



THE EMERGING RELEVANCE OF CREATIVE PLACEMAKING WITHIN RURAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

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Background

In recent years, diverse communities have embraced a growing movement to foster and implement *creative placemaking*, a process involving public, private, and community partners working together to strategically improve the social and physical character of a community through arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking, particularly when incorporated into a broader community development approach, has been shown to be a powerful vehicle for fostering community connections and pride of place. The strength of creative placemaking is its ability to gather a community around a common experience and to provide a process by which the history and future of a place can be expressed and discovered collectively. Reorienting community investment toward an asset driven model, particularly in low-income and/or under-resourced communities supports stabilization, historic patterns, and equitable revitalization.

Traditional notions of housing development are commonly focused on housing delivery or land development. However, the shift to incorporate cross-disciplinary activities – including the infusion of arts and culture – has shown to be a tremendous “value add” for a project’s community development goals. The conceptual framing of creative placemaking does not solely reference any one element of art, culture, or physical housing development (to include architectural, interior, and landscape design), but collectively creating, making, or sharing.

Issues/Challenges and Opportunities

Creative placemaking relies on inclusive resident engagement to be successful. Gaining and maintaining equitable representation of the community can prove to be time consuming and an ongoing challenge, yet is also an excellent opportunity to build trust within communities.

Adding engagement and creative activities into already tight project budgets can be seen as adding undue costs. However, when understood as part of a holistic approach to community development, the long-term economic benefits outweigh the additional upfront costs.

The words “art” and “culture” can be intimidating and/or alienating to audiences who perceive these endeavors as “not for them.”

Discussion Questions

- What does “resident engagement” really mean? How does the process of securing inclusive resident engagement work?
- What are the financial factors that create both opportunities and barriers to incorporating creative placemaking into development projects?
- How are concepts like “art” and “culture” defined operationally? How can they be discussed and presented in a non-alienating way for audiences who do not usually gravitate toward them?
- How do you view community vitality, and what role does both the construction of housing and the process of developing housing play in contributing or detracting from community vitality?