

# PLACE

In Dialogue with Canada's Placemaking Community

# LET'S TALK ABOUT PLACE MAKING

Canada's Placemaking Community



Major Collaboration Partners:  
PlacemakingUS  
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plus the contribution of 100+  
passionate practitioners from  
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Canada is a country of immense diversity and creativity, where every community—from the largest cities to the smallest towns—has its own unique story to tell. These stories are grounded in their place, shaped by the physical and human assets – which together create a unique culture. This publication, ***Let’s Talk About Placemaking*** highlights some of these creative and inspiring examples of how people and place come together—to realize extraordinary potential.

We got to this day because the pandemic tested us in our homes, workplaces and gathering spots—especially when our routine movements were restricted by efforts to contain the virus. COVID-19 starkly exposed the challenges in how we design and manage our shared, public spaces. Our streets, parks, and plazas were tested like never before, as were local governments, people and organizations working to create places where all people could gather and enjoy the benefits of public space.

During this challenge, the importance of placemaking clearly emerged as a practical and powerful way to reconnect people through shared places. The Canadian Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI) was launched by then Infrastructure and Communities Canada, a federal department response to the extraordinary challenges affecting how people could stay connected at a time of social and physical isolation. It was a nationwide effort to empower communities to reimagine and reanimate their public spaces, creating safe, accessible, inclusive environments that fostered connection. The initiative put an explicit emphasis

on equity-deserving communities where the historical absence of investment in public space was made clear during the pandemic. Led by Community Foundations of Canada, the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) worked closely with local leaders, grassroots organizations, and community builders across the country to reimagine public spaces as vital community resources.

What emerged was a series of locally-driven projects across Canada, contributing to a vibrant network of practitioners, advocates, and allies—Canada’s Placemaking Community. This network is intended to be a source of inspiration and guidance, helping to shape and amplify the 1,000+ projects funded by HCI, while connecting them to a broader movement of placemaking practices worldwide. Together, these efforts underscore the power of placemaking as a tool for building stronger, more equitable communities. In gathering the material for this publication, we invited this growing community of practice to expand on what they’ve been experiencing on the ground, to broaden our collective knowledge-base and start to catalogue and highlight the power of placemaking.

The projects and concepts highlighted shine a light on the diverse ways communities across Canada and North America are embracing placemaking. From transforming parking lots into vibrant plazas to integrating arts and culture into urban design, these initiatives demonstrate the adaptability and impact of placemaking as a practice.

Contributed through conversations with practitioners, the projects presented reflect the unique context, challenges, and

opportunities of the communities they serve. They remind us that placemaking is never a one-size-fits-all solution—it is an active process that draws on the creativity, knowledge, and aspirations unique to residents to create a collective vision.

While HCI provided a critical response to the pandemic, its legacy goes beyond the projects it funded. This initiative has helped to formalize placemaking as a framework for addressing some of Canada’s most pressing challenges—from supporting local economies, building social cohesion, to advancing climate resilience. As we look ahead, the insights gathered here offer evidence to inform the field for scaling placemaking as a pan-Canada priority.

They highlight the need for ongoing investment in community-led initiatives that are from the outset inclusive and participatory, the importance of centering Indigenous perspectives and histories in public space design, and the critical role for placemaking to create more resilient and prosperous cities and communities.

*Let’s Talk About Placemaking* is a celebration of what practitioners across Canada and North America have accomplished, and we hope will spark a dialogue about what comes next, including prioritizing formal and collective forms of data collection and analysis. It is a testament to the power of local action and a call to ensure that placemaking remains a cornerstone of Canada’s future development.

Let’s start now.

Mary W. Rowe  
CEO, Canadian Urban Institute





# This collection of practitioner insights and case studies is designed to inspire, inform, and spark dialogue.

*Let's Talk About Placemaking* is a dialogue created through field research and conversations with a diverse and growing community of placemakers—practitioners, urban planners, community leaders, architects, municipal stakeholders, and civic advocates. In this edition, we propose a collection of valuable perspectives and best practices on how placemaking can be practically applied to shape our cities.

This discovery illustrates that inclusive, activated public spaces can strengthen social connections, enhance well-being, and promote environmental resilience and economic revitalization. More, we see how placemaking becomes an essential tool in building adaptable, equitable, and resilient communities as urban areas face challenges like: isolation, exclusion, rapid growth, and climate change.

Through placemaking, creative communities are empowered to propose new ways to see the public realm as vibrant and equitable, forging experiences where arts, culture, and environmental initiatives create new connection and advocacy. In these spaces, neighbours engage,

shared identities emerge, and communities can unite around common goals for both people and planet.

We believe that the future of Canadian municipalities is bright when placemaking is well embedded at the heart of urban development. In our examples and research we outline how an evolving, collaborative process of placemaking transforms streets, neighbourhoods, and city centres into spaces where people feel safe, welcome, and proud. 'Place' fosters a true sense of belonging that enriches the collective well-being of all who live, work, and play there.

Placemaking is, above all, a people-first movement that champions the human experience. Together, we can continue to invest in spaces that reflect the unique identity and aspirations of the communities they serve.

Welcome to the inaugural edition—a guide intended to ignite conversations about placemaking from the viewpoint of those who live it every day.

Sincerely,  
Canada's Placemaking Community



# From coast to coast to coast, we honour the ancestral and unceded territories of the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations peoples.

Canada's Placemaking Community is committed to reflecting on the harms of the past and walking together in a spirit of openness and reconciliation.

Indigenous Peoples have stewarded these lands for generations. We are grateful for their wisdom, resilience, and ongoing contributions. Our efforts to build inclusive communities and protect our natural systems must continue to learn from, and be guided by, their experiences.

We also recognize that urban planning and development has too often reinforced the exclusionary practices of colonialism. The work of creating cities today requires confronting these legacies and embracing new approaches rooted in equity, inclusion, and shared stewardship.



Tawatinâ Bridge, David Garneau, Edmonton 2021. Photo: City of Edmonton

Placemaking is good & powerful

invest in the future of our cities!

# LET'S TALK ABOUT PLACE MAKING

Placemaking emerges as a term and practice with deep etymological roots connected to centuries of cultural evolution. Here, we open an ongoing dialogue, seeking to define and expand on placemaking's influence in modern Canadian public life, and internationally.

# A RECENT-ISH HISTORY

Public spaces have long served as the heartbeat of cities, shaping the social, cultural, and economic lives of communities, while evolving and adapting in response to the changing needs of societies. The word “place” dates back to the 1100s, signifying a “location or site where action occurs,” and comes from the Latin platea (public square), borrowed from the Greek plateia (wide street).

1800s  
INDUSTRIAL ERA: THE RISE OF PARKS AND BOULEVARDS

The Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries brought a new set of challenges for public spaces. Rapid urbanization and industrial growth created densely populated cities that were often unsanitary and overcrowded. In response, urban planners introduced public parks and boulevards as a way to provide relief from the chaos of industrial life. Spaces like Central Park in New York offered urban dwellers a place to relax, socialize, and enjoy nature. Yet, these spaces often catered to the middle and upper classes, leaving working-class neighbourhoods with few amenities. The rise of zoning laws during this era separated work, home, and leisure in ways that disrupted the natural flow of community life. Although public spaces provided some respite from the rigors of industrialization, they also highlighted the growing inequalities between different socioeconomic groups.

1900s  
MODERNISM AND FUNCTIONALISM: FRAGMENTING PUBLIC LIFE

By the 20th century, modernist urban planning emphasized functionalism, often at the cost of community interaction. Strict zoning laws separated housing from industry and commerce, eroding the mixed-use environments that once encouraged social encounters. Car-centric planning fragmented public life, replacing vibrant, walkable city centers with highways and sprawling suburbs. Efficiency-driven construction led to isolated high-rises and public housing, worsening segregation and social disconnection. The Garden City movement, founded by Ebenezer Howard to create balanced, self-contained communities integrating urban and rural benefits, was co-opted by suburbanization trends, resulting in car-dependent sprawl and the loss of public spaces to private lawns and malls.

1950+  
POST-WWII: THE CAR-CENTRIC CITY AND SUBURBANIZATION

The post-war era saw the rise of the suburban city, driven by the dominance of the automobile predominantly in North America. Public spaces further eroded as cities expanded outward into low-density developments. Freeways physically divided communities, and the car became the organizing principle of urban planning, leading to sprawl, gated communities, and isolation among socioeconomic groups. In many cases, public housing projects became symbols of segregation and neglect, lacking the integration with public life that once defined cities. The post-war period marked a low point in the development of public spaces, as the emphasis on cars and efficiency over connection led to the erosion of vibrant, mixed-use environments. Since the 1970s, New York City has been a hub for placemaking innovation. In 1975, Fred Kent founded Project for Public Spaces (PPS) to build upon William H. Whyte's studies of urban spaces, emphasizing community-driven design. These early efforts have since inspired global placemaking initiatives, promoting community engagement and sustainable urban development.

THE UNITED NATIONS' NEW URBAN AGENDA

The Placemaking movement made its global debut in 2016, with the adoption of the United Nations' New Urban Agenda, which contained foundational language that emphasized the importance of public spaces in relation to its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These agendas are widely recognized around the world for setting the standards and global goals for urban development with a focus on sustainable cities and human settlements. In particular, Goal 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Target 11.7 sets an ambitious goal: to have cities provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public spaces by 2030, particularly for women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. Many of the other SDGs can be combined with public space for greater impact, both through education, exposure, and significance.

PLACEMAKING: RECLAIMING PUBLIC SPACES FOR THE FUTURE

Throughout history, public space has not always served all people equally, often reflecting the power structures and priorities of their time. Today, the practice of placemaking resists this, aiming to transform public spaces into areas that can foster community interaction, cultural expression, and sustainability. Placemaking is a movement, a reclamation of public space, and an invitation to reimagine cities as dynamic, human-centred environments. As cities continue to reckon with decades of car-centric planning and rising inequalities, it's more vital than ever to invest in placemaking and bring public spaces back to their roots—as essential social, ecological, and economic hubs for people to flourish.



In collaboration with the work of practitioners, urban-focused professional networks, not-for-profit organizations, academic experts, placemaking consultants, curators, city staff, and many others, we synthesized 21+ diverse and active descriptions of placemaking. Here's a sample:

"Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution."

Project for Public Places

"Placemaking is a common cause which draws people together to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of their community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, "placemaking" offers a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize its value to everyone. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates more satisfying patterns of public use by paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its evolution."

PlacemakingX

"Placemaking is about creating spaces where people from all walks of life can connect and thrive. Placemaking involves local voices, creative ideas, and a collaborative spirit to transform everyday spaces—like parks, alleys, sidewalks, and community centers—into inviting and meaningful places. It's about reimagining our public spaces to make them more vibrant, inclusive, and enjoyable for everyone."

placemakingcommunity.ca

"Placemaking is an essential practice in urban development that goes beyond physical design, focusing on the holistic creation of spaces that foster community, culture, and well-being. At its core, placemaking is about more than just the end result; it is a process that emphasizes collaboration, local talent and knowledge, and the organic unfolding of ideas that reflect the unique character of a community. The process encourages local stakeholders to be active participants in shaping their environment, ensuring that the spaces created are not only functional but also resonate with the people who use them."

Placemaking US

"Placemaking uses arts and culture as tools to animate public and private spaces, and to rejuvenate structures and streetscapes. It brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire and be inspired. The approach leverages a place's existing creative potential and connects arts and culture to larger community revitalization or development initiatives. Creative placemaking advances a shared community vision that honors community distinctiveness through interdisciplinary and cross-sector activities that engage an array of people who call the place home."

Bring Back Main Street Report  
CUI, Happy Cities

"Placemaking is the process of working together to shape public spaces. Placemaking brings together diverse people to plan, design, manage and program shared-use spaces."

Evergreen

"Placemaking is the art of creating vibrant places that attract people. It can create memorable places through a range of interventions, through beautiful design, good programming, an adapted management model or an economically viable project."

Belleville Placemaking

"Placemaking capitalizes on a local community's assets and builds off the unique personality, history and qualities of a place. It requires looking at, listening to and asking questions of the people who live, work and play in that place to discover their needs and aspirations."

My Main Street - Initiative

"Placemaking is an approach to urban planning and design that focuses on the people who use a space, rather than just the physical structures or buildings. The idea is to create places that are not just functional, but also beautiful and meaningful to the people who live, work, and play there."

Placemaking Europe

"Placemaking is an approach to city-building that shapes and influences the quality of the public realm to strengthen connections between people and places."

Massivart

"For me, placemaking is an approach and a set of tools that puts the community front and centre of determining what their place looks like and how it functions. Today's placemakers have to be held accountable to its origin as a people-first and ground-up approach. The moment you take the community out of placemaking as both spearheading and equal stakeholders in the process, the process is not then placemaking and the radical imperative of this place-based process is lost."

Dr. Cara Courage

"Placemaking is the process of creating quality places that people want to live, work, play, and learn in."

Public Square - CNU

"Place where people can socialize and interact outside of home and work, and how to create rituals that generate attachment and belonging in people who attend certain places, such as festivals, markets, and celebrations, which is related to the primary goal of placemaking."

Placemaking Mexico Foundation

"Placemaking at its core is about strengthening the connection between people and place. The practice of placemaking occurs when local communities have the power, capacity and resources to actively shape public spaces in a way that meet their needs and improves everyday quality of life."

8 80 Cities

"Placemaking refers to community-led or -supported initiatives that aim to improve a place. These projects may take the form of murals, benches, community gardens, open streets, a variety of programs and activities, and much more. Placemaking turns streets into vibrant places where people want to stick around. People spend more time in shared spaces and at local businesses when there is a strong sense of place and community—and when there are lots of reasons to visit an area."

Happy Cities

# PLACE MAKING DEFINED:



Placemaking is the practice of transforming (public) space into a vibrant and accessible place that enhances quality of life, social cohesion, economic value, and the cultural health of the area. It involves designing and activating spaces with the people who use them.

December 2024

Largely recognized as an essential practice in urban development that goes beyond physical design, placemaking focuses on the holistic creation of spaces that cater to the human need to flourish: to strengthen community bonds, promote economic and cultural

exchange, and well-being. At its core, placemaking is about more than an end result; it is a process, an ongoing place management that emphasizes collaboration, local talent and knowledge, and the organic unfolding of ideas that reflect the unique character of a distinct place.





Promenade Ontario Street, PXP Design, Montréal 2020. Photo: Raphael Thibodeau

# Placemaking is not a one-size-fits-all approach but an iterative and flexible process.

Placemaking is an evolving practice that adapts to the unique characteristics and needs of each community it serves. There is no universal formula; it is flexible and responsive to local contexts, ideally creating spaces that reflect the unique social, cultural, and economic identities of a place. Rather than copy and pasting solutions across projects, successful placemaking asks for a tailored approach that integrates both immediate actions and long-term visions for place development.

Evolving through engagement and feedback, this practice aspires to create public spaces that welcome community broadly—places where people feel encouraged to spend time, connect with others, and return frequently.

Placemaking is classified in different ways from strategic placemaking to creative placemaking and tactical urbanism. These subsets or interrelated fields are primary approaches to placemaking and utilize adjacent skillsets from various disciplines such as the arts, planning and even finance, to forge places.

## TACTICAL PLACEMAKING

Tactical placemaking focuses on short-term, low-cost, and often temporary interventions to improve public spaces. Efficient design and informed by grassroots and community needs, these solutions can emphasize quick, tangible results. Examples include pop-up parks, street murals, and temporary seating. Tactical placemaking is all about experimentation—trying small-scale ideas that can lead to long-term change by engaging communities in the process and fostering local ownership.

## STRATEGIC PLACEMAKING

Strategic placemaking takes a long-term, broader approach, integrating placemaking efforts into larger urban planning and economic development goals. It involves deliberate planning and coordination across sectors—government, businesses, and community organizations—to create places that drive economic growth, social equity, and sustainability. These projects often target specific goals like revitalizing a downtown district or improving the connectivity of a public transportation system.



## CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

Creative placemaking emphasizes the use of arts and culture to transform public spaces, fostering a deeper connection between people and their environment. It involves artists, cultural institutions, and the local community to reimagine public places in ways that celebrate local identity, cultural diversity, and creativity. This approach uses cultural expression to drive social and economic change, often revitalizing neighbourhoods and strengthening community bonds. By the early 21st century, arts and culture became central to urban revitalization efforts.

In 2006, Tim Jones, then CEO of Toronto's Artscape, introduced the concept of 'creative placemaking' and hosted a series of convenings, Creative Places + Creative Spaces, which sparked a broader understanding of the importance of cultural activities and programming to the built environment.

In 2010, Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa adopted the term in a report for the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States, emphasizing the role of artists and cultural institutions in transforming public spaces.

## EMERGING APPROACHES

Never static, placemaking continues to evolve and reflect ever-shifting societal needs, values and natural habitats. Embracing greater equity and inclusion in public space continues to expand with emerging approaches like placekeeping, eco-placemaking, and focused agendas to accessibility, feminist placemaking and queering places; all of which contribute to traditional methods by embracing slowness and seeking solutions that are more valuable, conscious, and empathetic. See our Explorations of these approaches on page 160.



Canadian public spaces are extremely important as they bring together 450 ethnic and cultural origins, 200 places of birth, 100 religions and 450 languages (Statistics Canada). The mosaic of Canadian cohesion encourages Canadians to keep their cultures, with the collective citizenship as a sort of secondary identity. The opportunity for Canadian placemaking is to tackle this cultural cohesion head-on by creating vibrant public spaces with a uniquely Canadian identity, while also celebrating the various cultures and identities that make up the diversity of the country.

# What about Gentrification?

Placemaking has become a celebrated strategy for revitalizing urban spaces, fostering economic growth, and enhancing neighbourhood vitality. Yet, as David Harvey's *Rebel Cities* reminds us, such initiatives often come at the cost of gentrification and displacement, with rising rents and property values pushing out the very residents that give neighbourhoods their character. The challenge is clear: how can placemaking uplift communities without pricing them out?

Gentrification is defined by Merriam Webster dictionary as a *process in which a poor area (as of a city) experiences an influx of middle-class or wealthy people who renovate and rebuild homes and businesses, which often results in an increase in property values and the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents*. However, gentrification doesn't have to be the default outcome of progress: Majora Carter's work in the South Bronx

offers a powerful alternative. Her principle of "self-gentrification" shows how communities can lead their own transformation, retaining cultural and economic ownership while welcoming improvements. Carter's involvement in Hunts Point Riverside Park in the South Bronx exemplifies "self-gentrification" by turning a neglected dumping ground into an engaged community space. Through local engagement, job creation, and culturally reflective design, the residents benefit from revitalization and preserve their neighbourhood's identity and ownership.

David Harvey's critique of commodified urban spaces underlines the need for placemaking to focus on public good over private gain. This means ensuring safeguards are put in place to protect affordability and prevent displacement. Models like Cultural Land Trusts (CLTs) provide an effective framework for achieving this. By holding land

titles in perpetuity and leasing them affordably to community organizations or residents, CLTs safeguard affordability while resisting socio-spatial privatization. A pioneering example is Vancouver's 221A, which has initiated a Cultural Land Trust to secure and steward cultural spaces for artists and arts organizations, prioritizing long-term affordability and community governance. Concepts like this envisions neighbourhood as urban commons—spaces governed collaboratively by residents and founded on equitable access and participation.

Gentrification is not an inevitability. By prioritizing inclusion and empowerment, placemaking can deliver progress without loss. Neighbourhoods should thrive as equitable hubs where all residents—not just newcomers (or speculators)—benefit from revitalization. This isn't just an ideal; it's a blueprint for cities that can work for everyone.

Top-Down:  
Governments &  
Developers

The Collaborative Model

# Bridging the Gap

Placemaking initiatives are implemented by two dominant approaches: top-down, led by governments or developers, and bottom-up, driven by community efforts. Balancing the two is the key to creating exemplary public spaces.

Bottom-Up:  
Grassroots  
Communities

Practitioner conversations led us to understand that placemaking is not defined by the scale or cost of a project, but by the approach it takes—an approach centered on community engagement, iterative experimentation, cultural relevance, and creating spaces that foster social connections and well-being. Whether through community-led pop-up installations or significant urban redevelopment projects integrating stakeholder insights, the essence of placemaking remains rooted in participatory design and continuing community involvement.

## THE RISE OF TOP-DOWN PLACEMAKING: EFFICIENCY AT A COST

In a top-down approach to placemaking, the vision and decisions come from government bodies, urban planners, or private developers. Large-scale infrastructure projects like transit hubs, public parks, and waterfronts are often executed with a high level of expertise and funding. These projects are driven by professional teams across several disciplines who have the resources to address significant urban challenges, such as improving safety, accessibility, and functionality.

One example of successful top-down placemaking is the **redevelopment of Millennium Park in Chicago**. Spearheaded by the city government, this ambitious project transformed a former rail yard into a world-class public park, integrating iconic architectural and artistic elements like the Cloud Gate (often referred to as “The Bean”) and Jay Pritzker Pavilion. The park has become a cultural landmark, attracting locals and tourists alike, and proving that large-scale, government-led placemaking can result in vibrant, accessible spaces that can reflect a city’s identity.

Top-down place development offers efficiency and the ability to tackle large-scale problems, but can miss integrating context-specific knowledge directly from surrounding communities that make people feel

connected to the place. This can lead to dissatisfaction and risk disconnection from the community if local voices aren’t included.

## BOTTOM-UP PLACEMAKING: COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INNOVATION

On the other side of the spectrum is bottom-up placemaking, which is driven by local communities and grassroots organizations. These initiatives often start small, using “lighter, quicker, cheaper” tactics to make immediate changes that reflect community needs and desires.

In bottom-up placemaking, the community takes charge of the process—whether through creating urban gardens, organizing pop-up markets, or advocating for pedestrian-friendly streets. The idea is that those who live in and use a space are best equipped to shape it.

One powerful example of bottom-up placemaking is **Park(ing) Day**, an annual global event where artists, activists, and citizens temporarily transform parking spaces into vibrant public parks and social spaces to advocate for more urban green spaces. It is organized by community groups and supported by urban design advocates, emphasizing the importance of rethinking how public space is used in cities. This grassroots effort started small but grew into a global movement, showing how local, creative interventions can make a big impact.



The original Park(ing) installation at 1st and Mission in San Francisco, November 16, 2005. Photo: Rebar

Park(ing) Day was conceived in 2005 by the art and design studio Rebar in San Francisco. The idea originated when they transformed a single metered parking space into a temporary public park, sparking a global movement to reconsider how urban space is allocated.





Place des Fleurs de Macadam, Castor & Pollux, Montréal 2017-2019. Photo: Mélanie Dusseault

While bottom-up efforts foster a strong sense of place and ownership, they often face challenges in scaling up or securing the necessary resources to sustain long-term projects. Without the support of larger institutions, many community-driven initiatives struggle to go beyond their initial stages. The most effective placemaking doesn't have to be either strictly top-down or bottom-up. Instead, a collaborative model that combines the strengths of both approaches can create

spaces that are not only functional and beautiful but also deeply connected to the community.

A collaborative model allows the practitioner to leverage the strengths of both approaches, combining the financial and technical resources of top-down efforts with the cultural relevance and grassroots energy of bottom-up initiatives. This model in-

volves partnerships between governments, private developers, and local communities, ensuring that placemaking projects are informed by both expert knowledge and local needs.

One standout example of this collaborative approach is **Bryant Park** in New York City. Originally a top-down project, the park's redevelopment was led by urban planners. However, ongoing programming and management of the space have been deeply influenced by community input, making it a space that serves office workers, local residents, and tourists alike.

Castor et Pollux, public space designers from Montréal, emphasize community participation through participatory urban workshops, promoting a bottom-up approach to city-making. In the conception of their public space projects they facilitate deep and intentional workshops with local residents and engage them in hands-on activities—such as creating models of street furniture, exploring plans for planting, or marking boundaries in public spaces—fostering local ownership and engagement. The goal is to empower citizens to take an active role in transforming their neighbourhoods, democratizing the process and ensuring that public spaces reflect the shared vision of the community. These activities bring people together and encourage interaction and collective problem-solving, which strengthens community connections.

## Bridging the Gap

Through open innovation and community feedback, this approach enables placemaking to evolve organically, responding to the shifting needs of the people who use these spaces. This collaborative approach to placemaking taps into the financial and technical resources of top-down entities while integrating the flexibility and cultural relevance of bottom-up efforts.

By embracing this valuable exchange, placemaking becomes an evolving process that responds to the shifting needs of the people who use them. When top-down expertise meets bottom-up creativity, we can create spaces that are not only functional but also culturally and socially vibrant.

The sweet spot for the experienced placemaking practitioner is to be the thoughtful intermediary between the top down and the bottom up, assembling a place strategy to meet the needs of all stakeholders, including natural systems.

The Bentway, Public Work, Toronto 2018. Photo: Bradley Golding







# PEOPLE ARE 50% MORE LIKELY

to spend time in areas where creative placemaking has been implemented compared to those without such initiatives. This reflects how well-designed public spaces can enhance economic activity by drawing more visitors and encouraging them to linger longer.

Source: Toronto Metropolitan University  
—Impact of Public Art and Placemaking





Activate Downtown Brampton, Brampton BIA, 8 80 Cities, The City of Brampton 2022. Photo: Courtesy of the City of Brampton

# Placemaking in Canada: A Collaborative Success Story

The Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI) has exemplified the transformative power of a collaborative, community-led approach to placemaking.



Braiding Stories in Rowntree Mills Park, Arts Etobicoke, Etobicoke 2022. Photo: Courtesy of Arts Etobicoke



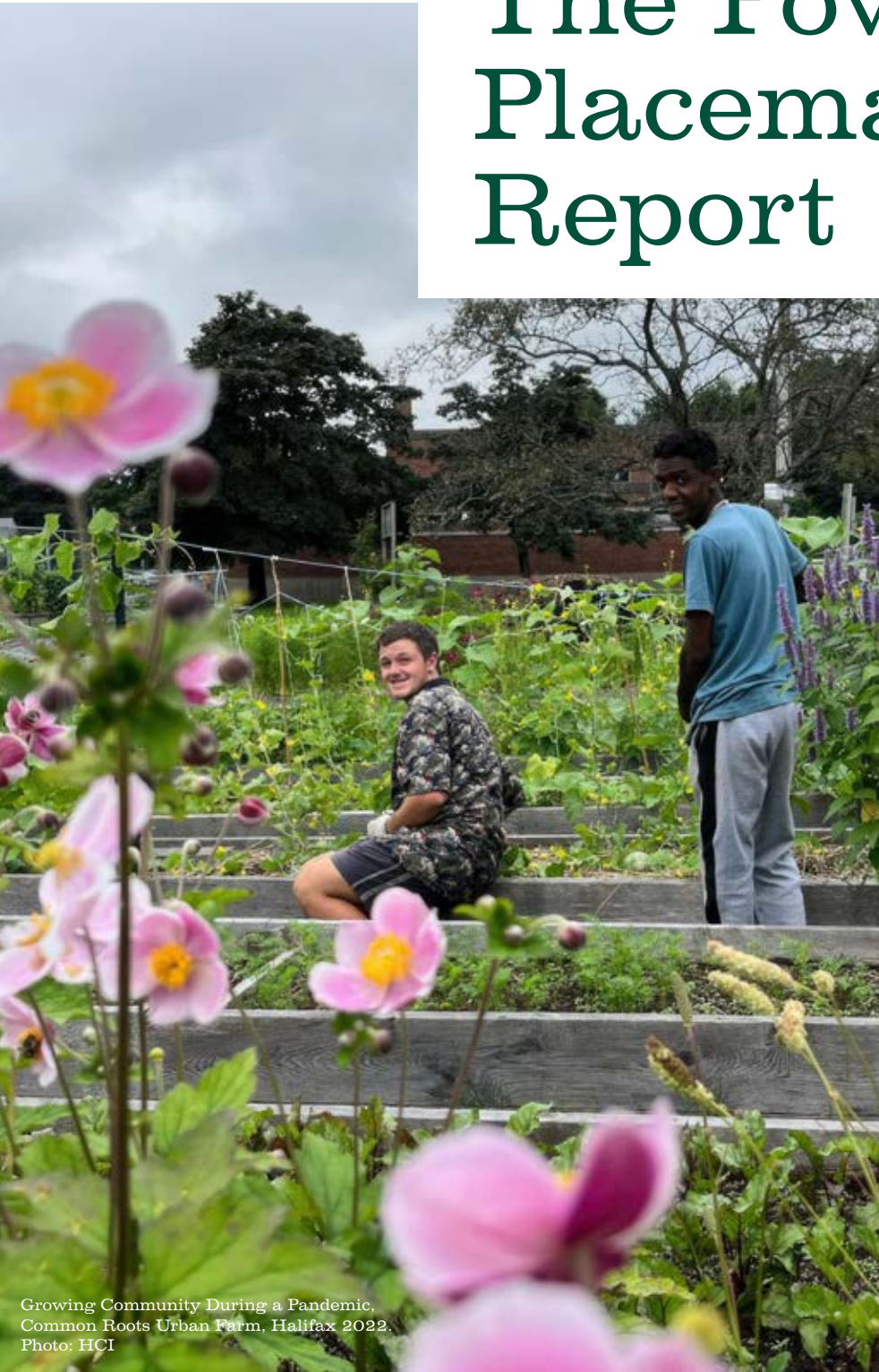
Western Bay Lighthouse Trails Safe and Vibrant Public Spaces Project, Conception Bay, 2021. Photo: Robyne Warren

The Healthy Communities Initiative funded more than 1,000 projects with local governments, charities, Indigenous communities, and non-profits, empowering local groups to spearhead community-building efforts in response to the challenges brought by COVID-19. The funding, ranging from \$5,000 to \$250,000, engaged local organizations to create or modify public spaces for safe cultural and physical activities, improve transportation options that maintain physical distancing, and implement digital solutions for community engagement and

service delivery. The Canada Healthy Communities Initiative, a \$60 million federal investment designed to support communities in adapting public spaces and services amid the COVID-19 pandemic, showcased community creativity and resourcefulness in fostering safe, accessible public environments. Administered by Community Foundations of Canada, the Healthy Communities Initiative placed resources directly into the hands of local leaders and at the ground-level of many communities across the country, resulting in

timely beneficial outcomes and a greater sense of belonging and engagement within communities. This program opened new doors for collaboration among governments, community foundations, and local organizations, to work collaboratively toward more equitable, timely, and inclusive placemaking approaches. This program illustrates the power to scale initiatives to meet the diverse needs of many cities and towns while enabling solutions to remain rooted in local identity, culture, and community-led vision.





Growing Community During a Pandemic,  
Common Roots Urban Farm, Halifax 2022.  
Photo: HCI

# The Power of Placemaking Report

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical need for accessible, high-quality public spaces. In response, the Government of Canada funded Community Foundations of Canada to administer community-led placemaking projects nationwide through the Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI). While the HCI program concluded in 2024, the momentum it sparked in communities continues to build, with communities increasingly motivated and encouraged to drive change from the ground up. The powerful results and heartening impacts of placemaking interventions have become clear as well as its ability to create spaces that enhance both individual well-being and community resilience.

The *Power of Placemaking* report, developed by Happy Cities in partnership with the Healthy Communities Initiative, highlights how placemaking is reshaping urban and rural environments across Canada. Drawing on research from 2021 to 2023, and insights from over 100 placemakers, the report provides evidence of the wide-ranging benefits of community-led placemaking. From fostering social connections to promoting mental and physical health, encouraging inclusivity, and enhancing safety, the report paints a compelling picture of how placemaking can build stronger, more connected communities.

Placemaking is not just about improving public spaces—it's about fostering a sense of ownership and pride. When commu-

nities take the lead in shaping their surroundings, they cultivate an enduring connection to their spaces, which is essential for long-term health and well-being. The study in Canada reveals six key dimensions where placemaking has instigated positive impacts with individuals and communities:

- **Social Connections:** Well-designed public spaces encourage interaction, foster new relationships, and reduce isolation and loneliness.
- **Physical and Mental Health:** Thoughtfully designed spaces such as parks and plazas promote physical activity, reduce stress, and provide environments that support mental wellness and relaxation.
- **Belonging and Inclusion:** By involving residents in the design and care of public spaces, placemaking fosters a sense of belonging and pride, particularly in diverse or underserved neighbourhoods.
- **Economic Vibrancy:** Vibrant public spaces attract foot traffic, support local businesses, and contribute to healthier local economies by driving both community engagement and property values.
- **Safety and Comfort:** Thoughtful design enhances perceptions of safety, encourages social interaction and fosters a sense of ownership among community members.

- **Resilience and Climate Action:** Integrating green infrastructure into place-based projects supports climate resilience, ensuring that cities and towns are better equipped to face future environmental challenges.

## COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PLACEMAKING

The report finds that truly effective placemaking must be community-driven. It highlights numerous examples where local residents played a central role in shaping and managing projects. This community ownership ensures that spaces reflect local values and needs, while also empowering people to be active participants in the process. Key to this approach is continually asking critical questions to ensure that placemaking is inclusive and equitable: Who is this project for? Whose voices are being heard? Who will use and care for the space?

## CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Despite the clear benefits, several barriers to successful placemaking remain:

- **Funding:** Many small-scale placemaking projects begin with modest financial support, but sustaining or scaling these initiatives over time is a challenge without ongoing investment.

- **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Successful placemaking requires coordination between local governments, businesses, and community groups—each with different priorities. Stronger partnerships are essential for long-term success.
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Navigating zoning restrictions, permits, and regulatory processes can slow or derail placemaking efforts. Streamlining these procedures is key to enabling more creative and impactful uses of public spaces.

## BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR THE FUTURE

Though HCI funding has concluded, the projects it supported continue to inspire and serve as models for future placemaking. Placemaking is about more than physical transformation—it's about building relationships within communities. By considering human scale in the creation of spaces, placemaking strengthens social bonds, promotes equity, and makes cities and towns more resilient. The *Power of Placemaking* report concludes with a call to action for policymakers, funders, and community leaders. It urges them to recognize placemaking as a powerful tool for enhancing quality of life and invites readers to use the report's insights as a blueprint for their own projects.



I HeART MAIN STREET  
STEPS PUBLIC ART

I HeART Main Street supports local Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and cultural workers by catalyzing funding and opportunity for multidisciplinary public artwork in underutilized spaces along commercial main streets. A series of projects in 2021, supported by the Canadian Healthy Communities Initiative funding, collaborated with 27 BIA’s and over 50 artists to support community engagement and recovery for local main streets across 8 cities in Ontario. The project continues to build capacity for public art production while prioritizing the inclusion of underrepresented stories and artists.



Storefront Window Wraps, STEPS Public Art, Downtown Timmins BIA, Jennifer Illett Timmins 2021. Photo: Nene Fortier



**THESE COLLECTIONS  
ILLUSTRATE CREATIVITY,  
ACTIONABLE IDEAS,  
AND PLACEMAKING'S  
ADAPTABILITY TO BRING  
SPACES TO LIFE.**

# WINTER PLACE MAKING



Warming Huts - Hay Space, Manitoba Association of Architects, Winnipeg 2023. Photo: Kristhine Guerrero

Winter placemaking transforms public spaces into vibrant, inclusive environments even in the coldest months. It’s not just about adapting spaces to winter weather, but creatively reimagining them to foster social connections and encourage outdoor activity. By addressing winter-specific challenges—like reduced daylight

and icy conditions—these initiatives turn obstacles into opportunities for unique seasonal experiences. Communities across Canada (and beyond) are embracing the spirit of winter through placemaking, helping to counter winter isolation, promote outdoor civic activity, and enhance mental well-being in the form of winter places for people.



Manitoboggan, Public City Architecture, Winnipeg 2020. Photo: Courtesy of Public City Architecture



Entre les Rangs, QDSi, Kanva Architecture, Montréal 2016. Photo: Cindy Boyce



Bradley Park Winter Program Enhancement, Moosomin 2021. Photo: Town of Moosomin



Winter Station Parc de la Maison Valois, En Temps Et Lieu, Montréal 2022



La Sous-Bois, COVID Emergency Winter Station, Castor & Pollux, Montréal 2020-2021. Photo: Michael Abril



WinterCity Festivals and Events, City of Edmonton, Edmonton 2012. Photo: IQRemix



# TAKE A SEAT!

Seating plays a vital role in placemaking as it enhances social interaction, comfort, and inclusivity in public spaces. Strategically placed seating naturally attracts passersby, encouraging them to pause and engage with their surroundings, fostering a deeper sense of belonging and connection with each other and the environment. Comfortable seating encourages prolonged use of spaces, inviting activities such as socializing, relaxing, and dining, which contribute to a lively and leisurely atmosphere. Inclusivity is also key, with seating designs that cater to diverse needs—such as benches in varying sizes and heights, with armrests for the elderly, and/or accessible seating for those with disabilities—ensuring that public spaces are welcoming to all. In addition to functionality, thoughtfully designed seating, integrated with natural or architectural elements, contributes to the aesthetic, identity, and enjoyment of a space.



Prenez-Place!, ADHOC + Maude Lescarbeau & Camille Blais, Montréal 2020. Photo: Raphaël Thibodeau



Port Credit Muskoka Chairs with Port Credit BIA, STEPS Public Art, Mississauga 2021. Photo: Selina McCallum



Portal, Urban Conga, Sarasota 2023 Photo: Christopher Brickman



Shamrock Table, PXP Design, Montréal 2019. Photo: Raphael Thibodeau



Waterfront Hammocks, Outside! Landscape Architects Inc., Halifax 2018. Photo: T.J Maguire



Les Becs Bleus, Castor et Pollux, Quebec 2023. Photo: Michael Abril



The Solstice Garden, En Temps Et Lieu, Montréal 2021-2024. Photo: En Temps Et Lieu and Latrompette Studio



Waterfront BIA, CK-JJ and MASSIVart, Toronto 2022-2023. Photo: Eliot Wright



# CONCRETE REIMAGINED



YZD Plaza, Future Simple Studio, Toronto 2024. Photo: Courtesy of Northcrest

Placemaking often involves redesigning and upgrading existing urban structure. This approach goes beyond maintenance, allowing for underutilized or deteriorating infrastructure to be repurposed, maximized, and transformed—we can imagine overpasses, curbs, transit stations, and vacant lots—into cultural magnets that encourage social gathering and lead to improved connectivity and mobility. This concept in placemaking can also remedy an over-use of

concrete infrastructure bringing natural elements into heat islands thus improving the environment through ecological interventions. Additionally, integrating public art, floor murals, enhanced lighting, and thoughtful design that reflects the community can turn previously unused spaces into expressions of local pride. These projects strengthen neighbourhood character and create more welcoming, engaging spaces for residents and visitors alike.



From Weeds We Grow, STEPS Public Art, Toronto 2020. Photo: Anushay Sheikh



Les Filets (The nets) of Esplanade Tranquille, Dikini with Alto design. Photo: Dikini



Agora Maximus, LAAB Collective, with PXP Design and Bao Nguyen, Montréal 2022. Photo: Raphael Thibodeau



Bump Festival, BB Iskew & Ryley Williams. Calgary 2022. Photo: Jevan Bailey



Yarmouth Main Street, Fathom Studio, Nova Scotia 2021. Photo: Harrison Jardine



Underpass Park, PFS Studio and The Planning Partnership, Toronto 2012. Photo: Rick Harris



DeLIGHTful Downtown, Nocturne, Downtown Halifax 2023. Photo: Stoo Metz



# WALK IT OUT

Walk it Out is more than just a collection of pedestrian projects—it’s a movement that showcases how people-centred streets can transform city life. These projects prove that when roads prioritize pedestrians over vehicles, cities become safer, alive, and connected. Successful pedestrian programs start with bringing everyone to the table, from local businesses to residents, ensuring voices are heard to bring forward the right approach. The results speak for themselves:

in places like Ontario Street and Mont Royal Avenue in Montréal, pedestrianization has boosted sales, increased foot traffic, and turned streets into lively destinations. With cosy seating, lush greenery, public art, and open spaces for performances, the many examples provided here remind us that streets can be more than thoroughfares—they can be social hubs that invite connection, spark joy, and build community.



Wellington Street Pedestrian Project, Verdun Montréal. Photo: Caroline Perron



Promenade Ontario Street, PXP Design, Montréal 2020. Photo: Raphael Thibodeau



Connaught Open Street, Sustainable Calgary and Connaught School, Calgary 2022. Photo: Sustainable Calgary



Projet de Ruelle Vert, Plateau Mont Royal, Montréal 2019. Photo: Toma Iczkovits



Pedestrianization of Mont-Royal Avenue, Castor & Pollux, Montréal 2020. Photo: Michael Abril

According to residents, the (people-centered) interventions have a positive impact on the entire neighbourhood (85%), highlight its attractions (85%) and improve the overall quality of life (83%).

Source: Borough of Mercier-Hochelaga-Maisonneuve



Gastown Water Street, Vancouver 2024. Photo: Vancouver Public Space Network



# RE-INDIGENIZING SPACES



Ziibiing, Brook Mcilroy & University of Toronto, Toronto 2024. Photo: Brook Mcilroy

Centering the cultural heritage, leadership, and agency of Indigenous communities is vital in placemaking, especially in countries that continue to navigate a deep legacy of colonial violence. There are multiple ways to connect to place through an Indigenous lens, from acknowledging treaties and original names, to fostering public space built by and

for Indigenous communities, as well as encouraging the preservation of language and tradition, education, community healing, and more. We encourage readers to review the Civic-Indigenous Toolkit’s best practices, generously shared by Evergreen, and look to some stellar Indigenous-led placemaking projects, on this spread:



Kapabamayak Achaak Healing Forest, Healing Forest Winnipeg Inc. and ft3 Architecture Landscape Interior Design, Winnipeg 2020. Photo: Duncan McNairnay



Ziibiing, Brook Mcilroy & University of Toronto, Toronto 2024. Photo: Brook Mcilroy



‘Isoktew’ by Amy Malbeuf in River Lot 11 Indigenous Art Park, Edmonton 2018 Photo: City of Edmonton



Parc Pindigen, Studio Overall, Ottawa 2017 Photo: Studio Overall



Everything you think you need to be, you already are. Artist Caroline Brown interpreting the words Joanne Okimawinew Dallaire, TMU Art Collection, Toronto 2023 Photo: Caroline Brown



# OLD TO NEW



The High Line, The City of New York, New York City 2014. Photo: Iwan Baan, courtesy of Friends of the High Line

Old to New is a collection featuring the results of breathing new life into underused and lost spaces. Revitalizing these sites isn’t just about preserving their architectural charm—it’s about embracing cultural heritage, nurturing community spirit, and promoting sustainable development. When old buildings and urban infrastructure are transformed, they do more than evoke collective memories; they bolster local identity and spark community pride.

Repurposing underutilized spaces is also a win for the planet.

By reusing existing structures, cities save materials and cut down on waste, aligning with eco-friendly urban goals. Economically, a growing number of revitalized spaces have proven to draw tourists, attract businesses, and generate interest with cultural events, energizing local economies and providing additional community value.

When residents are invited to contribute their ideas and help shape these heritage and underused spaces, it sparks an authentic transformation that can be inclusive and mirror the community’s cultural diversity.



NDSM, NDSM Werf Foundation, Amsterdam 2009. Photo: Andy Nash



Parkade of the Future, 5468796 Architecture & Kasian Architecture, Calgary 2022. Photo: James Brittain Photography



Breaking Boundaries, Domansa Urbiculture Lab, Seoul 2020. Photo: Courtesy of Heidi Youngha Cho



City Centre Lodge, Vancouver Mural Festival, Vancouver 2022. Photo: VMF, Sabrina Miso Creative



The Bentway, Public Work, Toronto 2018. Photo: Jonathan Gazze



ProjetMILL, Jeunes volontaires and Government of Quebec, Montréal 2013



# MOVE AND GROOVE

Trekfit Parc Olympique Montréal, PXP Design, Montréal 2020. Photo: Trekfit

Move and Groove is a collection of interventions inviting residents to prioritize activity and community connection. These projects can transform underused areas into dynamic environments with walking and cycling paths, outdoor fitness zones, and spaces for spontaneous dance classes, sports courts, and inclusive play areas that cater to various ages and abilities. By meeting community needs with novel ideas, Move and Groove makes it easy for people to incorporate movement into their daily routines. This approach not only boosts physical health but also creates a sense of belonging and inclusivity. The result is a welcoming spaces that invite everyone to come, play, and stay active, and make shared urban areas more vibrant and engaging.



High Park, Neighbourhood Beltline Association, Calgary 2020-2024. Photo: Neighbourhood Beltline Association



Park Park, Public City Architecture, Calgary 2020. Photo: Kokemore Studio



Windermere Community Fitness Park, Healthy Communities Initiative, Vancouver 2023. Photo: Windermere Community Fitness Park



Jouer, Castor et Pollux, Montréal. Photo: Castor et Pollux



Entangled, Urban Conga, Little Haiti Miami 2019. Photo: Christopher Brickman



# INTER- ACTIVE PLAY

Interactive Play invites you to pause and rediscover the joy in public spaces through playful and immersive installations. This growing collection demonstrates how art can turn everyday city spots into places of wonder and connection. These projects in public places allow for the spark of moments of shared play, inviting residents of all ages and backgrounds to step out of their routines and into spaces that delight and surprise.



Minigolf Gamelin, En Temps et Lieu, Montréal 2023. Photo: Vivien Gaumand and PQDS



L'île aux volcans, Castor & Pollux, Montréal 2018- 2019. Photo : Rosemont-La-Petite-Patrie borough



21 Balançoires, Daily tous les jours, Montréal 2011. Photo: Olivier Blouin



Gaukel Street Parkette Heart, Earthscape Play, Kitchener 2024. Photo: Earthscape Play



pARC, Urban Conga, Chapel Hill 2022. Photo: Tom Waldenberg



Eloge de l'air de Chevalvert, QDSi, Brussels 2023. Photo: Eric Danhier



Beirut Public Stairs, UN-Habitat Lebanon and CatalyticAction, Lebanon 2022.



# A CASE TO INVEST

For stakeholders balancing economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity, placemaking represents an opportunity to create not just public spaces, but thriving ecosystems that generate long-term value. As more cities across Canada continue to invest in public space projects that connect meaningfully to community needs, the case for placemaking as a critical tool for urban development grows ever stronger.

Placemaking drives direct economic benefits by increasing property values, boosting commercial activity, and promoting tourism. Tax revenues are increased and jobs created. Moreover, it can reduce public spending in areas like healthcare, infrastructure, and public safety in its ability to offer new contexts for social relations and outdoor activities.

# (1) Economic ROI



ByWard Market and the George Street Plaza  
Photo: Ottawa Tourism



# QUARTIER DES SPECTACLES

Montréal, QC

Montréal's Quartier des Spectacles demonstrates the economic potential of places designed for people and actively managed as public cultural spaces. The 1km<sup>2</sup> territory is home to 8 public spaces attracting over 8.5 million visitors and \$400 million in economic activity annually through its central free access to festival and cultural programming. Managed by the Quartier des Spectacles Partnership

and its board of cultural organizations, the area's animated vibrant festivals, events, human scale places, and year-round free programs, not only boost local businesses but also raise property values, significantly increasing revenue from property and business taxes.

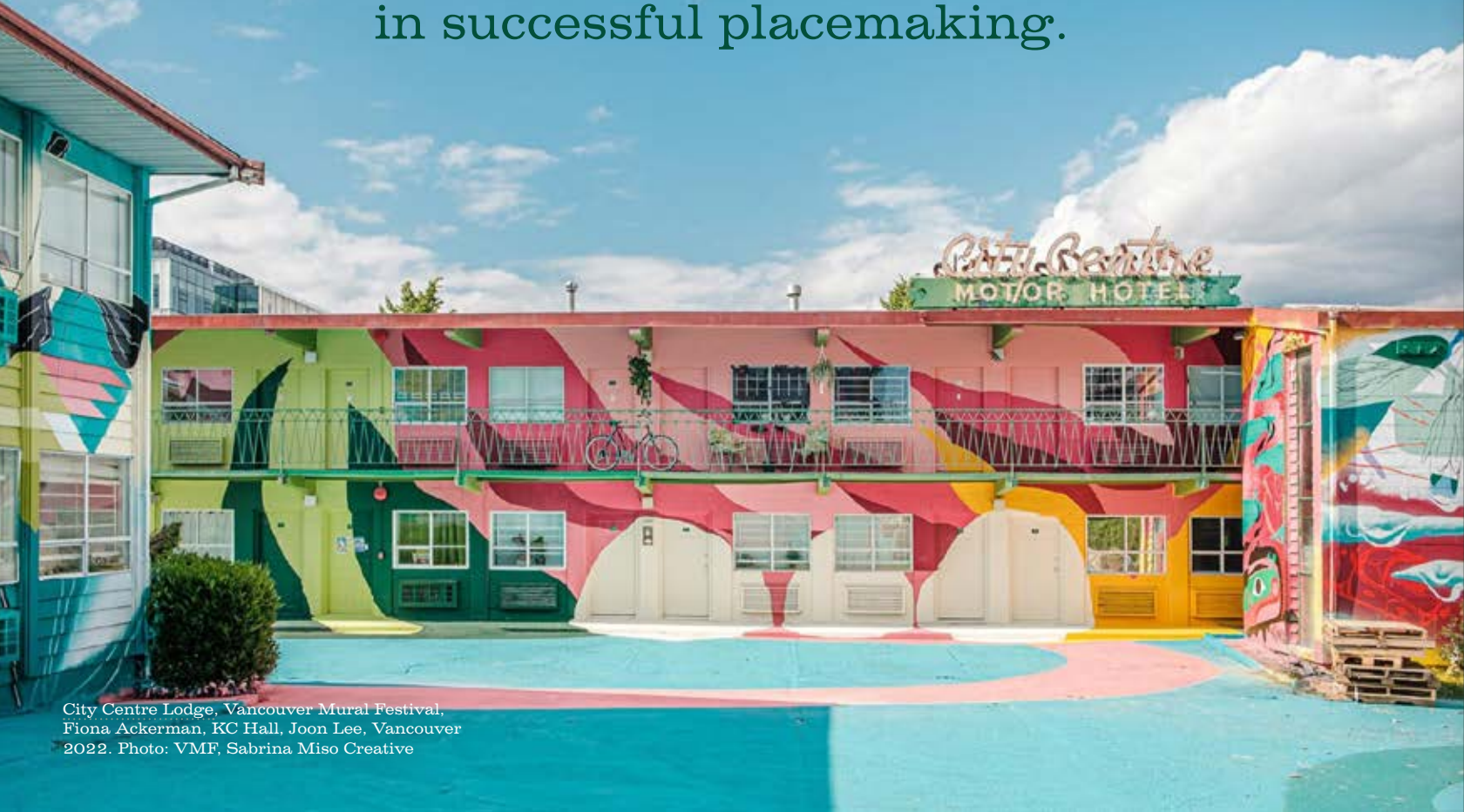
Since the turn of the millennium the investment to build five public places was \$234 million. From strong support and world-class programs

it catalyzes new investment to the area, notably between 2007 and 2023 the area welcomed 80 new major construction, renovation and expansion real estate projects representing a total investment of \$3.3 billion in the district. The economic spin-offs in consumption taxes is \$475 million and the property taxes related to these projects generate an annual surplus of \$44 million.



# POWER OF MURALS

Street art and murals play an essential role in successful placemaking.



City Centre Lodge, Vancouver Mural Festival, Fiona Ackerman, KC Hall, Joon Lee, Vancouver 2022. Photo: VMF, Sabrina Miso Creative

Murals bring more than just art to public spaces—they infuse places with shared stories, inspire community pride, and combat urban neglect. They transform underutilized areas into vibrant, welcoming sites that encourage diverse uses and interactions. Beyond their visual impact, the practice of creating murals often



acts as a catalyst for community engagement and for local economic impact, where the process itself becomes a unifying event, fostering connections between artists, residents, and local stakeholders. Mural festivals like Montréal’s MURAL exemplify this, demonstrating how art can energize neighbourhoods and bring people together while driving significant economic gains. Since its inception in 2013, MURAL has set out to democratize art and inject life into public spaces through ongoing programming. In 2024, the festival’s 11th edition drew nearly 500,000 visitors and generated \$36.4 million in direct economic benefits, highlighting its role as an economic and cultural driver. Festivals deliver beyond numbers; their collaborations with local leaders create lasting impacts, from open-air galleries to educational workshops, all of which reinforce shared identity and community participation.

As a mechanism of placemaking, murals thrive within bottom-up approaches that emphasize local input, building trust and transparency through community consultations and advisory committees. This model empowers towns and cities to tell their stories and enhance their public spaces. In 2024, the Beltline Urban Murals

Project (BUMP) commissioned 83 unique artworks in Calgary, expanding their total collection to 360 installations that weave narratives of place, identity, and possibility into Calgary’s public realm. Initiatives such as Montréal’s MU demonstrate how murals can cultivate neighbourhood pride, enabling residents

to feel reflected in their surroundings. Similarly, Street Art Toronto (StART) revitalizes areas with community-engaged street art, deterring vandalism and enriching local life. StART’s programs, including the ‘Outside the Box’ initiative, mentor emerging artists and embed cultural narratives across the

city, attracting visitors, fostering pride, and driving economic development. Sudbury’s Up Here festival showcases the multifaceted benefits of mural-driven placemaking. Since 2015, it has significantly impacted the local economy by generating over \$5 million, paying \$700,000 in artist fees, and engaging 75,000 visitors. This effort has led to 73 new public artworks and 45,000 volunteer hours, showcasing how festivals can mobilize local resources and build community spirit. Vancouver Mural Fest (VMF) underscored how art can rejuvenate spaces, turning underused urban areas into hubs of cultural pride. Projects such as the transformation of the City Centre Motel exterior illustrate the potential of murals to inspire further development and bring people together. This site, repurposed as affordable studios for artists, exemplifies how strategic public art can generate ongoing creative activity and community interaction. Across Canada, murals—whether part of large-scale festivals or standalone projects—are playing a vital role in fostering community identity, boosting economic vitality, and supporting a cohesive, connected urban fabric.





# RIVER HALL

Calgary, AB

In Calgary’s West End, River Hall emerged as a powerful example of effective placemaking. Addressing limited public space amenities in a rapidly densifying area, the City of Calgary identified Lot 6, an open-air municipal parking lot, as an opportunity to create a vibrant community space. The vision extended beyond filling the space toward a hypothesis of creating a sense of community, and testing future development concepts through placemaking. The project, developed by the City of Calgary, assisted by Belleville Placemaking and produced by Aire Commune, sought to create a welcoming space that was inclusive, dynamic, and reflective of Calgary’s unique community spirit. This included establishing a place where neighbors could meet, families and adults could enjoy themselves, and visitors

could experience an inviting boardwalk by the river, shifting the space orientation to embrace the natural path of the Bow River, creating an inviting “neighbourhood backyard”. During its five-week pilot in 2024, River Hall exceeded projections, attracting over 10,000 visitors, hosting 20 events with 25 artists and 60 local partners, and generating \$85,000 in sales. Vendors did well and surveys affirmed the venue’s value as a community hub. This early success prompted plans for a full 2025 season and informed future development strategies to prioritize river-facing retail—a unique move for Calgary. River Hall’s impact demonstrated that with modest investment, place-first strategies could drive economic vitality, enrich community life, and shape the future of urban design in meaningful ways.

Direct Economic ROI



River Hall, City of Calgary, Belleville Placemaking and Aire Commune. Calgary 2024. Photo: Glassfilm photography



# STACKT

Toronto, ON

Aerial STACKT, Toronto 2023.  
Photo: Franz Masini

Toronto's STACKT Market integrates retail, art, and community in a modular design of repurposed shipping containers. Since its inception in April 2019, STACKT has been redefining how cities use their public spaces, offering visitors a myriad of experiences ranging from local art and culinary offerings to contemporary brand showcases, and cultural events.

STACKT, built on an unused former industrial site, has become a key destination for Torontonians and tourists, since opening in 2019, achieving more than six billion media impressions, five million on-site visitors, and partnerships with more than 3500 brands. Its modular design, created by LGA Architectural Partners, enables flexibility and scalability, allowing the market to

keep evolving and offering new and exciting experiences. Pop-up spaces can be leased for a pop-up short-term lease or business owners can become part of the permanent residents of STACKT.

One of STACKT's key features is its commitment to community engagement and social enterprise, serving as a platform for cultural events and for local and international artists to display their work. From music festivals to food markets, the fluidity of the space is designed to support a wide array of accessible activities, boasting a modular design that uses repurposed materials and keeps sustainable development at the forefront. The market also features several social enterprises, supporting both local entrepreneurs and broader social causes.

## FUNDERS

### Community Partners

First Capital  
REIT  
City of Toronto  
Collective Society 360  
STACKLAB  
So Good City  
Cry Baby Gallery  
Scadding Court Community Centre  
Bowery Project

### Event Partners

ISO Radio  
Spiniko

### Hospitality Partners

Blue Moon Brewery  
Highbell Hospitality Group  
Victory Group



This model, demonstrated over their five year track record, offers both an economic return to

relevant stakeholders and ongoing community benefit and destination value. STACKT, with its

urban design and placemaking intention, demonstrates the potential for underused public assets to serve as both economic and cultural hubs.



Hygienic Dress League, Nuit Blanche, Toronto 2019. Photo: Hygienic Dress League



Nuit Blanche, STACKT, Toronto 2023. Photo: STACKT



STACKT Market, Toronto 2019. Photo: Supplied by STACKT

**3500+**  
partnerships

**5M**  
visitors

**6B**  
media impressions



STACKT Market, Toronto 2024. Photo: Supplied by STACKT



Placemaking can strengthen the social fabric and inspire community cohesion. Amenities in the public realm can enhance the quality of life of residents, encourage public engagement, and foster a sense of pride and stewardship over common spaces. Accessibility and open spaces introduce opportunities for people to linger, cross paths and strengthen their relationships as neighbours. We can positively impact collective mental and physical health by inviting outdoor activity, reducing social isolation, and creating safer, more engaging sustainable social environments.

# (2) Social ROI





# THE BENTWAY

Toronto, ON

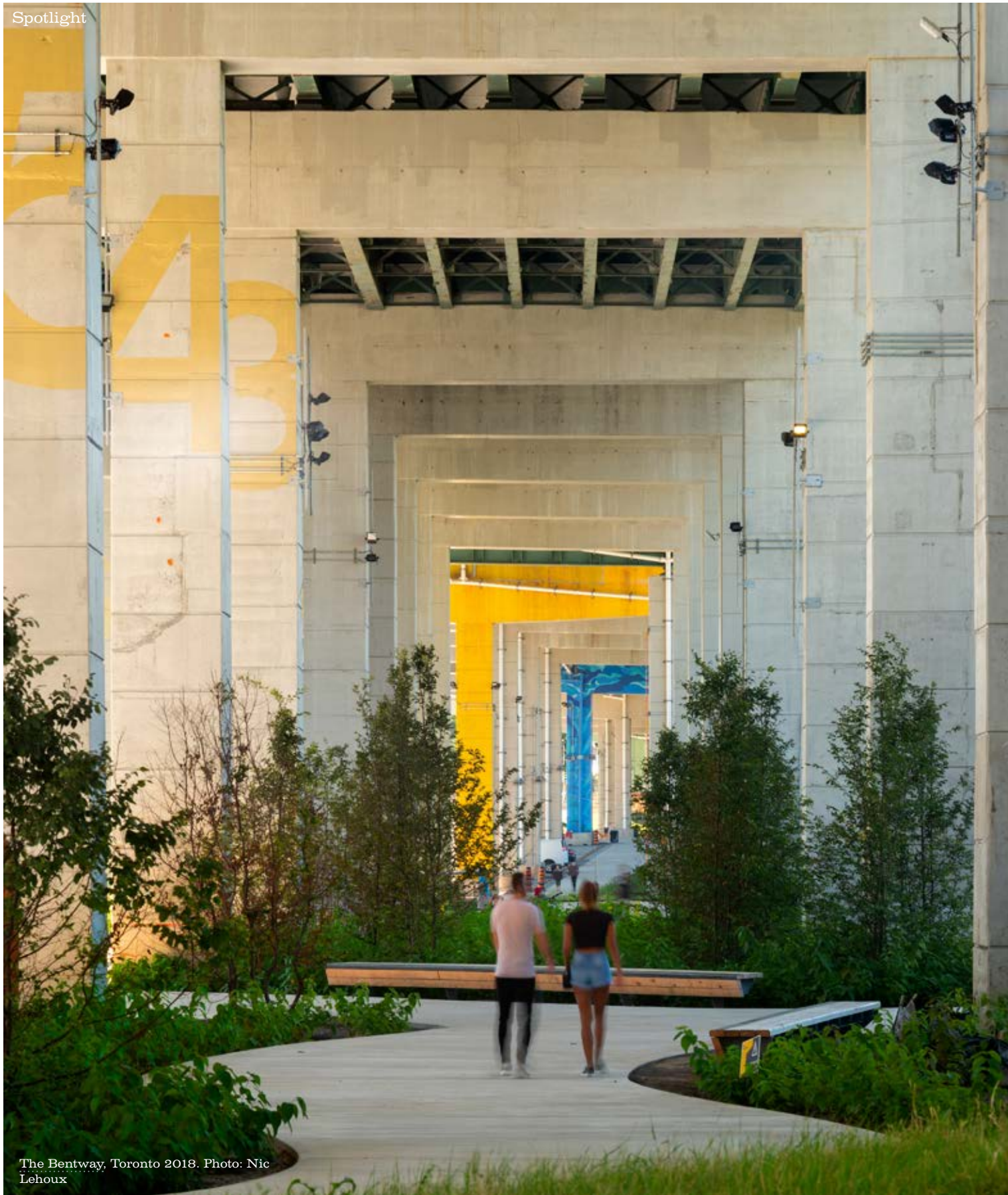
The latest addition to Toronto's changing public realm under the Gardiner Expressway is an ambitious and well-considered continuation of The Bentway's model to reimagine underused urban spaces as resilient, welcoming, and socially cohesive city places. Reflecting the leadership vision of the celebrated public space, a new initiative entitled The Bentway Islands will turn a series of medians between Dan Leckie Way and Spadina Avenue into spaces that blend play, biodiversity, and sustainable landscapes—covering more than 120,000 square feet of additional public space designed by Field Operations (New York) and Brook McIlroy (Toronto).

With input from local residents and a focus on Indigenous-led environmental sustainability, The Bentway Islands will offer welcoming areas for recreation that feature low-carbon, ecologically conscious designs such as rainwater

management and renewable energy sources, as well as intentional spaces that ignite community interaction across diverse groups, including the unhoused population.

The publicly accessible plan for the Islands embodies placemaking at its best: thoughtful, community-driven professional design that invites people to reconnect with their surroundings by bringing daily life to overlooked areas and addressing pressing urban challenges in meaningful ways.

Phase 1 of The Bentway was catalyzed by a \$25M donation from Judy and Wil Matthews to the City of Toronto, and ongoing funding has been received from a growing family of supporters including the City, Manulife, Balsam Foundation, Waterfront BIA, Ontario Trillium Foundation and more. (See the website for the full list of funders, [www.thebentway.ca](http://www.thebentway.ca))



The Bentway, Toronto 2018. Photo: Nic Lehoux



# EVERGREEN BRICK WORKS

Toronto, ON

Social ROI

Evergreen Brick Works, Toronto.  
Photo: Andrea Davidora







This former industrial site has been reimagined into a community hub that attracts thousands of visitors for environmental education, cultural events, and outdoor activities. Public park usage has increased by 15%, and the site plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of life in Toronto. Photo: Evergreen

Nestled in the heart of Toronto’s Don Valley ravine system, Evergreen Brick Works is a magical public space that welcomes thousands of people each year. In 2010, national nonprofit Evergreen transformed this series of deteriorating heritage buildings into an award-winning public space. Today it is internationally renowned for its leading-edge green technologies and ideas for building

sustainable cities and climate-ready public spaces across the country. A historic brick factory that made the bricks that built Toronto, the Brick Works is Canada’s first large-scale community environmental centre, featuring public markets that nurture small businesses, innovative pilot programs in the Children’s Garden that experiment with play, and ongoing efforts to

make the multi-space building a carbon-neutral facility. The learning gathered from the programs at the Brick Works helps Evergreen establish initiatives that can scale nationwide. Recognized by National Geographic as one of the top 10 ecotourism destinations worldwide, here are a few aspects that helped make the Brick Works one of Toronto’s most unique public spaces.

# Integrating nature into the cities is a crucial aspect of urban revitalization.



**SUSTAINABLE, CLIMATE-READY DESIGN**  
Designed with environmental consciousness, the Brick Works incorporates green features such as solar thermal technology and a renewable geo-exchange system. Its climate-resilient infrastructure includes cisterns and bioswales, mitigating the impact of extreme weather events like floods.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**  
The site actively fosters community involvement through public workshops, events, and markets, helping to build a strong sense of ownership and pride among city residents.



**ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND CONNECTION TO NATURE**  
Serving as an educational hub, the Brick Works offers programs on ecology, gardening, and sustainability, inspiring kids, adults, and organizations to adopt eco-friendly practices.

**GREEN SPACE RESTORATION**  
The project has revitalized surrounding natural areas, creating habitats for wildlife and offering recreational opportunities for visitors. Integrating nature into the cities is a crucial aspect of urban revitalization.



**CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
By transforming a derelict industrial site into a lively community space through its markets and public events, the Brick Works supports local economic growth and cultural enrichment, attracting both tourists and residents while supporting the arts and small, local businesses.

Photos, top to bottom: Evergreen, Nathan Zhu, Evergreen, Rebecca Clark, Evergreen,



Today, Evergreen Brick Works is a green respite from the hustle and bustle of city life. With time, patience, and the help of the surrounding community, this once-



abandoned site has blossomed into an attractive public space that nurtures the well-being of Toronto's community and the planet. It exemplifies how revalorization projects can revitalize forgotten spaces, championing sustainability and environmental awareness.



Photos, clockwise from left: Evergreen, Evergreen, Laura Iruegas

#### FUNDERS

##### Development Funding:

In 1992, the first phase of park development was supported by the City of Toronto, the TRCA (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority), and a significant donation by the Weston Foundation.

##### Partners

For over 30 years, the support of partners has been integral to the vitality of this award-winning public place: Foresters Financial, Beanfield Metroconnect, Less Mess Enviro bag, Bullfrog Power, and TD Ready Commitment.

##### Social Enterprise

Evergreen Brick Works functions as a social enterprise, meaning that any profit it makes from revenue-generating ventures like hosting events, the Evergreen Garden Market, or its camps and educational programs is invested in maintaining the Brick Works and used to fund Evergreen's work across Canada.



# (3) Environmental ROI

Investing in ecologically-focused placemaking strategies yields significant environmental returns by enhancing urban resilience to climate change and promote sustainable community design. Urban parks, green roofs, community gardens, wetlands, and bioswales leverage natural processes to tackle environmental challenges. Solutions exist to protect against environmental damages, and foster biodiversity, strengthening ecosystems that support local wildlife and connect communities with their natural surroundings.



ProjetMILL, Jeunes volontaires and Government of Quebec, Montréal 2013.  
Photo: ProjetMILL



# HARVIE PASSAGE

Calgary, AB

Harvie Passage on the Bow River has been transitioned from a once dangerous waterway into a destination-worthy, eco-friendly, recreation space. Following the 2013 floods, the City of Calgary redesigned the passage with two channels: one for thrill-seekers navigating whitewater and another for families enjoying calm waters. This dual setup brings together adventure and accessibility, inviting everyone to enjoy the river safely.

Ecological benefits are central to Harvie Passage’s redesign. Native plants stabilize riverbanks, boost biodiversity, and create habitats for local wildlife. Notably these features contribute

to a flood-resilient environment; reinforced banks and natural flow management protect against erosion and future flood damage.

Harvie Passage is more than a recreational spot—it’s a symbol of Calgary’s resilience, blending outdoor fun with essential ecological safeguards. This project is led by the City’s Parks and Recreation department in partnership with Alberta Environment, and with input from community stakeholders including The Calgary Foundation, Parks Foundation Calgary and the Harvie Passage Task Force who provides ongoing feedback and recommendations.



Harvie Passage, Government of Alberta, Calgary 2013 Photos: Courtesy of City of Calgary



# THE MEADOWWAY

Toronto, ON

Spanning a vast 200 hectares of meadow habitat, The Meadowway is more than just an ecological restoration project; it's a movement that presents an inspiring transformation of an underutilized powerline corridor into a thriving outdoor recreation space that encourages biodiversity, promotes community interaction, and offers a haven for both residents and wildlife. Previously defined by power lines and turf grass, The Meadowway takes inspiration from the success of the Scarborough Centre Butterfly Trail (SCBT), a crucial precedent in showing how urban green spaces can be revitalized to foster increased community engagement and environmental sustainability. On track

to be completed by the end of 2024, The Meadowway will consist of over 16 kilometres of multi-use trails, establishing a full green connection between downtown Toronto and Rouge National Park, offering easy access to nature across 13 neighbourhoods.

The process of restoration encourages biodiversity and revives essential ecosystems required to sustain wildlife habitats. The Meadowway achieves this through diverse native plantings that attract pollinators and support migratory species, contributing to the safe movement of animals and prioritizing deep-rooted plants to stabilize soils, reduce erosion, and improve water retention.



The Meadowway connects

**16**  
km of trails

**13**  
neighbourhoods in Scarborough



**7**  
watercourses

**4**  
ravines

The Meadowway, TRCA, Toronto.  
Photos: TRCA

Provides access to over

**1.1M**  
visitors

**600K**  
hours of education



**111K**  
participants

**1000**  
species flora & fauna





“We’ve taken what has been typically viewed as not a place that someone would want to ride their bike or hang out in and flipped it on its side.”

—Corey Wells

These native plants not only mitigate floods, but also filter air pollutants and cool temperatures to reduce the urban heat island effects. Invasive species are also managed through adaptive strategies.

The Meadoway also places a strong emphasis on community engagement and stewardship, involving community at every stage, from restoration work to educational programs and events. The trail network’s design invites locals and visitors to enjoy nature while traversing the city, and its recreational spaces foster physical

activity and social cohesion. The project’s on-site educational and engagement activities encourage residents to learn about cultural heritage and local ecosystems. Extensive community involvement in planning ensures the project meets residents’ needs, creating a sense of ownership and making The Meadoway a valued community asset.

The Meadoway, with its commitment to long-term ecological restoration and active community participation, is an exemplary project in urban greenspace development.

FUNDERS

**Development and Restoration**  
Total project estimated cost \$38M.

The Weston Family Foundation has pledged up to \$25 million in support, with an initial commitment of \$10 million announced at the launch event on April 11, 2018.

The City of Toronto has to date committed \$6.3 million for a total Phase 1 budget of \$16.3 million.

Additional funds are still being sought to complete Phase 2.

**Operation and Maintenance**  
The land is owned by the Province of Ontario and managed by Hydro One Networks Inc. The TRCA, working with the City of Toronto, maintains the meadow corridor.

The Meadoway, TRCA, Toronto.  
Photo: TRCA





Placemaking serves as a strategic investment to bolster a city's cultural vibrancy, foster a stronger sense of belonging, promote local creativity, and ensure access to diverse cultural experiences. When public spaces reflect the unique narratives and values of a community, they deepen residents' emotional and symbolic connection to their surroundings creating a distinct local identity. Public-access to cultural activity contributes to community health and drives economic growth through increased tourism and local business development.

# (4) Cultural ROI



Prismatica, Raw Design, Montréal  
2015. Photo: Cindy Boyle





Warming Huts - We Still Dream, Manitoba Association of Architects, Winnipeg 2023. Photo: Kristhine Guerrero, Courtesy of The Forks

# THE FORKS

Winnipeg, MB

The Forks in Winnipeg is a beacon for intentional and successful placemaking. What was once an abandoned rail yard has become a spirited gathering place drawing over 4 million visitors annually and contributing \$300 million annually to the local economy. Through public art, festivals, and a rotating selection of local makers, businesses and restaurants, The Forks continues to drive long-term

cultural vibrancy and economic vitality in the heart of Winnipeg. “At the heart of everything we do here at The Forks is community, and our annual Warming Huts competition is just that,” says Sara Stasiuk, CEO of The Forks North Portage. “These huts are designed and built by people for people. We put them down on the river trail to be explored, admired, and enjoyed by anyone and everyone.”



# JARDINS GAMELIN

Montréal, QC



Established ten years ago at Place Émilie-Gamelin, just east of the Quartier des Spectacles by Montréal’s main metro station Berri-UQAM, Jardins Gamelin offers a lively program for four months every year. Rooted in values of social inclusion, collaboration, and cohabitation of diverse needs, Jardins Gamelins is a thematic garden that offers free cultural, educational, and musical programming to reflect the diversity and artistic richness of Montréal.

Jardins Gamelin was originally envisioned as a temporary project to encourage use of the space and restore feelings of safety and vibrancy to the area. In the process, this entertainment and urban development project has helped revitalize Montréal’s socially diverse downtown by providing a touch of colour and joy. Every summer, from May until September, Place Émilie-Gamelin is reimaged into Jardins Gamelin, a lively, green, and inclusive space where culture and agriculture are brought together and celebrated. At the heart of the project, people

from all backgrounds, cultures, and walks of life are welcome. For those experiencing hardship and homelessness, the project has partnered with seasoned community-based organizations to provide ongoing support and necessary resources. Particular attention is given to this population, which has found in the Jardins a place where they feel welcome, supported, and safe.

Visitors stopping by this urban oasis experience a wide range of programming that showcases the diversity and artistic abundance of cosmopolitan Montréal. With the collaboration of dedicated artists and partners, free cultural activities and concerts are presented daily to the great delight of all audiences.

The Jardins’ urban agriculture model provides a breath of fresh air and biodiversity right in the heart of the city. The democratization of this practice is in the DNA of the Jardins, which gives people of all ages an opportunity to get their hands dirty and celebrate the coexistence of nature and the city.

PARTNERS

The initiative, led by the Quartier des Spectacles Partnership and with the support of the Ville-Marie borough, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec and the Canada Council for the Arts, as well as the collaboration of numerous partners including Sentier Urbain, the Société de développement social and the SPVM.

Jardins Gamelin, Quartier des Spectacles Partnership, Montréal. Photo: JALQ Photography



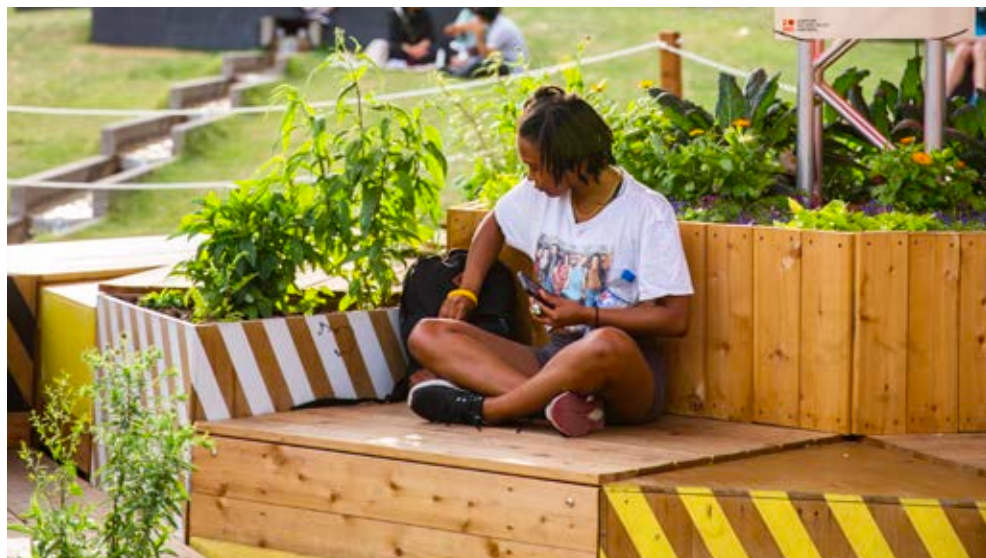


The Jardins Gamelin has become a place for all communities to feel welcome, supported, and safe;

a unique space that everyone can call “home.”

At the Jardins Gamelin, everyone benefits from and

contributes to making this social and cultural vision a reality.



10 seasons:

**3,000**  
artists

**32**  
social organization  
partnerships

**100**  
programming  
partnerships with local  
cultural organizations



# BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES

Chapter led by [PlacemakingUS](#)

In placemaking, the process and the outcomes are equally integral to achieving meaningful success. As cities strive to become more livable, equitable, resilient, and flourishing, placemaking provides a clear path forward, playing a fundamental role in building social connections, enhancing well-being, and advancing sustainable development.



“Public culture develops as strangers watch and converse, acquiring new ways of being. A park atmosphere creates opportunities for social encounters and encourages an openness to others. Together these processes create the context for human flourishing.”

—Setha Low

## Frameworks to Understanding Placemaking Outcomes

To understand the benefits and outcomes of placemaking, our research led us to conversations with thought leaders and practitioners, frameworks, literature, and case studies of different placemaking processes. This chapter taps into Setha Low’s concept of “the six domains of flourishing” from her recent book, *Why Public Space Matters*. Setha Low is a prominent ethnographer who stands as a pioneer in the field of place and public space studies. Low has had a distinguished career and is noted

for her groundbreaking research, innovative methodologies, and transformative insights into the social production and construction of public spaces. Through her seminal work on spatializing culture, Low has significantly influenced the trajectory of ethnographic practice, spatial analysis, and critical urban studies over the past three decades, establishing herself as a central figure in reshaping the discourse on spatiality, placemaking, and social justice within anthropology and beyond.



# SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

Focus on inclusion, representation, and the recognition of diversity.

# PLAY AND RECREATION

A way to cultivate socialization, creativity, and relaxation.

# CULTURAL IDENTITY AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

Emphasizes the importance of cultural symbols, artistic expression, and collective memory

# HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Highlights the role of public spaces in promoting physical and mental health, safety, and resilience

# ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

Encourages urban agriculture, ecological design, and environmental justice

# INFORMAL ECONOMY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Fosters innovative workspaces and social network

*The Six Domains of Flourishing*

—Setha Low

## The Six Domains of Flourishing

The idea of “flourishing” is a deep aspiration of place-based community development informed by positive psychology, a branch of psychology focused on the study of human strengths. Positive psychology offers a unique perspective on what it means to truly thrive and lead a fulfilling life. In this context, flourishing is often described as the optimal state of human functioning, characterized by positive emotions, engagement in activities that align with one’s strengths and values, positive relationships with others, and a sense of meaning and purpose in life. It goes beyond mere happiness or the absence of negative emotions but encompasses a holistic approach to well-being which is expressed across the physical, emotional, social, and psychological aspects of life.

This concept of flourishing informs our placemaking research and collective belief that every

person deserves the opportunity to thrive and have their needs met with dignity. Moreover, it emphasizes that people should have the power to exercise self-determination in the places where they live, creating an environment where they can shape their own futures.

Low’s six domains of flourishing are building blocks that provide a nuanced framework for evaluating how public spaces contribute to the well-being of communities and address systemic inequities that can limit access to the attainment of flourishing. This lens illustrates how placemaking practice can improve the experience of the built environment and deliver what’s needed for a sustainable increase to quality of life. Ultimately, each neighbourhood and place itself ends up defining what human flourishing looks like, and community development organizations can come alongside that vision to help make it a reality.



# SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

## DEFINED OUTCOMES

### INCREASED SOCIAL INCLUSION

Diverse demographic groups, including marginalized communities, actively participate in public space decision-making processes.

### REPRESENTATION IN LEADERSHIP

Public spaces reflect the voices of minority or underrepresented groups in local governance or planning.

### COMMUNITY COHESION

A measurable increase in social trust and a reduction in incidents of exclusion or discrimination within the public space.

### PROTESTS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Use of public spaces for peaceful protests, town halls, or community forums as indicators of civic participation and democratic practice.

Left page: New York Open Streets. Photo: Courtesy of PlacemakingUS  
Right page: Connaught Open Street, Sustainable Calgary and Connaught School, Calgary 2022. Photos: Sustainable Calgary



The potential to reconnect social life through placemaking cannot be understated. The importance of people knowing and supporting each other in community leads to opportunities and strengthens resilience. In Eric Klinenberg’s book, *Palaces for the People*, the author demonstrates that those most likely to survive catastrophes like heat waves and flooding events brought on by climate change are those neighbourhoods with more social capital. Social capital is achieved by what the author calls social infrastructure, third spaces like libraries and community centres, the lifeblood of which are programming (e.g activities, clubs). Social infrastructure can also be as simple as lively public squares and moveable seating in places people visit throughout the day. Without these amenities in a community, there is no place for people to “linger longer” and run into acquaintances and friends.

“Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city’s wealth of public life may grow.”

—Jane Jacobs

Since the pandemic, stoops, balconies, dining patios, and porches have been highlighted as interstitial space that creates more sociability in a city and provides important havens, particularly for Black and Latino families to gather. The City of Boston recently recognized the importance of these spaces in its urban planning documents.

showed the PlacemakingUS team how 7,000 students use the street every day to walk safely, joyfully and collectively to school. Its success caught the attention of the City’s department of transportation, which announced the addition of 71 new Open Streets at Schools projects to improve safety.

## THE CONNAUGHT OPEN STREET INITIATIVE

Led by Sustainable Calgary and Connaught School, the Connaught Open Street initiative has had a positive impact on both children and seniors by enhancing safety and accessibility. The project reimaged the street next to Connaught School as a car-free zone, emphasizing safer, active



routes to school. In the process, it promotes walkability and reduces vehicle dominance near the school zone. This transformation allows children to move freely and safely, supporting more active commutes to school and encouraging outdoor play. In addition to benefiting children, the project was designed with seniors in mind. The pedestrian-friendly environment includes accessible walkways, seating areas, and social spaces, making it easier for seniors to navigate and engage with their community. The calming

of traffic has not only created a safer space for children, but also increased the comfort and safety of seniors by supporting physical activity and social interaction. Public feedback has indicated that both age groups appreciated the improved safety and atmosphere, demonstrating the value of inclusive placemaking for all ages.





# HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

## DEFINED OUTCOMES

### IMPROVED PHYSICAL HEALTH

Increased access to walking paths, parks, and exercise facilities, leading to measurable health benefits like lower rates of obesity, heart disease, or diabetes.

### ENHANCED MENTAL HEALTH

Reduction in stress levels, anxiety, and depression among users due to access to green spaces, quiet areas, and safe environments.

### SAFETY AND ACCESSIBILITY

A reduction in crime rates, enhanced lighting, and universal design features that ensure public spaces are accessible to people with disabilities.

### EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Community resilience plans, like disaster relief centres or climate adaptation strategies embedded in public spaces, improve public health outcomes.

Both mental and physical health is largely determined by environmental and social factors that can be impacted by placemaking. Many health-practitioners and international urban health bodies are recognizing the importance of placemaking both for physical well-being and mental health. At the International Conference for Urban Health, discussions are centered around solving health problems upstream or downstream, likening community health to a river that can be dirty downstream because of dumping upstream.

Walkability is especially important, as it promotes daily exercise and casual social connections. Walks that are engaging and accessible—with varied storefronts, shaded paths, and resting spots—invite people to spend more time in their communities. As highlighted by Dan Buettner in *The Blue Zones*, places like Sardinia in Italy, famed for the longevity of its residents, encourage active daily routines, such as walking for errands, which strengthens cardiovascular health and reinforces social ties. By creating public spaces that support active, connected lifestyles, placemaking helps foster vibrant, healthy communities.

## FRIENDSHIP BENCHES, WINDSOR-ESSEX, ON

As part of the Healthy Communities Initiative, “Friendship Benches” addressed community mental health

concerns during the pandemic. A Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Ontario report from August 2020 revealed that one third of Ontarians felt their mental health had declined, with high stress, and 14% feeling frequently depressed. The Windsor-



Essex Community Foundation and local CMHA installed eight blue friendship benches to foster safe, outdoor connections between neighbours. Each bench has a QR code linked to community services and resources, inspired by successful models in Zimbabwe, the UK, and New York City, that enhance access to mental health care.

## MALCOLM X PLAZA, SOUTH DALLAS, TX

The Better Block Foundation transformed Malcolm X Plaza in South Dallas, and its efforts were studied by the Child Poverty Action Lab (CPAL) in 2021 to analyze how a vacant lot in a high crime area was turned into an activated park and sports space that resulted in crime reductions, both real and perceived. Before the plaza opened, the intersection of S. Malcolm X Boulevard



and Marburg Street was known as “The Dead Zone,” according to Tramonica Brown, the founder of the nonprofit, Not My Son. Owen Wilson-Chavez, Senior Analytics Director of the Child Poverty Action Lab, explained that this location was ideal for the project due to high levels of gun violence, with data from 2019 showing the area was 564 times more likely to experience violent gun crime than other parts

engaging the community in Fall 2021 through focus groups and conversations, eventually partnering with Better Block and securing a \$100,000 donation from Santander Consumer USA Foundation to create the plaza with community input. Although the pilot phase demonstrated significant outcomes, permanent investment and ongoing programming have not moved forward.

## TOWERPOPS, TORONTO, ON

In the Toronto-area “tower neighbourhoods” are reimagining once-ignored spaces into dynamic community hubs. Led by 880 Cities, the TowerPOPS project is taking an innovative approach to health equity by revitalizing the often-underutilized areas surrounding high-density apartment towers in Cooksville (Mississauga) and

Rockcliffe-Smythe (West Toronto). This project stands out not just for its ambition but for its grassroots focus. TowerPOPS activates these spaces with programming designed to boost physical activity and foster social connections among residents—especially those in racialized and low-income communities. The initiative, supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada, is built on co-design principles, inviting community members to shape the changes they want to see.

The impact goes beyond physical upgrades; TowerPOPS has sparked a sense of pride and ownership among residents, transforming the landscape from empty lots into vibrant social hubs. The goal is to create a model for rapid placemaking that can be replicated in other high-rise communities across Canada, and to demonstrate how even relatively small interventions can lead to significant social benefits.

Before and after of Malcolm X Plaza, Better Block Foundation, South Dallas 2022. Photos: Courtesy of PlacemakingUS



# PLAY AND RECREATION

## DEFINED OUTCOMES

### INCREASED YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Higher participation in recreational programs, sports leagues, or cultural activities among children and teenagers.

### DIVERSE RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Availability of multifunctional spaces for physical activities (sports, yoga, hiking) and creative endeavors (art installations, music performances).

### COMMUNITY EVENTS

An increase in the frequency of community-led recreational events (festivals, play days, workshops) that encourage social interaction and creativity.

### INTERGENERATIONAL INTERACTION

Facilities that promote interaction between different age groups, fostering a sense of community and shared play spaces.

Clockwise from left:  
The Underline, Miami-Dade County, Friends of The Underline, Miami. Photo: Courtesy of PlacemakingUS  
Parade Parasol, Daily Tous les Jours, Montréal 2020. Photo: Latrompette Studio  
The Wave, Downtown Halifax. Photo: M. Doucette  
The Lending Library, Children’s Council San Francisco, San Francisco. Photo: Courtesy of PlacemakingUS

Play and Recreation placemaking outcomes are found at the intersection of built environment design, intentional programming, and community improvisation. It emphasizes the importance of spaces that support playful and recreational activities as essential for social and physical well-being. Parks, playgrounds, and other recreational settings enable people of all ages



to relax, socialize, and engage in activities that promote both individual and community health. These spaces encourage spontaneous interactions, foster inclusivity, and contribute to mental and physical wellness, making them crucial for a resilient, thriving urban fabric.

A priority of this domain is providing multifunctional spaces that accommodate physical activities like sports, yoga, and hiking, as well as creative pursuits such as art installations and music performances. Community events, including festivals, play days, and workshops, further enhance social interaction and creativity. Another key outcome is fostering intergenerational connections, with facilities designed to encourage interaction across age groups and provide shared spaces that build a stronger sense of community.

A member of the High Line Network, Miami’s Underline has upgraded the shaded space beneath an elevated urban rail line with a series of outdoor living rooms along a linear trail. Not only does this path facilitate passive



recreation like walking and cycling, it serves as a stage for weekly free yoga sessions. Placing the right equipment in a space can also be transformative. In San Francisco’s Tenderloin District—often associated more with homelessness, mental health issues, and drug crises than with families and children—a corner park offers something surprising: a



play library. Stocked with tricycles and soft toys, this inviting space provides kids the chance to play freely with shared, non-stationary equipment, creating a vibrant corner for childhood joy amidst extreme neighbourhood challenges.

Parade Parasol / Shade Parade created by Daily tous les jours, reimagines everyday spaces like sidewalks and roadways into collaborative, joyful experiences. Using oversized mobile parasols, the installation provides shade and encourages social interaction. Passersby can glide the parasols along a track, moving slowly to share shade, enjoy conversations, and experience the city at a relaxed pace. Designed for West Palm Beach and featured in Montréal, Parade Parasol turns underused urban areas into lively and fun spaces for gathering, showcasing how play can connect people and enhance public life.



The Wave is a public art installation that pays tribute to Halifax’s maritime history and landscape. “Despite a sign warning persons not to climb the structure when the installation was first erected, it has become a Haligonian tradition for persons to ascend the Wave to see if they can make it to the top.” says Jonathan Goldson of the Downtown Halifax Business Commission.



# ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

## DEFINED OUTCOMES

### EXPANDED GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Implementing community gardens, bioswales, urban farms, and green roofs to enhance biodiversity and food security.

### COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Strengthening communities by fostering healthier, interconnected environments that boost public health, well-being, and cultural empowerment.

### SUSTAINING SOCIAL SUPPORT

Creating spaces and programs that support family life, cultural practices, and mutual aid, ensuring educational and social services for generational thriving.

### ADVANCING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Addressing disproportionate environmental burdens on marginalized communities, ensuring equitable access to clean resources and decision-making, and supporting sustainable development.

Increasing green infrastructure, such as community gardens, bioswales, urban farms, and green roofs, enriches local biodiversity and promotes food security, creating healthier ecosystems and sustainable urban spaces. These activities empower communities civically and culturally, supporting education and enriching social connections. Placemaking in this domain has the ability to reduce pollution exposure, enhance climate resilience and food security, and support community-led sustainable development projects, all essential steps toward advancing environmental equity and fostering thriving, inclusive communities. Additionally, promoting environmental justice addresses the unequal burdens that marginalized communities face, supporting more equitable access to decision-making,

clean resources, and green spaces. Placemaking interacts with environmental sustainability on many levels, from the grand scale to the very tiny. Some of the largest placemaking projects involve green infrastructure that also functions as recreation facilities and drivers of economic development. Singapore is a leader at this scale. Its National Parks document, Green Infrastructure, provides a library of examples and best practices for developing green infrastructure for and with the community.

Examples include reconstructing wetlands, daylighting streams, bioswales, and impervious surface use. These methods connect the built environment to the needs and demands of the natural environment and can help with everything from preserving biodiversity to helping



Clockwise from left:  
Supertree Grove, Gardens by the Bay, Singapore 2019.  
Land Art Generator, Pittsburgh.  
Sowing Seeds of Change, Long Beach  
Photos: Courtesy of PlacemakingUS

with stormwater ebbs and flows that could damage human and natural systems. As Singapore demonstrates, by connecting the experience of place to these more fundamental systems, funding is leveraged while creating a pleasant and healing humanscape. This work is also tied to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which provide a framework of 17 arenas for better development that is often cited by placemakers.

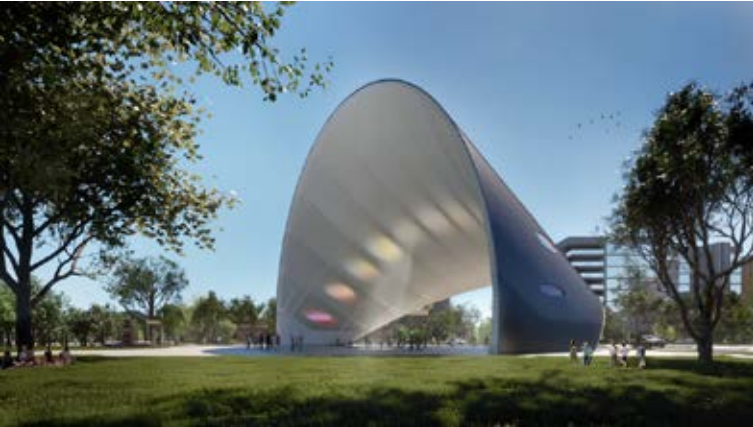
### THE LAND ART GENERATOR, PITTSBURGH, PA

The Land Art Generator in the industrial town of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, “engages the public in the co-design of our clean energy future, bringing together the disciplines of public art, urban planning, creative placemaking, renewable energy, and environmental justice.” Through community engagement and design competitions, it builds large-scale, context-specific public art pieces that also provide electrical output that harnesses nature. Their Arch of Time installation in Houston by Berlin-based Riccardo Mariano is a 100 foot tall triumphal arch that utilizes solar cells to generate 400 MWh of electricity, enough to power 40 Texas homes for a year.

### SOWING SEEDS OF CHANGE, LONG BEACH, CA

Sowing Seeds of Change, in Long Beach, California has a mission to empower its participants to discover and actively engage in the local food system, to encourage healthy living, nurture the environment, and grow a sustainable community through vocational training, youth

entrepreneurship, and leadership opportunities. This urban farm is located in a previously vacant lot that is now a flourishing green space in the heart of an industrial area known for poor air quality and crime. Located beside a major freeway near the Port of Long Beach and the Los Angeles River, the organization provides students with agricultural skills, culinary training, beekeeping, art programs, and entrepreneurship development.





# CULTURAL IDENTITY AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

## DEFINED OUTCOMES

### CULTURAL REPRESENTATION

Public spaces feature cultural symbols, art installations, and historical monuments that reflect the local community’s heritage and identity.

### ARTISTIC ENGAGEMENT

An increase in public art, performances, and festivals that showcase diverse cultural expressions (music, dance, theater) and foster cultural continuity.

### COMMUNITY PRIDE

A higher sense of place attachment as measured by surveys or interviews where residents express feelings of ownership, pride, and emotional connection to the space.

### PRESERVATION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Spaces that integrate local history through interpretive signage, storytelling events, or oral history projects, fostering intergenerational transmission of culture and continuity.

Jane’s Walk, Toronto  
Photos, clockwise from left: Wesley Reibeling, Amanda Shear, Amanda Shear

When people think of a city, they often think of the life of public spaces —its streets and the public characters and architecture associated with it. Public life is also a powerful transformer of intergenerational information and experience. Through placemaking, we understand how representations of a community’s identity, values, history, and aspirations can be intentionally woven into a place. It creates a sense of unity, as places hold the community’s collective memory, aspiration, pride and local spirit. By bringing broadly understood cultural symbols, stories, and diverse histories into shared spaces, placemaking practitioners can support the creation of places where everyone feels represented and valued. When public spaces reflect the rich backgrounds of Canadian communities, they become points of connection and pride, where people can celebrate their own heritage while discovering others.



Better public places foster unity as people experience their own stories alongside those of their neighbours, cultivating mutual respect and shared

understanding. Through cross-cultural festivals, performances, and community gatherings, placemaking creates environments that reflect a collective identity—demonstrating that, with intention and inclusivity, placemaking can truly evolve public spaces to be reflections of our diverse, yet united, communities.

The Levitt Foundation believes that “access to the arts and open green space are fundamental human rights.” It distributes annual grants, rooted in the belief in “the power of free, live music to strengthen the social fabric of communities, creating places people love while amplifying local pride, injecting joy into underused public spaces and fostering more equitable, healthy and thriving communities one city, and one concert, at a time.” The foundation believes in placemaking by funding summer music series and the creation of public venue bandshells in communities across the USA to create social cohesion through the enjoyment of music.

## THE CITY REPAIR PROJECT, PORTLAND, OR

In Portland, Oregon, a permaculture/placemaking group called The City Repair Project has created a 25-year strong event called the Village Building Convergence. It leads an annual call to communities to launch placemaking projects from intersection painting to building public benches and gazebos out of natural building materials. About 20 to 40 community-driven projects are assisted to completion across the city each year, toward a goal of more than 1,000 projects which it believes is the tipping point for systemic change. While it is about halfway there, it may have already achieved its goals; the City’s initial response has evolved from cease-and-desist letters to permanent local policies like Portland in the Streets which insures and licenses public furniture, allows for intersection painting, and simplifies the process for block parties.

## JANE’S WALK, TORONTO

Jane’s Walk is an annual global festival of free, community-led walking conversations inspired by the late urbanist Jane Jacobs. Held on the first weekend of May, the festival takes place in hundreds of cities worldwide, involving thousands of participants who lead and join walks in their neighbourhoods. Since its founding in 2006, Janes Walk has been held in over 500 cities worldwide. Driven by volunteers, the festival empowers residents to lead tours and share stories about their neighbourhoods, explore unseen parts of their city, and connect with neighbours, creating a platform for greater understanding and appreciation

of their communities. Jane’s Walk believes that everyday people hold valuable insights about their neighbourhoods, communities and city and encourages critical dialogue about our urban environments. Though the festival happens each May, a Jane’s Walk can happen at any time.

In 2024, Jane’s Walk in Toronto led 120 walks through 132 neighbourhoods. As Jane’s Walk Toronto Co-chair Celia Beketa notes, “The goal is to knit people together into strong and resourceful communities, instilling belonging and encouraging civic leadership.”





# INFORMAL ECONOMY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

## DEFINED OUTCOMES

### GROWTH IN LOCAL BUSINESSES

More micro-enterprises (street vendors, pop-up markets) thriving in the space, contributing to local economic development.

### IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

Immigrant communities successfully using public spaces for social networking, skill development, and informal employment opportunities.

### SOCIAL NETWORK EXPANSION

Public space initiatives that lead to the formation of social support groups, local clubs, or networks that enhance community resilience.

### INNOVATIVE WORKSPACES

The creation of co-working or flexible work areas in public spaces that support remote workers, freelancers, or creative professionals.

From top:  
My Main Street - Ottawa Chinatown Market, Canadian Urban Institute 2022. Photo: Ottawa Chinatown BIA  
Corona Plaza, New York 2023. Photo: Steve Davies

Placemaking impacts economic development on many scales. Vibrant public spaces serve as testing boards for new businesses as they spring up at low-cost market spaces and are permitted to set up as vendors in the public realm. The low cost of entry to place-based events and markets invites undercapitalized entrepreneurs, often recent immigrants, and burgeoning small business owners to catalyze new business opportunities that can quickly grow into more widely distributed products or occupation of a “brick and mortar” location.

Public Markets bring foot traffic to areas, resulting in the collection of parking fees and potential retail, food, and beverage sales by visitors to an area.

## CORONA PLAZA, QUEENS NYC

Corona Plaza in Queens, NYC, is a lively testament to how placemaking can fuel both community connection and economic growth. Once an overlooked area, it's now a bustling market space organized by local community leaders to support immigrant vendors and small businesses, creating new opportunities for growth and connection. The primary innovation to highlight is how the City of New York partnered with the Queens Economic Development Council and the cooperative of vendors to create a multi-layered approach to managing this inclusive space, and help formalize the emergent economy instead of just regulating it out of existence. Beyond commerce, Corona Plaza has become a social and cultural hub where neighbours come together for events, performances, and everyday interactions that foster a sense of belonging.





SALAM / WELCOME

This innovative gathering space reimagines the concept of Islamic Gardens within the context of an inner-suburban parking setting. Created through a unique collaboration between plazaPOPS and Muslims in Public Space (MiPs) it seeks to transform underused urban areas into vibrant hubs of community and creativity. The serene beauty and intricate design of traditional Islamic Gardens offer an invitation to engage, reflect, and connect in this newly re-envisioned public realm. This temporary placemaking concept fuses art, culture, and community in a setting that celebrates Toronto’s diversity and inclusivity.

Daniel Rotsztain, Plaza POPS' executive director, is a champion for accessible public spaces that resonate with community needs. The installation highlights how privately owned public spaces can foster connection and understanding, setting a strong example for celebrating cultural diversity in urban environments.



PlazaPOPS in Wexford Heights, Islamic Gardens, PlazaPOPS and Muslim Public Space Toronto 2024. Photo: Kat Rizza



Temporary uses, pop-ups, and “meanwhile spaces” are great places for new ideas to take root and to try placemaking ideas. A Florida placemaking operation called Zero Empty Spaces has been renting empty storefronts on a short-term basis across the US and turning them into collaborative working artist studios. Using this arrangement, they have provided low-cost studio space for 600 artists across 30 projects.

Creative workspaces and entrepreneurial hubs are vital in cities, as they provide environments designed to inspire, foster collaboration, and support diverse working styles. They often cluster creative industry professionals, promote public art, increase foot traffic, attract intellectual capital, and nurture entrepreneurial energy in a shared space. In Whitehorse, Yukon, is Northlight Innovation, the first innovation creative hub north of 60 in Canada. Its 24,000 sq ft space has become a collaborative cross-disciplinary space and become an essential third space for community.

#### TUKTOYAKTUK MAKERSPACE, NWT

The Canadian Healthy Community Initiative (HCI) funded the expansion of the creative makerspace in Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories. New equipment such as 3D printers and textile printing tools support the creative, educational, and micro-manufacturing activities of local artists and residents. Since its opening in January 2021, the makerspace has been well-received, attracting over 40 users in its first month and generating interest in new technologies. As a safe, indoor venue in an Indigenous-led community with limited public spaces, the makerspace provides support for residents’ artistic and business pursuits and serves as a welcoming space to gather around shared interests.



“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.”

—Jane Jacobs

## Benefits through the Domains of Human Flourishing

Placemaking stands as an influential practice that enhances the social fabric of public spaces globally. It empowers individuals and community groups—acting as “centres of democratic power” in both rural and urban settings—to collectively envision, design, and construct frameworks that enrich daily life and foster community cohesion. By creating welcoming, inclusive spaces that reflect diverse community needs and interests, placemaking nurtures a sense of belonging, active civic participation, and a shared commitment to stewardship, strengthening communities and enriching lives.

Each community is defined by its unique cultural histories, traditions, and stories, which add depth and character to its public spaces. When placemaking highlights these cultural assets through public art, events, and community-led projects, it transforms spaces into living embodiments of heritage, inviting residents and visitors to connect with and celebrate the community’s identity. These efforts make public spaces more appealing as destinations, driving

tourism and investment while contributing to economic vitality.

Viewed through the framework of the six domains of human flourishing, the broader impacts of placemaking are clear: enhanced well-being, a deepened sense of environmental and social responsibility, and economic growth that respects cultural continuity and civic pride. Community members who become active stewards of their spaces develop greater ecological and cultural awareness, fostering sustainable practices and preserving essential narratives. This stewardship creates pathways for future generations to maintain cherished traditions and shared values.

Spaces that resonate with iconic landmarks, unique local businesses, and cultural activity not only boost local economies but also promote resilience and well-being. When communities forge deep connections to their public spaces, they collaborate to protect these places, sustain natural and cultural heritage, and build a lasting legacy of human flourishing.



# The Crucial Role of Data in Proving Placemaking Outcomes

Data plays an essential role in demonstrating the effectiveness of placemaking projects, helping to validate their impact on communities, economies, and environments. The collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative indicators allow practitioners to not only prove the success of placemaking initiatives, but also refine strategies, attract investment, and guide future development.

By measuring placemaking outcomes systematically, we can standardize how we collect, compare, and code results. This allows for better benchmarking, increased accountability, and more informed decision-making. Ultimately, data-driven impact measurement proves the value of placemaking projects and strengthens their case for sustained funding and broader adoption across urban environments.

Several effective tools now capture key metrics and reveal both anticipated and unexpected outcomes of placemaking initiatives. By leveraging these measurement techniques, cities can showcase results that include increased public engagement, social cohesion, and economic uplift.

## INDUSTRY-LEADING TOOLS TO MEASURE IMPACTS

- **Public Life Study Tool – Happy Cities:** Assesses how public spaces affect community happiness and social interaction by observing and documenting activities, behaviors, and public engagement in shared spaces.
- **Inspired Art Impact: Main Street Toolkit – STEPS Public Art:**

Measures the social and cultural impact of public art projects on main streets, tracking community involvement and the vibrancy that art installations bring to public spaces.

- **Building Better Public Spaces: A Toolkit to Create a Public Space Inventory – Evergreen:** Presents a structured method for cataloging and analyzing public spaces, helping communities evaluate the quality and utility of existing areas to inform future improvements.
- **Open Streets Toolkit – 8 80 Cities and Street Plans:** Evaluates the impact of open streets initiatives by tracking data-points that promote active transportation, community interaction, and economic activity.
- **A New Bottom Line: The Value & Impact of Placemaking – Toronto Metropolitan University:** The research-backed framework measures the economic, social, and cultural impacts of placemaking initiatives to showcase their value to policymakers and community stakeholders.
- **Thriving Places Index:** This prominent index evaluates a community’s well-being by looking at various indicators such as sustainability, equality, and local conditions that support quality of life and placemaking impacts.
- **8-step Framework for Measuring the Impact of Placemaking – Placemaking Europe:** This comprehensive framework guides practitioners through a structured process to evaluate placemaking initiatives, focusing on key indicators such as social cohesion, economic benefits, and environmental impact.

# Placemaking Impact Analysis



Across the country, Business Improvement Areas and community organizations are doing great work to implement events, activations, and placemaking projects. In an environment where resources are often scarce, it is essential for these activities to provide clear benefits—but how do we know what’s working? The Canadian Urban Institute is building tools, resources, and methods to evaluate the impact of placemaking endeavors centred around the Measuring Main Streets Platform.

Recent developments in data and technology have opened new ways of measuring the connection between places and human behavior in greater detail than ever before. Location data derived from anonymized cell phones (GPS), card payments, and AI interpretation of street view images can help us better understand the impacts of placemaking, with cell phone data revealing how many people are in a certain place at a specific time, where they’re coming from, their demographic profile, attitudes

and preferences. When applied to placemaking, we can measure human activity before, during, and after the implementation of a project to gauge changes in human activity. For example, card payment data can reveal the impacts on consumer spending levels and artificial intelligence can interpret images of streetscapes at different times to assess patterns of walkability, accessibility, and safety. As no two placemaking projects are the same, measuring their impact requires careful consideration and application of the most appropriate and relevant methods.

Beyond impact analysis, the CUI is also refining the communication of the research by developing clear and consistent metrics as well as compelling visualizations. As the Measuring Main Streets platform continues to grow and evolve as a dissemination tool and central hub of main street best practices, the CUI is developing custom online dashboards to aid community partners in demonstrating impact to a wider range of stakeholders.



# POLICY AS A TOOL FOR GOOD PLACES

Chapter led by [Bridget MacIntosh](#)

Policy serves as the foundation on which successful placemaking activations can be built. By providing a framework and course of action, policy is a tool that can guide the transformation of public spaces into vibrant, inclusive environments that reflect the aspirations of the community.



# Forward-thinking policies

Forward-thinking, innovative placemaking policy recognizes that the built environment is not just a backdrop for everyday life, but a dynamic and interactive canvas where culture, community and the environment converge to create positive experiences and connections. In many cases, forward-thinking placemaking policies developed by governments share the ability to create and steward vibrant built environments and improve on the experience of public spaces of their residents, businesses, and users. These innovations break away from a traditional process of government-directed top-down approach to placemaking and development, and instead embrace genuine community connection and resident-led initiatives to create places that residents are invested in, protective of, and feel welcome and engaged in.

From scalable, easy-to-implement neighbourhood placemaking tool-kits and funding supports, to plaza stewardship and other strategies, to overarching policies to protect and celebrate cultural districts, these examples of holistic policies authentically bring places to life and provide opportunities for policymakers to dialogue and experiment with citizens on what could, and should, be made permanent in our shared built environments. Municipal staff play significant roles in policy development, as they’re in positions that can influence decisions about the use of space within a city. Municipal staff often face significant challenges when attempting to create innovative placemaking policies, such as having to navigate complex regulatory frameworks that can stifle creativity and impede the implementation of new

ideas; and resistance to change from within the bureaucracy and among stakeholders that pose barriers, such as when entrenched interests and traditional approaches conflict with the bold, collaborative strategies required for effective placemaking. Additionally, limited resources and budget constraints can hamper efforts to develop and sustain placemaking initiatives, while the need for broad consensus and public buy-in adds further complexity to the policy-making process.

Balancing the diverse needs and expectations of communities with the rigidities of governmental procedures makes it difficult to enact policies that truly reflect and enhance the dynamic, human-centred nature of placemaking.

Théa Morash, Arts and Cultural Development Coordinator for the City of St. John’s, shares how the “siloeing” of municipal responsibilities can impact the development of innovative placemaking policy. Her experience highlights the importance of integrating interdisciplinary staff across municipal departments, divisions, and teams to better respond to expressed community desires.

*“To be most effective, placemaking should be a lateral effort, as opposed to vertical. [I’m] working in a municipal structure with certain areas of responsibility, and then there’s a whole neighbourhoods team, which is in a completely different division. Even just internally within the City organization, that kind of siloeing can create additional challenges when it comes to developing a space because neighbourhoods have their work plan and I have*

*my work plan. We need a lot of planning and inspiration time [together] before anything gets off the ground.”*

Théa also emphasizes the necessity of taking time to build relationships with community members, but that the time invested in such relationship building can be seen as inefficient within a bureaucracy.

*“You want to prioritize community relationship building, and spend that time understanding the importance and impact that a place already has, instead of just going in and imposing an importance or a purpose onto a space. It’s going to take time, it’s going to involve building trust, and it’s going to seem like it’s not moving along in an efficient way, especially when it comes to building trust in a community that might be historically under-resourced, less-focused upon, or has a historical challenged relationship with either bureaucracy in general or the municipality specifically.”*

Théa shares some of the steps the City of St. John’s has taken to support forward-thinking placemaking and other municipal policy development:

*“Hopefully [that] is changing a little bit here. I’m thinking specifically about the municipality and the urban Indigenous community here [in St. John’s] working together on public art and other projects. I was happy to work with First Light to develop one of the study tours for the Creative City Summit here last October, and it was great to see that relationship building happening...The City also sits around the First Voice Partnership Table, which is excellent. Entering into those conversations in good faith with a real openness and willingness to work together...all of that is really positive.”*

In Victoria, Nichola Reddington, the City’s Manager of Arts, Culture and Events, shares how their culture division is beginning to explore data tools, such as cell phone location analytics, to demonstrate the positive impacts of community placemaking activities to other City departments, City Council, and stakeholders.

*“When we look at location analytics from people’s phones [we can identify] how many more people are walking by that street after a mural goes in, or how we noticed a reduction in traffic speed after that street calming proj-*

“Cities cannot be comprehensively successful, alert, agile, attractive, and sustainable without an imaginative and engaged bureaucracy that is resilient and proactive in finding better solutions. It requires harnessing the collective imagination and capacities of those who work within the city, as well as capable outsiders and partners—in short, leveraging both people and knowledge.”

—Creative Bureaucracy Festival

*ect went in. I think we’re just getting to that place where we can use data tools to track the before and afters; and to observe whether that park was more utilized after some beautification and safety activation than before.”* Having established successful neighbourhood placemaking and local champion programs, Nichola shares how Victoria’s placemaking work is now exploring a more placekeeping-based approach to reveal what existed in places before the built environment existed. For more details on placekeeping see page 166.

*“We’re doing this project right now called “Rewilding” with local Indigenous artists around unearthing what’s beneath the concrete, buildings and all of this built infrastructure. What was here before all of us came along and colonized these places? We’re unearthing where the rivers used to go into and from the Inner Harbor, where the villages are and where their sacred sites are... so how do we rewild these urban places from an Indigenous lens and Indigenous context? We work alongside many different partners, our downtown resi-*

*dent association is involved in this and we’ve got architectural firms working with Indigenous leaders and artists. I think that’s where we’re going next in terms of innovative policies. Especially for our downtown core where there is such a built-up environment and the lack of that natural world.”*

Seeing successful policies in practice and being inspired by them is the first step in encouraging placemaking practitioners to tackle the policy development challenges they face in their communities and to embrace approaches that share power with communities with an eye to creating authentic, vibrant, and inclusive environments.

The approaches shared in this chapter are just a few instances where policy makers have successfully navigated challenges and municipalities and taken bold steps to create policies that nurture a co-imagined vision of the built environment, making public spaces deeply connected to the people who inhabit them, and fostering social engagement, cultural expression, and economic vitality and sustainability.



# HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA Neighbourhood Placemaking

Halifax’s Neighbourhood Placemaking aims to celebrate and explore a neighbourhood’s unique identity, connect neighbours, and create a place people are drawn to, resulting in welcoming and livable communities where residents have more opportunities to get to know one another. Projects are neighbourhood-led, while the municipality’s community developers provide training on organizing a successful placemaking project, ongoing guidance to secure necessary approvals, and up to \$1,500 in support throughout the planning process. The program is structured to empower neighbours to drive their project, and where they maintain what they want to build. If a built component falls into disrepair, the City informs the group of the need to repair it, and if it becomes a safety risk, the City reserves the right to remove it. This does not apply to street painting projects, as they naturally fade with time. The City does not repaint these on the neighbours’ behalf or attempt to remove them, but neighbourhoods are eligible to apply to the City every two years for repainting.



Larch and Jennings Mural, Dalhousie and Halifax Regional Municipality. Tayla Fern Paul, Halifax 2023. Photo: Halifax Regional Municipality

# VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA Placemaking Toolkit

Victoria, BC’s Placemaking Toolkit is focused on grassroots bottom-up, community-led placemaking that can be implemented through existing city programs and grants. The toolkit focuses on small-to medium-scale projects using a lighter-quicker-cheaper approach to support the easy implementation of community-led placemaking projects that provide more spaces for locals to gather, meet and play. The toolkit is a living document to inspire and guide practitioners on implementing placemaking ideas through available City programs. It includes:

- A clear definition of placemaking along with best practices locally and from elsewhere to inspire community-led action
- A set of guidelines and strategies focused on small and medium-scale placemaking
- A clear approvals and grant funding process that builds on and links to current city placemaking programs and initiatives
- A placemaking elements catalogue to simplify and streamline community-led placemaking implementation.

- The Intended outcomes of the toolkit are to:
- Develop space for community gathering by encouraging people to engage with one another in a public space
  - Promote healthy and active lifestyles by supporting active modes of transportation, such as walking, biking and taking transit
  - Build community identity by providing a process and space for community members to express a shared vision
  - Examine the potential for an activation of Victoria streets by providing an opportunity for people to reimagine their streets for other uses beyond vehicular traffic
  - Activate underutilized space by bringing activity and programming to spaces in the right-of-way
  - Generate local business activity by including opportunities for local vendors to participate or encouraging people to visit nearby businesses.



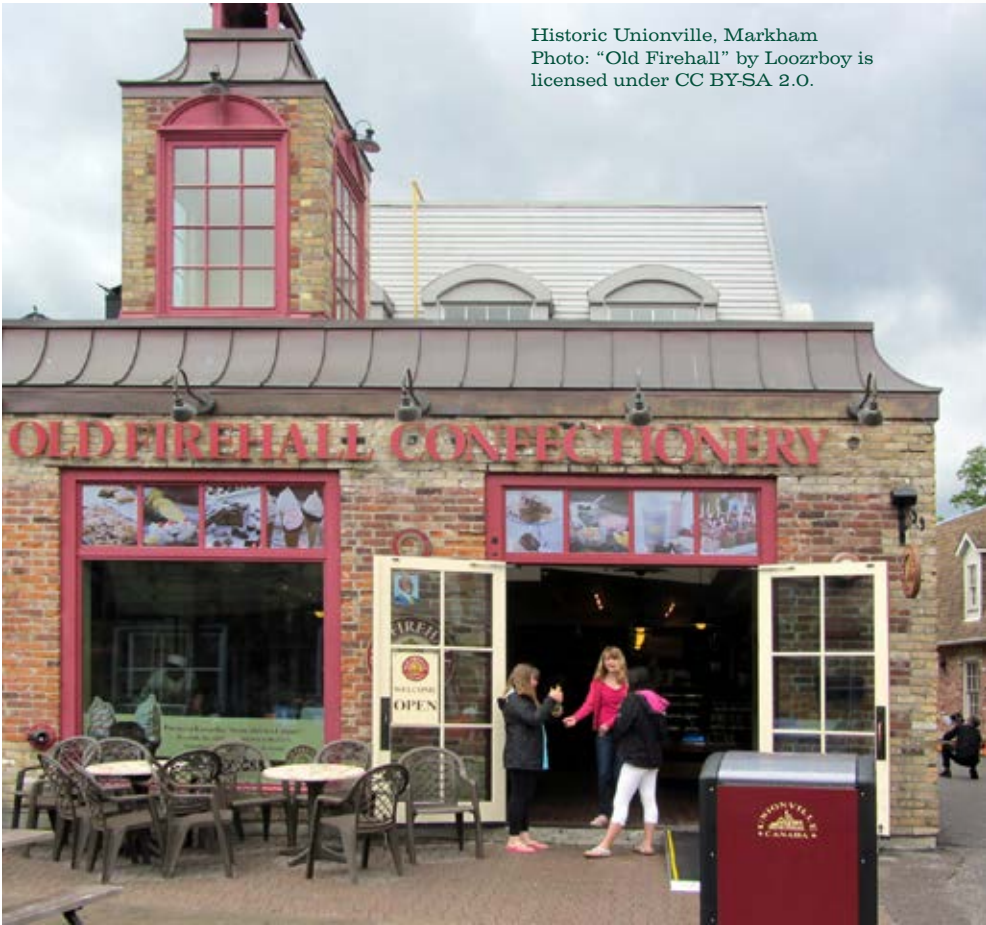
# MARKHAM, ONTARIO

## Shared Places Our Spaces - Markham Public Realm Plan

Markham's Public Realm Strategy aims to deliver an enhanced and complete public realm across the entire city. It aims to clarify what needs to be done and how everyone can contribute to achieving the following goals:

- Made in Markham Innovation and Design: Deliver high-quality public realm city-wide by applying innovative design standards, comprehensive oversight measures, precise construction practices and thorough inspection processes within our new development, capital and redevelopment projects.
- Keeping Markham Beautiful: Partner with residents and businesses to maintain and beautify private and public properties.
- Animating Our Neighbourhoods and Districts: Celebrate Markham's inclusiveness and cultural diversity by assisting in event organization and promoting community use.
- Harmonizing Our Efforts and Sharing Our Resources: Increase funding opportunities through public-private partnerships, government grants and private donations. Enhance collaboration among Markham residents, Business Improvement Area associations, community groups, public agencies and the City. Prioritize the city-wide public realm delivery, improvement and maintenance through the City budgeting process.
- Creating Gateways and Destinations: Showcase Markham's unique areas and destinations with beautiful spaces, great public art, memorable arrivals, and sustaining and engaging neighbourhoods and city districts.

- The strategy:
- Defines what the public realm means to Markham
  - Raises awareness of the importance of a high-quality public realm for our community and the role everyone can play to ensure its success
  - Defines the vision and goals for Markham's public realm
  - Provides a framework for the delivery and maintenance of a high-quality public realm
  - Provides recommendations and actions to enhance the public realm in the City of Markham.



Historic Unionville, Markham  
Photo: "Old Firehall" by Loozrboy is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

# MONTRÉAL, QUEBEC

## Handbook of Best Practices for Quality of Temporary Street Design Projects

Temporary street design projects play a crucial role in transforming our experience of the city and contribute to neighbourhood vitality. In Montréal, design strategies and implementation approaches differ depending on the street's context (neighbourhood street vs. destination street), the season, the duration of implementation, and whether the project will be repeated. Among the various types of design projects, seasonally pedestrianized commercial streets continue to grow in number and

popularity, and have become true emblems of summer in Montréal, attracting thousands of residents and visitors. For the 2024 summer season, 11 commercial thoroughfares were turned into pedestrian streets to a total of 9.4 linear kilometres. With this at the forefront, the City is raising awareness and reviewing decision-making tools to better plan, design, and implement temporary street transformations and improve their quality, especially in the case of projects that return every year. The recent

renewal of Montréal's Service du développement économique three-year (2025–2027) funding support for pedestrianization of commercial thoroughfares, enables the city's boroughs, commercial development corporations, and their many partners to continue to deliver the living environments that are increasingly meeting the needs of the population and contributing to economic vitality. To learn more, visit the publication section on the website of the Bureau du design de la Ville de Montréal.



Avenue Bernard, EVOQ Architecture, Montréal 2021. Photo: Caroline Perron



# VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

## Plaza Stewardship Strategy

The Plaza Stewardship Strategy provides a framework for the City of Vancouver and community partners on the management, maintenance, and programming of public plazas across the city. It includes an approach for stewardship implementation in different types of spaces: Civic Plazas, Neighbourhood Plazas, Parklets, and Activated Lanes.

Stewardship helps ensure that public spaces are well managed and maintained, as well as physically accessible and socially inclusive. Stewardship also helps involve partners and communities in public life. The Plaza Stewardship Strategy is a living document and will continue to be updated over time as the City learns and improves its public space management processes and programs.

The purpose of the Plaza Stewardship Strategy is to:

- Communicate how the City forms partnerships
- Share the City’s approach to equity and inclusion principles of public space
- Highlight roles and responsibilities for the City and plaza partners
- Outline processes for creating plaza agreements and stewardship plans
- Identify City-provided services and programs that support stewardship.

The key sections of the Plaza Stewardship Strategy include:

- Partnerships and Management: day-to-day oversight and vision for a space
- Maintenance and Operations: general upkeep of a plaza, such as regular cleaning
- Programming and Placemaking: uses and activities that take place in a plaza.

Maple St and 4th Ave Plaza, Vancouver 2021. Photo: City of Vancouver (COV), Street Activities



# TORONTO, ONTARIO

## Cultural Districts Plan

The Cultural Districts Plan encourages the enhancement and coordination of City services, resources, technical expertise, policies, and funding tools that support emerging approaches to protecting, retaining, and celebrating local culture. The plan positions the City as a key program administrator and funding partner, while recognizing the important roles and expertise of others such as community members, not-for-profit organizations, philanthropic leaders, corporations, and grassroots groups.

Equity-based placemaking embraces diversity and acknowledges the power dynamics that influence communities and public spaces. This approach takes into account the histories of exclusion and the social and spatial factors that shape each place. By recognizing that urban planning and design are never neutral, equity-based placemaking strives to create spaces that actively address, rather than reinforce, urban inequities.

As part of the development of this plan, City staff will:

- Identify planning policies to support the development of cultural districts and be of benefit to communities and neighbourhoods.
- Develop a Cultural Districts Program that strengthens local culture and communities, supports small businesses and retail, and promotes community-stewarded spaces and bring forward a program proposal inclusive of design and implementation components that include: eligibility criteria; program components; community role, and ongoing engagement; and estimated costs and financial impact.
- Work with Toronto Indigenous communities to ensure a Cultural Districts Program that reflects placemaking, placekeeping,v and self-determination priorities, and is aligned with the upcoming City of Toronto Reconciliation Action Plan.

In September 2023, the City inaugurated this planning initiative with the launch of The Little Jamaica Cultural District Plan.

In November 2024, the City of Toronto released “Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025 – 2035)”. “It sets out a bold new vision for culture in Toronto – a vision for a city where everyone, everywhere, can discover, create and experience culture.” An action of this culture plan is to “Develop tools to protect and strengthen cultural districts across the city.”



WINNIPEG, MANITOBA  
Exchange District Planning

The Exchange District has long been recognized as a centre for civic institutions, commerce, and entertainment. It has attracted unique local retailers, specialty restaurants, valued creative industries, a thriving tech sector, an acclaimed educational institute, a growing residential population, and more. While its legacy and character have been shaped by variable economic cycles over the last 140 years, it has emerged as one of Winnipeg’s most distinct urban areas. It is celebrated for its architectural heritage, for serving as a home to the city’s cultural and creative sector, and for its continued evolution into a thriving urban neighbourhood.

This plan envisions the Exchange District’s ongoing development into a celebrated urban destination and animated, inclusive, and sustainable Complete Community.

The term “Complete Communities” refers to mixed-use neighbourhoods that enable residents of all ages to access essential services—such as grocery stores, schools, medical offices, libraries, parks, and transit—within a 15-20 minute walk or 1-1.2 kilometres. They often focus on use of active transportation, intensification, and sustainability.

This strategic term is used by planners and policy makers to develop and fund accessible and vibrant neighbourhoods. It can be found in plans across Canada, such as *A Place to Grow: Growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* funded by the province of Ontario, and the *Complete Communities Guide* administered by the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) on behalf of the Province. The purpose of the Exchange District plan is to:

- Define a shared vision for the continued growth and evolution of the Exchange District
- Establish a set of priorities and objectives to align efforts and guide decision-making
- Identify directions and actions to achieve the following priorities and objectives:
  - Community Building
  - Resilience & Adaptation
  - Mobility & Connectivity
  - Character & Placemaking
  - Innovation & Creativity.

Accordingly, this plan intends to provide a roadmap to strategically guide the Exchange District into the future. It seeks to ensure a proactive approach in managing changing conditions, addressing new and persistent challenges, and responding effectively to emerging opportunities. In turn, a greater degree of predictability can be provided to residents, business owners, and other stakeholders investing time and resources into the area, while also promoting the community’s shared aspirations for the future of the Exchange District.



OMS Stage, 5468796 Architecture, Winnipeg 2013. Photo: James Brittain Photography



RED DEER, ALBERTA  
Ross Street Patio, Entertainment District Bylaw

The Ross Street Patio is a central gathering spot and entertainment venue in the heart of Downtown Red Deer. Featuring patio furniture and a stage, the area is recognized for its inviting atmosphere and live entertainment.

In June 2022, the city officially designated the Ross Street Patio as the city’s first Entertainment District. This move allowed for alcohol consumption within patio boundaries during specific hours while enjoying a variety of events such as live music, markets, and local festivals. Entertainment Districts provide an opportunity for municipalities to revitalize key neighbourhoods, drive tourism, and support small and local businesses. Additional entertainment options promote increased activity and support the downtown vision of a thriving place to be.

Ross Street Patio, The City of Red Deer and Downtown Business Association, Red Deer 2022. Photo: The SnapHappy Photographer





# Canadian Nightlife Policies

Canadian cities are undergoing a policy shift that recognizes the importance of nightlife as a vital component of their urban ecosystems. Vibrant nightlife economies contribute to job creation, talent attraction, real estate investment, cultural vitality, economic growth, tourism, and city branding. Ottawa and Montréal have taken significant steps in this direction, shaping new frameworks that embrace the positive impacts of nightlife.

Ottawa led with its Nightlife Economy Action Plan in 2023, appointing Canada’s first Nightlife Commissioner, while Montréal followed with a comprehensive Nightlife Policy. These policies address issues such as noise management, public safety, venue sustainability, and streamlined administrative processes for cultural organizations and collectives. Both plans emphasize creating inclusive and safe public spaces for citizens and visitors alike, with placemaking serving as a key tool for fostering safety and collaboration among stakeholders.

## OTTAWA’S NIGHTLIFE ECONOMY ACTION PLAN

Ottawa’s plan aims to develop and support nightlife activities from 6 p.m to 6 a.m, fostering a vibrant, diverse, inclusive, and safe nightlife across the city. It positions nightlife as a critical part of Ottawa’s cultural and economic landscape and as a major contributor to placemaking efforts.

The action plan outlines 10 targeted recommendations and actions focused on building the necessary infrastructure, amenities, and experiences to support a dynamic nightlife economy. Key actions include:

- Establishing the Office of the Nightlife Commissioner, which launched in June 2024.
- Encouraging city-wide and neighbourhood involvement in the nightlife economy.
- Reviewing and adapting city by-laws, policies, and services to better support nightlife activities.

## PLACEMAKING AND NIGHTLIFE: A UNIQUE SYNERGY

Ottawa’s Nightlife Commissioner, Mathieu Grondin, highlights the intrinsic connection between placemaking and nightlife. Well-designed public spaces foster nightlife hubs that draw diverse crowds and promote cultural expression. Elements like outdoor cafes, street markets, open-air concerts, and public art bring energy to otherwise dormant areas, encouraging social interactions and community engagement.

Intentional placemaking and vibrant nightlife experiences work together to stimulate economic and cultural growth, benefiting local businesses and helping retain a creative workforce. Thoughtfully crafted public spaces prioritize safety and accessibility, ensuring that nightlife is inclusive and enjoyable for all.

Ottawa is pioneering the integration of placemaking into its nightlife strategy with the Nightlife Economy Action Plan, highlighting nightlife as a catalyst for public realm development. Over the coming years, Ottawa’s urban landscape will undergo significant transformations, with placemaking initiatives including the Downtown Ottawa Action Agenda, a new NHL arena and entertainment district, an Arts, Culture, and Entertainment District, Lansdowne 2.0, and the ByWard Market Public Realm Plan. These projects will leverage nightlife as a driving force in reshaping Ottawa’s identity, enhancing the city’s appeal as a world-class destination for tourism, talent, and investment.





## NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

### NYC Plaza Program

NYC Department of Transportation (DOT) works with selected organizations to create neighbourhood plazas throughout the City to transition underused streets into vibrant, social public spaces.

The NYC Plaza Program is a key part of the City's effort to ensure that all New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of quality open space. Eligible organizations can propose new plaza sites through a competitive application process. NYC DOT prioritizes sites that are in neighbourhoods that lack open space, and partners with community groups that commit to operating, maintaining, and managing these spaces so they are vibrant pedestrian plazas.

Applications are reviewed and evaluated according to the City's strategic goals as presented in PlaNYC, the NYC DOT Streets Plan, and site-specific criteria, including:

- Open Space: whether or not the neighbourhood has an insufficient amount of open space.
- Income Eligibility: applicants receive additional points for proposals located in neighbourhoods that qualify as low- or moderate-income as designated by the US Department

of Housing & Urban Development as eligible for Community Development Block Grants.

- Community Initiative: the extent to which the applicant develops and executes a community outreach plan, builds consensus for the site, and solidifies local stakeholder support.
- Site Context: the proposed site's appropriateness to the adjacent land uses, population density, proximity to transit, safety, and other nearby open space.
- Organizational and Maintenance Capacity: the extent to which the applicant is willing and able to program activities, maintain, operate and manage the plaza once it is built.

The program is closely aligned with NYC DOT's Public Space Equity funding program.



NYC's Plaza Program, NYC DOT, New York City 2019. Photo: NYC DOT

## SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

### Festival Street and Clear Alleys Programs



Seattle's Festival Streets and Clear Alleys Program (CAP) are two initiatives designed to improve the use of public spaces and manage urban environments in the city.

The Festival Streets program aims to designate certain streets for community events and gatherings without permanently closing them to vehicular traffic. These streets are chosen because of their suitability for temporary closures to host street fairs, block parties, performances, farmers markets, and other community-based events. The idea is to activate public spaces, support local culture, and encourage pedestrian-friendly environments, while still allowing the streets to revert to normal use when not needed for events.

The Clear Alleys Program (CAP) was developed to address concerns about waste management, clutter, and public safety in Seattle's alleys, particularly in dense downtown areas. CAP is aimed at keeping alleys clear of dumpsters and waste bins, improving the aesthetic quality and safety of these spaces while ensuring efficient waste collection. By keeping alleys clear of garbage, opportunities to reimagine Seattle's alleys as gathering spaces emerged organically, with residents naming their local alleys and dreaming up ways to improve and activate the spaces. Some Seattle alleys have since received Festival Street designations providing even greater placemaking opportunities.

Nord Alley, Clear Alley's Program, Seattle 2014. Photo: "USA-GER at Nord Alley" by SounderBruce is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.



# SOUTH-WESTERN ONTARIO

## My Main Street Program

My Main Street is built on the principle of supporting community economic development and creating vibrant and diverse neighbourhoods which will enhance the overall quality of life for residents while also promoting sustainable and inclusive community development. My Main Street is delivered by the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI), and supported by a Government of Canada investment through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (Fed-Dev Ontario). The program provides direct-to-business supports as well as funding for placemaking projects, to boost local economic growth and foster vibrant, community-centered public spaces along main streets.

- The program offered two key funding streams:
- **Business Sustainability:** This initiative provided non-repayable contributions to small businesses located on main streets across southern Ontario. Businesses received financial support by presenting a solid business case that demonstrated how the support boosted their productivity, and strengthened their capacity for growth and stability.
  - **Community Activator:** Focused on high-impact placemaking projects, this initiative supported activities like events, festivals, streetscape improvements and other enhancements designed to bring more economic activity to local communities. This initiative supported a variety of transformative projects—from public art installations to cultural festivals—bringing a renewed sense of place to main streets, and positively impacting the economic vitality of the community.

My Main Street programming is a powerful tool for rebuilding local economies, while reflecting the unique cultural and social assets of each community.

Downtown Hamilton, City of Hamilton  
Photo: Tourism Hamilton



# HAMILTON, ONTARIO

## Placemaking Grant Pilot Program

The Placemaking Grant Pilot Program was a two-year pilot grant program that concluded in 2023. Made possible through a \$100,000 donation from the Patrick J. McNally Charitable Foundation, the Placemaking Grant Pilot Program awarded funds to community-led placemaking projects that temporarily animated public spaces around the city. Funding was offered at two levels:

- **Category 1:** Up to \$2,000 for approximately 20 temporary projects (ranging from a few days up to one year) that include a physical change to the place (signage, sculpture, garden planters) or that reimagine a space through repeated action (performances, gatherings).
- **Category 2:** \$5,000 to \$20,000 for 2 to 4 temporary projects (ranging from a few days up to three years) that include a physical change to the place (seating, sculpture).



# Community Placemaking Funding



Avenue du Mont-Royal, Studio Dikini,  
Montréal 2024. Photo: Raphaël Thibodeau

Placemaking programs and grants put the power in the hands of the community by defraying the costs for citizens to take ownership of their neighbourhood and create dynamic public spaces. Each city, from Kitchener to Vancouver and from Halifax to Victoria, offers its own grant offerings with a number of pluses that point toward community involvement, creativity, resiliency, and celebrating local culture while tending to social connections.

## **Kitchener's LoveMyHood**

**Matching Grant** places its emphasis on projects by residents that would help bond neighbourhoods through inclusive events, public art, and social initiatives, with \$30,000 as the maximal amount. The program matches contributions from residents, enabling ideas to become a tangible reality by fostering pride in ownership of local spaces. Kitchener offers even more than funds; there is steady technical job guidance from city staff supporting residents as they go through city processes.

## **The Community Placemaking**

**Program in Vancouver** awards up to \$3,000 to activate everyday spaces into interaction hotspots, cultural experiences, and joyful events. Various block parties, dance events, street art installations provide vibrancy in the neighbourhoods, while residents are encouraged to take over public spaces with celebration. The approachability of the program towards community-led design absolutely brings a sense of belonging with new improvements

in the cultural fabric of Vancouver.

**The Gritty to Pretty program, run by the Downtown Halifax Business Commission**, supports underused space into artistic renovation. Community artists and residents take “gritty” urban areas and make them pretty, alive, and colourful with the help of a grant of up to \$10,000, turning them into immensely popular spots for locals and tourists alike. This has been responsible for many of the murals that give new character to Halifax.

## **My Great Neighbourhood**

**Grants in Victoria** are designed to create resiliency in a community and permanent physical changes in the neighbourhood spaces. This program, supporting placemaking, community building, and resiliency initiatives, requires leveraging from community members through volunteer hours or donations. The Victoria program involves numerous community organizations in a collaborative effort that allows projects to reflect the diversity and needs of residents.

These are placemaking projects that contribute to illustrating the role of community-driven initiatives in rejuvenating urban life and turning public space into a linking space, source of cultural expression, and shared pride. In partnership with active local partners, cities and their residents co-create inclusive, interactive, and memorable space through grant funding-the kind of space which defines characteristics of neighbourhoods and strengthens cohesion.



# Funding (cont'd)

## CANADA AND USA - WIDE Patronicity Crowdfunding

Patronicity seeks to leverage partnerships with state agencies, foundations, sponsors and local governments, to provide matching grants. This means that when a crowdfunding campaign reaches its fundraising goal, the project receives additional funding from these partners, doubling the resources available to support the project's implementation.

## CANADA, USA AND MEXICO BLOOMBERG PHILANTHROPIES Asphalt Art Initiative

The Asphalt Art Initiative provides grants to cities to implement its projects, offering both financial support and technical guidance. Since its inception, it has inspired a wide range of colourful street murals and interactive designs that not only beautify public areas but also contribute to pedestrian safety by slowing traffic and making intersections more visible. The initiative reveals how low-cost, temporary urban interventions can have a lasting social and economic impact on cities.

## NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK NYC DOT Public Space Equity Program

The Public Space Equity Program (PSEP) focuses on under-resourced neighbourhoods, addressing where community-based partner organizations need support in maintaining high-quality public spaces. To achieve the goal of equitable public space throughout the City, PSEP provides operational and maintenance services, horticultural

care, financial subsidies, programming, and a variety of technical assistance tools to partner organizations across the city. NYC DOT distributes these resources to partners in the Open Streets program, plazas, and other public spaces through a formula that considers partner capacity, site context, and equity goals set forth by the agency and through partners such as the Hort (Horticultural Society of New York) and Street Labs (to pilot and establish new Open Streets).

## USA - WIDE ANNE T. AND ROBERT M. BASS Centre for Transformative Placemaking at Brookings

Launched in 2018, the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking aims to inspire public, private, and civic sector leaders to make place-based investments that generate wide-spread social and economic benefits. The Bass Center collaborates with a wide range of organizations to advance a new integrated practice for creating more connected, vibrant, and inclusive communities. With this, the Centre's transformative placemaking aims to:

- Nurture an economic ecosystem that is regionally connected, innovative, and rooted in the assets of local residents and businesses
- Support a built environment that is accessible, flexible, and advances community health and resiliency
- Foster a vibrant, cohesive social environment that is reflective of community history and identity
- Encourage civic structures that are locally organized and inclusive
- Support network building

To help deliver on the promise of transformative placemaking, the Bass Center provides research, tools, and insights that demonstrate:

- Why transformative placemaking can promote better outcomes for people and economies. The Bass Center examines the changing place needs of workers, businesses, and institutions; the economic, physical, and social implications of these shifts; and how place-based policies and investments can lead to greater growth, prosperity, and inclusion in cities and regions.
- Where to prioritize transformative placemaking investments. The center develops new methods for assessing communities' distinct assets, and for using that knowledge to target resources in ways that leverage their strongest opportunities, address their most pressing needs, and strengthen connectivity within and between them.
- How to support and advance model approaches to transformative placemaking. The center documents, co-creates, and disseminates information and insights on place-based practices and pioneering policies intentionally aimed at creating economic, social, and built environments that benefit more people in more places.

Through these activities, the Bass Center acts as a hub of thought leadership and practical knowledge on the intersection of place, placemaking, and inclusive economy building; and as a resource for public, private, and civic sector leaders who want to advance transformative, place-led systems change.

## USA - WIDE LOCAL INITIATIVES SUPPORT CORPORATION (LISC) Creative Placemaking Program

LISC's (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) Creative Placemaking Program is designed to leverage arts and culture as tools for community revitalization and development. This national creative placemaking program was launched in 2014 with major funding from The Kresge Foundation, and integrates arts and cultural strategies into comprehensive community development efforts to address social, economic, and physical challenges in underinvested neighbourhoods. It emphasizes collaboration between artists, residents, and other stakeholders to drive social change, economic opportunity, and community cohesion.

The principles of the program are to:

- Enlist and Support Artists as Leaders
- Pursue Racial Equity
- Affirm the Distinctiveness of Place
- Develop without Displacement
- Support Approaches that are Community-Driven
- Build Enduring Capacity

LISC offers:

- Financial and technical assistance for local community groups to integrate the arts and culture into their revitalization activities.
- Research and learning opportunities for community groups and funders to understand and support more enduring, equitable placemaking programs.
- Impact reports.



Larch and Jennings Mural, Dalhousie and Halifax Regional Municipality, Tayla Fern Paul, Halifax 2023. Photo: Halifax Regional Municipality



# PRACTITIONER NETWORKS

Practitioner networks in place-making are far more than knowledge-sharing platforms; they are dynamic ecosystems of collaboration, co-creation, and innovation. These networks gather professionals to drive critical conversations about how public spaces can address broader societal challenges—like social equity, sustainability, cultural identity, and well-being—while focusing on how these spaces can meet the evolving needs of communities worldwide.

Practitioner networks are action-oriented platforms that influence policy, practice, and global discourse on public spaces. Their value lies in their ability to:

- Bring Innovation to Public Space Design
- Build Toward a Shared Global Vision for Cities
- Advocate for Social Equity
- Promote Participatory Design
- Shape Policy and Governance
- Foster Global and Local Collaboration
- Drive Critical Dialogue

River Lines, Daily tous les jours, Cambridge 2023. Photo: Double Space



# Canada’s Placemaking Community

Canada’s Placemaking Community is a network of practitioners and local leaders driving placemaking initiatives nationwide. Formed as part of the Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI), its goals included amplifying community stories, supporting placemaking work, and fostering resource-sharing among over 6,000 local organizations and to an expanding international network. Created by the Canadian Urban Institute and the Community Foundations of Canada, this digital platform accompanied HCI funding recipients to create tools and build support programs for the unique challenges of COVID-19. For this project, Canada’s Placemaking Community worked with specialized Technical Partners to provide mentorship, expert guidance, and opportunities for collaboration, enabling projects that focused on HCI’s main mandates of creating safe, vibrant public spaces; enhancing mobility options with physical distancing; and implementing digital solutions for community engagement and service delivery.

## Technical Partners of Canada’s Placemaking Community

### Vivre En Ville

A Quebec-based nonprofit organization founded in 1995, promotes sustainable urban development through projects, training, and advocacy in urban planning, climate change, and mobility. It offers consulting and educational resources, engaging local governments, businesses, and citizens to implement sustainable practices. The organization operates at various scales, supporting decision-makers and citizens in creating prosperous, eco-friendly living environments. Its work includes research, training, consulting, and public awareness initiatives, emphasizing sustainable urban planning and design to enhance the quality of urban living in Quebec.

**Network for the Advancement of Black Communities (NABC)** Focuses on building a sustainable Black community sector by driving systems change, coordinating services, and advocating for policy reforms. It supports Black-led organizations and groups through network convening, knowledge mobilization, service coordination, evaluation, learning, policy, research, and smart grantmaking. Key initiatives include a digital map of Black community networks, evaluation development, and collaborative solutions for housing and systemic issues. NABC generates an impact through collaborative learning, policy analysis, advocacy, and transformative relationships with governments and allies.

### 8 80 Cities

A nonprofit dedicated to transforming urban spaces to be

inclusive, healthy, sustainable, and vibrant for all ages, from 8 to 80. It focuses on community engagement, public space activation, and capacity-building workshops to promote equitable cities. Its initiatives include neighbourhood diagnostics and tailored programs to enhance urban life through innovative planning. Its core principle is that a city suitable for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old will be great for everyone.

### Park People

A bilingual Canadian organization founded in 2011, mobilizes community park groups and advocates for vibrant urban parks where people and nature can thrive harmoniously. Park People focuses on the power of parks to enhance community reciprocity, ecological integrity, and social equity. By providing funding, organizing events, and fostering partnerships, Park People supports the advancement of urban parks as essential spaces. Its work emphasizes park stewardship, advocacy, and community engagement.

**ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability** A global network of over 2,500 local and regional governments dedicated to sustainable urban development. Operating in more than 125 countries, ICLEI supports cities in becoming sustainable, low-carbon, resilient, and biodiverse. It provides guidance and tools for climate action, nature-based solutions, and sustainable urban economies. ICLEI promotes systemic change for urban sustainability through peer exchange, partnerships, and capacity-building, emphasizing the importance of placemaking for creating livable, resilient cities.

### Nice Futures

An initiative focused on promoting sustainability and positive social change. It works on various projects to encourage environmentally friendly practices, community engagement, and social innovation. Nice Futures aims to create a better future by fostering collaboration and innovative solutions to global challenges. Its work often intersects with placemaking by encouraging communities to develop spaces that are both sustainable and beneficial for social cohesion.

**National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC)** A network of over 100 self-determined community hubs across Canada dedicated to improving the well-being of Indigenous people living in urban environments. Established in 1972, NAFC offers culturally appropriate programs, services and support to Indigenous communities. Its initiatives focus on programs for women, vulnerable populations, and youth, on themes of transition services, outreach programs and community wellness.

**The Canadian Centre for Nonprofit Digital Resilience (CCNDR)** Enhances the digital capabilities of nonprofits in Canada. It offers resources, training, and funding support to help organizations effectively use technology to advance their missions. By promoting digital literacy, capacity-building, and systemic change, CCNDR strengthens the digital infrastructure of nonprofits, improving service delivery and community engagement. Its initiatives include knowledge mobilization, public policy advocacy, and fostering partnerships to create a digitally-enabled nonprofit sector.



# A Helpful Directory of Practitioner Networks

**Placemaking Europe**

Fosters a pan-European dialogue on creating socially cohesive, environmentally sustainable, and culturally vibrant public spaces. By linking diverse practitioners across Europe, it ensures the exchange of place-based solutions to shared urban challenges, like housing crises, social integration, and climate resilience. Engages policy-makers to see placemaking as a holistic tool for urban regeneration and social cohesion.

**Project for Public Spaces (PPS)**

Project for Public Spaces advances the idea that public spaces are the core of thriving communities. As a 50-year-old planning and education organization, this nonprofit offers training, placemaking services, and a deep archive of research and case studies that inspire community-powered public spaces around the world.

**PlacemakingX**

Acts as a global movement uniting placemakers, city builders, and advocates for public spaces under a shared vision for healthier, more equitable cities. PlacemakingX encourages cities to move beyond mere physical development and adopt a people-first approach. Over 24 placemaking networks span the globe under the banner of PlacemakingX, a network of networks conceived of by the founders of Project for Public Spaces.

**Urban Design Forum**

Member-powered organization of 1,000+ civic leaders committed to a more just future for New York City. Through convenings, neighbourhood partnerships, policy innovation, and fellowships, the network focuses on the intersection of design, urban policy, and social justice, and how inclusive design can shape cities where everyone has access to quality public spaces.

**Placemaking US**

Serves as a platform for American

placemakers to address local challenges through collective action, with a focus on social equity, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation. Placemaking US pushes American cities to rethink the role of public spaces in creating resilient communities. It highlights the need for public spaces that can serve as platforms for social connection, particularly in the face of increasing social and political polarization.

**Placemaking Mexico**

A Latin American placemaking initiative that integrates placemaking into Mexico’s urban agenda, addressing challenges such as informal settlements, rapid urbanization, and public safety. It advocates for the right to public space as a fundamental aspect of urban life and social equity. Placemaking Mexico amplifies local voices in the urban design process and elevates the needs of underrepresented groups. The network helps create urban spaces that promote social cohesion and cultural vibrancy while addressing the systemic urban challenges prevalent in Latin American cities.

**Placemaking Canada**

A national volunteer-based placemaking network founded in 2015, Placemaking Canada is dedicated to integrating placemaking into Canada’s urban agenda. The initiative addresses key challenges such as fostering social inclusion, enhancing public space access, and promoting sustainable urban development. It seeks to make public spaces a cornerstone of community life and social cohesion across Canada, particularly by elevating community-based placemaking efforts. Its gatherings and collaborative events provide a platform for practitioners to exchange knowledge, share successes, and tackle systemic urban challenges, such as inequality and environmental resilience, ensuring public spaces serve diverse communities across the country.

“Convening diverse expertise and resources (...) ensures the places we build work hard for community needs and ambitions, and achieve multiple public policy objectives at the same time.”

—Jennifer Angel, CEO of Evergreen



# PLACE MAKING FOR A NEW GENERATION

Placemaking evolves to reflect the nuanced realities of growing populations and dynamic urban environments. By centering ecological imperatives, climate resilience, and uplifting historically marginalized voices, while integrating technology's potential, this practice empowers a new generation to lead, shape, and sustain inclusive, culturally rich urban spaces.





Les Terrasses Roy, Castor & Pollux, Montréal  
2017–2018. Photo: City of Montréal



# Eco-Placemaking: Harmonizing Urban Spaces with Nature

As cities face increasing environmental challenges—such as climate change, pollution, and habitat loss—ecological approaches to placemaking seek to minimize these impacts by promoting biodiversity, reducing carbon footprints, and improving climate resilience in their design. The goal, foremost, is to bring natural elements back into concrete environments and harmonize urban environments with nature by incorporating green infrastructure, such as rain gardens, sponge streets, urban forests, and green roofs, which help manage stormwater, improve air quality, relieve heat islands, and provide habitats for wildlife. By prioritizing environmental health, eco-placemaking helps cities adapt to ecological challenges while enhancing the quality of life for urban residents.

In parallel, organizations like Vivre en Ville in Québec are promoting sustainable urban development by encouraging cities to adopt practices that create resilient, low-carbon communities. Its focus on green infrastructure, sustainable mobility, and inclusive urban planning reflects a growing movement to make cities more livable, as seen in eco-district initiatives like their objectifecoquartiers.org. The guide underlines the importance of involving local communities in the planning process, ensuring that eco-districts are both environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive. By promoting sustainable living, it provides municipalities with a practical framework for creating greener, more resilient neighbourhoods.

Eco-placemaking often involves community engagement and local capacity-building through urban gardening, tree planting initiatives, and sustainability education programs. Engaging locals into this practice fosters a sense of stewardship and ecological responsibility among residents.



Îlot de verdure multifonctionnel Le parc Dickie-Moore, City of Montréal, Montréal 2022. Photo: Vivre en Ville



Right: Sharing the Field, The River Clyde Pageant, Charlottetown 2022. Photo: Andrew MacInnis & Faraaz Hussain  
Below: Shelldale Urban Farm Park, Kindle Communities, Guelph 2021. Photo: The Seed

# Community Agriculture

Prioritizing agriculture projects like urban farms and community gardens can reimagine and convert unused land into thriving community hubs. These initiatives go beyond adding green space; they help build capacity within neighbourhoods via practical gardening and sustainability skills, inviting residents to build knowledge for food sovereignty. Placemaking in these projects is about creating spaces where people connect, learn, and grow together, strengthening social ties and promoting self-reliance.

For example, **Kindle Communities’ project** in Guelph, originally supported by the Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI), turned underutilized land at Shelldale’s Farm Park into an accessible community trail and picnic pavilion. This program established a safe, inclusive area that brought the community together and served as a platform for gathering around shared interests and learning essential food-growing and preparation skills.

In New Glasgow, PEI, the **Sharing the Field project** revitalized a greenspace and nearby empty lot, to create a community garden and shared market space. This HCI-funded initiative invited residents to engage in gardening and environmental discussions, blending art and education to create a space that celebrated collective knowledge. By teaching sustainable gardening techniques and facilitating community-led events, the project contributed to skill-building that contributes to long-term food independence and stronger community connections.





# Digital Placemaking

Digital placemaking is emerging as a game-changer in urban planning, transforming how people connect with public spaces through technology. Defined by the Media Architecture Compendium as the process of creating meaningful public spaces through the integration of digital technologies, it has expanded from being a novelty to a practical and enduring approach. During the COVID19 crisis, the significance of digital connections in the absence of physical interaction became acutely apparent, highlighting the potential of digital tools to foster engagement and sustain cultural expression even during challenging times. By weaving digital tools into public spaces, placemakers are unlocking new levels of community engagement, breathing life into underused areas, and boosting urban functionality. Central to this transformation is the storytelling of place—giving voice to places and communities through digital integrations.

## DIGITAL URBAN ART

A signature of digital placemaking its power in storytelling. Through the use of technologies such as projections, interactive screens, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR), digital art can transform urban landscapes into visually striking canvases that are not only interactive, but embedded with site-specific stories, collective legacies and community dreams. When people are invited to participate in digital activations (whether through movement, touch or even voice commands), infrastructure like building façades, transit stations or public

plazas become an even-stronger reflection of a place's identity and character, at times allowing public to shape their urban environment nimbly through digital art. Montréal's Quartier des Spectacles (QDS), is known for its illumination of public spaces. The QDS features 365 days of video projection on four façades, showcasing the district's commitment to year-round digital arts, featuring an average of 25 different productions per year. In winter the district features a 5th projection surface with artwork displayed on the ice skating rink



at Esplanade Tranquille, creating an interactive art destination for the colder months.

## THE ROLE OF DIGITAL PLACEMAKING

While digital urban art often acts as the spark that draws people to a space, digital placemaking works to embed lasting value. Susa Pop, co-founder of Public Art Lab, champions an approach called “responsive placemaking” to tackle the growing inequalities that result from an increasingly global network. Responsive placemaking merges new digital technologies with traditional urban planning, with the aim of emphasizing public values and civic engagement to create a more equitable and connected urban environment. Responsive placemaking in the digital realm recognizes cities as hybrid spaces, shaped both physically and digitally, and integrates new technologies like real-time data visualization, algorithms, and digital map services



into traditional urban planning to enhance community engagement and address urban issues.

An example of this is London's Starling Crossing trial project, which uses smart LED systems and real-time data to make cities safer for pedestrians. Similarly, the Battersea Power Station Heritage Trail, which uses augmented reality to connect visitors with the rich history of the site, adding layers of storytelling to the experience and ultimately connecting them to the space's heritage.

As cities become increasingly hybrid—part physical, part digital—placemakers have the opportunity to reimagine public spaces not only as destinations but as dynamic canvases for co-creation. These spaces, layered with cultural significance and technological adaptability, hold the potential to address long-term challenges like sustainability, inclusivity, and accessibility while celebrating the unique identities of communities. We see in digital placemaking the potential of storytelling and digital art to shape lasting

urban frameworks, and shape environments that are as innovative as they are meaningful—fostering deeper connections between people, technology, and place.



Clockwise from left: Christi Belcourt at National Arts Centre, Moment Factory, Ottawa. Photo: Paul McKinnon  
Megaphone, Moment Factory, Montréal. Photo: Courtesy of Moment Factory  
Probabilités de neige, Quartier des Spectacles Partnership, Montréal 2018. Photo: Viven Gaumand  
Our Common Home, Iregular, Montréal 2021. Photo: Iregular



# Feminist Placemaking

“I am convinced that placemaking has the power to drive transformative change in gender-equitable design, addressing some of the most pressing challenges women face in public spaces.”

—Nourhan Bassam, *The Gendered City*

Feminist placemaking focuses on empowering women to actively shape urban spaces, making them safer and more inclusive. It emphasizes the importance of women’s ownership and influence, taking on roles as property developers, business owners, and community leaders. The practice opens the space for women to claim and redefine urban areas based on their unique needs and identities. Beyond ownership, everyday actions led by women—such as organizing community

gardens, creating social enterprises, and leading safety initiatives, among many others—enhance the livability and inclusivity of cities. *The Women’s Right to the City Manifesto* produced in 2019 presents concepts central to feminist placemaking, advocating for women’s freedom to move, participate in decision-making, and have their voices heard in urban planning. Advocacy continues to play a crucial role in amplifying women’s experiences and pushing

for gender-responsive policies. As we grow collective action to an inclusive agenda in placemaking and expand as a practice to better support feminist placemaking, it is essential to provide resources, networks, and collaboration opportunities for women to recognize and integrate their contributions to urban development. As this work is non-exhaustive and ever-evolving, we seek to continue engage in dialogue and strengthening our practice alongside leading experts.

# Queer Space and Belonging



As a practitioner community we celebrate the pioneering work of many leaders championing an inclusive placemaking agenda. Queer public space, or the idea of designing urban spaces created by and for LGBTQ+ communities, is an essential approach to fostering inclusion and diversity in contemporary cities, and reclaiming spaces that have historically been violent and exclusive of queer communities. Through engaging in this essential dialogue what is resoundingly clear is that queer public space strategy must be rooted strongly in principles of care and identity recognition. More, to advance this agenda is to engage in intentional dialogue to understand the lived experiences and provide the platforms to share stories of these communities in effect strengthening their visibility and resilience in public space. A well-loved example of this approach is *Jim Deva Plaza* in Vancouver. Located in the Davie Village neighbourhood, the plaza was designed as a community gathering space in honour of Jim Deva, a major LGBTQ+ rights and free speech activist who dedicated his life to creating safe, inclusive spaces for Vancouver’s queer community. The plaza serves not only as a tribute to his legacy but also as a vibrant hub for social events, protests, and celebrations, symbolizing resilience and pride for all who gather there. Part of a placemaking initiative in collaboration with the local community and stakeholders, *Jim Deva Plaza* is not just a physical space, but a strong symbol of the fight for LGBTQ+ rights in Vancouver. The presence of the megaphone, a tribute to Deva’s advocacy for free speech, reminds

visitors that this space is a place for dialogue, action, and recognition of social and political struggles. Additionally, *Arup’s Queering Public Space* initiative highlights the importance of rethinking the design of public spaces to ensure they are inclusive of queer communities. This project collaboration between *Arup* and the University of Westminster emphasizes the need to recognize how public spaces can perpetuate exclusion if they are not designed with diverse identities in mind. By integrating queer voices and considering the specific needs of LGBTQ+ individuals, this work illustrates how urban design professionals can evolve projects to become more inclusive and welcoming. Design strategies include improving lighting in public spaces, building safer seating configurations, and encouraging mural projects that reflect queer culture and celebrate LGBTQ+ history and identity. Queer placemaking and the developing inclusive placemaking agenda allows for the creation of spaces that not only meet the functional needs of LGBTQ+ communities but also reflect the stories, identities, and aspirations to be shared in public spaces. When urban design fully integrates queer narratives, placemaking becomes a powerful tool for building more just and equitable cities. We as a global community are only beginning to unfold this growing priority in the modern placemaking landscape. We point to the work of pioneers in this field including the *Global LGBTQ+ Storytelling Congress*, founded in 2023 to uplift LGBTQ+ voices globally in conversations about urban space through the power of storytelling.

Top two: *Jim Deva Plaza*, City of Vancouver  
Photo: Vancouver Public Space Network (VPSN)  
Bottom: *STACKT Market*, Toronto 2019  
Photo: Dooley Noted Productions





Kapabamayak Achaak Healing Forest, Healing Forest Winnipeg Inc. and ft3 Architecture Landscape Interior Design, Winnipeg 2020. Photo: Duncan McNairnay

# PLACE KEEPING

## Reclaiming Urban Spaces with Cultural Integrity

A prologue led by Madeleine Spencer of [PlacemakingUS](#)

Imagine a city that truly embraces its roots—a place where the stories of the land, its original caretakers, and the ecosystems they nurtured are woven into every corner of the landscape knowing that “wisdom sits in places.” This is the essence of placekeeping. For Indigenous peoples, place is not merely a backdrop to life but a co-creator of identity and heritage. It is where memories are formed, languages spoken, and ceremonies held. Placekeeping is an act of honouring this deep connection by ensuring that the ecological, historical, and cultural context of a place is not just preserved but actively celebrated and shared.

However, placekeeping is not only about reclaiming physical spaces, but addressing the painful legacy of displacement that has disrupted the lives of countless communities. For Indigenous peoples, enslavement forcibly severed ties to their ancestral

lands, while subsequent policies of assimilation, forced removal, and urbanization sought to erase their presence entirely. Similarly, Black communities have faced centuries of systematic disenfranchisement, from the traumas of slavery to the urban renewal projects that razed vibrant neighbourhoods, denying them the stability and opportunity to age in place. Moreover, for new immigrants, the promise of a new life has often been met with the harsh reality of exclusion and marginalization, as they are pushed to the fringes of cities and denied a true sense of belonging.

Placekeeping offers a powerful response to these injustices. By engaging communities that have been historically excluded and displaced, placekeeping is an act of resistance reclaiming not just land, but the right to remain and thrive in the places that hold their stories. It transforms

the urban landscape into one reflecting the diversity of narratives and contributions made by all its residents, past and present. Through this process, cities can begin healing the wounds of those who have been displaced and disenfranchised and create spaces where everyone has the chance to build roots, find connection, and truly belong.

Incorporating the voices and perspectives of those who have been denied their place in the city’s fabric, placekeeping reminds us that the land itself holds memory and that our role is to listen, learn, and collaborate in creating a shared future. This approach not only respects the legacies of those who have come before but also ensures that future generations inherit a city that honours their right to remain, age, and flourish in the places they call home.



# A Call to Centre BIPOC Voices in Placemaking and Placekeeping

Placemaking and placekeeping are evolving into critical frameworks for shaping and sustaining communities, especially for BIPOC communities navigating displacement, erasure, and systemic inequity. To serve communities, placemaking needs to go beyond short-term interventions and adopt long-term approaches that honour cultural heritage while allowing organic growth. The aim is not only to preserve the past but to envision a future where these communities thrive.

Placekeeping plays a key role as it bridges the past and future, safeguarding not just physical spaces but also cultural identities. Urbanist and entrepreneur Carmen Mays, a thought leader in this space, emphasizes the idea of “place remembering,” rooted in the West African concept of Sankofa—looking back to move forward. However, Mays cautions against romanticizing these ideas, reminding us that placekeeping is not just about nostalgia but ensuring that communities have the agency to shape their future.

Mays also challenges us with a crucial question: “What is your claim to a space once you’ve abandoned it?” This touches on core issues of ownership, belonging, and identity, especially in Black and immigrant communities. For these communities, the idea of “claim” often ties to struggles for justice and equity. Spaces must evolve with residents’ needs while maintaining their historical roots.

Cequyna Moore, Program Director at World Heritage USA, questions who placekeeping really serves: tourists, businesses, or the communi-

ty itself? Often, cultural landmarks are preserved without addressing the social and economic disparities that displace residents. True placekeeping must balance preservation with growth and change, adapting to contemporary needs without losing cultural heritage. A prime example of this is It’s OK\* Studios in Toronto, which provides Black artists with a space to express themselves, build community, and share knowledge, despite challenges like limited venues and industry gatekeeping.

BIPOC placemaking requires visionary, long-term thinking beyond short-term, grant-funded projects; it needs deep community engagement and support from municipal systems. Elizabeth Gomez Ibarra, an Industrial Designer, notes that municipalities must acknowledge that grassroots efforts alone cannot carry the burden. Sustainable placekeeping demands continuous investment, with BIPOC communities leading the way.

Funding remains a major issue. Guillermo Bernal, Founding Director of Placemaking Mexico, argues that placemaking is not just about who pioneered it, but who is currently serving the community. Similarly, Executive Director LeJuanno Varnell stresses that decision-making power and resources should be directed toward local placekeepers. For BIPOC communities to thrive, they need financial structures that prioritize their leadership, ensuring both heritage preservation and future development.

Urban planners and architects also play a crucial role in shaping cities, but often lack a comprehensive understanding of the communities

they serve. They must bridge the gap between top-down decision-making and the lived experiences of BIPOC communities. BlackSpace NYC, through its BlackSpace Manifesto, advocates for diversity in planning, pushing for equity in urban design and challenging traditional models that have historically excluded marginalized communities.

Global examples offer valuable insights. The forced displacement of Africville in Halifax and gentrification pressures in Toronto are stark reminders of how systemic issues impact BIPOC communities. However, solutions also exist. The New Roots Halifax North End Community Land Trust, led by Black planner Treno Morton, is one such model, preserving affordable housing and empowering long-term residents. Community land trusts, in particular, are powerful tools for securing land rights and preventing displacement. Morton highlights how these trusts enable Black communities to maintain ownership, fostering resilience in the face of gentrification. Another strong example is 221a in Vancouver, a land trust vision to remove real estate from the commodity market to allow for creative workspace to have a permanent presence in the city landscape free of speculation.

The land trust is a major legal tool that could shift common approaches to property ownership. A land trust is a property that is earmarked for a specific purpose, rather than for the benefit of an individual or organization. It makes it possible to exclude a property from the real estate market and seal its vocation in perpetuity. The trust helps maintain



It's OK\* Studios, Toronto  
Photo: Jesse Lau

affordable space for local communities. Placemaking and placekeeping are not one-size-fits-all solutions. They must reflect each neighbourhood’s unique histories, challenges, and aspirations. Madeleine Spencer, Co-Director of PlacemakingUS, argues that Black, Indigenous, and immigrant communities must feel empowered to “age in place,” ensuring their contributions are celebrated and not erased in the face of urban growth.

BIPOC communities also need to reclaim their narratives in placemaking efforts. As Economic Development Coordinator Lili Raizi asks, “Whose story is being told, and to whom?” These stories should not be reduced to marketing tools—they must

be lived experiences for the people who inhabit these spaces. Their struggles, experiences, and triumphs must take centre stage in placemaking.

Black placemaking manifests in various forms, from institutional efforts to grassroots initiatives. In Toronto, Nia Centre for the Arts—Canada’s first Black professional arts centre—helps Black artists like Apanaki Temitayo develop a strong sense of place. Noha Collective focuses on preserving cultural heritage through storytelling and community events. Meanwhile, entrepreneur Imani Dominique Busby uses “The Gift Shop” to promote economic sustainability for Black artists, showcasing local talent in interactive spaces. These exam-

ples emphasize the diversity of Black placemaking, from cultural preservation to economic empowerment.

The future of placemaking and placekeeping depends on empowering BIPOC communities to define their terms, own their narratives, and shape their spaces. Whether through community land trusts, municipal support, or grassroots organizing, the goal is sustainability, inclusion, and growth. It’s not enough to protect the past—we must create room for these communities to evolve, thrive, and lead their futures. Moving forward, placemaking must be about more than just buildings and spaces; it must centre on the people who bring them to life.



An Action toward Placekeeping:  
Community Trusts

# Africville



Mulgrave Park Mural, Jarus, Halifax  
2016. Photo: Indrid Cold is licensed  
under CC BY-SA 2.0

African Nova Scotians have a 400-year history in the region, predating Halifax’s founding in 1749. Many arrived as Loyalists after the American Revolution, while others came through the Underground Railroad, seeking promised freedom. Despite systemic challenges, African Nova Scotians built strong communities, such as Africville, which was forcibly demolished in 1970 by Halifax City Council. Similar displacements affected other communities, impacting cultural sites. Efforts to commemorate these histories include the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia and a museum in Africville. Ongoing land title issues and advocacy for recognition reflect the need for continued reconciliation.

For over 200 years, African Nova Scotians have lived on land

passed down by their ancestors without clear title, leading to difficulties in securing mortgages, selling, or accessing grants. This has disconnected the younger generation, who often leave the province. The Land Titles Initiative helps residents in several communities gain clear title at no cost. Community land trusts are being explored to preserve land ownership and fund housing initiatives.

Meanwhile, Halifax’s rapid population growth has increased housing demand, pushing up costs and contributing to a housing shortage and homelessness crisis. Despite volunteer efforts, affordable, safe housing and necessary support services remain inadequate, affecting community well-being.

Treno Morton, a Community Advocate and Entrepreneur, has

been at the forefront of efforts to combat these challenges through his involvement with the New Roots Halifax North End Community Land Trust. Treno’s deep connection to the North End stems from his upbringing in Uniacke Square, a predominantly Black public housing community originally displaced from Africville. Witnessing the effects of gentrification firsthand, Treno’s work with the New Roots Halifax North End Community Land Trust focuses on preserving affordable housing and ensuring that long-time residents can remain in their homes. The Land Trust is a community-driven initiative that seeks to secure land and properties in the North End, maintaining them as affordable spaces for the local community, particularly for those of African descent.

Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts support the acquisition, development and stewarding of permanent affordable housing, land and other assets that contribute to a thriving community. Community Land Trusts advance placekeeping efforts as they are a way for equity-deserving communities to reclaim space and combat displacement.

In May of 2024, the CNCLT led a delegation of 16 Black community land trust practitioners on a tour across the United States dubbed the Liberated Land Trust Tour. This tour was an opportunity for representatives from land trusts across Canada to learn from established organizations with shared values regarding Black land stewardship.

41  
Community Land  
Trust Organizations

2546  
Community Land  
Trust Members

9995  
Community Land  
Trust-owned homes





Underpinning any discussion about placekeeping or territory is the necessary recognition of the fact that Chinatown is located on unceded Indigenous land.

Yue Moon: Animated Light (圓滿：舞動), Winnie Truong, support by Meegan Lim, STEPS Public Art, Toronto 2021. Photo: Selina McCallum.

SUSTAINING CULTURE IN MONTRÉAL'S CHINATOWN THROUGH PLACEKEEPING

In neighbourhoods like Chinatown, placekeeping plays an essential role in ensuring that cultural heritage and community identity remain at the heart of urban development. While placemaking often focuses on the transformation of spaces, placekeeping emphasizes the long-term stewardship of cultural, social, and historical assets that make a community unique. Placemaking implies a reclaiming of urban space, while placekeeping maintains that the community was already there; it is more of a re-assertion than a reclamation. For Chinatowns across the globe, placekeeping has become a crucial practice in resisting the pressures of gentrification and displacement.

As urban development accelerates, many Chinatowns face the risk of losing their identity. Placekeeping strives to ensure that improvements or changes to these neighbourhoods are community-driven, respectful of local traditions and networks, and preserve the cultural and social fabric that make it a place of sanctuary for many generations of immigrants, past and future. By focusing on sustaining identity, placekeeping in Chinatown goes beyond simply enhancing physical spaces. It involves valorising local businesses, re-activating underused spaces, proposing relevant and contemporary cultural programming, fostering youth leadership, and integrating residents' voices into the design and planning process. This ensures that Chinatowns remain authentic cultural hubs and

living neighbourhoods, not merely spaces repurposed for tourism or luxury real estate development. In the past 18 months, Montréal Chinatown has seen numerous projects come to fruition that intersect with placekeeping approaches in diverse ways:

THE CHINATOWN REIMAGINED FORUM

Held in Montréal in September 2023, the Chinatown Reimagined Forum, hosted by the Jia Foundation, brought together participants from across North America to reimagine Chinatowns' futures through an anti-colonial lens. Recognizing the ongoing challenges in Chinatowns across North America, including land expropriation, economic dis-

placement, and cultural erosion rooted in colonial urban planning, the forum emphasized the need for a combined approach of advocacy, placekeeping and transversal solidarity. By highlighting historical injustices while proposing new strategies for sustainable growth, the forum re-envisioned Chinatowns as vibrant, living communities that honour their cultural heritage while embracing innovative futures—a blueprint for marginalized communities facing similar challenges across North America.

CHINATOWN HOUSE

Chinatown House is working to revive Montréal Chinatown's declining cultural offer by proposing issue-based, innovative, and interactive programming by and for Chinatown communities. The Chinatown House pilot, implemented by the JIA Foundation re-activated underused public and community spaces, such as the 2nd floor of the former Chinese Cultural Centre (now Chinese Family Services), Sun Yat-Sen Place and clan associations, and developed exhibitions, social events, block parties, performances, a lecture series and other events over about a



Chinatown Reimagined Forum, JIA Foundation, Montréal 2023. Photo: Rachel Cheng



Kahéhtaien-Lumb Community Garden, Montréal Chinatown Round Table, Montréal 2024. Photo: Parker Mah

year-long period between 2023 and 2024. Acting as a cultural space, a community hub, and an ecosystem grounding new ideas and visions for Chinatown, Chinatown House aimed to enable diverse community members to actively participate in social innovation and placemaking activities that fostered ties within and outside of Chinatown, and strengthen a sense of belonging to a spiritual “home” in the city.

KAHÉHTAIEN-LUMB COMMUNITY GARDEN

In June 2024, the Montréal Chinatown Round Table, a sister organization to the JIA Foundation that acts as a multi-sectoral representative for the neighbourhood, launched the first Indigenous-Chinese community garden project in Quebec: the Kahéhtaien-Lumb Community Garden. Located in a formerly disused empty lot across from the Montréal Chinese Hospital, a temporary lease was granted by the City of Montréal, which also agreed to install water access at the site. The concept and layout of the garden were designed in collaboration with urban planning students from Concordia University, as well as different Indigenous community partners and land defenders. The “three sisters” (corn, beans and squash) grow alongside traditional Chinese vegetables in planters made from recycled

materials. The garden is collectively managed and relies on volunteers from both communities for upkeep, watering, and harvesting. The project has seen Asian diasporic youth work alongside Indigenous residents and previously socially isolated seniors to share knowledge and bridge mutual understanding intergenerationally and interculturally. Part of a larger orientation towards Decolonizing Chinatown, the Garden proposes an innovative yet viable approach to understanding how to integrate Indigeneity in future visions of Chinatown. The Round Table's placemaking efforts have yielded the first accessible community-run green space in the area.

The Chinatown Round Table oversees the quality of life, the environment, and the recognition and promotion of all aspects of the cultural landscape of Montréal's Chinatown. It ensures that the voices of individuals as well as actors from the community, economic, cultural and association spheres are heard, amplified and taken into consideration, with a view to developing a Chinatown on a human and inclusive scale. Founded in 2022 following the adoption of the city of Montréal's Chinatown Action Plan 2021-2026, the Chinatown Round Table is born of a desire to protect this heritage site. It is a multisectoral platform for consultation through a horizontal governance structure reflecting diverse stakeholders and sectors in Chinatown.



# Indigenizing Cities



The Turtle and the Traveler flags on windrose, Born in the North and Future Simple Studio, Toronto, Photo: Cinemascope

Incorporating the voices and perspectives of those who have been denied their place in the city’s fabric, placekeeping reminds us that land and place have agency, life and memory and that our role is to listen, learn, and collaborate in creating shared, inclusive futures. Nourished by this grounding wisdom, and inspired by many Knowledge Keepers and practitioners from diverse wisdom traditions—Tanya Chung-Tiam-Fook developed the **Civic-Indigenous Placekeeping & Partnership Building Toolkit** as a standing invitation for municipal and civic practitioners to listen to, learn from, build reciprocal and long-term relationships with, and cede power to urban Indigenous communities. The following excerpt, the International Indigenous Design Charter, is republished here with her permission, to ensure that we are all working together to make visible and honour the persistent presence and activation of Indigeneity in cities.

This way of being with, visioning, designing, and planning public spaces and civic infrastructures not only respects the legacies of those who have come before but also ensures that future generations inherit a city that honours their right to remain, age, and flourish in the places they call home. The Toolkit is intended as a resource for users across sectors, guiding them in learning and actioning Truth & Reconciliation and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Indigenous cultural competency, community engagement, design and planning processes on Indigenous and intercultural placekeeping initiatives, and reimagining public spaces. Please note, this Design Charter does not aim to be a pan-Indigenous dilution of engagement and design protocols from across the diversity of global Indigenous cultures. The Charter offers shared protocols for building equitable and effective relationship and co-creation partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners.

Tanya Chung-Tiam-Fook is deeply engaged in Indigenous, environmental, transdisciplinary and transsystemic approaches to education and research, land relationships and stewardship, climate resilience, bioregional regeneration, placekeeping, innovation, and health and mental wellness. She is passionate about reciprocal, collaborative and intergenerational pathways for learning and knowledge co-creation, practice, and partnerships in her roles within project and research leadership, academia, advising and community. Her Akawaio-Kapon and mixed ancestry from Guyana and the Netherlands, combined with community and international experiences across cultures, ecologies and geographies, enable her to bring multifaceted perspectives and sensibilities to her work.

With thanks to **Evergreen** for their support to include this important resource into our work.

# International Indigenous Design Charter

This tool is inspired by the protocols featured in the International Indigenous Design Charter,<sup>1</sup> which is a self-regulated best practice guide and living document for placekeeping practitioners on the protocols and principles of Indigenous design. The Charter is based on the outcomes of research and community engagement with Indigenous practitioners from around the world. The Charter is aligned with Article 11 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states<sup>2</sup>:

*Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect, and develop the past, present, and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies, and visual and performing arts and literature.*

The Charter outlines 10 steps for designers and buyers of design to follow when representing Indigenous culture in their professional practice. For the purposes of this Tool, the protocols are intended to guide engagement processes between civic practitioners and Indigenous communities in the context of placekeeping and city-building initiatives. In coin-

cidence with the Charter’s mandate “to emphasize the need for respectful exchange, open thinking, deep listening, and a genuine commitment to appropriately engage with Indigenous knowledge,” the Tool encourages civic practitioners to cultivate deep listening and learning of cultural values, protocols and priorities during their engagement with Indigenous community. Space for learning and respectful exchange should occur both at upstream and downstream stages of a project: upstream relationship-building, planning and co-creation processes during the early visioning period; downstream implementation, activation, and evaluation in the latter stages.

Representation of Indigenous culture by non-Indigenous practitioners can be complex and problematic when Indigenous people are not actively included in the project from the inception. As with all the components of the Toolkit, this Charter-informed Tool is not a definitive manual for how civic practitioners can ensure appropriate forms of Indigenous culture and design without the direct engagement of Indigenous community and practitioners.

Rather, the Tool provides protocols for how civic practitioners can authentically engage Indigenous community and placekeeping creations through committed and mutually beneficial processes that

are guided by place-based Indigenous expertise. In this way, civic practitioners can learn from and benefit from the valuable contributions that Indigenous creations and innovations make to placekeeping and the transformation and evolution of cities, while protecting these vast systems of knowledge and the rights of knowledge-holders and practitioners. The World Intellectual Property Organisation ensures: “The protection of traditional knowledge should contribute toward the promotion of innovation, and to the transfer and dissemination of knowledge to the mutual advantage of holders and users of traditional knowledge, and in a manner conducive to social and economic welfare and to a balance of rights and obligations”<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>NB</sup> This Tool can be used in combination with the *Tool on Guiding Protocols for Civic-Indigenous Engagement*.

<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, R., Kelly, M., Greenaway, J. and Martin, B. (2018). International Indigenous Design Charter. Deakin University: Geelong, VIC.

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly. (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: resolution/adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/61/295. (www.refworld.org/docid/471355a82.html)

<sup>3</sup> World Intellectual Property Organisation (2016). The Protection of Traditional Knowledge: Draft Articles Rev. 2, p.3.



# Engagement and design processes should be...

## 1. INDIGENOUS-LED AND SELF-DETERMINED

- Invite Indigenous knowledge-holders and/or practitioners to (co) lead the co-creative planning and design process.
- In addition to community leaders, engage local champions or active practitioners as leaders, as they often have deep relationships with the relevant communities.
- As much as possible, work through community or regional Indigenous organizations and structures that can provide in- sight into local context and need, local legitimacy, networks and other invaluable connections.
- Respect the rights of Indigenous practitioners and community to determine the application of their cultural knowledge and practice in planning and design process.
- Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determine how their intellectual and creative property is used, including how engagement and design processes engage with and represent Indigenous values, knowledges, and creations.<sup>4</sup>
- Employ Indigenous staff or consultants where possible.

## 2. INFORMED BY INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL OWNERSHIP

- Acknowledge and respect the rich cultural history, innovation, and resilience that are at the heart

- of Indigenous knowledges and practices including ceremonies, designs, stories, land stewardship, creative productions, and technologies.
- Indigenous knowledges and traditions are held and valued collectively by the nation/ community, mostly by knowledge-keepers, cultural custodians, and practitioners.
- Civic practitioners must recognize that the “ownership” of knowledge and cultural productions remain with the Indigenous custodians.
- Early engagement fosters different perspectives for more robust problem identification and valuable outcomes, as well as a sense of co-ownership of the design and planning process.

## 3. COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC

- Ensure respect for the diversity of Indigenous cultures and practices by acknowledging and following nation-specific cultural forms and considerations.
- Each Indigenous nation has their own contexts, knowledge, protocols and practices and they should be reflected in the engagement approach and design project.
- Civic practitioners must develop cultural awareness and competencies aligned with the specific nation (and associated sensibilities) they wish to engage.
- Acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous Nations and cultures as represented in urban communities and their varied perspectives and practices.

## 4. COMMITTED TO DEEP LISTENING

- Building partnerships with Indigenous communities on a nation-to-nation basis requires a willingness to listen to and learn from the perceptions, experiences and priorities of Indigenous partners.
- Civic practitioners must commit to learning from the knowledge and guidance of Indigenous partners and advisors in the design, planning and delivery of projects.
- Ensure that recognized Elders, knowledge-keepers, practitioners, and local champions are actively involved and consulted.
- Ensure that knowledge, information, and opinions collected from community and practitioners are reflected in project decision-making and outputs.
- Ensure respectful, culturally specific, and personally engaged interactions for effective communication, positive and mutually valuable experiences, and effective outcomes aligned with community values and priorities.
- As much as possible, meet community where they are and do not expect people to engage solely through telecommunications or come to meetings and events located far from their community.

## 5. FEATURING CO-DESIGN AND SHARED KNOWLEDGE

- Co-design is the act of creating with Indigenous practitioners

- Civic practitioners must understand that more nuanced and sensitive cultural information and creations may only be shared by communities when there has been a deeper and more reciprocal level of relationship-building, trust, and shared value established.

and community within the design development process to ensure that process and outcomes reflect their cultural values, identities and expressions; and meet their needs and priorities.

- Co-design with community should take place at the initial stage (upstream) and across the design development process rather than seek approval at the end (downstream).

- Different from other collaborative approaches, “co-design” helps identify a more specific type of value-based partner- ship.

- Cultivate an approach to engagement and co-creation that is mutually respectful and beneficial, culturally specific, and encourages reciprocal knowledge sharing.

- This involves building trust with community and caring interactions that encourage the transmission of shared knowledge by developing a cultural competency framework to remain aware of Indigenous cultural realities.

- Ensure the appropriate cultural custodians and knowledge keepers guide the co-design and knowledge-sharing activities.

- Share back or disseminate all project outcomes and design productions with partners involved.

- Ensure all participants in co-design development understand that consultation may require an extended period of time to enable consultation with community members and appropriate inclusion of participant perspectives in the project.

## 6. COMMITTED TO SHARED BENEFITS

- Ensure Indigenous partners enjoy an equitable share in the benefits from the use of their knowledge and cultural productions, especially where it is being commercially applied.
- The non-commercial benefits of placekeeping projects that

contribute to the flourishing, well-being and development of people, lands, and communities are often of greater value to Indigenous communities and should be prioritized as shared benefits.

## 7. IMPACT OF PLACEKEEPING

- Placekeeping practices are multi-faceted and respond to complex and interconnected issues within communities such as health and wellbeing, cultural and spiritual values, ecological health and sustainability, rights and governance, political activism, identity and belonging, and food sovereignty.

- Consider the reception and implication of projects so that they reflect the holistic and interconnected nature of Indigenous worldviews and approaches, as well as remain respectful of cultural values and natural laws over deep time: past, present and future.

- Projects should also inspire and hold value for different generations and social groups in community, especially Elders, youth, and future generations; and positively impact Indigenous communities as both the subjects and producers of the stories and futures woven into placekeeping.

## 8. LEGAL AND MORAL

- Civic practitioners must do their due diligence to learn the legal and ethics frameworks that apply to particular nations, demonstrating respect and honour for Indigenous peoples’ inherent rights and cultural ownership, intellectual property, and data sovereignty rights by adhering to appropriate principles and obtaining appropriate permissions where required.
- Civic practitioners must be aware

of their professional and moral responsibility and the need to understand the power they have to advance particular narratives with their projects – careful to co-create space for Indigenous perspectives, decentering persistent colonial and dominating ethos.

- Civic practitioners must also be aware that some Indigenous content and productions are not suitable for sharing in a public setting or open platform.

- Sacred and ceremonial knowledge and sensitive material is often restricted under a nation’s customary law and privacy and confidentiality must be respected.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on Indigenous intellectual and creative property rights, visit the Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Portal of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) at [www.wipo.int/tk/en/indigenous](http://www.wipo.int/tk/en/indigenous)

WIPO provides guidance in the area of cultural innovation and representation. However, it cautions practitioners to be vigilant when sharing Indigenous knowledge. ‘The protection of traditional knowledge should contribute toward the promotion of innovation, and to the transfer and dissemination of knowledge to the mutual advantage of holders and users of traditional knowledge, and in a manner conducive to social and economic welfare and to a balance of rights and obligations’ (WIPO 2014, p.3).



# PLACE BECOMING

As the practice of placemaking iterates, evolves, and gains momentum globally, we see how technological advancements and empathetic, community-centered approaches are reshaping the field. From AI-enhanced community asset mapping to participatory workshops, these innovations ensure placemaking adapts to modern challenges while creating inclusive, resilient spaces that reflect the unique needs and identity of communities.



# Future-Focused Placemaking

## Integrating Technology and Empathy to Shape Inclusive, Resilient Communities

As the field of placemaking evolves, both technological advancements and community-driven approaches are enhancing the depth and impact of urban development. While tools like AI and data analytics help capture a real-time, detailed view of a community’s resources, human-centred practices ensure that these insights translate into spaces that reflect the identity, aspirations, and unique bonds within each community. The blend of these two tools allow for the design of adaptable and inclusive environments, centred on authentic community voices.

A well-used tool in placemaking is community asset mapping, a participatory practice where communities identify their local resources, such as not-for-profits, community leaders, grassroots organizations, and cultural institutions. This mapping exercise helps communities understand their strengths and leverage them for future development, rather than focusing solely on deficiencies. By documenting the relationships, social networks, and human assets that define a neighbourhood, placemakers can ensure that new projects build on what is already working. Traditional community asset mapping creates a catalogue or database of a community’s unique strengths, such as cultural institutions, local leaders, and informal networks. In

recent times, the power of technological tools like AI are enhancing this process by quickly codifying and visualizing social connections of organizations and relationships, giving placemakers and communities an evolving snapshot of accessible resources. For example, AI can take community asset mapping to the next level by analyzing public data, social media activity, and census data to automatically identify key community players that may not be immediately visible. What’s even more interesting is what’s found at the intersection of the discovery of the people-led consultations and the results of data findings; it allows for a dimension of empathy and nuance, weaving in community voices and location-specific stories to guide the interpretation of data and better ensure projects resonate with the people they serve.

Calgary’s Good Future Co. exemplifies this balance of tech tools and community depth with a tool they call “Place Futuring.” While data-driven tools predict shifts in local economies, social dynamics, and environmental conditions, the heart of Place Futuring lies in the people-centred discussions that guide these insights. By engaging communities directly in scenario planning and visioning exercises, its team grounds the predictive findings in the real, lived experiences and commu-

nity goals, creating environments that resonate deeply with residents and empower them as co-creators.

Castor et Pollux’s hands-on participatory workshop approach, appropriately named “community ateliers,” brings the power of personal interaction into projects through collective design and exercises that build on social bonds and community pride. While technology can facilitate broader community outreach, it’s the on-the-ground, hands-on approach that gives residents a tangible connection to the spaces they help shape. Through collaborative activities like building urban furniture or marking communal spaces, these workshops empower residents to leave a personal imprint on public spaces, transforming them into symbols of shared pride and identity.

By combining technology’s analytical power with human-centred design and community engagement, we create a holistic approach to community engagement in placemaking—one that values both the data-driven and the dialogue-oriented. Commitment to empathy, inclusivity, and collaboration in including residents and stakeholders in vision exercises allow projects to reflect the unique identity, needs, and aspirations of the communities it serves.

“When public spaces reflect the people who live around them, they become catalysts for change, not just in the environment, but in the lives of the people who use them.”

—Gil Penalosa,  
8 80 Cities founder





Place des Fleurs de Macadam, Castor & Pollux, Montréal 2017-2019. Photos: Michael Abril

# How Community-Led Urban Design Creates Lasting Value

Placemaking has long been the catalyst for transforming underused spaces into vibrant community hubs. Inspired by the trailblazing work of urban advocates like Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte, and carried forward by Project for Public Spaces and countless global practitioners, placemaking has evolved into a powerful tool for reshaping public spaces. Now, we stand at the forefront of an evolving iteration of the practice: *place becoming*.

## BEYOND SCALE: THE SHARED DNA OF PLACEMAKING

What unites both small-scale and city-wide placemaking efforts are foundational practices that have proven their value time and again:

- **Community Input and Co-Creation:** From concept to execution, community involvement is essential. It ensures spaces foster belonging and pride, and that they continue to reflect the aspirations of those who use them.
- **Cultural Relevance and Activation:** Integrating local art, heritage, social context, and cultural programming turns public spaces into living extensions of their communities, drawing people together and fostering identity.
- **Adaptive Use:** Whether temporary or grand, the most successful projects adapt as the community’s needs evolve. Many large-scale projects can remain agile, evolving through sustainable design and community feedback.

## THE EVOLUTION INTO PLACE BECOMING

Sharing insights on this concept, the Creative Capital Lab’s interdisciplinary work integrates innovative design, urban planning, and the performing arts to drive community-led urban transformation. By moving beyond traditional venue boundaries, they envision public spaces as dynamic stages for interaction and cultural exchange. This model aligns with “Culture-Oriented Development,” which prioritizes artistic and cultural engagement at the heart of public spaces, enhancing their value as socio-ecological assets.

## CONNECTING SCALE TO OUTCOME

While smaller projects often embody the “lighter, quicker, cheaper” philosophy, they share the same goals as their larger counterparts: engaging people, fostering interaction, and sparking joy. These modest efforts

often set the stage for broader initiatives by testing ideas and building trust within the community. Yet, larger projects don’t lose this essence; they scale it. The transformation of overlooked spaces into cultural anchors, such as Montréal’s Place des Fleurs Macadam and Robson Square in Vancouver, show how community-centric design, data gathering and experimenting can become the foundations of long-term urban development planning. Through iterative design processes and community consultations, the configurations of the public space were tested, adapted, and finalized by local input. For example, Robson Square after several years of summer-time pilots was directed by City Council in 2016 to be permanently pedestrianized. This approach of testing concepts before permanent infrastructure choices allows a public space to deliver an experience that is functional and able to hold deep, shared meaning.

## PLACE BECOMING AS THE FUTURE OF URBAN SPACES

Place becoming represents a new chapter where public spaces are designed for enduring engagement and evolving purpose. This approach builds on the lessons of placemaking pioneers, amplifying their ideals to a city-wide scale. It is not just about making a place come alive once but ensuring it continues to adapt, thrive, and serve as a touchstone of community life.

As we step into this next phase, the message is clear: placemaking is celebrated as a strategy for temporary activation, and can serve as a blueprint for creating lasting, adaptive, and culturally rich public spaces. By embedding innovation and evolution at the heart of urban public space design, we can scale this practice to city-sized canvases, growing our cities into spaces that reflect and nurture the communities they serve.





# A Path to Transformation

## Conclusions

# Change

As Canada looks to its next era of urban development, its future rests on embracing collaboration. We see impactful public spaces blend top-down resources with bottom-up creativity, producing environments that are functional, beautiful, and inherently meaningful. This evolution hinges on open dialogue and feedback loops, ensuring that places remain relevant and adaptive to the needs of the communities they serve.

Placemaking is defined not by scale or cost but by its approach—rooted in community engagement and cultural resonance. Integrating grassroots efforts into broader urban strategies bridges the gap between temporary interventions and long-term urban development. This adaptable, inclusive process ensures that placemaking continues to respond to evolving challenges, from climate change to social equity.

In this first volume, we sought to capture this moment in time and we recognize that placemaking, like the spaces it nurtures, is a living concept. It continues to adapt, shape, and be shaped by political, economic, and social currents. It is a process

and a call to continuous dialogue and co-creation. It invites practitioners, leaders, and communities to engage in shaping spaces that do not simply exist, but become—transforming cities into reflections of their people's shared aspirations and values.

We invite you to be part of this conversation, contributing to a future where practices of placemaking support cities to flourish as interconnected, inclusive reflections of their communities.



[placemakingcommunity.ca/  
lets-talk-about-placemaking](https://placemakingcommunity.ca/lets-talk-about-placemaking)



Over the summer of 2024, Canada’s Placemaking Community worked together with an international roster of placemaking practitioners and professional networks, *and the thousands of project examples between them*, to gather a deeper understanding of the pulse of placemaking as a global practice.

Our aims were to: 1) unify and harmonize multiple definitions of the practice 2) highlight the impact and outcomes that can be possible, 3) make a case for deeper investment in placemaking using ROI examples and policy best practices and 4) show how individual projects and new methodologies can inspire future investment.

The content presented here has been collected through a thorough review of literature, placemaking field research and case studies across many projects. Many online discussions were hosted as part of this work, connecting the project team with over 8 international networks, 100+ professional placemaking practitioners, and place-based specialists coming from a variety of disciplines, municipalities, and community organizations. We thank our lead partners in Canadian Urban Institute, Community Foundations of Canada, Placemaking US, Bridget MacIntosh, Placemaking Canada, Evergreen, Park People, Quartier des Spectacles International and our research support team at So Good City, Paul Hugo Baptiste, Sarah A. Smith, Vincent Briand, Alexia Bréard-Anderson. We thank our professional practitioner friends, especially to Belleville Placemaking, Marc-André Carignan, Good Futures Co., Castor et Pollux, Project for Public Spaces and Placemaking X, your value-add support is recognized and appreciated.

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