Culture and Creativity Are Fundamental to Resilient Communities

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Natural disasters test the resilience of vulnerable communities because they exacerbate both the already high barriers to social, economic, political, and environmental resources, as well as individual limitations due to illness or disability.[1] As a national intermediary with local insights and connections, Enterprise Community Partners has helped community development stakeholders that are facing the effects of climate change to think one step ahead, secure their physical assets, and meet the needs of residents. Through Enterprise's investments in long-term recovery and rebuilding post-Katrina in the Gulf Coast and post-Sandy in New York, as well as more recently in Houston, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Northern California, we have learned that surviving—and thriving—often comes down to people's ability to support each other and seek out help in moments of need.

At the same time, the national dialogue about "creative placemaking" has expanded beyond an economic development framing to recognize that culture and creativity, artists and designers, can play a significant role in building community resilience. This raises such questions as: What helps communities survive, withstand, and even thrive in the face of chronic and acute threats? How might people and institutions strengthen their capacity to adapt? Can community development strategies that honor culture and activate creativity increase social cohesion and resilience in measurable, long-term ways? If "research reveals that arts, culture, and creative expression are important determinants of how communities fare and that, by extension, a full understanding of U.S. communities is not possible without their inclusion,"[2] what would it look like if they were integrated as essential components of a resilience strategy for all communities?

Through our partnerships, we have found that investments in climate and cultural resilience need to focus on community-defined vision and goals, address needs specific to the context and population, employ healing-centered processes, and prioritize vulnerable communities.[3] With these guiding tenets, collaboration between creative practitioners and community developers can amplify community resilience outcomes. This article shares the

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1   National Collaborating Center for Determinants of Health, http://nccdh.ca/glossary/entry/vulnerable-populations.
2   M. R. Jackson, "Measuring Cultural Vitality in Communities," *Communities & Banking* (Federal Reserve Bank of Boston) Spring (2008): 16-19.
3   Meghan Venable-Thomas, "Can Creative Placemaking Be a Tool for Building Community Resilience?" (DELTA Doctoral Project, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2018).

evolution of Enterprise's thinking and programs, highlights lessons learned through collaboration, and surfaces questions for research and practice.

Why Resilience?

Evidence has shown that vulnerable communities "experience disproportionate, multiple, and complex risks to their health and well-being in response to climate change."[4] These climate-related stressors also exacerbate racial inequities that have been embedded in our country's fabric since its beginning, contributing to the outsized impact on people of color.[5]

Research on resilience and survival after natural disasters increasingly validates the importance of social cohesion—the sense of belonging and voluntary social participation of the members of society, and the bonds and trust between individuals, communities, and institutions[6]—in a community's response and recovery process. Research also shows that the daily stressors vulnerable communities face—from job loss to health issues to public safety concerns—test their resilience in similar ways to disasters.[7] Therefore, culture and creativity are not only forms of identity and expression; they are survival strategies and should be considered a vital part any community's resilience toolkit.

Some community development tools address short-term, more visible, and often more acute needs for recovery, while others support long-term recovery and rebuilding and, perhaps more important, help build adaptive capacity that reduces the trauma associated with chronic and acute stressors. Over the past 30 years, a comprehensive approach blending access to capital and programmatic innovations, along with policy advocacy, has proven essential to Enterprise's work in distressed communities across the United States. The community development field can expand its existing set of tools by working in partnership with artists, community-engaged designers, and culture bearers to build the resilience of vulnerable populations.

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4   J. L. Gamble et al., "Populations of Concern." In *The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment* (Washington, DC: U.S. Global Change Research Program, 2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.7930/J0Q81B0T.

5   Carmen Gonzalez et al., "Climate Change, Resilience, and Fairness: How Nonstructural Adaptation Can Protect and Empower Socially Vulnerable Communities on the Gulf Coast" (Washington, DC: Center for Progressive Reform, 2016).

6   Xavier Fonseca, Stephan Lukosch, and Frances Brazier, "Social Cohesion Revisited: A New Definition and How to Characterize It," Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research 32 (2) (2019): 231-53, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13511610.2018.1497480.

7   Daniel P. Aldrich, "Urban Resilience and Implementation: A Policy Challenge and Research Agenda for the 21st Century," *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 26 (2018): 403-10, http://daldrich.weebly.com/uploads/1/5/5/0/15507740/aldrich_et_al-2018-journal_of_contingencies_and_crisis_management.pdf). Georgia State University, "Fort McPherson Rapid Health Impact Assessment: Zoning for Health Benefit to Surrounding Communities during Interim Use" (Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University, June 2010), www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2010/06/fortmcpherson_at_ays_129.pdf.

Collaboration as a Tool for Learning

Collaboration strengthens social cohesion and builds resilience because it requires groups with different strengths and assets to form bonds.[8] Since 2000, Enterprise has created programs that explicitly leverage design, cultural expression, and participatory process as essential tools for collaboration that can address the challenges of community development. From partnering architectural designers with community development organizations through our Rose Fellowship program, to empowering developers to be leaders in design excellence through our Affordable Housing Design Leadership Institute, to launching our nationally recognized Green Communities Criteria, we have seen how infusing collaboration across disciplines, partners, and scales of practice can improve community development outcomes.

In 2016, with support from The Kresge Foundation, Enterprise began to envision how a creative placemaking strategy might fit into our larger body of work across the country. We hypothesized that creative placemaking could be especially effective at building social cohesion—an essential component of resilience—and that the words "culture and creativity" represented the process and intention behind how this would happen. We launched the Climate & Cultural Resilience (C&CR) grants for community development groups to strengthen the connection between building climate resilience infrastructure and social cohesion.[9]

The selected organizations in Atlanta, Chicago, San Francisco, Duluth, MN, and Mingo County, WV, framed a local climate resilience challenge in terms of human impact, such as heatstroke, asthma, expensive flood damage remediation, and extended power outages. Through collaboration with residents, artists, and other creative and cultural practitioners, their projects built local partnerships and made buildings and systems more resilient.

The organizations also expanded economic opportunities; they hired artists as full-time staff or for specific commissions and contracts, developed new businesses, created jobs, and offered paid job training. These tactics allowed them to explore new ways of working, tap into the cultural identity and narrative of the community, and reframe what resilience meant in each place. In turn, this deeper understanding led to more relevant and sustainable projects.

The relationships that formed between residents, developers, artists and designers, policymakers, funders, and investors over the course of this work affirmed that all communities and sectors can deploy culture and creativity as meaningful tools for change. *Uplifting local culture*—as the American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO) in Duluth did with a series of events on its roof garden featuring indigenous artists, performers, and educators—*and engaging in a creative process*—like making paper together, as Enterprise did with C&CR grantee groups—can put stakeholders in a position of common ground, reducing hierarchy and establishing a more level place from which to collaborate. These practices can create a foundation for new systems to emerge that support more equitable outcomes and, eventually, a new balance of power for previously disenfranchised communities.

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8   Aldrich, "Urban Resilience and Implementation."
9   For more on the Climate & Cultural Resilience program and case studies, see "Made to Last: A Field Guide to Community Resilience," www.enterprisecommunity.org/resources/made-last-field-guide-community-resilience-vol-1-8271.

This Belongs to Us: Oakland City's Participatory Process

The Oakland City neighborhood in Atlanta is bounded by Lee Street, Interstates 85 and 20, and the Beltline Westside Trail. A MARTA public transit station is within walking distance. The Utoy Creek Watershed provides the neighborhood with lush greenspace and an expansive tree canopy. Oakland City residents describe with pride their homegrown economy that includes open-air markets, neighborhood gardens, and community daycares. However, Oakland City is on the precipice of change.

Rapid regional growth has impacted nearly every neighborhood in central Atlanta. Increased demand for housing, coupled with the transformation of the Atlanta BeltLine from an abandoned railroad corridor to a multi-use trail with planned light rail transit, means this neighborhood is now experiencing intense development pressure. Local residents, over 90 percent of whom are African American, are feeling the threat of gentrification and displacement.

Enter the TransFormation Alliance, a group of collaborators leading Atlanta's response to the Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC),[10] which operates at a systems level to promote racial equity, health, and climate resilience in six U.S. regions. Through a grant from Enterprise, the TransFormation Alliance implemented *This Belongs to Us,* a C&CR project in Oakland City to advance SPARCC's resilience and equity goals.

Among many stressors facing the community, recurrent basement flooding from the Utoy Creek Watershed often occurs during heavy rains, leading to structural damage plus financial and health impacts on homeowners. The city was planning needed sewer and sidewalk upgrades in the neighborhood. This presented an opportunity to build green infrastructure that addressed both climate and cultural resilience through public art that would integrate community stories, environmental education, and local history into the built environment. The context of development pressure, serious watershed and safety issues, a desire for commercial development, and increasing concerns about displacement set the stage for a culturally responsive participatory process.

Brandon Jones, a local researcher, theater artist, and anthropologist working as an arts organizer with arts and social justice organization WonderRoot, mobilized the community to have a voice in the development of the neighborhood, building on recent momentum from a community-engaged art project that resulted in a mural at the Oakland City transit station. The *This Belongs to Us* project was a collaboration with WonderRoot, along with Southface—an organization with expertise in sustainability technology, research, and workforce training—and West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA)—which represents African American neighborhoods in West Atlanta that are most inundated with environmental stressors but least represented at environmental decision-making tables. The project team held six public meetings in the elementary school and other community spaces, identified community champions for a C&CR Advisory Committee, and held one-on-one conversa-

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10   For more information about the SPARCC Initiative, see www.sparcchub.org/about/.

tions with community residents. They asked such questions as: "How would you describe your community? What makes this community distinct that you would like for people to know? What does home mean to you? What about your community should never be lost?"

Along with the community engagement and listening process, the project team supported the development of a local Climate Resiliency Plan to identify climate-related risks and opportunities and help build resilience in ways that addressed specific priorities of Oakland City's residents. *This Belongs to Us* celebrated history and current culture, built shared identity, and marked this identity in the built environment. The collaborators reported that the project has illustrated immense community buy-in for climate-related training and artistic green infrastructure solutions.

This Belongs to Us grew new connections and organizing muscle that have prepared the community to bring its power to the negotiating table going forward. WonderRoot, Southface, and WAWA have earned the trust of community members and the city, enabling them to act as a liaison across local government departments. In this role, they are empowered to co-create solutions for Southwest Atlanta and Oakland City that align with resident needs and values and elevate those priorities to city leaders.

Lessons for Research and Practice

Over many years of collaboration with community-based nonprofits, combined with recent investments in understanding the role of artists, designers, and culture bearers in community development, several lessons have emerged about what is needed to make progress toward a more resilient and equitable society.

Artists Can Help Reimagine the Process of Community Participation

In expanding the Rose Fellowship to include artists, Enterprise has begun to more explicitly investigate the roles community-engaged artists take and the processes they use. Arts-based activities—such as creating a theater piece, building a sculpture, or writing a song—can be effective for involving community members in a process that is not traditional or formulaic. Artists can engage the community in new ways and introduce partnership dynamics that can shift the balance of power and ideally lead to more equitable outcomes.

One such example is theater artist Ashley Hanson's work with the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership, where she invited residents in the town of Milan, MN, to participate in story circles that led to *This Land is Milan,* a musical about the town's history and future. The musical was written, produced, and performed by over 40 local residents, or 11 percent of the town's population. It helped to bridge connections and understanding between longtime residents and new immigrant populations, unifying instead of dividing residents.[11]

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11   This Land is Milan, http://placebaseproductions.com/.

Artists Can Play a Range of Roles—from Fulfilling a Commission to Advising on a project to Managing a Program Strategy

As with *This Land is Milan,* community developers can commission artists to produce a project in collaboration with the community. AICHO in Duluth took a different approach, using an advisory group to provide guidance and cultural grounding for projects. In Atlanta, the *This Belongs to Us* team benefited from the leadership and project management of Brandon Jones, who helped map cultural assets, convene an advisory council, and commission artists.

Creative and Culturally Responsive Community Process Requires Time and Flexibility

Our partners often articulate the need for creative financing tools that provide capital while also allowing for the unpredictability inherent in the planning and pre-development phases. This includes support for community-engaged processes that lead to better-designed buildings. Although this takes time, investment in an engaged process helps reduce opposition and streamline approvals across multiple levels—from residents to city permitting offices.

Flexible financing also impacts how buildings are operated and programmed. For Hira-bayashi Place in Seattle, a temporary origami graffiti installation on a building slated for demolition was intended to draw positive attention to the future of the site. The development team was able to budget for a series of art installations throughout the building—ensuring that what was conceived as a temporary participatory art project became integrated permanently throughout the design and life of the building.

The Arts Provide a Means for Communities to Shape Their Own Narratives

Culture and creativity are powerful tools for communities to create a positive narrative about who they are and what they want their futures to look like. AICHO in Duluth hosted cultural events for the public that included a moonlight drum circle and the unveiling of a mural that was the city's first representation of Native American imagery created by an Indigenous artist. By telling their own stories, communities gain the power to define their current reality and build agency, as opposed to carrying forward lingering narratives from others in the past. Collaboration that honors cultural identity and creative expression is a particularly effective strategy to build bonds and bridges between people and groups, which are key elements of social cohesion that have been shown to impact survival.[12]

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12   Daniel P. Aldrich, "The Importance of Social Capital in Building Resilience." In *Rethinking Resilience, Adaptation and Transformation in a Time of Change,* edited by Wanglin Yan and William Galloway (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2017).

Community Developers Can Partner with Artists to Build the Evidence Base on Social Cohesion

Organizations across the community development field are hungry for indicators and measures of impact, especially related to social cohesion. Researchers in other fields have identified many of these indicators, but it takes time and expertise to evaluate impact in community contexts and on organizational practices. Although Enterprise has data on how the collaborative process influences and changes projects in the short and medium term, we need more research on impact over time in order to more tangibly demonstrate the value for projects across the country. Stronger evidence of impact would allow investors to factor this "double bottom line" into the calculation of their desired returns, which could broaden the set of interested financial players.

Conclusion

A dynamic tension exists between the pace of investment, financing, development, and construction, and the process of a community's evolution from disenfranchisement to healing, belonging, and ownership. Grounding community development in local culture, creativity, and resident leadership can ease this tension and increase community resilience in the face of climate change and other risks. To get there, collaboration across sectors and with residents is essential. The increasing evidence that equitable creative placemaking strategies can build resilience validates and expands the potential role of cultural and creative practitioners in community development.

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