

Placemaking in Nairobi

What are the socio-spatial movements to improve public space that have emerged?

This inventory study used a qualitative research method to answer the formulated research questions. First of all we identified 17 Placemaking initiatives in different areas of the city. There are more of those initiatives in Nairobi, but we have chosen to study the most clear examples of projects that aim for solving environmental and economical problems in collaboration with communities in public spaces. We studied these initiatives by interviewing citizens, civil servants, professionals and students in the field of Anthropology, Urban Design and Planning, Architecture and Journalism and by doing online research. For this research semi-structured interviews with the leader of the selected socio-spatial initiatives, observing spaces and online research are used. The data was collected during 1 to 3 fieldwork exercises per initiative in the last 7 months, most of the data is collected by Urban design and development and Urban and regional planning students from the Technical University of Kenya the last 2 months. This inventory is part of the international professional knowledge exchange organised by Placemakers, the International New town institute, Urbego (International Federation of Housing and Planning) and the University of Nairobi and Technical University of Kenya that is taking place from September 2014 to September 2015. During this project we will research local Placemaking initiatives, connect them and develop strategies to improve them in co-creation.

*'At its most basic, the practice [of Placemaking, red.] aims to improve the quality of a public place and the lives of its community in tandem. Put into practice, Placemaking seeks to build or improve public space, spark public discourse, create beauty and delight, engender civic pride, connect neighborhoods, support community health and safety, grow social justice, catalyze economic development, promote environmental sustainability, and of course nurture an authentic "sense of place."*¹

¹ Massachusetts Institute of Technology - Department of Urban Studies and planning, 2013

² "Places in the Making: how Placemaking builds places and communities" p.2,3



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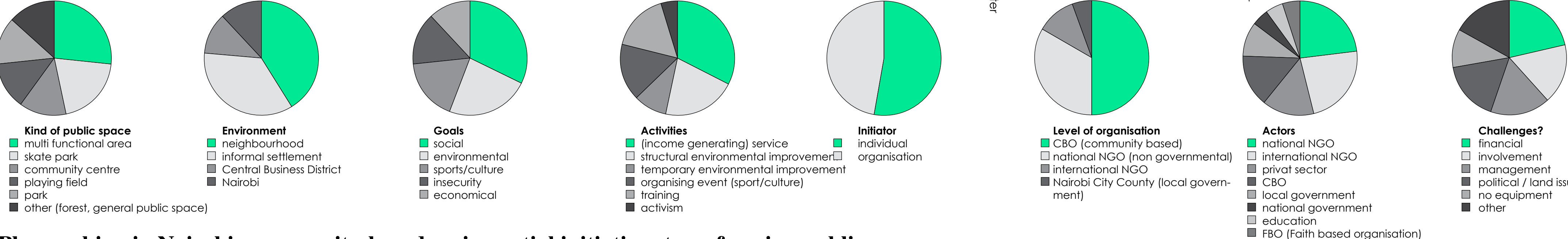
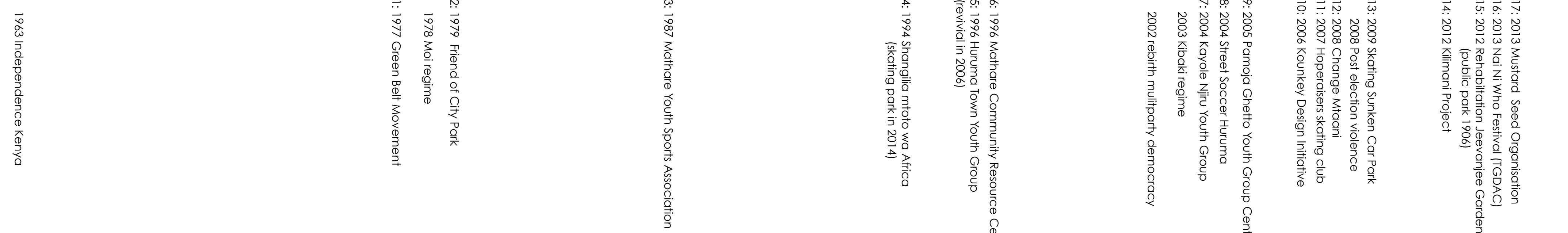
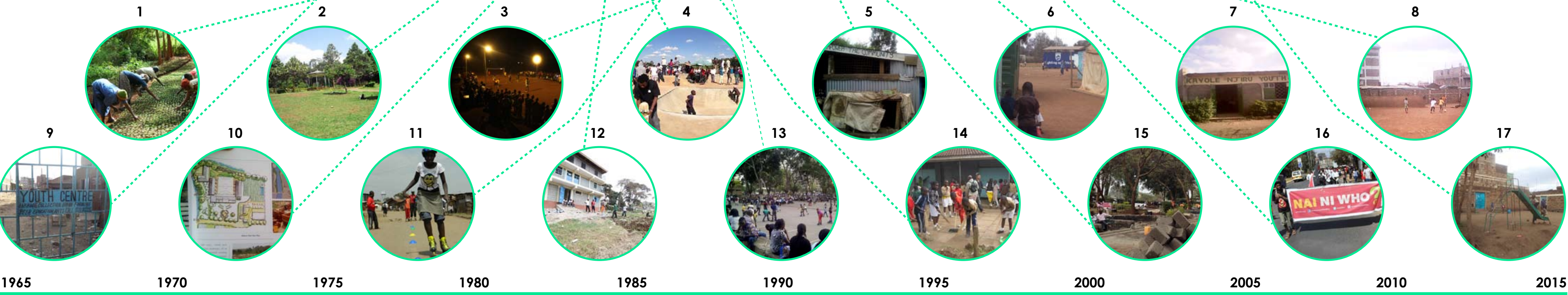


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Placemaking in Nairobi: community-based socio-spatial initiatives transforming public space

Which Placemaking initiatives have emerged in Nairobi and why? How did they emerge and by whom?

Nairobi, Kenya's capital, is a fast growing city. Rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation means public open spaces that were intended to serve a population of 250,000 now serve over 3 million people. Public open spaces in the city suffer from degradation, overcrowding and insecurity, thus denying city residents access to the much-needed recreation and leisure facilities. The lack of adequate public spaces reflects the stark social divisions across the city and reinforces them. Nairobians rarely come into contact with people from different socio-economic groups, there is little upward mobility for people in poor neighbourhoods. Jan Gehl argues that modern cities repel human interaction. Instead, we should build cities in a way, which takes human needs for inclusion and intimacy into account (2012). In Nairobi participation in development of successful public spaces is already taking place by different organisations and citizens. This projects have adopted a community-based co-creation approach to revitalise public space with local knowledge, ideas and assets, called Placemaking. In this inventory

Placemakers identified and investigated the Placemaking initiatives that have emerged, how they shape the city and how knowledge is being co-produced. The initiatives emerged to solve social, environmental and economical challenges in different parts of the city: the Central Business District (CBD), (dense) neighbourhoods and informal settlements. The public places in which they have emerged range from multi functional areas, sport parks and playing fields to community centres, parks, forests and semi-public spaces like communal court yards. The government barely has the capacity to take responsibility for socio-spatial upgrading. Due to the urgent need for sustainable and inclusive development in this fast growing city, the gap in this field of Placemaking is often filled by social entrepreneurs, community based organisations (CBO's) and nongovernmental organisations (NGO's). Passion for improving living circumstances seem to highly motivate individuals and/or organisations to set up Placemaking initiatives. A good example is the late Prof. Wangari Maathai, a Nobel Laureate who was central in the rehabilitation of Karura forest. She planted trees with communities to create green space. She created awareness about the relationship between human activity and the health

of the environment. Apart from her, there are other less known individuals, like Mr. Gitau, started the Mathare Community Resource centre to help his community after experiencing the consequences of drug addiction while living in the informal settlement. Apart from individual initiators and organically developed places, many national and international NGO's try to set up socio-spatial projects on a professional and bigger scale, like the Shangilia skate park at Kangemi, a low income settlement area West of Nairobi. Placemaking initiatives involve several actors to reach their goals, empowering people and creating better and healthier living environments. Starting from a strong local network, the initiators involve actors from national and international level. They involve the government, NGO's, the academia, private sector and religious organisations with different expertise and roles and for funding their projects. The local government is often involved, since 2012, the responsibility for spatial development of Nairobi was transferred to the Nairobi City County government. There are also Placemaking projects initiated by the urban planning department of the Nairobi City County. This received a major boost after the draft National Urban Development Policy of 2012 reinforced the need for public participation in matters

of public interest. The Nairobi City County recently launched the NIUPlan, the Masterplan of Nairobi which includes the rehabilitation of 60 public spaces.

How do Placemaking initiatives shape the city? To what extent have they contributed to greater social and economic justice?

Nairobi is the second fastest growing city in Africa, but it can hardly handle it's own growth. The extreme growth of Nairobi is shifting the balance between rich and poor in an extreme way. Placemaking aims at liveable, inclusive and prosperous cities by creating public spaces with communities. Due to the interconnected nature of the challenges the socio-spatial movements are attempting to solve, they carry out a range of activities with various initiatives. The Huruma Town Group collects garbage with youth groups to clean the environment and generate income for the youth. And the street soccer at Huruma attracts young homeless people to play soccer together on a public play field and helps them with education, fighting drug and encourage them to shun crime. Those interactive places create pride and identity. They become incubators in the neighbourhood and social encounter is enhanced, places become more vibrant,

healthier and safer. Although the effects of the bottom-up Placemaking interventions in Nairobi are small, working mainly on community level, they all together upgrade the quality of life for many citizens. When there is a lack of basic needs in a community, improvement that fulfils those needs create positive impact. In some projects short term inequality is enhanced by upgrading fenced court yards and sport clubs. In the end this places inspire other communities to improve their own living environments. Placemaking initiatives also create awareness that urban problems can be solved together and that residents need inclusive, intimate public spaces to share ideas, to play and to meet each other. Placemaking initiatives are facing challenges, because of the complex environment in which they operate with many stakeholders. Funding problems, political barriers, land ownership, management problems, engagement and a lack of tools are the main challenges and most of them are interconnected. Initiators experience difficulties in bringing the projects a step further to create more impact. This is because of the different interest groups involved. Partnering creates more impact because working in co-creation means more funding, expertise and a sense of confidence. However, it

also causes political and management issues. Bigger organisations who are not familiar with the local context and the community, have difficulties to creating ownership within the community for their idea and project. Moreover, citizens are not used to be involved or active in their own environment. As a result, the sense of ownership and responsibility for their environment isn't strong. This is partly attributed to their attachment to their other homes in the countryside. This creates a gap explored by individuals whose interest finds expression in the grabbing of public land. An example of a successful and growing initiative is Kounkey Design Initiative, which sets up small scale community projects in Kibera, a dense informal settlement. The initiative created public space next to the Nairobi Dam. They look for the needs of the community, including sanitation facilities, children day care, community centres and agriculture places and try to solve them in a process of co-creation. They created an attractive public space and experienced success. Unfortunately a member of local parliament wanted to benefit from this success and build a house on the reclaimed public space. Their mission is now to create several human scale projects in Kibera and connect them with each other,

in order to keep local quality and avoid the interference of organisations with other interests.

How is knowledge being produced or co-produced through Placemaking initiatives? What kind of knowledge is being spread and how?

Many projects are started by often well-educated local visionaries. Ideas for transformation starts with brainstorming among other peers. They are also inspired by other local projects, work together on occasion and learn from projects seen on social media, websites or television. Moreover, Placemakers sees a lot of 'learning by doing' in most of the initiatives. The growing initiatives are becoming formal organisations and they share knowledge from their experiences with other groups and they attract other NGO's to share expertise with. The knowledge spread is normally local, comprising of good practices in reclaiming the environment life skills, art and sports. (Inter)national NGO's who started community projects brought in their expertise. For example on skating and architecture. Their knowledge is spread among peers, but there is no official

network. These Placemaking initiatives reach their target groups mainly through word of mouth and meetings. Moreover, they organise competitions, festivals and events both for leisure and to engage more and more people. More than half of the projects actively run websites and almost every initiative runs a Facebook page. The number of 'likes' vary, with most of them under 1000 likes, four of the initiatives over 2000 with the Green Belt Movement leading with 20,682 likes.

Recommendations

These initiatives have helped reduce incidences of crime among the young people, helped in talent development, improved public spaces and helped change perception of previously infamous locations. Actors in Placemaking initiatives need to learn how to do more and better projects to create even more impact, without losing the local qualities. Therefore, it is critically important to not only share more experience and knowledge about Placemaking among the initiatives but to also create a platform to combine efforts in dealing with local problems and as a way of engaging more people and spreading more awareness on how to create more liveable public spaces.

Successful examples of Placemaking in different parts of the city

