HOW TO ORGANISE A PLACE GAME
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If you want to improve the sense of place in an area you work on, create a higher sense of involvement in the local community using a simple, flexible, and effective tool, we offer a solution - the place game!

A place game will not only ignite a robust source of creative ideas, it will also mobilise agency, build social capital, and catalyse economic feedbacks into the community. The beauty of the place game is its power to bring all types of stakeholders together who are all actively seeking to instill positive change into the place. Together, you are able to identify what is working in a public space, and conversely, identify those aspects that could be improved upon, based on observations of how people are, or are not, using the space.

You don’t have to be an urban planner, academic, or expert. You simply need to be involved in the place and be able to analyse how this place makes you feel. Therefore, a place game gives all types of participants -local residents, planners and developers- an easy tool to identify the assets and shortcomings of the public space they use every day. Most importantly, a place game is a joyful and collaborative activity, in which the community at large gets to interact with each other and really see how their space can be improved.

“The unique thing - and best part- about a place game is that anyone can use it.”

With this step-by-step manual, we hope to give you a head start in organising your very own place game, and enable agency to improve places in the city together with your local community in an enjoyable way.

The place game is not only about finding ways to give a place a short-term boost, for example by organising a one-time event. It is a fusion of short term action towards long term strategy planning for the place. Its goal is to see the potential of a space and finding ways to make the place a more enjoyable and welcoming environment in its everyday usage. This is about elevating a place to its full capacity working inclusively for everyone. With the place game, the participants are challenged to dream about the long term and combine this with short term, ‘quicker lighter cheaper’ actions to get started quickly.
WHAT TO LOOK FOR DURING A PLACE GAME?

During the place game, it is important to look further than the built environment. Good public space primarily is about things to do, not things to see. Therefore, the emphasis lies on the usage of the space. Based on the plan for the activities, more attention can be paid to the design and the atmosphere that comes with that design: is there a sterile environment, or a warm, informal and intimate one? Does the place invite to sit, stay, and relax? (For a better understanding of the criteria for good places and hardware-software-orgware, we refer to the City At Eye Level criteria as background material to this manual).

WHEN TO ORGANISE A PLACE GAME?

Place Game organisers should realise that organising a place game is a tool that has to be embedded in a long term process. It can be the kick-start of a new process, or an event to come up with possible improvements while there are already planned actions to bring new life to that space. In all cases, the intention for 'real change' needs to be there. You may want to spend time beforehand to raise the first budgets for implementation, and to get the authorities ready to say 'yes' to new initiatives quickly. Otherwise, the place game will only create expectations which you can not live up to.
BACKGROUND

The place game was created by Project for Public Spaces (PPS). They made an overview of all the factors influencing the quality of a space, as is seen to the right. The outer ring accounts for the measurable characteristics of a public space, while the middle ring details intuitive values supporting the place. Eventually, these two concepts, values, and characteristics, are linked via key aspects of a good place: a place that scores high on sociability, uses & activities, access & linkages and comfort & image.

During a place game, participants learn to look at how these different components work together and incorporate all these factors in the evaluation of their place in an approachable way. While the measurables may be collected before and after the place game, during it, the participants are invited to focus on the intuitive values.
STEP 1-3 GETTING READY

1.1 SELECT A SITE

The first step of organising a place game is selecting a site. This can be a square or plaza, a park, a waterfront, a campus, a vacant area, a street block, a street; and ‘space’ that should be turned into a ‘place’ for people. The place can be underused, well used or overcrowded.

- In underused places, ask yourself: how can we start to bring life back?
- In (fairly) well used places: how can we get from adequate to extraordinary?
- In overcrowded places: how can we create places of rest?
- In all places: how can we create a bigger diversity of use?

In each case, the place game will proof to be a useful tool in order to determine what components work in a place, and which components don’t. In general: follow the energy, don’t do a place game if there is nobody wanting to invest in any way in the place, then spend your time and attention on other places where there already is some energy to get started.

1.2 OBSERVE THE SITE

Before you let participants execute the place game, you should first get to know the place yourself. Walk around, see what people do. Observe the place on different times of the day, different days of the week, and maybe even different seasons. This way, you will be able to manage the place game well and know best where the opportunities for improvements are. Talk with people using the place to get a better understanding of what is going on and who should be involved.
STEP 1-3 GETTING READY

1.3 SELECT SUB-PLACES

A space turns into a place if there are many multiple things to do, and if the area has several smaller and intimate destinations in it. We never speak about ‘the park’, but split the area up into smaller sub-places. A square could for instance have up to 10 of these sub-places, that could each develop 10 things to do. The square would then have 10x10=100 things to do, which will lead to multiple during different times of the day, and interaction between different user groups. Therefore, before the place game, select the most relevant sub-places of the area which will give a nice overview of the negative and positive aspects of the area as a whole. Make a map that you can present at the beginning of the place game. And keep in mind that the place game may very well change the sub-places selected. As you get a deeper understanding of the place, your understanding in the sub-places will also evolve.

1.4 SELECT A CENTRAL VENUE

It is important to have a central and big enough venue where participants can gather. The venue should have a maximum of 10 minutes walking distance from the selected site, and has to be suitable for facilitating an event for your group size. It should have an informal atmosphere. At the venue, the initiators can give a small introduction about the place game and its goals before everyone heads off to their selected place. After everyone is done evaluating, the venue offers a nice spot where all the new ideas and insights can be discussed, while enjoying some music, snacks and drinks.
STEP 1-3 GETTING READY

2.1 IDENTIFY PARTICIPANTS

Make sure to invite a varied group of participants: (informal) representatives of the different groups within the local community should definitely be part of the place game, but also people with a background in urban planning and people working at the municipality could make a big contribution to your place game.

“Involved local partners are essential in providing background information, explaining the dynamics of the public space and its surrounding area.”

Try to aim for people who want to contribute or do something, not people who only want to talk. Try to get a mix of locals, experts, shop owners, employees, artists, the people maintaining the place. People with a long term view, people with a focus on the now.

When it comes to people from the local community, be inclusive, and be aware that some groups may need more effort to become involved, a personal invitation, a talk beforehand. Think of small children, elderly, people with physical restrictions, people with less experience at participating in workshops, people who may have difficulty understanding the language. Always think of who is still missing in the networks that you have opened up.

Most of the times, the place game itself takes place after a process of already meeting and talking with a great deal of people, walking in the place beforehand, one on one talks to prepare, and to open up the right networks. Placemaking is a process of co-creation that needs to be built up.

Doing so, be open and curious in your questions: ‘we are merely the tools, the community is the expert’. Once you have had 8 to 10 one on one conversations, you will start to get a better understanding of the issues and challenges, and the networks that should be involved. The people you speak with are often much better at inviting the proper networks than you yourself.

Make a good considered choice in who to invite and who not to invite. Ideally, the place game is done with a group of around 40-50 people, however it can also be done with a much smaller total group size.

Subsequently, think of inviting ‘zealous nuts’: ‘visionaries with a poorly developed sense of fear and no concept of the odds against them’. People like these, with intensively creative minds, could bring ideas to your place game that no one ever thought off. It is this kind of outside-the-box-thinking you are looking for.
2.2 SENDING INVITATIONS

Now that you have identified participants, it is time to invite them. Ideally this is done via e-mail, so participants can easily let you know they will be present; but again, be aware of the groups you may not reach this way at the same time. We recommend sending an invitation 2-3 weeks before the event, and another reminder 1 week before the event. Walking around in the place beforehand, of course the best way is to personally invite people. You may also want to use a flyer to hand out. Make sure you speak enthusiastic in the invitation! Keep it accessible for everyone, and carefully avoid using any jargon. Give a little bit of background of the area and the place game and tell participants about the duration, the location & the free snacks and drinks.

Finally, make it clear that recipients will let you know they will participate. Use a ‘Sign Up!’ button in your invitation. Using a hyperlink, you can connect the Sign Up!/RSVP button to a google form collecting the respondent’s name, email, and confirmation of attendance.

Dear residents, developers, civil servants and other stakeholders,

**We invite you to the BLANK Place Game!**

We heartily invite you to join us on the 3rd of October. We will provide free snacks & drinks. We are looking forward to exploring improvements and cultivating civic involvement together!

**Why this invitation?**

On the 3rd of October, we will host an event in order to make the Museumplein a more attractive place for everyone! During the event, we will map short-term opportunities, difficult obstacles and potential actions regarding the further development of Museumplein.

**From public square to public place to be!**

The Museumplein is one of the most vibrant squares of the Netherlands. Together with you, we will investigate how this square can become even more dynamic and diverse.

Snacks & Drinks will be provided!

- **October 3, 2019**
- **18:00 - 22:00**
- **Café Museumplein**
3. SET UP A SURVEY

During the place game, participants will be asked to fill in a survey regarding perceptions regarding four areas of the site;

- the access and linkages
- comfort and image
- uses and activities,
- sociability

The questions will be multiple choice, as well as open. PPS has made an approachable survey which can be used as an example and can be found among our downloadables.

It is important to note that the Place Game is one of the many tools usable to evaluate places. There are other tools, such as Jane’s Walks, Dot Boards, Measurables, Co-creation Interviews, Photo Reports and Street Profiles that are very relevant and can be used BEFORE launching a place game in order to get an even broader overview and idea of everything that goes on in a specific public space. You can find downloads for tools at the end of this manual, and on the websites referred to.
4. PRESENTATION

Welcome everyone at the central venue and strengthen enthusiasm by showing a brief presentation of the space, where the place game will take place, and examples of great public spaces! Talk about the site’s history, about its shortcomings and, importantly, about its potential. Of course, when possible invite others with more expert knowledge from the network to share their insights. Use inspirations from great places all over the world, places with similar challenges elsewhere, and from where others have come up with solutions. Make the presentation very visual, and about the intuitive feeling of the place, the intention is to communicate efficiently the impact a place has on our lives—mood, sociability, safety, behaviour, and well-being. Make people feel the value of placemaking, but avoid any jargon at all time, keep the presentation accessible to everyone. It is always advantageous if you or someone else can speak from your own experiences. Then give specifications about the place game: set up a time-frame and make clear what is expected of everyone. Let participants introduce themselves for about 10 seconds each.

The presentation can turn out to be a nice way to activate participants’ thoughts before they actually go out to ‘the field’. Moreover, it is important to set the tone of the place game: it has to be informal, suitable for open discussions, and there has to be no hierarchy whatsoever among participants.

You can find a recommended timeframe regarding all the components of the place game on the next page of this manual.
STEP 4-7 EXECUTE THE PLACE GAME

5. SPLIT INTO SMALLER GROUPS

Hand out the Place Evaluation Form developed by Project for Public Spaces (don’t forget pens!) to everyone participating and split into smaller groups with 4 or 5 each. It is important to create diverse groups in order to spark inventive and novel discussions and solutions - assign group numbers to everyone making sure people sitting together who already know each other are spread over different groups. Remind them to be back in an hour or so, this way there will be enough time left to discuss all the new insights. Most importantly - remember to have fun! Do your best to keep everyone enthusiastic, and remember the place game is a great interactive way to improve your urban space in a positive way!

TIMEFRAME WHEN PLACE GAME STARTS AT 18:00

18:00 welcome – intro (people introduce themselves 1 minute each, name, organisation, maybe a statement on the place)

18:15 Introduction placemaking and the placemake method, feed with examples and inspiration from elsewhere

18:45 Split up in groups, go outside, do analyses

19:30 Come up with plan: short term, long term, partners, investors.

20:30 Present plan

21:30- 22:00 Discuss next steps and conclusions
6. START WITH THE SURVEY

Start with walking around the area, observe what it is like, what people do, and then evaluate it using the multiple choice questions on the survey in the Place Evaluation Form.

It is important to answer the multiple choice questions individually first, as it is common for participants to be influenced by one another. Invite participants to use their intuition and fill out the Place Evaluation Form within the first 20 minutes of the visit! The Place Evaluation Form focuses on the inner ring: the intuitive values of the place. The outer ring shows the measurables. These can be mapped and defined at an alternative time separate from the place game.

The survey’s questions vary greatly, and cover topics related to the place regarding the safety, sociability, and uses and activities. Think of the reason why you are seeing what you are seeing: it can, for example, be found that there are not many people sitting down. Perhaps this is due to the fact that a certain space doesn’t facilitate enough seating, or instead be caused from the perception’s attached to the place itself.

Moreover, if the space isn’t appealing to sit down in the first place or holds an unwelcoming image, passersby are likely to keep walking.

Notably, observations can be heavily influenced by the time and season of the year. Later at night, you won’t see many children, and on a summer’s day, it is common to see more people in general. Take these factors into account while analysing the public space.

7. OPEN QUESTIONS

The second part of the place game asks more detailed questions, and asks participants to interview a stranger, one or two users in the space, a shop owner, etc about their opinion in the space, and what they might do to improve it.

The PPS form is the basis of your place game. However we recommend to not just leave it there - we encourage you to add other questions as well. For example, ‘€5000-question’: ‘What would you do if you had €5000 to improve this neighbourhood?’, and the ‘sustainability question’: ‘How do we make sure that ideas for improvement now are not neglected in the future?’.

Another specific question to pay attention to is the last one about potential local partnerships. It is very important to be precise about these partners, so please make sure participants are not vague with answers like ‘the municipality’ or ‘entrepreneurs’. Lastly, encourage participants to take photos (!) to back up their findings!

Ask all participants to take photographs of their observations!
STEP 8-9: DETERMINING AND IMPLEMENTING POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS

8. WRITE DOWN SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Come together again and let all the groups write down their findings organised into four different keypoints:
- A brief overview of the place they analysed
- Short term improvements (between now and three months)
- Long term improvements (three years or more)
- Potential partners to put these ideas into action.

The results of these evaluations reveal a lot about the space, highlight areas for improvement, and offer clues as to what is working and what could be improved. Use a big piece of paper for this, so all the other groups can clearly see the listed ideas.

9. COMPARISON, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Giving the floor to each group allow them to present their finding using the sheet of paper with listed ideas and possible partnerships. Limit each presentation to 3 minutes. If possible, have participants send the photos made during the place game to an email or uploading option to allow you to display the image on a larger screen (computer or screen/AV equipment). Within the presentations, ask them tell about the charastics of the space, secondly about short and long term improvements, then about possible partnerships and lastly about participants’ own role in this process. Surprisingly, often it is found that participants come to similar conclusions on what would make a space better. Even more surprisingly, the needed changes are often quite easy to execute.
STEP 8-9: DETERMINING AND IMPLEMENTING POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS

A nice way to make a clear overview of the analysed space is to create a dot map in which the green dots represent the nice places, the yellow ones the places which have potential and are suitable for short-term improvements, and the red ones the negative, unwelcoming places.

DON’T FORGET...

Ask all the participants to put their names and group numbers on their Place Evaluation Forms and to hand them in for the final report. Ask them also to share their pictures with you. And don’t forget to get everyone’s names and e-mail addresses for further actions. It is important to keep these forms organised by groups number for understanding participants’ answers related to the specific spot in the chosen place in the future.
Creating a great place doesn’t happen overnight. The place game workshop is very often an inspiring beginning. Turning a space into a place requires an interactive process comprised of quick actions, testing to find out what works, learning by doing and improving, and taking on bigger challenges. This requires a team from the community (at large) to remain involved during the first months—and possibly even years—after the initial place game. This is called place governance or a place management team.

While you have the momentum and the energy going at the end of the place game, don’t forget to ask people who would want to be on board the place management team. Hopefully you will get a great diversity of at least six active individuals, occupying community roles necessary to turn a place around. Ideally you will have a mix of shop owners, developers, municipal expert, and people who are already involved in some part of the management. This will be your team to seek the first implementations with. Keep your network growing, and deepen the understanding of the place.
STEP 10: MAKE A PLACEMAKING REPORT AND GET TO ACTION

Congratulations! You set up an event which not only brought positive change in a public space, but also cultivated civic involvement among participants. Now, you might be thinking:

**How do I convert all these insights in actual concrete long-term change in my urban setting?**

Try to reserve time immediately after the place game to make a Placemaking Report, containing:

- The aims of selecting the place
- A map of the place and its sub-places with names
- A brief description of the atmosphere and participants of the place game
- A summary of each sub-place, with scores based on the forms in these areas: the characteristics, short term actions, long term actions, coalition partners, and pictures or drawings
- An overall map of the short term actions
- An overall map of the long term actions
- The place management team who will bring the actions forward

Please find an example of a placemaking report in the list of downloads.

**TO SUMMARIZE...**

As an organiser, the most important thing to do is implementing achievable realistic short term improvements quickly. Make sure to formulate the ‘quicker lighter cheaper’ actions as specific as possible. Show the community that some things are actually being done, keep the momentum going and confidence in the process alive.

Secondly, regarding the place management team, position people to implement long term improvements. Encourage this through setting up a community group or neighbourhood organisation, or working together with the municipality, and further, make money available with the help of the municipality (€5000 ideas).
USEFUL DOWNLOADS

Pre-evaluation of the place:
• *Do it yourself checklist*

Tools for analysing the use of the place:
• *Behavior Mapping*
• *Counting*
• *Tracking*
• *Interviews & Questions*
• *Trace Measures*

Most important:
• *The Survey you can use for the Place Game*

Tools for the place game workshop
• *Letter of invitation*
• *Invitation flyer*
• *Workshop checklist*
• *Sample agenda*
• *Conducting a place evaluation On-Site exercise*
• *Sample visual concept plan*
• *Sample base map*

Examples of reports
• *Summary report*
• *Sample action plan*

SOURCES

PPS, The Place Game: **How to make the community the expert:**
https://www.pps.org/article/place-game-community

PlaceMaking Chicago: **placemaking:**
http://www.placemakingchicago.com/cmsfiles/placemaking_PlaceGame.pdf

STIPO, **The City at Eye Level: take action:**
https://thecityateyelevel.com/biglearning/criteria-for-great-streets-and-plinths/