



Reflection

With the main research question of this thesis being: *Which different perspectives of participatory placemaking exist in the scientific literature of developed economic regions regarding interventions in public spaces to reach social goals in neighbourhoods?* And the research method applied being a semi-systematic literature review supplemented by a focus group to verify the results from the literature review. The approach chosen for this research seems to be working. To answer a question which is about clarifying different concepts of placemaking in use in academic literature, a very theoretical research method was necessary. The 'how' of this research is the combination of research methods of semi-systematic literature review and focus group. And the 'why' is to systematically analyse the literature about placemaking to be able to clearly define frequently occurring placemaking concepts in the literature and reduce the confusion and miscommunication that often occur when actors use concepts like placemaking.

Through the literature review, eight preliminary placemaking concepts have been identified and how each of them scores for all of the placemaking differentiators. By validating these initial results through a focus group, consisting of actors from practice, the end result which is used to answer the main-research question is not purely based on the academic material from the first part of the research, but also has a connection with how placemaking concepts are used in practice.

Feedback given by my mentors included: to substantiate the formulation of the placemaking differentiators through a clear connection with the exploratory literature research; a detailed methodology for the validation method based on qualitative research methodology literature; careful attention to focus group participant selection; and inclusion of actor perspectives towards placemaking.

The process of improving the argumentation of the placemaking differentiators set off a light bulb to create the differentiator scoring system. This would smoothen the analysis stage of the literature review because there was a clear, pre-defined, scoring system to be used for quantifying different aspects of placemaking concepts encountered in the literature.

The validation method to be used for this research has been elaborated upon, the qualitative research method of using a focus group to provide feedback on the preliminary research results has been chosen because it enables focus group participants to react to the research results and also react to each other. This way not only providing insight into how actors react to the results, but also to each other reactions, which can provide interesting insight into possible clashes or understandings between actors towards their perceived meanings of placemaking concepts.

This brings us to the next feedback point, focus group participant selection. Before approaching possible participants, selection criteria had been created to ensure a varied focus group panel representative of actors who come into contact with placemaking concepts. See section 3.4.1. Participant Selection, for these selection criteria. However, after multiple rounds of sending out invitations, only five accepted the invitation to join the focus group. Leading to a focus group panel that does not fully cover all the selection criteria. Maybe this could have been prevented by inviting possible participants already at an earlier moment and/or enlarging the scope of possible actors to invite.

During the analysis stage of the semi-systematic literature review, an attempt has been made to identify specific actor perspectives. However, actor perspectives towards placemaking concepts were

not often mentioned in the studied material. Therefore, no such conclusions can yet be made at this point of the research. However, the validation of the preliminary research results to the focus group can still provide this aspect.

During the process of this thesis, I have learned to break up the process into small pieces in order to keep a clear focus on what needs to happen next and not to get lost in the process and everything that could possibly go wrong. Also, possible insecurities I have felt about aspects of my research process often were alleviated by first taking a step back and refocusing or first working on another aspect of the research which eventually also solved the initial problem. Of course, as stated above, for a possible future focus group, or something similar, it would be better if I started inviting participants earlier on, to increase the chances of a higher attendance and better coverage of the selection criteria.

For the final part of this reflection, I will answer the following seven questions, of which I have developed the last two questions myself so they relate to the content of my work:

1. What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

This thesis is part of the master track MBE, and its topic is related to urban development management, a chair within MBE. Through this research an attempt is made to clarify (different) meanings and goals actors attach to the concept of participatory placemaking in public spaces for improving social cohesion.

The master track MBE is part of the master programme MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences programme at the TU Delft, which encompasses everything related to the built environment, from the macro scale to the micro scale. This thesis fits within this master programme, because it researches the terminology in use by academics and actors involved in projects on the urban/neighbourhood level.

2. How did your research method influence your research outcomes?

With my research mainly consisting of a semi-systematic literature review and its results supplemented by validation through a focus group, the end results of this thesis mostly reflect the different concepts of placemaking that occur in the literature studied. This is in line with the main goals of this thesis, with the goal being to map frequently occurring placemaking concepts and their characteristics used in scientific literature. The application of different research methods would likely have resulted in different outcomes, for example, by using a case study method and/or in-depth interviews with experts to identify placemaking concepts, the results would probably better represent the usage of placemaking in practice.

The scope chosen for this research has likely also influenced the research outcomes. This research was limited to placemaking of public spaces (albeit a very broad definition of public spaces) and social goals that are aimed to be reached through placemaking. By broadening this scope, to also include other types of urban revitalisation and/or placemaking of housing, the outcomes of this research would have been more general. While narrowing the scope, like only taking placemaking into account when it takes place in a park, would have provided a more specific answer to the placemaking concepts in use in relation to placemaking in parks. However, this would not result in a clearer understanding of all the different concepts of placemaking in use with regard to all types of public spaces.

The search strategy used to collect all the material to be analysed during the semi-systematic literature review also has an effect on the research outcomes. A differently defined search strategy would probably have led to more/less/other material to be analysed. For example, in this search strategy, only material from developed economic regions was studied. Resulting in the research outcomes being more representative of placemaking concepts in those regions. No differentiation between the country of origin of the material would have resulted in the research outcomes to have been more globally representative.

3. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

I think my way of working was quite methodical and structured, but specifically for a semi-structured literature review even more structure would have been better. Because I was learning along the way how to conduct a semi-structured literature review the process could probably be more consistent, but

when discovering a (slightly) better approach along the way I also did not want to ignore it. For example, during the analysis stage of the literature review, I did not use descriptive codes right from the start with the first article studied. After a few articles I realised many descriptive codes were missing, so I added codes along the way when necessary. I did at the end go back to the earlier articles and added the descriptive codes when applicable, but maybe I would have done this differently if I had consistently done this from the start.

Next to that, because this research is of a qualitative nature, the quality of the end result would have benefitted from having more than one pair of eyes analysing all the material. Every single person would probably analyse this material slightly differently, but if more than one person would perform the analysis, personal biases could be filtered out. I also struggled with contacting actors to participate in my focus group. For a long time not feeling ready to invite people, because I was afraid my research would be lacking. In the end, this might have resulted in a somewhat small-sized focus group, earlier participant contacting might have prevented this.

4. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

The results from my thesis, my placemaking guidelines for variants of placemaking concepts in use, will hopefully help actors who come into contact with placemaking to be better prepared for what they and other actors expect when it comes to placemaking. This way reducing the chances of wrong expectations to occur. It will mainly be applicable to actors in the Netherlands because the focus group that has verified the preliminary results consists only of Dutch participants. And to a slightly lesser extent, it will be applicable to actors in developed economic regions, because all the literature studied was related to these regions. This does however mean that results from this study are not applicable to placemaking projects from regions that were not included in the research scope.

Because this research mainly consists of a literature review, with the only input from practice coming from the focus group as a validation step at the end of the research process, the results are largely based on the scientific view towards placemaking. The research results are therefore not very applicable for placemaking projects in practice. So, I think more in-depth follow-up research into placemaking, especially case-study research instead of only literature research, will be necessary to make this research have greater academic and societal value.

5. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

An attempt was made to make the process of this research as transparent and followable as possible. However, it was hard to find the right balance between the report being concise but also having every decision made during the research explained in detail. At least the search strategy for the data collection (subsection 3.3.1), the filtering process of all the articles/books (Figure 3.6), the reference list of articles/books used during the analysis and synthesis stage (Appendix B), ATLAS.ti codes used (Figure 3.8), the selection criteria for the focus group participants (Table 3.6), the script for the focus group (Appendix D), the focus group transcript (Appendix E) can be found in the report or the appendix. The specific list of documents filtered out during the filtering process and all the quotes and codes applied in ATLAS.ti could also be made available. This way an attempt is made to make it as easy as possible for others to make judgements for themselves if the research results from this thesis are transferable enough for their application.

6. How did setting up and carrying out the focus group influence my research and my own perspective towards my research?

The preparation of the focus group, like inviting participants and sketching out what I wanted to get out of the focus group, on the one hand sometimes distracted me too much from working productively on my research, but it also helped me in fine-tuning my research. Because it was necessary to have my thoughts about the research written out clearly to be able to set up the focus group, in the end, it also helped progress my research overall.

During the focus group itself, talking with experts in the field of placemaking helped me get a better perspective of what practitioners thought about placemaking, and it was also nice to recognise things I had read about placemaking in the literature during the focus group. It was especially nice to have the participants react to each other when they agreed or disagreed with each other on certain topics, something which would not have happened if I had conducted separate interviews with them instead.

Listening back to the recording of the focus group made me realise again that even for actors who have worked with placemaking in their professional lives, it is still sometimes vague and unclear term, causing confusion. Something I also stumbled upon at the beginning of my thesis when defining my research plan around placemaking. Which in the end led to the main goal of my thesis being to attempt to clear up the definition(s) of placemaking. Therefore, it was nice to get extra confirmation from the focus group participants that this is a real problem they encounter, and that they see the usefulness of my research topic.

7. How did the pre-defined research plan affect the research itself, was it possible to follow the plan or was there a need to deviate from it?

While I found it difficult to come up with a research plan that I thought was doable, once I had made it, I found it fairly easy to follow it. Overall, I did not really deviate from my research plan. However, I had made some errors in my estimations of how long certain parts of my research plan would take, with most of the time requiring more time than I had initially planned for it. Like the filtering of all the collected articles and books, analysing them, and reformatting the ATLAS.ti codes into easily understandable visualisations. And while overall I followed my research plan quite linearly, at some moments it was more of an iterative process. For example, during the semi-systematic literature, when analysing the articles in more detail I realised with a few articles that they were actually not talking about placemaking at all, and therefore, these articles needed to be removed from the list of material that was to be analysed, while this actually should already have happened for all the material during the filtering phase. Also, while already going through the filtering phase of the literature review, I got the feedback to better substantiate my placemaking differentiators. Preferably I would already have finished this before starting with the literature review. However, by reflecting upon my placemaking differentiators and improving their substantiation, I also created the scoring system for the placemaking differentiators. Something which would, later on, simplify the analysis and synthesis stage of the literature review by making it easier to code everything related to placemaking consistently. So, while I did not always stick to my research plan, I tried to use it as a guideline to keep myself on track, and when needed I deviated from it.