



Places in the Making:

How placemaking builds
places and communities



Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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This research was made possible by the generous support of Southwest Airlines

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Today's placemaking represents a comeback for community. The iterative actions and collaborations inherent in the making of places nourish communities and empower people.⁵



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Acknowledgements

As with any project of this scope, many people were involved during many different stages (just like a placemaking project!). First and foremost, Aaron Naparstek gets a big thank you for bringing this project to MIT's door and for providing expertise to the team on all things placemaking. His knowledge of the field and the players, as well as his insights, were invaluable during the research.

The three MIT research assistants on this project were much more than that...they were active partners in our journey to explore the current state of placemaking and they contributed greatly to the team's discussions and debates. Rebecca Disbrow, Katie Lorah, and Anna Muessig were the contact points for the case studies as they traveled far and wide this summer. They wrote up their findings and interviews and offered continuous feedback and input. I would especially like to thank Katie Lorah for her contribution to the writing of this paper. MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning deserves mention here as well. Under the leadership of Eran ben Joseph, we received all the support we could possibly want. Thanks DUSP!

A handful of gratitude is also extended to everyone at Project for Public Spaces® for their assistance to us and for providing some of the beautiful images in this paper. Fred Kent, Ethan Kent, Cynthia Nikitin, Philip Winn, Elena Madison, and Natalia Radywyl gave generously of their time and resources to impart some of the collective wisdom garnered during PPS's nearly 40 years of placemaking. We are also grateful for our access to the PPS Placemaking Leadership Council who gave enthusiastic and valuable input to the research team.

And...a note to Southwest Airlines. In a world of constrained resources, it is marvelous to find support and genuine interest for this placemaking research from a committed and enthusiastic friend. Thank you!

Dozens of placemakers gave generously of their time for interviews, meetings, and site visits. Some offered case study recommendations, others pointed us toward additional resources and literature. Many shared photographs and other project information and some were instrumental in scheduling case study visits, meetings and tours. All showed enthusiasm for the field and a deep commitment to community. Major contributors are listed below and we apologize if we have omitted names (a danger with lists such as these).

Robin Abad	Gregory Free	Perla Ni	Emily Weidenhof
Pam Atchenson	Gillian Gillett	Thomas O'Brien	Tracy Weil
Marisha Auerbach	Colin Hamilton	Sasha Ottoson-Deal	Andy Wiley-Schwartz
Susan Barnes-Gelt	Gaye Hamilton	Jacob Petersen	Mike Williams
Rory Beil	Andrew Howard	Becky Peterson	Chris Woldums
Wendy Benscoter	Keely Ihry	Andres Power	Laura Zabel
Alex Berryman	Alexander Kapur	Prerana Reddy	Kyle Zeppelin
Dan Biederman	Philipp Kellogg	Jason Roberts	Mickey Zeppelin
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The canon of placemaking's past taught us valuable lessons about how to design great public places while planting the seeds for a robust understanding of how everyday places, third places, foster civic connections and build social capital. The placemakers of tomorrow will build on this legacy by teaching us valuable lessons about how the making process builds and nurtures community.



Aspen, CO

Photo courtesy of Project for Public Spaces®

Contents

01	Introduction	1
02	The Past and Present of Placemaking	5
03	Placemaking is about the “Making”	9
04	Placemaking Projects: Challenges	13
05	The Cases	17
5.1	Corona Plaza: Queens, NY	18
5.2	Better Block: Norfolk, VA	21
5.3	Guerrero Park: San Francisco, CA	23
5.4	Precedent Mini-Case: Project for Public Spaces®, New York, NY	26
5.5	Eastern Market: Detroit, MI	28
5.6	Precedent Mini-Case: Bryant Park, New York City, NY	31
5.7	City Repair Cleveland: Cleveland, OH	32
5.8	Shreveport Common: Shreveport, LA	35
5.9	Fargo/Moorhead StreetsAlive: Fargo, ND and Moorhead, MN	38
5.10	TAXI: Denver, CO	41
5.11	Precedent Mini-Case: Playborhood, Menlo Park, CA	44
5.12	Kentlands: Gaithersburg, MD	45
5.13	Discovery Green: Houston, TX	48
06	Moving the Practice Forward: Building on Common Elements of Success	51
07	Conclusion	55
08	Endnotes	57
09	References	59
10	Appendix A—From Goals to Indicators and Measurement	60



01

Introduction

On a September afternoon, jazz music and barbecue smoke fills the air of a century-old urban market, rising to the rafters to mix with the pleasant din of hundreds of small conversations. Detroit's Eastern Market is one of the few bright spots of vibrancy and activity in a city that can often feel abandoned.

Here, community is nourished, literally, as Detroit residents and visitors of all descriptions peruse rows of fresh vegetables, stopping to chat with merchants and each other. A week later, the adjacent cities of Fargo, ND and Moorhead, MN host an event that brings people of all ages to the streets to bike, walk, rollerblade, and meet their neighbors. This same month, residents and public officials take a two-hour walk down 35th Street in Norfolk, VA to discuss a vision for a temporary event that will highlight pop-up businesses, open space, and new ways of celebrating community. In Denver, the small business owners and office workers of TAXI, an unorthodox mixed-use office park on an industrial stretch of the city's Platte River, gather for after-work cocktails and conversation on the deck of a shipping-container pool overlooking a freight train yard.

All of these scenes illustrate a community coming together in a physical environment created by a process of placemaking. The practice concerns the deliberate shaping of an environment to



Eastern Market, Detroit, MI

facilitate social interaction and improve a community's quality of life. Placemaking as we now know it can trace its roots back to the seminal works of urban thinkers like Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch and William Whyte, who, beginning in the 1960s, espoused a new way to understand, design and program public spaces by putting people and communities ahead of efficiency and aesthetics. Their philosophies, considered groundbreaking at the time, were in a way reassertions of the people-centered town planning principles that were forgotten during the hundred-year period of rapid industrialization, suburbanization, and urban renewal. Placemaking may come naturally to human societies, but something was lost along the way; communities were rendered powerless in the shadows of experts to shape their physical surroundings.

Since the 1960s, placemaking has grown up. What began as a reaction against auto-centric planning and bad public spaces has expanded to include broader

concerns about healthy living, social justice, community capacity-building, economic revitalization, childhood development, and a host of other issues facing residents, workers, and visitors in towns and cities large and small. Today, placemaking ranges from the grassroots, one-day tactical urbanism of Park(ing) Day¹ to a developer's deliberate and decades-long transformation of a Denver neighborhood around the organizing principle of art. Governmental organizations such as The National Endowment for the Arts and New York City's Department of Transportation, civic organizations like the Kinder Foundation, and funders such as Blue Cross Blue Shield have embraced placemaking, just to name a few. Conferences on the topic have been held, and well attended, in the last year by the Urban Land Institute, the Institute for Quality Communities, Project for Public Spaces[®], and others. Placemaking has hit the mainstream.

This is news to no one in the field; the array of placemaking projects, out-

comes and actors is large and strikingly diverse. The term encompasses a growing number of disciples and rapidly expanding roster of projects. Though this diversity is beneficial, the sheer number of projects that fall under the placemaking rubric can be overwhelming for scholars and practitioners, not to mention funders. The recession that began in 2008 has shown once again that planning, like economics, deals with the allocation of scarce resources. New political, economic and social realities demand that placemaking have measureable impacts on economic, social and health outcomes.² Placemaking advocates in all sectors are challenged to measure positive outcomes to justify expenditures in a field of practice where goals are often nebulous and attempts to measure impacts are nascent at best.³

Placemaking today is ambitious and optimistic. At its most basic, the practice aims to improve the quality of a public place and the lives of its community in tandem. Put into practice, placemaking seeks to build or improve public space, spark public discourse, create beauty and delight, engender civic pride, connect neighborhoods, support community health and safety, grow social justice, catalyze economic development, promote environmental sustainability, and of course nurture an authentic "sense of place." The list could go on. Many of these attributes have been well documented and well theorized over a half-century of research into what makes a great public place. While these efforts are valuable, the tendency to focus on the physical characteristics has created a framework for practicing, advocating for, and funding placemaking that does disservice to the ways the



Cleveland Intersection Repair, Cleveland, Ohio

Photo courtesy of Janet Century Photography for Neighborhood Connections

placemaking process nurtures our communities and feeds our social lives.

The intense focus on place has caused us to miss the opportunity to discuss community, process, and the act of making. The importance of *the placemaking process itself* is a key factor that has often been overlooked in working toward many of these noble goals. As illustrated by the ten cases highlighted here, **the most successful placemaking initiatives transcend the “place” to forefront the “making.”**

The importance of process over product in today’s placemaking is a key point that cannot be overstated—and it is pushing the practice to a broader audience and widening its potential impact. The recent resurgence of temporary, event-based, and tactical initiatives celebrates community process, deliberative discussion and collaboration with a lesser focus on the production of space. While there are myriad definitions for placemaking, we stress placemaking’s empowerment of community through the “making” process. In placemaking, the important transformation happens in the minds of the participants, not simply in the space itself. By engaging in the deliberative and communal processes of shaping public spaces, citizens are changing the landscape of the past century, in which “governments have centralized control and regulations, public spaces and services have been increasingly privatized, and communities lost the tradition and practice of having a local and active political voice.”⁴ Today’s placemaking represents a comeback for community. **The iterative actions and collaborations inherent in the making of places nourish communities and empower people.**⁵ This widening

emphasis away from just the physical place recognizes the long-term importance of nurturing community capacity and local leadership.

The implications for this framework are broad and far reaching. The mutual stewardship of place and community is what we call the *virtuous cycle* of placemaking. In this mutual relationship, communities transform places, which in turn transform communities, and so on.

The heightened interest in placemaking by a range of diverse partners and funders calls for the need to scale efforts, create a community of learning, and collaboratively address challenges. The practice requires active communication between placemakers about successes, failures, and lessons learned. This paper highlights current placemaking efforts and addresses the questions and challenges of our time by drawing on the history and literature of placemaking, interviews, and case study research to offer a snapshot of the state of placemaking. The research team reviewed existing scholarly work on placemaking theory and practice, efforts to measure progress toward goals and establish indicators of success, and the ongoing conversations of placemaking leaders. The team conducted over 100 interviews with thought leaders and practitioners across the United States and scanned dozens of potential case studies in addition to reviewing public programs and funding sources for placemaking. Ten placemaking initiatives were examined in depth for this paper.

What this research reveals is an astonishing range of placemaking projects, methods and instigators. All have in common the emphasis of creating posi-

tive change for people and communities through the transformation of a physical place. At the most basic level, the act of advocating for change, questioning regulations, finding funding, and mobilizing others to contribute their voices engages communities—and in engaging, leaves these communities better for it.

The current diversity and breadth of placemaking projects and processes is both a vindication for placemaking and a challenge for advocates and thought leaders as they seek to hone the placemaking message and develop a collective case for relevancy. How will the placemaking movement channel its tremendous momentum into positive results for communities and places? This research begins to answer this question and speaks to a diverse audience: corporate and non-profit funders wishing to have the greatest impact; community advocates looking to undertake a placemaking initiative; public agencies seeking to have wide-ranging positive impacts on communities; developers interested in increasing long-term value; researchers delving into community processes and outcomes; and professionals practicing placemaking.



Photo courtesy of Fargo Moorhead StreetsAlive

Fargo Moorhead StreetsAlive, Fargo, ND



The social goals of building social capital, increasing civic engagement and advocating for the right to the city are as central to contemporary placemaking as are the creation of beautiful parks and vibrant squares.

02

The Past and Present of Placemaking

“It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished.”⁶

—WILLIAM H. WHYTE

The placemaking practice has had many goals over time, but at its core it has always advocated a return of public space to people. The idea of making great, social, human-scale places is not new, and is evident in the canon of important public spaces, from the *agora* in Greece with its role as market place and public speech arena to the New England town common with its meeting house supporting democratic government. In the long history of human settlement, public places have reflected the needs and cultures of community; the public realm has long been the connective tissue that binds communities together. Despite this intrinsic link between public places and community, by the end of the 19th century, this link had fractured. The industrial age’s focus on machine efficiency, and the suburbanization of the United States in the 20th century cemented the divorce. The subsequent celebration of the car, the construction of highways and the implementation of urban renewal and slum clearance projects destroyed countless public places and communi-

ties across America. The efficient and modern city zoned out diversity and a mix of walkable uses in our communities. Suburban sprawl led us to the “geography of nowhere”⁷ where one strip mall and subdivision looked much like any other and “place” became a generic and valueless term. Land use decisions by “experts” and federal programs that came with fiscal incentives for highway construction, urban renewal, and suburban home ownership drove state and municipal policy making. The resulting “top-down” shaping of our built environment stripped familiar and well-worn public places from our landscape and took the place of local governance by the people—a local governance described by historian Mary Ryan as “meeting-place democracy.”⁸ When communities lost this space for “meeting-place democracy,” the importance of and control over public places went with it.

Present-day placemaking is a response to the systematic destruction of human-friendly and community-

centric spaces of the early 20th

century. Beginning in the 1960s, many of the current-day movements in city planning began to take root. They reacted to policies and regulations intended to cleanse the seemingly chaotic and disordered urban fabric that was visually and functionally at odds with the efficient and sterile ideals of the modern city. Scholars and urban sociologists began questioning how public space was appropriated and for what (and by whom) it was used. In 1960, Kevin Lynch published *The Image of the City* in which he presented his extensive empirical research on human perception of the city and how individuals experience and navigate the urban landscape, which influenced thinking on the importance of human-centered urban design. A year later, Jane Jacobs authored her seminal book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in which she used her experiences as a resident in New York’s Greenwich Village to question the clearing of city blocks to create a neat and orderly environment. “There is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder,” Jacobs wrote, “and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretended order, achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and to be served.”⁹

If Jacobs based her excoriation of “clean sweep” mid-century urban planning on

her personal experiences living in New York, William “Holly” Whyte took a more analytical approach, using time-lapse photography and a team of researchers to record direct observations of human behavior to determine why some spaces are good for people and others not. By the late 1970s, the tide of placemaking was beginning to turn toward a refocus on human-centered design. In his 1980 book and companion film, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, Whyte laid out his findings and provided, for the first time, a catalog of elements and factors that make a good public place. His observations of human behavior in public spaces linked urban design and the needs and desires of people—the *raison d’être* of placemaking. The year 1975 saw the formation of Project for Public Spaces® (PPS), founded by Fred Kent, a disciple of William Whyte. Since then, the organization has spent nearly a half-century as a thought leader in the field of placemaking, setting an early standard of practice with a global influence. Concurrent with PPS’s founding, Christopher Alexander’s *A Pattern Language* was published in 1977, which celebrated design for people by people. Alexander vehemently rejected the top-down urban design and architectural trends he felt were against fundamental needs of human nature. While Alexander’s deeply personal recommendations caused great discussion and dissent in the design field, he appealed to the profession that “people should design for themselves, their own houses, streets and communities. This idea... comes simply from the observation that most of the wonderful places of the world were not made by architects but by the people.”¹⁰ Alexander’s ethos of community-centered design is the core philosophy of placemaking.

Philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s work on urbanism and the creation of space lays another key foundation for the placemaking movement today. He argued in 1968 that there is a fundamental “right to the city,” an assertion against the top-down management of space that he felt restricted social interactions and relationships in society.¹¹ Contemporary critical theorists have taken up the “right to the city” movement, describing it as one of the most important social movements today. Philosopher David Harvey writes,

“The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights”¹²

Placemaking is a critical arena in which people can lay claim to their “right to the city.” The fact that placemaking happens in public spaces, not corporate or domestic domains, is a critical component to its impact on cities. Public places, which are not our homes nor our work places, are what Ray Oldenburg calls “third places.” Placemaking creates these “third places” that he describes as, “the places of social gathering where the community comes together in an informal way, to see familiar and unfamiliar faces, somewhere civic discourse and community connections can happen.”¹³ Oldenburg stresses the importance of this “neutral

ground upon which people may gather... in which none are required to play host, and in which all feel at home and comfortable”¹⁴ and expresses concern that these third places are being lost.

Third places, our public spaces, have long been studied and celebrated by urban theorists. Urban sociologist Richard Sennett stresses the important role public spaces play in creating necessary “social friction,” the interaction between different groups of people who would otherwise not meet.¹⁵ Sennett echoes the passion of Frederick Law Olmsted, the great creator of over a dozen major municipal parks from Mount Royal Park in Montreal to Central Park in New York City, who believed parks should be the public meeting ground of human kind. Olmsted believed, “The park is intended to furnish healthful recreation, for the poor and the rich, the young and the old, the vicious and the virtuous.”¹⁶ He was committed to an important role for public open space in our society and believed “the park was turning out to be a “democratic development of the highest significance.”¹⁷

Placemaking offers not just social friction but social capital. Robert Putnam’s seminal 2001 book, *Bowling Alone*, defined social capital as “the connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”¹⁸ Through extensive interviews and research, Putnam determined that our civic and personal health was at risk from decreased community activity and sharing. The concept of social capital is not new. Alexis de Tocqueville, French historian and political observer, alluded to it in the early nineteenth century

when marveling at the rich public life and civic discourse in American society,

“...here the people of one quarter of a town are met to decide upon the building of a church; there the election of a representative is going on; a litter farther, the delegates of a district are hastening to the town in order to consult upon some local improvements; in another place, the laborers of a village quit their plows to deliberate upon the project of a road or a public school.”¹⁹

A pervasive theme of de Tocqueville’s impressions of America is that public discourse, deliberation and disagreement bred equality for citizens. Over a century later, the concept of social capital was linked to fundamentals of placemaking when Jane Jacobs wrote of the importance of the public realm in fostering human connection and mutual civic trust.

“The trust of a city street is formed over time from many, many little public sidewalk contacts. It grows out of people stopping by the bar for a beer, getting advice from the grocer and giving advice to the newsstand man... The sum of such casual, public contact at a local level— most of it fortuitous, most of it associated with errands, all of it metered by the person concerned and not thrust upon him by anyone— is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighborhood need.”²⁰

These early theorists laid the foundation for complex thinking about placemaking. William Whyte’s behavioral observations of public plazas, parks and other urban environments created

new and much-needed awareness of the link between social interaction and design while Jane Jacobs examined the role played by our everyday spaces of streets, sidewalks and front stoops in building civic trust and respect. In the intervening decades, placemaking has grown in complexity, expanding from this nascent stage to its present day focus on human-centered urban transformations that increase social capital in a multitude of ways. This growth of the field is a reflection of our increasingly complex times. While urban renewal may have been a formidable crucible for placemaking in the 1960s, the contemporary city and suburb are faced with a new suite of challenges.²¹ As the cases in this paper demonstrate, today’s placemaking addresses challenges such as rising obesity rates, shrinking cities, and climate change, to name a few. **The contemporary challenge to placemakers is to address the pressing needs of our cities in a way that transcends physical place and empowers communities to address these challenges on an ongoing basis.** For example, Open Streets events address the goals of healthy living by encouraging communities to ride bikes; a “secondary” objective is the building of lasting social connections, which is

arguably just as important. Tactical initiatives like City Repair and Better Block provide a framework for civic discourse through the planning and physical building of temporary street improvements in a rapid timeframe, giving their communities the tools for positive change in the long term.

The social goals of building social capital, increasing civic engagement and advocating for the right to the city are as central to contemporary placemaking as are the creation of beautiful parks and vibrant squares. Leading placemakers around the country have known this for some time, and have been infusing their projects with meaningful community process, building broad consensus, creating financing mechanisms that bring unexpected collaborators to the table, and other strategies demonstrated in the case studies presented in this paper. The canon of placemaking’s past taught us valuable lessons about how to design great public places while planting the seeds for a robust understanding of how everyday places, third places, foster civic connections and build social capital. The placemakers of tomorrow will build on this legacy by teaching us valuable lessons about how the making process builds and nurtures community.

Photo courtesy of Project for Public Spaces®



Discovery Green, Houston, TX



Parking) Day

03

Placemaking is about the “Making”

“Placemaking is an act of doing something. It’s not planning, it’s doing. That’s what’s so powerful about it.”

—FRED KENT, *PROJECT FOR PUBLIC SPACES*®

The placemaking began while the coals were still smoldering. After an act of arson destroyed a Louisiana cultural council’s Shreveport headquarters, the mayor announced Shreveport Common, an initiative led by an unlikely alliance between arts leaders, city officials, community members, parish managers, and others focused on the revitalization of a long-neglected edge of downtown. In short order meetings were held, parties hosted, visioning sessions attended, parcels acquired, and by fall 2013, a yearlong activation of the neighborhood by artists was begun. Construction on the area will begin in 2014. More than fifty people are intimately involved in this placemaking effort, and Shreveport Common has laid the foundation to become one of the leading examples of creative placemaking in the country, without a single shovel of dirt being turned.

If placemaking has at its roots a commitment to shaping great public places around the needs and desires of a community, in recent years it has become a movement in which communities are not only recipients, but active participants in this shaping. A major trend has

been disintermediation of placemaking: the placemaking “professional” who has traditionally translated wishes to reality is simply gone. Team Better Block presents a framework in which the community dreams, plans and acts without “expert” help. Many cases also emphasize the process, not the product; the “making” fosters deliberative discussions and civic collaboration. While the place is important, the “making” builds connections, creates civic engagement, and empowers citizens—in short, it builds social capital. As architect Mark Lakeman of Portland’s City Repair organization puts it, “the physical projects are just an excuse for people to meet their neighbors.”

The cases in this paper show a number of trends, among them the forefronting of a solid plan for the ongoing programming of spaces; the rise and influence of tactical urbanism; and the prevalence of public/private partnerships. All of these trends rely fundamentally on a strong, strategic and inclusive foundational process. As a whole, they suggest that successful placemaking has become more *iterative* and more *interactive*. In essence, placemaking has mirrored what



Corona Plaza, Queens, NY



Guerrero Park, San Francisco, CA

Photo courtesy of Andres Power

has happened in countless other fields in the past decade, with the rise of the Internet. The new model of placemaking emphasizes flexibility, embraces impermanence, shares information, and draws on unorthodox sources for influence. It empowers everyday users to become makers, to share ideas, and to form alliances.

The following are some of the major trends that illustrate the increased importance of process over product:

Programming: The making is never finished.

While the mainstream of placemaking never advocated for a “design it and leave it” approach, the practice in the past has focused on front-end community engagement and the initial creation of a place to the detriment of the “continuous placemaking” allowed by programming. What happens when the designers go away—the maintenance and planned activity of a place—deserves equal attention. Programming was essential to success in a number of cases: Houston’s Discovery Green, where an ongoing draw was needed to ensure a new park developed a community of users; Eastern Market, to broaden social diversity

and create a sense of ownership to those across the socioeconomic spectrum; and Corona Plaza, to draw community members into the planning process who would ordinarily be distrustful of authority. Programming *is* placemaking—the fostering of community around a physical location. Placemakers are able, through programs, to continually tweak places to better meet the needs of their communities. Even more important, because programming involves a much lower barrier to entry, a broader community of individuals can be involved with minimal investment. There is endless opportunity to improve existing places through programming: the making is never finished.

Agile places: the rise and influence of tactical urbanism.

Tactical urbanism, usually low-cost, unsanctioned, and temporary additions to the built environment, has caught the recent attention of policymakers, planners, artists, and community members alike. At their most minimal, tactical actions have included “chair bombings” by Brooklyn’s DoTank Collective in which the collective built chairs and placed them in public where they felt seating was needed.

At their more involved, they include nationwide projects like Park(ing) Day, where anyone from ordinary citizens to civic groups temporarily appropriate on-street parking space for short term use as open space. Tactical projects can be remarkably effective in remaking a public space quickly and cheaply while calling attention to the need for better placemaking on a larger scale. A project like Chair Bombing solves the immediate need for seating, but it also provokes larger policy questions about the social nature of the public realm. While it is clear that not every project can be tactical, there is little doubt that the democratic ethos of the movement has rubbed off on the placemaking practice as a whole. Cities such as New York and San Francisco have embraced the pilot project, a kind of rapid-prototype for urban spaces. The “trickle-up” nature of tactical urbanism demonstrates the growing influence of an Internet-influenced model where positive change can happen in real time and everyone is empowered to be a maker.

The new collaborators: public/private partnerships.

Another challenge to the top-down, product-focused placemaking of the past is the growing prevalence of public/



Photo courtesy of ShapeThings / Flickr

Yarn bombing

private partnerships in the practice. These partnerships can be built on a number of different models that mix regulatory power and public ownership with private resources and efficient management to create and maintain well-run places that would not otherwise be possible. The vast majority of cases in this paper involve some mix of public and private entities as “makers,” whether the sectors collaborate initially as instigators (as in Fargo/Moorhead StreetsAlive), or whether private partners are primarily responsible for the ongoing maintenance and operations of a historically public place (as in Eastern Market). The bottom line is, the placemaking field has expanded to include the private sector, as well as public agencies, nonprofits, foundations, and individuals, to play a role in these important processes. Collaborations that a generation ago would be unheard of are now commonplace. And as the public and private sectors interact in new ways around the creation of places, lasting bonds form. The relationships that grow out of the “making” are equal to, if not more important than, the places that result.

The major trends in placemaking point toward a new, “making-focused” paradigm for the practice.

The most interesting, most successful placemaking projects today leave behind previous tenets of the field: gone is the master-planner, the big, top-down bureaucracy, and the enormously expensive, multi-year debt-financed capital plan. In his forward to *Slow Democracy*, Frank Bryan makes the case that the post-industrial age has allowed for “the ascendance of a third wave—a new paradigm—for today’s electronic age. It’s a paradigm that is nonhierarchical,

community centered, and fundamentally (and uniquely) democratic in character.”²² Bryan is describing an open source platform, one that placemaking is beginning to embrace. Long gone are the days when the dictate was that “ordinary citizens “should learn humility in the face of expertise.”²³ “We have gone from consuming places to making them”²⁴ and this has blurred the lines between layperson and professional—creating a community of makers.

The cases in this paper illustrate that the relationship of places and their communities is not linear, but cyclical, and mutually influential. Places grow out of the needs and actions of their formational communities, and in turn shape

the way these communities behave and grow. Often, a new cycle begins once the initial “making” is finished—a community might come together to ensure the place is properly maintained, or to create a calendar of cultural events to enliven the place on an ongoing basis. The place is never truly finished, nor is the community. This mutual influence of community and place is what we call the *virtuous cycle* of placemaking. Mutual stewardship grows from this cycle, which allows for multiple entry points into the placemaking process, **as shown in figure 1.**

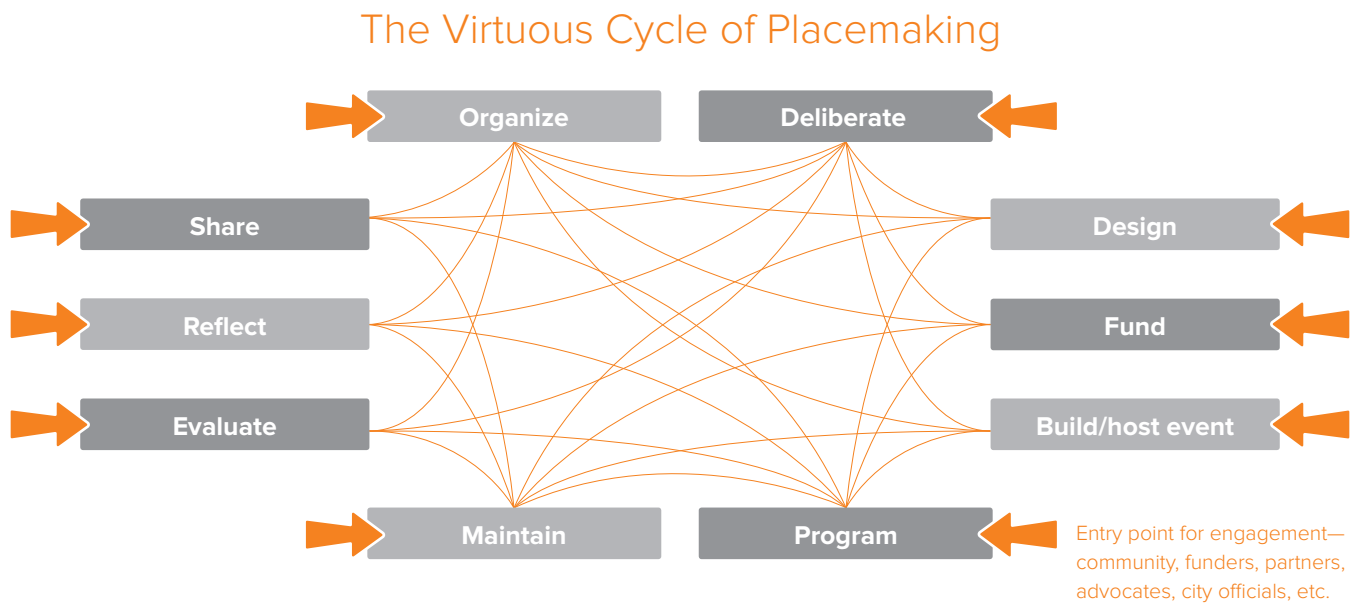
Rather than a cycle where instigators, regulators, and funders enter a linear process in a prescribed order,



Photo courtesy of Asterix 611 / Flickr

Bryant Park, New York

Figure 01



before “delivering” the product to the community, this model recognizes that placemaking is fluid, can involve multiple points of entry for different collaborators, and that community must be actively involved as a maker, not just a recipient, of a place.

Admittedly, the model we are describing may sound (and look) a bit anarchical. We will spend no time here arguing for orderliness in placemaking; like all true democratic processes, it is—and must be—chaotic. Opinions clash, motives contradict, strong personalities dominate, and the entire process can get sidetracked by politics, money, or a bad media story. Though the use of technology and the rise of the rapid-implementation model have streamlined the process, placemaking is often tedious. Good places still take years to become great places. Communities take years to adapt. And placemaking is still subject to the whims and personalities of powerful

individuals—politicians, funders, community leaders—who may change their minds or reach the end of their attention spans before the placemaking cycle is complete. There is little evidence that the shift toward a more process-centric, inclusive, iterative model has made placemaking any simpler. We would argue that in this complexity lies one of the great strengths of placemaking; as an iterative process, placemaking requires complexity to work in different contexts, with different communities, and for different outcomes. There is no simple answer to “what makes a good place,” or for that matter, “what makes a good process.” The best answer, for each individual project, lies in ongoing iteration and adaptation.

The key elements of placemaking, as illustrated in these cases, are an empowered community of makers, a complex network of cross-sector alliances involving individuals and groups with different

roles and areas of expertise, and a process that is set up to run indefinitely, ever course-correcting to improve the place and better serve the community. This is, of course, a placemaking model for the twenty-first century. **In an era marked by instant communication, crowd-sourced production, and rapid prototyping, it’s no surprise that the processes shaping our public realm have evolved to fit the times.** This is fitting given the role the public realm has long played as the “original social media platform.”²⁵ Throughout human history, public places have been used and created to facilitate the efficient exchange of information, goods and services. It’s only fitting that our placemaking processes, designed to produce a good, healthy, functional “user experience” in the public might carry the hallmarks of the information age, among them networked collaboration, flexibility, and the idea that nothing is ever truly finished.

04

Placemaking Projects: Common Challenges



Times Square, New York City, NY

Photo courtesy of Project for Public Spaces®

The cases examined in this paper are in different stages of the placemaking cycle. Some, like Discovery Green, are fully built physically and beginning to undergo the process of use, programming, and adaptation. Others, like Cleveland's intersection repair, have just completed the first stage of community visioning and are in the process of government approval. Each of these cases has grappled with challenges. Getting a placemaking project off the ground is a major undertaking, no matter who is initiating it, but the managing and programming also require ongoing resources and community engagement; as demonstrated in the Guerrero Park case, the place can falter when these resources are slim. While each project is different, placemakers can and should learn from each other's successes and failures in the spirit of "open-source" placemaking. From the cases, we have identified seven recurring challenges. The ways in which these projects have addressed these challenges has informed our recommendations, which conclude the paper.

1. Making the case for placemaking is harder than it should be

Considering that the shaping of our physical surroundings to better fit our lives is a basic human activity, placemaking is too often a hard sell. It is surprising how much advocacy, salesmanship, documenting, and negotiation is needed to gather allies, turn public sentiment, secure funding, and accomplish the project's goals. With public resources and community attention often scarce, it can be hard to make the case to divert public dollars or precious extra time to placemaking. The creation of new public spaces is often treated as a luxury in a time of scarcity, or a single issue in a crowded political environment. **Project initiators and allies face a major challenge in communicating the immense potential for the placemaking process, as well as the place itself, to improve and empower communities in the long term.** Buying into the idea of a new place, or a drastically overhauled one, before it is built requires a leap of faith that many potential allies see as too risky to support. Placemakers must sometimes be visionary storytellers and other times, savvy debaters.

2. “Making” takes time in a “here and now” culture

There is no way around it: many placemaking efforts take time, and lots of it. Even with the field's current embrace of the tactical and the temporary, many projects take time to assemble the right stakeholders, to study the context, to bring communities to consensus, to build political support, and to raise funds, and all this

happens before the “shovels hit the ground.” The process is often chaotic and slow—however this very messiness that can be infuriating and daunting also enables community building. Impatience, and the expectation of instant gratification, are great enemies of many placemaking projects. Media coverage, which so many projects desperately court, can often exacerbate the problem, as complex projects are reduced to a simple narrative that is then repeated until it is understood as fact while nuances are ignored. Most importantly, it takes time to perceive and measure the true impact of places and processes on their communities. Too often, a placemaking project will be quickly deemed a “success” or a “failure” prematurely, and the long-term lessons will be unacknowledged.

3. Expertise is a scarce resource

Placemaking projects too often fail because of a knowledge gap. Most often the missing element is knowledge of context; placemakers need to know their audience inside and out for their project to succeed. A visionary project by a leader unfamiliar with the community is all but doomed to failure; placemakers need the right allies, advisers, and collaborators. Finding true experts can present a great challenge. (Here we must differentiate “experts” from “professionals”—“expert” can just as readily apply to knowledgeable community members participating at the grassroots level as to paid consultants with professional expertise.) Bringing “community experts” on board can be harder still, especially in communities that suffer from

“planning fatigue” or have an ingrained mistrust of authority, as is sometimes found in historically disadvantaged communities. Success of a placemaking project can hinge on the cooperation of a small group of savvy insiders who are committed to the project, and needless to say, they don't just materialize.

4. It's hard to know who to involve—and when and how to involve them

Meaningful community engagement remains a major challenge in many placemaking projects. Community engagement is crucial for a successful project, yet a thorough engagement process can be time- and labor-intensive, and those most likely to volunteer their input are often not representative of the larger community. The cliché of the community meeting dominated by cranky “not-in-my-backyard” types has some basis in reality if placemaking leaders are not strategic about the ways in which communities are engaged and how. Even if the right people are brought to the table initially, it can be a major challenge to build trust to the point where the community is willing to work together to help the project succeed. It can be more difficult still to build a coalition of allies that will continue to support the project in the long term, stepping in when resources and expertise are needed beyond the initial “making” phase.

5. Placemaking exists in a world of rules and regulations

The brightest idea can be quickly sidelined by unfavorable policy. In some cases, like intersection repair, a

policy framework simply doesn't yet exist. In other cases, such as Build a Better Block, placemaking explicitly challenges existing policies. The best environments for placemaking require creative thinking in all sectors, and that often requires policymakers to be willing to take a risk on an unknown outcome, something government officials are often reluctant to do. Even if placemakers can point to successful precedents in other cities, they are often met with a litany of reasons why "that would never work here." Adding to the challenge is the lack of the average layperson's experience in and knowledge of complex regulatory and governance environments; the fine print of zoning regulations, multiplicity of public agencies with jurisdictional claims, and varied local, state and federal layers of requirements can mire a vision that seemed simple at the outset.

6. Reliable funding sources are scarcer than ever

Placemaking can be expensive, and untested projects are as risky for funders as they are for policymakers. Reliable funding is necessary at each major stage of placemaking, beginning with the initial process, which may include personnel costs, marketing and design fees, and funding for community processes. Implementation, which may range from the cost of materials for a temporary installation to capital construction costs in the millions of dollars for the building of a new public open space, also requires dedicated fund-

ing. A reliable funding source is necessary for long term maintenance, programming and operations for non-temporary projects. The relatively new emphasis on measurements of outcomes and evaluations of initiatives has added a fourth stage of funding. An iterative perspective on placemaking also demands long-term—or indefinite—revenue streams for placemaking projects, something for which few funders will sign on.

7. There's no glory in the post-mortem

It is astonishing how few placemaking projects actively and honestly assess their own successes and failures. The combined challenges we outline in this paper, coupled with an existing placemaking culture that focuses on fuzzy, unmeasurable goals as the norm, creates inertia in assessment efforts that hobbles shared learning and is detrimental to the field as a whole, as valuable insights are left undiscovered, and the same mistakes are made over and over again. Because of the great pressure for placemaking projects to succeed (pressure which is reinforced by funders and political allies alike), it benefits project leaders to be vague in their assessments, and many avoid metrics entirely. But by repeating the purposely uninformed and unqualified opinions that their projects were successful, placemakers prevent the amassing of a body of shared knowledge that the field needs to move forward.

[For more on metrics, see [Appendix A.](#)]



Photo courtesy of Project for Public Spaces

Milwaukee, WI



05

The Cases

The placemaking projects featured in this study were selected because they demonstrate the breadth of the field at this moment in time. They range across the spectrum of physical size, from the painting of a single intersection to a district-wide revitalization; the spectrum of initiators, from private developer to public agency; and the spectrum of permanence, from a daylong event to a 20-year bricks-and-mortar development. We in no way mean to imply that these are the “best” placemaking efforts. Rather, we have made an attempt to represent a variety of social contexts—

wealthy neighborhoods as well as low- and mixed-income areas—to reflect that placemaking can and is happening everywhere, and that community is broadly defined. Additionally, an attempt has been made to include projects that vary geographically, and to include parts of the United States that aren’t typically thought of as leaders in innovative planning.

Each project showcases a unique relationship between communities and their built environment. There are lessons in each case about process, community

engagement, partnerships, funding, messaging, and a number of other areas. We have distilled what we believe are the most important lessons from each study as a series of key takeaways at the beginning of each case. These takeaways have informed the recommendations at the conclusion of this paper. Taken together, this body of cases and their lessons contributes to a larger understanding of the field of placemaking as it currently stands. We feel that these lessons have great potential impact for communities, policymakers, designers, funders, and others in the placemaking field.



Corona Plaza, Queens, NY

5.1 Corona Plaza: Queens, NY

La Placita: using public space to empower a community in need

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The temporary-to-permanent placemaking model allows community to be “designers” of the space and inform professionals about important design considerations
- Programming partners add life to public places and can oversee cultural programming unique to the community, allowing residents and users to be comfortable within a space
- Public/private partnerships provide not only funding, but also needed resources and expertise in ongoing maintenance and space programming
- Finding supporting organizations and community capacity to engage in placemaking and maintain public spaces can be a challenge in a low-income, primarily immigrant neighborhood
- Temporary improvements provide “testing” time for a design and offer time to work out use and maintenance challenges before the space is made permanent

In August 2012, a new 13,000-square-foot triangular public plaza was unveiled in the Corona neighborhood of Queens. The plaza, located in the shadow of the elevated #7 subway tracks, had recently been paved with textured epoxy gravel, and featured movable seating, clusters of planter boxes, sun umbrellas, and chunks of granite serving as informal seating. Within days of its opening it was clear that this public space, which was created temporarily through the New York City Department of Transportation’s four-year-old Plaza Program, was a huge hit. It was a lively scene: children ran through the plaza or dragged metal folding chairs under the watchful eye of mothers, and groups of men played dominoes in the shade. A series of opening performances and cultural activities—dances and musical acts—was well attended. People chose to cut diagonally through the plaza on foot rather than stick to the sidewalk underneath the elevated track. The cross-sector team responsible for the



Corona Plaza, Queens, NY

plaza—the DOT, the Queens Economic Development Corporation, and the Queens Museum—began to plan for the next phase, the permanent design and construction of the plaza.

Corona, Queens is a densely populated, ethnically diverse neighborhood with a large and growing proportion of residents who are recent immigrants. More than 75% of its residents now identify

as Hispanic/Latino, most of them from Mexico and Ecuador, though the neighborhood was historically dominated by middle class blacks and Italians. This demographic shift has corresponded with a drop in income; many new immigrants work as day laborers or make their living in informal economic activities such as unpermitted street vending. The City has identified Corona as a neighborhood lacking in open space. This is largely due to dense living conditions—although most buildings are no more than four stories tall, residents often live three to four in a bedroom. Bustling Roosevelt Avenue, which borders Corona Plaza, is one of the district’s main commercial corridors and hosts the elevated subway tracks of the #7 line. The street offers a lively combination of small independently-owned food, retail and service businesses mixed with the occasional chain operator. Street vendors are prevalent, and sidewalks are often used for socializing.

DOT’s Plaza Program works with neighborhood organizations to transform underutilized streets and pedestrian refuge islands into new public spaces. The program launched in 2008 with the goal of increasing access to open space for all New Yorkers using a streamlined process of community engagement and rapid implementation. Plaza sites are chosen through an annual competitive application process; neighborhood-based nonprofits submit applications that include: the location of the proposed plaza, detailed plans for community engagement and maintenance funding, and support letters from elected representatives and cultural institutions. Since the program debuted in 2008, DOT has worked with neighborhood organizations to build more

than twenty new public spaces across New York City.

Once a site is selected, DOT provides the funding for design and construction of the plaza (in the case of Corona Plaza, around \$4 million). DOT also provides guidance in the community design process. The sponsoring organization provides the insurance and is responsible for community outreach, a plan for ongoing funding and maintenance, and programming and events. Physically, DOT plazas are constructed with either temporary materials (gravel epoxy, paint, movable furniture) or permanent materials (pavers, plantings, fixed seating); the design and implementation process, and the timeline, is different for each. Some plaza projects, including Corona Plaza, begin as temporary spaces before undergoing design processes for permanent construction.

Corona Plaza was sponsored by the Queens Economic Development Corporation, in partnership with the Queens Museum as programming partner. The temporary plaza opened in 2012, a year after DOT received the application. This was not the first time public use of this space was considered: a 2006 attempt by the New York City Economic Development Corporation to create a pedestrian plaza here was scrapped because of lack of funding, and the Queens Museum had been sponsoring and holding cultural events in the space for about six years before the application. The museum’s community outreach team had also previously worked with Queens College on a community information-gathering, planning, and design project called “Corona Studio.” These earlier activities around the plaza, combined with the lack of open space and crowded living

conditions in the neighborhood, helped to quickly gain support for the DOT plaza from the local City Councilwoman, Julissa Ferreras, the local community board, Flushing Willets Point Corona CDC, and the social justice organization Corona CAN.

Physically, the plaza occupies what was once a block-long side street running roughly parallel to Roosevelt Avenue, and separated from the busy avenue by a sidewalk and a fenced-off .04 acre triangle of greenspace. The street’s 26 parking spaces were primarily used by large delivery trucks. According to Emily Weidenhof of the DOT, “sometimes business owners (near other plazas) will object to the plazas because it takes away parking, but in Corona, those big delivery trucks were actually blocking the view from the sidewalk to the businesses, so the shop owners wanted them gone.” The street had a low level of vehicular through-traffic, but is located at a nexus of public transportation, including a stop on the #7 train and two nearby Q23 bus stops. Food shops, retail shops, restaurants, and a post office line the plaza.

The plaza was first built using DOT’s standard kit of temporary materials: granite blocks, umbrellas, movable chairs and tables, planters, flexi barriers, paint, and epoxy gravel. The temporary space was designed to be flexible, to offer opportunities to observe how people used it, and to allow for a range of public programming, to help establish a pattern of usership within the community. In early 2013, after a few months with the temporary plaza up and running, DOT commissioned RBA Architects to develop a permanent plan for the plaza. According to Alex Berryman of RBA,

having the plaza open on a temporary basis has improved the process of creating a permanent design for both the architects (“we can see how people circulate through the space and where they congregate naturally”) and the public (“their feedback becomes more directed when they are reacting to the experience of the space.”) The Queens Museum has played an important role in involving the community in the design process—according to Prerena Reddy, “the DOT and the architects don’t know Corona, but we do. There are a lot of people here who don’t feel comfortable showing up at community meetings. Many of them have a distrust of government and bureaucracy. We’ve had to bring the designs to them in new ways.” A recent design charrette was held in the plaza itself during a well-attended festival in August. Community feedback to the proposed design includes repeated requests for a baby changing station,

more shade, seating facing in multiple directions, and use of vibrant colors such as colorful stone for the seat walls. Many residents also mentioned a water feature, which unfortunately, due to cost and maintenance, is out of the question. However, Berryman said, “because they’ve been involved with the plaza design there seems to be a more realistic sense of how a plaza operates and how hard it is to maintain and there’s a greater understanding of why we can’t have certain features. There’s less disappointment, less of a sense that we’re just holding out on them or imposing a design on them, and that we are in fact designing the plaza with their input.”

In terms of use and improved value to both the residential and business community, Corona Plaza has been a great success. The largest single challenge facing the plaza, and many DOT plazas, is ensuring indefinite revenue streams for

the ongoing maintenance costs. Relying on a nonprofit organization to maintain a community asset, says Prerena Reddy, “can be problematic, especially when you look at the income variability in these neighborhoods.” Areas most in need of open space seem to correlate with those least likely to have stable local organizations with the discretionary funds to sign on as maintenance partners. One solution may lie in a group like the Neighborhood Plaza Partnership, a fledgling organization recently founded by Laura Hansen, formerly of the JM Kaplan Fund. NPP’s objective is to supplement local maintenance resources for plazas developed through DOT’s program, and to serve as a resource for maintenance partners who may be struggling for funds. Rather than these individual maintenance partners competing for maintenance funding, Reddy says, NPP uses some “economies of scale” to aid these organizations and build capacity.

5.2 Better Block: Norfolk, VA

Community engagement through rapid placemaking

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Temporary urban interventions can help a community envision permanent changes in the future
- City officials can use temporary zoning and transportation “grace periods,” allowing placemakers to break regulations to explore permanent regulatory changes
- Communities build powerful connections around the shared experience of “making” a vision for the future together
- Process and community engagement can be as important or more important than the “product” of a built-out place

In April 2013, the City of Norfolk hosted the Dallas-based consultants Team Better Block to organize a “rapid placemaking” event on Granby Street in the city’s proposed downtown Arts District, the first of four planned projects in the city. The efforts use temporary collaborative placemaking to coalesce the community and change citizens’ and City officials’ sense of “what’s possible.” During the weekend-long event, residents created temporary spaces, piloted small businesses, and forged important connec-

tions. The weekend also led to the City’s adoption of permanent zoning changes. Though the full long-term impact of the Better Block events remains to be seen, they have precipitated a sense of excitement, engagement, and energy among residents, business owners, and City leaders to revitalize Norfolk.

Better Block was founded out of what co-founder Jason Roberts calls “rendering fatigue,” where community enthusiasm wanes during a long planning

process. Roberts says, “We [founded] Better Block as a 30 day vision, not a five year vision.” Roberts, who founded the social-enterprise consulting firm Team Better Block along with Andrew Howard, believes that good placemaking aims to create “a highly connected community or tribe.” His firm engages communities by planning and orchestrating weekend-long local events to temporarily improve the physical and economic environment on a specific city block. The team has led twelve efforts around the



Build a Better Block, Norfolk, VA

U.S., beginning with one in the founders' hometown of Dallas. Roberts and Howard's work purposely flouts existing zoning and land use regulations that they feel are counter to good placemaking, such as restrictions on commercial activity. Their built projects often include a posted list of city regulations that have been broken. Of the legal transgressions, Roberts says, "what's the worst that could happen? A newspaper writes a story: 'Guy goes to jail for trying to bring coffee shop to neighborhood'—that would make a great newspaper story!"

Team Better Block focuses on smaller cities that aren't typically thought of as hotspots for tactical urbanism or progressive planning policy—and that's the point. Like many such cities, Norfolk shows the scars of chronic underinvestment, suburbanization that has drawn population (and tax bases) from the core, and outdated zoning codes and regulations which even City officials acknowledge hinder creative development. The Team does not offer solutions or "expert" suggestions; they try to help the community generate ideas about how to build on their city's assets to improve public space. They only work where some social capital already exists; of the four Norfolk streets targeted for Better Block interventions, all are historic commercial "main streets" in good locations but suffering economically.

The process begins with a preliminary site walk with community members—the second project walk, in August, drew about 50 people—followed by a series of community meetings with the City and a self-selecting core group leading up to the implementation event. The April Better Block event focused on transforming downtown's Granby Street

into the commercial spine of a new Arts District. The weekend of implementation drew over one hundred and thirty participants, including, according to the Better Block blog, "Moms, artists, DIYers, architects, cycle advocates and Norfolkers from all walks of life [who] joined together to create three pop-up shops, a Dutch bicycle intersection, a giant public plaza, 80 feet of parklets and countless amazing pieces of art."²⁶

A low budget for interventions is a hallmark of Better Block projects, and according to its founders, one of its major strengths. Tools, materials and street furniture are borrowed, donated, or improvised. "Borrowing," Roberts asserts, "builds ownership and trust within the community." In-kind donations in the form of art, landscaping, and construction materials are solicited from residents, local businesses and organizations. (What little actual funding is required, including fees for the consultants, usually comes from a mix of sources, though in Norfolk the effort was largely City-funded.) Roberts also believes in the strong power of connection created when people work together physically—Better Block efforts encourage community members to physically make things and place them in their shared environment.

The Better Block model also tests small businesses on a temporary basis—in Norfolk, these pop up businesses ranged from a cupcake baker to a barber shop. This strategy gives would-be entrepreneurs a low-commitment way to test business models while providing the greater community with a vision of what the block would be like with commercial activity.

After the conclusion of the weekend, Team Better Block provides the client



Photo courtesy of Team Build a Better Block

Build a Better Block, Norfolk, VA

with a report including metrics and an implementation guide for moving forward. Following the Granby Street event, resistance to land use and zoning changes subsided and the City Council unanimously approved additional uses that would encourage a viable Arts District, including art studios, breweries, flea markets, farmers markets, used merchandise stores, and commercial recreation centers. Frank Duke, Norfolk City Planner, says of the effort, "The first Better Block awakened the City officials and previously hesitant neighborhoods on the market potential for an Arts District in this downtown area." Within several weeks food trucks were authorized and design consultants working with the City developed a streetscape plan and began feasibility studies to examine narrowing some driving lanes to provide more on-street parking and wider sidewalks. The event also resulted in a \$1.1 million sale of a long-listed building in the district as well as the opening of several new businesses that had been piloted during the event. On the softer side, lasting friendships and open lines of communication were forged. Six months after the event, small business owners marveled at the changes in the area, such as seeing a runner jogging alone on the street past dark, which as one merchant stated, "you never would have seen" several months ago.

5.3 Guerrero Park: San Francisco, CA

Combining the powerful force of community with the insurgent power of pilot projects

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Strong bottom-up organizing combined with visionary public policy can achieve early and significant “wins”
- Public sector leadership with the vision to capture the designer-led tactical urbanism *zeitgeist* of the time can propel projects forward quickly
- A well-organized, diverse community with strong leadership can overcome political odds to realize public realm improvements and traffic-calming efforts that many thought were impossible
- An ongoing maintenance and funding plan is essential for the long-term success of a placemaking project; temporary-to-permanent projects may need to be made permanent to have lasting effect.



Guerrero Park, San Francisco, CA

Photo courtesy of San Jose/Guerrero Coalition to Save our Streets / Flickr user sanjoseguerrero

Many of the homes that line the formerly six-lane Guerrero Street from Cesar Chavez to 28th Street in San Francisco’s Bernal Heights neighborhood have been hit by speeding cars. The highway-like street was the result of the failed 1950s Mission Freeway project that got as far as widening the streets by bulldozing and relocating dozens of houses. What was left in the early 2000’s when Gillian Gillett and her husband Jeff Goldberg started organizing their neighborhood was, as Gillett puts it, “undesirable, the stores weren’t open, the dust was heinous, road rage was huge, no one talked to anybody.” Those conditions prompted Gillian to initiate a campaign to calm traffic and reconnect community in her neighborhood. Collaborating with the 5-year-old San Jose/Guerrero Coalition to Save our Streets, she knocked on every door and learned how traffic and the planned arterial had impeded her neighbors’ lives. This neighbor’s persistence and resulting sense of solidarity among residents lay

the foundation for a successful ten-year stretch of progressive neighborhood planning and community placemaking in the San Jose/Guerrero neighborhood.

One of the major battles fought by the coalition was the belief by adjacent residents that Guerrero Street shortened commute times for the area drivers and should remain a “traffic sewer between other neighborhoods.” “People were opposed to the fact that this is a place, that it’s a neighborhood,” says Gillett. Opponents to traffic calming would tell residents that if they didn’t like where they lived, they shouldn’t have moved there in the first place. The coalition fought vehemently against these assumptions, believing residential streets should be healthy, safe, beautiful places for community. Early on, an email list got the word out and helped to channel outrage in a constructive way. Gillett says, “We would send around photos of a car that hit a neighbor’s house and peo-

BEFORE



Guerrero Park, San Francisco, CA

AFTER



Photo courtesy of Thomas H. Rogers / Flickr user throgers

ple would go berserk.” This energy was key in gaining political support. “The city had never seen so many people from this neighborhood show up to meetings and say ‘I live here, I want to be able to cross my own street.’”

The San Jose/Guerrero Coalition earned a number of important wins within the first year of its new campaign: a new stop light, a lowering of the speed limit from 30 to 25 mph, a petition to allow bike lanes, and a reduction of the six lanes of traffic to four. These early wins sent the message to City officials and residents that the campaign had serious momentum. “The time between the city saying ‘yes’ and when the projects were actually implemented was so close. We thought, ‘we’re winning, what can we do next?’” says Gillett. Physical changes were next. The coalition won a Transportation for Liveable Communities Planning grant from the regional MPO to produce a plan for the neighborhood. Usually given to city departments, the grant had never before been awarded to a community group. The grant paid for Project for Public Spaces to lead a community process and develop a

neighborhood plan, which resulted in a new neighborhood public space, and plantings and trees in the median. Through the community process, it soon became clear that greening was a major priority for the neighborhood. In 2005, newly elected San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom had appointed Marshal Foster the new ‘head of greening.’ Eager to get demonstration projects in the ground as soon as possible, Foster approached Gillett to collaborate on a green traffic median, with the \$30k cost split between the Department of Public Works and the community group. The Coalition raised its portion quickly, with each block coming up with \$6,000-8,000 for its share of the greening cost. The subsequent volunteer planting events were so popular that more people showed up than there were plants to put in the ground. Gillett says constant communication was key to building the coalition’s momentum.

The coalition was lucky in that its efforts coincided with Mayor Newsom’s larger desire to create new public space in San Francisco. In 2008, New York City’s transportation commis-

sioner Janette Sadik-Kahn visited San Francisco to share the lessons from her city’s widely praised plaza program, which transformed underutilized streets into small pedestrian plazas, often on a temporary-to-permanent basis. This was not an entirely new concept to San Franciscans; in 2005 the first Park(ing) Day transformed metered on-street spaces into temporary parks, drawing much attention in the press and spurring an international movement. Mayor Newsom’s “Pavement to Parks” program combined the rapid implementation of Park(ing) Day with a loophole in the environmental review process that exempted temporary initiatives from the slow approval process for most City projects, much like Sadik-Kahn’s model.

Andres Powers, then in the Design Group at San Francisco City Planning, led San Francisco’s first Pavement to Parks pilot projects. “This project turned the public process on its head: Normally you have a public process about an improvement like a park. Pilot projects allow us to use the improvement itself *as a public process*,” says

Powers, “The plazas gave us the opportunity to have a more visceral relationship to a plan in a way that you can’t when you’re talking about that plan in the abstract.” The team sought projects that already had significant public support and would be easy wins—helping the program grow; San Jose Guerrero was quickly identified as a pilot. The small sliver of excess roadway created by the intersection of Guerrero St., San Jose St., and 28th Street had already been identified through the community process. The entire Pavement to Parks implementation cost roughly \$50,000; a quarter of this funding was raised from neighborhood institutions and businesses, and the rest came from the City. The park opened in 2010 to an excited community.

San Francisco’s Pavement to Parks program has expanded over the past few years, although the majority of projects have been smaller, more temporary “parklets” the size of a few parking spaces. The parklets were initially proposed as a “cheeky” way to satisfy Mayor Newsom’s request for 16 new Pavement to Parks projects in a very short time window. Larger plazas like the one on Guerrero accounted for

three projects, but their scale, expense, and maintenance requirements made it too difficult for the City to shoulder, and the City has put this program on hold. The parklets represent, for now, a more implementable solution; funding and maintenance contracts are managed through the community partner, often a local merchant who has something to gain from expanded adjacent public space.

Guerrero Park and the campaign to transform Guerrero Street, is now in a different stage in the placemaking cycle. After a hate crime in the park in 2010, the existing organizing sub-committee dissolved. Gillett now holds a position as the Mayor’s Transportation Policy Director, where she is prohibited from advocating for her own neighborhood. The coalition that she led has not persisted with the same momentum and the neighborhood has gentrified over the past ten years, much like the rest of San Francisco. Many of the new neighbors are tech workers who work long hours, and are younger and without children to drive activity in the park; few share an ownership or personal desire to maintain the organizing momentum. As Gillett says, “It’s easy

to get people to volunteer to plant, it’s hard to get them to come out to clean.” The design of the park, while beautiful, is still relatively temporary. There are no play structures for children, little space for active recreation, no public programming, and some feel the recycled stumps used as seating send the wrong message to a community that has been asking for recognition, dignity, and high quality public space for decades. This is, of course, the downside to temporary projects: while quickly implementable, if not upgraded, temporary materials end up looking “trashy” or “cheap” over time.

Guerrero Park shows that early community momentum and progressive policy are not all it takes to build long-lasting success in a placemaking project. A highly-touted pilot program has created a park and effort that is now struggling to be self-sustaining; after ten years, it seems a public or private partner is needed for maintenance and programming. The temporary design has been successful in helping the community reach initial goals, but it must be upgraded or replaced with permanent infrastructure to continue to have a positive impact on the community.

PRECEDENT MINI-CASE:**5.4 Project for Public Spaces, New York City, NY**

Photo courtesy of Market Square Pittsburgh



Pittsburgh Market Square, Pittsburgh, PA

Any research on placemaking would be incomplete without examining the role of Project for Public Spaces in defining the field. Founded in New York City by Fred Kent in 1975 to build on the work of William “Holly” Whyte and his Street Life Project, PPS has been championing placemaking since that time. In the nearly 40 years of its existence, Kent, Kathy Madden, Steve Davies, and the rest of the organization’s leadership and staff have worked in thousands of

communities and 40 countries and are compelling spokespeople for the field.

Through its worldwide placemaking efforts and training sessions with clients ranging from non-profits to community residents to city officials, PPS is exposed to the current thinking, trends, and constraints in the field; Fred Kent doesn’t mince words when discussing what he thinks is important for communities and places. He believes in the power of

“zealous nuts” to effect positive change in communities and readily uses that term to promote acceptance of citizen activists—whether they are community residents, public officials, or non-profit visionaries. PPS’ core model of practice and education recognizes the community of users as the “experts” in matters of placemaking and the organization uses the term “place governance” to describe a placemaking approach that extends from the initial design and creation of

places through to ongoing management and programming.

PPS' belief in citizen "experts" has caused tensions with designers over the years. But as Fred Kent describes it, this tension is less personal and more a reflection of his frustration with a system set up to reward "products" over process. Kent believes that this focus on "completion" and finished products/designs is an anathema to great places and says we need to focus on "organic places that grow and develop with community needs and desires." To this end, PPS is a proponent of LQC – the lighter, quicker, cheaper approach to placemaking that allows for flexibility, takes the stress out of making the "expert" design decision, and is readily implementable in an environment of regulatory and fiscal constraints. As Kent says, in many PPS projects, "it's an enormous success – the whole philosophy is to program. Lay the foundation of infrastructure that allows layering and design but it all comes from the foundation. That is the beauty of lighter, quicker, cheaper. You try it, you see what fails and what doesn't and then you adjust and move on to the next piece." The PPS LQC philosophy includes: embracing incremental changes; using temporary, inexpensive streetscape elements to influence transportation planning and public spaces; and capitalizing on local resources and knowledge to avoid capital-heavy projects that can get bogged down in financing and regulatory requirements.

The LQC approach supports the PPS model of "place led" design which engages community and allows a place to evolve and change over time. PPS contrasts this with project-led design which it considers rigid and top-down. Within

this framework, PPS cautions against a myopic focus on measuring impacts. PPS' Ethan Kent worries that a measurement ethos focused on quantitative metrics "measures inputs and outputs but the placemaking process is different...it's about unfolding. Placemaking builds capacity for things to happen that wouldn't normally occur in a project driven approach." PPS measures success with what they call more "fuzzy" qualities: happiness, smiles, diversity of users, people taking photographs when something special happens. They also consider increased community capacity as another important goal. PPS firmly believes that placemaking is more than simply about the physical space; a good placemaking process builds community capacity, management capacity, and collaborative capacity. As Elena Madison of PPS says, "Building capacity is about convincing community they can do it

to. This is at odds with the designer as author or keeper of the expertise."

LQC is a tool used to build capacity and hand the design reins to the community. This approach reflects the trend of the field toward tactical, temporary, and doable. Like Better Block, City Repair, and others, PPS espouses breaking down the obstacles to change and encouraging bold thinking and citizen empowerment. As Ethan Kent says, "the role of designers is very small compared to how the world is shaped right now. The design professions are still narrowly defined. Place has to be more broadly defined...it's not just about a static thing that you do and walk away. Temporary projects allow you to do bold things and to make mistakes. No pressure." Fred Kent agrees, "Lighter, quicker, cheaper is an amazing set of words. It does what it says. Just like placemaking."



Photo courtesy of Project for Public Spaces

Harvard Plaza, Cambridge, MA

5.5 Eastern Market: Detroit, MI

A century-old market, remade to nourish community

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A low-pressure place where people can interact with others in a jovial, democratic environment can create spontaneous community
- Visionary leadership is instrumental in maintaining the focus on the placemaking mission
- In a place with a long, storied history that has been known to its community for a century, community attachment to a place is already high and less needs to be done to make a place work
- Non-profit corporations can be exceptionally effective at funding and managing a public space like a market

Detroit's decline has been well-chronicled; among its many troubling challenges, the city is considered by many to be a "food desert," with a dearth of grocery stores and fresh food options, and an over-abundance of liquor and convenience stores. Detroit's Eastern Market is a remarkably successful attempt to address food access issues while building community in a dramatically shrinking city. The market itself is a century-old institution: since 1891, it has provided both local, healthy, affordable food and a vibrant community gathering place. Since that time the market has had high and low points but by 2006 was in need of renovation and attention the city could no longer afford. Today the 43-acre market sees up to 45,000 visitors on a market day and hosts over 250 vendors each Saturday. Eastern Market Corporation (EMC), the non-profit that manages the market, runs three distinct markets, one year round and two seasonal. The market is a point of life and brightness in this city and perhaps the only place where low-income Detroiters and more affluent suburbanites interact on equal footing.

Prior to 2006, Eastern Market was owned and managed by the City of Detroit, but like many city institutions, it struggled to stay afloat during the last decades of the 20th century. From 1981 to 2002, a series of nonprofit- and foundation-led studies explored its future. Privatization was explored and rejected, and minor improvements made. Project for Public Spaces was hired by the City

in 1998 and the organization's involvement continued over the next eight years. In 2006, PPS worked with Kate Beebe of the Downtown Detroit Partnership in a master planning and transition process. These efforts included two major Detroit foundations, Kresge and Kellogg, and led to an investment of \$1 million each by the foundations with the caveat that the City pass management



Eastern Market, Detroit, MI

to a new public-private partnership. The non-profit Eastern Market Corporation (ECM) was born and has been governed by a cross-sector team of City officials, residents, vendors, business owners, and other stakeholders, with EMC and local foundations providing the main leadership and direction. The 18-person EMC staff is responsible for funding, management, and operations. Since EMC took over the market's management, two major facilities have been revitalized for more than \$8 million, and another \$8 million worth of renovations are underway on a new plant and flower center, Community Commercial Kitchen (available for rent to food-related entrepreneurs), and a new public plaza. By 2016, more than \$80 million will have been invested. Plans include a mixed-use shed, streetscape projects, a greenway, a parking facility, and alternative energy projects. Additionally the EMC has created far-reaching food-access programs, a series of food-business incubator programs, a new Tuesday market and "after hours" markets, and is planning a Sunday market featuring artisanal merchants. Part of the stakeholders' vision is to use the success of the market to revitalize the entire area while retaining its authenticity, grit, and productive industrial uses.

Almost half of EMC's funding comes from vendor fees, another half from foundations and grants, and less than 5% comes from the City. EMC has diversified the types of vendors at the market, adding specialty products, which were previously banned, to broaden the market's appeal. There are now over 40 vendors that offer processed food items like pickles, jam, and granola, but EMC deliberately



Eastern Market, Detroit, MI

curates the ratio of fruits and vegetable vendors to other types, maintaining approximately 200 traditional produce vendors to 50 specialty ("hipster," or typically more upscale) foods vendors to retain the essential mission for the market and to keep the customer base broad.

William Whyte, the great urban sociologist, said, "Triangulation is the process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other."²⁷ It is in that theory where one of the greatest lessons and strengths of Eastern Market is found: this market has a social function. People don't need to have leisure time to come here (it often is their shopping trip), they don't need to bring friends, and they don't need

to think of an ice-breaker to strike up conversation with a stranger. This is a place where people of all walks of life come together, rural to urban; rich to poor. The market provides very reasonable prices and this, combined with the convivial atmosphere and huge range of products, serves different market segments remarkably efficiently; starting at noon, growers drop prices every half hour. Tight budgets go even further with end-of-day haggling, vendor's acceptance of public food assistance, and the special Double Up Food Bucks program which doubles buying power on local healthy foods.

By providing low cost food options, delivering fresh produce around the city, supplying local restaurants and institutions with fresh food, and supporting foods-related small business

development through more than a half dozen programs, EMC is providing entrepreneurial and nutritional support to its extremely needy community base. By drawing in wealthier suburban customers, it brings more money to vendors and thus, to the market itself, while creating a healthy “social friction” and connecting people who care about the market. Eastern Market has recently stepped more explicitly into placemaking by leading efforts to revitalize the surrounding areas and coordinate a large-scale streetscape improvement, greenway and bike connection plan. EMC has also branched into community programming, hosting community events like yoga and Zumba classes, historical walking tours, and festivals.

These new initiatives support EMC’s mission to offer extensive services to a needy community. CEO Dan Carmody expresses trepidation when he says, “We’re starting to do more traditional placemaking functions and it scares me that we’ll make it too snazzy and lose our authenticity.”

Carmody is a gruff but approachable visionary leader—a results-oriented CEO who knows his audience and is committed to maintaining an authentic market that maintains its diversity. Without question, the formation of EMC has been instrumental in building the trust with vendors, customers, and the City that has ensured ongoing revenue for the market. But gaining that trust has not been without its challenges in a city where there are a lot of historical reasons to distrust public and private institutions.

EMC has struggled to get a few hard metrics by which to measure success. To strengthen funding and lobbying requests, having sales figures of food distributed would be instrumental. It has recently launched a text app for vendors to anonymously submit sales totals, but this has “gone over like a lead balloon,” says Terry Campbell, Chief Operating Officer for the market. Most vendors are wary of revealing exactly how much money passes through the market, both because of concerns about tax implications and worries about crime (though crime is currently nearly nonexistent). Additionally farmers are wary of report-

ing off-the-books employment, as many rely on ad-hoc workers and help from family members, including children.

Perhaps the greatest ongoing challenge is how to get the right balance between gentrification and revitalization. Dan Carmody says, “EMC is actively avoiding becoming too ‘cool,’” and decisions have been made to: clean up the market but not make it “too pretty;” limit the number of specialty foods vendors; and make sure residential zoning is kept to the outskirts of the district. Similar concerns are found with fundraising. EMC grapples with amount of corporate sponsorship it wants to solicit, mindful to balance authenticity and independence with financial stability. With every weekly market and event, EMC works to rebuild Detroiters’ faith in community, revitalize a struggling district, increase food access, bring suburbanites back to the city, and help bridge socioeconomic and racial divides. It’s an ambitious mission that takes sensitive leadership that is highly attuned the needs of the community, not just as consumers but as agents of the market’s long-term success.

PRECEDENT MINI-CASE:**5.6 Bryant Park, New York City, NY**

“Most of what makes Bryant Park a great place is programming, except for a few decent looking buildings we put in and some gardens.”

—DAN BIEDERMAN

The revitalization of Bryant Park by the private Bryant Park Corporation (BPC) is one of the most dramatic examples of successful placemaking in the last half century, and is a good illustration of the power of public-private partnerships and of strong programming. Founded by Dan Biederman in 1980, the corporation set out to turn the litter-strewn, crime-ridden, abandoned park back into a safe, welcoming, well-used public space, and it has far surpassed those goals. Today the park sees over six million annual visitors and hosts more than 600 free programmed events or activities every year, from ping pong to fencing.

On free movie nights—every Monday night in the summer—thousands of New Yorkers arrive hours in advance to get the best possible seat.

Bryant Park is stunningly successful by nearly every conceivable metric. In 1979, 150 robberies occurred in Bryant Park, but since 1981, there has been only one.²⁸ In just the two years following its restoration, rental activity in the area increased by 60%.²⁹ It was the catalyst that began a revitalization of midtown Manhattan, as well as an important model; many business improvement districts and privately funded public parks, have sought to emulate its success.

To what does Bryant Park owe its success? Dan Biederman’s leadership, for one. His constant focus on not only design and programming, but also long-term revenue generation has sustained the park through good times and bad. BPC’s meticulous care of the grounds (it has a maintenance staff of over 30) keeps the park in perfect condition. Its location in midtown Manhattan is an undeniably terrific asset. And the park provides much needed amenities to everyone who wants to use them, drawing in consistently large, diverse crowds. It boasts award-winning public restrooms, sets a beautiful stage for tourist pictures, entertains people all day long with free programming, offers the only free ice skating in New York City, and welcomes the homeless - assuming the vast number of other visitors will diminish any negative effect the homeless may have.

Bryant Park is often held up as a placemaking success story—and for good reason. Its success has brought private management of public spaces into the mainstream, and its variety of free public programming has cemented it as a beloved place for New Yorkers and tourists alike. Though its lessons are not applicable to every placemaking project, it can be seen as a benchmark of what smart, context-sensitive placemaking can be.



Bryant Park, New York, NY

Photo courtesy of Rebecca Disbrow

5.7 City Repair Cleveland: Cleveland, OH

Placemaking from the grassroots

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Communities can come together to vision and collectively implement the type of shared space they want, without the help of official approval or institutional support
- The process of collectively implementing a shared vision, and working with one's own hands to shape one's community can be a more powerful dividend of placemaking than even the most beautiful permanent physical improvements
- Importing a successful model can raise a project's profile, but some elements are lost in translation; each community has its own unique circumstances that must be accounted for
- Passionate, driven, and charismatic leaders are essential to push a project forward, no matter how much community support exists

In the mid-1990s architect Mark Lakeman began instigating community gathering places in his neighborhood. He built a teahouse in an empty lot near the intersection of SE 9th and Sherret Streets in Portland, OR as a way to show, not just tell, about a possible urban future based on collaborative consumption, sharing, and collective action. Lakeman says he didn't want to lecture people about how to make community, he wanted to show them. What began as regular Monday evening tea for 25 quickly grew to 200-person events. One night the event spilled into the nearby street to accommodate a performance, which prompted Lakeman and his collaborators to paint a large circular mural encompassing the entire intersection. Doing this without permission from City officials, they activated four corners with a solar-powered teahouse, a lending library, community bulletin board, and seating. "Villages don't start with some agreed-upon consensus, they start with people bringing what they

have to contribute...we just encouraged them to make their gifts more outward facing," says Lakeman. When asked why he didn't ask for permission for his first project, Lakeman replied, "The ratio of deliberation to action is too often exhausting—if you have to have an idea, you should just get it down so you can move on to the next big idea."

That first intersection project, called Share-it Square, was intended to demonstrate the importance of production and generosity over consumption and homogeneity. Lakeman called the initiative Intersection Repair (and its parent organization City Repair) to emphasize the project's role as a social catalyst to heal a broken society



Photo courtesy of City Repair

Share-It Square, Portland, OR

through community building and design. Share-it Square enjoyed broad community support and advocates were successful in passing a city ordinance officially sanctioning other street murals around the city. The movement has since spread throughout the United States and other countries. Although City Repair has won acclaim from politicians throughout the city and the world, the initiative's ethos is stridently anti-authoritarian and community-led. Baked in to this revolutionary ethos of civil disruption and humanism is a flat organization model that includes a belief in democratic access to design. Lakeman believes that community design can have a transformational effect on society. As he puts it, "Democracy functions best when people are able to look at their environment and assess the situation, figure out solutions, bring community resources to bear, and enact visions that are an expression of their values."

Over more than 15 years, City Repair has had a measurable impact on its community: Public health researchers have demonstrated positive health benefits from its interventions. Entrepreneurs and popular organic food restaurants have been spawned by the group. And the gift economy has exploded. City Repair's work to build community in-place, and Lakeman's advocacy for the power of design and the built environment to foster community have become touchstones for placemakers across the country.

In 2013, the local foundation Neighborhood Connections, brought Lakeman to Cleveland to talk about City Repair's work. The differences between Cleveland and Portland are vast; while Portland is racially homogenous, financially

stable, and has a celebrated planning legacy, Cleveland has stark racial divides, a more diverse population, and all the financial troubles of a rustbelt city. Despite these challenges, Cleveland has an extremely robust network of community organizations, two active land banking initiatives, and progressive foundation and citywide planning efforts. The city planning department rolled out a placemaking initiative this year, and director Robert Brown has high regard for the movement's values. As he says, "The community development projects that have these physical components have the advantage of being long lasting. They're not just an event, the street murals give a new character and identity to these neighborhoods. It's 'the gift that keeps on giving.'"

In April 2013, Neighborhood Connections held a well-attended workshop with City Repair and selected three neighborhoods with strong social fabric to each host a local Intersection Repair project. An advisory group was formed with Brown on the team, and a member of the City's community development department helped oversee the process. Neighborhood Connections hired development consultant Adele Kious to steward and implement a community process.

A core team of Neighborhood Connections staff and members of each of the three pilot projects met every Monday for community-building workshops, asset mapping, permaculture discussions, and planning sessions for the neighborhood interventions. Team members came from eclectic backgrounds—from permaculture experts to development consultants and activists, and the majority were racial minorities. In summer 2013 the three groups held "design

parties" in which ideas were debated and final designs decided. The resulting three pilot projects spoke to the unique characteristics of each neighborhood:

- **The Larchmere and Buckeye-Shaker Square neighborhoods are historically divided by racial and economic characteristics, and by the well-traveled road and light rail line that runs along Shaker Boulevard. The group proposed a mural intended to unite the two neighborhoods across the 121st Street Bridge. Seen as a point of community pride, the mural design includes colorful bollards, the painted footprints of children, and the image of hands reaching towards the sky.**
- **In the Stockyards neighborhood, several large urban farms mark the intersection of Frontier and 61st Street. This neighborhood wanted to commemorate the productive legacy of the area and designed an enormous mural of a bull to be painted in the intersection of the street.**
- **The neighbors that share Newark Alley had been meeting as a block club before City Repair came to Cleveland. Their efforts had focused on cleanup of the overgrown, dark alley that was perceived to be dangerous. An elder member of the group remembered when the area was an orchard and a stream flowed through where the alley is now, a legacy that inspired the decision to paint a stream on the alley pavement.**

Community groups worked all spring and summer to incubate their designs, and although they had the support of City Planning, the extensive community process combined with a long regulatory

approvals lead time meant that the City was unable to obtain approvals for a new ordinance allowing the work to proceed by the September launch date. Despite this, on the weekend of the scheduled interventions, neighbors celebrated and painted murals at the project sites. One of the benches installed in the Stockyard neighborhood during the festivities featured a quote that reflected the sentiment of the event, “You don’t have to move to live in a better neighborhood.”

The delay in the project highlights a challenge facing community members who are energized to connect with each other and act. While City planning

hopes to approve an ordinance defining the scope of allowable Intersection Repair projects by spring 2014, the delay took the wind out of the sails of some community members. Hopes remain high though. Kious believes the core team will buoy any community doubts through the winter and says, “This year was the first step in City Repair’s journey here in Cleveland. We made a lot of positive progress: the transformation of a formerly deserted and avoided alleyway, hope and confidence in the children, people feeling joy and pride about who they are and where they live, and three generations working together. The sparkle in people’s eyes and smiles

at the end of the week were beyond words.” Planning director Brown agrees with this sentiment. While the delay in the project was frustrating, Brown emphasized the importance of community process, “The activities associated with designing a mural, painting it, and holding parties obviously engage the neighborhood and create a stronger sense of attachment between neighbors. This sense of community is what any neighborhood needs to be a great place to live.” Lakeman would agree. As he says, “We believe that by starting small we can transform the way we relate to each other and the world.”

City Repair, Cleveland, OH



5.8 Shreveport Common: Shreveport, LA

Tenacity from tragedy: using arts and culture as a driver of placemaking

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Arts and culture strategies have great power to activate an area while brick-and-mortar investments are being planned and financed
- Strong mayoral leadership can break through institutional boundaries to create powerful task forces with a unique set of participants that cut through red tape and get things done
- Creative placemaking working at the intersection of culture, urban development, transit, and housing, allows it to leverage a huge array of funding sources
- Placemaking doesn't need hot-market cities and young urban professionals to be successful: it just needs committed leaders and an enthusiastic community

Shreveport is Louisiana's third largest city and an economic, educational, healthcare, gambling, and cultural center for the region where Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas meet. Once an economic hub, a downturn in the area's oil and gas industry caused the city to suffer from disinvestment and neglect; the area west of downtown known as Ledbetter Heights lost 90% of its population between 1980 and 2010.³⁰ Despite a series of regeneration strategies including festivals, special development districts, and the attraction of two major casinos, the area continued to slide into disrepair. In 2009 the City used the tragic arson of the office of the Shreveport Regional Arts Council (SRAC) to spark the revitalization of this area. Bypassing standard routes for redevelopment, the mayor charged SRAC with leading the revitalization of the area, relocating them to a historic fire station in this crumbling area of downtown. SRAC was already well loved for throwing festivals and delivering high-quality arts education curriculum, and this trust helped them lead a coalition, called Shreveport Common, that has

become the city's de facto redevelopment authority. This public-private coalition is working on a plan for the revitalization of the nine-block district west of downtown anchored by and themed around the arts. This well-organized entity wields an uncommonly wide range of powers; in addition to organizing monthly arts festivals, Shreveport Common has the power to make neighborhood planning decisions and even to use eminent domain powers.

Shreveport Common's ambitious plan has been successful where others have failed primarily due to the tenacity of SRAC's leadership and the management team's stalwart efforts to bring every last stakeholder to the table. The planning process began with a nine-month listening campaign, the assembly of a 55-person advisory board made up of property owners, neighbors, city department heads, and



Photo courtesy of Shreveport Common

Shreveport Common, Aseana Festival, Shreveport, LA

directors of non-profits, and eight task forces, who developed a vision plan for the area. After the plan was approved, the mayor appointed a thirteen-person management team to provide oversight in the advancement of implementation. The team includes government and non-profit officials, with representation from the North Louisiana Council of Governments; the parish; the city council; the City departments of public assembly and recreation and community development; the Downtown Development Authority; SRAC's president; a creative placemaking consultant; an architect; and liaison to the artist community. The management team also has strategic alliances with the city's public transit system and development community.

These unique partnerships give the Shreveport Common coalition broad powers: Caddo parish finances public realm improvements, while the head of public assembly acquires land, clears title on fractured real estate parcels and packages them for developers. The manager of the City's federally designated Choice Neighborhoods program acquires funds for redevelopment, and the North Louisiana Council of Governments obtains federal transit funding that will finance new bicycle and pedestrian routes. Meanwhile, SRAC calls meetings, builds relationships, does public relations, and provides interim cultural programming. SRAC's meetings are notoriously fun and fueled by food and drink. "This is the south, we have to have a good time," says Gregory Free, member of the management team.

Shreveport Common has created a strategic geographic focus through which

to fulfill its management team's goals: the parish can help grow population; the development authority can help put abandoned parcels back on city tax rolls; the downtown development authority and the arts council can bring cultural vitality to downtown. Realizing these shared goals was essential to bringing together this diverse group of stakeholders. "We knew if we wanted to be successful we would have to start from a place of shared vision and shared values," says Wendy Benscoter, a member of the management team.

Shreveport's all-in approach to community development is demonstrated in their embrace of the local social service clients in the area. Although a large downtown homeless population had been an issue in the past, Shreveport Common has a new strategy. As Executive Director Pam Atchison says, "We embrace the diversity of Shreveport Common and our eclectic mix of neighbors. A great deal of effort has been invested in working with the existing cultural, social services, and faith based groups, including several organizations that provide services to the homeless to keep everyone here. Our goal: no one leaves!" Much of the harmony in Shreveport Common's coalition is due to Atchison's tenacity. "Pam could sell anything to anybody. I bet she could even broker the Middle East peace," says Free, "When Pam says something, people listen."

The Shreveport Common plan charts the course for a revitalized arts district centered around the area's historic and cultural assets. The plan includes a reconfigured public realm, including a new 1.3-acre park, space for art markets and festivals, a public art program, and

enhanced transit connectivity. A significant element of the plan rebuilds the Common at moderate density through renovated residential, commercial, retail, and anchor historic properties. The Common seeks to attract artists and others to live and work downtown, hopefully enticing some of the artists in the region to live in market rate and affordable housing planned. One of the explicit goals of the Shreveport Common plan is to drive population growth in the area. Whereas this goal might raise red flags of gentrification in more expensive cities, as Gregory Free explains, Shreveport doesn't deal with these issues. "Gentrification is the longest four letter word in the English language—but it doesn't really apply to Shreveport. Because this neighborhood has been blighted for so long, we don't have the G-word that haunts us the same way that makes it difficult to maneuver." Transit improvements include emphasizing the I-20 highway off ramp that would redirect downtown-bound traffic to the district, a new bike and pedestrian network, and the creation of an intermodal bus station, which would drive foot traffic to the area.

The diverse management team has been helpful in acquiring unique funding sources to move the plan forward. The plan received early funding through the Mayors' Institute on City Design 25th Anniversary Initiative, which awarded Shreveport funding for its vision process in 2010. The plan and related programming also received a National Endowment for the Arts Our Town grant two years in a row, for a total of \$250,000, and was a recipient of a \$240,000 Creative Placemaking grant through ArtPlace. The Shreveport Regional Arts Council has received \$1,280,000 in

national grant awards; and has matched this with an additional \$2,400,000 for the Common (plus nearly \$3 million to renovate the central fire station). As part of Shreveport's H.U.D. Choice Neighborhood program the area is poised to receive millions more to revitalize the area. The management team has also been successful in working with the Metropolitan Planning Organization in securing federal transportation enhancement funds for implementation of bicycle and pedestrian improvements. State support has come from Louisiana's cultural district program, which holds up Shreveport as a model. Under the state cultural districts plan, sales by artists in the district are exempt from sales tax and developers may access historic preservation tax credits (a privilege normally only allowed in historic districts).

Today, the physical environment of Shreveport Common looks similarly to what it looked like in 2009, with some notable exceptions. The central fire station has been rehabilitated and SRAC relocated there in February 2013,

the area is dotted with public art, and the historic cemetery at the north has begun bond-financed renovations. However, while earth has yet to be turned, there is a sea change amongst leaders in the city. City leadership is excited about the project, and as many as 600 people participated in a recent community design charrette. Already three new businesses have opened in the Common in long-abandoned storefronts, and in 2013 the area added 50 retail/service/support/creative jobs. The cultural District Zoning Ordinance was also approved this year, which paves the way for developers to take advantage of tax credits, and artists to sell work tax-free.

While the slow process of development takes place, SRAC has planned an extensive program of events to invigorate the Common with street life. SRAC hopes this regular animation of the district will keep spirits up as the development process continues. "Sustained programming is the key to sustained development," says Atchison. As part of a program called UNSCENE!,

each month from October 2013-April 2014, national artists will come to Shreveport to mentor five local artists, culminating in an exhibition. In addition, SRAC has launched several arts programs that infuse the neighborhood with art, artists, and collaboration. This year SRAC launched an Arts Entrepreneurial Training program, a food truck pilot, and a new temporary public art program. They also launched Pay it Forward, a unique program that provides space to artists in exchange for their service to local social service organizations.

Shreveport Common has been touted as a premier example of Creative Placemaking, which forwards the perspective that putting creativity and culture at the core of neighborhood development fulfills both artistic and livability goals. Designating a regional arts council to lead a neighborhood development process is an unusual tactic, but one that SRAC believes is vital, "The Common is a testing ground, and also the crow bar to open the door to future changes at a broader scale," says Atchison.



Shreveport Common, CommonLink design charrette, Shreveport, LA

5.9 Fargo/Moorhead StreetsAlive: Fargo, ND and Moorhead, MN

Placemaking through active living

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Ephemeral, event-based placemaking can create community and influence behavior
- Open streets projects can act as public health initiatives, in this case a more politically palatable goal than privileging pedestrians over cars
- Event-based placemaking can be a tool for gaining allies for permanent planning and smart growth measures
- Non-traditional placemaking goals such as healthy living initiatives can create new channels for funding from previously untapped sources
- Sensitive marketing that acknowledges a local political environment can be key in achieving goals

On two Sundays each summer, a three-mile loop stretching along Broadway and First Avenue North in downtown Fargo, across the Red River into Moorhead, Minnesota, is closed to car traffic. The route, which runs through a portion of Fargo's Central Business District and Civic Center, several parks, and two residential areas, is intended as a temporary thoroughfare for cyclists, pedestrians, and rollerbladers of all ages. The most recent Fargo/Moorhead StreetsAlive, on August 25, 2013, featured a "Healthy Food Festival," cultural offerings such as Native American and Latin American dance performances; and active games geared toward kids, in addition to other programming along the route. According to event organizer Kelly Ihry, the primary goal of StreetsAlive is to "increase active transportation and promote physical activity as part of a community health initiative." Organizers also hope the experience of a temporarily car-free downtown gives participants a positive taste of what

the City plans for its future: a denser, less car-centric and more environmentally sustainable downtown.

Fargo-Moorhead StreetsAlive is one of a growing number of "Open Streets" initiatives in the United States; many cities and towns across the country hold such events. The idea for these events, which usually involve closing streets to cars and encouraging cycling, walking, and active play, originated in Colombia in the 1970s, when "ciclovias" began to take over the car-jammed streets of Bogota, Cali, Medellin, and other cities. In the past ten years, many U.S. cities have adapted the model, combining messaging about active living, car-free transportation, cultural heritage, and social interaction. Fargo's is a particularly interesting case, as it has grown from a public health initiative to an event that actively challenges the city's car-centric past and encourages participants to engage in long-term thinking about Fargo's future.

StreetsAlive grew out of a public health campaign called Cass-Clay Alive, a joint initiative between Clay County in North Dakota and Cass County in Minnesota that promotes health and safety in schools, child care centers, work sites, and residential communities. Organizers Rory Beil of Dakota Medical Foundation in Fargo, and Keely Ihry, of Moorhead, attended a 2008 conference in Seattle on walkability and bikeability and discussed ways to promote active living as part of their public health campaigns. The two applied for funding through Blue Cross of Minnesota, which earmarks significant funds for preventative health campaigns in physical activity, food access and tobacco prevention. They were awarded a grant of \$10,000 for their first year, and \$5,000 per year for the following two years, to organize the event.

Kim Lipetzky, a public health nutritionist and member of the Cass-Clay Alive



Fargo/Moorhead StreetsAlive, Fargo, ND and Moorhead, MN

Photo courtesy of Fargo Moorhead StreetsAlive

steering committee, says the goals of StreetsAlive reach beyond just active living to “build community around bike lanes and alternative transportation,” and to “encourage holistic thinking about healthy living, from better food choices, to more physical activity, to more play.” According to Fargo City Commissioner Mike Williams, there is a need for increased density downtown and throughout Fargo, but says that he “fights a political battle every day” promoting a denser, less car-centric vision for the city. Temporary car-free events like StreetsAlive, Williams says, help participants experience firsthand a better quality of life, and help promote sustainable development in a fun, non-pedantic way.

From the outset, organizers of StreetsAlive faced a challenge in messaging the event. According to Beil, pitching StreetsAlive in terms of alternative

forms of transportation would have been a political failure from the outset. Compared to other cities which have successfully organized Open Streets events, “we’re extremely conservative here,” Beil says, “and people don’t like being told to give up their cars, don’t want to be told what to do.” Downtown bicycle store owner Tom Smith, who supports the event, says, “We’re not Critical Mass, we’re a bunch of nice Norwegians. A militant biker approach would have been wrong. This is a celebration of the bike, a celebration of using the streets in a new way.” The event was initially promoted as a family-friendly festival, with music, games and activities. As awareness of the StreetsAlive event has grown over the past four years, however, its organizers have become stronger in their messaging. According to Beil, “this year’s theme was ‘Life after cars,’ and we had strong messages posted along

the route. We didn’t really know what to expect, but nobody rebelled. People see this as a fun event, and we see it as the beginning of a conversation about better transportation.” Jill Chamberlain, a funding officer from Blue Cross Minnesota, said, “I have to hand it to Rory and Keely—they figured out a way to bring up a topic in Fargo that never would have been brought up.”

While some larger Open Streets events are run by dedicated nonprofits or city government, Fargo-Moorhead StreetsAlive is organized by the Dakota Medical Foundation. Only a fraction of its two organizers’ time is devoted to planning the event, and additional work and day-of staffing is done by volunteers. Its largest single funder has been Blue Cross of Minnesota, which has sponsored six full-scale events over three years (StreetsAlive also runs a series of smaller-scale open streets events in West Fargo and other residential neighborhoods. These events usually run for two or three hours and are attended by several hundred people apiece). An in-kind contribution comes from the City of Fargo in the form of street barriers, police presence, and administrative help with permitting and other city processes. According to the organizers, the annual budget for StreetsAlive, including direct and in-kind support for two large-scale and one or two small-scale events is around \$30,000.

As with many placemaking initiatives, particularly event-based ones, the most obvious indicator of success is attendance numbers. The event typically draws between 6,000 and 8,000 participants each time it is held. Other indicators mentioned by organizers



Photo courtesy of Fargo Moorhead StreetsAlive

Fargo/Moorhead StreetsAlive, Fargo, ND and Moorhead, MN

include increased awareness of the existence and use of downtown bike lanes; greater media and social media attention; increased interest from local businesses in sponsoring and exhibiting at the event; and increased diversity of event participants, which has thus far been a challenge. According to Rory Beil, outreach to growing immigrant communities has been a top priority, with marketing materials being printed and distributed in nine languages this year. The least quantifiable but perhaps most important indicator of the event's success is increased public interest in walking, biking, and sustainable development, and increased community engagement around those issues.

The organizers and supporters of StreetsAlive believe that the initiative has already done a lot to help bring about what Williams calls a “cultural shift:” conversations centered around the need for alternative transportation, denser development, and smart-growth policies within the region. In 2012,

the City of Fargo held a community master planning and visioning process for a 2030 plan, funded by a \$1 million federal energy efficiency block grant. The process involved more than 8,000 participants in an online visioning process facilitated through the community engagement platform Mindmixer, and an equal number of participants in traditional engagement tactics such as community meetings, door-to-door canvassing and business owner polls. Williams, who helped run the process, was astonished at the level of engagement around environmental sustainability, alternative transportation and energy independence. Specifically, bike lanes were brought up again and again in an overwhelmingly positive light. Williams has long been active in Fargo around these issues, but he believes that the 2030 plan illustrates the sea change in public opinion in the past years. It's a shift that he says can be partially attributed to events like StreetsAlive, that show the positive benefits of relying less on cars.

Events like OpenStreets function as placemaking in both the short and long term. Ephemeral in nature, they allow city residents to use familiar spaces such as a downtown main street in a new way, and can provide at least one day of physical and cultural engagement. Over time, as these events become more accepted by the broader population, they come to be seen, as Beil puts it, as “not just a bunch of nut jobs on bikes,” but as a glimpse into a viable alternative future that is less reliant on cars, more social, more active, and more fun. This increased public awareness and enthusiasm can then lead to greater public pressure for better permanent planning. Mike Williams' definition of placemaking is “Creating an interesting space where people feel comfortable and want to be, and are more likely to meet their neighbors.” Offering a tangible, welcoming, temporary version of this can go a long way in convincing people to advocate for better placemaking in their communities.

5.10 TAXI: Denver, CO

Developer-led placemaking transcends the site

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Developers with a vision beyond their specific project can help impact neighborhood revitalization by building boundary-pushing projects and catalyzing neighborhood organization
- Business owners and tenants are an important part of “community,” and the curation of mixed-use tenant structures with a focus on creative enterprises can be an important component of placemaking.
- Private progressive master-planning and design innovation can inform city leadership
- Social spaces and active programming can create a sense of community for office workers and residents

The Denver development known as TAXI is unfinished, both in the sense that one-half of the 20-acre brownfield site is still under construction, and that its buildings, some of which have been occupied for as long as a decade, have the rough aesthetic of unvarnished materials and salvaged objects. The landscape suggests a process rather than a finished product: poured concrete blocks are a repeated architectural detail, and exterior pathways are striped in white paint, giving an improvised, temporary quality to the landscape. Several people describing the development use terms like “pioneering,” and the site it occupies is often called a “frontier” or “no man’s-land.” Situated between the willow-entangled Platte River and an active rail yard, and adjacent to a concrete plant, TAXI is in many ways an oasis of activity in an industrial stronghold. At the same time, the presence of TAXI, and its larger-than-life developers Mickey Zeppelin and his son Kyle, is felt throughout the entire district. Says Becky Peterson of commercial anchor tenant, Boa Technology, “The Zeppelins make this a community. Mickey is the undis-

puted mayor of this entire area.” TAXI demonstrates how a single developer with a signature project and vision can catalyze a district-wide revitalization and build and nurture community through careful design, strategic economic investment, and advocacy.

At 75, Mickey Zeppelin is nearly universally described as a “visionary.” A self-described “placemaker above all else,” Zeppelin has more than 40 years of experience as a developer in Denver, having led the revitalization of the Lower Downtown and Golden Triangle



Photo courtesy of railisroots / Flickr

Taxi, Denver, CO

districts before he turned his sights to TAXI, which he considers his greatest legacy. His partner on the project is his son, Kyle. He chose the TAXI site for its “grittiness, and sense of freedom,” and its “quasi-rural feeling.” Situated in a rough industrial neighborhood, TAXI has surprising proximity to downtown Denver. From the outset, Zeppelin had a good sense of his target audience: creative entrepreneurs, designers, and tech companies. Says Mickey, “You create a place by paying attention to people and their values and their needs.” For these young-ish professionals and families, needs include flexible, non-hierarchical spaces for work, collaboration, and socializing; plenty of light and air; attention to design detail; active-living amenities; and a high bar for environmental sustainability. Around-the-clock, mixed-use activity was another goal: Kyle Zeppelin was quoted in the *Denver Post* as saying, “We didn’t want this project to die at

6 p.m. We didn’t want it to be just an office park.”³¹

Though the development can seem physically disconnected from its surroundings, Mickey has worked hard to make sure TAXI is not an island. He refers to the development as “rough around the edges,” which describes its aesthetic, but also the blurred boundaries it shares with the surrounding district. The Zeppelins have been heavily involved in shaping and promoting the RiNo Arts District, led by a 120-member group currently transitioning from LLC to a nonprofit model. The past ten years have seen hundreds of artists, gallerists, fabricators and related uses move to the sleepy industrial area, which RiNo founder and artist Tracy Weil calls “white hot.” Zeppelin estimates there are between 200 and 300 artists currently living or working nearby. Both Zeppelin and Weil agree that RiNo and TAXI are complementary and mutually

beneficial. Zeppelin’s other project in the neighborhood, a brand-new rehabbed warehouse-turned-foodie-destination called The Source, enjoys an almost-comical level of buzz, although it is still under construction. Needless to say, Zeppelin’s version of placemaking puts the “brand” front and center.

In addition to promoting the arts, Zeppelin and RiNo are vocal advocates for neighborhood improvements. Infrastructure in the neighborhood is poor—there are no storm drains, street trees, or bike lanes, and few sidewalks. According to Mickey, the area has for years been a “low investment priority for the city.” When he first bought the TAXI property, “everyone at the city thought I was crazy.” The developers are tireless advocates and savvy coalition-builders on issues such as pedestrian connection (the Zeppelins have been pushing for a pedestrian bridge across the Platte for years) and bike lanes. At a



Taxi, Denver, CO

recent community meeting on planned improvements to Brighton Boulevard, the transportation spine of the district, there was a strong sense that the majority of attendees were there because of Zeppelin's organizing. With the City finally giving attention to infrastructure investments in the district, Zeppelin's guiding influence is clear.

Mickey says, "What is community? It's communication." The TAXI campus itself is a laboratory, a controlled environment to demonstrate some of the Zeppelins' placemaking principles. Tony Mazzeo, landscape architect, has helped create a landscape that "layers events: social encounters and events on top of natural process events." "FreightScape," an industrial-naturalistic plaza makes its ecological purpose visible, with stormwater systems and a succession of plantings used to organize the space. Cafes Fuel and re-Fuel are by far the most popular social spaces, while clusters of casual seating occupy outdoor areas and indoor corridors alike. The original building, called TAXI 1, is organized around an "interior street" (literally a former indoor driveway), which is designed to facilitate chance encounters. Several conference rooms are communal, and facilities like a fitness room, outdoor swimming pool, and private bike share are intended to increase social activity beyond office walls. Programming, too, helps build community at TAXI: recent highlights include a summer weekly party at TAXI's on-site shipping-container pool; outdoor movie nights in the FreightScape theater; lunchtime bike rides; and a riverfront cleanup. For the pool parties, TAXI's sales and leasing associate Jamey Bridges says, Zeppelin "always lays out

a couple hundred dollars, but it shows the tenants they can organize events whenever they want." Bridges says "it's not unusual to see people grilling out by the pool, plugging their iPod into the sound system. These events just sort of happen sometimes."

TAXI's community, for now mostly business tenants, has the advantage of being self-selected. The Zeppelins are not known for their hard sell. Becky Peterson says, "Mickey and Kyle just showed us around, and told us what TAXI was all about. They said, 'if this seems like an environment you would enjoy, we'd love to have you.'" For the initial building, the Zeppelins courted architecture offices, tech companies, and others that might value natural light and a flexible work environment. Recently, though, the company has allowed the place to speak for itself, and tenants have organically selected into an interesting, if not totally diverse, mix. The development now houses 60 businesses with over 400 workers. The residential community is smaller (all units are market rate), but two new residential buildings are planned to attract more families, whereas existing units were largely marketed toward single professionals. Zeppelin has specifically tried to attract women-owned businesses, and has built amenities that cater to female professionals including an on-site pilates studio and an on-site child care facility.

Though Mickey Zeppelin has a reputation as a renegade, and many in the RiNo district take a certain pride in its lack of infrastructure, TAXI could not have happened without the help of the City of Denver. In the past decade, Zeppelin has received four loans from Denver's Office

of Economic Development. John Lucero of OED says that the office "sees our role as that of a community bank," and builds relationships with its borrowers. Though OED usually turns down projects for which it would be the sole lender, Mickey Zeppelin's good reputation within the community led the office to take a solo role in financing one of TAXI's buildings; Mickey, for his part, paid the 15-year loan back in just one year.

It may have taken ten years, but it is clear that the City is now prioritizing overlooked areas of North Denver. The recently-launched North Denver Cornerstone Collaborative is a group of senior-level representatives of City agencies tasked with deciding how best to invest and improve communities in the area. A light rail system is being expanded—a station will sit on the edge of RiNo, a ten-minute walk from TAXI—and "walkability" and "Transit Oriented Development" are on everybody's lips. The City is aware that attracting more residential developers to the district will require infrastructure investments such as storm drains, street lights, and sidewalks. In the midst of these new conversations about city investment in North Denver, Zeppelin is positioned to be an important influence. As area resident says, "Mickey has been going to that same community meeting for a decade. So when they finally do something, they won't be able to ignore him." As former TAXI consultant Susan Barnes-Gelt says, "Real change in a city takes a determined, visionary developer working with a friendly regulatory body." The developer showed up to the table a decade ago, and has spent that decade building trust and influence in anticipation of the City's arrival.

PRECEDENT MINI-CASE:

5.11 Playborhood—Menlo Park, CA



Photo courtesy of Michael Rutchik

Playborhood, Menlo Park, CA

At one end of the spectrum of public/private placemaking lies Mike Lanza's Playborhood, a completely self-financed, self-built initiative on private property—namely, Lanza's front yard. Playborhood, in the leafy upper-middle-class suburb of Menlo Park, CA, is a remarkably popular neighborhood amenity for kids of all ages, and should not be discounted for the important social role it plays in its community. Lanza believes private placemaking efforts and private spaces offer much-needed contributions to communities such as his, which often lack public space within walking distance. Lanza's creation, an elaborate play zone for kids, supports his philosophy of the importance of free play in building community. Lanza says, "Kids are so programmed these days with lessons, supervised visits to parks, and digital entertainment. We wanted our

children to learn how to share and play on their own, but there weren't safe places for them to do this freely."

Lanza shares the DIY entrepreneurialism of many placemaking leaders—the difference is that Playborhood needed no regulatory buy-in or community process to move from vision to implementation. Instead of petitioning the government for a park or enhanced open space for children, Lanza decided to use his yard as canvas to create the place lacking in his neighborhood. He and his wife invested over \$100k of their own money on an extensive retrofit of their front and back yards, including two play fountains, a white-board fence for writing and drawing, a two-story play house, an in-ground trampoline, a chicken coop, a garden, a neighborhood mosaic, a map of the neighborhood painted on the drive-

way, and a colorful river painted on the front sidewalk. The Lanzas, who have three boys of their own, run a week-long summer camp and encourage all neighborhood children to visit throughout the year.

The success of Playborhood shows the role of one extreme model—the completely private placemaking initiative. It also shows placemaking in a context where social spaces are truly needed—the often overlooked suburbs. Lanza describes more typical placemaking efforts as "great little pocket parks in the middle of economically vibrant places for hipsters, not the children (or older people for that matter) who are mobility restricted and really need this type of amenity... it's really the suburbs where the demand for meaningful places for free play and recreation is more desperately needed."

5.12 Kentlands, Gaithersburg, MD

Process and design foster long-lasting community

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Heavy community involvement in the visioning process can create a united, passionate group capable of shepherding a development according to their vision
- Neighborhoods deliberately designed to be social can play an important role in facilitating a connected, active community
- A strong civic association can stand the test of time and turn over management to future leaders
- Ongoing programming led by a dedicated nonprofit entity helps strengthen neighborhood connections and ties to the surrounding community

New Urbanism is a movement focused on the creation of new neighborhoods that resemble old ones, focusing once again on community and place. These developments usually emphasize principles that encourage walkability, connectivity, mixed uses, diverse housing choices, increased density, progressive transit options, and a traditional neighborhood layout with a clear center. While the movement, which came about in the 1990s, has been criticized by some for being overly nostalgic and contrived, Gaithersburg's Kentlands provides a new urbanist placemaking success story. One of the first new urbanist developments, this 8,000 person community is now more than twenty years old. The developer, Joseph Alfandre, sought out the designers Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, of the design firm DPZ, original proponents of new urbanism, to help envision a new traditional neighborhood inspired by the beauty and order he saw in the historical Kentlands Farm complex. Early design charrettes spread the vision to new and soon-to-be homeowners. Soon after, financial troubles coalesced this group to organize and successfully



Kentlands, Gaithersburg, MD

Photo courtesy of kentlandsdowntown / Flickr

advocate for their community with banks, developers, businesses, and the City. Today, Kentlands is a thriving and desirable neighborhood, one with a kickball league, charity runs, and neighbors who greatly value their strong sense of community.

From its inception, Kentlands was more community-oriented than a typical new residential development. In 1988, Alfandre and DPZ met with Gaithersburg City officials, planners, and members of

the public during a weeklong charrette to create a plan for a pedestrian-oriented and mixed-use “new-old town.” The charrette was used to inform a new mixed-use zoning code, created to accommodate a community-supported design and a diverse population through a range of home types. Alfandre, a community minded developer, wrote Kentland’s bylaws so that the first three months of each resident’s homeowner’s association fees would be put into a Title

Holder's Initial Contribution (TIC) fund used to support the cultural and social life of the broader community. Design and programming charrettes continued throughout the planning phase and before groundbreaking commenced, Alfandre hosted the "Kentlands Festival of the Arts" in a giant tent on the empty site. This began a string of arts-related events that remain a mainstay of the Kentlands culture today.

Alfandre soon met some financial difficulty, however. The 1991 recession and pull out of a major financial partner forced the development company into bankruptcy. Rather than let the plan die, the dozens of homeowners already committed to Alfandre's vision became a powerful lobbying force ensuring the development continued as planned. While new developers took the reins, residents became very involved in day-to-day development decisions and had a constant presence in City Hall. Displeased with plans for an adjacent parcel, residents led a successful campaign to retain a new urbanist vision for that property as well. In 1992 Kentlands' first civic organization, the Ad Hoc Kentlands Committee, was formed to advocate for the Kentlands community. The group met in residents' homes, communicated through door-to-door flyers, and in 1993 began publishing a monthly newsletter. When another developer purchased a large parcel nearby, the Mayor and City Council imposed a moratorium on development at citizens' urging so that a single, coordinated plan could be developed for the remaining parcels.

Originally created and controlled by the developer, the Kentlands Citizens' Assembly has had a citizen-elected five person Board and separately elected

President since 2000. The Assembly's yearly budget is around \$2 million and handles maintenance, capital improvements, and programming. Neil Harris, Board Chair for the KCA, says they rarely struggle to get community volunteers, "We have been very successful at getting people to step up and contribute to running the community. Because of the social atmosphere they want to do their part to keep it working, because it is a very special place."

Today, Kentlands is an award-winning example of how resident engagement and design can together foster long lasting community. The initial public process was instrumental in creating a sense of ownership in the community and an organized group to guide the project through completion. Now, however, residents tout the deliberate design decisions that constantly foster social contact. Public spaces are scattered throughout the community, including quiet parks, gardens, a lake and a village green, as well as busy playgrounds and more than three miles of nature trails. Alleys are used for parking and playing and narrow streets with wide sidewalks create a pedestrian-friendly environment. Houses, clustered together with small yards and big porches, encourage neighbors to talk to each other frequently. "The porches are offset from the sidewalk by a very small space, if people walk by you almost have to say hello because you are in that distance where it's weirder to not. There are lots of designer touches like that to make this a social place," says Harris. Kentlands Community Foundation Director (and Kentlands resident) Carrie Dietz agrees, "Honestly this place is different because people talk to each other, you are forced to."

These non-stop interactions mean community members get to know each other and as they do, they begin to care about each other. Says Dietz, "It has been the perfect place for us to raise our kids, I am confident every one of these parents would call us if one of my daughters was doing something wrong and that is a great thing to know as a parent!" Programming is heavy and continuous; the homeowners' association has, as one of their many committees, an activities team that hosts everything from community happy hours and pool parties to breakfast with Santa. Residents attend official events such as the now-20th annual 5k which serves as a fundraiser for the Community Foundation and attracts over 1,300 runners, but they also organize informal activities like a smaller unsanctioned 5k "Turkey Trot" which neighbors and kids participate in on Thanksgiving morning, followed by bloody Marys for adults and donuts for all. The non-profit Kentlands Community Foundation, which is funded through the TIC fund, hosts events which welcome and serve the greater area. The foundation also manages and runs regular volunteer events for residents and families.

With all of that programming, over 8,000 residents, one million square feet of office and commercial development, and a multi-phase cultural arts campus, Kentlands is a small town rather than a neighborhood. While the town lacks some socio-economic and racial diversity, it has achieved the age diversity the developer originally hoped it would. There is a constant cycling-through of residents, and long-time community members say the age range has always been broad. Residents have much pride in and a strong sense of attachment to their community and many attribute

this to the constancy and ready availability of social contact. As Neil Harris recites the daily rounds of groups who meet in the neighborhood coffee shop (a Starbucks now), his comments about the cafe, bars, and central square echo Ray Oldenburg's assertions about the importance of community gathering, or "third," places. Harris shares how there are places you can go to serendipitously run into people as well as bars and coffee shops with many regulars.

Mark Eppli and Charles Tu's 1999 study on New Urbanist property values focused on Kentlands and showed that people will pay a 12% premium to live

there.³² Whether the brand, the planning scheme, or the community spirit that is the attraction, people are willing to pay more to get it. More important, however, is the community Kentlands creates, and it is likely this is at least partially responsible for driving prices up. From a 2004 study by Joonngsbum Kim and Rachel Kaplan, "Findings suggest that Kentlands residents perceive substantially greater sense of community; they express stronger attachment to their community and sense of identity with it," and 66% of respondents rank "sense of community" as a "very important" factor in their decision to live in Kentlands.³³ Carrie Dietz echoed the self-se-

lecting nature, "It takes a certain personality to live here; if you don't want community you probably don't live here. I have found people who are not like that, but they aren't typically the people who stay." However, even controlling for self-selection, the Kim/Kaplan study found a significantly higher sense of community. Other similar studies have come to nearly identical conclusions. Resident Neil Harris agrees, "Before I lived here I used to think there was something in the water or they were the stepford people or something, they were always evangelizing how great the community was, but now here I am, evangelizing it myself."

Kentlands, Gaithersburg, MD

Photo courtesy of kentlandsdowntown / Flickr



5.13 Discovery Green: Houston, TX

Public-private partnership delivers transformative city park

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Large park projects can be the centerpiece of major urban revitalization strategies
- Robust programming can be key to reversing stagnation and negative perception of an area by attracting heavy usage from a wide variety of local and regional users
- Destination placemaking projects can re-connect suburbanites to urban centers
- A community design process can result in creative programmatic elements and a greater sense of community ownership
- A combination of strong foundation funding and non-profit management can propel projects to ambitious and successful outcomes

Discovery Green in Houston is both a classic and a unique example of a large-scale, urban park created through public-private partnerships. It has all the hallmarks of traditional placemaking: Project for Public Spaces® (PPS) led a long public engagement process, the City donated land and capital, private foundations led the fundraising, a Conservancy oversaw the development and runs the operations, and a renowned landscape architecture firm was hired for the design. The 12-acre park is now an urban destination enjoyed by over one million visitors each year. The park's development was not without its challenges: It is located in an area many thought could never be an attractive or safe destination. The project weathered a tug-of-war regarding how heavily programmed it should be, a tug-of-war weighing a park that offers respite with one with active uses to draw visitors. Both the park itself and its development strategies were deliberately crafted, from the funding to micro-level design and development decisions. Since its opening in 2008, Discovery Green



Discovery Green, Houston, TX

Photo courtesy of Project for Public Spaces

has had an enormous economic impact on its neighborhood, spurring the first residential construction in 40 years and breathing life back into a once forgotten part of Houston.

Public-private partnerships are increasingly common in the creation of large public parks, but within this model,

Discovery Green is unique. The park was the brainchild of Houston Mayor Bill White who quickly passed development oversight to a newly-created conservancy to coordinate the fundraising, design process, and implementation. As Greg Ortale, President and CEO of the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau shares, the City couldn't afford to

plan and manage on its own and wanted the expedited timeline—Mayor White gave a three-year deadline—that private funding and leadership could provide.

The idea for the downtown park was met with much initial skepticism; downtown Houston is not somewhere people were used to spending their leisure time. In 2004 a partnership was initiated and the City contributed 6.4 acres of land as well as an additional \$7.9 million. Private foundations kicked in the rest, raising \$54 million more through a private non-profit, the Discovery Green Conservancy. Houston-based philanthropic foundations including the Brown Foundation, the Houston Endowment, the Wortham Foundation, and the Kinder Foundation led the effort. The park's operations funding comes in roughly equal parts (\$650k - \$750k each) from four sources: the City; rents from a cafe and restaurant; a bi-annual gala; and sponsorships and rent from private events. The Conservancy has been instrumental in connecting the park to those with wealth in the community, ensuring Discovery Green has a reliable and personally-invested philanthropic base in the future.

One of the challenges to the design team, led by Hargreaves Associates, was the need to incorporate the vast programming wishes of the City, while still preserving the “green” and quiet park areas. Jacob Peterson of Hargreaves explains that often, the better known an area is, the less programming it needs to be successful. He says, “When you are trying to map an unknown place onto people’s consciousness, programming is extremely important.” Discovery Green is heavily programmed; the park hosts more than four hundred free events and

activities each year and has extensive design features including a lake, lawn, a children’s playground, botanical gardens, two interactive water features, a performance stage, dog runs, public art installations, and a full service restaurant and casual café. This presents a challenge, because the many programmatic elements of the park make it difficult to have a unified identity or to find quiet spaces, are expensive to maintain, and draw additional users, who are hard on living elements of the park. The soil gets over compacted, grass turns to mud, plantings are ruined. As Jacob says, it literally can be “loved to death.”

The City mandated that Discovery Green’s design and planning process involve a high degree of community engagement. This PPS-led public visioning process, plus the “blank slate” state of the project, led to highly creative ideas. “People said ‘I want a lake, why can’t we have a lake?’ and so we have a lake. Also, the upper floors of the Grove restaurant came from the idea for a Treehouse,” says Bob Eury, executive director of the Houston Downtown Management District. Security and comfort, keeping the park cool; making sure it has quiet areas for respite; and making sure people feel safe, were design priorities. The park design avoids blind corners, glass was used in structures to add visibility, and buildings were placed throughout the space to allow plenty of “eyes on the park.”

If visitor numbers are an indication, the park is shockingly successful: visitorship increases each year, with 1.2 million visitors recorded in 2012. Perhaps most surprising, 60-70% of park users drive from the suburbs and 20% of these visitors come from outside

the Beltway. Bob Eury thinks the park closely represents the racial breakdown of Houston itself, “It really does end up being an amazing amalgam of people just like Houston is.” One Park Place, the first new downtown residential building in over 30 years, has a 95% occupancy rate and its promotional materials tout adjacency to the park as a significant selling point. In addition, according to a 2008 *Urban Land* article,³⁴ Discovery Green has spurred \$1 billion in new construction including the Hess Tower, which sold for the highest per square foot price of any Houston building to date. Civic leadership provided the backbone and vision for this project. Nancy Kinder, of the Kinder Foundation, receives praise and credit for the quality of the park from many sources. One of her strengths, Bob Eury insists, is that Nancy understands the tension between programming and design. As he says, “That tension is so incredibly healthy. I don’t think the designers can get there on their own, I think somehow the design has to be challenged to ultimately get it to its higher form.” Guy Hagstette, the first President of the Conservancy, was essential in making rapid decisions and thinking critically about the design. These civic leaders, along with several others, intelligently ushered the park into existence, in a very high quality form, and very quickly. And there is little doubt that it would not have been possible without the private management structure. According to Peterson, “Most significant urban parks are going toward private management because it delivers a better park and a more flexible structure... places need to be flexible because the world is fluid, they need to adapt quickly.”

The partnership between the City and the major foundations, with excellent professionals brought on board, allowed for productive debate, on-going financial support, and swift delivery of

a very high quality product. And it has breathed life into downtown Houston as a whole. As Jacob Peterson says, “It didn’t just catalyze redevelopment it changed the whole perception of

downtown living.” And according to Greg Ortale, “It’s become the city’s ‘town square’... if you haven’t been to Houston since 2008, then you haven’t been to Houston.”

Discovery Green, Houston, TX



Photo courtesy of Hargreaves Associates

06

Moving the Practice Forward: Building on Common Elements of Success



Harvard Plaza, Cambridge, MA

Photo courtesy of Project for Public Spaces

What do these cases, and other recent efforts, suggest for the future of the placemaking field? Above all, they show that the very definition of placemaking has expanded far beyond its roots in the works of Jane Jacobs, William H. Whyte, et al. Placemaking encompasses a vast arena of physical scales, from town green to district; processes; initiators; and partners. The gradual

turn from “what makes a good place?” to “what—and who—makes a good placemaking process?” indicates that an increasingly nuanced understanding of community, political power, and social capital is beginning to permeate the field. And **rather than a dilution of the field due to the increasing size of placemaking’s “tent,” it seems that placemaking’s increased inclusive-**

ness and diversity is strengthening the field. How, then, can our knowledge of this moment in placemaking shape greater positive impact going forward? Public and private sector placemakers, funders, community advocates, and public officials all have a role in successful placemaking. Below are some recommendations for framing the conversation, and the action, of the field.



Campus Martius, Detroit, MI

Photo courtesy of Project for Public Spaces

The Placemaking universe is expanding: Think more broadly about the potential benefits of place and community

The process of creating places is not linear, nor is the relationship between communities and their places. Even for seemingly traditional, open-and-closed, top-down placemaking projects such as the design and construction of a new park, public programming and maintenance can completely shift the way a community relates to, and shapes, its place going forward. The experience of being part of a placemaking process can have as great or greater impact on a community as the finished place. As Allan Jacobs and Donald Appleyard wrote in *Towards a New Urban Design Manifesto*, “While we have concentrated on defining physical characteristics of a good city fabric, the process of creating it is crucial...It is through this involvement in the creation and management of their city that citizens are most likely to identify with it and, conversely, to enhance their own sense of identity and control.”³⁵ It’s time for placemakers to speak of the benefits of the process in equal terms as those of the place itself in definitions and explanations of the field. The virtuous cycle enlarges the universe of supporters, potential funders,

and advocates and makes placemaking relevant beyond the discussion of public space to include community empowerment, capacity, and attachment.

Enlarge the welcome mat—there is room for many types of “communities”

If “placemaking” has been too narrowly defined in the past, so too has “community.” So often, the word is used as proxy for “residential neighbors,” “our best guess to who will use the future place,” “poor people” and other too-small categories. The cases illustrate that no one group or constituency owns placemaking. Broadening the definition of community will go a long way to helping make sure that community engagement is actually an asset to the process, and not just a box that is checked reluctantly as part of a legal requirement. *A community is anyone who stands to gain from the process or the place.* Communities might benefit in terms of economics, quality of life, civic engagement, fun, safety, the social connections they make, the list goes on. In some contexts, real estate developers, for example, must be considered a legitimate community whose goals are not dissimilar from that of potential users of a place. Maybe, as in the case of Discovery Green where 70% of users drive in from the suburbs, there is little overlap in the community of “users” and “neighbors.” If placemakers can cast the community net wide, the field will become more inclusive, and our processes and places better.

Look far and wide for placemaking tools that might work

A recurring theme in the cases and our research is that the strategies and tactics used by placemakers have expanded. The projects also demonstrate that

more than one tactic may be used in the life of a project...reinforcing the power of the placemaking cycle and exploiting the multiple entry points available for community, funders, and actions. More and more placemaking projects are adopting the tactical, temporary, or temporary-to-permanent model, and for good reason. When appropriate, adopting projects on a temporary or pilot basis has many benefits. It allows for tangible change with minimal resources. Inherently less risky, temporary projects can attract greater political support and community buy-in: nobody’s career is going to be ruined if a temporary project fails. The model allows for testing, recalibration, and retesting of ideas on a short timeline. Far from usurping the traditional bricks-and-mortar project, in some cases temporary or pilot projects give stakeholders something tangible to experience, which can build support for longer-term projects. Events are also used to bring attention to issues, energize communities, and circumvent “planning fatigue.” The tools placemakers have serve both process and physical place and adept placemakers are strategic about embracing all of the possibilities and thinking about the continuous making of place.

Give equal attention to process and outcomes in planning, research, and media

Judging placemaking only on its physical result misses half of the story. In order to fully understand the impact of a project, we need to take into account the relationships built, social capital earned, and lessons learned in the process. Focusing on the benefits of the process—making clear that placemaking is *working beyond the physical*—can help

increase support from communities, government leaders, and funders. This will, of course, require the development of metrics specific to the process. Just as the physical space has its commonly-used metrics (number of users, decrease in crime, increase in sales revenue for area businesses) the placemaking field needs a way to measure the impact of a placemaking process. We recommend the development of a common set of process metrics with which placemakers can measure and compare projects. These metrics might measure social capital indicators such as number of volunteers or turnout for meetings. It is understood that these metrics won't be comprehensive but they will certainly be a step in the right direction.

Show that it is working—or that it isn't. And then do something about it!

Many placemaking projects don't include any plan to measure success, and this is a fundamental mistake. Although observation and measurement have always had a place in the field, the desire to develop indicators and measure outcomes is a defining element of placemaking today. The push to quantify impacts and outcomes is spurred in part by a restricted fiscal environment in a society that values instant rewards. Funders and taxpayers want to see a return on their investment for placemaking projects and placemakers are increasingly interested in the various outcomes of their projects, whether public health impacts or economic ones. At the same time, the establishment of concrete success metrics from the outset of a placemaking process can help focus the effort, and can help "sell" the project to funders, public officials, and other stakeholders. Before

the project even begins leaders need to ask both *what specifically do we hope to achieve with this project?* and *how will we know when we have been successful?* Be transparent from the beginning how you plan to measure success. Impacts and outcomes might be measured quantitatively or qualitatively, and "fuzzy evidence" like personal interviews can be perfectly acceptable in areas like social capital, civic engagement, and the like. *Appendix A* contains information on how to communicate placemaking successes and offers examples from projects. The important point is that the project leader is using specific, concrete, agreed-upon evidence to support the claims that the effort is working to advance its goals. And remember—a project that fails to meet its stated goals can offer valuable information, but only if its leaders can point to the specific ways in which it fell short.

Embrace the benefits of open-source placemaking: support a national/international placemaking community.

The placemaking community has much to gain by sharing information—luckily, the field's increasing move towards an open-source model is making this easier. Placemaking has hit the mainstream and it can benefit from a mainstream platform of support, funding, and advocacy. Many of the recommendations listed here require a forum for discussion and dissemination of ideas. Some initiatives may be well suited to central coordination, information sharing, collective advocacy and perhaps even pooled funding. Research regarding measurement and impacts, communicating the broad potential benefits of placemaking's mutual stewardship of

place and community, and embracing an open source placemaking platform, come to mind.

Project leaders should do all they can to foster a sense of collaboration, not competition, with other placemakers. This might include building a system of mentorship, training, and support for those involved in new placemaking projects. It might include the development of an online platform or resource where outcomes, lessons, and resources can be easily accessed and browsed. It should mean the creation of open communication channels between placemakers and public policymakers about how policy can best support placemaking. Above all, the placemaking field needs to adopt an open-source culture, wherein a project's success is partially measured on how helpful it was to other placemakers. *The continuum of making includes the synthesis, and sharing, of major lessons learned.* In that way, a failed project can still be a success if it teaches another placemaker *what not to do.*

Momentum is already gathering toward this end. Proponents of creative placemaking "get it:" national efforts by the NEA Our Town program and ArtPlace to establish indicators, support research on impacts, and collaborate on programs and actions have advanced discussion and supported widespread efforts in this area. Recruitment of top advocates and funders, academic partners, and leaders in all types of placemaking should be a priority and a collaborative effort made to establish an agenda and goals.



Newark Court Alley, Cleveland Intersection
Repair, Cleveland, OH

07

Conclusion

What separates the projects we brag about from the disappointments? It clearly isn't the "type" of project; case studies highlighted in this paper range from volunteer and community-driven temporary events to large urban parks with multi-million dollar budgets and big-name funders. Rather, the most successful projects seem to be those that can combine tactics that historically would have been kept separate. The model of the DOT Plaza program, for example, in which pilot projects are tested and then made permanent, combines rapid-implementation with long-term investment by a public agency. City Repair combines guerilla-style public art with a long, consensus-based community creative process. TAXI focuses simultaneously on creating a highly-branded experience on a private parcel with transportation advocacy and planning on a district-wide scale. These projects have effectively combined aspects of different placemaking models in a strategic way that is context-savvy and flexible.

Even in a networked, technology-enabled world, placemaking can't escape "place," and while many lessons and tactics might translate across projects, individual project context remains elemental. The nuances of this context—culture, political milieu, demographics, community resources, climate and environment, and public will—offer rich information to set up a pathway to success. Is it realistic to expect that the community will have the capacity and resources available to meet the project goals? If not, is there additional capacity in other sectors? In the face of uncertainty about the future maintenance and operations funding structure for the NYC DOT plazas, a philanthropic foundation recently formed to help manage and fund these new places on an ongoing basis. It goes without saying that understanding the "market" also helps shape strategies. How desirable is the area? Will it be a struggle to attract people? Proponents knew that extensive programming would be needed to draw visitors to Discovery Green—in a downtown area suffering from disinvestment, with few residents and a perceived crime issue. StreetsAlive organizers in Fargo stressed the fun and community-centered qualities of its events, knowing a hard sell on alternative transportation and a reduction on auto dependency would turn people off. An early survey of context can help avoid the disappointment of overpromising based on non-comparable precedents. A "community expert" can often do this more

quickly and easily than can a placemaking professional, no matter how keen.



Corona Plaza, Queens, NY

Successful project leaders are a special breed. In fact, a commonality of many projects is the prominence of what PPS' Fred Kent calls a "zealous nut"—a singleminded, tireless, passionate advocate for the project who is also a great connector. The cases examined here present a diverse group of individuals; the "visionary" role can be filled by anyone from a community activist to a city official, from a foundation funder to a developer. Regardless of their official capacity, a key characteristic of project leaders is that they aren't afraid to ask for help. Robert Hammond of Friends of the High Line says of himself and his co-founder, "We lacked any kind of relevant expertise. All we did was raise the flag—we made a lot of phone calls to people who we thought could help us." These leaders are also salesmen, generating enough enthusiasm and optimism for a project to win over skeptical city officials and community naysayers.



Newark Court Alley, Cleveland Intersection Repair, Cleveland, OH

Photo by Janet Century Photography for Neighborhood Connections

In Shreveport, the local Arts Council was chosen by the City to lead a placemaking project for a large downtown area—an oversight role that might traditionally be spearheaded by a public planning authority or redevelopment agency. As one stakeholder puts it, the Arts Council “really knows how to throw a party.” The importance of social connection should not be minimized: what placemaking requires is not an expert leader who understands the intricacies of zoning or landscape design, but a savvy generalist who knows where to find these people and how best to use them. These leaders balance the visionary with the strategic, the political with the social, and the lofty with the practical.

It should be obvious by now that effective engagement of community tops the list of crucial characteristics of successful placemaking, but since it’s surprisingly rare to see it done well, it bears some discussion. The projects that are most successful at engaging their communities are the ones that treat this engagement as an ongoing process, rather than a single required step of input or feedback. Further, effective engagement is sensitive to each community’s individual social context. In Corona Plaza, the community design forums held in traditional town-hall settings failed to attract the community of new immigrants from Mexico and Ecuador, so plaza officials elected to bring the designs to the plaza itself, during a cultural festival. Children are frequent users of public places but are usually overlooked in the planning process. Mike Lanza, the founder of Playborhood, simply provides fun toys, installations and spaces for kids to play in his Menlo Park, CA front yard and provides opportunities for them to paint pavement, scrawl on playhouse walls and personalize this space—appropriate levels of engagement

for young children in a private yard. Other communities are difficult to identify or may not fit traditional notions of that term: business people mostly hidden from view who leave the area at 5pm, suburban families who drive to cities to use an urban green space, tourists in a downtown park. Temporary, tactical, and event-based placemaking can help identify communities that might otherwise go unnoticed, by allowing them to self-identify. These initiatives engage community by giving them something tangible to react to, which makes the placemaker’s job of outreach and inclusion easier. The act of creating, rather than reacting or opposing, brings a self-selected group to the table—a group ready to deliberate and create positive change. As Team Better Block has found during the weekend events it facilitates, “trouble makers and naysayers will quickly drop out when physical work is involved.”

The best forms of community engagement, and in fact the best forms of placemaking, are those that recognize and exploit the virtuous cycle of mutual stewardship between community and place. This is the conceptual glue that supports success at the project level and propels the placemaking field forward.

In most successful cases, the “com-

pletion” of the project is far from the end of the placemaking effort. Success at identifying these ongoing “making” activities and engagement in the civic processes that support them, creates the mutual relationship between community and place that lifts these placemaking projects above a simple sum of the parts.

The virtuous cycle model can benefit the larger placemaking field. Each new step in each new project represents a learning opportunity not just for the project, but for the larger community of placemakers. The field has everything to gain from an open-source model, wherein information about tactics, obstacles, successes, and failures becomes a constantly-updating resource base for the placemaking community. Battling an ever-shrinking pool of resources, placemakers must learn to share knowledge, their most valuable resource; as Mickey Zeppelin says, “community is communication.” The diversity and strength of placemaking projects in the twenty-first century presents tremendous opportunity for the collective understanding and advancement of the entire field. A successful project can, and should, advance the virtuous cycle for placemaking as a whole.



Discovery Green

08

End Notes

1. Rebar created the original PARK(ing) Day project in 2005 to transform a single metered San Francisco parking space into a temporary public park. Faced with many requests to replicate the effort, the firm created an open source manual to help citizens all over the world reclaim public parking spaces for human use. For more information, see <http://parkingday.org/about-parking-day/>
2. See *Appendix A: From goals to indicators and measurement*.
3. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) created a Community Indicators Study to look into how creative placemaking projects impact communities, following up on their Our Town initiative which granted \$6.6 million in its inaugural year to such projects. The program has resisted traditional evaluation, favoring the indicator method, but making it difficult to attribute benefits directly back to the NEA investments. See: Moss, Ian David. "Creative Placemaking Has an Outcomes Problem." *Createquity*, May 9, 2012. <http://createquity.com/2012/05/creative-placemaking-has-an-outcomes-problem.html>.
4. Silberberg, Susan. "What's your Place in the World?: Building Community in every City," Mashable Social Good Summit, NYC, September 23, 2013, available online at: <http://new.livestream.com/Mashable/sgs2013/videos/30705080>
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9. Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House, 1961. p 15.
10. Alexander, Christopher, and Sara Ishikawa. *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
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Interestingly, Lefebvre's stance illustrates that the wide tent of placemaking today contains many approaches and philosophies about public places. He was wildly critical of spaces produced "out of capitalism" particularly for the restrictions they place on behavior in these spaces. To tie this to reality, this would mean the frustration with rules in privately managed public spaces like Bryant Park's closing at dusk and rules against playing football on the lawn. He felt that these spaces served a certain sect of the population and valued those relationships over other population groups, creative works, and nature itself.
12. David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review* 53 (October 2008): 23.
13. Oldenburg, Ph D. Ray, ed. *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories about the "Great Good Places" at the Heart of Our Communities*. Da Capo Press, 2002.
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15. Richard Sennett's recommendations about public places are played out in the Eastern Market case study. Here, it is estimated that 60% of the market's visitors hail from the suburbs...a remarkable statistic for the most segregated city in America (Business Insider Article, April 25 2013). Sennett would approve, we think. In a speech at Harvard University in February of 2012, Sennett lamented the locational decision of a market in Spanish Harlem. The market was created in the center of the community; Sennett asserted that, if placed at the periphery where Spanish Harlem meets the more affluent community to the south, the opportunities for social mixing and exchanging of values as well as commerce would help create a stronger, more aware social fabric.
Baird-Remba, Rebecca, and Gus Lubin. "21 Maps Of Highly Segregated Cities In America." *Business Insider*. Accessed October 9, 2013. <http://www.businessinsider.com/most-segregated-cities-census-maps-2013-4>.

16. Martin, Justin. *Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2012. p 140.
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09

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10—APPENDIX A

From Goals to Indicators and Measurement: Communicating Placemaking success stories and challenges

In 1979, renowned urbanist Donald Appleyard developed a painstaking process to show the relationship of car traffic and street design to human interaction and friendships on three San Francisco blocks.¹ William H Whyte, observer and champion of small urban spaces, spent hours in the 1970s compiling findings from days of aerial video recordings of city streets and plazas to determine the design elements that make good places for people. Today, Dan Biederman checks the number of monthly Twitter hits and Flickr photos with Bryant Park tags and hashtags to gauge the park’s public standing. Although observation and measurement have always had a place in the field, the desire to develop indicators and measure outcomes is a defining element of placemaking today. The push to quantify impacts and outcomes is spurred in part by a restricted fiscal environment in a society that values instant rewards. Funders and taxpayers want to see a return on their investment for placemaking projects. At the same time, placemakers are increasingly interested in the various outcomes of their projects. Effectively conveying this information to others can help expand available funding sources

and build broader support for placemaking projects.

Many practitioners are only able to demonstrate the impact of their efforts through anecdotes and other qualitative data, or by citing economic metrics without showing direct causality between these positive indicators of change and placemaking projects. The process of “making” and the places resulting do not sit in a controlled laboratory setting where projects can be isolated from variables. How do we know that the rise in downtown real estate prices is the result of the new park and not because the Mayor has a new public safety campaign? Is a newly-created pedestrian shopping street responsible for a revitalizing influx of residents or is new micro-unit zoning a factor? In addition, some benefits of placemaking, such as the accrual of social capital, are difficult to define and measure but can have lasting positive benefits for communities and should be considered in a holistic approach to project evaluation.

Members of the placemaking community are hungry for best practices and tools to

measure impacts of initiatives and convey information to funders, advocates and others. While there is no “one-size-fits-all” indicator set—as the goals of placemaking vary widely, so do the measurement techniques—we have assembled this appendix to capture some of the information we have found in our research. We hope this provides placemakers with a starting point for their own discussions about measuring outcomes.

Translating Goals into Indicators and Measurement techniques

1. Use and activity

Perhaps the most common and tangible measurement of placemaking is to simply measure who is using the space, when and how. William Whyte’s simple pre/post measurements of street life demonstrated the ability of public space programming and good design to draw a crowd. Placemaking leaders like the managers of Bryant Park have become adept at determining peak usage times by conducting twice-daily user counts and using aerial photo-

graphs to count visitors during the day. Creative placemaking funding platform ArtPlace caused some stir in 2012 with its “Vibrancy Indicators” which track everything from cell phone activity to employment rates as a proxy for activity and reputation, a cocktail of desirable attributes they call “vibrancy.” The NYC DOT Plaza Program tracks partners’ programming frequency as a way to see how often the space is activated. In one of their curb expansions that created a pocket park on Pearl Street in Manhattan, the DOT found that a 77% increase in seated pedestrians led to a 14% increase in sales at fronting businesses.

2. Economic

Many placemaking projects are expected to serve as catalysts for revitalization, and those that are not, such as Eastern Market, often keep a close watch on changing economic values in their neighborhood to monitor gentrification. Hoped-for ripple effects include increased tax revenue, reduced commercial and retail vacancies, population gain, and others. While it can be difficult to show causality between a placemaking initiative and changes in economic indicators, tracking these metrics is helpful in supporting an anecdotal case showing return on investment for funders and the public.

While large well-funded bricks-and-mortar projects receive the most attention as “turnaround” placemaking efforts, there are claims that temporary and tactical initiatives have lasting impact as well. Memphis’ “Memfix,” began with a project on Broad Avenue, once a thriving thoroughfare that suffered years of disinvestment despite a 2006 planning effort. In 2010, Livable Memphis spearheaded a Better Block-style event in collaboration with the Historic Broad

Business Association. The organizations raised over \$10,000 and 13,000 residents (more than twice the number anticipated) participated in *A New Face for an Old Broad*. Tactical efforts included re-positioning parking to create protected bike lanes, adding tree planters, and temporarily utilizing vacant storefronts. Shortly after the event a \$25,000 matching grant was given to Livable Memphis for permanent bike lanes. Commercial rents in the area have increased by 50% since 2006, and 25 of the 40 total businesses on the Avenue have opened since the event. There has been \$15 million in private investment, 17 blighted properties have been restored, and public art projects have been installed.

3. Public Health/ Healthy Living

The overlapping importance of public health and environmental factors in cities is a growing interest area for progressive urbanists and indicators range from asthma rates to noise decibel levels. The Portland-based community nonprofit City Repair, has demonstrated the positive impact placemaking can have on public health outcomes. A series of reports authored by clinical psychologist Jan Semenza reveals that City Repair’s holistic approach to community revitalization which includes bold design interventions to paint intersections, setting up community centers, and encouraging a gift or sharing economy actually had a measurable impact on participants’ sense of community, social interactions, and social capital as well as mental health.² City Repair organizers were not surprised by these findings. As one organizer says, “We knew that this project would have an impact on public health—any potential safety concerns about painting in the street were overwhelmed by the sense of

what we were already experiencing, that it’s more unsafe to feel isolated, alone, and vulnerable than it is to be connected.” City Repair has used Semenza’s measurement techniques to prove its legitimacy to skeptics. Another health-based measurement technique is the NYC Department of Transportation’s tracking of street injuries, which saw a 35-58% decrease in injuries to all street users after protected bicycle lanes were installed.³

4. Social Capital

Few organizations track community development and process metrics with rigor because few funders require it, and because prevailing wisdom treats the placemaking process like a black box in which social capital and civiness are accrued and stored but not examined. These measurements can include meetings held, number of people involved, number of repeat attendees, new personal connections, friendships deepened, and so on. For some placemaking processes, including Build a Better Block, these social capital benefits are the most important outcomes. Build a Better Block’s goal is not to complete a bricks-and-mortar project, but rather that the community and officials vision a future through communication, connection, and hard work. The Team’s physical work is temporary in nature and when they leave town, what is left is, by intention, sown seeds. The local government is made aware of what regulations are blocking improvements, residents have a much stronger network within their community, and an excitement, vision and shared spirit are instilled in participants.

Danish researchers, in 1996, wanted to determine the impact of social capital on the success of developments, particularly

for those with lower-income residents. This research was conducted under the framework of the World Bank Social Capital Initiative (SCI);⁴ findings showed that in these housing developments, where a sense of community was higher, social capital was found to be a significant tool in poverty reduction and improving income and welfare of the poor. The project, developed in conjunction with the World Bank, also established a Social Capital Assessment Tool, which is an extremely comprehensive rubric. Similarly, Thomas Pacello and the rest of the members of the Memphis Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team are in the midst of creating a methodology to measure social capital in the city's neighborhoods. Pacello, who was involved in Memphis' "Memfix," says the team is planning a door-to-door survey that will ask people questions such as "Do you know your neighbor's name? Do you know their pet's name? On a scale of 1-10 how comfortable would you feel disciplining a neighborhood child?" A survey of this sort has potential to reveal the impact of placemaking on social capital.

Conclusion

The old adage, "we manage what we measure" is true to a certain extent with placemaking as well. If project leaders can

clearly define goals and develop a rubric against which to judge progress, they are much more likely to work towards and achieve those specific goals. Indicators help with fundraising, assist case comparisons, and facilitate the sharing of ideas, stories, and similarities. We also emphasize that placemaking is an iterative, ongoing process that in most cases, is never truly "finished." In lieu of measuring ending points, measurement should occur as a benchmarking process to acknowledge the iterative nature of "making." As stated by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, co-author of the NEA-commissioned *Creative Placemaking* white paper, "...I worry about managing expectations. It's probably unreasonable to expect that a modest, one-year Our Town grant will move the needle, at least quickly. In my work evaluating the impacts of five art spaces in Reno, Seattle, Minneapolis, and St. Paul, the neighborhood transformations and benefits to in-house artists occurred over time horizons of ten to twenty years."⁵

The scope and depth of measuring outcomes will also depend on the size of the effort and level of available resources. Some measuring efforts depend heavily on high-cost techniques that require either a contract with a private data vendor, hiring a fleet of staff to perform

intercept surveys or built environment surveys. Other efforts can track change over time using free, regularly collected information such as US Census data, department of labor statistics, etc. Qualitative data can be a useful supplement to quantitative measurements. A picture is worth a thousand words. Or a thousand statistics. Placemakers from all over the country have told us that while data points help sign on supporters, so do stories. Andy Wiley-Schwartz writes a yearly report on the data behind the NYC DOT Plaza Program, yet he says it is the before/ after photos that really get people excited. Quotes from festival-goers, reviews in magazines, press, social media, word of mouth also have a huge impact on legitimizing the DOT's work.

The table below summarizes four categories of placemaking goals and some commonly used indicators for each. This information is not a comprehensive listing nor do we imply that these are the only metrics. These are provided to give an overview of how placemakers might categorize goals and measurements to move forward in efforts to track progress.

Endnotes

- 1 This research, published in Appleyard's 1981 book *Livable Streets*, showed that of three similar streets in San Francisco with three levels of traffic volume (2,000, 8,000 and 16,000), residents of the street with the lowest traffic volume had three times as many friends and connections on those on the street with the highest traffic volume.
- 2 Jan C. Semenza, Tanya L. March, and Brian D. Bontempo, "Community-Initiated Urban Development: An Ecological Intervention," *Journal of Urban Health* 84, no. 1 (January 2007): 8–20, doi:10.1007/s11524-006-9124-8.
- 3 NYCDOT, "Measuring the Street: New Metrics for 21st Century Streets," 2012.
- 4 For a list of research and papers related to the World Bank Social Capital Initiative, see Web: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/0,,contentMDK:20502531-pagePK:148956-piPK:216618-theSitePK:244363,00.html>
- 5 Gadwa Nicodemus, Anne, "Creative Placemaking 2.0," in *Grantmakers in the Arts I*, Vol 23, No 2 (Summer 2012), accessed: <http://www.giarts.org/article/creative-placemaking-20>

Placemaking Measurement Categories/Indicators

CATEGORY	MEASUREMENTS/INDICATORS
Use and Activity	Mixed-use index
Use and Activity	Daytime use
Use and Activity	Evening use
Use and Activity	Weekend use
Use and Activity	number of 'indicator' users such as families, older people, or racial or ethnic mix
Use and Activity	Transit usage stats (bike and transit)
Use and Activity	Occupied buildings
Use and Activity	Number of public events
Use and Activity	behavior mapping
Use and Activity	Timelapse photography
Use and Activity	Population
Use and Activity	Walkscore
Use and Activity	Building conditions (e.g. façade scores)
Use and Activity	How much mentioned in the press?
Use and Activity	online reputation, hashtags, Flickr keywords
Use and Activity	# of ads for sale and rental properties naming public place as amenity ("proximity to..."),
Use and Activity	Security perception survey
Use and Activity	User satisfaction survey
Economic Impact	Employment rate / gross jobs
Economic Impact	Indicator businesses (e.g. concentrations of consumption/socializing-oriented businesses such as restaurants and bars, as well as independent businesses)
Economic Impact	Direct (salaries), indirect (eg chair vendors), Induced (general raise in spending based on increase in local HH income) spending
Economic Impact	Property values
Economic Impact	increased tax revenue
Economic Impact	change in adjacent business retail sales
Economic Impact	Number of businesses
Economic Impact	increase in premium in property sales (what people are willing to pay over the typical in the area)
Economic Impact	commercial and residential occupancy rates
Economic Impact	increase in median area wages
Economic Impact	Tax liens on buildings or properties in adjudication
Public Health and Healthy Living	Crime statistics
Public Health and Healthy Living	Sanitation rating
Public Health and Healthy Living	Air quality
Public Health and Healthy Living	Decibel levels
Public Health and Healthy Living	Traffic speed
Public Health and Healthy Living	Traffic counts
Public Health and Healthy Living	Baseline public health data: asthma rates, life expectancy, etc.
Public Health and Healthy Living	crashes/injury data for pedestrians cars, bikes
Social Capital	Social network mapping
Social Capital	Rates of volunteerism
Social Capital	Number of community meetings related to placemaking project
Social Capital	Number and diversity of community partners involved
Social Capital	Number and diversity of people who show up to community meetings (how many repeat attendees?)
Social Capital	Value of in-kind donations
Social Capital	Diversity and geographic range of financial supporters
Social Capital	Diversity and geographic range of users of public place
Social Capital	mental maps of residents' perceived "territory"
Social Capital	Number of friends on the streets
Social Capital	number of congregation points on the streets
Social Capital	most significant change technique
Social Capital	Changes in legislation
Social Capital	Social Capital Surveys - do you know neighbors name, neighbors pet, how comfortable do you feel disciplining a neighborhood child, etc

