
CREATIVE POLICYMAKING: TAKING THE LESSONS OF CREATIVE PLACEMAKING TO SCALE

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Abstract

As political forces reshape the role of localities, creative practitioners are uniquely positioned to directly affect the direction of development in new ways that build community power and position cultural considerations at the heart of governance. Social justice advocates believe that policy change offers the most direct route to advancing equity and transformation at scale. Inclusive practices like creative placemaking, an emerging model of equitable development, has the potential to help facilitate the development of participatory policymaking in ways that ensure that the voices of those with less historical political access and influence aren't excluded from transforming the systems that allocate power and resources. Despite this knowledge, equity-focused strategies often stop at the programmatic level. To date, key actors are investing in horizontal strategies to integrate creative practices across organizations, sectors, and systems. However, insights gained from local successes have not been fully translated vertically into systems-level policy change or to galvanize into a coherent ecosystem of social innovation. This paper examines how the rules of civic problem-solving are evolving to prioritize citizenship and leverage local knowledge, one expression of culture, by drawing on longstanding discourse in fields that range from architecture and planning to economics, political science, philosophy, sociology, and community psychology. The insights revealed suggest that by grounding practices within a systems change framework, acquiring new competencies, evolving institutional structures and roles, and expanding the application of creative practices to participatory policymaking, an inclusive set of stakeholders can advance a more transformative model of equitable development. Participatory policymaking should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather an effective means by which to promote human agency, intercultural dialogue, and societal wellbeing. Doing so can help to strengthen creative democracy, which recognizes that human imagination is the generative basis on which individuals and societies successfully engage with complexity, envision alternative futures, transform systems, and successfully adapt to change.

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A society's values are the basis upon which all else is built. These values and the ways they are expressed are a society's culture. The way a society governs itself cannot be fully democratic without there being clear avenues for the expression of community values, and unless these expressions directly affect the directions society takes. These processes are culture at work.

— Jon Hawkes, *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning* (2001)

The modern word *creativity* comes from the Latin term *creō*, “to create or make,” which stems from the Proto-Indo-European root *kerh*, “to cause something new to grow.” As a composite of the Greek word *demos*, “the people,” and *kratos*, “power,” the root meaning of *democracy* is “power of the people” (Ober, 2007). But power to create what? In modernity, democracy is often construed as being concerned with a voting rule for determining the will of the majority. Framing the purpose of democracy this way

minimizes its value and possible functions, particularly as a process that enables inclusive participation “in the governance of the polity” and “realization of commonly agreed collective goals” (Castoriadis, 1995).

Almost eighty years ago, philosopher John Dewey (1939) argued that democracy’s highest potential is the fulfillment of “community life” and a robust civic capacity to create new solutions to local problems. Dewey believed that human experience provides the insights necessary to bring about a vibrant and just society in which all share and to which all contribute. This conception of democracy recognizes the central role of citizens to not only authorize government to act, but to act with it, and even beyond it, if that is required to affect meaningful change. Dewey’s perspective on the ways local actors should cooperate based on personal knowledge complements political philosopher Hannah Arendt’s (1958) “theory of action” and use of the ancient concept of *praxis*. Praxis refers to the process of transforming ideas into action. For Arendt, praxis is the highest form of active life, or *vita activa*, which she analyzed through three fundamental human behaviors: labor, work, and action. For Arendt, human action refers to the capacity citizens have to envision new possibilities and the potential for those ideas to influence the shape and direction of the public sphere they share. To exercise effective political action, communities must first be willing and able to develop a shared identity. Arendt recognized this enduring challenge of participatory citizenship but also viewed the deliberative process of finding common ground as its highest value. By engaging in critical self-reflection Arendt believed that communities could continually renew themselves by asking: *who are “we,” what do “we” value, where do “we” want to go together, and how will “we” get there?*

Dewey and Arendt both believe that a vibrant democracy requires meaningful participation by an active citizenry who recognize the dynamic nature of communal living and draw from local culture to navigate change. In this context, culture can be understood as the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features that characterize a society or social group, including not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, embodied heritage, human rights, value systems, traditions, and beliefs (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2012). These dimensions of culture combine to produce place-based knowledge. Dewey and Arendt also see shared experience as the means by which individuals with diverse cultural identities exchange ideas, learn from one another, build trust, and eventually establish a shared vision for the direction society should take. This perspective complements that of human rights and social justice advocates who see the expression of cultural freedom as a necessary condition for democracy and essential component of human dignity.

Building on these ideas, a *creative democracy* can be considered one that intentionally strengthens peoples’ power to negotiate difference and affect change in ways that benefit everyone. In doing so, a *creative democracy* recognizes that a just and cohesive society is not a static goal to be achieved, but rather an ongoing commitment that requires constant renewal and recalibration in the face of dynamic conditions, which enable change. By enhancing citizens’ competencies, including the ability to engage in productive dialogue with others whose world views, values, identities, and experiences may differ from their own, a creative democracy empowers communities to collectively imagine and effectuate the world to which they aspire. This kind of intercultural dialogue between citizens is the oldest and most fundamental mode of democratic conversation. Its objective is to enable us to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world and to develop a sense of community and belonging. Intercultural dialogue is an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other’s global perception (Council of Europe, n.d.).

Critical Imagination

Developmental psychology demonstrates how human imagination forms the basis of both individual and collective agency. Without imagination, without the ability to conceive of non-existing (yet potentially existent) alternatives to the present state of affairs, humans would be enslaved by their immediate

situations (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015). In this field, two fundamental approaches to imagination can be distinguished. First is the “deficit approach,” wherein imagination is tolerated because of its positive role in early childhood development. Conversely, the “expansive approach” advocated for by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky positioned imagination as a specific, productive, unique feature of the human mind that allows people to distance themselves from their own experience and, by drawing on that experience, propose new syntheses that open new thoughts and actions. Alternative visions serve an important function: they are part of the collective semiotic guidance system (Valsiner, 1998), encouraging people to explore and to voyage into possibility (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015). A creative democracy embarks on that journey, recognizing that critical imagination is the generative basis on which individuals and societies successfully adapt to changing conditions by introducing novel ideas, prototyping alternative futures, and learning how to behave differently. Without the human capacity to imagine, humanity would be bereft of new narratives about who we are and what we might become. It is through the process of envisioning alternative futures that anxiety about change can be transformed into excitement for the possibilities it may yield.

The theory of narrative identity postulates that individuals form a personality by integrating their life experiences into an internalized, evolving story that provides the individual with a sense of unity and purpose. Personal narratives integrate one's reconstructed past, perceived present, and aspired future. Some creative placemaking practices aim to amplify similar narratives, though at the community scale. In a longitudinal study, social psychologists found a positive correlation between the coherence of individuals' personal narratives and sense of agency. In fact, the same researchers determined that changes in patients' stories consistently occurred before improvements in their mental health could be seen, suggesting that our capacity to imagine alternative narratives is deeply connected to personal, and by extension our collective wellbeing (Adler, 2012).

Communities as Complex Adaptive Systems

The substantive problems societies face—human rights, public health, safety, employment, housing, education, economic opportunity, the environment, and beyond—are complex and shifting. Complexity science tells us that the “wicked” nature of these issues is not evidence of a balanced system gone awry, but instead a positive indication that diverse actors are engaged in collaborative learning to achieve a more functional fit with their current environment. Without the ability to experiment and adapt, complex systems harden and change becomes impossible. A sub-discipline of urban planning, complexity theory of cities, emerged in the 1980s. Viewing communities as complex adaptive systems (CAS) allows us to view the issues they face in a new light. The efficacy of the mechanical worldview and the need to rationalize cities by design reached its zenith in the dehumanizing urban renewal projects of the 1960s. By the 1980s ecologists, economists, and planners alike began to see the consonance between complex systems that could learn and evolve such as forests, markets, and cities. Soon after, researchers identified a set of characteristics that enable these systems to learn and effectively navigate change. In short, complex adaptive systems contain main autonomous actors that use simple rules to interact coherently, change by testing novel ideas, exchanging feedback about what works and what doesn't, and self-organizing. Together, these traits combine to create conditions that enable new behaviors to emerge.

Complex systems like communities move through cycles of development as they strive to “achieve a more functional fit with their environments” (Cleveland, 1994). This is driven by the ongoing need to make optimal use of the resources currently available. Systems “on the edge” of change are notable for a “hunger” for novelty and disequilibrium that distinguishes them from rigidly ordered systems. At the same time, however, they possess a deep underlying coherence that provides structure and continuity, and distinguishes them from chaotic systems as individual agents interact and learn from each other. Through the lens of CAS, one can see how the limits of top-down planning and ways it imposes a rigidity that eliminates adaptability, spontaneity, and the vibrancy that make places unique. Inspired by these insights,

the rules of civic problem-solving are evolving to prioritize participatory citizenship, building on longstanding discourse in fields that range from architecture and planning to economics, political science, philosophy, sociology, and community psychology.

Placemaking: Spatial Justice in Community Planning

The term “placemaking” emerged in the late 1960s in the planning and design fields, encouraging greater community participation in neighborhood revitalization efforts. Few voices have been more influential than that of activist/urbanist Jane Jacobs, who referred to cities as “organized complexity” and said, “Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody” (Jacobs, 1961). Landscape architect Lynda H. Schneekloth and planner Robert G. Shibley define placemaking as “the way in which all human beings transform the places where they find themselves into the places where they live” (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995), advocating for a more inclusive and democratic approach to advancing spatial justice. Participatory concepts such as placemaking were enhanced further by the emergence of asset-based community development strategies, first developed by practitioner-scholars John McKnight and John Kretzmann as a more equitable approach to place-based revitalization (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Their asset-focused methodology encouraged communities to become more aware of their existing resources and power, to have the confidence in their own capacities to affect change, and to take authorship of solutions to local problems.

Economics and Human Rights

This orientation complements Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen and philosopher Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities-based approach to just human development, which asserts the importance of freedom to achieve personal and collective wellbeing through the creation of conditions that maximize opportunities. In this context, economic development should not be seen as an end in itself, but as an intermediate goal; human flourishing should be considered the most meaningful aim. In contrast to models that foreground economic metrics, the capabilities approach is a normative framework that draws attention to individual and social wellbeing, with a focus on people’s ability to be and to do what they desire. Such flourishing is rooted in human agency, which results from development efforts that aim to build human capital as much as the physical or policy infrastructure of place. An individual’s ability to act upon the world to achieve his or her goals without being unfairly constrained by social class or position defines Sen’s view of agency. His work also speaks to how existing institutions of power can enable greater personal empowerment through the cultivation of new skills and capacities: “All persons possess a set of key capabilities and it is the realization of these capabilities that gives him or her claim to agency and liberation from the ‘unfreedom’ that results from social injustice” (Sen, 1999).

Nussbaum claims that Sen’s view is too vague and would prefer he specify a definitive set of capabilities as the most important ones to protect (Nussbaum, 2003). In response, she created a list of Central Human Capabilities that she views as central requirements of life with dignity. A society that does not guarantee these to all its citizens, at some appropriate threshold level, falls short of being a fully just society, whatever its level of opulence (Nussbaum, 2003). Many of the capabilities included in Nussbaum’s fosters creative democracy, precisely the critical role of the senses, imagination, and independent thought, as well as our capacity to show concern for others and exercise effectively political agency and participate in processes that shape our environment. Similarly to Sen, Nussbaum also believes institutions have the responsibility to nourish these capabilities. Both Sen and Nussbaum view human agency as the ability to act and affect change in line with one’s values, voice, and objectives, which complements emerging models of equitable development that integrate local culture and prioritize citizen participation. This view also suggests that if practices such as creative placemaking are to contribute to greater equity, then its practitioners are

advised to not only promote fair access to processes but should also strengthen individuals' capacities to engage meaningfully by helping them build new skills and confidences.

Sociology and Community Psychology

Recent research from the fields of sociology and community psychology deepens our understanding of why inclusive citizen participation must be prioritized in transformative change efforts, specifically in light of the root social causes of most contemporary issues. For instance, Heide Hackmann (2013), Executive Director of the International Social Science Council, argues: "Climate change is primarily a social problem, not an environmental one because its causes and consequences are social—and so the solutions must be too." In this sense, contemporary issues are viewed as not naturally occurring and instead are the result of human behavior. This insightful observation suggests that breakthrough solutions must support the emergence of new behaviors and recognize the values, attitudes, and cultural norms that inform them. This orientation complements views held by community psychologists who represent a new way of thinking about human behavior and wellbeing in the context of *all* environments and social systems. Community psychology is like public health in that it promotes healthy environments and lifestyles, considers problems at both the individual and communal levels, and adopts a preventive orientation (Levine, Perkins & Perkins, 2004). Proactive solutions are informed by psychological knowledge, or insights about the local values, attitudes, and norms that shape individual and collective behaviors. As such, community psychology provides a helpful lens with which to understand why communities act the way they do, and how equitable development efforts can be intentionally designed to nudge people to behave in more positive ways.

Public Administration and Experimental Governance

It is widely acknowledged that the erosion of old institutions does not automatically generate new ones that will work, but does create space for more participatory strategies to emerge. As emergent models of creative placemaking and participatory development become more mainstream, the efficacy of existing structures, practices, and roles are being challenged in ways that can encourage democratic institutions to experiment and evolve. Breakthrough problem-solving in democratic societies calls for more multidimensional forms of accountability, and more practiced, skillful combinations of learning and bargaining by civic actors (Briggs, 2008). Better government by design also calls on public-sector leaders to prioritize evidence-based decision-making, greater engagement and empowerment of citizens, thoughtful investments in expertise and skill-building, and closer collaboration with the private and social sectors (Farrell & Goodman, 2013).

Exciting precedents exist, such as social and public labs, which first emerged in the 19th century alongside theories that made the case for experimentalism over top-down strategies. For instance, John Stuart Mill advocated for living experiments and believed it was the states' responsibilities to provide people with space to test new ideas. While there is no universally recognized definition of what constitutes social or public labs, they tend to conduct intentional experiments inspired by everyday life, and with the goal of generating new ideas about how to address social needs in effective ways. Many pioneering labs, such as the Musée Social in Europe, focused on social change and provided space for government to develop new ideas in collaboration with other actors. Much like today, early proponents of social innovation labs believed that small-scale experiments could be used to prototype development trajectories in multiple disciplines.

A problem many communities face is that they have become dominated by institutions that articulate an idea of the "official" future, leaving little room for people's everyday aspirations and imagination. This has led to a serious disconnect between institutions of governance and the public, with many people feeling that the future is something that has already been decided rather than something owned and created by everyone (Hassan, Mean, & Tims, 2007). But perhaps the problem has more to do with the

specific design of our institutions than with the tasks they face. If so, the challenge is to develop new organizational structures that enable cross-functional cooperation and adopt creative practices that leverage a community's most abundant source of ideas—its people. Doing so can stimulate the kind of institutional change necessary to transform systems that allocate power and resources in ways that both promote creative democracy and advance equity and societal wellbeing.

What contemporary community life can supply beyond feelings of belonging and affiliation is a capacity to act together on environmental problems, crime and insecurity, illness, educational failure, and more in ways that are efficacious, rewarding, and even irreplaceable (Briggs, 2008). The promise of this collective efficacy requires communities to cultivate civic capacity, which is shorthand for the ingredients that *can* make the machinery of governance more effective. Civic capacity concerns the extent to which different sectors of the community—businesses, parents, educators, state and local officeholders, nonprofits, and others—act in concert around matters of community-wide import. Scholars have defined this form of social capital as resting on patterns of small-scale social organization, notably among neighbors in larger cities and societies; hinged on proximate trust (trusting in particular those who share one's neighborhood), social cohesion, and the expectation that others will act with you if the need arises (Briggs, 2008). Community civic capacity can be cultivated through creative and participatory governance practices, which hold tremendous potential to contribute to more equitable outcomes due to a more inclusive set of stakeholders sharing decision-making power.

A noteworthy innovation during democracy's "third wave" has been the widespread incorporation of participatory governance practices. Participatory governance is a subset of governance theory that puts emphasis on inclusive engagement through deliberative practices, and seeks to deepen citizen participation in the governmental process by examining traditional assumptions and activities that can hinder the realization of a genuine democracy (Fischer, 2012). Participatory budgeting and policymaking practices can be found in regions and cultures throughout the world dating at least as far back as ancient Greece. Participatory democracy strives to create opportunities for all members of a population to make meaningful contributions to decision-making about allocation of public resources and the direction of government. The most extreme example as of late can be found in Iceland, where, in 2010, 950 citizens were randomly chosen to participate in drafting the country's new constitution (Farrell & Goodman, 2013). Participatory democracy is not a rejection of representative governance; rather, it represents an effort to redesign institutions and improve the quality of democracy, social wellbeing, and the state (Fischer, 2012). Creative approaches to participatory policymaking prioritize citizen engagement as a critical means to ensure that agenda setting, solution development/implementation, and assessment processes are rooted in local cultural knowledge and values that reflect an inclusive set of voices and aspirations. The federal government's current interest in devolving greater power to localities places a greater burden on municipal actors to do more with less, but also invites leaders to adopt more participatory governance models that empower citizens to play an active role in shaping their communities. This foundational change could provide the opportunity to galvanize a more comprehensive model for creative place- and policymaking, and the equity movement more broadly.

A New Era of Comprehensive Cultural Development

Comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) have a long history in American social policy, starting with the settlement houses of the 1900s and resurfacing in popularity every thirty years or so. CCIs encompass a variety of strategies in their efforts to mobilize citizens and their connections to one another, foster their ownership of the work, identify and build on their assets, and strengthen their civic capacity (Stanger & Duran, 1997). When the first CCIs were created, their designers assumed that a "comprehensive" approach to change would generate the alignment between strategies, systems, and stakeholders necessary to catalyze transformative outcomes. Over the past two decades, CCIs and related

place-based efforts have evolved to prioritize issues of racial/economic equity and inclusive practices more overtly. In parallel, the field of community cultural development or “creative placemaking”, comprising social justice-oriented artists, cultural organizations, activists, and community leaders, has also matured, along with practitioners’ understanding of the central role of local values in sustainable development.

Internationally, it’s increasingly common for sustainable development efforts to acknowledge a combination of interconnected factors (cultural, environmental, social, and economic) through “transversal strategies,” or integrated approaches that intentionally cut across all four dimensions and between different scales of governance and citizen participation. A transversal approach to development includes a combination of horizontal and vertical integration strategies that reinforce each other. Horizontal strategies cut across and connect programs, organizations, and sectors that lie within a nested system. Vertical integration strategies focus on ensuring policies developed by different levels of government to create an enabling environment for horizontal strategies in which to take root. Community change researchers believe that comprehensive approaches that include vertical efforts prioritizing the relationships between policies at the federal, state, and municipal levels, in concert with horizontal activities at the ground level, can help stakeholders from different sectors establish a shared vision and understand how efforts can be aligned to be mutually reinforcing. For example, state-level policy that requires arts education to be offered in all public schools helps to create an enabling environment for teaching artists and other kinds of arts education providers.

Across the United States and around the world, many local governments are recognizing the essential relationship between local culture and equitable development through a dual approach: (a) as a driver of development through the establishment of solid cultural policy, and (b) as an enabler of development through advocacy for the recognition of culture in all public policy (United Cities and Local Governments, 2017).

Over the past decade, work at the nexus of social justice, cultural vitality, environmental resilience, and community wellbeing have emerged with greater regularity and have energized efforts to advance creative systems change across the United States. New relationships have emerged between and across adjacent fields, resulting in new insights and interdisciplinary praxis promoting individual voice, collective agency, and mass imagination—in short, to act as creative democracies. The emerging field of creative placemaking represents the latest chapter of equity-focused community cultural development.

Creative Placemaking

While pieces of the infrastructure needed to sustain creative placemaking practices exist, they have yet to coalesce into a cohesive whole. To date, arts funders and intermediary organizations are investing in lateral strategies to integrate creative placemaking across organizations, sectors, and systems. However, insights gained from local successes have not been fully translated into the systems-level policy change required to have sustained impact. By adopting a comprehensive model of place-based change, these actors can incentivize encourage practitioners to explore how creative practices can be integrated not only horizontally but also vertically through a transversal approach, generating more conducive conditions for this approach to become the standard model of sustainable equitable development.

In the United States, the definition of creative placemaking differs among key actors; yet one shared aspiration has been improving the quality of life for all citizens through the intentional use of arts-based strategies that empower local residents and leverage communities’ distinct cultural assets. Since 2011, the National Endowment for the Arts, ArtPlace America, and the Kresge Foundation, among other local and intermediary funders, have invested over \$200 million toward an impressive variety of creative placemaking projects in all kinds of communities (J. Bennett, J., personal correspondence, March 27, 2017). The majority of these investments have been towards horizontal strategies to integrate creative placemaking into diverse organizations, systems, and sectors in the arts and beyond. Less emphasis has been placed on

understanding how creative practices can be integrated vertically to encourage participatory citizenship and facilitate the cooperative development of public policy, however. Vertical integration can help to create more enabling conditions for equitable development by providing a mechanism to ensure that the voices of those with less political access and influence aren't excluded from transforming the systems that allocate power and resources. By expanding the focus of creative placemaking beyond altering the physical attributes of place, and adopting a transversal approach to strategy design, a cross-section of practitioners can help demonstrate the value of this emerging field in ways that improve its long-term sustainability.

The Role of Policy in Placemaking

The techniques of creative placemaking can provide both physical and ideological space for people with varying worldviews and social positions to interact, negotiate differences, share power, and come to care for the common good. A growing body of evidence demonstrates how these practices can amplify the efficiency of investments in both the built and natural environments, enrich the aesthetic qualities of place, strengthen social fabric, stimulate civic participation, and fuel economic growth. As our knowledge of the impact of creative placemaking matures, how might we begin to apply similar techniques towards achieving greater equity through more imaginative and participatory forms of local governance and policymaking? Developing a common definition of equity and the means by which it can be achieved may be an important first step.

The Center for Social Inclusion's definition of racial equity, which can also be applied to social equity generally, reads, "A lens and outcome, which requires an inclusive approach that empowers people to transform systems that allocate power and resources in order to create communities where all people have equitable access to opportunity" (Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge [SPARCC], 2016). Creative placemaking has the capacity to serve as this "inclusive approach." To realize this promise we must reflect on the function, both perceived and potential, of creative practices; the role of storytelling in policymaking; and ways adaptive change frameworks can ground and connect individual projects to larger systems of practice.

When thinking about comprehensive community development it may also be helpful to consider three primary components of place: the "hardware" of physical infrastructure, the "software" of economic systems and public policies, and the "operating system" of the everyday lived experience of community members (Lefebvre, 1974). Creative placemaking has the capacity to enhance each of these elements in mutually reinforcing ways. To date, however, the vertical integration of creative placemaking as a means to facilitate the participatory development of public policies has not been fully explored. By incorporating a transversal approach that includes better vertical integration, creative practices can help to ensure that the voices of those with less political access and influence aren't excluded from transforming the systems that allocate power and resources towards development activities of all kinds, including creative placemaking. This application of participatory democracy expands existing notions of who can engage in policy entrepreneurship, which has historically been reserved for established political operatives rather than the general public.

Movement toward vertical integration of policy and practice requires making clear the distinction between public policy and organizational strategy, which are often conflated. Public policy refers to the regulatory frameworks, laws, and funding priorities related to different areas of civic concern and the ways government makes decisions at multiple scales. Put simply, public policy is the mechanization of value, the applied expression of public priorities, and accountability for realizing those aims. Though sometimes seemingly invisible, public policy, whether set at the municipal, state, or federal level, plays a critical role in shaping the environments in which we live, work, and create.

Conversely, cultural values inform public policy in implicit and explicit ways. For example, environmental awareness represents a fundamental attitudinal shift that has contributed to the creation of

new legislation. Hence, public policymaking is inherently a cultural activity, because it is grounded in human values. When designed within an equity frame, creative placemaking can reveal and, when necessary, challenge these community values and help stakeholders establish a shared vision about the direction society should take. That vision can subsequently energize local planning, placemaking, and policy, rendering each more responsive to and representative of the diverse stakeholders who will be affected by them. In essence, mass imagination becomes a powerful means to inspire civic participation.

Public policy should not be conflated with politics either, and the decision-making processes that accompany the creation and enactment of legislation. Politics can be defined as the art of governing, while policy refers to the plan that articulates explicit goals. A major challenge to creative democracy is to influence existing patterns of political decision-making, which is largely a negotiation between diverging values, visions, and interests. Changes to political decision making occurs when new constituencies gain the necessary power to influence negotiations through organizing, advocacy, and activism.

The Future is Unwritten

As discussed above, critical imagination is a requirement of effective systems change, for without it there would be no possibility of action. The vibrancy of any place largely depends on how successfully it mobilizes the widespread participation of its people to co-create new solutions rooted in their stories and experiences. Society's capacity to transcend existing challenges, address "wicked problems," and adapt to uncertainty relies on our ability to cooperatively envisage, assess, and realize alternative narratives. This process represents an act of futures-oriented, collective imagination.

Shared experiences strengthen connections between diverse groups and allow ideas to flow more freely, which improves a community's capacity to navigate uncertainty and ultimately adapt to change. Social scientists use the term "futures literacy" to describe thinking imaginatively about the future so that we can challenge our current assumptions, make explicit our shared values, engage in rich dialogue with others, and speculate on outcomes that are possible, probable, and preferred. The ideas and expectations developed through improved futures literacy contribute to more robust decision-making in the present about the preferred trajectory of local development. By increasing our capacity to improvise and be spontaneous, live with permanent ambiguity and novelty, futures literacy enables us to embrace complexity (Miller, 2011). When framed as a tool for advancing forward-looking collaborative problem-solving, creative placemaking can help communities evolve by increasing futures literacy. Strengthening this capacity sets into motion a healthy process of collective reflection and action, stimulating change and collaborative learning that can gradually encompass a wider range of community issues across multiple scales of practice.

Connecting the Dots

Collaborating for Equity and Justice: Moving Beyond Collective Impact, a report released by *Nonprofit Quarterly* in January 2017, articulates a set of guiding principles intended to facilitate participatory systems change. The recommendations, co-authored by six social justice practitioners, highlight the critical role of policy in advancing transformation at scale: "Policy offers the most direct route to measurable progress, but all too often collective impact practice stops at the programmatic level." The authors' suggestion is "to amplify the possibilities inherent in local successes and translate the lessons and insights into the systems, policy, and structural change needed to have sustained impact on whole populations" (Wolff et al., 2017).

The capacity exists to both deepen investments in individual projects and connect them to larger systems of activity. Creative placemaking has the same not-yet-realized catalytic potential to help policymakers and community members imagine the future implications of different policy options and local investments. To activate this unrealized promise, creative placemaking practices must be grounded in more comprehensive strategies that weave horizontal efforts to align work across programs, organizations, and

sectors together with vertical efforts to work at multiple scales—both integral components of complex place-based change.

Creating Change through Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development: A Policy and Practice Primer, a report released by PolicyLink in February 2017, articulates ways in which arts and culture actors can leverage public policies and major investments to centralize their role in equitable development. The report includes case studies that demonstrate how different communities have employed creative strategies to operationalize their equity-focused policy objectives. The authors advocate for the integration of arts and culture into community development systems, practices, and comprehensive plans. They also describe ways in which public agencies and philanthropy can “expand their practices and invest in arts and culture assets” in order to strengthen the capacity of these resources to contribute to greater equity (Rose, Daniel, & Liu, 2017). In this context, creative practices are primarily used to *implement* equity-oriented policy objectives. But complementary examples are emerging, both in the US and internationally, of ways creative practices including storytelling, cultural organizing, resident-driven impact assessments, design fiction, and visual arts are being used to facilitate the participatory *development* of innovative public policy as well.

The Art of *What If*?

Increasingly, municipal agencies are integrating creative practices as means to empower a diverse cross-section of stakeholders to directly inform the policies that shape their lives. Government initiatives around the world are demonstrating how arts-based methods amplify marginalized voices, harness local cultural knowledge, and help communities find common cause.

One example of the vertical integration of creative practices to facilitate the collaborative development of public policy comes from the UK-based Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC). In 2015, the AHRC launched the ProtoPublics initiative to support researchers and community partners in becoming active participants in “crafting new services, experiences, projects, and policies that address contemporary issues.” A series of ProtoPolicy workshops were held in partnership with individuals who had direct experience of specific issues. Workshops employed “speculative design fictions”—a participatory method that uses texts, visualization, artifacts, films, and storytelling to generate provocative scenarios, kindling insights into the future shape and direction of public policy. In the initial phase of ProtoPolicy, older community members participated in a series of creative workshops that examined the country’s Aging in Place policy agenda. By prompting visions of what a future of “flexible living” might look like from the perspective of those who will experience that reality first-hand and empowering them to directly inform public investments, ProtoPolicy was able to build a shared understanding of the constraints and opportunities inherent to different policy options in ways that recognized older residents as a critical source of insight. Those stories and the insights they revealed were then used to design responsive policies and strategic investments for Britain’s elderly. Today, sectors ranging from public health to sustainable development are now using this citizen-led approach to public policymaking (Dunne & Raby, 2013).

Port Phillip, Australia’s Community Pulse initiative, launched in 2001, intentionally uses place-based measures that relate to people’s everyday experiences as a means to inspire residents to express themselves and play a central role in local governance. Local leaders asked community members: “How do you know your neighborhood is getting better?” The community’s reply: “When we feel control over our destiny.” In response, policymakers invited residents to set benchmarks and long-term development goals to help safeguard local assets and generate evidence to stimulate political action and accountability. This participatory methodology provides a vehicle for multi-directional feedback between the City of Port Phillip council and community that strengthens individuals’ capacity to identify and assess issues as well as participate in the design, development, and delivery of policies. A formal evaluation in 2011 found that this creative strategy has contributed to “services and infrastructure that are better tailored to need, the community has greater faith in the process of local government [e.g. trust], and the City of Port Phillip

council has greater faith in the community's commitment to their vision for the future [e.g. reciprocity]." As a result, the initiative has been formally integrated with the city's long-range Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (City of Port Phillip, 2001).

The City of Minneapolis and Intermedia Arts established Creative CityMaking (CCM), a multi-year, arts-based innovation initiative within local government designed to advance the city's goal of eliminating economic and racial disparities, in 2013. Through in-depth collaborations between city departments, skilled community artists, and the public, CCM demonstrates how arts-based engagement can inform policymaking at multiple levels of government, provide underrepresented communities with direct access to influence decision-making, and revitalize municipal agencies with fresh ideas. One such collaboration was designed to facilitate the development of the city's emerging Blueprint for Equitable Engagement, a five-year plan to ensure local leaders seek, value, and incorporate all community voices in public processes. To highlight the range of perspectives, local artists created an "equity pulpit" from which community members could share and document their views. The pulpit moved around the city, appearing at block parties, festivals, and parks, where stories were collected from individuals whose voices were previously unlikely to be heard through traditional engagement practices. In a subsequent evaluation, CCM staff learned that 90 percent of the program participants reported they had never contributed to a local planning process before and that participation by communities of color increased from 30 percent of the total participants to 60 percent. By connecting this program to larger public systems and embracing an adaptive framework, CCM provides participants with a powerful vehicle for identifying emerging opportunities to proactively address the strategic priorities of a risk-averse city. By intentionally designing projects from the outset with these needs in focus, CCM has been able to demonstrate its value in ways that build the political will necessary to sustain such programs over time. Creative CityMaking is now institutionalized within the City of Minneapolis (Kayim, G., personal correspondence, March 29, 2017).

Performing Statistics, a project by Art180 and Legal Aid Justice Center, connects incarcerated teens, artists, designers, educators, and leading state policy advocates in order to transform Virginia's juvenile justice system. The project asks the question, "How would criminal justice reform differ if it were led by currently incarcerated teens?" Performing Statistics empowers youth to become civic leaders and directly affect laws and public policy that influence the school-to-prison pipeline (Performing Statistics, n.d.)

Among its many efforts to advance social justice, Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts New York (NOCD-NY) weaves arts-based practices into the typically closed, meeting-based process of public budgeting, enabling a greater variety of people and perspectives to inform local investment decisions. Participatory Budgeting (PB) connects community members who might not usually interact. For example, Friends of the High Line has teens, many of whom live in nearby public housing, help run their PB workshops, which strengthens relationships between public housing residents and others living on Manhattan's West Side. By making physical representations of projects for funding consideration, the process becomes more concrete, contributing to more transparent decision-making (Atlas, C., personal correspondence, September 29, 2016.).

These examples demonstrate how creative placemaking can function as a tool for institutional change, advancing collaborative problem-solving and realizing alternative futures that benefit everyone. They achieve this by developing individual projects within systems-change frameworks, fostering meaningful dialogue between diverse parts of local systems, expanding access and redistributing power, and creating space for new possibilities to emerge. Furthermore, these strategies identify and leverage the unique expertise each participant brings to the table, which is consistent with any asset-based strategy. Finally, each example demonstrates how working in partnership includes a shared commitment to using insights generated to fuel systemic change.

Facing the Future

Equitable development efforts that intentionally integrate the arts, local culture, and participatory design have enjoyed significant investment in recent years. The increasingly widespread adoption of creative placemaking practices is inspiring a diverse ensemble of actors to reflect on their core values and the extent to which existing institutional structures support more collaborative approaches to local governance and public problem-solving. Institutional arrangements and relationships are evolving to become less siloed, more porous, and adaptive as colleagues incorporate new practices and begin to work cross-functionally. As a result, communities large and small are only starting to realize the promise of a genuinely creative democracy. The underdeveloped nature of the infrastructure supporting creative placemaking and equitable development presents strategic opportunities to influence its shape, purpose, and direction. Policymakers, creative practitioners, funders, and local citizens can play important roles in helping to craft a more coherent and resilient ecosystem of innovation. The conditions are favorable for the fields of equitable development and creative placemaking to evolve in mutually beneficial ways, and an emerging set of principles, practices, and structures can light the way forward.

Democracy cannot exist without democratic institutions, political processes, and public policies, which themselves cannot work in reality unless they are grounded in a culture of shared values, attitudes, and practices. A combination of values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge are needed to empower a more inclusive set of citizens to participate effectively in a creative democracy. Values, including the primacy of human rights, equity, and cultural diversity, are of central importance. Attitudes, including openness, trust, mutuality, civic responsibility, and tolerance for change, are equally important. Skills, including the capacity to cooperate, navigate conflict, listen, engage in intercultural dialogue, and deploy one's imagination, all help to create enabling conditions as do knowledge, including critical understanding of the self and desire to know others coupled with an authentic interest in local issues, understanding of adaptive systems change and of the policymaking process. These competencies combine to foster creative democracy and a participatory citizenry. Therefore, a primary task of institutions of power, including public agencies, funding entities, and civil society organizations, is to strengthen the power of everyday people to not only believe they can affect change but to develop the skills necessary to do so. Through this process, creative democracy can fuel transformative change and significantly contribute to societal wellbeing.

While these competencies are necessary for stakeholders in favor of creative democracy to exhibit in order to participate effectively and equitably, they are not a sufficient solution for transforming the systems that allocate power and resources. In addition, we must design new organizational structures that enable cross-functional cooperation and creative practices that leverage a community's most abundance source of ideas—its people. One way to do this is by adopting transversal strategies that cut across issue areas and provide citizens with direct avenues to express community values, and for those perspectives to inform the shape of policy at multiple scales of government. In doing this, measures must be put into place to address inequalities in access and structural disadvantages with the aid of tools such as developmental evaluation. In the absence of such, well-intentioned practitioners may inadvertently privilege established players.

The potential for creative practices to enhance the development, implementation, and analysis of public policy is tremendous and not yet fully explored. While some practitioners develop strategies with the goal of transforming structures in mind, projects are still often fractured from the systems within which they are nested. An opportunity exists to strengthen citizens' and creative practitioners' understanding of how policy is made as well as policymakers' appreciation of the ways in which imaginative approaches could be adopted to encourage greater civic participation. In doing so, local governments in particular can begin to model a new institutional character, one that is less focused on reproducing practices and outcomes and more interested in transforming the craft of contemporary governance through citizen participation. Structure enshrines value and shapes behavior. In the year ahead, the author will work with a cohort of interdisciplinary partners, from rural, urban, and indigenous communities to establish a new Creative

Policymaking Lab. The lab will prototype new institutional structures, processes, and relationships, grounded in the values of equity and inclusion, to promote collaborative and creative systems change. Working within an adaptive systems change framework, we will launch a discrete number of place-based pilots designed to sharpen understanding of the efficacy of specific creative practices to facilitate the development of participatory policy. We will integrate developmental evaluation methods to refine the design of our processes, deepen our understanding of the optimal composition of each pilot group, how best to raise issues, negotiate conflict, and establish consensus in different cultural contexts.

Public policy provides one important mechanism for institutionalizing constructive creativity, while creative activities themselves may inform future policies. By embracing a systems perspective of the diverse ecology of activity already underway, local government, along with funders, creative practitioners, and citizens can work together to draw out insights to inform transversal strategies and accelerate a more cohesive field of practice. Benefit can be found in allocating resources toward deepening our understanding of how creative methods can facilitate participatory policymaking at various scales. Local governments can map existing organizational structures and traditional planning processes with an eye toward understanding the extent to which they enable cross-functional collaboration and citizenship engagement. Where possible, new and more porous structures as well as cross-functional roles can be introduced. Formal roles should be established for practitioners working in the interstitial space across systems to build scaffolding into the future. Embedding artists and designers to lead such processes can be particularly powerful as a means to offer a new way of seeing and organizing political processes. Creative practitioners should explore ways to facilitate participatory policy entrepreneurship by creating spaces and processes that lift up local issues, encourage inclusive dialogue, promote collaborative learning, and strengthen citizens' capacity to imagine and realize alternative scenarios.

Practitioners can advance creative policymaking by taking a hypothesis-driven approach to solution design that incorporates local knowledge and research as means to test policy innovations. Helping practitioners design projects from the outset with policy change being the ultimate objective by setting benchmarks and incorporating critical evaluation can help to substantiate the value of creative placemaking to municipal agencies and communities. By actively generating a robust evidence base, creative practitioners can demonstrate the value of participatory development practices in ways that resonate with municipal agencies as well as other partners for whom data informs decision-making. A commitment to learning and evaluation can also help to ensure that processes are transparent, parties are held accountable, and assets are fully leveraged. Data can also ensure vulnerable groups—particularly those residing in the margins of society—are identified and care is taken to enable their engagement. Trusted spaces such as public libraries can be leveraged as platforms for open dialogue, knowledge building, and cultural expression in ways that directly inform local policy outside the traditional, and often uninviting, walls of government. Exchange programs can be especially valuable ways to help partners, both current and potential, develop greater empathy and understanding for each other's daily realities and the ways in which their unique expertise might be leveraged creatively.

Democracy is a process that enables diverse individuals to discover collective goals and the means by which to achieve them—not only for the select few, but also for everyone who lives beneath its banner. It is a collective act of imagination that is as fragile as it is powerful. In a world that's increasingly divided and uncertain, communities need creative approaches that promote inclusive dialogue, harness the cultural vitality that exists in all places, and leverage the solidarity that springs forth when individuals recognize their interdependence and come together to imagine the shared futures they want. As political forces reshape the role of localities, creative practitioners from diverse disciplines are uniquely positioned to directly affect the direction of development in new ways that build community power and position cultural considerations at the heart of governance. In doing so, we can foster creative democracy and embrace change as a natural and necessary resource that enables societal renewal and vibrancy.

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