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emergent placemaking

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Design and the Dialectics of Placemaking

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The topic of placemaking has always attracted the attention of EDRA members. The theme of the current conference is an indication of the growing interest that justifies revisiting a number of related concepts. The domain of placemaking constitutes a major avenue for advancing environmental design knowledge in both humanistic and user-centered directions. With the advent of Postmodernity and related philosophical approaches, the conceptualizations of place and placemaking acquire new dimensions and interpretations. The multifaceted nature of place and its multiple interpretations require extensive research programs and the accumulation of resources. The concept of place is construed in multiple disciplines in ways ranging from physical descriptions of space to the social construction of meaning. Correspondingly, placemaking contributes to a wide array of phenomena, from environmental design to the spontaneous production of individual and shared meanings. This variety of conceptualizations affects the nature of placemaking practices, and it also necessitates certain negotiations in order to foster productive contributions by all parties involved. The purpose of this presentation is to explore the dialectics of design and placemaking. The objective is to continue the discourse on architecture and placemaking initiated by Scheekloth and Shibley (2000) and to foster new developments on this important topic. The study uses a social constructionist perspective on place, placemaking, and design. The methodological framework borrows from a number of postmodern thinkers who study the phenomena of praxis, the constitution of everyday life, and the social production of space and place. The methodological apparatus is crafted with the intention of recreating the boundaries of design and placemaking, their relationships, and their synergetic potentialities with respect to creating more meaningful environments for the end users. The presentation will discuss the dialectics of the objective and algorithmic methods of creating built environment and the subjective appropriation of space as co-creation. It is the vantage point of this study that place is a subjective phenomenon, socially constructed and shared. "Placeness" emerges through the appropriation of space by the users, and it depends on users to endow that space with existential meanings. From this perspective, designers can most successfully function as placemakers by providing necessary features for accommodating user schemata and expectations, cultural patterns, and existential concerns. Design will engage deeply in the realms of producing social situations. Such design actions will facilitate the creation of meaning and existential significance that are important for construing a place.

Lost in Translation: Signage and the Case of the Non-English Speaking Commuter Using Public Transportation in an English Speaking Setting

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How effectively does signage in public transportation settings communicate to people who do not understand the local language? Drawing upon theories of symbolic interactionism and nonverbal communication that suggest information communicated through the environment has significant influence on behavior and decision-making abilities, our study focused on the effectiveness of signage in a public transportation setting, using the Chicago Transit Authority's 'L' train system as a case study (in and around transit stations and on trains) for a population that did not speak the local language--in this case, non-English speaking people. Our geographical area focused on 'the loop' in Chicago's downtown, and our research subjects were chosen with a combination of convenience and judgment sampling. In addition to observational and self-report studies (including visual aids), 44 non-English speaking commuters were questioned on-site about how signage influenced their travel. This being a field study and not a controlled experiment, the main intent was to allow for as many issues as possible to emerge, as well as to elicit spontaneous reactions from commuters using the facility. Grounded Theory method was used for data analysis. Participant responses and data from observation were focus coded to allow themes

to surface. Results underscored a consensus about the necessity of signage, and three troublesome findings emerged: (1) Inability of signage, visual maps, and color alone to communicate route choices in train stations (2) Extensive and exclusive use of the English language for vital information, including what to do in case of emergencies (3) Poor street-train-street relationship, with two-thirds (67 percent) of passengers interviewed reporting that they would have been unable to navigate without studying maps in advance; and four out of 10 (41 percent) reporting feeling lost upon exiting the station. Such inadequacies--the inability to get a sense of ones' surroundings and the inability to understand/interpret the space one is in--can have serious consequences not just on the psyche, but also on future decision-making. While language barriers are bound to exist, with increasing international travel visual representation has a strong impact on people's route choices. More research across different cities and cultures will help better understand this important issue and aid in providing solutions that could be generalized globally, making universal symbols universal not just in principle, but in practice as well.

Working Group:
EDRA's Social Media Strategy: How You Can Get Involved Posting, Tweeting, and Networking

Danny Mittleman, danny@cdm.depaul.edu, (DePaul University)

EDRA has an active presence on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. In addition, EDRA recently launched social networking communities on its own website tied to the 22 EDRA Networks. This working group explores how all EDRA members can become more active in these social media communities to raise their own stature in the field and network for personal advancement. In this working group, we will introduce participants to all of EDRA's social media communities, describe strategies for using them, and encourage tactical personal use. We will show how participation in these communities not only helps to transfer research knowledge to practice—a core component of EDRA's mission—but also helps advance the individual networker by increasing their own knowledge and visibility. We will discuss online stores of E&B research material,

and how best to find new research online. This working group will also discuss mobile tools for social networking, posting, and personal storage of information.

Cultural Aspects of Design

How We Bond With Environments: A Closer Look at Place Attachment

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This paper presents the research findings and conclusions of an empirical, qualitative study on sensory characteristics of the concept of place attachment. Environmental experiences and meanings of places may influence people to generate certain attachments to places that can be strong, deep-rooted, and long-lasting. Most research studies on place attachment seem to involve home environments, nature, lifecycle stages (childhood, elderly), and gender. These research findings typically describe only visual characteristics of spaces related to place attachment. While visual experiences are without doubt important, research inquiries on non-visual spatial experiences associated with place attachment are largely absent. Filling this gap, the primary focus of this research study is to evaluate the concept of place attachment by analyzing the significance of sensory experiences to place meaning and place attachment. Based on a qualitative approach, respondents of a random sample group completed detailed environmental autobiographies, recounting places to which they have formed a significant attachment and the particular nature of that attachment in descriptive detail. The guiding questions in the environmental autobiography exercise were kept open-ended; the scope of this research was not limited to any stage in lifecycle, particular type or scale of environment, or any other defining descriptors. It also allowed respondents to describe place experiences, including sensory characteristics. The results reveal that the types of environment to which respondents formed attachments significantly widely varied, and that place meaning and attachment included not only visual components of the environments, but also several types of non-visual sensory experiences. Additionally, the data analysis indicated that environmental autobiography