Opportunity at the Intersection of Community Development and Creative Placemaking

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The community development field has delivered unprecedented social change work since the 1960s: billions of dollars in private capital invested; hundreds of thousands of affordable housing units built; the development of many high-performing local, regional, and national nonprofit organizations; and the creation of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, the most successful private-public partnership the nation has ever seen.[1]

The emerging creative placemaking field has a different but complementary set of assets. Creative placemaking leads with the ability to address the intangibles that make a successful and vibrant community (see Gary Hattem's article in this issue), to mobilize social capital (Darren Walker and Xavier de Souza-Briggs in this issue), to bring performance and participatory activities to public spaces (Jamie Bennett, this issue), and–maybe most important–the capacity to "challenge preconceptions about what a city is supposed to look like and how it works" (Rip Rapson, this issue).

The intersection of community development and creative placemaking holds great promise. If we combine the energy and spirit of creative placemaking with the demonstrated capacity and practices of community development, we can create an exciting, inspiring, and inclusive vision for our communities in the future. To reach this goal, we should better understand the potential and common challenges of each field. The essays in this collection enable us to do just that.

What Creative Placemaking Brings to Community Development

Focusing on Human Capital

There is growing consensus in the community development field that we need to expand from our initial focus on the built environment to include strategies that simultaneously address people and opportunity. As Xavier de Souza Briggs, vice president for economic opportunity and assets at the Ford Foundation, explains in this issue, we are going from a "near obsession with the hardware of place–the physical systems–to a much deeper appreciation for the role of human capital, knowledge, and creativity."

Jamie Bennett, executive director of ArtPlace America, underscores this point. "In creative placemaking, 'creative' is an adverb describing the making, not an adjective describing the

1 David J. Erickson, *The Housing Policy Revolution: Networks and Neighborhoods*, (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, August 2009).

place. Successful creative placemaking is not quantified by how many new arts centers, galleries, or cultural districts are built. Rather, its success is measured in the ways artists, formal and informal arts spaces, and creative interventions contribute toward community outcomes." Expanding this idea, Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation, notes that creative placemaking, particularly in under-resourced communities, can unearth and support inherent creativity within a community: "I reject the idea that a community that is poor can't be a place of creative placemaking....The creative process might need to be organized, leveraged, and oxygenated, but you often find that creativity is there." Examining communities through a lens of assets instead of deficits transforms perspectives. In addition, de Souza Briggs notes that artists, better than developers, can "connect, engage, and listen" toward enabling the community to "narrate itself:" how it sees itself, what the critical issues it faces are, and where it is headed. As many in the community development field and the broader social sector learn how to meaningfully engage communities and incorporate their voices and visions in development strategies, enlisting artists as partners has proven particularly effective in many geographies and contexts.

Further, creative placemaking opens the door to marry physical environment improvements to arts programming, events, and education. It fosters public spaces that encourage social cohesion and engagement, and nurtures local talent and distributed, diverse leadership.

Unearthing Engines of Economic Development

The essays in this collection are rich with examples of how art and culture serve as engines of economic development (Mary Jo Waits, Stephen Sheppard, among others). Samuel Hoi, president of Maryland Institute College of Arts, writes about a recent Otis report documenting the potent economic drivers and jobs generators that the creative professionals and industries are in Los Angeles and California. In the same vein, Bennett writes, "Creative placemaking supports economic diversity and place-based prosperity in the community, creating more opportunity for all...By clustering together different types of arts spaces along underused streets, communities are able to create consistent patterns of foot traffic, which provides a positive presence on the street to improve public safety and to drive a neighborhood's economy, as these members of the public dine and shop."

Rip Rapson, president of the Kresge Foundation and chair of the ArtPlace presidents' council, tells a compelling story of how creative placemaking in Detroit has leveraged both the economic potential and the creativity of artists to reimagine the city: "Artists in Detroit ...are instrumental in helping us see connections among the past, the present, and the future. They embody, embrace, and express the soul of the place. And they are fully engaged in creative placemaking–contributing tangibly and powerfully to energizing and animating neighborhoods." Artists, both long-term residents and those recently attracted to the city by the prospect of a community of like-minded individuals and affordability, do not, according to Rapson, see the city as "on the skids" and are instead converting public ruin and decline into a new cultural identity that has significant potential for attracting attention, visitors, new residents, and further investment.

In addition, Jane Chu, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and Jason Schupbach, director of design programs at NEA, outline how the endowment's Our Town grants have, among other important goals, supported communities in defining arts as economic assets. They emphasize that "Artists and designers provide amenities for consumers and rejuvenate downtowns and neighborhoods....[They] help form the core of community development practice."

Releasing Imagination, Boldness, and Animation

As de Souza Briggs points out, community development has a "problem-solving frame: delineating problems and fixing them." This frame is important and necessary. However, creative placemaking allows for more comprehensive solutions that supplement those fixes with bold, inventive reinforcements that contribute to resilience. Artists can breathe life into buildings, make places more attractive, and provide elements of unique character and the unexpected.

As Bennett describes, "Creative placemaking provides a sense of community identity and agency, which connects community members with one another as stewards of shared space." This type of shared stewardship holds great promise for extending the impact of community development intiatives.

What Community Development Brings to Creative Placemaking

The community development field is mature, and with that maturity, it has developed, refined, and applied tools and mechanisms that have helped transform underinvested places in the course of decades. These mechanisms can add great value to and strengthen the creative placemaking movement and bring the two fields into even closer, more productive collaboration in a few key ways.

Harnessing Private Capital

One of community development's greatest accomplishments has been its success in leveraging public and philanthropic dollars with private capital. The Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) movement has invested and catalyzed more than $30 billion in financing to urban, rural, and Native communities, with losses of less than 1.7 percent.[2] As many of the essays in this issue note (Ann Markusen/Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, Gary Hattem), financing is one of creative placemaking's greatest challenges. As Hattem notes, "Intentionally directing a flow of commercial capital for creative placemaking will require a sustained commitment to fostering a network of resources that allow for a capital-ready environment" Community development has done that consistently throughout the United States.

2 Democracy Collaborative. Overview: Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), http://community-wealth.org/strategies/panel/cdfis/index.html.

Managing Permanent, Dedicated Funds

Community development has built the capacity to create, manage, and deploy a pool of funds dedicated to community development activities–from the $230 million New York City Acquisition Fund to the $50 million Bay Area Transit-Oriented Affordable Housing (TOAH) Fund. Community development also has effectively supported public measures such as Seattle's special fund for construction and rehabilitating housing for low- and moderate-income families, the Seattle Housing Levy. Initially enacted in 1981, 66 percent of Seattle voters supported the most recent renewal of the fund in 2009. These public and private funds provide not only a ready source of capital, but the capacity to move from the periodic to the predictable–a long-term asset that enables a robust level of transactions that have the potential to be transformational. If the Public Art Trust Fund, Nonprofit Displacement Working Group and Mitigation Fund, and Community Arts Stabilization Trust–described by San Francisco mayor Ed Lee and director of cultural affairs Tom DeCaigny in their essay in this issue–are indicators of what the future holds, community development could dramatically accelerate the creation of similar mechanisms throughout the United States dedicated to creative placemaking.

Building Public-Private Partnerships

The power and effect that the community development field has had are directly related to building public-private partnerships. Whether it is the blending of public, private, and nonprofit funding streams in individual transactions or large-scale funds, such as in New York and the Bay Area, or in the implementation of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, this concept has long been at the core of community development efforts.

Several essays in this issue clarify that this type of collaboration, beyond financing, is essential to advancing effective creative placemaking at scale. Mayor Lee and DeCaigny refer to the Rainin project that builds on the momentum of several public-private partnerships including the "Let There Be Light" video installation on the side of 1019 Market Street by the producer of the internationally heralded "Bay Lights," a monumental public artwork that adorns the Bay Bridge; the UN Plaza Fall Event Series that fills the San Francisco Central Market district with daytime and evening cultural and culinary programs; and the mayor's Living Innovation Zones. Community development's experience with building win-win relationships could be invaluable in expanding these types of activities.

In addition, the community development field could help creative placemakers ride the current wave of "zones" or districts and make arts-led zones more ubiquitous. Zones are a city's effort to bring an array of partners and institutions together in a defined geographic area to achieve specific outcomes, whether it be creating jobs, clustering arts institutions, or stimulating innovation. For example, community development's experiences navigating land use laws and regulations and understanding how to create incentives for desired types of development–gained by working in an array of zone initiatives such as the empowerment zones of the 1980s and President Obama's current Promise Zones–could be invaluable.

Working Together Toward More Rigor in Measuring Results

Uniting community development and creative placemaking has the potential to both better address the needs of communities and take better advantage of local assets, particularly the people, in more comprehensive, responsive, authentic, and inclusive ways. Although each field brings unique strengths to the table, they both lack effective measures of success. Many essays in this issue refer to efforts to bring rigorous measurement to creative placemaking and the lack of success in doing so (Elaine Morley/Mary Winker, Sheppard, and Walker/de Souza-Biggs, for example). De Souza Briggs summarizes these efforts well: "I don't think that creative placemaking has necessarily made a big impact on how success is measured in communities, though it has much to offer and the potential is there." As the two fields work in closer collaboration, defining the results that investors and citizens should expect in these place-based efforts should be easier to articulate, supported by data, and more measurable. We must organize evaluation efforts based on understanding outcomes for individuals and communities, rather than outputs.

The Road Ahead

The synergies from and benefits of more collaboration between the community development and creative placemaking fields are compelling–an almost certain case of one plus one equals three. Less certain, however, is how collaboration will be accomplished. Should philanthropy or government, which fund both fields, drive the marriage and, if so, how? Would something such as a large-scale, national "prize" competition create a tipping point? Should we simply maintain the current transaction-by-transaction strategy, which has been receiving traction, but do more to share "what works" more broadly? This anthology makes it clear that something special is happening in US communities and raises the ante on determining what more we should do to nurture the movement.

Ben Hecht became president and CEO of Living Cities in July, 2007. Since that time, the organization has adopted a broad, integrative agenda that harnesses the collective knowledge of its 22 member foundations and financial institutions to benefit low income people and the cities where they live. Prior to joining Living Cities, Mr. Hecht co-founded One Economy Corporation, a nonprofit organization that leverages the power of technology and information to connect low-income people to the economic mainstream through broadband in the home and public-purpose media. Immediately before One Economy, Mr. Hecht was senior vice president at the Enterprise Foundation. There, he led the organization's efforts beyond housing – into childcare, workforce development and economic development and oversaw the expansion of the organization's revolving loan fund from $30 million to $200 million. Mr. Hecht received his JD from Georgetown University Law Center and his CPA from the State of Maryland.