PLACEMAKING

What if we built our cities around places?

WHAT IS **PLACEMAKING?**

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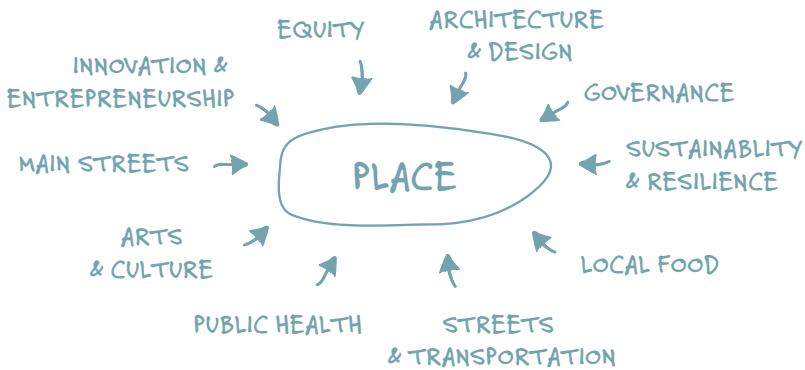
Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody

-Jane Jacobs

Public Space at the Crossroads

Public space is inherently multidimensional. Successful and genuine public spaces are used by many different people for many different purposes at many different times of the day and the year. Because public spaces harbor so many uses and users—or fail to do so—they are also where a staggering cross-section of local and global issues converge.

EQUITY

ARCHITECTURE
& DESIGN

INNOVATION &
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

GOVERNANCE

MAIN STREETS

PLACE

SUSTAINABLITY
& RESILIENCE

ARTS
& CULTURE

LOCAL FOOD
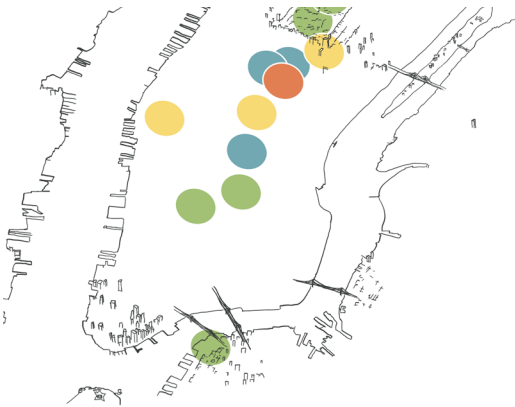
PUBLIC HEALTH

STREETS
& TRANSPORTATION

Public space is for negotiating the interface between our homes, our businesses, our institutions, and the broader world. Public space is how we get to work, how we do our errands, and how we get back home. Public space is where nearly half of violent crimes happen. Public space is where policing ensures safety for some but not others. Public space is for buying and selling, or for meeting, playing, and bumping into one another. Public space is for conveying our outrage and our highest aspirations, as well as for laying the most mundane utilities and infrastructure. And when we let it, public space can be a medium for creativity, expression, and experimentation.

In short, public space is where so many tragedies and triumphs of the commons play out. And that's why getting it right matters. The ten issue areas where we believe placemaking can have the most transformative impact are: **equity & inclusion; streets as places; architecture of place; innovation hubs; market cities; place governance; sustainability & resilience; rural communities; creative placemaking;** and **health.**

POWER OF **10+**

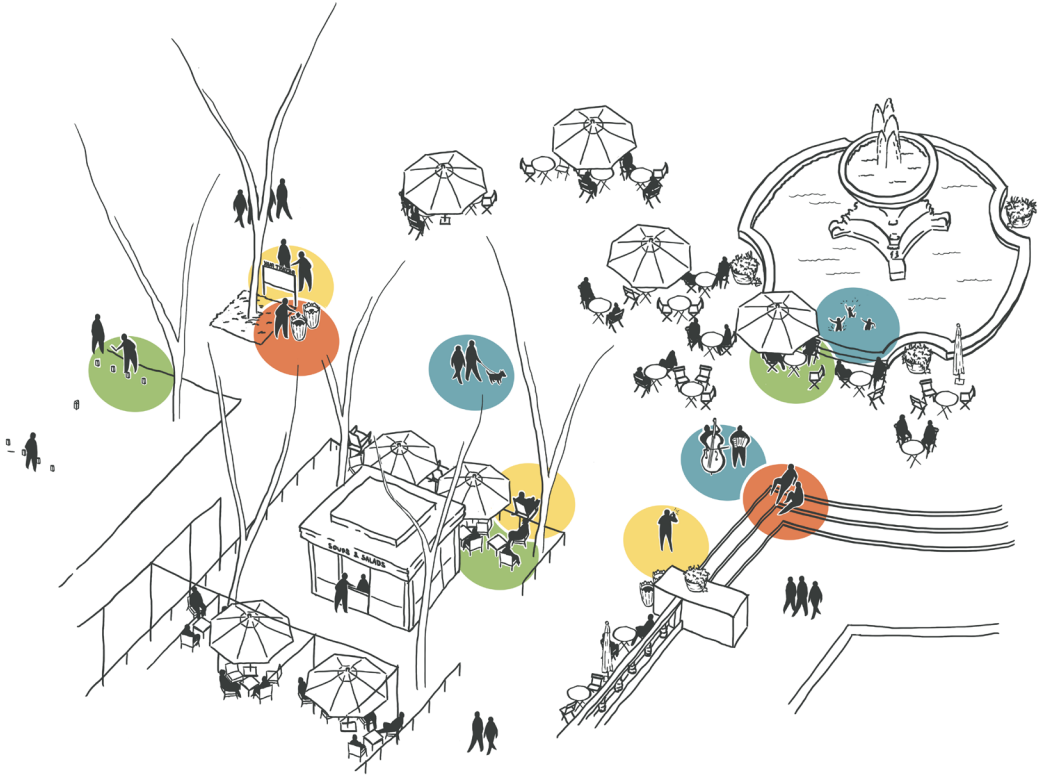## *How Cities Transform through Placemaking*

To be successful, cities need destinations. They need destinations that give an identity and image to their communities, and that help attract new residents, businesses, and investment. But they also need strong community destinations that attract people. A destination might be a downtown square, a main street, a waterfront, a park, or a museum. Cities of all sizes should have at least 10 destinations where people want to be. What makes each destination successful is that it has multiple places within it. For example, a square needs at least 10 places: a café, a children's play area, a place to read the paper or drink a cup of coffee, a place to also sit, somewhere to meet friends, etc. Within each of the places, there should be at least 10 things to do. Cumulatively, these activities, places and destinations are what make a great city. We call this big idea the "Power of 10+."

City/Region
10+ MAJOR DESTINATIONS
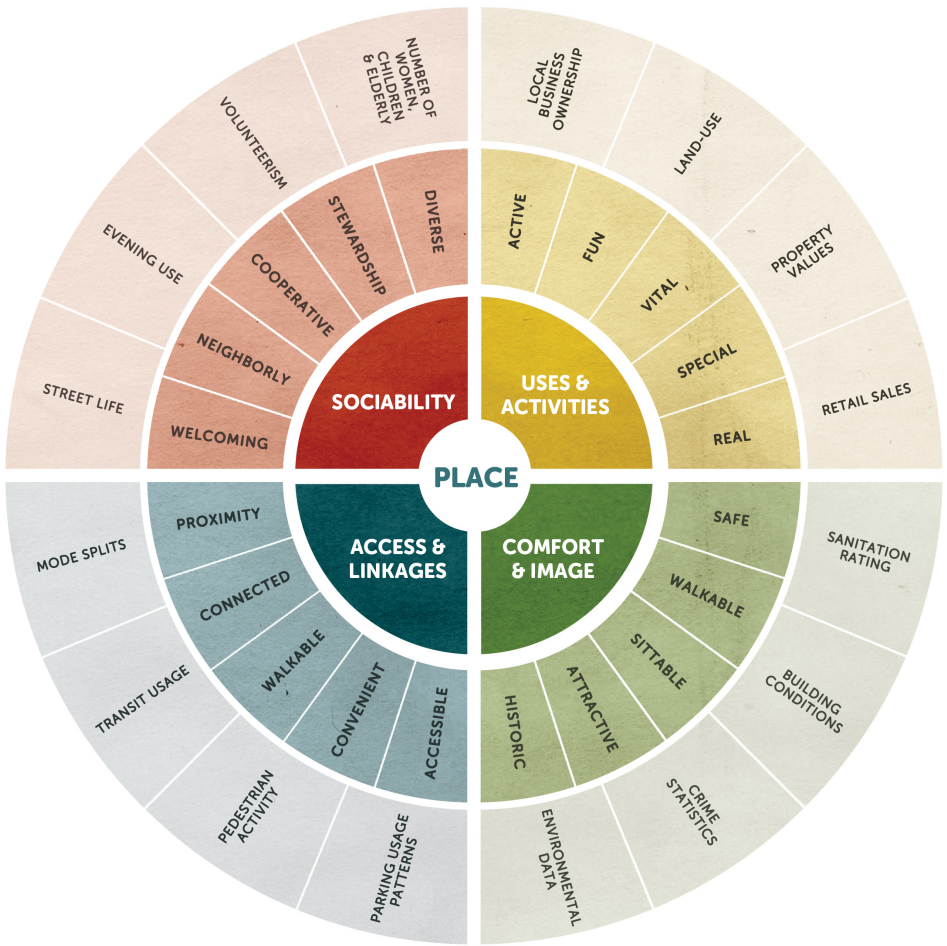
Destination
10+ PLACES IN EACH

Place
**10+ THINGS TO DO,
LAYERED TO CREATE SYNERGY**

WHAT MAKES A **GREAT PLACE?**

It's surprisingly simple.

Most great places, whether a grand downtown plaza or humble neighbor-hood park, share four key attributes:

1. They are accessible and well connected to other important places in the area.

2. They are comfortable and project a good image.

3. They attract people to participate in activities there.

4. They are sociable environments in which people want to gather and visit again and again.

PLACE

SOCIABILITY
- DIVERSE — NUMBER OF WOMEN, CHILDREN & ELDERLY
- STEWARDSHIP — VOLUNTEERISM
- COOPERATIVE
- NEIGHBORLY — EVENING USE
- WELCOMING — STREET LIFE

USES & ACTIVITIES
- ACTIVE — LOCAL BUSINESS OWNERSHIP
- FUN — LAND-USE
- VITAL — PROPERTY VALUES
- SPECIAL
- REAL — RETAIL SALES

ACCESS & LINKAGES
- PROXIMITY — MODE SPLITS
- CONNECTED — TRANSIT USAGE
- WALKABLE — PEDESTRIAN ACTIVITY
- CONVENIENT
- ACCESSIBLE — PARKING USAGE PATTERNS

COMFORT & IMAGE
- SAFE — SANITATION RATING
- WALKABLE
- SITTABLE — BUILDING CONDITIONS
- ATTRACTIVE — CRIME STATISTICS
- HISTORIC — ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

KEY ATTRIBUTES ● INTANGIBLES ● MEASUREMENTS ●

Cities fail and succeed at
the scale of human interaction

5

Access & Linkages

You can easily judge the accessibility of a place by noting its connections to the surroundings, including the visual links. A great public space is easy to get to, easy to enter, and easy to navigate. It is arranged so that you can see most of what is going on there, both from a distance and up close. The edges of a public space also play an important role in making it accessible. A row of shops along a street, for instance, is more interesting and generally safer to walk along than a blank wall or an empty lot. Accessible spaces can be conveniently reached by foot and, ideally, public transit, and they have high parking turnover.

Questions to consider about Access & Linkages:

- *Can you see the space from a distance? Is its interior visible from the outside?*

- *Is there a good connection between this place and adjacent buildings? Or, is it surrounded by blank walls, surface parking lots, windowless buildings, or any other elements that discourage people from entering the space?*

- *Do occupants of adjacent buildings use the space?*

- *Can people easily walk there? Or are they intimidated by heavy traffic or bleak streetscapes?*

- *Do sidewalks lead to and from the adjacent areas?*

- *Does the space function well for people with disabilities and other special needs?*

- *Do the paths throughout the space take people where they actually want to go?*

- *Can people use a variety of transportation options—bus, train, car, and bicycle—to reach the place?*

Comfort & Image

A space that is comfortable and looks inviting is likely to be successful. A sense of comfort includes perceptions about safety, cleanliness, and the availability of places to sit. A lack of seating is the surprising downfall of many otherwise good places. People are drawn to places that give them a choice of places to sit, so they can be either in or out of the sun at various times of day or year.

Questions to consider about Comfort & Image:

- *Does the place make a good first impression?*

- *Are there as many women as men?*

- *Are there enough places to sit? Are seats conveniently located? Do people have a choice of places to sit, either in the sun or shade?*

- *Are spaces clean and free of litter? Who is responsible for maintenance?*

- *Does the area feel safe? Are there security personnel present? If so, what do these people do? When are they on duty?*

- *Are people taking pictures? Are there many photo opportunities available?*

- *Do vehicles dominate pedestrian use of the space, or prevent them from easily getting to the space?*

Uses & Activities

A range of activities are the fundamental building blocks of a great place. Having something to do gives people a reason to come (and return) to a place. When there is nothing interesting to do, a space will sit empty. That's the best measure that something is wrong. A carefully chosen range of activities will help a place attract a variety of people at different times of the day. A playground will draw young kids during the day, while basketball courts draw older kids after school, and concerts bring in everyone during the evening.

Questions to consider about Uses & Activities:

• *Are people using the space, or is it empty?*

• *Is it used by people of different ages?*

• *How many different types of activities are occurring at one time—people walking, eating, playing baseball, chess, relaxing, reading?*

• *Which parts of the space are used and which are not?*

• *Is there a management presence, or can you identify anyone in charge of the space?*

Sociability

This is the most important quality for a place to achieve—and the most difficult. When a place becomes a favorite spot for people to meet friends, greet their neighbors, and feel comfortable interacting with strangers, then you are well on your way to having a great place.

Questions to consider about Sociability:

• *Is this a place where you would choose to meet your friends? Are others meeting friends here?*

• *Are people in groups? Are they talking with one another? Do they talk to people in other groups?*

• *Do people seem to know each other by face or by name?*

• *Do people bring their friends and relatives to see the place? Do they point to its features with pride?*

• *Are people smiling? Do people make regular eye contact with each other?*

• *Do many people use the place frequently?*

• *Does the mix of ages and ethnic groups generally reflect the community at large?*

• *Do people tend to pick up litter when they see it?*

What attracts people most, it would appear,
    is other people.
                        - William "Holly" Whyte

+ Visually pleasing

+ Generally stimulating

+ Sense of belonging

+ Greater security

+ Better environmental quality

+ Feeling of freedom

PROMOTES SENSE OF COMFORT

+ Greater community organization

+ Sense of pride and volunteerism

+ Perpetuation of integrity and values

+ Less need for municipal control

+ Self-managing

NURTURES & DEFINES SENSE OF COMMUNITY

PLA

PROMOTES HEALTH

+ Increased physical activity

+ Access to fresh food

+ Greater security

+ Greater social inclusion

+ Enhanced environmental health

+ More walkable
+ Safe for pedestrians and bicyclists
+ Compatible with public transit
+ Reduces need for cars and parking
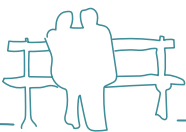+ More efficient use of time and money
+ Greater connections between uses

CREATES IMPROVED ACCESSIBILITY

BUILDS & SUPPORTS THE LOCAL ECONOMY

ACE

+ Small-scale entrepreneurship
+ Economic development
+ Higher real estate values
+ Local ownership, local value
+ More desirable jobs
+ Greater tax revenue
+ Less need for municipal services

FOSTERS SOCIAL INTERACTION

+ Improves sociability
+ More cultural exposure, interaction
+ Draws a diverse population
+ More women, elderly, children
+ Greater ethnic/cultural pluralism
+ Encourages community creativity

11 PRINCIPLES FOR CREATING
GREAT COMMUNITY PLACES

Effective public spaces are extremely difficult to accomplish because their complexity is rarely understood. As William (Holly) Whyte said, "It's hard to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished."

PPS has identified 11 key principles for transforming public spaces into vibrant community places, whether they are parks, plazas, public squares, streets, sidewalks, or the myriad other outdoor and indoor spaces that have public uses in common. These principles are:

It takes a place to create a community and a community to create a place

Underlying Ideas

1 *The Community is The Expert*

2 *Create a Place, Not a Design*

3 *Look for Partners*

4 *They Always Say "It Can't Be Done."*

Planning & Outreach Techniques

5 *Have a Vision*

6 *You Can See a Lot Just By Observing*

Translating Ideas into Action

7 *Form Supports Function*

8 *Triangulate*

9 *Experiment: Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper*

Implementation

10 *Money Is Not The Issue*

11 *You Are Never Finished*

1. *The community is the expert*

The important starting point in developing a concept for any public space is to identify the talents and assets within the community. In any community there are people who can provide historical perspective, valuable insights into how the area functions, and an understanding of critical issues. Tapping this information at the beginning of the process will help to create a sense of community ownership in the project that can be of great benefit to both the project sponsor and the community.

2. *Create a place, not a design*

To make an under-performing space into a vital "place," physical elements must be introduced that would make people welcome and comfortable, such as seating and new landscaping, and also through "management" changes in the pedestrian circulation pattern and by developing more effective relationships between the surrounding retail and the activities going on in the public spaces. The goal is to create a place that has both a strong sense of community and a comfortable image, as well as a setting and activities and uses that collectively add up to something more than the sum of its often simple parts. This is easy to say, but difficult to accomplish.

3. *Look for partners*

Partners are critical to the future success and image of a public space improvement project. Whether you seek partners at the start to plan for the project, or brainstorm and develop scenarios with a dozen partners who might participate in the future, these collaborations are invaluable in providing support and getting a project off the ground. They can be local institutions, museums, schools, and others.

4. They always say "It can't be done."

One of Yogi Berra's great sayings is "If they say it can't be done, it doesn't always work out that way," and we have found it to be appropriate for our work as well. Creating good public spaces is inevitably about encountering obstacles, because no one in either the public or private sectors has the job or responsibility to "create places." For example, professionals such as traffic engineers, transit operators, urban planners and architects all have narrow definitions of their job – facilitating traffic or making trains run on time or creating long term schemes for building cities or designing buildings. Their job, evident in most cities, is not to create "places." Starting with small scale community-nurturing improvements can demonstrate the importance of "places" and help to overcome obstacles.

5. You can see a lot just by observing

We can all learn a great deal from the successes and failures of others. By looking at how people use public spaces and finding out what they like and don't like about them, it is possible to assess what makes them work. Through these observations, it becomes clear what kinds of activities are missing, and what might be incorporated. And when the spaces are built, continuing to observe them will teach us even more about how they evolve and can be managed over time.

6. Have a vision

The vision needs to come out of each individual community; however, essential to a vision for any public space is an idea of what kinds of activities might be happening in the space, a vision that the space should be comfortable and have a good image, and that it should be an important place where people want to be. It should instill a sense of pride in the people who live and work in the surrounding area.

7. Form supports function

The input from the community and potential partners, the understanding of how other spaces function, the experimentation, and overcoming the obstacles and naysayers provides the concept for the space. Although design is important, these other elements tell you what "form" you need to accomplish the future vision for the space.

8. Triangulate

"Triangulation is the process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other" (Holly Whyte). In a public space, the choice and arrangement of different elements in relation to each other can put the triangulation process in motion (or not). For example, if a bench, a wastebasket and a telephone are placed with no connection to each other, each may receive a very limited use, but when they are arranged together along with other amenities such as a coffee cart, they will naturally bring people together (or triangulate!). On a broader level, if a children's reading room in a new library is located so that it is next to a children's playground in a park and a food kiosk is added, more activity will occur than if these facilities were located separately.

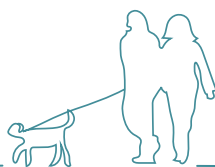## 9. *Experiment: Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper*

The complexity of public spaces is such that you cannot expect to do everything right initially. The best spaces experiment with short term improvements that can be tested and refined over many years! Elements such as seating, outdoor cafes, public art, striping of crosswalks and pedestrian havens, community gardens and murals are examples of improvements that can be accomplished in a short time.

10. *Money is not the issue*

This statement can apply in a number of ways. For example, once you've put in the basic infrastructure of the public spaces, the elements that are added that will make it work (e.g., vendors, cafes, flowers and seating) will not be expensive. In addition, if the community and other partners are involved in programming and other activities, this can also reduce costs. More important is that by following these steps, people will have so much enthusiasm for the project that the cost is viewed much more broadly and consequently as not significant when compared with the benefits.
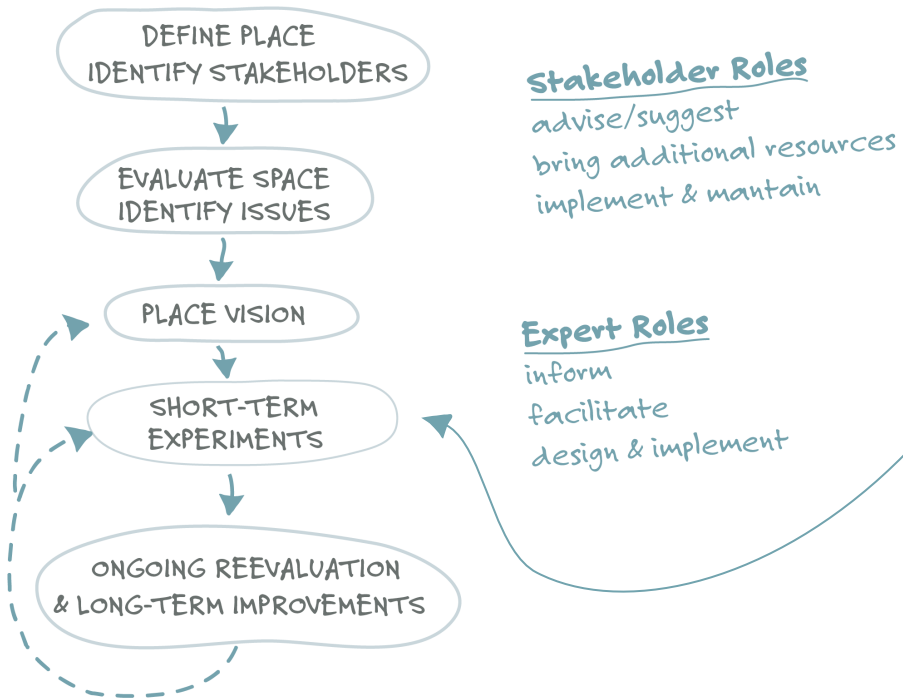
11. *You are never finished*

By nature good public spaces that respond to the needs, the opinions and the ongoing changes of the community require attention. Amenities wear out, needs change and other things happen in an urban environment. Being open to the need for change and having the management flexibility to enact that change is what builds great public spaces and great cities and towns.

THE PLACEMAKING **PROCESS**

Placemaking is both a process and a philosophy. It is centered around observing, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space in order to understand their needs and aspirations for that space and for their community as a whole. Working with the community to create a vision around the places they view as important to community life and to their daily experience is key to building a strategy for implementation. Beginning with short term, experimental improvements can immediately bring benefits to public spaces and the people who use them and inform longer term improvements over time.

Place Led, Community-Based Process

DEFINE PLACE
IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

EVALUATE SPACE
IDENTIFY ISSUES

PLACE VISION

SHORT-TERM
EXPERIMENTS

ONGOING REEVALUATION
& LONG-TERM IMPROVEMENTS

Stakeholder Roles
advise/suggest
bring additional resources
implement & maintain

Expert Roles
inform
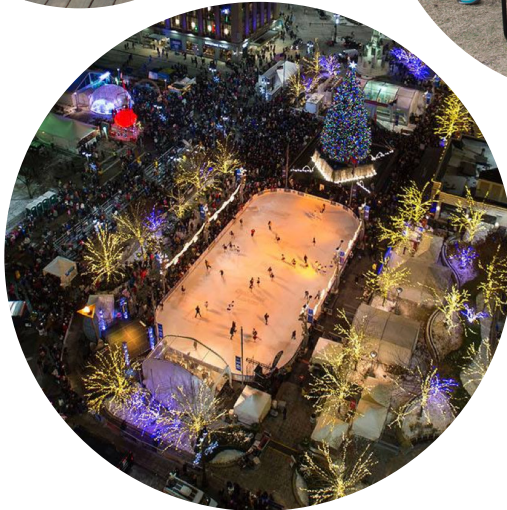facilitate
design & implement

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC)

A low-cost, high-impact incremental framework for improving public spaces in short order that capitalizes on the creative energy of the community to efficiently generate new uses and revenue for places in transition.

LQC experiments range in scale and impact.
From small neighborhood amenities and art to large downtown temporary structures and events.
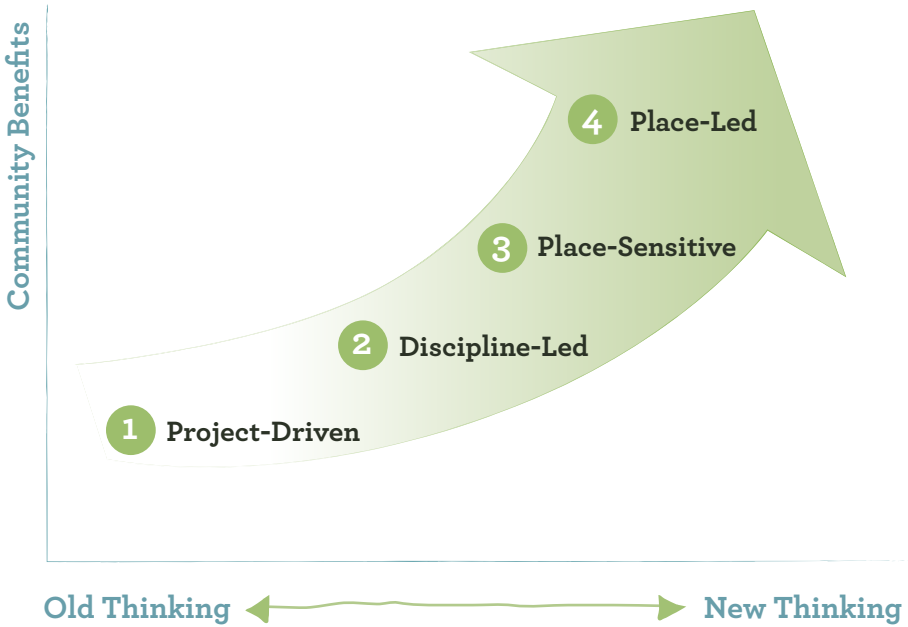
TOWARDS A **PLACE-LED** FUTURE

Through our own placemaking work, we've found that public space projects and the governance structures that produce them tend to fall into one of four types of development along a spectrum.

1 **Project-driven** spaces often emerge from top-down, bureaucratic leadership, which value on-time, under-budget delivery above all else. Project-driven processes generally lead to places that follow a general protocol without any consideration for local needs or desires.

2 **Discipline-led** projects may be of higher value and more photogenic, but their reliance on the singular vision of design professionals and other disciplinary silos often makes for spaces that do not function terribly well as public gathering places.

3 The **place-sensitive** approach to projects, which we see emerging among some design professionals, makes a concerted effort to gather community input—but the process is still led by designers and architects.

4 A truly **place-led** approach relies not on community input, but on a unified focus on place outcomes built on community engagement. A place-led process turns proximity into purpose, and the planning and management of shared public spaces into a group activity that builds social capital and shared values. Local participants in this process feel invested in the resulting public space, and are more likely to serve as its stewards.

Evolution of Development

Community Benefits (vertical axis)

4 Place-Led

3 Place-Sensitive

2 Discipline-Led

1 Project-Driven

Old Thinking ⟵⟶ New Thinking

When you focus on place,
you do everything differently

Everyone has the right to live in a great place. More importantly, everyone has the right to contribute to making the place where they already live great.

- Fred Kent

Project for Public Spaces (PPS) is a nonprofit planning, design and educational organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build stronger communities.

Want to participate in the Placemaking movement? Apply for the **Placemaking Leadership Council** and connect with over 1,800 activists and strategists (from over 80 countries, and 500 cities) at the forefront of a growing movement.

Learn more: *pps.org* and *pps.org/about/leadership-council/*