

Artists & Creativity in Urban Placemaking

Reflections on a Downtown Minneapolis Cultural District

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Abstract

Participatory city planning led by artists was not in the sightlines of Geddes or Mumford when modern planning practices were born. A century-long trend brings increased requirements and expectations of participation by public stakeholders and growth in neighborhood and district-level planning. Increasingly complex urban environments require cross-sector collaboration and cross-cultural dialogue, in addition to understanding a multitude of culturally specific ways people use public and private spaces. Challenges to the profession grow as the role of planner evolves from engineer to facilitator. This paper reviews these trends as well as recent scholarly work calling for more involvement of creative voices and practices in planning. Through a Minneapolis case, this article examines inclusion of a theater artist, choreographer, vocalist/songwriter and muralist in leadership of a district planning project that generates a richer analysis, more robust options, and offers a greater sense of participant ownership through creative placemaking.

Keywords: *Artists, Urban Planning, Creative Placemaking, Culture-led Regeneration, Cultural Planning, Cultural Districts*

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Introduction

The tools of the artist are an essential part of how we imagine cities: through stories, images, metaphors, exploring possibilities as well as critiques (Baeker 2002:24).

This paper explores theory and practice related to the integration of creativity and creative methods within the process of city and district planning – in particular the public participation process. A Minneapolis case is described, an urban district undergoing a regeneration through building on cultural assets and strengthening social and institutional cohesion.

This paper traces the evolution of urban and neighborhood planning practices and summarizes challenges to the planning profession in relation to globalization, ethnic diversity, and economic changes in cities. The introduction of cultural planning and the idea of creative placemaking are summarized along with the call by some scholars for use of more creative and culturally appropriate methods.

I suggest that creative methods employed by artists can engage people of more diverse backgrounds and draw them more deeply into the analytical and visioning work of city planning. A Minneapolis case examines inclusion of a theater artist, choreographer, vocalist/songwriter and muralist in leadership of a district planning project that generates a richer analysis, more robust options, and greater sense of participant ownership through creative planning activities.

Urban Planning and the Social Needs of Cities

Strategy making in the planning field requires complex imaginative, intellectual and technical work, involving a wide range of sources of understanding and imaginative power (Healey 2010:188).

Urban planning on the local or neighborhood level can be traced through voluminous literature on the topic (Rohe 2009, Silver 1985). Formal city planning came to be recognized in the early part of the 20th century, and by the second half of the century became a full-fledged profession with trained personnel embedded in all levels of government (Baeker 2002, Peterman 2004, Rohe 2009). The emerging role of public participation in the process of planning stems, as well, from the middle of the 20th century but evolved significantly after the 1970s (Healey 2010, Peterman 2004, Rohe 2009, Silver 1985).

Urban theorists Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford, advocated citizen participation in planning before it was a generally accepted part of the practice. According to Baeker (2002:23), they promoted “civic exhibitions on urban and regional issues, surveys, and through input to the creation of planning alternatives or scenarios. Mumford saw plans as ‘instruments of communal education.’” Earlier forms planning required engineering and organizational skills to coordinate resources and materials to implement top-down, expert-designed schemes. As societies and cities evolved along with the growth of local municipal governance and citizen activism, requirements of planners became more complex.

Most scholars acknowledge the urban planning profession is grounded in allocation of real estate and provision of infrastructure and municipal services to meet needs of expanding and changing populations. Known for its primary purpose as 'land use planning', this remains its chief concern (Albrechts 2005, Healey 2010, Peterman 2004, Zukin & Braslow 2011).

Friedmann (1971) and Peterman (2004:266-7) describe how planners incorporated concepts from the social sciences into their practice after World War II. Planning was based on making rational choices among alternatives. This rational planning model remains the undercurrent of the practice, positioning planners as experts who inform leaders and the larger public of optimal choices. Many in the profession began to acknowledge by the 1960s that choices were laden with values and benefits for some over others. Considering planning as a technical field, Peterman writes, "it was presumed that planners operated above the political process and apart from those for whom they were planning." Practitioners and observers quickly discovered, argues Huang (2005:78), that even engineers and bureaucrats had biases. She writes, "The value-free model of planning is nothing but a myth."

The professionalization of the urban planning field during the 1950s and 1960s and its institutionalization within municipal government, Baeker (2002:23) argues, put it within a political milieu and undermined the capacity of the field to maintain a holistic view or interdisciplinary nature. While planning was as apolitical by many, Baeker argues, the value of "growth and development were generally viewed in positive – and often unquestioned – terms."

Many critics argue that urban expansion and building by private sector developers took precedence over rational human needs or the rights of residents to maintain long-standing and cohesive communities. Huang (2005:78) argues that, "modern urban planning in the Euro-American context was born as a tool of the state to balance private and public interests under capitalism." However, she and others agree that it lost its balance.

Zukin and Braslow (2011:133) assert that in a capitalist society, cities provide two basic commodities: land and labor. Even in the transition from an industrial to a creative or knowledge-based economy, they argue, the specific requirements of land and the skills of labor may change, but for municipal leaders the object of "industrial and land use policy [remains] to prepare the ground for private-sector real estate developers."

In her arguments to redefine planning as more people-based than land-based, Healey (2010:18) offers a more optimistic view of what she calls the 21st century planning project. "Overall, the idea of planning as an enterprise of collective activity, of public policy, is linked to a belief that it is worth striving to improve the human condition as lived in particular situations in the context of interaction with others, human and non-human."

Collaborative Planning and New Challenges for Planners

It's no-one's job to connect agendas, ways of thinking, knowledge and skill bases. If no-one is responsible at present, then everyone is to blame for our many ugly, soulless, unworkable cities and to praise for our occasional places of delight (Landry 2006:7)

In his 100-year survey of urban planning, Rohe (2009:216) provides a view into the more specific evolution of local and neighborhood-based approaches that provided planners important lessons.

It also taught us that local social relations and networks matter greatly to people and should be given great weight in revitalization planning. Social networks are particularly important in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. It taught us that total clearance should be a last resort, considered only when rehabilitation is not feasible. Finally, it taught us that planners do not have all the answers, but should listen to and work with local residents in neighborhood rehabilitation projects.

A later stage in the development of urban planning Rohe (2009:217) labels 'community action', called for a "permanent increase in the capacity of individuals, groups and communities ...to deal effectively with their own problems..."

Peterman (2004) traces a different trajectory of planning describing the practices of advocacy planning and collaborative planning. Planners realized that in the allocation of land, services, and other resources, significant choices were being made that had great impact on the lives of community residents. Healey (1998:1534) calls this "a competition in which there are a few winners and quite a lot of losers." Some planners felt personally or ethically obligated to address needs of the less powerful in society and took on the role of advocates to develop plans on behalf of those they considered citizen clients.

An underlying assumption of advocacy planning is that communities have a single interest. In many cases homogeneous communities, comprised primarily of one socio-economic or racial group, found themselves in opposition to a large-scale public or private project (Healey 2010). In such cases the advocate-planner may help turn the tables. Such homogeneous communities are less often found among growing cast of what Sandercock (2004) calls 'mongrel cities' where diverse populations and people with conflicting interests share space. In such cases, Sandercock argues, the 'politics of voice' becomes a volatile dynamic. Who is speaking, and who is speaking for whom, are frequently asked questions. This leaves planners to ponder not only the desired qualities of place but whose aspirations for that place are heard and accounted for in the planning process (Healey 2010).

Healey (1998) suggests that planners respond through collaborative approaches to emphasize ways of thinking and acting that encourage discussion of the qualities of places and address conflicts in non-threatening ways. This, she says, simultaneously builds capacity for problem solving both in planning and in the community in general. Collaborative planning requires planners to step into the role of a

neutral facilitator, leading a consensus-driven participatory approach to decision-making (Peterman 2004, Sandercock 2010). In these cases, there is less emphasis on technical expertise and more on social skills. “Listening to stories, identifying common goals and forming partnerships in action: this is creative community engagement – engagement that is as much about learning as doing” (Sarkissian & Hurford 2010:154).

In order to achieve more robust public engagement, Redaelli (2010:3) argues, “it is necessary to move away from a model of participation in which the administrator plays the role of the expert and citizens are merely reactive.” Planners, she argues, should involve citizens in an exchange and engage them in a progressive dialogue rather than merely asking their input.

Changes in the larger social environment elevate the importance and potential value of participation and collective action as well as the need for skills to manage and maximize this involvement – widely divergent from the technical skills with which most planners have been equipped.

Illustrating emerging conditions facing the planning profession, Bradford (2004), describes the established field as largely unprepared for a variety of challenges including diversity, creative thinking, economic equity, and issues around environmental sustainability. In the wake of such challenges, Healey (1998:1543) writes:

This recasts the role of urban planning in a new form as an active social process through which the governance power to regulate and to distribute resources which affect the qualities of places is reshaped by a collaborative reflection on the ideas, systems of meaning, and ways of acting which have been driving placemaking in particular places in the past, and a mobilisation of transformative potential to make a difference to placemaking in the future.

Globalization of urban populations, and changing lifestyle patterns unfolding in the 21st century (Florida, 2010) increase the complexity of the task for planners. Bradford (2004:5) observes,

...conditions of diversity require bridging cultural differences, remedying social inequalities and a discursive re-framing to merge economic and environmental goals....[these provide] sweeping challenges to established policy routines and planning practices still based on rigid functional specializations and categorical programming, with little cooperation and learning across different departments, specializations and sectors.

Planning practitioners in these conditions have found their work cannot be bound by established field and sector definitions or by their own cultural biases (Vazquez 2012) if they are to truly engage with and address the needs of their communities. A more holistic view (Baeker 2002) and meaningful dialogue across race and class increase challenges to planners and communities of all sizes.

Globalization and Local Place Identity

Places that did not ‘stay true’ to their history, social dynamics, economic background and distinctive heritage and urban features tended to struggle with maintaining a new identity and brand over time while those that adopted a more ‘organic’ and joined-up approach to identity building were more successful (Bianchini and Ghilardi 2007:284).

While globalization has complicated the city planning, the idea that it results in homogenization of places have been put aside by many scholars and planners. According to Healey (1998:1531), the seeming contradiction in globalization is that the distinctiveness of each city and neighborhood take on greater significance. She writes, “in a world where integrated place-bounded relationships are pulled out of their localities, ‘disembodied’ and refashioned by multiple forces which mould them in different directions, the qualities of places seem to become more, not less, significant.” Qualities of place, argues Healey (2010:35), are more than an image or assemblage of assets. “Place qualities are generated and maintained by complex inter-relationships between people in diverse social worlds, which potentially connect them to all kinds of other places and times in dynamic and unpredictable ways.”

Each city, region, or nation develops unique political structures and traditions of public participation, points out Redaelli (2010), adding another dimension to the challenges for planners. These are what Healey (1998) calls planning cultures. As different localities evolve their own ways of conducting business and making decisions, complexities are multiplied within multi-ethnic and transitional neighborhoods, exponentially increasing challenges in bringing people together through the process of planning and subsequently building a sense of ownership of plans. Maginn (2007) asserts that planners and policymakers often set up planning processes and local partnerships with insufficient knowledge of local cultures. This is complicated by the general lack of what Vazquez (2012) calls ‘cultural competence,’ arguing that most planners lack reflective understanding of even their own cultural practices, let alone appreciation and understanding of the cultures and practices of others.

Some of the difficulties in adapting to planning with diverse stakeholder groups, points out Maginn (2007:38), include practical dilemmas such as negotiating access and finding appropriate settings. Language translation and cultural inclusion can slow the planning process requiring added expertise, time, and expense. Traditional data-driven policymakers see little value in such investments. They tend to have “concerns about the validity, reliability and objectivity of qualitative research.” These same policymakers are likely to confront social dynamics that cannot be measured by statistics. Relying on data to make local development and policy decisions may prove quicker and less costly, but do not take into account unique local conditions and social dynamics, Maginn argues. Data-driven planning may, in fact, produce results that exacerbate or create unanticipated problems with greater costs.

In some governance cultures planning can be adversarial, observes Healey (1998:1541). She argues that planning structures should embrace rather than suppress conflict as part of a process of building local governance capacity. “Collaborative approaches to placemaking help to create arenas which can act as learning environments through which stakeholders learn new ways of relating to each other.” Maginn (2007:31) concurs, “if policy agents embraced conflict and harnessed the energies generated by it, they could increase their institutional capacity which would eventually lead to more productive policy outcomes.”

Cultural and Aesthetic Justice Through Planning

Generalizations about what constitute the ‘good life’ can result in formulaic design principles and public policies. These have proven disastrous, argues Healey (2010:32). Such practices represent “major mistakes that twentieth century planners and policy experts tended to make,” and must give way to more culturally and place-sensitive approaches. Motivating engagement of disenfranchised or disaffected citizens goes beyond conflicts over land uses, allocation of housing, jobs, roadways, infrastructure, or other civic amenities. Cultural, aesthetic, and symbolic conflicts take on increased significance in diverse communities.

In planning and other social policy arenas redistributive justice has dominated most 20th century struggles for social justice, according to Baeker (2002b:68). Redistributive justice, he points out, has focused on “socioeconomic inequities, disparities in basic physical and material needs (such as income, property, access to paid work, education, health care, and leisure time), and – more starkly – the resulting rates of morbidity or life expectancy.”

In light of globalization and increasing diversity, the material-based view expanded during the latter part of the 20th Century to include less tangible elements related to cultural justice or recognition. This emerging struggle, says Baeker (2002), is rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication, including cultural domination, non-recognition, and disrespect. The urban planning profession is particularly prone to such missteps as it privileges some aesthetics, land uses, and even ways of conducting civic dialogue (Sandercock 2004).

In addition to equity in land use, economics, and cultural representation, spatial and building design emerge as a dimension of the quality of life of urban inhabitants (Matilla 2002, Talen 2006). Acknowledging challenges in the discussion of aesthetics in civic discourse, Matilla (2002:132) argues that modernism has created a separation of aesthetic issues from social and political issues. “My claim is that aesthetic welfare cannot be distributed simply by distributing ‘aesthetically good quality urban form’ produced by professional designers.” Defining aesthetically good urban form, she contends, is a political matter – not simply a task to be left to architects and designers. Universalizing theories of good aesthetics ignore cultural variations and preferences and suppress the cultural identities of those who tend to be outside economic and cultural elites. Thus, equitable distribution of so-called ‘good design’, argues Matilla, advances injustice rather than reduces it.

Instead, Mattila (2002:137) argues that aesthetic justice stems from equitable distribution of the rights to design cities. In other words, the right of people to participate in the process of determining appropriate aesthetics. She points out that this is a, “matter of developing the institutions and the methods of urban planning and design in a way that they retain sensitivity to the experience of different groups of inhabitants and better allow public participation in planning and design practices.”

Expanding the Toolbox: Cultural Planning and Creative Placemaking

The value of creative placemaking is as much in the doing as in what is done
(Vazquez (2012:2)

To aid urban planners in this complex landscape, new tools, new partnerships, and new planning techniques are needed. Mapping, understanding, and engaging with the people and cultures in rapidly diversifying cities has emerged as one of the tenets of cultural planning, a practice with less than a generation of history in most parts of the world. Cultural planning has emerged only recently as a relevant component of the urban planning landscape (Ghilardi 2008).

In most parts of the world, cultural planning has based itself in a more anthropological definition of culture as a way of life, seeing the “integration of the arts into other aspects of local culture, and into the texture and routines of daily life in the city” (Ghilardi 2008:5). This requires cultural planners and local cultural managers to gain broader appreciation of ways in which artists, the arts, and culture are and can be integrated with the social and economic life of cities.

Evans (2005:959) makes a case for cultural planning, as a “critical aspect of mediating and articulating community need, as development is planned and takes shape, through culture’s potential to empower and animate.” This in turn, he argues, can lead to participation in, and ownership of, community regeneration by stakeholders. He warns, however, that culture-led regeneration programs can be a distraction from underlying power shifts or control of real estate (See Vazquez 2012). Too many city leaders and policy makers focus on cultural assets as tools to address economic development and the competitive images of cities in the global arena – to the detriment of quality of life, social equity, or other concerns argues Evans.

Cultural planning seeks involvement of diverse stakeholders to fashion the kind of city in which they would like to live. A cultural lens in planning enables people to imagine their cities or neighborhoods in new and different ways. Defining culture and cultural assets broadly enables a wider range of people and groups to have a reason and a way to be heard and to contribute their concerns, visions, and stories (Baeker 2002).

Maginn (2007:30) suggests that techniques of applied ethnography offer planners a way forward in achieving more effective community participation. He first advocates policymakers develop a more sophisticated understanding of the topography

and culture of local communities, and that policymakers, “need to demonstrate an explicitly genuine commitment to participation by embracing community diversity and conflict.” Like the cultural competence advocated by Vazquez (2012:30), policymakers need to become more aware of the impacts of their own cultural practices. In particular, writes Maginn, “they need to understand how the structures and processes they put in place, the policy discourse(s) they use, and their perceptions of and attitudes towards local communities impact on the participatory experiences of different groups within a neighbourhood.”

Ghilardi (2008:7) also weighs in on the importance of approaches and styles involved in the placemaking process, “Place-shaping and culture-led regeneration must be seen as truly creative rather than mechanical, formulaic processes.” In the course of any planning process, the methods or approaches employed can have great bearing on the outcomes.

As an ongoing process, versus a discrete planning process, the practice known in the United States as creative placemaking includes the formulation of plans as well as ongoing place management (Markusen & Gadwa 2011). Both planning and management must include diverse stakeholders on an ongoing basis. Successful placemaking, argues Healey (1998:1541), rests in its social infrastructure, “both the range and density of networks between stakeholders in a place and the degree of trust and translatability between the different social worlds surrounding the different stakeholders.” In the presence of such networks, she says, knowledge moves freely, increasing the intellectual capital of a community and advancing policy objectives meaningful and useful to all stakeholders. It is through these networks and creative ways of thinking that successful creative placemaking results (Vazquez 2012).

Creative placemaking incorporates the practice of cultural planning and its tools for broadening public participation, along with the creative and analytical capacities of artists, cultural mapping, and creative facilitation techniques. Such techniques, applied in planning processes as advocated by Albrechts (2007), Dang (2005), Sandercock (2004, 2005), and Sarkissian and Hurford (2010), engage residents and stakeholders in deeper and more meaningful ways.

“The strength of creative placemaking as a vehicle for a sustainable community, cultural and economic development,” writes Vazquez (2012:3), “is due largely to the processes that lead to the outcomes.” These ongoing processes require active engagement and investment by all sectors and stakeholders. Key among those stakeholders are artists and other creative sector workers. They serve to maintain the flow of intellectual capital in communities (Healey 1998), and refresh ways of thinking. As boundary-crossers artists bring an array of tools for building and maintaining intellectual exchange in communities (Baeker 2002).

Artists as Planning Partners

While the planning profession may be reluctant to engage in community cultural development work, community-based artists are hard at work in community planning (Dang 2005:123)

Many artists working in community settings develop an extensive array of techniques and practices that foster community building (Cleveland 2000, Goldbard 2006). Their involvement in formal urban planning, however, is less common. The planning profession growing from engineering and technical practices, rarely opens itself to creative activities or to artists as partners. While planning describes itself as a highly collaborative profession, artists and community arts organizations are not formally considered within the purview of the field but have much to offer (Grodach 2010).

Scholars such as Albrechts (2005), Dang (2005), and Sandercock (2003), and scholar-practitioners Sarkissian and Hurford (2010) advocate ramping up involvement of creative people in planning, bringing artists into central roles. Observes Baeker (2002:24), “In this vision of cultural planning, the contributions of the artist are also invited, and the tools of the artist become key to the participation of all.”

Community planners, artists, and cultural practitioners have a great deal to learn from one another. Artist training and practice emphasize observation, listening, and intuiting the shape and dynamics of their surroundings in ways different from those most commonly accepted (Root-Bernstein 1999). In fact, some artistic processes parallel planning processes. Dang (2005:124) describes artists as the storytellers of their communities. “They can provide a planner not only deep insight into a community, but ready-made and powerful means of communicating them.” Many community-based artists teach and facilitate processes for people to create art together. They are skilled at helping people examine complex issues and bringing forth poignant personal stories in effective ways.

Dang (2005:124) asserts that “as a means of conversation, the arts are often more accessible and inclusive than the standard town hall meeting or open house.” Artists often have skills to help the voiceless find their voice especially for individuals less skilled at verbal debate. Some can help, perhaps without using words, to address the fears, questions, emotions, dreams and visions of individuals, groups, and communities.

Bringing to the planning practice the tools of artists and decades of practice in community-based arts offers new opportunities to unleash imaginations, bridge cultural divides, and build the efficacy of members of communities. “In whole systems approaches, that involve broadly based-participatory decision making and embrace a broad understanding of cultural resources, the tools of the artist are engaged by all who care about the collectively imagined public space in which they dwell,” writes Baeker (2002:24).

As the planning profession emerged as a discipline, it both benefitted and suffered from the division of labor that has proven effective at deepening knowledge and increasing productivity (Fischer 2005:4). However, we also know from “all the attempts to support multidisciplinary work that hardly any ‘real’ problems can be successfully approached by a lone discipline.”

Sarkissian and Hurford (2010:5) recount two decades of employing creative practices in their Australian planning work describing the impact of these techniques in “bridging conflict, changing the flavor of community discussions, opening participants to new possibilities and forming lasting partnerships to transform our communities and our futures.”

Bringing together multiple points of view is central to deepening the knowledge planners have – and the knowledge members of communities have about their communities. Artist-led processes can also help develop connections between different sides of issues, problems, and policies. Borrowed from ethnographic practices, the practice of bringing ‘local knowledge’ into the planning process has emerged as a critical part of good planning (Healey 1998, Maginn 200, Matilla 2002, Sandercock & Atilli 2010).

Local knowledge, according to Healey (1998:1539-1540), “describes the mixture of knowledge built up through practical experience and frames of reference people use to filter and give meaning to experience.” The capacity to collectively establish arenas for dialogue and enable interaction in ways sensitive to cultural differences, can better inform planning and other urban governance processes. Healey goes on to assert that this helps to sustain a comprehensive consciousness or what Dewey calls ‘enlarged intelligence’ (Dewey 1927-1991 as cited in Healey, 2010:195). Healey suggests this “holds in place the breadth and depth needed to ensure that conceptions of the whole and parts of an urban area are as pluralistic and dynamic as possible.”

In addition to sharing knowledge and developing deeper understanding, the building of relationships through creative planning processes has added benefits. Such relationships subsequently help coordinate strategies and actions called for in plans. Inclusive planning processes can legitimate policy decisions and represent actual moves towards more participatory forms of democracy, argues Healey (1998). Albrecht (2005:16) claims important products of inclusive planning include “strengthening of the social tissue” and enhancing “social capital and political capital as citizens and local politicians [take] pride in ‘their’ city.” Reardon, Sorenson and Klump (2003) call this the ‘empowerment approach’ to planning. These approaches set the tone for an artist-centered public participation process employed in planning a downtown Minneapolis cultural district.

Reflections on a Minneapolis Cultural District

Deliberate place-development and management work thus involves mobilizing a particular type of imagination, one that ‘sees’ places and spatial interconnectedness and recognizes the complex dynamics through which we experience place qualities as we and they evolve (Healey 2010:230).

The Minneapolis planning project was designed to engage a diverse mix of stakeholders in a downtown district in a variety of ways in accordance with the complex nature of the district, and to bring local knowledge to bear in generating wider public discussion of visions for the area. While the process leaned largely on

local knowledge, it included outside expertise. Visiting speakers on topics meant to push boundaries of thinking and to inform the process complemented a parallel set of artist-led public participation workshops. Participation activities also met goals related to long-term capacity-building, creating and/or strengthening relationships among stakeholders and the practice of problem solving.

In cultural planning, moving beyond asset inventories to the collection of stories is an important step (Baeker 2002, Sandercock 2003). For this work the Minneapolis project engaged several youth organizations to work with artists. Youth interviewed, videotaped, photographed, wrote poetry and created radio spots highlighting stories of people in the district. With story central to planning (Sandercock 2003), collecting a multitude of stories of people on the street – and focusing on their experiences and ideas for the future was an early focus of the process.

This youth-led cultural mapping exercise explored life on the street, the people, and histories of the area. Youth related their own stories, interviewed a variety of people with connection to the street, and offered observations and reflections. Products of the youth projects were presented in numerous venues including the central public library, museum, and formal theater space, as well as a web page. While some cultural assets were mapped in standard ways, youth projects engaged many people and served as an inspirational part of the process. Artists in the public planning exercises built on these stories.

Among the challenges with this downtown district was devising public participation in planning to involve the diverse mixture of people who make it their space. Stakeholders range from white suburban families attending the Disney Lion King, transgendered and gay club-goers, and basketball fans attending a game at the nearby arena, to African American teens strolling and congregating. The district comprises a kind of urban space and experience unfamiliar to many Midwesterners.

The project presented a dense concentration of activities, involvement of creative people and strategies, and a high level of public attention. A study of the pedestrian realm was compiled using an internet-based social media tool and the participation of 300 community stakeholders. A Facebook page solicited comments, photographs, and videos related to conditions and experiences of the street.

Multiple public planning workshops, similar to those used by many urban planning professionals engaged stakeholders including residents, business and property owners, nonprofit leaders, artists, students, and others with relationships to the district. The sequence engaged stakeholders in co-creation (Sirianni 2007) of the key elements of the corridor plan. These elements, in order focused on values, vision, design, and naming and claiming (or declaring intentions to take action).

Such workshops are familiar in urban and neighborhood planning yet these differed as they were led by a team of artists and engaged participants in arts-centered activities. During the workshops a team of urban designers and architects

engaged with the project participated as stakeholders contributing to and learning from local knowledge (Healey 1998, Sarkissian 2005). Artists led the workshops; they included a theater director, visual artist, choreographer, and vocal artist/songwriter.

The Role of Artist-Planners

Art can be that important initial point of entry, transcending language and providing opportunities for residents to learn to work together on shared projects (Dang 2005:125).

Artists can tell powerful stories through their respective media – and help others do so. Sandercock (2003), in her discussion of the use of story in planning, writes, “There are still too few practitioners or academics who are conscious of or creative about the use of story”, (p. 26).

The interdisciplinary artist team led the Minneapolis planning workshops bringing many skills cited by Dang (2005), Maginn (2007), Sandercock (2005), and Sarkissian and Hurford (2010). The mix of artistic disciplines engaged a wide range of stakeholders and used strong group facilitation techniques, representing sensibilities appropriate to the urban environment and relevant to this downtown district. Seeing and experiencing a place through the practice of movement – with multicultural sensibilities in addition to those of a visual artist, storyteller and music-maker – bring critical dimensions to creative placemaking.

The boundaries and fringes in which the production of new knowledge takes place, Fischer (2005:5) asserts, “are where the unexpected can be expected, where innovative and unorthodox solutions are found, where serendipity is likely, and where old ideas find new life.” Sarkissian and Hurford (2010:7) sum up their experience as creative planning consultants, “Our deepest desire is to meet at a place of creation that calls new, informed and meaningful ideas into existence through rationality, integration, community knowledge and experience.”

The challenge for the artist team was similar to that described by Sarkissian and Hurford (2010:13), to create “spaces of trust for different kinds of stories to emerge and for people to express themselves in their own vocabularies.” Activities exercised every voice singularly and in unison, practiced listening to others, moved in relation to others, and drew visions of the future to activate and bring forth a tapestry of ideas in new ways.

Conclusion

The Minneapolis case supplied many lessons. Multiple stakeholder involvement platforms resulted in a wide variety of vantage points, ideas, and new partnerships – or potential for partnership. Assets were uncovered – in that they were connected and appreciated where they were not before. Stories of the multitude of people occupying the district, through the planning, took on equivalent value where previously many stories had been ignored or discounted.

The central thrust of this case was to contextualize and illustrate involvement of artists and creative practices in urban placemaking, particularly in the public participation process. The complexity of stakeholders engaged by the artists reflects an ongoing process of discovery. Focus groups, social media, suggestion boxes, public displays of a three-dimensional model of the district, representative steering and advisory committees, and other vehicles also engaged and collected input from a diverse array of stakeholders.

Drawing attention to the breadth of “ownership” of the district served an important purpose to influence civic leadership and discourse in the media. Public participation workshops involved individuals representing many of the stakeholder categories including residents, students, workers, visitors, property and business owners, and artists.

Considerable time was devoted to the pre-planning of each of the workshops, involving artists and the planners, designers and architects, learning and adapting from each. Meetings were lively and challenging. Artists brought different ideas to accepted ways of conducting planning, thus this process demanded re-articulation and re-thinking, exactly what the project set out to do. The end product exceeded expectations but required more time than expected. Bringing together artists from a variety of disciplines and experiences with designers and planners provided the kind of innovative and unorthodox solutions cited by Fischer (2005) and Sarkissian and Hurford (2010).

Activating creative people can help community stakeholders better tap their thinking through multiple expressive forms. Artists embody, demonstrate, and move people to engage in reframing ideas and in making things that are new and unique. Artists re-purpose raw materials to create value, beauty, and new meaning, as well as unique and different functions. Taking stakeholders beyond symbolic change to learning and to creating together took them to a next level of making real things in time and space and to forming new associations and relationships. This was the intent and result of engaging artists in creative placemaking.

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