.51–55).



In a case study in San Francisco, the theoretical concepts discussed above were used to analyse the place relations of various actors (i.e. the informants). The main research questions in seeking to develop a place-based understanding of place attachment in the case study were: 1) Which parts of the placemaking process particularly stimulated place attachment? 2) How did place attachment relate to the materiality and use of the resulting places?

**Figure 2**  
Illustration and interpretation of the levels of outsidership and insidership defined by Relph (1976) in relation to place attachment.

## Empirical studies

The public space improvement programme Pavement to Parks in San Francisco was chosen for the case study. The projects included in the programme are explicitly aimed at exploring new and innovative ways of developing and managing public space. The public is encouraged to engage in the process, either through active involvement in the design and building of new public plazas or as initiators and managers of public mini-parks (so-called parklets). The programme therefore seemed appropriate as a case for exploring place attachment during all four of Carmona's place-shaping phases. A qualitative approach was chosen, as the research focus was on various kinds of attachment, rather than on the quantitative degree of attachment (Williams, 2014, p.94).

To study the experiences and influences of place attachment on Pavement to Parks projects, interviews were performed in spring 2012 with project managers from the San Francisco Planning Department, architects and designers who had been involved in the creation of plazas and parklets, business owners who had initiated parklets and current users on-site (a few of whom also participated during the design or building phase). Questions regarding the creation process, roles in the project, motives for participating, ways of involvement in the design and building of the place, emotional bonds experienced (i.e. place attachment), use of the place and overall satisfaction with the process and results were posed in semi-structured interviews. In total, interviews were conducted

with 60 individuals, of which 10 were in-depth (lasting between an hour and an hour and a half). The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded, in order to discover common themes among the stories of different actors. In some cases the informants provided picture material from the creation process, such as photographs and sketches. This information was triangulated with the author's on-site observations at different times of the day and week (resulting in notes and photographs), and with the written information found on websites, in journals and in newspapers.

### The Pavement to Parks programme

The Pavement to Parks programme in San Francisco aims to help merchants, community organisations, business owners and residents take individual action in the development of the city's public realm (San Francisco Planning Department, 2014). The programme seeks to temporarily transform under-used street spaces into public places. Initiated by the Mayor of San Francisco in 2008, each Pavement to Parks project is intended to be a public laboratory testing new ideas together with local communities. The intention of the experimental approach is to allow a larger number of people to engage in the urban development process. Each project should reflect the diversity and creativity of the people who design and build it, thereby adding "beauty and whimsy" to the streets of San Francisco. By opening up the legal framework, citizens who are not commonly involved in urban development are given the possibility to create places where they want to spend time.

The programme tests new methods for urban development on two different scales: plazas and parklets. Plazas are the result of stepwise transformations of underused paved surfaces, such as large intersections. The locations are initially identified by a team from various city departments (including the Planning Department). An initial design session is announced via public notices on the site and in the local newspaper, and one or more professional placemakers are engaged by the city authority to lead the creation process. In a first step, a full-scale mock-up is built from very simple materials (e.g. cardboard), and community feedback is collected by studying the use of this for some months. Both materials and design solutions are meant to be inexpensive, temporary and easily movable, to allow for changes. After testing their initial performance, some locations are reclaimed permanently as public open spaces and are given a more permanent design. Seating, landscaping, paving refurbishment, plantings, bike racks and art are common features of all plazas.

Parklets are much smaller in scale and signify a temporary transformation of parking spaces. They are based on public-private partnerships, where citizens apply for a permit to create and maintain a mini-park on a yearly basis. Before getting a permit, a public notice has to be posted, displaying an image (drawing, rendering etc.) of the intended design

on-site for 10 days. If there are objections, a public hearing has to take place (as in a conventional urban development process). Questions, comments and concerns are gathered by the initiator and eventually a design proposal is created for the permit. The city authority encourages the involvement of professional placemakers in applications for permits, but this is not a formal requirement. The parklet is subsequently built either by professional construction workers or as a participatory community project, depending on the preferences of the initiator. The majority of parklets are initiated by business owners who can use the space as an extension of their business (e.g. for outdoor seating). They may do so on the condition that the space also remains open to non-customers.

Among numerous locations throughout the city<sup>2</sup>, two plazas and two parklets were chosen for more thorough investigations because of the access to first-hand information that they provided. For all four sites, in-depth interviews were held with professional placemakers from the design and building phases. In addition, the places-in-use could be visited at various times of the day and week, which made on-site interviews with a range of users possible.

#### **Jane Warner Plaza (*previously known as Castro Commons*)**

Jane Warner Plaza, located on 17th Street at Castro and Market Street, was one of the first Pavement to Parks pilot projects. The first phase (Pavement to Parks Demonstration) lasted from May 2009 to April 2010. The design and installation were performed by Public Architecture and included moveable seating (chairs) and planters made of cardboard tubes (Figure 3). After being evaluated for a year, the place was upgraded to a Pavement to Parks Trial Plaza, for which the design was done pro bono by Boor Bridges Architecture. The place was given a greater sense of enclosure by low concrete walls, more seating and more greenery. Drought-tolerant and wind-tolerant plants were added, including palm trees and succulents (Figure 4). The Plaza was converted into a permanent public space in August 2013. The Castro Community Benefit district, together with the city authority, was responsible for community outreach during the first two phases, and since then has been responsible for managing and activating the plaza. The moveable seating allows for flexible use and from early morning until late evening the place is used by people walking, resting, watching, socialising or eating. The plaza is a pedestrian-friendly terminus for one of the streetcar routes and thereby creates a front door to the Castro neighbourhood (based on the interviews and Pavement to Parks, 2015b).

- 2 When the case study was performed in the spring of 2012, there were about 30 Pavement to Parks sites in total.



Figure 3  
Jane Warner Plaza during the first phase (Pavement to Parks Demonstration). The objects are made from very simple materials (e.g. cardboard planters) and are easy to move around.

PHOTO: CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT.



Figure 4  
Jane Warner Plaza during the second phase (Pavement to Parks Trial Plaza). The objects are more robust (e.g. terracotta planters) and some are no longer easy to move around (e.g. the cast concrete flower beds).

### Showcase Triangle Plaza

The San Francisco-based group Rebar designed, acquired materials and built the first phase of Showcase Triangle Plaza, located on 8th Street, between 16th and Irwin Streets. The place is lined by two cafés, which makes it busy at lunchtime and at week-ends. An art school (California College of the Arts) is located a few blocks away, and the plaza is also frequently used by students. The Pavement to Parks Trial period was between September 2009 and winter 2012, and prior to construction Rebar organised a community meeting to generate a public discussion about the design. During the Trial period, old granite kerbstones formed green islands for people to relax on, play and enjoy the greenery. Large granite blocks, which had previously been used in the city centre, were reused for creating flexible seating areas. Former debris boxes filled with trees

and plants provided lush greenery. Unused terracotta sewer pipes filled with soil and planted with various drought-tolerant plants were placed around the periphery of the plaza to provide a physical edge and barrier to the noise from the street (Figure 5). Showplace Triangle is to be redesigned as a permanent public space (based on interviews and Pavement to Parks, 2015b).



Figure 5  
Showplace Triangle Plaza during the Pavement to Parks Trial period. Reused kerbstones and granite blocks create islands for sitting between two restaurants.

PHOTO: REBAR.

### Devils' Teeth Baking Company parklet

Devils' Teeth Baking Company parklet was opened in December 2011. It is located in the Outer Sunset District on 3876 Noriega Street, and was initiated by the owner of the bakery, as there was previously no place to sit outside on the block. The bakery, which manages the space, built the parklet with the help of a city grant and volunteers from the local community. An architect (working for Matarozzi Pelsinger Builders) who lives two blocks away donated the design pro bono, and another community member drew the planting scheme and helped organise a community planting day with donated plants (Figure 6). Matarozzi Pelsinger Builders built the parklet at cost. The parklet replaces three diagonal parking spaces and provides seating in two clusters, space for bikes, strollers and playing, and protective greenery to the street. Since its completion, the parklet has been frequently used by the local community and bakery customers from other parts of the city (Figure 7). The bakery hands out drawing chalk for children and sometimes uses the space for various festivities and events. At the time of this study, the parklet was also being used by community members as a social space after closing hours (based on interviews).





Figure 6  
Community members planting donated plants at Devils' Teeth Baking Company parklet.

PHOTO: SHANE CURNYN.



Figure 7  
Devils' Teeth Baking Company parklet on a weekday morning. Various citizen groups have found their own niche to use.

### Luna Rienne Gallery (previously known as Fabric 8 Gallery) parklet

Luna Rienne Gallery parklet on 3318 22<sup>nd</sup> Street in the Mission District is a venue for public art. Open since September 2011, it hosts designs (rotating on a yearly basis) by artists featured in the gallery. The case study was conducted during the first design, called “The Peace Keeper”, by local artist Eric Otto. During this design, the parklet was a space intended for quiet relaxation, as well as spontaneous interaction between citizens. The major elements were designed after a couple of brainstorming sessions with the gallery owners and a neighbourhood committee; beanbags for relaxation, a lighthouse, greenery and a protective back to the street. The proposal was displayed on the gallery window for some weeks and a few adjustments were made based on comments from the

community, e.g. the back was lowered to maximise viewing and visibility and some permanent seating was added. The parklet was built from recycled materials, with the supporting structure being constructed in the artist's studio. The structure was subsequently affixed to a steel frame and completed on site, in order for the community to see and be part of the building process. There was a request for community donations in terms of materials or labour, which resulted in donations of plants. The Peace Keeper parklet was used during the opening hours of the gallery (the bean bags were taken inside after closing hours and during rain and a "closed" sign was hung up in front of the entrance) (Figures 8 and 9). The gallery owners put out video games on sunny days, and the space was then often filled with people relaxing or playing games. At night, the lighthouse provided light and a sense of safety to the sidewalk (based on interviews; Otto, 2011; Pavement to Parks, 2015a).



Figure 8  
The Peace Keeper design for the Luna Rienne Gallery parklet on a rainy day; the bean bags have been taken inside and a "closed" sign is displayed.



Figure 9  
The Peace Keeper design for the Luna Rienne Gallery parklet during an art opening at the gallery. The lighthouse is lit during the hours of darkness to contribute to a safe atmosphere on the sidewalk.

## Analysis and results

During analysis of the empirical material, the main focus was on interview answers revealing if and when in the process place attachment was experienced, factors transferring people from one of Relph's levels of outsidership or insidership to another, and how the place was used. The site observations focused on whether and how the involvement and place attachment were related to the materiality and use of the places.

### Which parts of the placemaking process particularly stimulated place attachment?

For some, place attachment seems to have been the reason for engaging in placemaking in the first place. One architect reflected: "I did it for free and I don't think I would have ever done that if it hadn't been in my neighbourhood. [...] You know, to design and help construct it and then having this be a place where I get to sit and meet my friends [made this project special]." The architect was a local, familiar with the neighbourhood and community, which made him an empathetic insider of the place from the very beginning. This insidership was reflected in his careful design. A parklet design that he produced for a different neighbourhood (for which he was paid the usual architect's fee) did not appear as careful and place-specific, and thus during that project he seemed to have been a behavioural insider. Business owners applying for parklet permissions expressed the same kind of a priori place attachment: "We've had the business for 30 years and wanted to give something back to the community." "I really did it because I wanted to add value to the neighbourhood [...]. It's about giving back to the community." "A lot of pro bono work goes into these things because people are... it is a public project and it is a nice way to give back if you are a larger office and you can [...]. The owner of this place, he is very neighbourhood and community oriented."

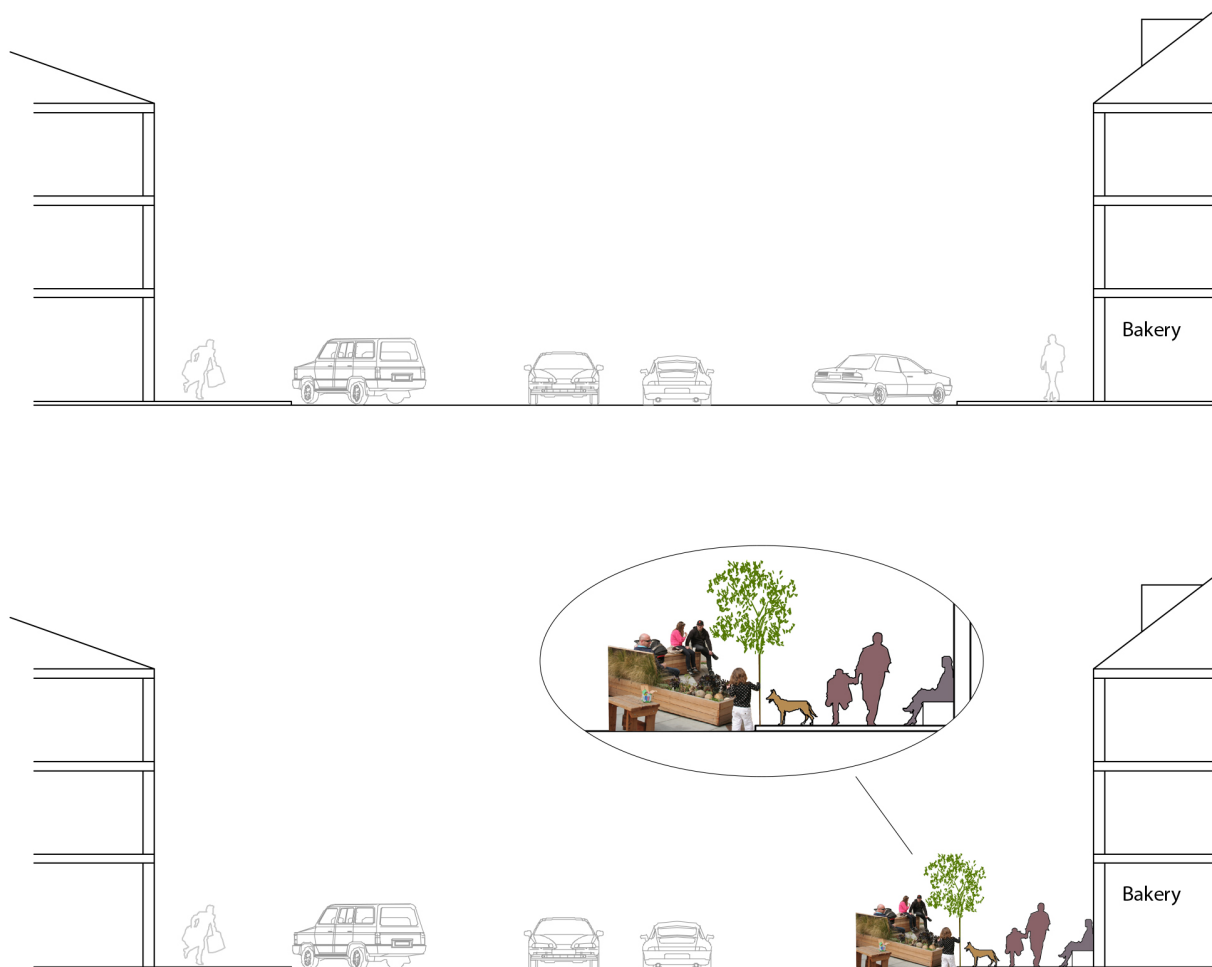
For others, place attachment grew during the design and building phases of the placemaking process. The San Francisco Planning department encourages applicants not to do any actual parklet design until they have completed the public notice phase, because "we might reject them and they get sort of attached, and then we don't want them to have to spend money on design until they know that they can actually build it." Engaging in a design process was anticipated as immediately triggering emotions, empathetic insidership and place attachment. One design team organised two public preparation events before building of the parklet started. The sessions were used for calculating material demand and organising the construction work. Many community members, who had not previously heard about the plans, volunteered for building after participating in those events. Participation during the building of the place generated a sense of involvement, according to the informants. A business owner initiating a parklet recalled: "We had a sign saying 'If you have succulents [to donate], please bring them!' So we didn't have to buy any of them. One of the women [in the community], she came

and planted everything – for free – to help. So she did all the planting, all the organising and [later on she was also] weeding it.” They ended up with a lot more plants than they could actually fit in the parklet. Another parklet builder reported: “It definitely has my hand, my touch, and all those little pieces of wood were leftovers from other projects and all those like colours and markings, I know where they came from, so there is a lot of connection of me to it.” The professional placemakers too felt that active involvement in the construction enhanced their bond to the place; “[...] the fact that we were going to be involved in the construction, so you know we were intimately involved in this space, so it was less like a public landscape design, and more of a private residential design in terms of our connection.” This resulted in many of them working for free to complete the projects: “This was kind of amazing in that we were... It’s a design and build thing that we have going. So I’m an architect and able to build it! [...] Yes, so I offered to build it for free.” Thus, in many cases the placemakers went from being incidental outsiders or behavioural insiders to empathetic insiders of the places during the design and building phases.

Place attachment also arose during the use and management of some places. The Showplace Triangle unexpectedly became extremely popular with skateboarders, which the city authority found problematic: “It’s been really popular with skateboarders and we are not opposed to skateboarders but... they sort of push everyone else out of the place.” It emerged that it was the reused black granite which was attracting the skateboarders, due to nostalgia (it had once been the pavement in another very popular skating location in the city). This turned the skateboarders into existential insiders, discouraging others from using the place. An evaluation and alteration of the first design was part of the project plan, and the same granite was then used for a purpose-built skate park at a nearby location instead. The design of the plaza was adjusted to make it more attractive to other user groups, e.g. some of the granite was replaced by grass and more traffic-shielding vegetation and seating were added. Having someone feeling responsible for the places on a long-term basis was crucial for the success of the Pavement to Parks projects, according to several interviewees. The parklets, where the citizens themselves proposed the physical locations, seem to have generated greater citizen engagement than the plazas, where the locations were originally identified by the city authority. One architect reflected: “I think the public private aspect of the parklet is such that it has a defender. Like if business owner X is concerned about this thing in particular, it has someone who looks after it.” A project manager at the San Francisco Planning Department recounted: “We’ve had developers ask if they can put up a parklet in front of their building, but before it’s built and leased out we’ll say no because we want someone to be there and keep an eye on the space.” He believed that place attachment and empathetic inside-ness would arise during the management of the space.

### How was place attachment related to the materiality of the resulting place?

Before the construction of Devils' Teeth Baking Company parklet, vehicles and traffic determined the scale and pace on Noriega Street. Once built, a new scale and level of detailing and variation was introduced. The parklet gave the sidewalk, with its pedestrians, cyclists, dogs, strollers, sunbathers, bakery customers and other socialisers, a new dignity and sense of place (Figure 10).



In the parklets described above and in other parklets throughout the city, unusual materials such as driftwood and reused red cedar, donated plants of various species and new types of seating (e.g. bean bags) were added to the streetscape due to the place attachment experienced by the placemakers (Figures 11 and 12). One designer concluded: “The parklets are participatory primarily in the sense that they’re all unique. Because rather than the city building them and doing one kind of the design for each location, each property owner, home owner, residents’ group, has their own idea about what it is, so you’ve got this remarkable variety of design ideas within the certain framework of the parklet.” The

Figure 10  
Noriega Street section before (top)  
and after (bottom) Devils’ Teeth Baking  
Company parklet was built.

plazas, which had less citizen involvement during the design and building phases, did not undergo similar material additions and variations to the streetscape. At Showplace Triangle Plaza, however, familiar urban elements, such as the granite kerbstones and debris boxes, were reused in creative ways.



Figure 11  
Example of physical marks of user interaction and place attachment; unusual plants in a parklet hosted by a private house owner on Valencia Street.



Figure 12  
Example of physical marks of user interaction and place attachment; driftwood from the nearby beach used for sitting and climbing in a parklet on Judah Street (hosted by Trouble Coffee).

As place attachment arises through interplay between emotions and actions, having the possibility to leave physical marks at a place could facilitate the attachment process. This was formalised in different ways in the examples studied here. Many parklet developments were aimed at letting local artists display their work (on a short- or long-term basis). One designer invented a modular system, i.e. a plug-and-play design for parklets consisting of different public furniture. With this design, each permit applicant would be able to find the combination of e.g. benches, planters and tables that best suited the situation. One business owner funded construction of a parklet by selling floor plaques on which names could be engraved to community members. The plaques had a free design, based on the buyer's wishes (Figure 13). The parklet designer recalled: "Someone wanted to put the name of their dog actually, instead of their own name, and then they stuck their dog's paw into the concrete." Adjustable furniture was perceived as important for the feeling of customisation once the place was in use. One designer explained the initial ideas of the design group: "This piece here, which was movable in this design [was] for people to have different types of engagement. [...] So if you want to sit by yourself, you can pull it out and sit somewhere. If you want to make a group setting, you can." A user at one of the parklets said: "I actually have my own way of sitting in the parklet, where I push one of the cushy chairs up against the slope and you can literally recline all the way, it is really like taking a nap if you needed to." These interactions with the built structures enabled community members to become empathetic insiders of the new public spaces in their areas.



Figure 13  
Example of physical marks of user interaction and place attachment; floor plaques created by the participants in a parklet on Judah Street (hosted by Trouble Coffee).

Initially, there were very few design guidelines for the parklets, which resulted in some of them looking much like outdoor seating to be used by business/café customers only. A project leader at the San Francisco Planning Department said about one of them: “It looks private. [...] They’ve actually been asking people to leave. [...] We now require them to use different furniture than they would have for outdoor café seating or inside the restaurant.” The business owners in this case felt ownership – existential insideness – regarding the space; they felt it was for them and their customers only. The city authority therefore eventually had to introduce more specific requirements: “We are requiring people [i.e. parklet applicants] to include some sort of public civic gesture, that would be permanent seating, and if permanent seating doesn’t work then bike racks. And they’ve got to have some sort of landscaping in them to feel more ‘parky’” (Figure 14).



### How was place attachment related to the use of the resulting place?

Once installed, the sidewalk extensions that the parklets constitute were used in many new ways (Figure 15). People spent more time on the sidewalk, lingering differently than before. As street benches are often lacking, many interviewees appreciated the seating opportunities in the new, non-commercial spaces. One user said: “It’s not a place where you have to buy a drink to stay there, you can just walk up to it like a park, any park, and you can sit down and enjoy it for what it is and for as long or as little as you want.”

Many parklets were used at night-time or during the closed period of the host business: “It was a Tuesday so they were closed. Still, people would get a burrito across the street and sit down on the parklet.” The sidewalk sometimes turned into a playground for climbing or drawing, as some host businesses provided canvases and paint, or chalk, for spontaneous creativity (Figure 16). A new user group – children – could thereby modify and put their mark on the place. One parklet architect, apparently comfortable with users inventing their own “rules” for the use of the built structures, and thus becoming insiders of the place, said in interview:

Figure 14  
Left: A rather private looking parklet  
and right: a more “parky” looking  
parklet.



“We wanted the concrete to have as few control joints as possible so it would be a canvas for children with chalk. [...] They also draw on the wood, but I can’t really control that – all I can do is create a framework, but that’s ok!” The architect in this case was clearly not an existential insider of the place, who would claim exclusive right to invent the rules for its use.



Figure 15  
Parklet on Valencia Street hosted by the Freewheeling Bike Shop, an example of a new kind of use of the sidewalk. The parklet creates a non-commercial space to stop and relax in for a while.

In the plazas and parklets featuring moveable seating, a common way to make alterations to the place-in-use was to rearrange chairs to better suit personal preferences (sun, shade, alone, in groups etc.). The users also discovered favourite spots unexpected to the architect or designer: “And the acute corner where it looks like your professor would tell you ‘What happens there?’ that’s the most popular seat! It works like a chaise longue.” Due to flexible design, or to design customised by empathetic insiders, various social groups often used the spaces side by side, and thus met or saw each other in a new way. This was particularly evident at the parklet on Noriega Street: “I am always the only Chinese person here, even though there are many in the area, but they go to other places. So I feel a bit different from the other guests here, but the atmosphere is friendly and the place feels open and inviting.” The architect of the place concluded: “The idea, from the big picture, was to use angles to create two different spaces; one that was open to the sidewalk and another that was a little more intimate and sort of closed-off. So then you could have two different groups of people potentially occupying the parklet at the same time. [...] And we’ve seen that too. There’ll be a group of African Americans who have just finished in church, and they’re having a coffee, and there’ll be a group of Asian folks who have just finished in a different church, sitting on a different section of the bench, and then there’ll be



Figure 16  
Parklet on 24<sup>th</sup> Street hosted by Just for Fun, where canvas and paints provide an opportunity for a new user group – children – to make changes to the sidewalk.

a group of parents in a different section, and then there'll be a group of, you know, surfers having beer." The architect was part of the local community – an insider – and could thus customise the design according to its needs.

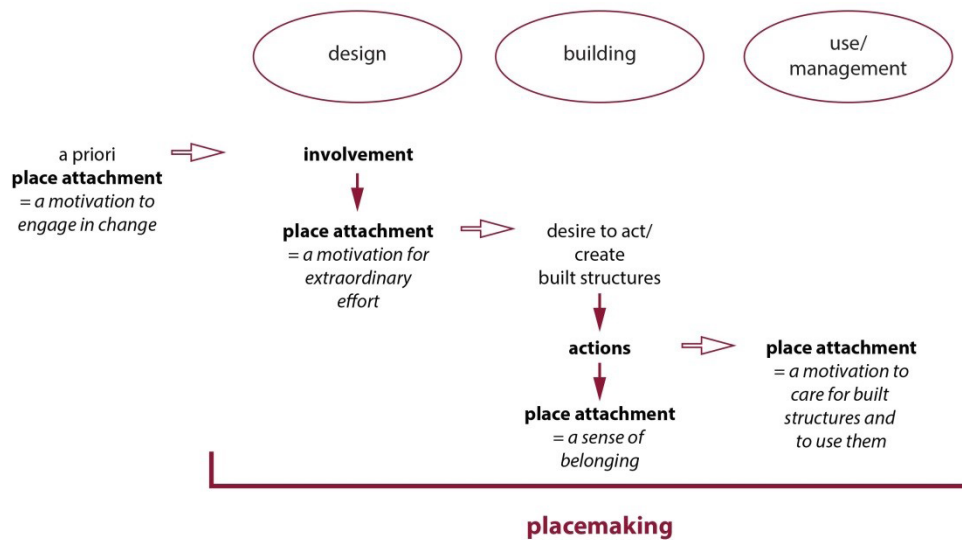
Some places united people in new ways. Business owners who had worked next door to each other for years, but never talked to each other, suddenly felt that they had a common interest to discuss once a parklet was built. Interactions with the built structures and adjustments/alterations to the places became nice surprises; according to one parklet user at the Luna Rienne Gallery, people would suddenly be doing things "right there on the sidewalk that you normally wouldn't catch yourself doing, like playing video games with strangers". Place attachment thus enabled spontaneous events to take place – events that appealed to

the empathetic insiders. In other places, place attachment resulted in a very particular use, with some citizen groups gaining exclusive access to the space. This happened, as described above, at Showplace Triangle Plaza, which became so popular with skateboarders that other users were scared off. The skateboarders became existential insiders of the place; their attachment and use turned into a sense of ownership which excluded others. Empathetic insiderness thus developed into existential insiderness, which was rather inhibiting for the public use of the space.

The case study approach adopted in this study proved to have some limitations. Participants from the community could only be reached by chance (as the initiators did not have their contact information). For the plaza processes, no participants at all were encountered. Some of the current plaza users saw the places being built or altered, but none of them was part of the creation process or saw any signs during the construction explaining what was going on. The data obtained made it difficult to point out specific phase(s) of the placemaking process that were more decisive for the growth of place attachment than others. However, the empirical material did reveal that place attachment could arise during any of the phases in the process. It also revealed various ways in which place attachment related to the materiality and use of the places; extra detail and care in the design and building of the valued places could be seen. The dynamic also worked the other way round; places which were carefully designed and built and/or could be customised during use generated a sense of place attachment among their users. Very little damage had been noticed by the parklet hosts.

## Discussion

This case study on the Pavement to Parks programme in San Francisco showed that place attachment can be either a reason for users to get actively involved, or a result of their engagement in the creation process and/or of their use of the place (see Figure 17). All four of Carmona's place-shaping phases are thus decisive for placemaking, and for the experience of place attachment. An individual can enter the placemaking process in any of the phases, and still experience emotional bonds and empathetic (or existential) insiderness. The place component in Scannell and Gifford's place attachment model appears to be related to the place creation process, and to the materiality and use of the resulting places. Additional research on these parameters could further advance place attachment theory and make architects and urban designers more familiar with the concept.



The character of the places generating place attachment is inclusive and inviting, they show detail and care in their design and/or they can be customised during use and management. If empathetic insiders are involved in the placemaking process, the resulting place is likely to introduce a new scale and level of variation to the streetscape. Places that are designed according to the needs of the users or that can be customised during use are valued and cared for. Placemaking hence creates places generating, and places generated by, place attachment. Stepwise development makes it possible to add, alter or remove designs and guidelines as a project proceeds. In San Francisco, a first version of the plazas was set up very quickly (one of them in as little as 72 hours), using simple materials and temporary designs. This first test phase showed if, and how, people used the place and if there were other requirements that needed to be fulfilled. An iterative design process can help balance different public interests, as in the case of Showplace Triangle Plaza. This has practical implications for professional placemakers. New working methods, and a humble and collaborative attitude, need to be developed in order to invite a larger group of individuals into the placemaking process. Proceeding with a design step-by-step, creating mock-ups and building together with future users and making observations on the place in use between iterations provides fertile ground for place attachment.

The case study showed that temporary projects are not always participatory in a conventional sense (with a public call for participation), but could be regarded as participatory in the sense that they are developed directly by the public for the public. Ensuring that place attachment does not develop into exclusion is an important role for the city authority in placemaking processes in public space. As existential insiderness may result in the exclusion of others, it appears to be empathetic inside-

Figure 17  
Theoretical implications of the finding of this study. All phases of the placemaking process can contribute to place attachment. An individual can enter the process in any of the phases and still experience emotional bonds and insiderness.

ness that is most fruitful when developing public space. On that level, users identify with and care for a place, but do not exclude others from doing so (Relph, 1976, p.54-55). This is a delicate balance that needs to be safeguarded in order for public space to remain public.

### Concluding reflections

Place attachment and “true” placemaking are closely related to the feeling of place insiderness and arise through the interplay of emotions and actions performed at certain places. Professional placemakers most commonly relate to a place as either objective outsiders or behavioural insiders, but might experience emotional bonds and thus become empathetic insiders during some projects. As personal preferences or experiences tend to determine place relations, place attachment can contribute to, or detract from, the public dimension of a place. Professional placemakers thus need to be aware of place attachments, their own and those of others, when developing public places. Detail and variation regarding materiality and use seem to increase with the level of user involvement and emotional bonds. If they were more well-known to architects and urban designers, place attachment and placemaking could enrich the discourse on public space and appropriation, and provide a path to vivid urban landscapes.

### Acknowledgements

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