

Making Up Creative Placemaking

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Abstract

Creative placemaking is an increasingly prevalent form of planning practice that invokes arts and culture as tools for revitalization. Planners, policymakers, funders, and practitioners are engaged in a discursive struggle to define what is meant by creative placemaking and what value it holds for cities. Using frameworks developed by Foucault and Hacking, I analyze the emergence and ongoing contestation of this term, contrasting the way creative placemaking is understood and enacted by actors in Philadelphia with definitions employed by national funders. I argue that practitioner and community voices deserve amplification in the unfinished work of creative placemaking as urban practice.

Keywords

creative placemaking, discourse, Philadelphia, arts, arts economic development

“This has caused me the greatest trouble and still does always cause me the greatest trouble: to realize that *what things are called* is unspeakably more important than what they are.”—Friedrich Nietzsche

“Does the availability of a classification, a label, a word or phrase, open certain possibilities, or perhaps close off others?”—Ian Hacking¹

Creative placemaking is an emergent form of cultural policy and planning practice that has recently come to dominate the agenda of many arts funders. This paper mines the complexity of the concept and how it has come to be understood in the field. To get the reader started, here is a baseline definition: “Creative placemaking is when artists, arts organizations, and community development practitioners deliberately integrate arts and culture into community revitalization work—placing arts at the table with land-use, transportation, economic development, education, housing, infrastructure, and public safety strategies” (National Endowment for the Arts [NEA] n.d.). Creative placemaking champions artistic projects made in public settings rather than funding artists to create masterworks in isolation. According to former National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Rocco Landesman, it is designed to gain arts “a seat at the table” where domestic policy more broadly is made, increasing funding for artists and cultural organizations accordingly (Legro 2010).

Each major promoter and practitioner of creative placemaking seems to operate according to its own definition, leading Ann Markusen to classify creative placemaking as a “fuzzy concept” that means different things to different people yet flourishes because of, not despite, its imprecision (Markusen 2013, 293). Creative placemaking joins other fuzzy concepts in planning, such as “community development,” “new urbanism,” and “sustainability,” that have been

subject to prior interrogation (Stoecker 1997; Beauregard 2002; Markusen 2006). These concepts fail when they are employed without critical scrutiny, and the practices associated with them require ongoing unsettling and contestation. For example, the field has continually scrutinized community development’s objectives and tactics to ensure its ongoing relevance, from how it embraces community organizing (DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge 2010) to how leaders of color are supported (Axel-Lute 2017b). The point is not to fix the meaning of a concept for all time but to set the terms of debate so that all the stakeholders have standing and agency to meaningfully evolve the concept.

Since 2010, rapid adoption of the term *creative placemaking* has led to confusion and consternation over what activities ought to be classified under that rubric and how to measure their impact. In this paper, I question how the act of defining creative placemaking both limits and liberates creative placemaking practice. I assert that prior analyses of creative placemaking fail to fully address the competing forces undergirding the concept. I question how different epistemological assumptions lead to different outcomes and therefore expectations of stakeholders, particularly local practitioners. These practitioners—the parties charged with implementing creative placemaking projects—hold their own beliefs, which sometimes stand in conflict with funders’ assumptions. Therefore: How has the discourse shaping

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creative placemaking configured conditions on the ground? If creative placemaking is to thrive, how can the various parties assert their needs, find points of agreement, and build an equitable and productive field of practice?

To answer these questions, I offer an account of creative placemaking that emphasizes the role of policy as discourse, moving beyond a focus on the discrete behaviors of rational actors. My inquiry is informed by Michel Foucault and Ian Hacking's explorations of naming and categorization, using their insights to deepen my understanding of the relationship between ontology, identity, and practical outcomes. As a means of situating these discursive moves in the lived experience of practitioners, this paper relies on interviews with creative placemaking grantees and local stakeholders in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, funded as part of a national creative placemaking grant program. In each interview, I asked stakeholders what the term *creative placemaking* meant to them to capture the variation in working definitions held by the grantees especially. I detail how the top-down, funder-derived use of the term resonates on the ground, many of whom had been engaging in practices like creative placemaking for years (or decades) before the appellation was placed on their work. I find that practitioners have many concerns about creative placemaking, ranging from the term itself, to the role of artists in funded projects, to the potential for creative placemaking to usher in gentrification and displacement.

After discussing these findings, I conclude by exploring the challenges inherent in constituting a discursive field and suggest next steps for generating rapport between funders and practitioners of creative placemaking. I advocate for an inclusive, iterative project of definition that critically embraces a diversity of practices constituting creative placemaking. A politics of placemaking based on such a project of mutual learning and sustained yet productive disagreement encourages funders and policymakers to be inspired by local knowledge and lived experience.

Constituting Creative Placemaking

Creative placemaking as cultural policy emerged in the early years of the Obama administration (Markusen and Gadwa 2010), yet its roots go deeper. The idea of placemaking (without the *creative* modifier) has a history of its own, linked to the work of urban planners and theorists beginning in the 1950s. Placemaking was conceived as a reaction to a perceived loss of a sense of "place" amid the architectural dystopia of the urban renewal era. Placemaking has a variety of influences, primarily Jane Jacobs's neighborhood activism (Redaelli 2016). Though the creative placemaking moniker is newly minted, similar practices exist throughout the history of city making (Bianchini 2012). Scholars have traced creative placemaking back to a tradition of arts-based economic development that has roots in the City Beautiful movement of the late nineteenth century (Ashley 2015;

Vazquez 2012). Yet the reification of "creative placemaking" as a discursive practice, informed and enforced by government agencies, funders, and other institutions, renders it salient in ways that prior forms of arts-based economic development or cultural planning have failed to achieve.

In the wake of the 2008 recession, the Obama administration encouraged federal agencies to develop place-based policy solutions in response to the spatial nature of the financial crisis. Creative placemaking fit that bill by moving the arts out of the studio and into neighborhoods (Chu and Shupbach 2014). The prime movers behind creative placemaking at the NEA were Joan Shigekawa and Rocco Landesman. Landesman, NEA Secretary from 2009 to 2012, was a highly successful Broadway producer who sought to use his entrepreneurial acumen to raise the revenues and the profile of the agency (Axel-Lute 2017a). Landesman's deputy, Joan Shigekawa, came from the nonprofit cultural sector, having previously served as a senior official at the Rockefeller Foundation. While there, Shigekawa had commissioned research on the social impact of the arts and the agglomerative effects of natural cultural districts (Stern and Seifert 2007).

Landesman and Shigekawa asked researchers Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus to produce a white paper laying out the concept and purpose of creative placemaking (Gadwa Nicodemus 2012), which was released in 2010 and continues to be a benchmark for work unfolding in the field. Markusen and Gadwa were substantially influenced by the work of Maria Rosario Jackson at the Urban Institute (e.g., Jackson 2011, 2012) as well as the work of the Social Impact of the Arts Project (Stern and Seifert 2007, 2010). Markusen and Gadwa highlighted the importance of cross-sectoral intergovernmental partnerships, thus advancing the interests of the arts sector among a broad coalition of policy actors in Washington and beyond (Redaelli 2016). Their place-based approach to the arts combined with placing arts in partnership with better endowed federal agencies fulfilled both Shigekawa and Landesman's goals to bolster the standing of the NEA and meet the administration's place-based policy mandate.

The concept of creative placemaking outlined by the NEA offers a fundamentally different role to the artist than traditional studio or performance practice. The artist is one member of a coalition of stakeholders working in a partnership to develop projects that have a public impact. Even traditional public art commissions are different than creative placemaking as the projects are not designed in the studio to please a design review panel. Generally, they are conceived in consultation with a broad array of actors, and the artist's vision is not necessarily the driver. Most of the discourse on creative placemaking emphasizes projects driven by partnerships. Some guides reclassify participants as "creative placemakers" rather than artists, developers, citizens, and so on, including the artists as one voice among many (Borrup 2016). This leads some artists and not others to pursue

creative placemaking projects, including artists trained in social practice and outreach, though even these artists may struggle with the competing interests in any given placemaking project.

Creative placemaking projects vary in form, scope, and intention. A recent NEA (2016) publication profiles projects as varied as a celebration of tribal history and artistry among the tiny Squaxin tribe in Washington State to a public park connecting stormwater management and physical fitness in Chattanooga, Tennessee. With the range of projects classified as creative placemaking, it can be hard to know what fits under the category—or what would fail to fit under its capacious umbrella. Some creative placemaking projects are based around time-based performances, and some are site-specific installations. Some projects are temporary, such as a festival, and some are intended to be permanent, as in projects where vacant land is reclaimed and rendered more beautiful and functional.

Cara Courage (2017) has attempted a placemaking typology that offers a starting point for evaluating and theorizing practice. In Courage's model, there are four forms of placemaking—*public realm*, *creative*, *participatory*, and *social practice*—with public realm and creative placemaking being relatively coordinated and top-down and participatory and social practice placemaking being relatively bottom-up and informal. Each of these modalities of placemaking can be implemented in strategic, tactical, or opportunistic ways. Notably, creative placemaking, in Courage's model, is considered relatively formal, presumably because of its close identification with funder initiatives such as the NEA's Our Town program.

The various discourses that undergird creative placemaking serve to configure a field that incorporates public and private funders, artists, community developers, residents, and others, all trying to figure out how to imbue this category with life. And they seem eager to tackle the challenge. Since 2010, creative placemaking as cultural policy and planning strategy has been broadly adopted beyond the confines of arts and community development. A few years after the concept made its debut, it was not hyperbole to label creative placemaking "ascendant cultural policy" and note the "unprecedented speed and coordination with which [creative placemaking] was adopted" (Gadwa Nicodemus 2013, 215). Despite an uncertain future for funding sources of creative placemaking, at the moment, it is very much alive in cultural planning and policy.

Contesting Creative Placemaking

Despite the rapid adoption of creative placemaking, the concept has faced resistance in three main forms. The first questions the measurement of creative placemaking's outcomes and efficacy, the second critique questions the uniqueness and authenticity of creative placemaking interventions, and the final form of resistance is a political critique of creative

placemaking's potential for exclusion and dispossession. I will address each of them in turn.

Creative placemaking's efficacy is bound up in an ontological dilemma: What is it meant to be and do? Creative placemaking is informed by at least two competing discourses: economic development and social impact of the arts (Stern 2014). These two objectives can stand in opposition to one another, which partly explains ongoing contestation over creative placemaking. The economic development justification for creative placemaking can be traced back to the creative cities paradigm that emerged in the 1990s (O'Connor 2012; Pratt 2009). The discourse around creative cities was championed by Richard Florida, whose rhetoric around the creative class catalyzed a wave of entrepreneurial "fast urban policy" in the early 2000s that fueled loft conversions and cultural district designations from Michigan to Baltimore (Peck 2005; Ponzini and Rossi 2010). The subsuming of a class of practitioners under a moniker like *creative placemakers* certainly resonates (at least partially) with Florida's (2002) attempt to classify many urban professionals under the name *creative class*.

The foundational NEA white paper appeals to economic development considerations as a justification for creative placemaking, including extended discussions of the creative economy and the notion of artists as producers of economic innovation (Markusen and Gadwa 2010). Yet even as Markusen and Gadwa foregrounded the economic development potential of creative placemaking in their foundational white paper, some of the theoretical work and placemaking case studies they highlight draw from a competing tradition. Projects that seek to build local ties and advance community development are usually resident-led and resident-focused rather than being targeted at the "visitor class" (Eisinger 2000). These examples recall the social impact approach advocated by Mark Stern and Susan Seifert, which emphasizes the importance of local, organically formed cultural clusters and a robust arts ecosystem (Stern 2014) rather than advancing the arts as an economic driver. Thus, there is a tension in the core discursive foundations of creative placemaking from the very beginning. To be fair, the same tension around art's fundamental value (Is art justified *intrinsically* by the pleasures it produces, or does it need to function *instrumentally*, to do things like fuel the economy?) reverberates throughout the fields of cultural policy and arts advocacy (Brown and Novak-Leonard 2013; McCarthy et al. 2004).

The issue of creative placemaking's so-called "outcomes problem" was raised in a May 2012 blog post on the popular arts and culture website Createquity (Moss 2012). The post was a reaction to the initial evaluation schemes of the NEA and ArtPlace, which relied on a bundle of "vibrancy" indicators ranging from housing values to cell phone use. A positive score on the indicators would ostensibly indicate successful creative placemaking. These indicators are grounded in trying to increase economic development. Moss's (2012) post criticized the indicators on methodological grounds and stated

that they indicated the lack of an overall theory of change. Markusen (2013) and Gadwa Nicodemus (2013) echoed and amplified these criticisms but felt that in time and with better measurement, creative placemaking would find its footing. This issue of measurement, the very choice of what to measure, informs the second critique, which sees the indicators as a drive toward making over places to attract higher income cultural tourists, as opposed to supporting resident-focused redevelopment.

A related critique of many placemaking interventions is that many are highly derivative and unoriginal. Planning and urbanism websites like Planetizen and Project for Public Spaces have wondered if placemaking has become cliché or cookie-cutter, whether food trucks and Adirondack chairs make a place unique. Tom Borrup (2016), one of the key advocates for inclusive arts-based community development, worries that we are developing homogeneous places. Indeed, with mayors, developers, and funders browsing the same websites, going to the same national conferences, and seeing what is getting built, it is no surprise that there is some duplication of tactical placemaking interventions. Often these interventions match the aesthetics and interests of middle class, mostly white consumers, which leads to the third and most salient critique of creative placemaking.

Several voices in the field critiqued the initial formulation of creative placemaking as potentially dangerous to the equity outcomes in communities. Roberto Bedoya, former head of Arizona's Tucson-Pima Arts Council, vociferously raises this critique. Bedoya (2013) points out a consequential "blind spot" for placemaking advocates, reminding them that the history of placemaking in the United States calls to mind forced removal of American Indians, Japanese internment camps, and urban renewal. All these earlier attempts at placemaking were designed to advance a sense of belonging for one group of people at the expense of another. His analysis is informed by George Lipsitz's (2011) concept of a "white spatial imaginary," in which nonwhite cultural praxis is deemed a cultural threat. A contemporary example of the white spatial imaginary (one that many of us might recognize) is when gentrifiers look around an "emerging" neighborhood and ask "Where is the yoga studio? Where is the organic food co-op?" These new residents bring a set of class-informed assumptions, a "habitus" that allows those with purchasing power to begin to reshape the environment to match their spatial imaginary (Bourdieu 1989; Grenfell 2014).

When places are remade in this way, the consequences can be harmful to longstanding, often marginalized residents. Bedoya (2013) argues for an "aesthetic of belonging" to guard against the impulse to use creative placemaking as an excuse to make places over according to a racist, exclusionary image.

I assert that these critiques of creative placemaking, while necessary, are not sufficient on their own. The fundamental issue with creative placemaking is not that it is a fuzzy concept, though it is, and not that it has the potential to exclude

many people from its project, though it surely does. The challenge of creative placemaking arises from something prior: the practices of naming and categorization themselves. To illuminate this issue and suggest some ways out of the dilemmas of creative placemaking, I offer a reading that focuses on placemaking as discourse, informed by the work of Ian Hacking and Michel Foucault. This reading offers a way to critically engage creative placemaking so that it can be more equitable and effective.

Creative Placemaking as Discursive Field

The evolution of creative placemaking has been discussed elsewhere (Axel-Lute 2017a; Nicodemus 2013; Redaelli 2016), yet these accounts are largely descriptive and based on an epistemology of rational actors working in concert to deliberately birth creative placemaking as we now know it. By contrast, my understanding is grounded in the notion of policymaking as discourse, foregrounding the complex and contradictory strands that came together to form creative placemaking, and help to explain the ongoing resistance to the concept even as it gains traction in planning and policy circles.

A discursive reading of policy formation contrasts with a rationalist view that imagines policy as a measured governmental response to discrete problems that exist "out there" in the world (Bacchi 2000). Discourse holds more than historical or linguistic interest: It regulates practices and sets the conditions under which policy operates. This approach is grounded in the theories of Michel Foucault, who saw discourse as a means of defining and producing the objects of knowledge (Hall 1997). Discourse is a system that represents knowledge on a particular topic at a particular time. Because meaning inheres in our social practices and not just in language, all practices serve a discursive function (Wetherell, Taylor, and Yates 2001). Discourse is thus bounded in time, as is the contemporary practice we have come to know as creative placemaking, which collates a set of activities that were known under other names at other times.

Foucault's work is relevant in the case of creative placemaking as it is grounded in a reading of historical and social conditions geared toward both critique and renewal (McHoul and Grace 1993). Individual actors play a role in the making of policy, but they do so within discourse's ambit, enveloped by its shaping power. These actors are not, however, utterly helpless: There exists some "space for challenge" of established pathways of power (Bacchi 2000). It is important to underscore the dialectic between control and freedom in Foucault's vision of discourse so as not to feel trapped under its weight. As Inch (2018, 197) explains, Foucault:

emphasized that his understanding of power was not only negative but also positive, in the sense that power-relations are always productive and not simply repressive. Thus,

whilst there can be little doubt that Foucault saw dispersed, localised power-relations as tending to be shaped by wider patterns of domination, and in turn to have “hegemonic effects” that reproduce “global strategies,” he also argued power is always also limited and contingent in its reach and effects.

The naming of “creative placemaking” inauguates a new stage in the relationship between art and community development, recalling Ian Hacking’s (1986, 229) seminal work on “making up people.” Working from Foucault’s ideas on discourse, Hacking suggests that the act of classifying people actually “changes the space of possibilities for personhood,” a theory he called *dynamic nominalism*. Hacking’s work on multiple personality disorder, for example, illuminated how the category was created, and then people emerged with psychiatric symptoms that fit the category. Until the diagnosis of multiple personality disorder existed, so-called “splits” couldn’t properly exist. After the diagnosis came into fashion, it became possible for people to exist under that rubric as well as to retroactively label people as having had multiple personalities even though it wasn’t thought about that way at the time. Hacking calls this process “making up people.” As he explains: “Social change creates new categories of people, but the counting [of them] is no mere report of developments. It elaborately, often philanthropically, creates new ways for people to be” (223).

For Hacking (2004), making up people is linked to control, for once a category is enforced, certain people can benefit from it, be victimized by it, or be excluded from it altogether. Sometimes this fight for control begins from above, as a community of experts creates a category that in turn shapes reality. Sometimes it can arise from the behavior of the people affected by the label. Thus, Hacking’s approach is both dynamic and dialectical; he believes that acts of classifying people may change people, but the changed people in turn affect the classifications.

Hacking (2006) sketches a five-part framework instructive for locating the pressure points in contesting and transforming the working definition of creative placemaking to ensure it will be responsive to the needs of residents and practitioners instead of meeting funders’ needs alone. Hacking’s model consists of (1) classifications (e.g., creative placemaking), which chase (2) people (now called *creative placemakers*) and absorb them and their peculiar tics under a categorical aegis. These classifications are discussed, defined, promoted, and enforced through (3) institutions. These institutions produce (4) knowledge, which gets disseminated through popular and scholarly channels. Finally, there are (5) experts, who work with this knowledge and legitimize it with their imprimatur.

In the case of creative placemaking, the operations of this framework are fundamentally clear. Experts working at the behest of the NEA created the classification. The public and private institutions that fund creative placemaking ensured

that the classification would be promulgated and enforced since there was funding attached. People with diverse artistic and community development practices began to adapt their work, either rhetorically or materially, to match the funding guidelines that classified them as creative placemakers. Not long after, a variety of experts came to the party, seeking to produce knowledge about this burgeoning field of placemaking, staking their scholarly reputation and their consultancies on the successful uptake of the term. Yet to balance the expert discourse framing the term, it is worthwhile to explore how the affected parties interpret the term, placing them in substantive dialogue. These acts of adaptation, of trying to squeeze into the creative placemaking tent, are signs of the kind of dialectical and dynamic nominalism elaborated by Hacking.

Hacking and Foucault’s work offers a useful way to think about creative placemaking. It is a “made-up” category, christened from above by funders and experts to describe a set of practices that previously existed under a range of other names. Like Hacking’s sensational stories of multiple personality arising in popular culture in the late twentieth century, people since 2010 have been spotting acts of creative placemaking all over the place where none existed before. Practitioners are scrambling to have their work recognized as creative placemaking so that they may be funded for the work they do. Some of these practitioners have a track record of projects stretching back decades that anyone might consider creative placemaking, now that creative placemaking is a “thing.” Others are adapting their practices or opportunistically pursuing entirely new areas of practice to meet the definitional demands of funders like ArtPlace, Kresge Foundation, or the NEA.

Though it may be possible to render creative placemaking as the rational response of a few key actors to a need to diversify cultural funding, the discursive formation is more manifold and complex—it situates the actions of policy players in historical, social, and rhetorical context. And the power differentials among the various participants that constitute the field of creative placemaking help to explain the continued contestation of creative placemaking in national discourse, which has been reproduced in my local Philadelphia interviews. By expanding the field of view, creative placemaking can be seen in more nuance, and the contours of its future left more widely open—even if one day the primary policy actors are moved by choice or circumstance to pivot away from enacting creative placemaking as it exists today.

Definitions from below: Practitioner Voices

In 2014, Kresge awarded \$3.5 million to support the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in starting a national creative placemaking program. (LISC is an intermediary that bundles funding from public and private sources and deploys it in communities around the United States by partnering

with community-based organizations at the local level.) Philadelphia, where I work, was one of five funded sites, each with slightly different implementation schemes. In Philadelphia, funds were competitively awarded in Eastern North and West Philadelphia through “requests for proposals” jointly issued through local CDCs. Grants were approximately \$20,000 to each local project for Phase I. Phase II funds were awarded in 2018. Each location has its own research evaluator, working with the local LISC chapters and grantees over a three-year period.

LISC’s approach to creative placemaking is rooted in its philosophy of comprehensive community development, which seeks to address housing, education, health, safety, and economic development (Local Initiatives Support Corporation n.d.-a). When it comes to the arts, LISC is clear that it favors resident-led engagement with the goal of grassroots neighborhood development. LISC clearly calls out equity and inclusion in its creative placemaking material (Local Initiatives Support Corporation n.d.-b).

I was engaged by LISC beginning in 2015 to serve as the Philadelphia research evaluator (LISC hired other evaluators for its other sites). In late 2015 and early 2016, I interviewed about thirty stakeholders, ranging from LISC staff to creative placemaking grantees, artists, residents, and other key stakeholders. I was given contacts for interviews by LISC local program officers, and I sought out additional interviewees who participated in creative placemaking public meetings in West and North Philadelphia. I announced my role at these meetings and my openness to interviewing anyone who was interested in the project, which resulted in a few additional interviews. One-third of the interviewees worked in North Philadelphia, one-third in West Philadelphia, and one-third had a citywide purview. Though I did not ask for interviewee demographics, the pool appeared to contain women and men of a variety of ages as well as Hispanic, black, white, and Asian interviewees. Interviews were semi-structured and tailored to the specific projects and neighborhoods in which the grantees worked. I recorded interviews and transcribed the interviews, and I analyzed them using qualitative data analysis software. This article uses pseudonyms for all participants.

Before presenting these findings, I want to issue a few caveats. The first is that I spoke to a relatively small sample of creative placemaking practitioners, all based in Philadelphia. Second, because the LISC Philadelphia program office chose these projects, the responses may be skewed to the perspective of the projects that were selected (though I did interview artists who were not selected for grants). Third, all these practitioners are somehow connected to the LISC/Kresge project, which may predispose them to see this program favorably. Also, there are other prominent projects in Philadelphia that have been funded by ArtPlace, Our Town, or a local Philadelphia foundation. These findings may or may not be generalizable to other funders and their grantees.

As the research evaluator for Philadelphia, one of the main questions I asked interviewees was to define creative placemaking and discuss the relevance of the term to their practice. For some grantees, creative placemaking was a new term to describe projects they already had underway. Other grantees were novices at creative placemaking, pulled into projects by the grant requirements that each submission consist of at least two partners. I thought it would be useful to get a baseline definition from people who were about to be formally engaged in projects funded under a creative placemaking rubric. As the projects evolve over the grant period, I plan to ask them again about how their view of creative placemaking has changed, if at all. Last, I view this as a set of reports from the field of practice, and therefore I am not going to critique or contextualize each observation from my own subject position—the point is to let the practitioners speak. What follows are some of the key themes that emerged from these discussions.

Longstanding Practice Versus “Flavor of the Month”

There was a widespread feeling among interviewees that they have all been doing creative placemaking for a long time and that it is only recently becoming recognized as such. Indeed, Philadelphia has some projects that have been cited as pioneers in the field, before the term itself existed (some were even profiled in Markusen and Gadwa’s foundational white paper). Because some grantees have been doing arts-based community development since the 1970s, as in the case of Norris Square Neighborhood Project (which built beautifully ornamented *casitas* reminiscent of those found in Puerto Rican villages) and the Village of Arts and Humanities (which reclaimed a number of vacant lots to create an internationally renown peace garden), there was both relief at having new sources of funding mixed with consternation at the idea that creative placemaking is a novel practice. As in Hacking’s model, it is the classification that is chasing the people rather than the other way around. Nevertheless, practitioners eager to see their projects funded are adopting the label and participating in the creative placemaking discourse, enrolling themselves as subjects in the collective project.

Some felt that creative placemaking is merely the funders’ flavor of the month, a trend like others that have come (and gone) before. Mark, who works for a local funder, reflected that a couple of decades ago, it was festival marketplaces that were going to save cities, then pedestrian malls, and so on. Now the new “savior” is creative placemaking and has the “credibility of being a movement.” Sandra, an arts advocate, spoke humorously about the flavor of the month quality of creative placemaking, comparing it to the 1978 movie *The Wiz*. The person related:

There’s a scene in *The Wiz* where they get to Oz and the great powerful Wiz . . . you can’t see him but he’s [on] a big

speaker and all these people are dancing and the Wiz comes on and he says “the new color is red.” So, all the lighting changes. It appears that all the outfits changed and everybody is like, “red is the new thing.” And he comes back on the speaker and he’s like, “bump that, it’s green.” And everyone is hype about green. It’s funny but sometimes I think that’s the way funding happens.

At least one interviewee, including Melanie, a community development specialist, felt that the problem with the term is that it is “jargon-y and foundation-y”—referencing its coinage by top-down entities such as NEA, ArtPlace, and so on. She asked, what do these foundations, who are based in the arts, know about community revitalization? The person added sardonically: “It’s like asking a Supreme Court judge to make a decision on a stop-and-frisk case. Have you ever been in a cop car? Have you ever been arrested? You’ve no idea what you’ve been talking about.” Melanie raises the question of the value of local knowledge and how that can be scaled up to the national level where decisions are made.

Many stakeholders felt ownership over their practices but expressed concern that their work would be temporarily “hot” and attract a lot of newcomers to compete for funding, only to be abandoned by the funders when the next trend emerges. For the staff at a North Philadelphia community arts organization, their longevity in the community was a cornerstone to the success of their creative placemaking work. The executive director, Mira, explained: “I’ve spent a lot of time looking at why spending a very, very long time in a community . . . is absolutely vital to making change in communities like this. . . . It’s not just, you know, turn and burn.” Even if programs come and go, the organization itself has been there for decades and plans to stay.

Contesting the Term

Even the term itself, *creative placemaking*, was contested by several of the participants in this research. These folks were pushing back, as Hacking predicts; those who had been named were reacting against the name. Two respondents found themselves more interested in “place discovery” rather than placemaking. And they were not the only interviewees to spontaneously offer a substitute term for creative placemaking. Mira in North Philadelphia suggested “space making” as an alternative, explaining:

We’re not interested in making place. It’s very externalized: making a destination, making a place for people to come, for people to use, whether it’s people in the neighborhood or outside the neighborhood. We’re talking about systematically and systemically oppressed, right. We’re talking about creating space to envision a better future first.

Another term in use in the field (though it was not proffered in the interviews) is *city repair* (www.cityrepair.org), a term that speaks to the real physical transformations needed in

neighborhoods with distressed urban infrastructure. Many of the projects undertaken in Philadelphia had some element of physical transformation or public space reclamation. But when cities are repaired, who is the intended user of that repositioned place? Who decides how a place should be made, discovered, repaired? For Mira and other Philadelphia interviewees, the key drivers of successful creative placemaking are longevity, community standing, trust, and local control of the process. They are concerned that the economic development and external focus of some creative placemaking serves the white spatial imaginary. This notion of *remaking* a place, or making up a place where there was perceived to be none there, is a central concern of community-based actors. In the wrong hands, it is not only the placemakers who are “made up” but the places themselves.

Role of Artists Versus Community Developers

The role of artists in creative placemaking was contested among the participants in the interviews; in part, it depended on whether I was talking to artists or community development practitioners. This speaks to the challenge inherent in the formulation of creative placemaking as driven by partnerships and not by a single lead artist. When partnerships are formed, who is ultimately responsible to carry out the vision? Sandra, the arts advocate, spoke of the importance of including artists as stakeholders in creative placemaking processes, not just as hired hands. For her, the goal of creative placemaking should be to build artist capacity, but it is unclear in the discourse formation whether the artist should lead, the community planner, or another entity. She explained:

When you talk about creative placemaking and artists being called upon to be a part of that, I really want to support efficacy and capacity building for artists. . . . You don’t just go in and get hired and you leave and it’s done. But if we have artists that are more equipped to project manage, to be a part of the process, to have feedback to the process, it enriches what is happening for the organization that’s bringing them in for the funder who wants results and for the artists that are at a table. They’re not just hired help and then you know, they bounce.

As much as everybody involved in the interviews believes in the power of the arts, not everybody wants to see artists running the community development process. Mark, the foundation officer, was troubled by the idea that artists will have a seat at the community development table. In creative placemaking, there may be more potential for creative engagement than some planning interventions, but the person admitted:

I don’t want artists running the government. We’d be cautious of freighting too much expectation on the arts community. Artists are not going to save the world. I think it’s these things have the tendency to sort of build up steam and run

away. Next thing you know all you're going to do is have the artist and they'll . . . develop all the solutions to your community development needs.

Some respondents felt that creative placemaking is an opportunity to teach artists and arts organizations to speak the language of community development so they can connect and be effective in supporting their communities. Yet for this to happen, there needs to be a lot of technical assistance paired with the funding. Ellen, leader of a West Philadelphia community development organization that supports creative placemaking, was sensitive to perceptions of artists that creative placemaking might cannibalize some of the support the arts had previously received for doing its core work. Some artists and cultural groups might see CDCs as "interlopers in a funding field that has traditionally been theirs. I kind of feel for them with that because I think it's valid."

Ellen went on to talk about the challenges and benefits of being a CDC getting engaged with arts-based community development:

We're not an arts organization, but we might get funding that's arts related. We're almost forced to work with our local arts community because we couldn't do that without them. So I think that it creates a really great opportunity for community development corporations and other similar organizations that don't have a traditional mission or focus around art or creativity to work more closely with that community in achieving shared goals or at least realizing that there are shared goals and working towards achieving them together.

Ricardo, a leader of a North Philadelphia community development agency, also felt strongly that there was a role for CDCs to work with artists. Without physical development, it would be challenging for artists to do their work. He stated:

Before you hang a piece of art, you need a wall. So my focus is . . . what we're doing with the [LISC] program. I need an infrastructure that will be a building for there to be an activity that will generate people. It's the secondary and tertiary effect that you see where you have camaraderie, cohesion, [and] community development.

Role of Partnerships

One of the core ideas of creative placemaking, at least in the NEA framework elaborated by Markusen and Gadwa and endorsed by the LISC Philadelphia call for proposals, is that creative placemaking is best undertaken by partners from multiple sectors. In this way, it can increase the chances for systemic change. I asked interviewees to talk about the role of partnerships in their creative placemaking work. At its best, interviewees felt that creative placemaking could be an opportunity to bring different kinds of people together in a

meeting place, such as students and neighbors in North Philadelphia, suggested one North Philadelphia community developer. But to be effective, creative placemaking needs to be continuously enacted by the same players, not just one-off projects by organizations chasing dollars.

At the same time as partnerships are important, there is the possibility that they compel "coerced collaboration," as one of my interviewees put it. A LISC staff person went on to explain that the insistence on partnerships to get a Kresge grant meant: "I think it could end up meaning that we just arranged a marriage for them and they have to endure 12 months of it!" Nevertheless, this person saw the arts and culture world as fundamentally more cooperative and less competitive than the real estate development world:

When you make those introductions and they find some commonality, it could be just [for] a short time and opportunistic for that grant but in many cases I think, especially with the stakeholders here, I perceive them as slightly different than like community development where . . . [you] continually have a pipeline to produce projects to show your competency and also generate fees for your organization. It is really fierce and is place-based. But I think in this world of sort of arts and culture and sort of social service organizations, that sort of competitiveness is not as strong.

Concerns about Gentrification

Gentrification was another theme that drove my discussions with stakeholders. There was a sense by some that creative placemaking is a cover for gentrification or at least an unwitting aid to it. Carlos, an Eastern North community developer, stated: "I'm really cognizant of . . . people feeling uncomfortable. There's change in their community and they feel unconformable and therefore displaced while they're in place." He went on to explain that the language itself carries some negative and disempowering consequences:

When you talk about creative placemaking or the creative economy, [it] is very aristocratic and top down . . . it's a cultural attitude that, oh those people don't know how to recreate. Let's come and tell them.

This notion that "those people" do not know any better reflects again concerns about the spatial imaginary that governs a given place. Other interviewees asserted that creative placemaking is often used as a lever for economic development in areas that are well off or close to it, explaining that creative placemaking does not really focus on what arts can do in low-income neighborhoods. In a way, it is the opposite problem: too little rather than too much intervention in low-income neighborhoods. It puts sheen on the top but does not address issues that continue to degrade the neighborhood until there is a forceful changeover of local residents as a result.

One solution, according to Anna, a citywide arts leader, is to "partner with those organizations that have deep roots and

anchors in these communities and know how to do this work, to revitalize them and sustain them.” This person felt that there was a tranche of “original placemakers” that have been doing this kind of work for several decades and not getting the level of support they deserve. She specifically mentioned organizations run by and supporting communities of color that are currently not getting institutional support or funding. She feels that they have been left behind for newer, “sexier” initiatives. These organizations have been highly dependent on philanthropy (grants and public funding), and when patterns of giving shifted, they suffered. The lion’s share of philanthropic funding goes to large institutions, not to the neighborhood organizations (Sidford 2011).

Discussion of Findings

In speaking to numerous stakeholders in LISC’s Philadelphia creative placemaking program, I found several issues that may provide fodder for continued funder and practitioner conversations. The first is the concern that creative placemaking is a funder-driven flash in the pan. The organizations devoted to these practices want some assurances that their work will not be forsaken if funder priorities change. Of course, practitioners are always at the mercy of funder priorities, but the rhetoric around creative placemaking is that it is a new form of cultural policy and is here to stay. If it is a new way of thinking about arts and culture, will it catch on, or will practitioners be expected to change their work in a matter of years when the prevailing winds change direction?

There also is ambivalence about the term *creative placemaking*. The ambivalence comes from its recent coinage, sudden diffusion, and the legitimacy of a term that was produced and promulgated primarily by funders. The practitioners feel “named” by the funders and are not sure they want to passively accept the name. Interviewees also see the potential for creative placemaking to harm the communities it purports to serve. Are funders asking grantees to make an uncreative place turn “creative”? Are these projects an invitation to the creative class to come in and take over these communities? Would a term like Roberto Bedoya’s *place-keeping* be a better alternative? This concern speaks to broader tensions around the role of creative placemaking in promoting gentrification and displacement.

Third, there is confusion about the role of the various stakeholders, especially artists, in creative placemaking processes. Are artists the leads of a project, or do they serve the community development or public safety interests? Is the purpose of creative placemaking to build capacity among artists? Or to reinvent the practices of community development to embody creative praxis?

Finally, practitioners are concerned about forming authentic and sustainable partnerships. The requirement to find multiple participants might lead to “coerced collaboration.” But is coerced collaboration bad in all instances? Might it be preferable to no collaboration at all? It remains to be seen

whether partnerships formed for the LISC grants will work out well or poorly; this is an area for future research in the subsequent phases of this and similar grant programs.

The plan for future research is to ask these practitioners about their view of creative placemaking again once they have completed the grants. I expect that their views will change over time; these interviews were conducted once grants had been announced but before they were executed; it will be useful to compare these impressions with the ones that follow from later interviews.

Conclusion

Creative placemaking stands at a crossroads. It is unclear as of this writing whether the NEA itself, much less the Our Town creative placemaking program, will survive the current presidential administration. The other major funder, ArtPlace, sunsets in 2020, and is actively thinking about the future of creative placemaking beyond its existence. Is creative placemaking just a funders’ flavor of the month? If it is going to succeed as cultural policy and community development strategy, creative placemaking needs to be institutionalized, and a field of practice needs to be built. Yet despite its best intentions, I believe that the funders of creative placemaking need to acknowledge the fundamental power imbalance brought into being by “making up people” and dubbing them creative placemakers, people who may previously have thought of themselves simply as artists, neighborhood volunteers, or community organizers. By inventing a term and putting significant new sources of funding behind it, the funders have set in motion a process of definition that has consequences both for the practitioners in the field and the funders themselves. In my research, I was curious how the field viewed creative placemaking in practice: Are practitioners the “naïfs” of placemaking, who work without a global, Cartesian perspective? Are funders and policymakers the experts? What is the rapport between the two, and where are the gaps?

Most importantly, a democratic, iterative project of “making up” creative placemaking will ensure it does not fall into the trap of serving Lipsitz’s white spatial imaginary. Communities facing urban change depend on seeing themselves represented in the way places are made, claimed, even repaired. To ensure a more equitable remaking of places, funders, policymakers, and practitioners should come together to deliberate and debate who stands to gain from the resources available.

Given the relatively brief history of “making up” creative placemaking and the relatively small group of people involved in producing expert knowledge in the funding and research communities, there is a path toward learning and change available to all of us. Instead of abiding only by expert knowledge, we can embrace what Chris Argyris (1977) called “double loop learning” in which knowledge is contested and modified based on the active input of multiple

classes of participants. In addition, a reflective stance toward policy is possible, and that process can include a multitude of stakeholders (Schön and Rein 2000).

Funders ought to amplify practitioner voices, to let the named affect the ongoing process of naming. Ian Hacking elaborated a dynamic, five-part structure for understanding how making up people works. Creative placemaking fits such a structure, in which experts in institutions produce knowledge that places people into categorizations. All the protagonists in this structure have a responsibility to engage in an ongoing, collective process of definition. Experts need to listen to practitioners, who have local, concrete knowledge of what works in their communities. And practitioners should take advantage of the knowledge produced by experts and disseminated through institutions as experts are able to synthesize experiences drawn from a range of projects in different geographies. There needs to be ongoing venues for this kind of information sharing to occur, and these interactions need to be undergirded by trust. In his later work, Hacking saw the value of adding face-to-face interaction to the work of building discourse; for Hacking, Foucault's distanced approached to discourse was completed by bringing in Erving Goffman's emphasis on shared interactions to expand the possibility for dynamism and change (Hacking 2004).

The major players in creative placemaking are working to achieve these goals. ArtPlace has made a commitment to research on the intersections between creative placemaking and issues like housing and public safety as well as national gatherings of grantees to build knowledge and relationships. The creation of these discursive and actual spaces allows for what Andy Inch (2018, 202), calls "cultural work," in which actors "individually and collectively, more or less actively, negotiate a sense of self and fit with prevailing regimes, sometimes in ways that work to reshape that regime itself." NEA has recently engaged LISC and PolicyLink in a national partnership to provide technical assistance for artists and residents (Hutter 2016). For a rapidly emerging and changing discursive field, the relatively small and close-knit community of funders and practitioners seems open to introspection and reflection about the nature of its collective work.

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Note

- Nietzsche (2011, 69); Hacking (2004, 285).

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