Can digital placemaking improve mental health through nature?

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Abstract

Digital placemaking is confusing term and its potential support to health and wellbeing through engagement with nature is little understood. This microtalk will focus on how digital placemaking and green spaces impact health and well-being and aims to create digital placemaking toolkits for each Cultivating Cities. This question will be addressed by Maria's PhD as part of GoGreenRoutes, an EU-funded project sowing the seeds for increased nature connectedness across Europe, Latin America and China.

Keywords: digital placemaking, mental health, wellbeing, green space, nature-based solutions

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By 2050, 68% of the world's population will live in urban cities following the United Nations (2018). Nevertheless, urban space has suffered a reduction of public spaces since the industrialization process (Paquin, 2019) that translate into a limitation of the contact with nature for urban communities.

The new experiences that we have lived during the COVID-19 pandemic have raised awareness of the impact of open space and nature on our health and wellbeing. There has also been a shift in how people experience places and their surroundings during this pandemic. An

increase in the use of digital devices to engage with the environment, physical or digital, has also been notorious during this time (Halegoua & Polson, 2021).

Sense of place and the connections with our surroundings has been proved to have an effect on our overall wellbeing. However, this sense of place is not created only by spending time in a space, but actively engaging with it (Abdel-Aziz et al., 2016; Aravot, 2002; Fredericks et al., 2018).

To help engage and create this sense of place, placemaking appeared as a concept in the 1960s (Sepe, 2016). Placemaking aims to put the community at the centre of decision making (Courage et al., 2021). Despite definitional discrepancies, this concept has evolved following technological innovations and community needs into a range of categories.

Digital placemaking hosts a variety of definitions, and as a process, it can be considered 'the augmentation of physical places with location-specific digital services, products or experiences to create more attractive destinations for all' (Calvium, 2018). Moreover, digital placemaking can play a key role in enhancing community engagement and wellbeing in urban areas via nature-based solutions. While using location-specific technology to support community engagement and place attachment, it could also cultivate deeper relationships with public spaces (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

The relationships among digital placemaking, health and wellbeing, and green and blue spaces have not been thoroughly explored yet. This opportunity to advance our understanding of digital placemaking practices and their effects on community health and wellbeing when linked to nature is what we will be researching as part of the work package 6 (FEEL) in the GoGreenRoutes project (Horizon 2020). We also aim to create digital placemaking toolkits in each of the Cultivating Cities of the project.

GoGreenRoutes is an EU-funded project sowing the seeds for increased nature connectedness across Europe, Latin America and China.

TNOC Festival 2022 microtalk link:

https://airtable.com/shrAeI4H2zngGp6iz/tbl1VwQXd6kQd7SuR/viwmUpkWoWrfITOJU/recsyA4XECtl8XHUj

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