SPRING 2024

The Art of Creative Placemaking in Maryland

STUDENTS

Maya Bellas, Sydney Neal, Olabisi Omoniyi-Alake, Reva Vyes

UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF

Professor Paul Brown

COURSE

PLCY400: Senior Capstone in Public Policy

PALS

An initiative of the National Center for Smart Growth
Kathryn Howell, NCSG Executive Director
Kim Fisher, PALS Director

Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability

Table of **Contents**

Executive Summary 1

Introduction 2

Methodology 2

Findings and Discussion 3

- **Creative Placemaking Defined** 3
- **Best Practices** 4
- **Case Study: Mount Airy Parklet** 9

Recommendations 11

- **Local Government** 11
- **State Government** 13

Conclusion 13

Resources 14

Executive **Summary**

How can local governments in Maryland with no experience in creative placemaking engage in the process, and how can state agencies, such as the Maryland Department of Planning, aid local governments? This paper outlines the best practices for both local and state governments.

It recommends local governments address areas of underuse, address their demographic, involve their communities, and find metrics to measure the outcomes of a project.

It also recommends that state agencies provide funding and structural support for local creative placemaking projects, and to be an open resource for local jurisdictions. These recommendations will be of value to both state agencies and local governments interested in fostering creative placemaking projects in their communities.

Introduction

This PLCY400 Senior Capstone Project, undertaken in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP), explores the potential of creative placemaking to revitalize and engage communities across Maryland. Our research empowers local governments inexperienced in creative placemaking to initiate these projects within their jurisdictions. It also provides recommendations for state agencies, like the MDP, to support these processes and further partnerships between local and state governments.

This paper outlines best practices for government involvement in creative placemaking, providing a roadmap for fostering strong partnerships with residents. Additionally, it showcases a successful case study at both the state and local levels—the Mount Airy Maryland Pride creative placemaking project between Carroll and Frederick Counties.

This paper analyzes the potential impacts of creative placemaking on economic growth, civic participation, and urban renewal to offer a comprehensive understanding of the use of creative placemaking. Because creative placemaking is a relatively recent phenomenon, there is a lack of research on its long-term impacts. This paper adds to the research through research methodologies that include interviews conducted with experts in creative placemaking in Maryland, literature reviews, and documented case studies in the United States.

This project aims to equip local governments with the knowledge and resources to conduct creative placemaking that addresses the needs of their community and fosters more engagement in jurisdictions throughout Maryland.

Methodology

A combination of interviews, literature reviews, and case studies inform the local and state government recommendations. Extensive research into creative placemaking literature—definitions of creative placemaking, documentation of past projects, best practices, value indicators, and step-by-step guides—provided a baseline understanding of creative placemaking within and outside of the public

policy realm. Interviews with experts enhanced our grasp on creative placemaking by delving into past projects and learning about the relationship between local project developers and the state.

Professor Ronit Eisenbach, the director of UMD's Creative Placemaking minor, deepened our understanding of creative placemaking's potential to impact a community, as well as best practice concepts for the process. Through his experience as the Director of the 11th Street Bridge Park project along the Anacostia River, Scott Kratz shared his recommendations for leading large-scale, community-centered placemaking projects. Finally, we interviewed the Department of Planning at Mount Airy, Maryland. With this interview, we aimed to get insights into the entire process of creative placemaking, with emphasis on one example that we could use in the presentation to our client.

These data sources provided a thorough and faceted conception of creative placemaking and the potential for local and state government involvement.

Findings and Discussion

Creative Placemaking Defined

Coined by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus in 2010, the term creative placemaking describes the process in which "partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities" (Smart Growth America, n.d). Professor Eisenbach embellished this definition by articulating that creative placemaking fosters meaningful connections between people and space that artists are uniquely suited to do.

Creative placemaking is distinct from placemaking in that creative minds—visual artists, performers, food creators, and more—can elevate space to spark conversation, not just achieve desired policy outcomes. Additionally, successful placemaking relies on the long-term management, evaluation, and evolution of space. Creative placemaking holds the potential to not only stimulate growth and civic engagement but also enhance people's lives through deep connections to community members and spaces.

Placekeeping differs from placemaking in that it leverages local resources to maintain and enhance a community's social and spatial fabric (Manklang, 2018). Creative placemaking emphasizes partnerships with a range of groups, but placemaking and other neighborhood revitalization projects run the risk of losing local integrity in the process and its outcomes. Placekeeping focuses not only on elevating and preserving physical space, but also on "supporting the ability of local people to maintain their way of life as they choose" (Manklang, 2018).

This report focuses on creative placemaking, however, its recommendations and best practices are organized to prioritize the locale at every step of the process.

Best Practices

The Project for Public Spaces advises that creative placemaking processes follow five steps:

1. Define place and identify stakeholders
2. Evaluate space and identify issues
3. Place a vision
4. Undertake short-term experiments and management
5. Conduct ongoing reevaluation and long-term improvements.

The remainder of this subsection will delve into each step, incorporating relevant literature and professional advice to further inform creative placemaking entrepreneurs.

1. Define Place and Identify Stakeholders

Local leaders, nonprofits, and artists hoping to initiate a creative placemaking project must learn the lay of the land and establish partnerships well before the design stages. Throughout the process, but particularly in this first step, gathering intel from the community, staying true to their identity and desires, and paving the way for their leadership is key.

As the Project for Public Spaces asserts, "The community is the expert." Community members can provide an understanding of a space's historical, functional, and cultural aspects, and the critical issues at play. Municipal governments and local leadership are best equipped to identify stakeholders. Once a project leader identifies stakeholder groups, community outreach may

include surveying small business owners, calling and emailing residents, and holding public meetings and workshops. Project leaders must remove barriers to community participation. For example, not another meeting for parents and business owners to add to their schedules, but joining existing public meetings, placing the project on those agendas. Providing food and childcare can ease attendance logistics and show the community you care. Project leaders should be mindful that residents may be accustomed to officials asking for their input and failing to follow through. It's important to overcome this trust deficit by exemplifying at every step that decision-making power and influence are in the community's hands (S. Kratz, personal communication, April 29, 2024).

Creating and structuring partnerships among municipalities, artists, nonprofits, experts, and funders occurs in this step, as well. Project leaders should create asset maps of local nonprofits, arts organizations, and other talent already working in the area. Avoid being duplicative! They may have skills that could support the project.

Municipalities and artists must partner with intention; these partnerships are referred to as M/A programs. Both municipalities and artists offer unique perspectives on placemaking. Artists can help tackle external goals like facilitating cross-cultural relationships and internal goals that address an agency's internal needs directly such as "everyday issues like staff development, agency processes and systems, and organizational culture, and outreach strategies." Municipalities can enhance civic engagement, improve agency outreach and communications, promote under-funded municipal resources, and deepen understanding of the community. Recognizing each other's value while structuring the partnership will ensure future success. Structuring involves establishing scope, timeframe, and roles. M/A programs must position local artist agencies, nonprofit arts and civic organizations, place-based funders, and other third-party partners in their operating structure. Grounding the process in shared values and articulating specific roles set up the program for success (Cohen-Cruz and Korza, n.d).

2. Evaluate Space and Identify Issues

The Project for Public Spaces offers four key attributes of space: access and linkages, comfort and image, use and activities, and sociability. Evaluating these attributes in a given place can steer project leaders toward areas of improvement

and drive vision. Accessible spaces can be reached by foot, public transit, and car, and are arranged openly. Onlookers can visualize the space up close and from afar. Comforting spaces invite visitors through positive perceptions of cleanliness, safety, and seating availability. Usable spaces provide opportunities for interacting with and on the space, such as a playground, building blocks, markets, or thought-provoking art. Sociable spaces foster relationships between visitor and visitor and visitors to space. Do diverse friends, families, and groups convene here regularly? Do they care about the space by, for example, picking up trash? Project leaders must identify obstacles to establishing these community attributes if they are lacking.

Issues may exist in spatial use and design, but problems more than likely coincide with social issues and inequities in a locality. Thorough inventory-taking in the first step will likely reveal social issues faced by community members. Surveying those issues can show if they're disproportionately felt by some groups or differ between groups. Housing, employment, health, crime, and racial inequities may be the most pertinent issues creative placemaking can tackle. Ensure that data collection around those social issues stems from the people affected. Consider how you can tackle those inequities through the process. For example, providing construction training to locals if employment is low in the area (S. Kratz, personal communication, April 29, 2024).

3. Place a Vision

Defining a vision and desired outcomes at the outset of creative placemaking projects is key to success. Defining civic outcomes may be daunting, especially because outcomes such as community building and equity are vague, encompassing terms that tend to be employed in public policy. Tracing a "continuum of impact" can help project leaders articulate specific outcomes and indicators for project goals, processes, and evaluation. Consider asking yourself and your team the project's what, who, when, and how during this stage.

- What — the condition, behavior, or characteristic to be measured
- Who — the target population to be measured
- How much — the degree of change that is expected
- How many — the amount of change among the target population that would indicate a successful level of achievement
- When — the time frame in which this change should occur.

These factors outlined in Animating Democracy, a project of Americans for the Arts, can guide the design and measurement of outcomes once the project is underway. Circle back to the concrete indicators and vision as the project progresses and use them as a guidepost for evaluation.

If you struggle to define evaluation criteria and methods, rely on a municipality's existing expertise or connections to experts, such as an urban planning department in a local university. Placing vision must be a collaboration between stakeholders. It involves the nitty-gritty process of defining outcomes and indicators for data collection led by experts and the aspirational vision-setting of artists and community members. Grounding vision in community voices with the help of arts, government, and funding institutions will establish a fitting direction to adhere to throughout the process.

4. Short-Term Experiments and Management

The Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC) framework involves low-cost, high-impact incremental tactics to hone a community's creative energy to fuel new uses and revenues for transitioning spaces. LQC projects may involve pieces like recycling bins, benches, outdoor cafes, and events like markets and concerts. As sites and communities are constantly in flux (Eisenbach), starting projects small and inexpensively may be ideal for project implementation and outcomes. Employing the LQC framework may also align more with community members resistant to investment in "creative" fields. This strategy assists project leaders in providing acute results that coincide with the project objectives set at the beginning of the project. The LQC may not apply to larger-scope projects, but the essence of the framework—trial and error—and openness to amending plans is crucial.

5. Ongoing Reevaluation and Long-Term Improvements

Project leaders should clarify the purpose of project evaluation, considering who the evaluation serves, the nature of the project, challenges and factors contributing to the effectiveness of the partnership, and the project's desired effects. Evaluation requires resources and dedicated personnel to effectively document partnerships and progress throughout the project. As entities begin to collaborate on a creative placemaking project, stakeholders must identify parties responsible for evaluating, how to document the process and the work, and define meaningful outcomes. Those responsible for evaluation should represent

project constituents and context to ensure that evaluation is relevant and inclusive. Successful project evaluation teams may include municipal evaluation resources; creative minds; community partners, participants, and other stakeholders; and evaluation professionals.

Community members may experience several long-term improvements through the creative placemaking process. Alternatively, a poorly or inequitably executed process can result in gentrification, exclusivity and displacement, and a fracturing of community engagement. Like the creative placemaking process overall, pitfalls must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Urban sites, for example, are more susceptible to gentrification than rural sites. It is also important to remember that the context of place and community is different among stakeholders. Historical harms such as urban renewal projects and the 2007 housing crisis have disproportionately impacted communities of color and shaped their connection to place.

The Town Theory of Change (TToC) is a response to these pitfalls. It is a conceptual framework to mobilize transformative community change that links arts, culture, and the design process to local and national change (Komarek-Meyer, 2019). This logic model is a framework for conceptualizing and planning that outlines the goal of a creative placemaking project “to advance sustainable creative placemaking activities through community development and diverse cross-sector partnerships on the local and national levels.”

The model has four tenets: leadership, cross-sector partnerships, financial resources, and community. The TToC recognizes that projects can also address structural and systemic inequities, and categorizes them as follows: economic change, social change, and physical change (Komarek-Meyer, 2019). When implemented correctly, creative placemaking can have compounded positive impacts at many community levels. The process works to increase awareness, change beliefs, and inspire actions that result in community, cultural, and economic development.

Policy professionals have developed value indicators to evaluate the overall impact of creative placemaking projects. One of the most widely used set of value indicators was created in a collaboration among Landcom, Newcastle University, Macquarie University, the University of New South Wales, and City People (Cohen, 2018). The mission was to create a methodology and toolkit for

public officials and community members to better understand the value and impact of creative placemaking in urban spaces.

The value indicators are:

- Environmental (built and natural), for example, upgrades and investment in the public realm, walkability, and environmental benefits
- Social, for example, civic participation, health and well-being
- Economic, for example, education and skills development, employment, increased infrastructure investment, increase in property values, tourism and place-brand value
- Place attachment
- Cultural memory
- Reduced crime.

Arts and culture is not listed as an area of outcome value in its own right, because the literature suggests that the arts act as a catalyst for creating economic, social, and environmental value (Cohen, 2018). Research suggests that there is no inherent independent value in arts and culture, but attention to and investment in culture underpins all the value indicators. The value indicators toolkit offers rubrics for community and government stakeholders and can be found in the sources section of this report.

Case Study: Mount Airy Parklet

Mount Airy is a middle/upper-middle class community in Frederick and Carroll Counties, Maryland. Interviews with the Director of Planning, John Breeding, and his associate Ashley Collier about the creative placemaking projects offer insights into projects and process. The Mount Airy Parklet is here analyzed for its full step-by-step process and the outcomes of a local creative placemaking project. This “Maryland Pride” parklet attempted to facilitate community engagement and function by celebrating Maryland’s native plants and pollinators.

The first step in the process was the initial planning stage; the Mount Airy Department of Planning engaged community stakeholders by outlining the project goals to align it with the broader community’s needs. This step also included deliberations on the safety features, raised garden beds, artistic elements, seating, etc. that would ultimately create an engaging and enticing experience.

The next step was to establish community partnerships and project funding. The Department of Planning partnered with the 4 County Lions Club, which contributed labor and resources throughout the parklet project. Including the Main Street Program provided financing for the safety features, artistic incorporation, and more. The Department of Planning also sought sponsorships and donations from local businesses to cover extraneous costs. For the artwork/design portion of the project process, Mount Airy Department of Planning collaborated with local mural artists on a design that would effectively bond and engage the community. The design chosen was the Maryland flag, to express the “Maryland Pride” theme. Collier noted that the “Maryland Pride” theme most strongly facilitated community bonding and connection (Breeding & Collier, 2024).

As in Mount Airy, there must be extensive research among stakeholders and community members to determine features and actions that would support a successful project. In Mount Airy, these creative placemaking projects fostered belonging and created a sense of cultural competence among the public.

During the design/artwork phase, the artwork was constantly monitored for its expression of the goals to emphasize Maryland plants and pollinators and to advance the downtown atmosphere. This step also called for the supervisor (Collier) to manage the artists’ needs, scheduling, budgeting, and overall planning of the project.

The next step was to construct the parklet’s garden beds in partnership with the 4 County Lions Club. The club members volunteered to construct the raised garden beds with sourced materials and ensured safety features such as ADA accessibility. The Planning Department also engaged community volunteers to help, which enhanced community engagement during the development stages.

The next project steps involved creating seating and directional signage, repairing issues with the foundation or accessibility, and planting the garden. The final step was to facilitate local engagement and outreach through educational workshops and events, and to organize garden care to maintain long-term engagement.

Grants from the state, local businesses, and community donations covered the project costs. Success was measured through economic activity, foot traffic, and

social media presence, indicators that expressed the effects on parklet goals established at the beginning of the project.

Breeding and Collier suggested more help from the Maryland Department of Planning would have been valuable. The processes for State grants and meeting ADS accommodations and safety approvals were longer and trickier than necessary (Breeding & Collier, 2024).

The Mount Airy Parklet project demonstrates a community's power to facilitate its own solutions and strengthening. Through creative measures, community engagement throughout the planning process, and collaboration, the Mount Airy Department of Planning completed a successful project that facilitated the engagement they aimed to achieve.

Recommendations

Local Government

The involvement of local jurisdictions is crucial to successful creative placemaking projects. It is recommended that local governments facilitate and implement creative placemaking to address underused spaces, address their demographic, and foster community collaboration. They must also find the best metrics to measure project outcomes.

1. Address Underused Spaces

Local governments can begin by identifying underused public spaces in their communities. This could include vacant lots, neglected parks, or underutilized infrastructure. For instance, the Mount Airy Parklet project used dead spaces, such as parking lots, during COVID-19 to facilitate community engagement. This allows for increased civic participation while addressing both the use and visual appeal of a space. Underused spaces can be identified by surveying the community or conducting a spatial analysis.

2. Identify the Demographic

Understanding cultural backgrounds and prioritizing marginalized residents is essential. It allows a creative placemaking project to resonate with the community and ensure inclusivity. Community leaders should consider the bounds of the project and ways to incorporate residents. Efforts should foster a sense of ownership and empower residents to participate and engage with both the creative placemaking project and local government.

3. Fostering Community Collaboration

Creative placemaking thrives on community involvement. Local governments have the unique ability to act as facilitators, bringing together residents, community organizations, artists, and local businesses. This can be done by public calls and partnerships.

Local governments can engage with their constituents via social media platforms. Public calls can feature requests for funding, donations, supplies, and ideas for the creative placemaking project.

Developing partnerships with existing community organizations can help identify existing community initiatives and further civic participation, as well as find avenues for funding.

4. Measurement Metrics

To accurately assess the impact of creative placemaking projects, local governments need to establish clear metrics in advance. For instance, one local government may prioritize increasing awareness of marginalized identities within the community, and another may prioritize economic growth and tourism. The local government should clearly define a goal for the creative placemaking project before finalizing the project. Furthermore, they need to establish clear and relevant metrics at the outset, such as increased foot traffic in previously underused areas, positive media coverage of the creative placemaking project, or an increase in racial minorities in the jurisdiction. Defining clear goals and metrics of success allows local governments to adjust the project as needed.

State Government

Since creative placemaking is a new concept, and is being newly explored by many localities, the Maryland Department of Planning can have a strong role in facilitating and supporting the process. First, MDP can provide best practices guides and creative placemaking resources to local governments. With localities still new to or unaware of the concept, MDP can facilitate creative placemaking as a solution to local issues, or to reach local goals. Offering best practices guides and creative placemaking resources and examples, localities can gain inspiration and motivation and avoid past mistakes, while developing their unique locally centered approach to their projects and plans.

Also, MDP can provide funding and structural support for locally led projects. As shown in the Mount Airy Parklet case study, the project would have never been able to take shape without a substantial State grant.

Likewise, by providing structural support, the State can become a facilitator as well. Mount Airy had repeating struggles to get approved and certified for State codes and accommodations. With future structural support from the State, cases like these can be more swiftly processed and facilitated to completion and success.

Conclusion

Creative placemaking is a relatively new concept that is being further explored and developed with new explorations and projects. Its benefits are being seen in many localities worldwide. As these localities explore creative placemaking as a solution to unique issues, or to promote engagement and culture, the idea and scope of creative placemaking develop and grow.

It's important to note that creative placemaking does not take a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Instead, localities must understand the community, its goals, and develop uniquely created methods to effectively achieve them. This process leads to more successful outcomes and engages the community and planners in the process itself.

Immersing yourself in the community as a planner is essential since it gives perspective on how to engage the community and increase the potential of the locality.

Resources

Breeding, John and Collier, Ashley (Mount Airy Department of Planning), personal communication, April 2024.

Cohen, M., Gajendran, T., Lloyd, J., Maund, K., Smith, C., Bhim, S., & Vaughan, J. (2018). Valuing creative placemaking: Development of a toolkit for public and private stakeholders. NSW Government.

Cohen-Cruz, J., & Korza, P. (n.d.). *Evaluation & Documentation*. Municipal Artist Partnerships.
https://municipal-artist.org/nuts-and-bolts/the-nitty-gritty/evaluation/

Eisenberg, Ronit (University of Maryland), personal communication, March 2024.

Komarek-Meyer, G. (2019). Gentrification, Displacement & Creative Placemaking.
https://usfblogs.usfca.edu/nonprofit/files/2019/08/komarekmeyergrace_6191661_65710208_Gentrification-Displacement-Creative-Placemaking-Evaluation-Methods-for-Nonprofit-Arts-and-Cultural-Organizations.pdf
Kratz, Scott (11th Street Bridge Park Project Director), personal communication, April 2024.

Manklang, M. (2018, August 22). *Creative placemaking, placekeeping, and cultural strategies to resist displacement*. U.S. Department of Arts and Culture.
https://usdac.us/blogac/2017/12/11/creative-placemaking-placekeeping-and-cultural-strategies-to-resist-displacement

Project for Public Spaces. (n.d.). Placemaking: What if we built our cities around places?

https://uploadsssl.webflow.com/5810e16fbe876cec6bcbd86e/6335ddc88fbf7f29ec537d49_2022%20placemaking%20booklet.pdf

Understanding indicators. Understanding Indicators | Animating Democracy. (n.d.). https://animatingdemocracy.org/social-impact-indicators/understanding-indicators