

THE POWER OF PLACE-MAKING



A Summary of

Creativity and Neighborhood Development

Strategies for Community Investment

by Jeremy Nowak

TRF Capital at the point of impact.



There's new life in the site of North Philadelphia's old Crane Plumbing Company.



In a neighborhood that's battled decline since the collapse of its manufacturing base, the former factory now bustles with the energy of artist studios and exhibition galleries, of a university art program and professional performances. Born of a partnership between a developer and two artists, and renamed the Crane Arts Building, the renovated space opened its doors in 2007 with a lengthy waiting list of would-be renters. This once-vacant industrial building now serves as an emblem for innovative investment and development, expanding neighborhood networks and the promise of future community and economic transformation.

Stretching from North Philadelphia across the city, more than 2,700 murals stand as markers of civic engagement.



Created over the past two decades by Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program (MAP), these artworks stem from collaborations between MAP (a public/private venture with City sponsorship) and countless neighborhood block associations, civic groups, business leaders, congregations and political representatives. Each year, more than 300 artists and 3,000 young people are at work making murals in a venture that turns empty walls into recovered public assets and creates a bridge between public art, community revitalization and youth development.

In the West Oak Lane section of the city, an annual Jazz and Arts Festival attracts thousands of people from inside and outside the neighborhood.



The festival reflects and facilitates the newfound stability of an African American working-class community that had been losing ground. By addressing issues of public safety, school quality and civic cohesion, the neighborhood again found its footing. The Jazz and Arts Festival, sponsored by a local community development corporation and supported by local and city-wide businesses and civic groups, serves as a market signal about the area's renewal. It is not only a magnet for regional talent and audiences, it is a hallmark of how creative activity, civic relationships and economic impact can entwine to build the value of place.

Thank you to OARC for providing Patrick Simione's photos from the 2007 West Oak Lane Jazz & Arts Festival.

Each of these examples tells a story of place-making: the ways households, businesses, entrepreneurs, government and civic and cultural institutions can combine to increase economic opportunity, the quality of public spaces, and investment and development activity in distressed places. And each reveals the significant contribution community-based arts and culture can make to this process.

The Power of Place-Making

Over the past year and a half, The Reinvestment Fund (TRF), in collaboration with the Social Impact of the Arts Project of the University of Pennsylvania (SIAP), has been examining the ways creative activity, specifically community-based arts and culture, can play a role in neighborhood revitalization. One outcome of this collaboration, the monograph **Creativity and Neighborhood Development: Strategies for Community Investment**, *lays out steps for building an integrative vision of creativity and neighborhood revitalization. It focuses on the ways cultural activity and redevelopment have complementary and in some ways intertwined missions, and offers a framework for flexible investment and funding that can spur imaginative and substantive neighborhood renewal.*

This document offers a summary of the monograph. Find the full piece at www.trfund.com.

What is community-based arts and culture?

We include a range of pursuits: theater, music, dance, museums and galleries, arts education, electronic media, literary arts. Our examination considers large cultural organizations, neighborhood-based arts centers or schools, festivals and private ventures that bring together artists and organizations in collaboration with particular communities or that are sited within specific neighborhoods.



The Creative Sector and Post-Industrial Cities

The creative sector, with its range of content-rich industries, has significant import for cities struggling to define post-industrial relevance.

Given their interrelated webs of universities, cultural institutions, design firms and culturally diverse populations, all of which help attract creative workers and spur creative content, cities are naturally positioned to take advantage of this sector. Yet if we develop a more comprehensive view of how creative activity, particularly community-based arts and culture, interacts within cities, we can stimulate even more integrated and effective action in the development of distressed urban places.

Our approach looks beyond studies showing the economic impact and regional competitiveness of the creative sector (each important for showcasing the role of arts in cities and giving artists and organizations a voice in the public arena), towards how the intrinsic value of arts and culture can support what we call the architecture of community.

The Architecture of Community

A community is a process, not a static entity. Capital, people, businesses and institutions move in and out, sometimes changing a location's meaning and potential within very short periods of time. A place is affected by neighboring conditions, distant policy decisions and unpredictable market trends. In Creativity and Neighborhood Development: Strategies for Community Investment, *we explore the architecture of community, dividing it into four domains. Community arts and cultural activities, through their intrinsic processes and products, can catalyze or reinforce place-making in each of these domains.*

Social Capital and Civic Institutions

Social capital is the relationship glue through which individuals, families, and social networks navigate economic opportunity, social conflict, and various institutions. These connections within communities and between communities help build consent, preserve institutions and organize change. Neighborhood arts centers and public cultural events become workshops of this kind of civic engagement, serving both as a staging ground for community identity and a source of neighborhood stability and growth. Research from SIAP backs the link between cultural activity and neighborhood improvement; and when combined with TRF's data on urban market change, the research shows how cultural engagement indicators can be important predictors of market improvement.










Public Assets and Infrastructure

Place-making activities have the ability to link public and private investments so that public assets can influence social change, development and wealth creation. Parks, public plazas, community centers, recreation facilities and libraries are the cornerstones of community arts activity. The public sector constantly sends signals about the importance of creative neighborhood activity by how it handles public assets – how playgrounds and parks are cared for; the kinds of programs established in public venues; how streetscapes and public spaces are designed; the ease with which permits for performances and festivals are processed and approved; and how zoning encourages or discourages artist, design, and cultural work space.

Economic Assets and Market Relationships

Creating or uncovering asset value in distressed neighborhoods provides residents and entrepreneurs with increased wealth-building opportunities. Artists can be early market entrants whose search for work space can help stabilize neighborhoods and mitigate the risk of investment for homeowners or developers. Because they value the process of remaking space, they are well-suited for the risks of uncertain markets and they can help reveal the potential for recovery inherent in many urban neighborhoods. In both the redevelopment of discrete buildings and the incremental renewal of large districts, cultural and design communities provide entrepreneurial energy to the task of preserving something old through the development of something new.

The Flows of Information, People and Capital

Place-making restores or creates links between local, city and regional markets, making places both attractors and incubators for people, capital, and ideas. Community arts and cultural organizations have great potential as intermediaries capable of spanning diverse geographies, social classes, and ethnic groups. They can provide rigorous artistic training, build critical thinking and interpersonal skills and offer avenues for lifelong learning, while also serving as a significant source of employment for artists. Arts and cultural centers and performance spaces are hubs of interaction, drawing people from inside and outside the community. They behave as networked enterprises, crossing a myriad of boundaries in the way they work, the people they draw together and the information and ideas they share and generate.

Place-making, with its attention to these ongoing exchanges of value and meaning, is a creative process that manages a range of practical tensions: between market and civic capacities and roles; physical design and social utility; and the need to integrate the old and the new. How can community-based arts and cultural activity add value to this process? Artists are expert at uncovering, expressing, and re-purposing the assets of place – from buildings and public spaces to organizations and communal stories. They are *natural* place-makers who assume – in the course of making a living – a range of civic and entrepreneurial roles that require both collaboration and self-reliance. And they are steeped in a creative dialogue between the past and the future.

Investing in Creativity and Place-Making

In Creativity and Neighborhood Development: Strategies for Community Investment*, we recommend investing in community-based creative activity to enhance its place-making role and potential. These investments would focus on three areas:* **creativity, development and knowledge**.

We seek the flexible allocation of private, public and philanthropic resources in support of emerging activity and new projects (including research) whose innovation and risk profile require this kind of targeted investment. The investments would have the fluidity to support individual artist/entrepreneurs, non-profit institutions, for-profit creative sector businesses, and partnerships among any of these. Moreover, they would not be guided by traditional grant deadline systems but work in a more demand-oriented manner.

What kind of ventures would benefit?

1. Art-making projects that engage communities in expressing aspects of place, and/or adapt neighborhood sites or buildings to reveal their potential as sites for creativity.

2. The construction, renovation or repurposing of existing facilities as artist studio space or housing.

3. Ventures initiated by individual artists/entrepreneurs, which could involve partnerships with non-profit or for-profit organizations and could be oriented around new businesses or creative work.

4. Commissioned research and the creation of a data infrastructure that can highlight emerging trends, markets and opportunities; influence policy; and inform ongoing evaluation geared towards increasing investment impact.

These investments are not meant to substitute for other arts and cultural funding. This is a portfolio of place-making investments. If we blur the distinction then the familiar zero sum game of nonprofit fund raising and development overwhelms the conversation. Unlike discipline-based funding in the arts or strict categories in an investment portfolio, this model intentionally crosses boundaries, because that is how this work best unfolds. The overarching areas of creativity, development, and knowledge are meant to be part of a simultaneous package, and the flexibility and fluidity of this strategy are essential.







To be most effective, these resources ought to:

- identify multiple leverage points for change, related to the architecture of community: markets, civic institutions, public assets, and trans-local connections;
- allow artists and other creative sector participants to do what they do best while encouraging them to use or engage in community collaborations;
- discover the value of what exists or what is emerging rather than imposing a vision;
- focus resources on what existing actors and activity cannot accomplish alone;
- construct investment and funding partnerships across public, private, and civic sectors;
- function through a demand-oriented posture that allows for ongoing learning and change;
- foster a "culture of evidence" without allowing the search for the best data to stall action;
- include artists and community representatives in the development of funding strategies.

The investments could flow from a combination of individual public and private actors or be organized around a Creative Neighborhoods Fund. In most instances we recommend a combination of individual and common fund efforts. A Creative Neighborhoods Fund could be constructed through existing intermediaries or through a new collaboration of investors and philanthropists. The advantages of a fund outweigh the disadvantages, but only if it is conceptualized as one part of a broader network of portfolio mechanisms.

Breaking Through

Preparing this publication gave TRF a new understanding of the value of the arts institutions, cultural organizations and artist entrepreneurs we already finance. Throughout the project, we've brought together artists, developers, philanthropies and public policy advocates. This is a rare combination of viewpoints, and it has the potential to break through entrenched categories and stimulate imaginative action in urban neighborhoods.

From art-making projects that unearth community assets, to the transformation of old warehouses into new studios, to a data infrastructure that can drive smart investment decisions, the synthesis of creative activity and development practice that we propose can elevate the field of neighborhood revitalization.

Our work on this project has catalyzed an interest at TRF in extending additional resources to ventures that join creativity and neighborhood development. We want to increase the rate and effectiveness of culturally-driven community change and build institutional capacity, intellectual capital and a public brand for the sector. We want to broaden the notion of who can and should be part of planning, policy, decision-making and financing related to this field. We envision the combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies that will both expand the resources available and fortify the grassroots activity crucial for success.

Finally, we hope to offer a framework for how a unique combination of civic actors, each operating from their distinct strengths, can mutually reinforce what the other does and create a vision for place-making that is deeply rooted in a community's strengths and vigorously committed to developing its potential.



Capital at the point of impact.

Copies of *Creativity and Neighborhood Development: Strategies for Community Investment* may be downloaded at www.trfund.com. For a printed copy, please contact our Philadelphia office.

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