The Routledge Handbook of Placemaking

Cara Courage, Tom Borrup, Maria Rosario Jackson, Kylie Legge, Anita McKeown, Louise Platt, Jason Schupbach

‘I am not a satnav’

Publication details
Morag Rose
Published online on: 31 Dec 2020

How to cite :- Morag Rose. 31 Dec 2020, ‘I am not a satnav’ from: The Routledge Handbook of Placemaking Routledge
Accessed on: 30 Dec 2023

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
It's possible, for a moment, to be overtaken by the place and forget where you're going or why but feel part of a shared heritage and cityscape that exists on a grand scale. Library Walk is a place that is unlike any other in Manchester. (Bradbury, 2012)

Introduction

This chapter explores Library Walk in Manchester, an ordinary place rendered extraordinary when it was threatened. Community action transformed an everyday path into a space of imagination and a conduit for wider debates around heritage, consultation, and public space. Most significantly for this Handbook, Library Walk illustrates how municipal placemaking strategies may fail to anticipate or appreciate how emotionally and viscerally attached citizens can be to the built environment. The discrepancy between the corporate agenda and lived experiences of those who used, and treasured the space, resulted in a protracted conflict.

In 2011, Manchester City Council (UK) revealed ambitious plans to redevelop key buildings and public realm in St Peters Square. This is a conservation area which houses several significant civic buildings and the proposed scheme included refurbishing the Central Library and Town Hall. It was broadly welcomed until, in 2012, an additional announcement was made: the intention to erect a new reception area linking Central Library and The Town Hall extension. This necessitated the enclosure of Library Walk, a curved path that bisects the two buildings. A campaign group quickly emerged challenging the official description of the path as dangerous and unloved; they reframed Library Walk as a site of civic pride, beauty, and considerable affective resonance. Friends of Library Walk mobilised in a variety of ways, including an action ‘beating the bounds’ of the contested area utilising vernacular tradition to reassert community ownership. The Friends failed to stop planning permission being granted. However, in 2014 they mobilised again to object to the ‘Stopping Up Order’ required for the completion of work. This legislation would remove the public right of way along Library Walk and the volume of complaints meant a Public Inquiry was held over eight days in 2014. Campaigners revealed the multiplicities of a space the council defined as merely an accidental void between buildings.

This chapter gives voice to those campaigners and offers an autoethnographic account of community placemaking. It will discuss lessons learned when folk came together to define,
defend, and celebrate Library Walk. It explores why this place became so important to so many people, exemplifying their sense of belonging in the contemporary urban landscape. There was profound anger and disconnection felt when that connection to their local environment was ruptured. This revealed hidden power dynamics, issues of land ownership, and the fissure between planning regulations and citizen passion. Library Walk became, to use local Manchester dialect for an alleyway – ginnel – ‘the ginnel that roared,’ and this is part of its place narrative. I am writing here not just as an academic but as a citizen and a campaigner, implicated and embedded in this work as one of the instigators of Friends of Library Walk. Although this interpretation and account is my own, and omissions are mine, the narrative itself is co-created. A huge debt of gratitude is owed to everyone who contributed to the campaign to save Library Walk, and in particular to those who have contributed directly to this chapter.

I will begin by explaining more about the social, cultural, and political context of Manchester before outlining who Friends of Library Work were and what we did. This chapter is necessarily partial and partisan as it explores the tangled meanings and conflicting demands placed on an everyday place.

Context and case study

This case study is situated in Manchester, a city in North West England. Its population in 2015 was 530,300 and it is one of 10 metropolitan boroughs which comprise Greater Manchester, the second largest UK conurbation after London. It was hailed as ‘Cottonopolis’ when it became ‘the city of Britain’s industrial revolution (1840s–1920s): a mythic time of city prosperity, change and growth’ (Hetherington, 2007, p. 632, emphasis in the original). Between 1930 and 1980 it suffered from deindustrialisation and decline, before implementing a range of urban regeneration initiatives facilitated by national, regional, and local policies (Parkinson-Bailey 2000; Bayfield, 2015). In the latter decades of the twentieth century these transformed the perception of Manchester from ‘grim’ to a place which ‘more than London or any other British city, has been represented as “cool”’ (Hetherington, ibid.).

Manchester has frequently been cited as ‘the perfect example of a city which symbolised the trajectory of progress … from urban decay to urban renaissance’ (Minton, 2009. p. 39) and a variety of placemaking strategies were implemented to achieve this. These include – but of course are not limited to – cultural events, festivals, and marketing campaigns (Bayfield, 2015). Manchester City Council (MCC) employed graphic designer Peter Saville to devise a brand that would encourage tourism and he designated us ‘the original modern city’ (Marketing Manchester, 2009) to emphasise dynamism and to position Manchester on a competitive global stage. Bayfield (2015) provides a pertinent analysis of the ‘Original Modern’ concept and conflicts around culture, branding, and placemaking in ‘a city that is never short of event, spectacle or opinion.’ She also discusses the local political background and how elite figures produce dominant narratives of the city.

Manchester’s current status has been achieved embracing neoliberalism as defined by Harvey (2007) with Haughton et al. (2016) and Ward et al. (2015) amongst many demonstrating how this has manifested in a Manchester context. Labour have been in control of the council since 1974 when the city was reconstituted as a metropolitan borough, and since 1996, Sir Richard Leese has been the council leader. Concerns about the possible implications of this extended period of uncontested power are apparent in the conflict this chapter discusses. Leary (2008) documents shift in local politics from municipal socialism to entrepreneurship, Minton links this to a new culture of ‘authoritarianism and control’ (2009, p. 40) where democracy gives way to profit and grassroots voices are seldom heard.
Placemaking in Manchester has come at a cost. Hatherley states Manchester ‘has neatly repositioned itself as a cold, rain-soaked Barcelona’ (2010, p. 115) but is very clear that this involves ‘a transfer of assets from the poor to the affluent.’ (2010, p. 141). The myth of Manchester’s ‘success’ has been challenged from its inception when Engels (1845 / 2009) documented a place of poverty and horror. Of course, the landscape has changed dramatically since Engels was here, but Manchester remains a place of stark inequality. More recently the impact of austerity has been documented by Greater Manchester Poverty Commission (2013), Goulding and Silver (2019), Folkman et al. (2016) amongst many others, and arguments about economic priorities were central to many objections to building on Library Walk. Hatherley (2010) and Minton (2009) both demonstrate the direct and tangible impact local, national, and global economic policy has on the urban landscape in Manchester. This encompasses the key civic area of St Peters Square and Library Walk, which was deemed in need of a makeover. It must be asserted that campaigners were not nostalgic or anti-change per se; indeed many were actively involved in supporting other developments in the city, but they felt strongly about losing Library Walk. The aesthetics of the neoliberal city are beyond the scope of this work, but the glass, chrome, and security-conscious design proposed embodies those values and was perceived as ‘culturally hollowed out’ (Davis, 1990, p. 78) in comparison to what was previously there.

Manchester Town Hall is classic Victorian Neo-Gothic, embodying success, prestige, and civic pride. Designed by Alfred Waterhouse it was completed in 1877. Between 1934 and 1938 an extension was built; its architect E. Vincent Harris was also responsible for the neighbouring Central Library. Manchester Central Library opened in 1934 and at the time it was the largest public library in the country. It is a Classical-style building with a circular plan inspired by the Pantheon in Rome. The entrance is a huge portico, emphasising the importance of St Peter’s Square. Both of Vincent Harris’s buildings are Grade 2* listed and in adjoining conservation areas. The side of the Town Hall extension adjacent to the library has a concave curve, forming a 200-metre-long path. This is Library Walk. The plans included not just a link building at the St Peters Square end of the walk but gates at the other. These were necessary because of the cul-de-sac created by the new structure.

The Twentieth Century Society North West was one of many organisations alarmed at plans to damage that area and, in their expert view:

Library Walk is probably unique in that instead of merely separating these two great civic buildings, it creates a sense of tension between them. In architecture, as in art, literature and music the absence of something and the space between can be as powerful as form itself.

Library Walk is a true walkway and can only be experienced on foot. Because of the curve, it reveals itself gradually, introducing an element of mystery and surprise, with something of the character and atmosphere of film noir cinematography. It is that kind of urban space which creates the distinctive character of a city and one that should be cherished. In its original form it is also an excellent example of how the city can be perceived as series of visual sequences responding to different spatial elements, light and even memory, as argued by Gordon Cullen in his influential The Concise Townscape (1966).

(Email to the author 2019)

Many residents of, and visitors to, Manchester also cherished Library Walk and people mobilised to object almost as soon as the plans were announced. Initially the conversations were online, but when it became clear there was sufficient motivation a meeting was organised at a local bar
whose manager was sympathetic to the cause. I was the convenor and recall being amazed at the passion, energy, and diversity of the people in the room. From the beginning the focus was on local political action, lobbying, and building a broad-based community coalition to demonstrate wide public support. The strategy was multi-faceted, and a decision was made to focus on a positive campaign message rather than a negative or defensive approach. This was exemplified in the run-up to the original planning committee meeting. The loose collective opted to call themselves Friends of Library Walk, taking a cue from friends of parks and green spaces. These organisations MCC have always been keen to facilitate and we felt it demonstrated an ethos of care and communality. The Friends were never formally constituted as they were purely a task-and-finish campaign, feeling bureaucracy would be an unnecessary burden. Pertinently, we never engaged in fundraising or needed to apply for grants etc., so a bank account or incorporated status was deemed unnecessary. The cost of campaign materials—postcards and badges—were met by individuals, particularly Mancunians who were living too far away to attend events but who wanted to contribute. The main tactics used were: social media, crucial to group identity and message dissemination, with Facebook and Twitter being particularly important; petitions and letter-writing to lobby Manchester City Council; mobilising support and representation at the planning committee meeting, later scrutiny committee meetings, and the planning inquiry; researching to ensure our arguments were robust and factually sound; events, mainly informal meetings but also a larger more carnivalesque event, ‘Beating the Bounds,’ before the planning meeting; and producing promotional literature, including a celebration booklet, badges, and postcards.

There was an alternative suggestion that more radical, direct action tactics could have been utilised but there was little appetite to do so—although that in no way diminishes their power in other campaigns. Those most active in Friends of Library Walk included people with caring responsibilities, disabilities, employment, and other circumstances that meant they were uncomfortable risking arrest. There had been a suggestion to occupy Library Walk, but there was also a major logistical obstacle. Ongoing renovations in Central Library meant Library Walk itself was in the middle of a building site hidden by large hoardings. Active numbers of the group fluctuated and several supporters who were urban design, architecture, and built environment professionals wished to remain anonymous. They were concerned about a negative impact on their careers if they were viewed as troublemakers; whether this was justified is a moot point, but it indicates concern about power structures within the city.

Over 1,300 people signed a petition and 137 letters were received by the Planning Committee (in contrast, and to contradict any notion that people were merely opposed to any change, no other application for changes to St Peters Square received more than two). Some of the comments were published in a celebration pamphlet (Friends of Library Walk, 2012) and comments included:

This walkway really is a hidden gem in Manchester. I remember over ten years ago walking down it for the first time, I was rushing across town, double busy and it actually stopped me in my tracks. It made me appreciate a whole lot more what Manchester is and was, a great city with lots of history.

These squeezed thoroughfares between some of Manchester's most historic architecture give us a sense of our city's history – and can inspire daydreams and creative ideas as we pass through every day and evening.

It is the most beautiful spot in Manchester.

The tactics utilised by the group were based on consensus view about what they felt were the most likely to be effective. They were influenced by participants' previous experiences as well as
by limitations of time and money. One tactic, the ‘Beating of The Bounds,’ drew on traditional ritual to designate ownership and establish communal boundaries. It was intended to be a convivial spectacle with plenty of noise and colour. Placards were made using a variety of slogans and many featured Aidan O’Rourke’s photographs. Aidan became involved because for him it was a ‘matter of principle and aesthetics… A respect for the architecture’s vision.’ He had celebrated Library Walks’ qualities several times in print over the years, and likened passing through it to ‘being in a time machine, virtually unchanged since it was built.’ Giant book props were borrowed from The Book Bloc and participants were encouraged to bring musical instruments. We gathered in Piccadilly Gardens and processed along Mosley Street to St Peters Square, a distance of approximately 650m. We then circled the hoardings surrounding Central Library and the Town Hall extension, an area encompassing Library Walk itself. As we walked, instruments were struck and noise was made to assert our right to be there and own our space. The group paused at the west end of Library Walk to pose for photographs and peer through the gates of the building works. We then carried on with the circling, coming to stop at the St Peters Square entrance. There, several people and organisations spoke about why they were Friends of Library Walk. Some of these speakers had been invited, others were impromptu. We finished with a song, specifically written for the campaign by Matt Hill, aka Quiet Loner.

This event served several purposes. It raised the campaign’s profile, engaging press and social media. It alerted the planning committee to the energy and passion and it also brought campaigners together and was undoubtedly an enjoyable evening. This mattered because the research and writing takes its toll and respite is needed. Furthermore, the convivial atmosphere strengthened a sense of purpose and cohesion prior to the planning committee meeting. This took place in the formal atmosphere of the Town Hall. When the committee met, protocol dictated only one representative was able to speak in opposition to the plans and that they only had three minutes to speak. Tom volunteered for the task and read a speech collectively written by the group. Supporters filled the room, but the experience was dispiriting for many reasons. Members of the planning committee played with their phones, left the room, and generally appeared disinterested. They passed the plans, and this was upheld by the scrutiny committee.

However, this was not the end. There was a lull but in 2014 Manchester Council applied for a Stopping Up Order to remove the public right of way on Library Walk. The Friends mobilised again. Sufficient objections were received for the Secretary of State to announce a Public Inquiry, overseen by the Planning Inspectorate. Unlike during the planning committee, anyone who wished to make a representation to the Inquiry was able to do so and the Friends spread the invitation widely. We did not have any funds or means to legal representation and so many individuals supported each other to speak. The Friends were joined by Don Lee of The Open Spaces Society and Gloria Gaffney of The Pedestrian Association. Describing themselves as ‘veteran campaigners’ with an impressive track record of legal action to protect rights of way, their expertise in navigating the Inquiry process was invaluable.

The initial Inquiry was due to last two days but the volume of people wanting to speak meant it was extended to eight days. Many local residents spoke up alongside representatives from Manchester Disable Peoples Access Group (MDPAG), Manchester Women’s Design Group, Manchester Modernist Society, The Open Spaces Society, The Greater Manchester Pedestrian Association, The Ramblers Association, The Twentieth Century Society, academics with specialisms in lighting, architecture, and urban design and, unexpectedly, a local councillor. Supporters were always present in the public gallery, many coming in on their lunch hours. The experience of giving evidence in an Inquiry such as this is worthy of its own chapter; it was an incredibly intense and demanding experience. Flick Harris of MDPAG remembers it as ‘daunting, because it was so formal. A lot of stamina was needed, but the support was incredible, and we were a
'I am not a satnav'

team.' Several Friends of Library Walk have commented about how access to judicial processes such as this is contingent on many personal factors, most notably time, energy, and literacy. It was also noted who was absent; privately practicing architects expressed support but felt unable to do so publicly because of their relationship with Manchester Council.

The end came in a brown paper envelope, and despite our best efforts and an extensive dossier of evidence, we lost, because Inspector Yates said he was ‘not satisfied that it has been shown that any disadvantages to the public arising out of the proposed stopping up are sufficient to outweigh the benefits of the Order’ (Yates, 2014). Many of our arguments were deemed ‘not material’ to his decision because ‘people will still be able to access and look at the remainder of Library Walk during permitted hours.’ There was, of course, a profound sense of dismay and disagreement with many of the points made in his report, in particular a lack of appreciation of the key limits of permissive access rather than a genuine public space. Many felt the whole process was more attuned to a rural context than urban civic space. The Friends contemplated a Judicial Review and informal advice suggested some grounds to believe it could succeed. However, the risk would be high and the potential costs in time, energy, and money considerable. Reluctantly consensus felt it would be too expensive proceed and, sadly, I remain convinced this was the correct choice. The scale of the space involved mattered too; although we cared passionately, this was a micro-level incident and lessons learned could benefit other struggles. Alliances were formed which had lasting resonance, although there is also a lingering feeling of being cheated, and of power relationships being laid bare. As Don Lee, of The Open Spaces Society, says, it felt like a ‘very shoddy deal.’

Key placemaking issues

The struggle for Library Walk focused on three main issues; process, access, and the quality of the built environment. The first of these is exemplified by questions the case raises about democratic and bureaucratic processes in Manchester specifically and the UK planning system more generally. Space and focus here preclude detailed examination of these issues, but they broadly encompass criticism of the public consultation and whether public engagement genuinely seeks to value diverse voices. Manchester resident Peter Castree had attended the very first public consultations about the development of St Peters Square, because:

I was concerned for the future of Library Walk in particular and made a point of asking the relevant representatives whether there were any plans to roof it over or otherwise interfere with it. I was reassured to be told that there were no such plans, the proposed underground link between Central Library and the Town Hall extension having been designed to allow people to pass easily from one to the other. When I learned later that Library Walk was to be obstructed by the addition of a superfluous link building, clearly dreamed up well after the close of the ‘public consultation’ period, I felt betrayed and incensed — enough to want to attend the resulting inquiry and speak as a citizen witness.

There were also questions raised about what constitutes valid evidence, for example around crime statistics for the area. There had been claims from the council that Library Walk was dangerous, but no actual figures were ever produced to support this. In one particularly arcane interlude during the Inquiry there was a debate about whether or not the extension constituted a building and MCC could claim it exempt from regulations. Finally, there were concerns about fairness and power. Building work on the link building commenced prior to the Stopping Up
Order being granted, thus demonstrating an assumption that it would be approved. Melissa Moore was studying for her LLB (Bachelor of Laws) at the time she gave evidence to the inquiry and said she used her legal knowledge to expose the deliberate misquoting of legal precedent by the Council in their application. This has still never been explained – copy and paste was used as an excuse by the City Solicitor but… the falsehoods on the part of the Council throughout the campaign made and still make my blood boil.

The second key issue is around public space and its importance to civil society. I extend this to include the maintenance of the rights of way and the need for fully accessible architecture. The privatisation of public assets is central to neoliberal discourse, although Worpole and Knox review research and conclude that ‘public spaces play a vital role in the social life of communities’ (2007, p. 5) and ‘public spaces facilitate the exchange of ideas, friendships, goods and skills’ (ibid., p. 7). The scale of Library Walk may not fit the conventional image of a public space, but its civic role is demonstrated by the many accounts that pay tribute to the respite it offers visitors, a sense of being both within and yet apart from the city. It is a place of private epiphany and personal attachment, but it has no monogamous relationships. Library Walk was open to anyone who chose to walk down it. Public space is where many bodies mingle and includes not just agora but everyday sites such as pavements, footpaths, and bus stops. Cities have always been cosmopolitan places where diverse people encounter each other in ‘light-touch gatherings’ (Thrift, 2007, p. 217). These encounters may not hold individual significance, but their cumulative effect is an awareness of other actors in the environment that come to ‘constitute a binding affective force’ and sustain the cosmopolitan city (Thrift, 2007, p. 218). Jane Jacobs’ (1961) vision of the street as a site of conviviality, cohesion, and natural surveillance also addresses the positive emotional and material impact of sharing space. Meeting with people breaks down barriers, challenges stereotypes, and turns ‘the other’ into an individual that can be related to on a personal, human level. The street is a physical manifestation of social, economic, and cultural forces which fluctuate over time.

The Library Walk link building did not simply destroy public space for all equally. The particular design had a number of flaws which made it particularly difficult to use for neurodiverse people and those with sensory impairments. MDPAG cited numerous breaches of both policy and law. Flick was particularly concerned about the uneven surfaces in the link building, the disorientating qualities of the architecture, and the poor acoustics in the new structure. During the inquiry MCC redesignated Lloyd Street as an alternative route to Library Walk, but Flick demonstrated that the kerbs posed a serious risk hazard for those using this street. Equality was also ironically evoked when MCC claimed women were threatened by Library Walk, an idea robustly challenged by campaigners who wryly noted cuts to domestic violence services was a far bigger problem. Another recurrent refrain from MCC was an assertion the Walk was a prolific site for public urination. This is a widespread problem in the ‘24-hour city’ but no evidence was ever given this was a specific hot spot. The Friends countered areas with lots of night-time entertainment suffered disproportionately, and that improved street cleaning and provision of public toilets was a more sensible solution.

The third issue was around the affective and aesthetic components of the cityscape. Competing definitions of heritage, space, beauty, and fear led to conflict between the municipal authorities and citizens. The two groups valued different things and perceived Library Walk in contrasting ways. This was apparent from the very beginning when the Link Building was first announced and was exemplified by a tweet sent on 10 February 2014 by Sir Richard Leese, Leader of
Manchester City Council. There was a widespread perception that he had a personal interest in completing the project, and local news website Manchester Confidential came to refer to the building as Leese’s Folly (Schofield, 2014). Sir Richard had tweeted about a meeting with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) to discuss urban design in Greater Manchester and Eddy Rhead, of Manchester Modernist Society, asked him about The Cenotaph (moved during the renovation of St Peters Square) and the closure of Library Walk. At 12.45pm Leese posted, ‘And hate 2 tell you but Library Walk was just the space left between buildings’ (Twitter).

This tweet, whilst an ephemeral, probably spontaneous remark, gets to the very crux of the matter. Ignoring the disregard it shows for design – buildings do not accidentally curve together – this illustrates the profound conflict between interpretations of, relationship to, and feelings about a place. To Leese, and his ‘Official Manchester’ team of top-down bureaucracy represented by the city council, planners, regeneration professionals, and others with concern for the macro view, Library Walk was not really worthy of consideration. On a metaphysical level it did not even really exist. (I do not wish to suggest this was a homogenous mass of people or a singular view, and neither do I attribute negative intent to all those holding this perspective; I am simplifying due to word constraints). There is an economic logic to their unsentimental view which is also shaped by institutional practice, professional training, and a focus on a particular, neoliberal vision of what Manchester is for. Library Walk had no commercial value, no tangible purpose, and building on it did not directly impact on anyone’s work or home life. However, this does not take into account emotion, affect, and attachment.

The testimonies from Friends of Library Walk and its allies revealed a radically different perspective on this space between buildings. The value inscribed here is not about money or commercial use; indeed, Library Walk was often framed as respite from the urban and a breathing space away from the more normal business of the city. Where Sir Richard saw a place that was threatening, dirty, and to be avoided, others saw sanctuary, wonder, and beauty. No one supported the idea of Library Walk as threatening and spoke instead of how they chose to walk down it, often necessitating a detour. Joan Rutherford is a retired town planner, design expert, and a member of many key local organisations. She said she ‘was shocked [MCC] hadn’t read work on Lynch and Cullen which provides background information regarding the value of cityscapes. The beautiful curve is not an accident, it’s a space for quiet.’ She also questioned the need for a link building on the grounds that it ‘creates an entrance, because the grand portico to the library already does that.’ The affection for, and a collective sense of ownership and belonging in, Library Walk is underlined by its informal description as ‘a ginnel.’ Its scale and splendour mean that designation is tender rather than strictly accurate; this is not a domestic space or a narrow gap between houses.

There appeared to be genuine surprise within MCC about the uproar precisely because these perspectives on place are so different. This was summed up in a memorable moment at the public inquiry which was recalled as a vivid memory by many that were there. Matthew Schofield spoke as a member of The Society of Friends, The Quakers, whose meeting house is opposite the Mount Street end of Library Walk. He was being questioned about why his preferred route between the Meeting House and his home was via Library Walk when this necessitated a detour which made the trip longer. He spoke quietly and passionately when he explained ‘because I am not a sat nav’ and expounded on the need for beauty and joy as well as utility.

The incongruency leads to a conflict, because the physical imposition of the link building obliterates the possibility of alternative values. It closed down the imagination and removed potential; it also removed the personal connection to the affective joys of the glimpse of sky. The walk was saturated with emotion and stories of personal connection and collective memo-
ries, but these could not be quantified or commodified. It is perhaps significant that Library Walk adjoins a beloved public amenity. Libraries have been hard hit by austerity but remain a manifestation of a civil idyll, a public resource, open to all for learning, self-empowerment, and recreation. They have themselves been sites of community building and fighting. The centralisation agenda in Manchester has led to the closure of local neighbourhood amenities and an assumption that people can and will travel to a more central hub. The implication of this policy is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the survival of Central Library is of huge significance to the psyche of the city. Many Friends of Library Walk spoke of the Library itself, whilst they rarely spoke with such affection about the Town Hall, despite this being the site of many personal and public ceremonies. One particularly memorable letter read at the Inquiry was written by Doris Hardy, a woman who remembered as a child seeing King George open the library; she was indignant at the slander on the landscape.

The background hum of austerity had another role to play in the rhetoric of campaigners. The link building was roundly condemned as a waste of money, and local journalists spoke later of how it had become an informal shorthand for public profligacy with money. Jonathan Schofield, Editor of Manchester Confidential, reported the cost as £3.5million and dubbed the project ‘Leese’s Folly,’ highlighting concerns about an autocratic council leadership style. Jonathan says he stands by those words now, telling me he still believes it was ultimate folly, a double folly because of the need for gates at the other end too. It wasted a massive amount of money in a time of austerity for something that was not needed. (It was) a vast vanity project… a waste of time and a flagrant twisting of authority.

He remains very critical of the justifications given for the work ‘the engineering of facts to make a case for it – I hated that.’ (It is worth noting Manchester Confidential is neither a radical voice nor inherently critical of developments within the city.) The controversy led to a widespread sense of disenfranchisement. Just after the Inquiry the power imbalance implied by this critique was pulled into sharp relief by a collective of homeless people who set up camp in St Peters Square and were later evicted.

There is always complexity to topophilia and there is a particular constellation of relationships at play in Manchester. I’ve discussed this elsewhere, using hipcholia (Rose, 2018) to refer to an ambivalent nostalgia, where people are attached to places such as redundant mills and warehouses despite knowing they were sites of hardship and exploitation. However, this does not explain the hostility to the changes in St Peters Square. The Friends of Library Walk were not anti-development per se; they just felt this particular development was unnecessary, damaging, and wasteful and they wanted to protect a cityscape they loved.

Conclusion and legacy

At the time of writing I find myself once more campaigning on issues of access, inclusion, and public space alongside several members of Friends of Library Walk. The catalyst this time has been artist Jeremy Deller’s Peterloo memorial. This commemorates the two hundredth anniversary of the Peterloo Massacre, a pivotal moment in the fight for democracy and equality, and something dear to many of us in Manchester, and UK-wide. Unfortunately, the interactive monument is a flight of steps, so reifies inequality, segregation, and exclusion of disabled people. The debacle has many similarities: an inadequate consultation process, a failure to listen, and an idiosyncratic approach to what constitutes a building for legislative purposes. There is another
connection too – embedded in the floor of the Library Walk link building are the names of those murdered at Peterloo. Initially the gates were intended as a memorial, but the irony was too rich, and the plan scrapped. Placemaking still remains a source of conflict in other parts of Manchester, perhaps most prominently in debates around human rights abuses in United Arab Emirates and whether investment from the country should be so pivotal in current regeneration projects. Writer Kate Feld makes this explicit in her powerful work ‘Ethiad,’ about persecuted journalist Ahmed Mansoor: ‘Placemaking is happening here, right now. Our city’s being sold out from under our feet and its streets are filling with the bodies of people who have no place. Do you see them? Pay Attention’ (Feld, 2018).

The Link Building itself is empty of any furniture and only scantily used. It looks visually dissonant and was a runner-up in the 2015 Carbuncle Cup. Although the fight to save Library Walk was lost, the campaign itself has had a legacy for many of those involved. Individuals involved learnt new skills, formed new relationships, and deepened existing connections. They also believe it had an impact on the local environment in a number of ways. Emma Curtin was a key part of the team and told me one of the legacies of The Friends for her was a demonstration of how ‘activism functions as pedagogy, as learning and teaching which is important and often overlooked.’ Reflecting on why she gave so much time for the cause she said:

[Library Walk] has always been special to me, genuinely, from my lived experience not as an architect or academic. I would get off the bus early, it felt like a different city, felt a bit special. Now it’s a symbol of bad decision making and activist solidarity.

Peter sensed there had been an impact on a number of local campaigns and had motivated him to become involved in other groups. He mentioned a key lesson was the need to get involved in the planning process early on and ‘citizens need to be much more vigilant about what is being done supposedly in their name.’ Aidan notes regretfully the physical changes to St Peters Square and fears much has been lost, although people still use it: ‘It’s destroyed, erased… Possibility was erased too. They’ve won – obliterated the past, … its depressing really – most people using the space will have no memory [of what it was like before].’

Jonathan Schofield says: ‘It’s not too offensive now if you can’t remember it, but I can,’ although he thinks the bigger legacy is more intangible. Despite the failure it was ‘a morale boost for campaigners that was of benefit … Library Walk was a good measure of people power and those who want to get their voices heard.’ He feels the engagement with planning paved the way for bigger and more successful protests, although that is of course unverifiable here. The solidarity within the Friends of Library Walk was powerful and Melissa told me:

The campaign itself means so much – that so many disparate groups and people came together… the fact it was a space, not a building per se, is also an incredible thing and still shows that humans need aesthetics to grow and that they are prepared to fight for something so ephemeral.

She felt the publicity around Library Walk engaged people who were not generally aware of planning issues and inspired them to get involved more, citing successful objections to developments on Boadicea Street as an example.

The place called Library Walk remains and there are parts of the passageway that look much the same as they did before the link building. However, everyone I spoke to felt the atmosphere has changed, the sense of escape has been lost, and the knowledge we are only there on sufferance has had a profound psychic impact. The passageway is saturated with stories,
contrasting and conflicting perceptions of the value of a space between buildings. Library Walk became a conduit for wider debates around, and beyond, placemaking. It demonstrates the intense attachment people can, and do, feel for well-designed civic space. The emotional and physical movements of people may challenge dominant narratives; vernacular creativity contrasts with planning processes. To borrow from de Certeau (1984), The Friends of Library Walk animated place through their everyday practices, bringing life in unexpected ways and making the space their own. Powerful affective and sensory connections were generated, and when they were threatened, people joined together to fight for their rights to a beautiful city. A chasm between top-down and grassroots trajectories for the same location was revealed and corporate placemaking visions were challenged. Library Walk was, is, cherished, and hope remains that in time the Link Building will be demolished, and Library Walk returned to its publics. Until then it remains ‘the ginnel that roared.’

Acknowledgements

Heartfelt thanks to everyone who supported The Friends of Library Walk, and particularly those who spoke to me for this work: Peter Castree, Emma Curtin, Gloria Gaffney, Flick Harris, Don Lee, Melissa Moore, Aidan O’Rourke, Joan Rutherford, Jonathan Schofield, Howard Smith, and Aidan Turner–Bishop. Thanks also to John Hawes, Marc Hudson, Steve Millington, Louise Platt, and Maureen Ward for critical and inspiring conversations which fed into this chapter.

References

Further reading in this volume

Chapter 2: Placemaking as an economic engine for all
James F. Lima and Andrew J. Jones

Chapter 5: Making places for survival: looking to a creative placemaking past for a guide to the future
Jeremy Liu

Preface: ‘Disastrous forces, accidental actions, and grassroots responses’
Tom Borrup

Chapter 7: Conflict and memory: human rights and placemaking in the city of Gwangju
Shin Gyonggu

Chapter 9: From the dust of bad stars: disaster, resilience, and placemaking in Little Tokyo
Jonathan Jae-an Crisman

Chapter 10: From moon village to mural village: the consequences of creative placemaking in Ihwa-dong, Seoul
Jason F. Kovacs and Hayun Park

Chapter 11: Free State Boulevard and the story of the East 9th Street Placekeepers
Dave Lowenstein

Preface: The radical potential of placemaking
Cara Courage

Chapter 23: Routing out place identity through the vernacular production practices of a community light festival
Gail Skelly and Tim Edensor

Chapter 25: ‘If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere…’: cultural placemaking at the heart of cities
Sherry Dobbin

Preface: Towards developing equitable economies; the concept of Oikos in placemaking
Anita McKeown

Preface: The only thing constant is change
Kylie Legge

Chapter 35: Planning governance: lessons for the integration of placemaking
Nigel Smith

Chapter 42: Creative Placemaking and Placekeeping evaluation challenges from the practitioner perspective: an interview with Roy Chan
Maria Rosario Jackson

Chapter 45: How the city speaks to us and how we speak back: rewriting the relationship between people and place
Rosanna Vitiello and Marcus Willcocks