Urban Maestro

New governance strategies for Urban Design

Place Standard

framework for conversations around place quality (UK)

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1. SUMMARY

Place Standard is a formative evaluation tool designed to facilitate and structure conversations around the quality of places. The tool takes into consideration fourteen themes on the physical elements (buildings, open spaces, transport) and social aspects of a place (for example, whether people feel they have a say in decision-making). Each theme hinges on one central question for participants to answer, aided by secondary questions highlighting particular aspects for people to consider and rate on a scale from 1-7 according to the level of improvement that a place may need. In asking a series of questions about different aspects of a place, the Place Standard tool provides a framework for local stakeholders and communities to assess and identify the strengths and weaknesses of a place. Officially launched in 2015, the Place Standard tool was jointly developed by the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland and Architecture & Design Scotland. Although applied mostly by local authorities, the tool is being widely used across Scotland and has already been transferred to other national contexts.

2. CONTEXT AND ADMINISTRATION

In terms of administrative structure, Scotland has had its own devolved parliament and government since 1998, with the power to legislate in all areas of policy except for those overarching ones reserved to the government of the United Kingdom (such as immigration, foreign policy and defence). The Scottish government runs the country in relation to all other matters, including responsibilities such as health, education, justice, rural affairs, housing, and the environment. In order to handle these tasks, the Scottish government is structured into a number of directorates, which, along with their internal divisions as well as via related public bodies, are responsible for developing and implementing different areas of public policy.

The origins of the Place Standard tool can be traced back to two policy initiatives, one starting from the side of health and the other from that of the built environment: entitled ‘Good Places, Better Health’ (2008) and ‘Creating Places’ (2013) respectively. The former was a national policy strategy on health and the

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3 http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1706/1-johnny-cadell-origins-1.pdf
At the heart of this initiative was the belief that policy in Scotland at the time did not quite reflect the significance of the physical environment for health, nor its role in addressing the issue of health inequalities that was identified as being particularly important. For more information: [link](http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1707/2-george-morris-key-note-1.pdf)

The 'Good Places, Better Health' policy implementation phase (2008-2011) focused on the environmental determinants of health and inequity in health for children, and led to the publication of 'Good Places, Better Health for Scotland's Children' in 2011.

This very early conceptual outline of what would become the Place Standard already embraced two key dimensions: that it is a tool to enable conversations, and that it needs to present an easy-to-grasp model of interrelated factors (Ibidem). Regarding the latter, 'Creating Places' was a national policy statement on architecture and place for Scotland adopted in 2013. Among several initiatives, this document defined the following policy commitment: “Develop a Place Standard assessment tool, which will be the hallmark of well-designed places. This standard will be aimed at creating greater certainty around quality of place and it is intended to support the private and public sectors and communities. It will address quality in relation to places that support healthy and sustainable lifestyles” (Scotland, 2013).

To develop the Place Standard tool, a partnership was established in 2015 involving three organizations: the Scottish Government (Architecture & Place Division), NHS Health Scotland, and Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS). Leading this joint venture, the Architecture & Place Division of the Scottish Government is part of the Local Government and Communities Directorate, and, organisationally, operates under a Chief Planner, who supervises the planning and architectural policy of Scotland. Within that operates the internal Division of Architecture & Place, headed by the Chief Architect for Scotland, whose functions run the gamut of built environment aspects, from housing and heritage to community engagement, promotion and advocacy.

The partnership also involves NHS Health Scotland (now Public Health Agency), one of the Scottish national health boards with a specific focus on health inequalities. One of their strands of research concerns the impact of social and physical environments on health and, within that, the notion of place (as the combined physical, social and cultural environment) has emerged as a key factor that significantly affects health equity.
The third and final partner is Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS), a semi-independent national champion for good architecture, design and planning in the built environment. Established in 2005, A&DS works closely with the public, private and third sectors, assisting communities to engage with their environment, advising the government on how to best deliver policy and taking the initiative in appropriate directions. A&DS is accountable to the Scottish government and works closely with the Chief Architect in developing several policy initiatives, including the Place Standard tool.

3. OBJECTIVES

According to its detailed guide, the Place Standard tool was developed to “support the delivery of high-quality places in Scotland and to maximise the potential of the physical and social environment in supporting health, wellbeing and a high quality of life.” In order to achieve this, Place Standard provides an evaluation tool that enables anyone to assess the quality of places. This is because, although “most people are capable of making judgments about places, it is often difficult to establish a precise definition of what place quality means due to the term’s subjectivity and the different ways it can be interpreted by each individual” (Carmona & Sieh, 2004, p. 13). Aware of this difficulty, the Scottish government decided to develop the Place Standard tool in order to cultivate greater certainty around the notion of place quality by providing a methodology that somehow rationalize the qualities and complexities inherent to making judgments about the quality of places (Carmona et al., 2017, p. 198).

A second objective of Place Standard is to facilitate conversations about the physical elements and social aspects of the built environment, through which local stakeholders and communities can work together and assess the quality of places. In this context, Place Standard is meant to be one step in a larger process, in which different stakeholders may easily co-produce a qualitative assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of a given place that can be used to identify priority actions. In relation to this, Karen Anderson, the former Chair of A&DS, described the Place Standard as a:

“simple way to broker a conversation with a number of different communities around anything. And it doesn’t even need to be with communities, it could be

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10 A&DS is designated as an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body (NPDB) funded by the Scottish Government, whose role is to support and promote ministerial policies and objectives for the built and natural environment. As an organisation external to the government, it has more freedom and flexibility to work directly with communities or engage with stakeholders (White & Chapple, 2019)

11 https://www.placestandard.scot/guide/full (accessed 08/05/2020)
with any client group; but it means that you are instantly having a joint analysis of issues [...] which is free of the traditional role of 'I'm the planner, you're the architect, you're the member of the community and you're the guy with the money. [...] The primary idea is to give people confidence, they become the expert because they know their place better than you do" (interview: 2018).}

This means that the focus is on the process of evaluation itself and not so much on what exactly the outcome of the assessment is, since the results are not comparatively analysed, and hence the tool is not designed to be used centrally by one organisation or by trained professionals only. Rather, it is about providing a common base for people to collectively consider their quality of life in relation to their experience of a place and to be more actively involved in the planning of improvements.

In this context, a third and final objective is the promotion of public participation and the empowerment of Scottish communities. This underlying goal stems from its teaser question: “Are we having the right conversations with the right people at the right time to change things for the better?” To do so, the tool was designed using accessible language that everyone can use, namely, by people with different social and economic backgrounds, thus enabling them to gain further knowledge about their places and to decide their own aspirations, priorities and possible solutions.

4. THE TOOL / INITIATIVE: DETAILED DESCRIPTION

4.1. Themes and scoring system

As explained, the Place Standard is a formative evaluation tool designed to assess the quality of places in a holistic and accessible approach so all type of users may identify the strengths and weaknesses of a place and select priority intervention areas. The tool is structured around fourteen themes encompassing both the physical elements and social aspects of a place, from mobility and traffic to the sense of belonging and having a voice in how things change. For each theme, there is one main question for the participants to answer, aided by secondary questioning...
highlighting particular aspects for people to consider when replying to the different questions (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moving around</td>
<td>Can I easily walk and cycle around using good-quality routes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transport</td>
<td>Does public transport meet my needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic and parking</td>
<td>Do traffic and parking arrangements allow people to move around safely and meet the community’s needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streets and spaces</td>
<td>Do buildings, streets and public spaces create an attractive place that is easy to get around?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural space</td>
<td>Can I regularly experience good-quality natural spaces?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play and recreation</td>
<td>Can I access a range of spaces with opportunities for play and recreation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and amenities</td>
<td>Do the facilities and amenities meet my needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work and local economy</td>
<td>Is there an active local economy and the opportunity to access high-quality working opportunities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing and community</td>
<td>Do the homes in my area support the needs of the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social contact</td>
<td>Is there a range of spaces and opportunities to meet people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity and belonging</td>
<td>Does this place have a positive identity and do I feel like I belong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling safe</td>
<td>Do I feel safe here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care and maintenance</td>
<td>Are buildings and spaces well cared for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence and sense of control</td>
<td>Do I feel able to take part in decisions and help change things for the better?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Place Standard themes and main questions (source: www.placestandard.scot)

All questions are phrased in such a manner that they always refer to people’s experience of the place (asking, for instance, ‘do the facilities and amenities meet my needs?’ rather than ‘how many of such-and-such facilities are there in the area,’ ‘how many people use them,’ or any other kind of detached observation / measurement type of questions). To support the users’ understanding and ability reply to all 14 questions, the Place Standard tool provides 5-7 prompts for each question with a particular emphasis, which encourages the user to consider the different population groups and ages who may engage with the place (Howie, 2018). In the end, however, the answers result in a simple score on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means there is a great deal to improve and 7 that there is little need for change. Scores on all fourteen themes are plotted in a spider diagram, which allows whatever their age, sex, ethnic group, disability, religious belief or sexuality?"
As an example, under the themes of “Moving Around,” “Traffic & Parking,” and “Feeling Safe,” a user who would like to cycle safely may prioritise the need to reduce the volume of traffic and increase cycling opportunities in their area through a number of actions that include the introduction of improved traffic calming and segregated cycle lanes (Howie, 2018).

To facilitate the completion of the Place Standard assessment, an online version was developed as well as a mobile application (app) version, where the scores are automatically displayed and available for download or printing. After the Place Standard diagram is completed, users can review their comments and then prioritise and document what place dimensions may need improvement(s). Once this stage is completed, users are invited to identify and describe what actions should be taken to make the necessary improvements (Ibid.)

Fig. 1 – Example of Place Standard final spider diagram (source: www.placestandard.scot)
The Place Standard tool is intentionally left vague enough so that it can be applied to different scales, from a single street to a whole region, and to existing places and proposals alike. It can also be used in different formats, from individual evaluations or as a basis for a survey, to more collaborative ways of working in workshops. It is no surprise it has so far been employed in numerous different manners. The Place Standard was also developed in such a way that it can fit within public health science models, particularly those examining fundamental/systemic, environmental, and individual influences on health inequalities.

In the months before and leading up to its public launch, A&DS conducted four pilots for Place Standard in communities and places of different circumstances. Lessons learned from those pilots were incorporated into Place Standard’s final version (e.g. bringing the number of themes down to 14 from 24, solidifying the 1-7 scoring scale as opposed to alternatives such as +/-3 or 1-5).

### 4.2. Application

Since its launch, the Place Standard tool has been used in a diverse array of ways and at a range of scales to inform spatial planning community planning and design across Scotland, from settlement and city district to neighbourhood and development site scale. The wide variety in the ways Place Standard has been used would seem to suggest it works well as a common foundation on which different groups and places can build and expand, whether through focused meetings, community-led design charrettes, structured workshops, surveys, street consultations, etc. According to John Howie (2018), in December 2018, 142 separate instances reaching almost 17,000 individuals were recorded by 28 local authority areas and 1 national park.

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15 For more information on cases studies and examples see: https://www.ads.org.uk/case_studies_place_standard/

16 Johnny Cadell of A&DS has cited a number of past initiatives that were examined as part of the development process for Place Standard; amongst them, the work of CABE (By Design 2000 & Building for Life 2012), previous initiatives of the Scottish Government (Designing Streets 2010), the work of Danish architect Jan Gehl, social tools like the Health Impact Assessment of NHS Scotland and the Healthy Sustainable Neighbourhoods of the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, and the ‘Creating Strong Communities’ initiative. Source: http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1706/1-johnny-cadell-origins-1.pdf

17 The four pilots were: Carnegie Trust UK which piloted the tool with three communities that had won the Carnegie Prize for Design and Wellbeing, each for a small public space improvement project; Angus Community Planning Partnership, who tested the tool in Arbroath town centre in a ‘before’ scenario (evaluating a place as-is); the South Queensferry & District Council and City of Edinburgh Council who tested the tool in a ‘during’ scenario, i.e. in managing a major ongoing change, the Forth crossing; and finally, the Shetland Islands community which tested the tool in survey format for the monitoring and evaluating of changes already taking place (Ibidem)

18 In the Place Standard development, considered different scoring options were considered (e.g. +/-3 or 1-5), but it was ultimately decided not to introduce negative scoring so that negative feelings or attitudes would not be created or instilled in more deprived places (Currie, interview: 2020)

19 For example, the Argyll and Bute Council Community Planning Partnership (CPP) used the Place Standard tool to engage residents in Argyll and Bute on how they feel about the place(s) where they live and work, for which 1,558 responses were received. For more information: https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/how-good-your-place
Within these figures, over 70% of the applications were used for local authority locality planning, master planning or local development planning.

According to Jude Barber (interview: 2020), to help set the conversations with community groups about the fourteen themes of the tool, their events have also included didactic materials, such as different scales of orthophoto maps, models and pictures of an area to help participants visualize the different target areas and the interrelation between the physical and social aspects of a place (see Fig. 2).

![Fig. 2 – Workshop with local communities in Edinburgh (Source: @LeithCreative)](image)

4.3. Implementation and monitoring

To supervise the development and implementation of the Place Standard tool across Scotland, it was decided to set up a Place Standard Implementation Board, chaired by the Chief Architect who oversaw the development of the tool and its launch in late 2015 (John Howie, interview: 2020). This board supervises the work of the Place Standard Implementation Group alongside three other working groups (see Fig. 3). A three-year-long implementation plan (2016-2019) was also agreed upon, which provided a framework of actions to support the practical application of the tool across Scotland.
After the launch of the tool, Place Standard was officially in its implementation phase, so as such a new network was established, the ‘Place Standard Alliance,’ which consists of practitioners, communities and other stakeholders actively involved with the tool. Local coordination and delivery are supported by a Place Standard Lead from each local authority and both national parks, who meet together in a Place Standard conference every six months (Howie, 2018). Over the years, more organisations have joined the alliance, either as active partners (Glasgow City Council) or in other modes, leading to the formation of new entities. In December 2019, a new three-year strategy was launched for the tool, which will be followed by an updated version of the original tool and three new place standard publications: the first for children, the second for young people, and a third for key professional groups such as architects, urban designers and planners (Ibidem).

4.4. Assessment

In May 2017, NHS Health Scotland published a report evaluating the first year of the Place Standard, looking into the reach of the tool across Scotland and the specifics of its local implementation, by recording the instances and types of use at the national level and selecting five implementation case studies for in-depth examination. In terms of reach, the report found over 80 use instances in the first
year, with at least 11,000 individuals involved in some way or another (each use may mean a focus group or a large-scale survey, or a series of one-to-one evaluations). 70% of Scottish local authorities had either signed up to begin or had begun using the Place Standard, mostly as a community engagement tool and to support the development of Local Outcome Improvement Plans (one of the formal participatory planning formats in the country). However, the tool was not only employed at the local authority level, but at varied scales including smaller districts & neighbourhoods in both urban and rural areas.

Findings from the five case studies were grouped to address seven key themes pertaining to local implementation, and to address both the positive outcomes and the barriers to effectiveness. Without going into all of the details, some of the important points addressed included: the need to engage underrepresented yet highly affected communities via more sensitive and targeted approaches; the importance of scale and context; the need to have skilled facilitators assisting the process (especially those competent in qualitative data analysis), which was also the part requiring and consuming the most resources; the need for the process to go beyond mere ‘community planning’ and include a wider range of stakeholders, who can buy in to assist with taking actions forward; the need to manage expectations of what Place Standard can and cannot do, and to formulate specific plans with clear responsibilities and financial opportunities to move towards tangible results.

Overall, Place Standard has been positively perceived as an engagement tool with the spider diagram representation thought to be effective; on the other hand, concerns have been noted on the overlap of some themes, on the fourteen question-long evaluation process still being too lengthy for some purposes, and on the language being too complex for some users (especially children). It was also highlighted that, often, the comments accompanying the scores were perceived as being more important than the scores themselves. Particularly in larger-scale implementations such as surveys, the averages tended to display a middle-option bias with everything converging around the 3 & 4 marks. Therefore, a more nuanced analysis of the results and an understanding of the reasons behind the scoring were thought to be more meaningful than the headline scoring figures.

Based on this report’s findings and on the general feedback from the first year of implementation, the online version of the tool was improved to allow for various types of usage including in a survey format, and capacity-building resources were planned to assist with further learning and analytical skills, as well as with how to transition from mere assessment to concrete action plans. In that regard, the online ‘Place Standard Learning Resource’ was launched in 2018, following separate pilots and
under the umbrella of NHS Health Scotland. A follow-up was also planned for the examined cases studies.

In 2017, a World Health Organisation-sponsored event also took place that specifically focused on the Place Standard. Among other presentations, there were early case studies showcasing the particulars of implementing Place Standard and the effects of the process. By December 2018 when the second Place Standard Alliance event took place, there was already a satisfactory basis of implementation efforts at various levels - including one architecture/design practice, Collective Architecture, who were already incorporating the tool in their practice and experimenting with its use. More recently, they presented their efforts at the first Making Places conference in June 2019, including their attempt at formulating a ‘designers’ version.

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH FORMAL (REGULATORY) TOOLS

From its very origins, Place Standard has always had a close connection to formal policy, given that it is the product of (at least) two formal policy documents and the outcome of a collaboration between governmental and arms-length organisations, whose main working tool still remains policy documents. Unsurprisingly then, there has been an effort to incorporate Place Standard in formal planning processes (mostly as an evidence tool). Nevertheless, the usage of the Place Standard tool is not compulsory in any way and, even when it is cited as a potentially solid source of evidence, it is never compulsory that this method in particular and no others should be used to generate evidence. This may suggest that the value of Place Standard, as seen by its creators, still lies in its ‘informal’ character and the flexibility this affords.

That being said, Place Standard is indeed designed to have a place in the formal planning process, and the policy framework is cited as one of the factors involved in the first implementation plan. Even before Place Standard’s launch, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act of 2015 set the stage for the application of such tools: each council area is also designated as a Community Planning Partnership (CPP),

http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1710/5-case-studies-x-3-1-1.pdf
http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2305/2_jude-barber.pdf
http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1708/3-kat-hasler-implementation-1.pdf
which is meant to incorporate all services that come together to take part in community planning (incl. public bodies). CPPs are responsible for producing two types of plans: Local Outcome Improvement Plans for the whole council area, and Locality Plans (at least one) which cover smaller areas and usually focus on those which are the most deprived. Additionally, CPPs have a legal requirement to work with their communities in producing those plans, which is where the Place Standard usually comes in.

For another perspective, some local councils have been making an effort to integrate the Place Standard tool into their formal planning framework. For example, the Glasgow City Council (which is an active partner in Place Standard) refers to the Place Standard in its Supplementary Guidance to City Development plan. This document stipulates that “the Place Standard Tool will be a requirement for all masterplan areas in the City and all new major development unless otherwise agreed by the Council” – as evidence of its impact on health outcomes (although, again, other equivalent forms of evidence would be accepted). While this presents a sometimes-ambiguous mix between formal and informal tools, it does showcase how Place Standard is meant to be integrated in the local placemaking processes.

![Fig. 4 – Policies & Plans from the National to Local levels in Scotland](https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=36870&p=0)

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32 [https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=36870&p=0](https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=36870&p=0)
6. ALLIED FINANCIAL MECHANISMS

The Place Standard tool does not have a direct allied financial mechanism. Nonetheless, Scotland used to have a Charrettes fund, which was transformed (in 2018) into the Making Places initiative, which is aimed at encouraging communities to contribute to the development of their local places.33 The first round of the initiative was to provide funding for projects to be completed by the end of March 2019 and which consisted of two strands: the Place Standard Conversations fund and the Community-Led Design fund.34 The first was closely related to the Place Standard tool, as it provided small grants directly to community groups to support them in beginning to use the tool as an incentive to reconsider their place and how it affects their life. The fund was primarily aimed at areas of large-scale deprivation, communities which have fewer resources and opportunities, and may not have the confidence to undertake such an evaluation process without further support. Funding from this strand did not require match funding and was not available to local authorities (solely for community groups). According to John Howie of NHS Scotland, in 2018/19 a total of 21 projects were awarded funds of between £500 and £5,000, amounting to just under £77,000 in total.35

The second strand, the Community-Led Design fund (now accessible through the new ‘Investing in Communities Fund’ within the Scottish ‘Empowering Communities Programme’) was meant to support the delivery of participative design and place-based workshops, particularly where these support the development of local place plans. This fund was open to community groups, third sector organisations and public authorities, in order to take forward design processes relating to a particular place. Match funding was required, with the Government contributing, in most cases, to 50% of the cost. The total fund available for this initiative was £275,000.36 Although this strand was not directly connected to the Place Standard, it would enable the use of the tool under the auspices of its workshops and meetings.

35 http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2309/6_john-howie.pdf
36 as in [31]
7. CHALLENGES AND EQUALITY ISSUES

One of Place Standard’s key challenges is its capacity to influence decision making process and effectively help reduce inequalities and improve places for the better. As noted previously, Place Standard is a formative evaluation tool about the qualities of place that can be used by very different people. This means that its main outputs are detailed information about the level of satisfaction, needs and aspirations of local actors and communities, which in turn would influence planning decisions. However, the collected data is not a guarantee that it will effectively influence decision makers and lead to change. As John Howie (interview, 2020) puts it:

“one of the Place Standard big challenges is how to transfer the information that communities, businesses and organizations shared of what could improve a place into a reality. We have to accept that creating our reality requires funding, time and political commitment and strong leadership.”

This means that the Place Standard tool is part of a wider system of design governance, where decisions to improve places in a certain way will be dependent on a combination of multiple factors and interests, with the information provided by the Place Standard tool comprising only one of those. Therefore, it is important not to create false expectations for participants and to make the best use possible of the collected data to determine priority actions and to influence policy decisions in putting forward the needs of communities. Nevertheless, the information collected by the tool has the potential to inform the planning process in several ways, including Local Development Plans or more strategic/city district plans.

Another key challenge is the capacity to identify and consider the needs of different users of a certain place, as any public space will encompass numerous different views on what a place may need. This means that according to the age, social background and interests of whoever is completing the Place Standard tool, the tool will produce highly different results. Similar to a public consultation process, the role of facilitators or those coordinating the consultation will be crucial for reading through and analysing the different answers in order to reach a common understanding of the weakness and strengths of a place, including integrating and weighting the different needs and preferences of a community in an independent manner.

Regarding the relation of the tool to equality issues, Place Standard has always had a great concern for the rights of different people to have similar voices and receive the same treatment by focusing on participation, empowerment, inclusion and health. In fact, concern for health (in)equalities was at the very heart of the scheme since its
conceptual beginnings on the part of NHS Health Scotland. Considering the impact of place quality on the health of individuals and communities, the tool intends to enhance the built environment as a method to promote wellbeing, and physical and mental health by obtaining a better perception of what a place may need.

The presentations cited before have also mentioned the need for further efforts to be made towards more extensive inclusivity in the use of the Place Standard - most commonly in reference to its translation to other languages and making sure the language use is accessible for all age groups/demographics, including young children. As every place is used by a huge diversity of people, with different ages and social economic backgrounds, it is crucial to create conditions for different people to influence their surroundings in order to strengthen local communities and include the voices of the disadvantaged in the wider debate surrounding the future of places.

Fig. 5 – Place Standard street consultation (Source: @LeithCreative)
8. KEY INNOVATIONS, SUCCESSES AND IMPACTS

Although other evaluation tools for design quality have existed before, one of the key innovations of Place Standard is its holistic approach that touches on the majority of the issues affecting the quality of places, including both the physical and social aspects of the built environment. When assessing the quality of the public realm, most people tend to focus only on its physical attributes and forget that places also consist of people, where aspects such as safety, freedom, or the capacity to take part in decisions and help change things for the better are also highly important. The tool also innovates in raising awareness to the fact that the quality of the built environment affects our health and well-being, particularly for disadvantaged people. The connection between the quality of a place and the way it affects our physical and mental health is particularly important in the current COVID-19 situation the world is facing.

Another key innovation is the fact the Place Standard tool is available as a free resource for anyone to use, aiming for it to contribute to the reduction of spatial inequalities. Once available, the Scottish government and its partners have sought to empower others to take ownership of the tool and promote its dissemination as a resource focused on compelling people to gather and talk in groups and to demand more from their local places. As argued in the Place Standard strategic plan 2002-3, the tool can help give local communities a voice and a “role in influencing their future and bringing together all of the interests and resources within an area. This process of engagement and informed decision-making provides a strong foundation to address inequalities and improve the wellbeing of communities” (Scotland, 2020).

Since its launch in 2015, the Place Standard tool has been successfully implemented and widely used across Scotland, and is beginning to be exported to other countries and national contexts (see below). Its success appears to be rooted in the simplicity of the tool (given that anyone, be they a professional or normal citizen, can use it) to measure spatial quality from a holistic perspective and to facilitate conversations about place. Considering the tool is also being used within local planning consultation processes, there is some evidence that it assists public authorities with holding discussions with local stakeholders and communities to better understand the assets and needs of their local places.

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37 For example, see the CABE ‘Spaceshaper’ tool: https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/spaceshaper-users-guide

Regarding the impact of the Place Standard tool, it is not possible to measure its direct impact on the quality of projects and places. Being an informal tool aimed at facilitating dialogue between communities and planners, the Place Standard tool will end up having an indirect impact on places by improving overall planning practices in Scotland. The value of involving communities in the planning and design of their urban spaces goes much beyond merely its measured results, such as the number of assessments, meaning it strongly contributes to wider engagement, inclusiveness, and the participation of different stakeholders on the discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of a place and to collaborate on the definition of areas for improvement.

9. EXAMPLES

To illustrate how the Place Standard tool has been applied to projects of different scales and associated planning processes, three examples will be briefly described below. The information provided about these three examples is based on reports developed by Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS).39

9.1. Alloa (Clackmannanshire): housing design and town centre improvement

In the follow up of a design workshop, the City Council of Clackmannanshire recognised that there was a need to improve local services and infrastructure in the town centre of Alloa alongside new housing that could meet the needs of elderly residents. In this context, the City Council decided to use the Place Standard tool to examine whether the town centre would make an appropriate place for older people to live and what type of needs had to be prioritized by the Council.

How was the tool applied?

In a first stage, the Place Standard tool was used to assess and test the requirements for the town centre of Alloa, supported by A&DS and the Scottish Government. In 2018, a focus group was set up including Council officers from across a range of services working with health and social care professionals, architects, housing association representatives and representatives of town centre businesses. Using

39 The reports are accessible on the A&DS webpage: https://www.ads.org.uk/tag/place-standard/
the tool, the group looked at the town centre assets and improvements required to provide for the needs of the elderly residents of the new housing proposed at Primrose Street alongside those of the wider Alloa community.

Fig. 6 – Focus group meeting using the Place Standard Tool (Source: A&DS report on Place Standard tool Alloa Case Study)

In a second stage, the Place Standard tool was used for a major community consultation in 2019. Led by the City Council and organized by the Clackmannanshire Third Sector Interface (CTSI), the consultation involved around 300 residents of Alloa. The consultation received grant support from the Scottish Government through the Place Standard Conversations fund (see Section 6 on Allied Financial mechanisms). The Council and CTSI organized a three-day drop-in event in vacant town centre shop premises, and throughout the consultation period the CTSI also connected with specific target groups in order to ensure a representative cross-section of society, including local disability groups, racial minorities, and younger people.

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40 The Alloa case study report is available at:

What influence did the work have?

According to the A&DS report (2019), the Place Standard focus group helped identify priority streetscape improvements that would benefit the new development as well as the wider town centre, with these priorities being reinforced by the community in the results of the second stage. From the consultation process, it became clear that the “streetscape works to make the town centre a safer, friendlier place for older people were simply good practice actions that would benefit everyone” (Ibidem).
9.2. Pollokshields Community Council: neighbourhood strategic plan

At the end of 2015, the Pollokshields Community Council (Glasgow) commissioned Collective Architecture and Dress for the Weather to lead a design charrette for East Pollokshields which would engage the community in identifying key areas for long-term improvement. The main aim of the consultation was to complete the East Pollokshields and Port Eglington Planning Study as a masterplan document that, as a Supplementary Planning Guidance to the new City Development Plan, would help guide the next two decades of development in this multicultural area. The Place Standard tool formed an integral part of this wider design charrette process to structure and facilitate engagement with local stakeholders and residents from a holistic perspective.

How was the tool applied?

In February 2016, the Place Standard tool was used in a week-long design charrette in a range of settings and in different ways, so that local residents could participate and contribute regardless of how much time they could devote to the undertaking. In order to do so, the week began with informal, on-street ‘mobile charrette’ consultations, where the project team went out onto the streets with plans and models. This mobile charrette used a simple, one-page version of the Place Standard compass diagram with a small comments section in order to obtain thoughts from passers-by on the street.

To support the process alongside the community council and the consultant team, a number of active local residents signed up as Charrette Champions, representing a cross-section of the local community and who encouraged local residents to participate. This was divided into a series of four focus group workshops structured around the Place Standard topics. Each of the four half-day workshops covered three to four of the Place Standard themes, so that the participants could have a questionnaire completed by the end of the process. The workshops also used maps of the area with note-taking and sketching overlaid. The discussion was prompted by the Place Standard questions, which allowed for consistent themes across the charrette but also for participants to express specific concerns.

According to the case study report, at the end of the charrette all of the completed forms were digitally transferred using the Place Standard app so they could be context, design charrettes provide a dynamic environment where residents can put forward their own ideas and aspirations on how the local area should develop over the coming years.
assessed together with the key themes and feedback. The collected data was gathered into a report and distributed to all key participants for review. Finally, the outcomes were refined into a five-point vision for the area and an action plan.

What influence did the work have?

Through the design charrette process and the use of the Place Standard tool, the local community was able to produce a clear and concise five-point vision that addressed existing challenges, proposed viable solutions, and set out a positive future plan/outlook for the area. This vision seeks to build on existing infrastructure and to better support the local community in shaping and influencing the development of East Pollokshields. Adding to this, the process also helped to shape a community action plan, a series of short, medium and long-term actions through which the five-point vision could be achieved in a dynamic, phased manner. This process led to the formation of a Community Trust which has been taking forward the aims and objectives identified in the study.

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42 This case study report is available at:  
9.3. Aberdeenshire Council: local development plan

In collaboration with the Community Council of Portlethen, the Aberdeenshire Council used the Place Standard tool to inform settlement statements for the Local Development Plan (LDP) and for three large settlements in the Kincardine and Mearns area (Portlethen, Stonehaven and Laurencekirk). The aim of the initiative was to establish a community brief for actions in each of the three settlements.
How was the tool applied?

A series of community events was promoted by the Council’s Area Management Team in conjunction with the Portlethen & District Community Council in order to establish a community brief for actions. A variety of community groups and other potential participants were targeted through a known range of networks and residents. The paper version of the Place Standard tool was used to facilitate collaborative group works with small groups of four to ten participants. In initial briefing sessions, the key themes and priorities were established followed by the action planning sessions for identified specific projects and initiatives to be reflected in the Local Development Plan and the Settlement Plan.

An online version of the tool was also launched to gather contributions from those who could not attend the event, using which 120 people responded. The different replies were analysed in conjunction with the data from the event and online survey. A final follow-up prioritisation event took place with around 40 participants to discuss the action plan. At a third session, five key themes were identified, some related directly to Place Standard themes while others were linked to more than one theme.

Fig. 11 – Different options for street improvement in Portlethen (Aberdeenshire) (Source: A&DS report on Place Standard tool being used for planning at the Settlement Scale)

What influence did the work have?

According to the A&DS report, the crosscutting nature of Place Standard themes has enabled the main concerns of the community to be surveyed regarding the different areas. In order to consolidate plans for improvement in Portlethen, a follow-up two-day event took place to confirm the community brief and create project profiles for specific initiatives. Opportunities to improve three ‘town centre’ locations in Portlethen were then identified and discussed with stakeholders. The brief and projects that arose from the sessions were then mapped into cross-service policy and investment plans to be able to define an implementation programme. In this way, community ideas and priorities were mapped into policy and investment opportunities. The process gave rise to a Place Making Plan for Portlethen, to be delivered by the Aberdeenshire Council, as well as by community and stakeholder groups. Finally, the process also catalysed initiatives to be led by the community, such as improvements to path networks, improved open space and play areas, improved community facilities and improved retail experiences.

10. KEY LESSONS AND TRANSFERABILITY

One of the key lessons is the value of the tool as an enabler that promotes constructive conversations about the quality of places. Using easy and clear language, the tool facilitates a structured dialogue with local communities or other target groups about different aspects of the built environment. Looking at the Place Standard experience in Scotland, it is possible to conclude that using an informal evaluation tool improves the dialogue and engagement between authorities, technicians and non-experts, including the most disadvantaged and socially excluded, which in turn will contribute to better collaborative processes surrounding places, namely planning and designing collective spaces in a more inclusive manner.

Regarding the transferability of the tool, the Place Standard has already been applied internationally across 14 European countries and translated into other languages (Dutch, Greek, Norwegian, and Turkish). The World Health Organisation European Healthy Cities Network has widely adopted and promoted the use of Place Standard
According to John Howie, the Place Standard has had the following international applications: a) Local use in Carlisle, Sheffield, Kirklees Council and the UK Eden Project; b) In Lithuania the tool was delivered via the Healthy City Team in Kaunas City Council within 11 city areas in 2018; c) Research-based testing in Macedonia (Skopje) & Latvia (Riga) via Eurohealthnet funding to determine roll-out in both national contexts; d) Maastricht University Health Promotion Department use in spatial planning development around the Maastricht Railway Station; e) Belfast WHO Healthy Cities – Planning Workshop with Organisations & Communities delivered on 3rd May; f) the initial pilot in the Netherlands followed by the development and launch of a new Dutch tool in Utrecht; g) the PhD research study in Cyprus using a Greek version of the tool which is now being adapted for application in six areas in Greece; h) An application in Copenhagen’s South Harbour area, and thereafter being escalated by the Danish Healthy Cities Network into a 30 month-long funded programme at 14 individual sites across Denmark; i) A workshop for Turkish WHO Healthy Cities in Bursa to develop country-wide and regional capacities for roll-out in December 2019 (a Turkish version of the tool launched early 2019); j) a Norwegian translation to support piloting across Norway; k) a German pilot in two municipalities with a new German version planned for March 2021; l) a Spanish adaptation tested by the Valencian Office of Community Action for Health; and m) an Early interest to develop the French translation by the University for General Medicine & Public Health, Lausanne, Switzerland.

The H2020 research project INHERIT piloted Place Standard in Skopje (North Macedonia) as part of one of its case studies, and has featured the tool (as applied there and also in Riga) as one of the project’s selected ‘triple-win cases’. Recently, following an initial pilot, a Dutch version of the tool was launched in 2019, entitled the “LeefPlekMeter,” with some slight changes so that it would be more adaptable to the Dutch context (Howie, 2018).
KEY REFERENCES


KEY ONLINE RESOURCES

https://www.placestandard.scot

https://www.ads.org.uk/placestandard

https://www.placestandard.scot/docs/Place_Standard_Strategic_Plan.pdf
URBAN MAESTRO

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www.urbanmaestro.org

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