

Creative Placemaking: Arts and Culture as a Partner in Community Revitalization

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INTRODUCTION: CONNECTING PEOPLE, PLACES, AND STORIES

To share the same place is perhaps the most primitive of social bonds, and to be within view of one's neighbors is the simplest form of association.

—Lewis Mumford¹

This chapter examines the contemporary practice known as *creative placemaking*, including some key principles and best practices for artists, arts organizations, and communities engaging in creative placemaking, as well as some of the challenges they may face. Creative placemaking brings people and organizations together to create better lives for those sharing a geographically defined community. The term was coined by economist Ann Markusen and arts consultant Anne Gadwa in a 2010 white paper for the National Endowment for the Arts. As they explained it:

In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.²

Creative placemaking builds on local human, physical, and cultural assets to enhance the social and civic fabric. It builds on distinctive local character and story. It is a long-term, partnership-based strategy that results from a commitment to social equity and a meaningful life for its residents as well as an interesting experience for visitors and a stronger economic base for the area.

A key thread through the creative placemaking process is building on the identity and historical trajectory of the place – with all the gifts and baggage that history carries. Ultimately, creative placemaking attempts to strengthen relationships between and among people, and between people and place, building a community where stewardship of one another and of place is central.

In creative placemaking, art and culture work as partner and catalyst, not as the center of attention. In their 2010 white paper, Markusen and Gadwa gave useful definition to this growing field. However, their suggestion that communities are shaped “around” arts and culture was incorrectly interpreted by some to mean that arts and culture should be “at the center” of creative placemaking. Equitable community building cannot place any one sector at the center; it requires what Kresge Foundation CEO Rip Rapson called “the willingness and capacity of arts and cultural organizations to take an outward orientation,” or as Debra Webb said, referring to the “silo mentality” that blocks institutional and cross-sector communication and interaction, “to get out of their silos and into their neighborhoods.”³

Others in community building – city planners and economic and community developers – must also try new approaches. Urban planner Leonardo Vazquez, executive director of the National Consortium for Creative Placemaking, noted that “to accept creative people as full partners, communities and leaders must be open to new ways of seeing their environments.”⁴

Rapson cited four principles of creative placemaking:

1. It is grounded in the particulars of place;
2. It employs authentic and ongoing community engagement
3. It embraces existing community development systems
4. It assumes the willingness and capacity of arts and cultural organizations to take an outward orientation. In the process, artists at community-building tables can realize a new catalytic role in their community.

Creative placemaking is an *ongoing process* with key outcomes that serve to ensure the vitality of the process. These include:

- Enhancement of the unique qualities and identity of place
- Connections between and among people, and between people and place
- Processes that include planning; animation of spaces and actions to secure permanent places for living, working, creating, socializing, recreating; and exchanging goods and ideas
- Capacity building for local civic sector and organizations to maintain engagement of the community and to exercise local stewardship and governance

Including examples from communities across the United States, this chapter explores benefits that can accrue when creative and civic sectors, together with planning and development sectors, expand their tool boxes and enter new kinds of partnerships.

1. OVERVIEW: THE MAKING OR PRODUCTION OF SPACE

Objects alone do not make a place. It is how people feel about and respond to the elements in their environment, as well as other people who share their space, that help determine what a place is.

—Leonardo Vazquez⁵

Creative placemaking sits within a broader and longstanding discourse that goes by many names, including urban renewal or regeneration, revitalization, community building, culture-led regeneration, city-making, placemaking, and more. French social philosopher Henri Lefebvre proposed a construct he described as “production of space” that included:

- the *perceived*, or physical (land use, design, and physical structures)
- the *conceived* (the legal, economic, and the political systems applicable to or within the physical area)
- *everyday lived experience* (the social, cultural, and other activities of daily life)⁶

Most practitioners who typically drive the process of building and rebuilding of cities and towns focus first on the uses of land and basic infrastructure such as water, sanitation, and transportation as well as physical structures. They also generally include the social and economic systems and civic infrastructures. However, most fail to account for the everyday lived experiences, including the cultures and stories of place – the ways people make space their own and create a sense of belonging and ultimately a sense of stewardship. When they are in balance, the three forces described by Lefebvre also generate social cohesion or social capital without which communities face disintegration with every challenge or obstacle.⁷

If creative placemaking is to fulfill its promises, practitioners must grapple with a wide range of age-old issues facing towns, cities, and neighborhoods – and this presents challenges. Good creative placemaking, however, must commit to building holistic and sustainable places that are of, by, and for people – all people.

Cultural administrator and thought leader Roberto Bedoya asserted that the same people often excluded from the dominant processes of city building also find no place for themselves in creative placemaking. The social dynamics of creating urban spaces, he wrote, should enable “identity and activities that allow personal memories, cultural histories, imagination, and feelings to enliven the sense of ‘belonging’ through human and spatial relationships.”⁸ Effective creative placemaking must generate, among other things, this sense of belonging. Particular artistic visions, cultural assumptions, or aesthetic sensibilities incorporated in design choices that speak to one group of people over others exclude some people.

Placemaking and Creative Placemaking: A History

The practice of placemaking is about “everything,” and it is always about different things. There is often no easy way to bound the sphere of intervention or the starting or stopping of it.

— Lynda Schneekloth and Robert Shibley, *Placemaking*⁹

The term “placemaking” became popular in the 1960s and ’70s in the planning and urban design fields. It supported a growing practice of community participation towards development of distinctive and livable places at the neighborhood and block level. In their 1995 book on placemaking, scholar-practitioners Lynda Schneekloth and Robert Shibley found the practices they developed were “not in the mainstream of academic theory, nor were they necessarily consistent with the dictates of any singular discipline or professional practice.” Placemaking, they wrote, “is not just about the relationship of people *to* the places; it also creates relationships *among* people in places.” Finding people disconnected from stewardship of their cultural and physical surroundings, they advocated the role of professionals as “enabling and facilitating others in the various acts of placemaking. ... The allocation of such work to a small body of professionals,” they wrote, “ultimately disempowers others because it denies the potential for people to take control over events and circumstances that *take place* in their lives.”¹⁰

The fields of arts and culture have not been immune from this phenomenon. In his book *Arts, Inc.*, Bill Ivey, former chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, similarly lamented the professionalization of 20th-century artistic practices that removed what he called *expressive forms*

from daily life. Music education, for example, shifted from teaching young people to make music to “music appreciation.” A variety of social and economic changes, Ivey pointed out, “steadily drained from society some of the most obvious incentives to becoming a *citizen-artist*” as growing institutions and corporate media “ushered in the age of cultural consumption.”¹¹

In the making of places, just as in the making of art, people turned into consumers rather than active participants. A central focus for the placemaking professional, Schneekloth and Shibley argued, is to restore a sense of empowerment and active engagement in the process of making places and sharing space. These early practitioners of placemaking defined a more inclusive process akin to the contemporary practice of creative placemaking. However, few of those in planning, design, community development, and other professions related to city building followed their lead. In the ongoing process of making cities and neighborhoods, leaders, planners, and community developers deferred to their specific area of professional training. Charles Landry, an early leader in culture-led regeneration, and community vitality wrote:

Planners find it easier to think in terms of expenditure on highways, car parks and physical redevelopment schemes rather than on soft infrastructure such as training initiatives for skills enhancement, the encouragement of a lively night-time economy, grants to voluntary organizations to develop social networks or social innovations and the decentralization of powers to build up local capacity and encourage people to have a stake in the running of their neighborhoods.¹²

While city planners are often expected to draw together the disparate parts of the process of making cities into a cohesive whole, Landry, as well as Canadian researcher Neil Bradford¹³ and others have argued that the skills required for a holistic approach are typically outside the purview or training of the planning and community development professions. Bringing different skills, sets of knowledge, professional fields, and approaches together into a synthesized whole is what placemaking (as defined by Schneekloth and Shibley) aspired to do, just as creative placemaking now aspires to.

Silo-based structures and professional practices result in what social scientists who explore contemporary urban communities call a “crisis of social cohesion.”¹⁴ Practitioners and advocates of creative placemaking have staked out the challenging – if not impossible – task of breaking through or bridging an entire cluster of silos.

Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam’s research on social capital had a profound impact on the community development profession. In his widely influential work *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, he argued that communities large and small have become increasingly fragmented, resulting in a dramatic decline in social capital over the second half of the 20th century. Maintaining social cohesion and building new social capital, Putnam argued, is further complicated by globalization and growing ethnic and cultural diversity within neighborhoods. Concepts related to trust, social capital, social cohesion, and the capacity for collective action of people in place-based communities are central to forming sustainable and equitable cities and neighborhoods. These can be especially elusive in ethnically or racially diverse communities.

A key principle to keep in mind: *Community building is ongoing work and has its difficult times and issues.* It can easily lose its joy. Keep building on the social and civic fabric and relationships in the community. In doing so, be sure to find ways to make community building fun: share food, stories, and cultural and personal celebrations; this is the core of the process and the work of creative placemakers.

The holistic practice of placemaking, supplemented with participatory art-making and a commitment to building social capital, among other ingredients, has added up to the contemporary construct of creative placemaking. As an emerging field, creative placemaking must find ways to employ cultural awareness and cultural differences as assets in the process of building vibrant, distinctive, diverse, and sustainable communities and economies. Culture and creativity can and must cross ethnic, economic, professional, and other boundaries to become a galvanizing force.

2. CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AND TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

It is not enough to inject a vacant lot with quirky art happenings, or develop an artist live/work collective in an old, dank warehouse district. Before we can envision placemaking, we must first acknowledge our legacy of place-taking and seek to establish places of connection, social equity and economic opportunity for everyone.

—Debra Webb¹⁵

The foundations of modern urban planning are rooted in the allocation of real estate and the provision of infrastructure and municipal services to meet expanding or changing needs and populations. The primary function of “land use planning” remains the core concern of the profession.¹⁶ In its earlier forms, planning required technical and engineering skills to coordinate the resources and materials to implement top-down design and development schemes. Primary tools employed in these practices include allocation of space uses through zoning and the leveraging of public and private capital to generate housing, jobs, retail shops, service businesses, green space, and institutional uses (schools, health care, etc.). But as democratic societies and cities evolved and requirements became more complex during the 20th century, planners and developers had to be more responsive on a local level.¹⁷

The emerging role of public or local citizen participation in planning stems from the middle of the 20th century. By the 1970s, organized pressure from neighborhood associations, local business groups, and others required planners and city leaders to open up to “local knowledge” and accommodate more local concerns through formal participation processes. Increased citizen participation in the planning process set the stage for the creative placemaking process.¹⁸

Case Study 1. Bringing Creative Placemaking and Community Development into a Cohesive Strategy: Madison Park Development Corporation, Boston, Massachusetts

Once the second-largest shopping district in Boston, the Lower Roxbury/Dudley Square area is home to over 40,000 people, numerous cultural organizations, artists, and the city’s largest bus

transfer hub. In its 1940s and '50s heyday as Boston's most vibrant African American neighborhood, it boasted ballrooms, theaters, jazz clubs, and an ice cream parlor as vital parts of community life. In the 1950s the area began to experience disinvestment, loss of local businesses, and an increase in crime and poverty.

Madison Park Development Corporation (www.madison-park.org) began in 1966 as the Lower Roxbury Community Corporation. One of the nation's first community development corporations, it grew from local opposition to highway construction through the heart of the neighborhood. The community lost wide swaths of housing, businesses, and jobs to demolition but mounted a campaign that stopped construction. In its first 30 years, Madison Park Development rebuilt housing for low and mixed-income residents and conducted job training programs. It then looked to new strategies for bringing back business and a sense of active community vitality.

In the late 1990s the city's Community Development Corporation formed Arts Culture Trade (ACT) Roxbury to build on cultural assets as a strategy to bring retail and service businesses and renewed energy to the Dudley Square Business District and Lower Roxbury community. Addressing the business development and marketing needs of artists was a key piece of that puzzle. ACT Roxbury's mission was to engage arts and culture to enrich and strengthen physical, economic, and social revitalization.

A cornerstone in the strategy to generate more positive street-level activity was to rehabilitate Hibernian Hall, a four-story former Irish social club built in 1913 and left vacant for decades. The building now houses the Roxbury Center for Arts that hosts year-round events and transforms the image of Roxbury from a community filled with violence and poverty to a community rich in creative talent and cultural heritage. Through multiple partnerships, ACT Roxbury (now Roxbury Center the Arts) built a variety of events and invested in support structures for artists. It helped launch and promote the Roxbury International Film Festival, the Roxbury Literary Annual and Roxbury Open Studios, and other programs to encourage cultural tourism for both locals and outsiders.

Combined with other efforts of Madison Park, a new identity and revitalized economy has formed in Roxbury, built on a proud identity as an African American cultural hub with a mixed economy that includes growing creative-sector businesses.

Creative placemaking finds connection to traditional urban planning and city development, and goes beyond. It grows from a philosophy of equity and broad participation in the planning process. In creative placemaking the basic commodity or raw material is the creative and celebratory interaction among the people who share a place, including residents, workers and visitors. Primary tools include civic, cultural, and social events, organizational capacity, and public spaces, employed to generate physical and aesthetic improvement, as well as new or revitalized economic enterprises.

One of the challenges in creative placemaking is getting traditional practitioners of planning and community development to join with arts and cultural development practices. Kresge Foundation CEO Rapson said, "We believe that rather than standing outside the community development fence-line and looking in, arts and culture can step inside it and join in a multi-textured fabric of

land-use, housing, transportation, environment, health, and other systems necessary for strong, more equitable, and vibrant urban places.” One obstacle pointed out by Vazquez is that “cynicism among creative sector professionals about their ability to influence public debate.” This self-limiting or silo-based thinking and pre-conceived ideas about capacities keep people apart – people with much to contribute to the whole when they work together.

Offering a different observation, Canadian scholar-practitioner Steven Dang wrote that “while the planning profession may be reluctant to engage in community cultural development work, community-based artists are hard at work in community planning.”¹⁹

At its best, creative placemaking finds common ground, blends organizational goals and creates scenarios where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Creative placemaking focuses on the local, the neighborhood unit where face-to-face relationships are frequent and essential; in Robert Putnam’s terms, it builds social capital. It brings new dimensions and new tools to localized planning, community development, and community animation in the century-long drive to think more holistically about the goals of making space.

3. FINDING ASSETS IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES

Asset-based strategies have emerged in a variety of fields, from youth development to social services and from business entrepreneurship to community development. More recently the arts and culture community has begun to integrate asset-based thinking into its work in relation to communities and their cultural resources.

These strategies were articulated by Chicago-based practitioner-scholars John McKnight and John Kretzmann as an approach to more equitable place-based revitalization.²⁰ Their Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) practice encouraged communities to become more aware of their own resources and power, have confidence in their own capacities, and take charge of solving their own problems. This process begins with engaging community members in the process of making an inventory of community assets. They look to all corners for strengths and capacities that neighborhoods, organizations, and individuals can put to work to address challenges. Creativity, individual talents, and constructive relationships are high in those asset categories. The practice endeavors to identify and marshal new forms of internal (endogenous) power and capacities while leveraging and maintaining local control of outside (exogenous) forces and resources.

Focusing attention on holistic connections and the capacity of people to weave together assets within their communities is not only energizing, but foundational to creative placemaking. The ABCD process emphasizes active broad-based participation in asset identification as a vehicle in itself to build relationships and networks within communities. British planning scholar Patsy Healey addressed similar ideas, suggesting that relationship building may not have immediate purpose but can serve to prepare people for unknown or future challenges. Lewis Mumford described neighbors connecting through “intermediate links of association” and wrote that “in times of crisis, a fire, a funeral, a festival, neighbors become vividly conscious of each other and capable of greater cooperation.”²¹ Links of association – social capital – remains the most important deposit in any community’s bank of assets.

Characteristics of Creative Placemakers²²

The term *creative placemakers* includes everyone who is actively involved in creative placemaking, as defined above. Individual skills and talents are not always immediately evident and yet they are probably the most important assets to bring into the process. To achieve their mission, creative placemakers:

- **are collaborative.** Just as no single person can lead and manage all aspects of a society, creative placemaking by one person or one interest group is unsustainable. Collaboration should be shared among as many groups as possible within a community.
- **are creative and compassionate creators.** Creative people can see opportunities and connections that others might not. Creators generate ideas that lead to new ways of thinking and doing. Creative placemakers are not mere facilitators or technicians; they are actively involved in creating from the beginning of the initiative. But because they are also collaborative, creative placemakers use compassion to temper any desires to make their ideas rise above others.
- **are culturally competent.** Creative placemakers recognize that artists, developers, and elected officials, as well as distinct communities, can have very diverse hierarchies of values and tolerances of risk. Effective creative placemakers understand and respect these differences, and engage in strategies that meet the diverse interests of stakeholders to build consensus for action.
- **intend to guide, but not control, market activity.** No one can accurately predict the comprehensive array of transactions that is called “the market.” But all human activity is guided by awareness, intent, action, reflection, and response. Through such activities as market analysis, thought leadership and place marketing, creative placemaking works to understand the values, interests and concerns of audiences, and to address them in ethical, sustainable ways.
- **recognize that shaping awareness and beliefs is as critical as shaping the built environment.** One of the reasons that the Municipal Art and City Beautiful movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries could not achieve broad, sustainable results is that their members put too much emphasis on physical determinism – the theory that social behavior can be predicted and directed through changes in the built environment. A person’s willingness to risk time, energy, money, and other resources depends on his or her values, beliefs, perceptions, tolerance of risk, and experiences. The physical environment is only one of several elements that impact a person’s willingness to engage in a place.
- **value, and promote the value of, creative processes and creators.** Creative placemakers seek to produce sustainable and predictable outcomes through processes that have internal order and can be managed. Creativity is inherently disorderly and unpredictable. Creative placemakers strive to balance *idea generation* with *idea resolution*, and seek to build the capacity of others to get more comfortable with the yin and yang of creative placemaking.

4. STORIES OUR COMMUNITIES TELL

Culture is sometimes described as the DNA of a community; or, in computer terms, it is the operating system that enables the hardware and software to work together. A community, like an

organization or computer, won't work if its culture – its DNA, its operating system – is dysfunctional. Creative placemakers try to understand how organizational cultures drive places, learn how to function with and within that culture – and sometimes learn how to change it. Every culture, as well as every place, is an accumulation of the layers that nature and earlier people left behind. *Everyday lived experience* – one of Henri Lefebvre's three ingredients for the production of space – becomes an essential starting point for community planning based on creative placemaking. These experiences take the form of stories that define places. These stories can move the community forward – or hold it back.

A core component of every creative placemaking effort is to listen to and gather stories, to find the storytellers and to seek out shared narratives. One key to learning how *not* to repeat mistakes is to respect and appreciate the stories or histories of place. Providing ongoing places for those stories to be told and to be shared is both one of the first and one of the last jobs of the creative placemaker. A fitting job for the arts!

Schneekloth and Shibley emphasized that the first and “most important activity of professional placemakers” is making “an open space for dialogue about place and placemaking.” Effective creative placemakers bring people together to share stories in a psychological space – if not an actual physical space - where “all knowledges are valued, shared, and used in the process of decision making.” Steven Dang described artists as community storytellers: “They can provide a planner not only deep insight into a community, but ready-made and powerful means of communicating them” Debra Webb similarly observed, “Artists are storytellers, preservers of cultural identity, and critics to the injustices that stagnate humanity.”²³

Creative placemakers draw on local stories to set their sights on a vision for a future that is consistent with its past. To fail to connect with the historical trajectory that shaped the place is to move down a dark or empty path. In some places creative placemaking explicitly includes historic preservation or the reinvigoration of 19th- or early 20th-century cultural resources (a jazz scene, for instance). While not every place has an immediately evident trove of significant period architecture, music legends, momentous events, or even important crossroads, every place *does* have stories which illuminate the ways people have used or interacted with the place over centuries, or even millennia, and the dynamics and relationships between the people in that place as it evolved.

The story of place may include its geology, indigenous peoples, waves of immigrants, economies that have come and perhaps gone, and the skills people employed to make their livelihood working with wood, stone, leather, or metal. The story may include a product or service of special significance that explains why that place was used for gathering, resting, or healing. There is never just one story of place, nor one correct story. The biggest mistake for the creative placemaker is to not listen to as many stories as possible or to fail to give stories an ongoing place in the process of community building.

Schneekloth and Shibley observed that “to appreciate a place and people does not, however, imply an uncritical stance toward it.” They pointed out that “to act responsibly in the historical moment requires knowledge of that time/place/cultural reality; wisdom to recognize that one never has sufficient information or insight on which to base a ‘rational’ decision; and courage to proceed anyway.”²⁴

The critical process of exploring and sharing stories as a visible and ongoing part of creative placemaking demonstrates a respect for place and for the people who are there, who have been there, and who will be there in the future.

Creative placemakers must remember to utilize approaches that recognize, honor, and contribute to their community’s ways of getting things done:

- Plan, engage, and work with others in every step of the process.
- Make small changes that signal momentum—both symbolic *and* meaningful steps.
- Understand and employ the unique capacities the arts bring to the table.
- Build bridges across difference.
- Visualize possibilities.
- Create and manage spaces where people feel free to express new and different ideas.

5. CREATIVE PROCESS AND PRACTICE: THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

When social theorist Marshall McLuhan famously introduced the phrase “the medium is the message,”²⁵ he furthered our understanding that means and ends, or process and product, are not distinct. As Leonardo Vazquez has stated, “The value of creative placemaking is as much in the doing as in what is done.”²⁶ Unfortunately, this can be a most difficult message to convey to policy-makers, philanthropists, and business leaders who want results. There is often a tendency to short-cut the process to get to the product. If the desired product is a creative, inclusive, and highly engaged community but the process to get there is formulaic, closed, and/or top-down, then formulaic, closed, and top-down is the kind of place that will be made.

To build creative places that exemplify inclusion, equity, and open dialogue, creative methods that employ those same values are required. Artists maintain the flow of intellectual capital and refreshing ways of thinking, as Patsy Healey has argued, and according to senior Canadian cultural planner Greg Baeker, artists are boundary-crossers who bring an array of tools to foster the exchange of ideas both within and across communities.²⁷

Artists working in community settings during the past 40 or more years have developed an extensive array of techniques and practices that foster community building.²⁸ Scholars such as Louis Albrechts,²⁹ Steven Dang, and Leonie Sandercock, as well as Australian creative planning practitioners Wendy Sarkissian and Diane Hurford, have advocated ramping up the involvement of creative people in community planning and bringing artists into central roles. Writing about the process of cultural planning, Greg Baeker observed, “The tools of the artist become key to the participation of all.”³⁰ Sarkissian and Hurford described the impact of these techniques as “bridging conflict, changing the flavor of community discussions, opening participants to new possibilities and forming lasting partnerships to transform our communities and our futures.”³¹

Case Study 2. Creative CityMaking: Arts-Infused and Inclusive Community Planning, Minneapolis, Minnesota³²

The cutting-edge Minneapolis art center Intermedia Arts (www.intermediaarts.org) built on its history of work with surrounding neighborhoods and with various municipal agencies to form the *Creative CityMaking Program* (CCM) in 2011. CCM operates as a partnership with the City of Minneapolis to foster fresh and innovative approaches for addressing long-term transportation, land use, economic, environmental, and social issues.

The program formed artist-planner teams involving local practicing artists and city planners. They initiated discussions with community members through a variety of planning projects with the goal of increasing participation of under-represented communities in determining the city's future. During 2013, CCM focused on a set of short-term goals and small community changes with the idea that small and strategic change that impacts individuals, ecosystems, economies, and/or social systems will lead to larger changes.

Artist-planner teams focused on small-area plans for distinct geographic areas of the city and on an evaluation of the city's survey efforts to inform historic preservation policy. Other teams focused on action plans around a Light Rail Transit Station Area. Artist-planner collaborations brought new people together and inspired innovation that bled into other city departments.

In assessing their early efforts, artists, planners and evaluators came to define the practice as *arts-infused and inclusive community planning*. By 2014 the project had resulted in many new tools and strategies that foster engagement in community planning among under-represented communities. The arts also brought playful and more accessible qualities to the process of engaging communities in complex planning processes.

One artist reported: *The project has allowed me to make artwork and to do things that I am really passionate about. It has given me faith that art can change people's lives and provide perspectives that were not there.*

A city planner said: *This project has affirmed how useful a partnership like this can be. It has made me think about the creative process and how it interfaces with what we do.*

Community planners, development professionals, artists, local policy makers and cultural practitioners have a great deal to learn from one another. In fact, some artistic processes parallel planning processes and complement them. Steven Dang asserted that "as a means of conversation, the arts are often more accessible and inclusive than the standard town hall meeting or open house."³³ Artists often have skills to help individuals less skilled at verbal debate or at using the traditional vehicles of civic engagement to find their voice. They can help individuals, groups, and communities use forms of expression beyond words to address their fears, questions, emotions, dreams, and visions.

The dialogic space advocated by Schneekloth and Shibley can be seen to be working if, "as the work progresses to decisions about action, all voices can see themselves in the approach." This results in community members with "a higher level of commitment to the decisions, and often more willing to live with and care for the resultant conditions."³⁴ And according to Rip Rapson, "The centrality of arts and culture to social cohesion is one of the arts and culture community's secret sauces."

6. SUSTAINABLE CREATIVE ECONOMIES

Much of the interest in creative placemaking stems from its promise to improve local economies, open new employment opportunities, bring prosperity to artists and arts organizations, and expand or reinvigorate municipal tax bases.

Standard economic development strategies are dominated by outside (exogenous) investors or corporate entities. They generate economic activity but typically return little value or equity to the local community. Development activities are generally composed of industry attraction strategies and major infrastructure investments such as shipping ports and power generation. Creative placemaking emphasizes local (endogenous), people-centered, productive livelihoods. This is often pursued through synergistic growth of the creative sector and small entrepreneurial businesses.

In his book on creative placemaking, Leonardo Vazquez wrote, “In economic development practice, attracting a big employer would have a bigger immediate impact than many arts initiatives.” He went on to argue that big employers are more mobile and thus contribute less to local sustainability while creative enterprises, which that often require more time to grow, provide “the greatest returns on investment for the goals of both community and economic development.”³⁵

The grassroots economic development practices of creative placemaking are drawn from *economic gardening*, a practice that nurtures and grows start-ups generated by local entrepreneurs who tap local assets and resources. Economic gardening builds on existing endogenous assets and is considered more sustainable.³⁶

Local economic development typically grows a diverse mix of locally owned, interdependent enterprises that produce goods or services with local raw materials or skills. They export goods and/or attract customers, clients or tourists who seek out their unique or highly distinctive qualities. They also produce local social networks that keep them connected to and invested in place.

In recent decades, city leaders witnessed the industrial era, characterized by large manufacturing plants and pools of nominally-educated labor, give way to an economic era based increasingly on knowledge production, innovation, global exchanges, and creativity.³⁷ Cities in many parts of the world moved into this realm of creativity and culture, sometimes in desperate attempts to regain their economic and socio-cultural footing. “‘Be creative – or die’ is the new urban imperative” wrote British sociologist Jamie Peck, and Italian economists Sacco and Segre argued that “creativity and innovation – or lack of it – make the difference, specially when cities face a period of transition.”³⁸

Increasingly, city leaders have come to believe that arts and cultural institutions can play a catalytic role in regeneration. Some have made significant investments in the arts in order to make their cities more appealing, boost their image, and attract people with wealth and/or sophistication. American planning scholar Amanda Johnson traced a history of arts-led urban regeneration projects through the 1950s and '60s in the United States. She found early efforts characterized by construction of large-scale performing arts centers and implementation of tourism strategies. “For sixty years policymakers have been experimenting with clustering

different arts activities as a revitalization strategy and a way to demonstrate a city’s cultural reputation” she said.³⁹

The concept of *creative industries* surfaced in the United Kingdom in the mid-1980s. Creative industries are characterized by for-profit entrepreneurial activities to produce goods and services, such as the design and/or production of ceramics, film, fashion, furniture, jewelry, wines, etc., and enterprises based in intellectual property development, including advertising, architecture, software, and video games.⁴⁰ A broad definition of the creative sector used by some in the United States gathers both for-profit creative industries and the not-for-profit sector under the umbrella of the *creative economy*, creating a larger interdependent ecosystem.⁴¹

Case Study 3. Yellow Springs, Ohio

Nestled in the softly rolling landscape of Southwest Ohio, the village of Yellow Springs (population 3,500) bustles with creative activity. Small artisan shops, galleries, restaurants, and cafes – even a small independent cinema – sit at the heart of the village. The village center is walkable and active day and evening. Youth hang out in front of the grocery store and older people gather across the street at the Senior Center. About 20 miles from Dayton, 50 miles from Columbus, and 60 miles from Cincinnati, Yellow Springs’ distinctive identity is still rooted in the healing properties of the mineral spring once frequented by Native Americans. It is home to Antioch College, founded in 1852, open to women and people of color from the start, led by its first President, the iconic American educator Horace Mann, and later by Tennessee Valley Authority architect Arthur Morgan.

Yellow Springs illustrated the creative economy long before the term was coined. Many well-established artists and intellectuals have been drawn to the liberal community and teach at some of the 25 colleges and universities within an hour’s drive. Festivals, art fairs, and gallery/studio walks have been a feature of the community for decades. Theater, music, dance, poetry, cinema, and other organized cultural and arts events clog the calendar of the town’s award-winning weekly newspaper. Many in Yellow Springs earn their living in the creative sector and the vibrant retail economy is dominated by creative enterprises, including fine food. The kind of “artistic dividend” Markusen and King described, in which creative energies fuel innovation and entrepreneurship across sectors, is evident in abundance.⁴²

This synergy across disciplines and sectors can be seen in the multiple enterprises the community has spawned. In addition to one of the most concentrated, active small arts communities in the U.S., this small village has fostered businesses producing innovations in aluminum casting, seed hybridization, industrial design, and high-precision thermostats, as well as water-monitoring devices, industrial surface-plates, high-stress rubber bearings, and the first known EMT training program. In one of his many books, *Industries for Small Communities*, Arthur Morgan concluded that these enterprises sprouted from a quality of life that included interdisciplinary education in which both art and science were central, inclusive racial and labor relations, and a highly engaged civic community. Some of these old-line companies remain and continue to employ area residents, joined now by countless small start-ups springing from the community, including clothing, medical technology, software design, and sustainable animal and plant nutrients.

In his 2002 study, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida set off a global firestorm of debate with his assertion that what he termed the *creative class* serves as fuel to power the post-industrial economy. Many cities began chasing creative talent – highly educated designers, scientists, engineers, software developers, artists, marketers, and others – and abandoning older economic development and industry attraction strategies. Transformation of old factories into loft living spaces, coffee shops, and art galleries became the operative strategy. As Sacco and Segre put it, “Human cleverness, desires, motivations, imaginations and creativity [are] the driving forces; replacing location, natural resources and market access.” Politicians and planners wanted their communities to appear innovative, exciting, creative, and safe places in which to live, visit, play, and consume. Festivals, spectacles and displays, cultural events, flagship arts institutions, and a robust arts scene were increasingly appropriated as symbols of a dynamic city.⁴³

But is this creative placemaking, or simply a strategy for cities to compete with one another to attract talent, capital, and stature in global trade and tourism? Most scholars, including Florida, now acknowledge the talent attraction strategy has heightened economic inequity and set off waves of gentrification that have harmed many of the poor and elderly as well as many artists. Creative placemaking, instead, focuses on endogenous assets and economic gardening to generate and keep wealth within the community.

7. OUTCOMES AND MEASURES

Assigning measures to assess the success or failure of creative placemaking has proven one of the more complex arenas for practitioners and scholars alike. Some of the difficulty may lie in the classic left-brain/right-brain conundrum. Can quantitative tools measure “a sense of belonging” or “cultural stewardship” along with “walkability scores” and “local tax generators”? While some believe they can, others have asked if such measures are as applicable in a Philadelphia neighborhood with half a century of disinvestment as they are in a fast-growing Seattle suburb looking for more active social spaces.

A set of “Vibrancy Indicators,” designed to assess placemaking outcomes, was issued in late 2012 by ArtPlace America, a creative placemaking funding consortium of over a dozen major U.S. foundations. They were divided into three categories: *people*, *activity*, and *value*, and included specific indicators and data sources for the *people* and *activity* categories. When compared year to year, the indicators measure changes in communities where ArtPlace has made grants and are available for use by others interested in measuring community outcomes. Because “a recurring issue in creative placemaking is whether the process of neighborhood change leads to places becoming less economically and racially diverse,” ArtPlace also developed two measures of economic and racial diversity in neighborhoods – the racial and ethnic diversity index and the mixed-income, middle income index.

Ann Markusen and other cultural leaders and scholars have challenged standard quantitative measures while expanding the dialogue on the purpose and practice of creative placemaking. “Efforts based on fuzzy concepts and indicators designed to rely on data external to the funded projects are bound to disappoint,” she wrote in 2013. Markusen argued for development of a new framework for assessing creative placemaking that transcends economic growth and instead values social equity and belonging. Creative placemaking, she argued, should not automatically

equate higher property values and more people walking with success.⁴⁴

Around the same time, the National Endowment for the Arts issued livability indicators addressing four areas:⁴⁵

- Positive effect on artists and arts community
- Residents' attachment to community
- Improvement of quality of life for residents
- Positive effect on local economic conditions

Like the ArtPlace indicators, certain publicly available data sources are used to track changes in each of these areas. For instance, government jobs data tracks numbers of people employed in arts-related occupations; housing values and the numbers of people buying homes might be indicators of attachment to place.

While neither of these indicator systems have been fully implemented as of this writing, proponents and critics alike point to the challenges inherent in what Markusen alternately called “indicator mania” and “one-size-fits-all indicators.” Community change through creative placemaking requires many years, even decades. Major short-term changes in communities rarely benefit residents, artists, nonprofits, or even local businesses.

8. SUSTAINABILITY AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Community-based work is not easy. It involves people, their cultures and identity, the places to which they have emotional attachment, and politics. As in any community-development process, there are too often winners and losers. When it comes to economic development, it is increasingly rare in the current era to see economic outcomes generated equitably across all members of a community.

Creative placemaking and culture-led regeneration have room for improvement. Most critics maintain that while creative placemaking holds great promise, it is sometimes not carried out with a holistic agenda and set of strategies, or with clarity of means and ends. “Public art, cultural districts and performing arts centers are not the outcomes of creative placemaking – they are strategies” wrote Vazquez. He warned of the “lack of awareness or concern about the negative effects arts-based economic development can have on disadvantaged communities.”⁴⁶ A pair of Taiwan-based researchers found encouragement in arts-based strategies because “unique-cultural resources of place, civic society strength and place-identity [serve] as vehicles for local sustainability and urban social cohesion in the globalising context,” but they also expressed concern that homogeneous places result from “formulaic models of urban regeneration [that] result in standardized landscapes in localities, displacing local symbolic content.”⁴⁷

Sharon Zukin and Laura Braslow argued in 2011 that “real estate developers and public officials often use the symbolic capital of the ‘artistic mode of production’ to establish new place-identities for problematic industrial areas, rebranding them as ‘creative’ and increasing their economic value.”⁴⁸ They went on to describe how this economic value becomes a profit center for

developers and a tax generator for cities. In its wake, it causes dislocation of artists, the poor, elderly, and others who find they no longer belong in their neighborhood.

Using the label and strategies of creative placemaking, some cities or neighborhoods seek to capture, retain, and brand creative “space” – artist districts or quarters, live-arts scenes, or an overall ‘cool city’ image. However, as singular achievements, these are not enough. Charles Landry called these failed regeneration strategies favored by many political leaders the “Starbucks and Stadiums” approach. Critics cite such limited approaches as largely image makeovers that tend to further the process of gentrification and dislocation of the less affluent.⁴⁹ A consequence of creative placemaking or culture-led regeneration – whether intended or not – is often income inequality, gentrification, and displacement, as well as cultural conflicts. These are well-known, predictable phenomena that creative placemakers have scarcely addressed.

According to Jamie Peck, the global creative cities competition “gives way to a form of creative trickle-down; elite-focused creativity strategies leave only supporting roles for the two-thirds of the population languishing in the working and service classes.”⁵⁰

The potential to blend together urban planning, economic development, and cultural policy with values related to equity and social justice has proven a difficult recipe for creative placemakers. Part of the reason for this, Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa have argued, is that public, private, and nonprofit sectors and professional fields within urban planning, design, arts, and economic development find it hard to understand each other, let alone coordinate efforts.⁵¹ Another part of the equation, according to Sharon Zukin and Laura Braslow, is that cities become beholden to aggressive global investors and top-shelf developers. City and political leaders do not always assert values that protect their populations from growing inequity and political disenfranchisement.⁵²

Peck also cited abandonment of comprehensive planning in favor of the selective development of “urban fragments” – neighborhood nodes of upscale housing, coffee shops, and cultural and entertainment amenities designed to attract creative-class residents. Whether such efforts represent a fragmentation or a move towards localized democracy and empowerment is the subject of ongoing debate among scholars in planning and municipal management. He argued that notions of the creative class would not be sweeping cities around the globe if they fundamentally ran counter to established business and political interests. “For the average mayor, there are few downsides to making the city safe for the creative class – a creativity strategy can quite easily be bolted on to business-as-usual urban development policies.”⁵³

Case Study 4. Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation and Market Creek Plaza, San Diego, California

Within a five-minute drive of downtown San Diego, an abandoned 20-acre factory sat in the center of a diamond-shaped business improvement district. The Diamond, as it came to be called, includes parts of 10 different neighborhoods and has a total of 88,000 residents. Latinos and African Americans make up about 75 percent of the population, along with a mix of immigrants from various parts of the globe speaking more than 15 languages. This part of the city suffered over 25 years of disinvestment and a 1998 study found that, as is true in many poor communities,

residents of the Diamond were going outside their neighborhood and spending over \$60 million annually for basic products and services not available locally.

Market Creek Plaza and the Village at Market Creek emerged through a partnership between a San Diego community and a family foundation to redevelop the abandoned factory site, but it became much more. In 1996 Joseph and Violet Jacobs and the Jacobs Family Foundation formed the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation (www.jacobscenter.org) to explore new ways of helping communities, and soon decided to focus on the Market Creek project. The project grew into a skill and asset-building opportunity of considerable scale. “Working and learning together” became its motto and central strategy.

Early public projects included construction of the Malcolm X Library and Performing Arts Center and the Tubman-Chavez Multicultural Center. Market Creek Plaza opened for business in 2001 on a ten-acre parcel adjacent to a San Diego light-rail and bus transfer station. The Village at Market Creek, a housing development, and additional enterprises came on line over the next decade. The development includes office space, a 500-seat amphitheater, cultural center, walkways along a restored creek, myriad public art works, over 800 units of mixed-income housing, and 60 new businesses. The Jacobs Foundation and the hard work and imagination of community residents set in motion developments designed to encompass over 45 acres.

At least as important is how the project works. The process began when the Jacobs Center hired seven residents to survey 700 neighbors. Hundreds of community meetings followed and planning teams were launched to work on areas such as art and design, business development, employment, youth, childcare, community ownership, and a community center. Community art projects brought participation into the thousands. The art and design team created a unique design aesthetic to blend styles, colors, and designs derived from the neighborhood’s multiple cultures. The number of working/learning teams grew and involved hundreds of residents bringing out the residents’ natural creativity, problem-solving abilities, and appetite for risk-taking.

Market Creek Plaza evolved into a holistic community building project with culture and creativity at the center. Its imperative was to tap the creativity of residents while bringing about a new multicultural identity and building the skills and assets of the neighborhood. Arts and culture became a key strategy to engage residents and build the sense of connection and stewardship. Another key to the project was resident ownership through an equity stake for residents in businesses and homes. The community has become a growing employment center, with residents literally building the neighborhood.

Market Creek Plaza is about building community block-by-block in an inclusive, participatory, and focused way, and it’s based on the theory that social, cultural, and economic goals are interdependent.

In their critique of a creative-class initiative in Baltimore, Davide Ponzini and Ugo Rossi acknowledged that an inclusive approach to culture-led regeneration can renew the image of long-deprived cities and neighborhoods, provide a strengthened sense of belonging, and improve the liveliness and attractiveness of places. However, they found that the city and its cultural district

promoters appeared “not to be concerned with the issues of social inclusion and life-chance provision that are most relevant in socially deprived areas.”⁵⁴

The challenge for creative placemakers is to move beyond activation of public spaces and to do more than improve conditions for the creative class with the economic and intellectual benefits artistic involvement can bring. As part of a more holistic effort at people *and* place revitalization, they need to influence the values and outcomes of a larger set of collaborators with whom they aligned themselves in creative placemaking.

9. ASSESSING READINESS AND GETTING STARTED

Celebrate and stabilize distinctiveness with modest-scale investments ... paying more attention to the animation of places with economic and cultural activity.

– Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa⁵⁵

Creative placemaking leaders and prospective leaders need to assess their own readiness and that of their community and of some key organizations, including local levels of government. A central question to ask is: Does the community have the requisite internal self-governance experience and capacity, as well as cross-sector partnerships that are functional and can be built upon?

Over a period of three decades in the U.S., the community-development movement and the designers and advocates of large-scale urban renewal programs, initially launched by federal and state agencies, have learned that the development of local capacity is essential to the success of local efforts. Top-down, large-scale, or imposed and formulaic solutions have not often been well received and are simply not successful.⁵⁶

In building a bottom-up, people-centered placemaking effort, some questions creative leaders need to ask include:

- Is there adequate *appreciation* of the history, stories, and unique qualities of the community?
- Are the creative leaders personally *invested* in the community and do they know their neighbors?
- Are the creative leaders familiar with *how things get done* in the city and with major actors in neighborhood, political, social, and business arenas?
- Are the creative leaders familiar with existing *planning strategies and documents*:– city comprehensive plans; district, downtown, cultural, and neighborhood plans; and proposals for development in and around the neighborhood?
- Do the creative leaders understand how the *development* of major infrastructure projects in the past – and any pending infrastructure development – has altered and defined the community?
- Are the creative leaders and organizations prepared to make this work an *ongoing* part of their missions?

- Do the creative leaders share a meaningful *vision* for the community with other members of the community? How flexible is the creative leaders' vision? (If the answer is "Not open to adapting, amending, or making significant changes to it" based on the ideas of others, then the creative placemaking project may need to be postponed as the key players may not be prepared for such an undertaking.)

12 Steps: Preparation and Ongoing Practice in Creative Placemaking

1. Start with knowing and valuing the history and its multiple origins and interpretations.
2. Design and implement a process to engage people in identifying the community's assets; keep that process open to fresh ideas.
3. Value, engage, and honor local knowledge.
4. Identify appropriate outside thinkers and learn from their ideas.
5. Put in place an ongoing program or vehicle to connect community leaders across sectors, interests, ethnicities, always working to build new bridges and maintain existing ones.
6. Connect with, listen to, and meaningfully engage the talents of youth.
7. Get people talking and keep them talking. Use multiple strategies, including local media.
8. Include artists, culture bearers, designers, and other creative people on every team or committee and keep them involved at all stages.
9. In all aspects of the process, use creative approaches and maintain a creative environment.
10. Walk – literally – with people, and listen, as an ongoing practice.
11. Try new technologies to engage people in creative thinking, to keep people talking, and to inform people – but don't rely on it completely.
12. Generate and leverage the public visibility you generate to engage more people, to promote events, and to build political capital.

The emerging and evolving field of creative placemaking builds on a variety of formal and informal practices that shape, animate, and govern place-based communities of all sizes. It is not a new invention but a re-casting, re-articulation, and fresh combination of existing ideas and practices. The field tackles a broad and inclusive agenda, addressing the many ingredients that make places tick – the three components of “the production of space” described by Lefebvre: the perceived, conceived, and everyday lived experiences.

Only by thinking holistically and by actively working to bridge existing silos of practice can creative placemakers achieve success. Those from the arts and culture sector who have stepped up and stepped out from their own silo are taking on important work, but work that comes with a constant need for learning and often unpredictable challenges and rewards.

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