WHY GOOD QUALITY PLACEMAKING?
Placemaking is a relatively new urban design tradition of thought, paradigm and concept. It emerged in the late 1980s from early work by William Whyte, Jane Jacobs and other mostly American urban design thinkers to address the shortcomings of the visual/aesthetic and social/humanistic traditions which dominated the field until roughly the 1950s. Placemaking brought these two traditions together by recognising the importance of both the aesthetic and behavioural qualities in the design of urban spaces. The advocates of this placemaking tradition have been more concerned with the application rather than the advancement of new urban design theory and as a result have been more interested in identifying the desirable qualities of successful urban places and good urban form which they translated into key principles of good urban design. In Europe, Jan Gehl has been certainly its most keen advocate, but a lot of other academics and practitioners have followed, making placemaking the most popular urban design tradition in the twenty-first century.

Interestingly enough the concept of placemaking has become a buzzword in planning and urban design practice, but it is taking varied meanings, and how it is to be achieved appears to be defined through layering of policy provisions in what is still an ongoing creative process. In fact, placemaking is not enshrined in legislation and does not constitute statutory requirements in any of the four UK nations. This leads to varying degrees of quality of placemaking that can be experienced in everyday public spaces.

WHAT ARE (GOOD) PLACEMAKING TOOLS?
This special issue of *Urban Design* examines current discussions on placemaking through a combination of articles that critically reflect on existing placemaking tools and lessons learnt across public, educational and private practice settings in the UK and abroad. It aims to bring together existing knowledge, experience and evolution of a variety of placemaking tools by investigating their aims and scope in order to determine current good practice.

Six individual articles have been selected which cover a wealth of knowledge and practices to help provide a range of user perspectives on placemaking tools today from related urban design and planning academics to practitioners and stakeholders in relation to their development, role and implementation. The toolkits described in the articles cover a range of geographical contexts from Nottingham to London, Wales to Alton Acton, and globally. They each offer a range of approaches for placemaking and public spaces by creating tools for residents, local authorities, councillors, stakeholders, developers, and urban professionals.

The *Global Public Space Toolkit* discussed in article one was developed in 2015 and provides principles, best practices and tools to guide the future work of the UN Habitat’s Global Public Space Programme as well as sharing key messages for local authorities, urban professionals and public on public space. It was specially designed “to be available and easily accessible to everyone”, setting globally a precedent for user-friendly public space toolkits.

The article *Co-producing toolkits for challenging power and proposing community-led plans* focuses on the design, planning and placemaking process and how using assemblage toolkits can be
created. The toolkit emerged originally from the recognition that we needed to go beyond the consultation processes of participation to develop instead a greater sense of ownership. It aims to allow residents to shape the physical plans for regeneration, and decisions about aspects of the local economy.

**Greater London Authority’s Good Growth by Design programme** and its toolkit(s), discussed in article 3, aims to better define the value of public spaces and what these bring to London’s different boroughs. It raises awareness of the dynamic trends, issues and opportunities in public realm design delivery and foregrounds the significance of multifaceted and meaningful engagement in the design process.

In comparison, **Nottingham’s Design Quality Framework** has become a ground-breaking local authority design toolkit that has been seen to make the whole planning process more efficient, user-friendly and transparent through the application of 15 design guides.

To address the inequalities in accessing neighbourhoods that many children face, Play Wales’ article **Play, rights and place: policy into practice** outlines resources and toolkits to support how local authorities, organisations, schools and communities can make better use of community assets. In their article they showcase a number of toolkits they produced to support the development and implementation of cost-neutral interventions such as play streets and promoting better use of community assets for play.

The final article **Lessons from the Placemaking Toolkit for Wales** aspires to become a steppingstone for shifting Local Authorities work towards effectiveness and quality in respect to the development, care and maintenance of the public realm in Wales. This project has been shaped around co-production revolved around collective problem-definition.

As we will see in this issue, placemaking tools encompass all sorts of resources that are produced by and for local governments, built environment professionals and communities with the aim to improve placemaking literacy and practice, focusing on the design, use, and/or management of places. Their range and applicability can be wide ranging, but they are more likely to include a combination of practical advice and skills that can help to understand, create, improve and manage places or increase community engagement and participation to foster the right decision environment. The most comprehensive are usually called ‘toolkits’ because they include not only one tool but a set of tools, and this reviews a number of good examples which can help us understand their practical value and contributions for placemaking practice. We hope that this issue will not only inspire but also provoke further discussions about placemaking among urban design scholars and professionals.

Better placemaking!

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**References**

**Figure references**
FRONT COVER: Extract from Expanding London’s Public Realm Guide_GL
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