

Creative Placemaking in Community Planning and Development: An Introduction to ArtPlace America

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Creative Placemaking

For the past five years, “creative placemaking” has increasingly been used to describe projects in which art plays an intentional and integrated role in place-based community planning and development. The phrase simply adds creative interventions alongside the other “placemaking” strategies pioneered by Jane Jacobs and her colleagues who believed that community planning and development should be human-centered, local, and holistic.

A growing interest in creative placemaking led to the creation of ArtPlace America, which is a 10-year project supported by a partnership of 14 foundations, eight federal agencies, and six financial institutions that is working to position art and culture as a core sector of community planning and development. To date, ArtPlace has invested \$56.8 million in 189 creative placemaking projects in 122 communities of all sizes across the United States.

Each of these projects has done four things: (1) defined a community based in geography, such as a block, neighborhood, city, or even a county; (2) articulated a change the group of people living and working in that community want; (3) proposed an arts-based intervention to help achieve that change; and (4) developed a way to know whether the change occurred.

In each project, arts and culture are working to help achieve a place-based change, which means that it is the interventions that are creative, not necessarily the outcomes. In creative placemaking, “creative” is an adverb describing the making, not an adjective describing the 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.

As a result, ArtPlace has adopted the language of community planning and development as the framework and context for understanding the impact of our investments.

The Functions of Creative Placemaking

In examining the projects in which ArtPlace has invested, we found four ways that creative placemaking has regularly functioned in communities—ways that are both of interest to those involved in community planning and development, and those that are grounded in existing research. Communities consistently employ creative placemaking interventions to

strengthen economic development, encourage civic engagement, build resiliency, and/or contribute to quality of life.

Strengthens Economic Development

Creative placemaking supports economic diversity and place-based prosperity in the community, creating more opportunity for all. At the end of 2013, the US Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis published their first Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account. It estimated 3.2 percent of the 2011 gross domestic product (GDP), or \$504 billion, was uniquely attributable to arts and cultural production. For comparison, this figure is only slightly less than the construction industry's contribution to GDP—and slightly more than the travel and tourism sector's contribution.

Arts and culture are often consumed in person, which means they also increase foot traffic and its associated benefits. Different types of arts spaces attract different patterns of foot traffic. Performing arts venues, for example, attract many people who arrive and depart at set times in the course of a week. Museums and other visual arts venues attract a steady stream of people in the course of a day. And rehearsal and studio spaces for artists tend to attract individuals on an hourly basis, throughout the day, seven days per week.

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. Perhaps not surprising, social scientists at the University of Pennsylvania's Social Impact of the Arts Project have said their signature finding is that "high levels of cultural engagement are a leading indicator of a neighborhood's revitalization."¹

Encourages Civic Engagement

Creative placemaking provides a sense of community identity and agency, which connects community members with one another as stewards of shared space. In "Informal Arts: Finding Cohesion, Capacity and Other Cultural Benefits in Unexpected Places," Alaka Wali, an anthropologist commissioned by the Chicago Center for Arts Policy, examined participation in the informal arts—the types of art participation that are more likely to be a part of daily life, such as singing in a church choir, participating in a drumming circle, writing poetry at the local library, painting at home, or acting in a community theater.² She found that individuals with higher rates of participation in the informal arts also vote and volunteer at higher rates.

James Catterall, a University of California, Los Angeles professor emeritus, looked at patterns of participation in arts among students with low socioeconomic status in "The Arts

1 Mark J. Stern and Susan C. Seifert, "The Arts, Civic Engagement, and the 'Tragedy of the Commons.'" (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Social Impact of the Arts Project, June 2008), http://impact.sp2.upenn.edu/siap/docs/civic_engagement/4d-Civic-Tragedy%20of%20the%20commons%20PDF.pdf.

2 Alaka Wali et al., "Informal Arts: Finding Cohesion, Capacity and Other Cultural Benefits in Unexpected Places," (Chicago, IL: Chicago Center for Arts Policy, June 2002), http://archive.fieldmuseum.org/ccuc/ccuc_sites/Arts_Study/pdf/Informal_Arts_Full_Report.pdf.

and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies.”³ According to Catterall, young people who are at risk, but who actively participate in arts, have “comparatively high levels of volunteering, voting, and engagement with local or school politics.” People who participate in the arts are also more likely to engage civically beyond the arts.

Builds Resiliency

Creative placemaking contributes to long-term investment in a community. It helps reestablish normalcy and provides psycho-social relief following a natural disaster or community tragedy. Thanks to the leadership of the Rockefeller Foundation (an ArtPlace partner), for example, communities are increasingly focused on building resiliency: the prevention of, preparation for, and recovery after major disruptions. The foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities project uses a framework that gives 12 attributes of a resilient city.⁴ Two of their key ingredients for resiliency are “social stability and security” and “collective identity and mutual support.”

The Knight Foundation (another ArtPlace partner) worked with Gallup to investigate the drivers of “community attachment” (their term for Rockefeller’s “social stability”). They conducted the “Soul of the Community” poll in 26 different communities and discovered that the top three drivers of community attachment were consistently “social offerings, (such as entertainment venues and places to meet), openness (how welcoming a place is), and the area’s aesthetics (its physical beauty and green spaces).” Arts and arts organizations regularly provide all three, also providing one of the key ingredients for resiliency.

Turning to Rockefeller’s “collective identity,” the same Chicago Center for Arts Policy paper that delineated the role of the informal arts in encouraging civic engagement also found that these same informal arts “build both individual identity and group solidarity,” which means that the informal arts play an important role in helping heterogeneous communities create the stable and shared sense of collective identity that is a second key ingredient for resiliency.⁵

Contributes to Quality of Life

Creative placemaking creates more vibrant and livable places by offering social activities and improving an area’s aesthetics. During her tenure as the founding director of ArtPlace—building on the work she did in her previous role with CEOs for Cities, and work which she continues in her current role at the Knight Foundation—Carol Coletta worked with Joe Cortright of Impresa Consulting to investigate and understand the quality of life offerings that today’s increasingly mobile workforce seek in the places they choose to live. Their research reveals that arts and cultural leisure activities are regularly among the quality of life offerings that are present in the “vibrant, close-in neighborhoods” that are seeing population growth.⁶

3 James S. Catterall et al, “The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings From Four Longitudinal Studies,” (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, March 2012), <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/Arts-At-Risk-Youth.pdf>.

4 The Rockefeller Foundation, “City Resilience Framework,” (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, April 2014), <http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/uploads/files/0bb537c0-d872-467f-9470-b20f57c32488.pdf>.

5 Alaka Wali et al, “Informal Arts.”

6 Joseph Cortright, “The Young and Restless in a Knowledge Economy.” (Chicago, IL: CEOs for Cities, December 2005). http://www.ceosforcities.org/pagefiles/CEOs_YNR_FINAL.pdf

How Creative Placemaking Works

For these outcomes to be useful in community planning and development, we should look beyond the functions of creative placemaking and examine how creative placemaking works.

Looking again at the projects in which ArtPlace has invested, we found communities use creative placemaking to anchor, activate, “fix,” and plan.

Anchoring

Creative placemaking leverages arts and culture organizations as stable community institutions, contributing to neighborhood identity, bringing jobs, and attracting patrons who support area businesses.

Community developers have long understood how hospitals and universities serve as community anchor institutions: employing community members, purchasing goods and services, having a stake in communities, and drawing diverse foot traffic to the area. Museums, performing arts centers, and other arts organizations can serve the same functions while bringing the added benefits of social offerings, aesthetics, social cohesion, and quality of life.

Activating

Creative placemaking brings performance and participatory activities to public spaces (including plazas and alleyways) to make them more attractive, exciting, and safe.

In her groundbreaking 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs recognized that public spaces regularly inhabited by diverse people are safer, more prosperous, more enjoyable for residents, and more attractive to visitors.⁷ Planned public performances, flash mobs, and temporary and permanent works of public art have attracted residents and visitors to previously abandoned and underused spaces.

“Fixing”

Creative placemaking ameliorates structural design problems. It encourages beautification, engagement, and reimagining use—and it connects people with opportunities and one another. The quotation marks around “fixing” are intentional. It can be too easy to talk about a broken home or struggling neighborhood. We are not using “fixing” to describe a problem that needs to be fixed from an outside perspective. Instead, we are talking about challenges that communities have identified and the changes they want to see.

Artists and arts organizations can use their creative processes and the imagination they inspire to help communities invent new solutions to historic challenges. From using lighting to increase safety and help pedestrians navigate a city, to the more aspirational use of beauty to help change a community’s narrative, creative placemaking projects can help communities address their most pressing concerns.

⁷ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York City, NY: Random House, 1961).

Planning

Creative placemaking engages residents in the neighborhood development process. It solicits input and suggestions through rapid prototyping and iterative design so that residents may determine the future of their community. Some community planning and development is done to communities. Most successful community planning and development is done by and with communities. Designers, planners, and community developers have seen the benefits of allowing people to use public spaces before making permanent infrastructure investments in them. Engaging with a community at the beginning of a project promotes understanding of how people currently use space and how they are likely to use space in the future. Proper planning often negates the need for “fixing” later. The arts, by bringing people together in a way that fosters both individual identity and group solidarity, can facilitate community-engaged and community-led planning efforts.

Creative Placemaking in Action

The following profiles describe 16 projects that ArtPlace has supported. Creative placemaking is at work in communities of all sizes and in all areas of the country—from Anchorage, Alaska, across to Charlotte, North Carolina—because artists are an asset that exists in every community. Not every community has waterfront access, a strong public transportation system, or a major hospital or university. However, every community has people who sing, dance, and tell stories. These sixteen projects represent some of the functions of creative placemaking and how it is at work.

Jamie Bennett is the executive director of ArtPlace America, a partnership among 14 foundations, 8 federal agencies, and 6 financial institutions working to position art and culture as a core sector of community planning and development in order to help shape a community’s social, physical, and economic. To date, ArtPlace has invested \$56.8 million through 189 grants to creative placemaking projects in communities of all sizes across the United States. Until December 2013, Jamie served as chief of staff at the National Endowment for the Arts. Previously, he served in similar roles at the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and to the president of Columbia University; provided strategic counsel at the Agnes Gund Foundation for 8 years; and worked in fundraising at The Museum of Modern Art, the New York Philharmonic, and Columbia College.

The framework below showcases some of the many different ways that creative placemaking projects are employing arts-based strategies to achieve place-based outcomes.

What Creative Placemaking Can Do

	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Strengthening Economic Development	Drive economic diversity, new investments, and new access points to participate in growing economies	The REVOLVE program of the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation has paired artists and pop-up businesses in vacant storefronts along Livernois Ave to catalyze interest in the community's revitalization (<i>Detroit, MI</i>)
Seeding Civic Engagement	Connect community members to one another, as stewards of their place, and to a shared sense of the future of a place	International Sonoran Desert Alliance hosts traditional and contemporary Tohono O'odham and Mexican artists to create a tri-national border-themed art installations, bringing the community together around a broader vision for their place (<i>Ajo, AZ</i>)
Building Resiliency	Help re-establish normalcy, generate new community assets, and provide psycho-social relief following a natural disaster, community tragedy or long-term disinvestment	The new Prattsville Art Center and Residency serves as a central community hub and engages artists to reimagine the future of this rural town as it recovers from devastating 2011 floods (<i>Prattsville, NY</i>)
Contributing to Quality of Life	Create new amenities and increase access to public spaces, resources, and infrastructure to increase attachment to place	The Near Westside Initiative has increased recreational, social, and economic opportunities in for residents in their neighborhood through engaged scholarship, innovative design practices, and community coalition building (<i>Syracuse, NY</i>)

How Creative Placemaking Can Do It



How Creative Placemaking Can Do It

	ANCHORING	ACTIVATING	"FIXING"	PLANNING
Strengthening Economic Development	Town Square Anchor for a Changing Skyline <i>Miami-Dade County, FL</i>	REVOLVE Detroit <i>Detroit, MI</i>	Irrigate <i>St. Paul, MN</i>	Arts and Culture Temporiams <i>Washington, DC</i>
Seeding Civic Engagement	Sonoran Desert Retreat Center and Residencies <i>Ajo, AZ</i>	The Great Chicago Fire Festival <i>Chicago, IL</i>	The ARtery <i>Milwaukee, WI</i>	Fairmount Cultural Corridor <i>Boston, MA</i>
Building Resiliency	Prattsville Art Center and Residency <i>Prattsville, NY</i>	World Garden Commons <i>Fargo, ND</i>	Art and Ecology Campus at Brightwalk <i>Charlotte, NC</i>	Design/Relief <i>New York, NY</i>
Contributing to Quality of Life	SALT District <i>Syracuse, NY</i>	Follow the Light <i>Anchorage, AK</i>	The Santo Domingo Heritage Trail Arts Project <i>Santo Domingo Pueblo, NM</i>	The Porch at 30th Street <i>West Philadelphia, PA</i>

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