ARTS, CULTURE AND PUBLIC DELIBERATION:
AN EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRATIC PLACEMAKING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION + DEFINITIONS
DEMOCRATIC PLACEMAKING

1. The process of creating safe and sustainable spaces for people to engage in collective decision-making.

2. Providing clear pathways to participation and accessible entry points for all residents who are attached to a community.

3. Encouraging a sense of belonging and caring about a place that motivates people to act and become change agents.

4. The co-creation and co-contribution of citizens to address and solve issues of importance to the community.
A basic tenet of healthy democratic practice predicated on the idea that when citizens are closely involved in making decisions that affect them, it strengthens representation, transparency, accountability and can lead to citizen empowerment, action and results.
Tools, methods and processes that link people, ideas, values, and place

OR

To bring people together to share what they each hold valuable
WICKED PROBLEMS

1. Systemic: Multiple causes and effects

2. Difficult to resolve: No simple solution, may require an on-going response

3. Requires action from multiple stakeholders

Adapted from Pratt Cassity, University of Georgia, College of Environment and Design
GOOD INFORMATION IS NOT ENOUGH . . .

An informed public is deeply grounded in our political tradition and essential for democracy to work... Yet scientists, like leaders in other fields have enormous difficulty engaging the public on critical issues... that can only be solved when good science, wise public policy and thoughtful public judgment all come together.
PROCESS FOR EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES & INDIVIDUALS

A NATIONAL PROJECT
NATIONAL PROJECT

PHASE I

Working closely with Extension partners to engage rural communities:

a. Gather public concerns about the future of rural communities using “traditional” surveys and focus groups
b. Gather similar information using ART, DESIGN & CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

PHASE II

c. NAME AND FRAME the issues identified by the community conversations
d. Produce an ISSUE GUIDE modeled after the Kettering Foundation/National Issue Forums:
e. Hold public deliberations in rural communities using the issue guide, focusing on relevant local issues.

KEY QUESTION: How do we authentically incorporate art, design & humanities into the deliberative process?
PARTNERS

Thank you to our partners

ART OF THE RURAL

Imagining America

Kettering Foundation

NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

Office of Extension Service

Extension Service
Project field teams

9 state Cooperative Extension Field teams self-selected to participate:

- Alabama
- Florida
- Georgia
- Kentucky
- Illinois
- Nebraska
- Oregon
- South Dakota
- Wisconsin
BEGIN BY NAMING AND FRAMING

1. What do we hold valuable?
2. What concerns us about . . . ?
3. Why do we care?
4. How is our community going to be affected?
5. What do we hold sacred?
6. What do we want to change?
7. What should we do about it?
“WHY RURAL MATTERS” SURVEY

HTTPS://uwex.qualitrics.com/jfe1/form/SV_dg8RKC2PTVKCdff

(If interested, we are happy to send you the link!)
MANY DIMENSIONS OF MEANING

A single story, image, or thought doesn't give a complete picture of what is happening.
THE ROLE OF ARTS, HUMANITIES, AND DESIGN IN PLACEMAKING

1. Creates a more open and inclusive process by bringing more and different people to the table

2. Facilitates people with different viewpoints listening to one another and finding shared value

3. Opens participants to learning new ideas

4. Increases and sustains a sense of community belonging

5. Helps communities to celebrate who they are, where they come from, and where they are going together.
EXPERIMENTS IN OUR COMMUNITIES
KENTUCKY:

- Six sessions held in April & May 2015
- 59 adults, 33 youth participated
- Greenup, Pike, Whitley County residents participated in sessions
- Extension Fine Arts Agents facilitated sessions
KENTUCKY: GREENUP
OUR REGIONAL HERITAGE & CULTURE

• Then and Now photographs of community landmarks slide show

• “My Old Kentucky Home” visualization exercise

Facilitator Anne Stephens with Senator Robin Webb, an active participant in the Greenup County sessions.
KENTUCKY: PIKE HATFIELD VS. MCCOY AUDITIONS

- Monologues from play performed by session participants
- Adults and youth participated in session
KENTUCKY: WHITLEY
SCULPTING OUR FUTURE

• Participants created both a beautiful art project (wire sculpture) and a challenging discussion about community concerns.

• Youth session and adult session
ILLINOIS:

• Bridgeport, Lawrence County
• 26 Participants
• Facilitated by
  - CED Educator
  - CED State Specialist
  - CED Intern
  - Director of Community Arts Development, Illinois Arts Council
ILLINOIS: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF LAWRENCE COUNTY

- Slideshow: Historical Society Photo Contest

- “Community” Illustrations

- Visioning Exercise:
  - What’s good…
  - What’s working against…
  - Magic Wand
Downtown Summer
ILLINOIS: WHAT’S GOOD ABOUT LAWRENCE COUNTY?
ILLINOIS: WHAT’S WORKING AGAINST...?
ILLINOIS: MAGIC WAND QUESTION
NEBRASKA

• Youth and Young Adult focused
  • Ag Leadership class on campus
  • CWF group
  • Sandhills Leadership group

• Focus Groups held in May-June 2015
  • IRB approved
  • IRB took time

• Youth Educators facilitated sessions
RURAL NEBRASKA IS A PLACE TO ESCAPE THE CHAOS OF BIG BUSINESS WHILE HAVING AN OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT LOCAL, SMALL TOWN COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS.
SIMPLE AND SPACIOUS IS HOW I'VE ALWAYS SEEN RURAL NEBRASKA. ONE CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE HISTORY AND MEMORIES THAT HOLD TO SO MANY PLACES THAT HAVE PERSEVERED THROUGH THE ELEMENTS OF TIME.
FAMILY IS ONE OF NEBRASKA'S BIGGEST VALUES; PEOPLE CENTER THEIR LIVES AROUND THE JOY OF CHILDREN AND CARING FOR THE ONES THEY LOVE
NEBRASKA – “AHA” MOMENTS!

- Rural was about people and community
- Rural supports each other
- Change is happening in rural communities
- The draw of “city life” for opportunities is a very strong perception for people living in rural communities, and the draw is a serious concern for rural sustainability.
- Concern community will not succeed
- Open to share
- Concerned about the lack of community involvement and the lack of acceptance of new people to their communities
- Greatest problem for youth was that they use technology too much and are connected to their devices
- Important to teach others about agricultural literacy
- The expense of farm start-ups and the lack of conversation about the importance of other businesses start-ups in their communities
TRANSLATION
WHY DO IT THIS WAY?

1. Reach populations who are sometimes challenging to bring together
2. Allows people to respond to a third “element” (such as an image or a map) when talking about problems and personal issues that matter
3. Breaks down the wall between the dominant/passive roles of facilitators/participants.
4. Can help decrease cultural and language barriers
5. Produces a different kind of analysis than traditional public meetings
6. Allows for a more comfortable distance between the issue and the response.
7. Helps alleviate “planning fatigue” … just too many meetings!
TAKEAWAYS
1. The engagement of citizens from all walks of life is central to Democratic Placemaking.

2. The dominant framework for understanding citizenship today is passive. We need to develop affirmative cultures around citizen action.

3. While a great deal of Placemaking work comes from grassroots activity, we need more change agents working within communities to pull people in.

4. The more that citizens are able to contribute to creating their preferred public spaces, the more vibrant their communities will be.

5. Civic engagement and a sense of belonging to place are both critical to building healthy democratic practice in communities.
OUR QUESTIONS

1. Are we and our institutions ready to take in the deep insights/truths that emerge from incorporating art, humanities and design into development research and work?

2. Do we support the change-making work that artists do and help bring their work into the world? Do value it monetarily?

3. How can we help bridge gaps between different ways of learning and knowing?

4. If we knew we had to make this happen but in a connected and compassionate way how would we make it happen?
YOUR QUESTIONS?
THANK YOU!

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