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A PLACE OF MY OWN, A PLACE OF OUR OWN

Creative Placemaking in a Transatlantic Context

MATTHEW CLARKE



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SUMMARY:

This policy paper looks at creative placemaking, which is generally described as arts-based community development, in a transatlantic context. While creative placemaking has more purposefully emerged in American circles of government, philanthropy, and community development, European institutions have a long-standing history of investing in the arts as a core driver of healthy societies. This paper frames critical issues facing our society today, ones that have a strong relationship with culture, and then unpacks how cultural policy has evolved in both the United States and Europe. To situate this conversation, the paper looks at a series of case studies in the neighborhoods of Moabit, Berlin and Molenbeek, Brussels, two examples with acute challenges and inspiring arts-based community development. Finally, the paper makes a series of high-level policy recommendations that could benefit from a shared, global conversation around the future of creative placemaking.

The Place of Creative Placemaking

Creative placemaking, occurs when “partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities.”¹ In effect, creative placemaking is a discipline that posits the power of the arts to make positive, place-based change. It believes that artists and cultural organizations have unique skills that can help address community development challenges. The power of this idea rests in the flexibility of the arts: Visual artists can fulfill community health needs, culinary artists can increase job opportunities, and jazz musicians can redress violent crime. The arts touch everyone in powerful ways — and this power has value.

In the past decade, the idea of creative placemaking has coalesced around something that might be called a discipline.² There are dedicated funders, private and public, that support the work; educational and curricular materials exist to train people in creative placemaking; national non-profits have adopted the practice as a part of their regular programming; city governments have hired staff to weave it into standard practice; and publications have featured the work of creative placemakers across the country.^{3,4,5}

For the life of this discipline, one of its key strengths has been the ability to address a variety of important community-based issues. Though this flexibility should continue, current challenges might require creative placemaking to hone its focus on a condensed set of impacts. This renewed focus could help expand support for arts-based strategies; a transatlantic frame could identify shared challenges for the field.

This policy paper considers these key issues, discusses the history of place-based cultural policy, and frames the issues in two neighborhood-scaled case studies. Finally, five broad areas are identified for further policy development.

Shared Challenges Across the Atlantic

Our contemporary moment feels fraught with change and uncertainty: the rise of political extremism, migrations borne from violence, the impact of a changing climate, and the growth of economic inequality. These perturbations in our story feel uncontrollable and out of scale. How can a human impact such systems? Creative placemaking emerged as an attempt to relate these large, unbounded changes and make them relatable to people and to the places where people live.

The idea of “place” has a deep and diverse legacy in academic and policy realms: Human geography frames place as an outcome of culture on a specific geography,⁶ health officials talk about the social determinants of our health based on where we live,⁷ and political scientists describe the growing trend of self-segregation based on life perspectives.⁸ In the simplest terms, people — together — create culture; the geography of those people creates place. And inversely, the culture of that place affects and shapes people. Culture and place share a cyclical relationship. Cultural policy has been increasingly trying to impact this relationship in more and more purposeful ways.

As a way to limit the infinitely complex nature of people and places, this paper looks at three challenges that have resonance on both sides of the Atlantic. These interrelated challenges will allow us to compare and contrast U.S. and European approaches to place-based cultural policy, and more importantly, they will help us identify opportunities to advance the field in a more collaborative way.

1 Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, “Creative Placemaking,” National Endowment for the Arts, 2010.

2 While the idea of a discipline is a recent invention, the principles and practices of creative placemaking have been around for decades, if not centuries.

3 www.artplaceamerica.org

4 New Hampshire Institute of Art, Certificate in Creative Placemaking, <http://www.nhia.edu/creativeplacemaking>.

5 St. Paul City Artist Amanda Lovelee, <http://publicartstpaul.org/artist/amanda-lovelee/>.

6 Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” *Marxism Today*, June 1991, http://www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/mt/index_frame.htm.

7 Michael Marmot, “Social Determinants of Health Inequalities,” *The Lancet*, March 19, 2005.

8 Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009.

Immigration and Perceived Global Fluidity

Human migratory flows — and the perceived impact of those dynamics — have altered how we govern, care for, and manage people. In 2015, the International Organization for Migration recorded the highest number of international migrants in history of over 244 million people (despite the fact that the share of migrants as a proportion of global population has remained stable). What is more startling is that 2015 also saw the highest levels of forced migration since World War II, largely driven by refugees, asylum seekers, and internationally displaced people from places like Syria.⁹

Beyond numbers, the direction of that migration has reflected new patterns in global movement. In 2015, the European Union doubled the number of first-time asylum seekers in a period of only two years. Germany moved into second place as the most popular destination for migrants, behind the United States and ahead of Russia.

Combined with other economic and social factors, the realities of this migration have created bureaucratic challenges and political destabilization. When confronted with the largest refugee crisis in recent history, German leadership suspended the Dublin Procedure for Syrians, which allowed them to stay in Germany, to take part in the asylum process, and to avoid traveling back to their European country of alightment. This has contributed to the growing visibility of far-right politics in Germany, including the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), which supports German nationalism by railing against the European Union and immigration.¹⁰

“ People feel excluded from and lack control over their environment. They sense an abrogation of systems that were meant to protect them, support them, and elevate them.”

Even where migration patterns have not changed appreciably, public perceptions have, and they are affecting political dynamics. U.S. immigration has grown at a relatively linear rate since the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. Public perceptions remain largely in favor of this pro-immigrant stance, believing that these individuals contribute innovation and energy to the country. However, in the past five years, a growing partisan split has emerged with conservative, older, and less educated people feeling that immigrants are a negative influence on American society.¹¹ This schism, combined with growing economic inequality, drove strongly nationalist forces at play in the 2016 elections.

Distrust in Systems and Institutions

Since the 2008 financial collapse, American distrust in banking institutions has dropped to a mere 32 percent in 2015, down from nearly 50 percent in 2006. However, financial institutions are not the only victims. General distrust in governmental, regulatory, healthcare, and public safety institutions has dropped dramatically in the past decade.¹² This distrust expresses itself in diverse, but consistent ways: groups of aging white populations in the American Midwest who feel overlooked by a changing economic world, communities of color that feel civil rights protections have not adequately protected against racism and prejudice, and women in corporate America who feel that sexual harassment

was a quietly protected system of control. These share a common ground: People feel excluded from and lack control over their environment. They sense an abrogation of systems that were meant to protect them, support them, and elevate them.

9 International Organization for Migration, “Global Migration Trends Factsheet,” <http://gmdac.iom.int/global-migration-trends-factsheet>.

10 “Home - Alternative for Germany,” AfD, September 17, 2017, www.afd.de.

11 Richard Fry, et al., “Modern Immigration Wave Brings 59 Million to US, Driving Population Growth and Change Through 2065: Views of Immigration’s Impact on U.S. Society Mixed,” Pew Research Center, September 28, 2015.

12 Jim Norman, “Americans’ Confidence in Institutions Stays Low,” Gallup, June 13, 2016, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/192581/americans-confidence-institutions-stays-low.aspx>.

Equitable Access to Growth

The global economic system has never seen such signs of power and growth. The Gross World Product is expected to cross 100 trillion dollars by 2022 and the Dow Jones Industrial Average recently crossed the unbelievable 25,000 threshold. The trials of the most recent recession have faded as corporate profits and market indices hit record levels. But as politicians have noticed in recent elections, the electorate intuits the signs of growing inequality: stagnating wages, larger degrees of extreme wealth, and limited access to new jobs. OXFAM's recent report, which went viral, shows that 1 percent of the richest people in the world have more wealth than the rest of the world combined.¹³

Economists have increasingly sounded the warning bells of a world economy unequally distributed. Branko Milanovic has shown that income inequality is deepening within nation-states but getting slightly better at a global scale. This indicates that while developing countries are making progress, developed countries have receded and are not giving its most needy population the platform necessary to thrive. Robert Wade uses the absolute Gini index (a statistical measurement of a country's distribution of wealth, in absolute and not relative terms) to show that inequality has exploded in recent decades, from 0.57 in 1988 to 0.72 in 2005.¹⁴

Whether measured by economists or felt by an angry electorate, clear indications show that inequality is a growing concern across the world. These large, global-scaled trends imply a consistent narrative. People feel like they are missing out on economic growth, they feel distrustful of the institutions that are meant to

“**Policymakers should lean on “soft power,” or those strategies that involve art, culture, and education, which are powerful mediums to enact change.”**

help them get access, and they feel like outsiders are stealing part of the pie and making it even harder to advance their lives.

This paper elevates these three particular challenges not only because of their close performative relationship, but because they share a common fallacy. As policymakers seek methods to redress inequality,

improve trust in institutions, and manage migration, they frequently lean on technocratic solutions, naturally and rightfully so. However, these challenges can be equally defined by their cultural terms: how people relate to each other and to the places where they live. Policymakers should lean on “soft power,” or those strategies that involve art, culture, and education, which are powerful mediums to enact change. However, these policies are often informal, value-driven, and largely ineffable. How do

activists or governments create stable policies in something so fluid; how do they convince others that these policies have real impact?

Power and Culture

Seeking power in culture has its intellectual roots in the thinking of Antonio Gramsci. His concept of hegemonic power described the “soft-power” used by the liberal bourgeois to retain power in modern society. By controlling cultural expression, values, and belief systems, a ruling elite can establish their authority over all of society and do so with methods that remain opaque.¹⁵ More importantly, Gramscian thought recognized that the same cultural hegemony could be resolved or reversed by an opposing party, for example, by creating “critical pedagogy” in schools.¹⁶ In other words, those same cultural systems can be destabilized to support other causes

13 Jason Hickel, “Global Inequality May Be Much Worse Than We Think,” *The Guardian*, April 8, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/apr/08/global-inequality-may-be-much-worse-than-we-think>.

14 Measured on a scale from 0-1, with 0 being a perfectly distributed share of wealth. Sudhir Anand and Paul Segal, “The Global Distribution of Income,” University of Oxford Department of Economics, July 2014.

15 Lenny Flank, *Hegemony and Counter-hegemony: Marxism, Capitalism and Their Relation to Sexism, Racism, Nationalism and Authoritarianism*, St. Petersburg, Florida: Red and Black Publishers, 2007.

16 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000.

and ideas. (The “culture wars” in American politics during the 1990s and 2000s owes much to this idea of resistance.)

Gramsci can feel like an ivory tower to today’s global citizens (or caught in its historical context of early 20th century Europe and the rise of communism), but its core lesson remains true: Culture is power, and we can change our societies by leaning on it, by investing in the arts, by supporting education, and by sending people abroad.

Gramsci’s thesis can be used by groups of any persuasion. Today, he has influenced a new generation of the global right, who have been successful in articulating a cultural rationale for their positions and ideas. The French Identitarian Movement, also called *Nouvelle Droite*, is a white nationalist movement that has emerged in recent years out of the *Groupement de recherche et d’études pour la civilisation européenne* (GRECE), an informal political organization grounded in a defense of Western society, nationalist protection, and rationalized racism. Identitarians argue that national borders should be respected; nations should retain their national identity. They argue that this is not out of racism or hatred, but that cultures should be protected from outside influences in order to preserve their internal logic. The movement, led by the ideas of Alain de Benoist, uses a cultural strategy to propagate its beliefs. Instead of focusing on just policy perspectives and political aims, it slowly built a following based on an appeal to culture — food, music, language, etc — and to people.¹⁷

The *Nouvelle Droite* has influenced other far-right movements, including the AfD in Germany and in the alternative right in the United States, which saw its apogee in the 2016 election of Donald Trump. Richard Spencer, the de facto leader of this movement, took many of his cues and strategies from this Gallic movement. Spencer, in an interview with the French publication *Europe Maxima*, self-identified as an Identitarian. He describes how culture has become the currency of power: “Minority groups are encouraged to embrace their respective group identities through

their own institutions and encouragement by the state, such as affirmative action in education, Americans of European descent do not have such mechanisms.”¹⁸

The rise of the new right in a Euro-American context demonstrates a successful application of soft power through culture (and that it has been more successfully used by the Right than the Left). A way to counter these regressive politics is straight from Gramsci’s playbook by inserting positive, inclusive models of culture into the dialogue. Thankfully, modern societies have a tradition of cultural policy, and with it, the institutions and funding sources necessary to take the requisite action.

What is even more exciting is the growing interest in place-based cultural policy, loosely called creative placemaking, which has the flexibility to address complicated social issues and to increase our access to the arts. The ultimate aim of this policy is not to levy a particular view or political belief, but to ensure that the arts have a seat at the policy table and to give everyone a chance to feel agency over their own culture and how that culture connects them to their place.

By unpacking a brief history of cultural policy, including the rise of creative placemaking, and relating that history to a series of case studies in Berlin and Brussels, this paper will make recommendations about the future of creative placemaking.

Creative Placemaking in Context of Cultural Policy

At a transnational level, cultural policy cannot be fairly generalized. Governments have varying resources to invest, “culture” as a term can be defined in many ways, and cultural sectors have many different makeups. However, certain key trends can paint a schematic view of cultural policy since the 1970s.

17 Michael O’Meara, *New Culture, New Right: Anti-Liberalism in Postmodern Europe*, Arktos, 2013.

18 Richard Spencer, “Richard Spencer’s Interview with Europe Maxima,” *Radix Journal*, February 15, 2017, <https://altright.com/2017/02/15/richard-spencers-interview-with-europe-maxima/>.

In industrialized countries, workers' leisure time and disposable income increased in the last quarter of the 20th century, creating new demands for cultural products and experiences. As the social movements of the 60s and 70s faded, leaders also saw culture as a tool for urban regeneration and economic development, giving culture more political purchase within increasingly right-led governments. Additionally, a growing decentralization impetus encouraged local, regional, and state-level officials to use cultural policy to highlight what made each of these geographies unique, as means to shore up political power and to boost tourism and internal development.¹⁹ Despite this variation, the ultimate aims of cultural policy at the end of the 20th century were focused on political consensus and economic partnerships with private and non-profit sectors.

European and U.S. cultural policies have more overlaps than not, but some loosely identifiable distinctions are worth making. European cultural policy emerged from a tradition of state-based patronage and has evolved into a progressive system of supra-national, national, and local actors subsidizing arts activities.²⁰ While the motivations of each actor remain distinct, there is in Europe a willingness to invest in the arts as a human and cultural right.

The United States, and its tradition of manifest libertarianism, has often had to identify how the arts can perform and be instrumental. For example, one of the National Endowment for the Arts's (NEA) most successful initiatives has been the Military Healing Arts Partnership, where arts therapy activities have helped returning soldiers recover and transition into civilian life. There is some suspicion of public investment in the arts, but Americans by-and-large appreciate and support the arts as an important part of society.

“ The arts are being looked to as a means by which to communicate across cultures, appreciate other world views, and find common means of expression.”

Creative Economies and Intercultural Dialogue

Two trends have characterized recent developments in cultural policy. First, based on the early ideas of John Howkins and Richard Florida, the concept of the creative economy has emerged in the shadow of failed 1980s-era urban regeneration schemes. As the information economy developed, automatization rendered jobs obsolete, and people began moving back to cities. Howkins posited that creativity and information will replace land, labor, and capital as value creators. Furthermore, Florida posited that cities should actively work to capture this new value with a creative-focused policy platform. Places that can welcome young, creative types in the arts-related industries will have healthy and sustainable economic futures. These young people will work in marketing, film, technology, and the arts, and they will consume local food, attend music performances, and go to cultural institutions.

The creative economy has seen purchase in both the United States and Europe. For example, many U.S. cities have expanded their economic development policy to include creative-focused growth and development. Los Angeles has long leaned on this sector, benefitting \$504 billion in revenue from the entertainment sector.²¹ Other cities, like Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Austin, Texas have benefitted from strong growth in the creative tech sectors. In Europe, emerging economies in Eastern Europe have developed creative economy policy to encourage high-wage job growth in areas where industrial development was lacking in later-era-communism.²²

A second trend has been the rising interest in using cultural policy to advance intercultural dialogue and understanding and to expiate underserved

19 Franco Bianchini and Michael Parkinson, *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration: The West European Experience*, Manchester University Press, 1994.

20 Vincent Dubois, "Cultural Policy Regimes in Western Europe." *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd Edition, 2013.

21 Farmakis, E. "Fostering the Creative Economy," 2014.

22 Bialic-Davendra, Magdalena, et al. "Creative Clusters in Visegrad Countries: Factors Conditioning Cluster Establishment and Development." *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series* 32.32, 2016.

and underrepresented populations. For example, the European Commission's "Culture for Cities" program, which is attempting to provide cities with advice on how to invest in culture. Their three-part structure includes not only "culture and the economy" and "cultural heritage"—resonant with the history described above—but also includes a provision for "social inclusion, social innovation, and intercultural dialogue."²³ In a fluid migratory world, the arts are being looked to as a means by which to communicate across cultures, appreciate other world views, and find common means of expression.

Urban expansion in Hamburg, Germany can shed light on the application of both the creative economy sector and the need for intercultural dialogue. HafenCity, a 157-hectare development project—one of the world's largest, is an entirely new district on former dock and industrial lands. Created as a demonstration project, HafenCity will expand the city area by 40 percent and will be used to test a range of planning and policy concepts. Creative economic policy was an important idea to test. Most recent literature points to the opening of the Elbaphilharmonie—perhaps the most significant cultural facility to open since Guggenheim Bilbao—as an example of that effort. However, other efforts demonstrate better the intent of these policies. The City of Hamburg and HafenCity GmbH, the district's managing entity, wanted to create a center for the creative economy. They negotiated with DesignXPort, a design-focused gallery, incubator, and resource center, to relocate to the new District to serve as an anchor. The city leaders wanted to encourage young residents to start design-focused industries, as Hamburg already depends on the presence of the German media industry. HafenCity's policies are meant to exploit the presence of this information-rich industry to encourage creative economic expansion.

Just across the Elba River, Internationale Bauausstellung (IBA) 2013, another urban demonstration project with a century-long legacy of urban innovation, has been redeveloping Wilhelmsburg, an area that drew from the nearby port for jobs and commerce. The area is multicultural and changing; Hamburg has a growing Muslim population, with a strong Turkish population and

the largest Afghani population in Europe. These dynamics compelled the organizers of the IBA 2013 to include, as one of their core tenets, the idea of the "Cosmopolis," or a city that fosters intercultural participation and cooperation. It elevated this concept alongside its more traditional foci of urban mobility and climate change. The team led with cultural practices during the community engagement process to encourage inclusivity and empathy.

Creative Placemaking and the Place-Based Frame

Both the interest to build creative economies and to promote intercultural dialogue suggests that cultural policy continues to develop as a place-based tool. In the United States, the emergence of creative placemaking as a standalone discipline reflects the same emphasis on place-based frames in policy solutions.²⁴

The practice of creative placemaking, while not at all new, received more precise definition as a result of the 2008 economic recession and housing crisis. Unlike previous recessions, the 2008 crash was characterized by sudden devaluation of housing stock, leaving Americans less mobile and tied to their home's debt. This, ultimately, prevented what happened in other downturns, where people could move to job-rich centers of the U.S. economy. This freezing of mobility forced the incoming Obama administration to think about place-based policy across the entire federal government, eventually creating the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, which linked programs and grants of the Department of Housing Urban Development, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Transportation.²⁵

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) recognized the role that arts could play in this place-based frame, with culture as a thing that connects us to place. It commissioned a white paper on the subject and initiated a new grant program to support

²³ Culture for Cities and Regions, "The Project," <http://www.cultureforcitiesandregions.eu/culture/project>.

²⁴ Place-based refers to a general planning approach, which emphasizes the characteristics and meaning of places as a fundamental starting point for planning and development. Place-based knowledge or information has a geographical position.

²⁵ <http://betterplansbetterplaces.iscvt.org/>

this community-development focused work.²⁶ NEA leadership — which celebrates its role as a thought leader, given their proportionally small \$150 million budget — inspired other national foundations and arts leaders to make investments in creative placemaking.²⁷ Additionally, national non-profits, city governments, and other larger organizations have been making efforts to incorporate creative placemaking into their regular systems and practices.

Across the Atlantic, European governments, foundations, and arts-organizations have deployed place-based cultural activities and programs with increasing frequency. While a discrete “movement” has not been named, these actors have increasingly been interested in cultural policy that is focused on equity, place-based, and connected to political systems.

This convergence of cultural policy suggests a field poised for remarkable growth and impact. This paper — in light of the challenges mentioned above — makes the claim that a shared cultural policy and shared resources could help to amplify the field’s influence. Two important words should be elevated and foregrounded: agency and equity. The arts, in the context of place, can play an outsized role in giving people agency over their environments and building equity into the systems which govern our lives. Creative placemaking’s story fits wonderfully into this frame.

Place of Our Own

In order to ground these words — agency and equity — in real experiences and to identify possible policy recommendations, this paper will explore how creative placemaking is operating in two cities, with a particular focus on neighborhoods in each: in Berlin, the Moabit neighborhood, and in Brussels,

the Molenbeek neighborhood.²⁸ While different in many ways, and not representative of every challenge on the continent, these two neighborhoods both have large immigrant populations, face growing developmental pressure, and have used the arts to address community development.

Moabit

Technically an island — bounded by the River Spree and two service canals — the neighborhood of Moabit is often associated with the Kriminalgericht (Central Criminal Court) and detention center. These two facts often work to reinforce each other: an island, separated from Central Berlin, associated with society’s faceless people. On the façade of the

jail is a sculpture in relief, depicting a hand, holding a string between two pulleys that holds two men. As justice is decided, the string will either release this faceless individual or will pull him upward into incarceration. This work of art reflects both the fairness of

justice, but more visibly, the plight of incarceration for thousands behind its walls.

Moabit itself faces an uncertain sentence. As Berlin grows, the once peripheral neighborhood has become a central district, contiguous with the federal government center and the new Hauptbahnhof (central train station), which brings in 350,000 passengers daily. In *Imagining Home*, Bruna Emanuela and Franco Manai compare the neighborhood to a train station, as a place in transition:

*Moabit does not fit comfortably with the image of Berlin constructed by the city for internal use and for tourists. It has no monuments or museums to visit, there are no clubs or venues a la mode to attract young people and, in spite of its central position, it shows all the social and urban traits of a suburb.*²⁹

²⁶ Markusen and Gadwa, National Endowment for the Arts

²⁷ The NEA’s “How to Do Creative Placemaking,” released in 2016, is a fantastic resource for those interested to learn more about how creative placemaking can make better places. “How to Do Creative Placemaking,” National Endowment for the Arts, November 2016, www.arts.gov/publications/how-do-creative-placemaking.

²⁸ Molenbeek, while part of the Brussels regional government, is technically an independent local municipality.

²⁹ Glenn, Diana Cavuoto, Eric Bouvet, and Sonia Floriani, eds. *Imagining Home: Migrants and the Search for a New Belonging*. Wakefield Press, 2011.



Photo: Center for Art and Urbanistics. Credit: zku-berlin.org

While not changing to the same degree as southern and eastern neighborhoods like Neukölln or Friedrichshagen, Moabit feels the pressures of growth. Immigration from Turkey and Middle Eastern countries continues to draw new residents, as does the promise of affordable rent and more space for young Berliners.

The intersection of multiple identities — foreign and native, young and old, Moroccan and Turkish, laborer and white collar — has created the need for a space of dialogue about important community issues. More importantly, this sense of a multicolor history creates a related need to give people the sense of belonging and agency: Can a new immigrant from Turkey navigate the customs of Germany, do they have a community space where they can feel fully vested in this strange new land?

Social impact organizations have worked to answer these questions in positive ways. On Quitzostraße, the “Main Station” hostel provides regular shelter for 170 refugees who have had their asylum status approved, but who have not yet found permanent housing. The manager, Mustafa Islamoglu, works with residents to maintain a nearby community park, giving refugees a sense of purpose and creating a well-maintained

public space. The project *Misch Mit* (Mix With) creates regular gatherings for refugees to “mix with” a range of people, supporting equal participation and openness in the neighborhood.

Along the northern border of Moabit, between Siemenstraße, a major rail corridor, and the Westhafenkanal, sits a former rail depot, a brick building with impressive corbelling and a roof that stretches across all sides. Today, this building has been repurposed as the Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistics (ZK/U), or, the Center for Art and Urbanistics. The center, which functions as an artist residency, community center, and public park, demonstrates the power, often unbeknownst to its creators, to give many people from different walks of life a place that they can call their own.

ZK/U occurred, by many accounts, as a happy accident. The municipality of Moabit was looking to build a new park around this abandoned rail depot, a community eyesore for many years. At the same time, the artist collective and “common-good” non-profit KUNSTrePUBLIC was searching for a space to host an artist residency. The two entities thankfully found each other, and developed an agreement that the artists would hold a nearly rent-

free 40-year lease on the property as long as they provided basic maintenance and care. The grounds around the building became the Skulpturenpark Berlin_Zentrum, an open-ended space to engage the community around issues, but to also serve as a respite in the urban environment.

The residency provides studio living space for fellows who might stay between three and six months. While this artistic incubator was the core idea of the project, the reality of taking over this space in Moabit unearthed other, powerful roles that it might play. First was filling the gap in community space. There were few non-specific spaces where community groups of all types might gather. The lofty and character-rich spaces of the rail depot were welcomed by many in Moabit; on any given day, they are used by arts-therapy organizations, international music performances, or local food groups. The power of this diverse programming is that the original mission — an artist residency — has been protected and cultivated; these local events rub up against the international fellows in unplanned and unexpected ways. By protecting the arts and by protecting the rights of locals to use the space, ZK/U remains a fresh, authentic, and vibrant forum.

Much of that vibrancy is due to the diligence of its founders. The group acts as an enlightened intermediary between a range of interests. A contemporary arts space, such as this, risks being seen as an interloper in the community, taking advantage of cheap real estate to expropriate privileged conversations about art. This, largely, has not happened. The founders serve in a unique role of connecting the community to important civic leaders, funders, and stakeholders, and vice-versa. They have their feet in more than one world, global arts or local migration, and have the respect to speak in each. This particular capacity to empathize is a unique property of the arts and explains why it can play such an important role in shaping our places.

ZK/U should be understood in context of Berlin's (and in many ways, Germany's) arts community. Post-unification, the notion of space, has received special attention: how underutilized spaces can be appropriated for social purposes, and how to remake



Photo: Center for Art and Urbanistics/Friendly Fire Event. Credit: Berliner.Gazette via Flickr

territories that were once so starkly divided, how to think about capitalism within the context of these hybrid geographies. More pragmatically, Berlin has remained an arts entrepôt, thanks to its cheap living and studio space.

Arts collectives have explored these ideas. ExRotaPrint, a “model for urban redevelopment,” is exploring how to establish a non-ownership, non-profit space for community in a former printing press manufacturing plant. ExRotaPrint considers itself an artistic endeavor and the renovation of this plant in many ways serves as a full-scale artistic project.

In Moritzplatz, two projects exemplify a changing city and the use of arts in this development. The Modulator complex, which includes a massive arts-supply store, creative economy workspaces, theaters, eateries, and nightclubs, demonstrates a more professional iteration of this same appropriation of vacant space. Next door to Modulator is Prinzessinnengarten, a community garden that was prevented from becoming a private development, that now serves as a community resource for the neighborhood. Residents can practice gardening, or can partake in any other number of cultural activities that the organization offers.

Molenbeek

Like Moabit, the Molenbeek neighborhood is remarkably close to the city center, perhaps only ten minutes walking from the majestic Grote Markt. However, the neighborhood feels much farther away, thanks to the Brussels-Charleroi Canal and to the stark cultural divide that has promulgated for centuries (first in the industrial workers who clustered there, and then the influx of northern Africans in the past several decades.)

Molenbeek has received global attention in the past several years; some of the more recent terrorist attacks in Europe were conducted by individuals who lived in or had connections to the neighborhood. The raids on the terrorist's homes after the Paris Bataclan shootings in Molenbeek were photographed and projected across the world, underscoring a perception of a lawless district, driven by vengeful, apoplectic immigrants.

The perception misses some of the fundamental realities of Belgium, and of Brussels in particular. As a country and region, Belgian governance exists as an imbrication of jurisdictions and identities: Flemish and Wallonian geographies, varying languages, and many urban management areas. Belgium has six national governments, each with their own bureaucracies. Critics of this accommodating structure claim that it allows for gaps — in immigration policy, cultural integration, or policing—that could have resulted in a neighborhood where sympathizers of the self-proclaimed Islamic State and terror cells could safely remain anonymous.³⁰

While this narrative of a neighborhood lost in the overlapping bureaucracies holds water, the story, repeated by many journalists, of a place that was a “den of terror” is patently not true. However, Molenbeek would feel familiar to many post-industrial cities: an area once home to industrial workers, now migrants, that has high unemployment rates. It is this story,

limited access to job opportunity, that most concerns local social advocates. Young women and men in Molenbeek cannot find jobs and as a result, do not feel empowered to make decisions about their lives and feel a lack of control over their environment.

Local leaders have stepped up to fight this lack of opportunity and agency with novel strategies that look to the arts as way to connect to youths and connect them to place. While social service agencies play an important role in Brussels, they often have public-mandated ways of working. Cultural organizations have been complementing this work with creative and authentic strategies.

Ras El Hanout, a local theater group, was an initiative of a group of young friends who wanted to do something about political and social change.

A theater group was not the ultimate goal, but the success of an early experiment showed the immense power of the arts as a tool to achieve the change they so desired. This early project, *Fruit Étrange(r)*, a comedic look at discrimination, depicted individuals and the stereotypes they often receive, whether by wearing a headscarf, selling DVDs on the side of the road, or having a particular haircut. The title (translated: Strange Fruit), recalls the macabre Billie Holiday song about bodies hanging from trees, and the tragi-comic nature of discrimination.

The reception of the play was astounding. The mostly North African or Muslim audience identified with the actors and felt embodied by a voice they did not frequently see. The actors looked like them and they described problems felt by people like them. The larger initiative took on its own momentum after the success of *Fruit Étrange(r)*. Theater was clearly the thing to catch the conscious of Molenbeek.

Ras El Hanout quickly identified goals for its work: diagnose the problems of the neighborhood, provide a forum for youths to express themselves, and connect the dots within the systemic nature of inequity. The answer to these questions became place-focused.

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of cultural actors.”**

³⁰ Williams, Aaron, et al, “How Two Brussels Neighborhoods became a ‘Breeding Ground’ for Terror,” *Washington Post*, April 16, 2016.

If young people could feel at home in the theater, then they could answer for themselves many of the questions posed by the project.

As an example, Ras El Hanout worked with the local job-training organization in the Brussels district to tell stories about the struggle to keep a job while balancing the other demands of life, building empathy between employers and people seeking employment. As jobs remain the most important issue in Molenbeek, this project attempts to connect the dots between intractable social issues and their nuanced, human nature.

Ultimately, Ras El Hanout sees the theater in simple terms. A majority of the participants and the audience are below the age of 26. The ongoing renovation of their building reinforces the simple prerogative of providing place for these young Bruxellois. By creating such a place — where they belong and where they bring value — these young Muslim men and women will not see radicalization as a necessary pathway, they will not look to terrorist cells in Syria or Yemen or Afghanistan for their “place” in the world.

A mere two blocks from Ras El Hanout is the Flemish cultural center of De Vaartkapoen (VK), one of the 22 such centers in the Brussels region. Founded in 1984, it was meant to inculcate the Flemish culture into the highly blended region. Early in its history, VK recognized the social development nature of its work; the first decade of its existence was concurrent with the rise of North African immigration to Molenbeek and the shrinking of job opportunities.

Aside from cultural programming, VK offered social services like a kitchen incubator, after-school programs, and an information desk. An early success was a project called Kaleidescope. Many of the Muslim women felt uncomfortable accessing social services or asking for help in any way. This program established a group of women advocates who could connect

with other women to organize trips to museums and cultural centers, conduct financial trainings, and teach women how to ride bicycles.

In 1998, the organization separated into two institutions, one focused on cultural programming and the other focused on social services. VK, the cultural institution, continued to host artistic and cultural events. However, Brussels, and in particular Molenbeek, was a starkly divided community. Much of the Flemish-inspired programming felt disconnected from the cultural reality of the neighborhood. The institution started to explore unique, place-based activities that utilized the public realm and incorporated food and celebrations that were consonant with many of the residents in the neighborhood.

At the same time, youths in the neighborhood were increasingly taking part in VK programming that was not designed to be culturally specific. Music, in particular, is an important part of the institution. From reggae to punk to hip-hop, VK promotes a diverse array of musical acts. At an underground hip-hop concert, the concert hall might be filled with Muslims in head-scarfs, Wallonian hipsters, and teenagers from Antwerp. While VK found value in hosting cultural-specific events, it also found value in the common ground built by young people's



Photo: Millennium Iconoclast Museum of Art. Credit: "Lieven SOETE" via Flickr

interest in music. Often, artists with an aggressive message — say a heavy metal band — would create riotous situations (not quite dangerous, but animated). While there is certainly risk associated with the passions of youth, there is also the “sound of something at stake.” In this space of intense emotion, there is an opening in a young person’s life, a chance to reach a deep-seated sense of self and how that self fits within the world.

VK has embraced this role as much as possible. While it does host programs that connect directly to Muslim culture, it also connects people across cultures and uses concepts like youth to demonstrate some of the shared challenges we face. In this space, VK has become an important place for Molenbeek.

The Canal Bruxelles-Charleroi that separates Brussels from Molenbeek was the site of a major urban planning effort in the year 2010. With many empty warehouses, the area was ripe to accommodate part of the Brussels region’s growth. However as might be expected, this exercise also created angst among Molenbeek residents about displacement and gentrification. Two projects demonstrate how place-based cultural activities can assuage some of those fears and build positive change into urban development.

The Millenium Iconoclast Museum of Art (MiMA) occupies a handsome brick building that used to be the Bellevue Brewery on the edge of Molenbeek. The museum is joined on the site by a chic, budget hotel chain. The founders of MiMA had initially operated a bookstore-type gallery in Brussels’ central district. While interested in art and culture, the four founders viewed the space as a political project: a place for people from all walks of life to gather and consider important social issues.

With the planning of the canal area and the need to expand the footprint of this gallery, the founders moved into the former brewery and its wonderful spaces. It quickly became apparent that the neighborhood was a central character in the museum’s story. The institution opened almost immediately following the



Photo: Allee du Kaai. Credit: OST Collective

terrorist attack at the Brussels airport. Police raids on the suspected assailants took place on a block directly adjacent to the museum. The museum’s courtyard acted as a staging area during that time.

Questions arose: Would people cross the Charleroi Canal to come to a predominantly Muslim neighborhood, would Molenbeekers come to a museum opened by white cultural producers? The opening on March 22, 2016 was a triumph, with lines forming down the canal and 4,000 visitors from all backgrounds on the first day alone.

The founders knew that they had new challenges and imperatives after the terrorist attacks brought international attention on the neighborhood. The identity of Molenbeek as a place and the nature of race would become keystones in MiMA’s mission. One way to address these questions head on was already programmed into a pedagogical approach that the group had developed in a term called “Culture 2.0,” describing an emphasis on subcultures and informal cultural expression, such as tattooing, graffiti, social media, and skateboarding. These interests were things that nearly every young Belgian was interested in.

Secondly, the group recognized the need to build partnerships with other organizations and to open their space to the community. An important such partnership — one that many other organizations tapped into — was the Brussels Boxing Academy,

which was located in the neighborhood and drew from the local Muslim population. The Academy was seen as an important failsafe for local youth, giving them a place to feel at home and a means to externalize negative feelings. The founders visited the academy occasionally and spoke with its leaders and the boxers.

Eventually, it was decided that a party in MiMA was the appropriate way to encourage young Molenbeekers to visit the museum. The institution let young people plan and host the party on their terms, giving them access to the space and letting them define the rules. The dance parties that followed were huge successes for several reasons: They were popular and well attended; they were planned by the community and reflected their interests; and they allowed young people the chance to feel comfortable entering an institutional setting, breaking down a substantial barrier of access. The image of an Imam and a fashion designer dancing joyously to hip-hop in the museum's main space is one that more need to see.

Just a 15-minute walk north along the canal will take you to the Allee du Kaai, a vacant waterfront property that has been turned into a kind of alternative public space and community center. A project of the VZW Toestand collective, the Allee demonstrates the organizing principle of the concept — “a space of one's own” — in the purest and most simple terms.

VZW Toestand, which now runs programming and spaces across the Brussels region, started as a youthful interest in celebrations. A group of young friends identified an abandoned school that was slated for demolition. They were entranced by the space and thought that it would make a good space for a party. The history of underground music is wedded to these subversive co-opting of spaces. Remarkably, the local authorities allowed the group to program the school over the course of an entire summer. Doing so enabled the group to have that party, but it also showed them something else: to curate the space over

the entire summer as a kind of “third space” for the community. It created tremendous value and was immensely successful.

The group, still not certain where their career paths were taking them, decided to explore how this placemaking could be continued. Over time, they found resources and support to do similar activities in other abandoned spaces. The Allee du Kaai was a large step for the group, now becoming more formalized and professional. On the northern border of Molenbeek, the former industrial property was unique in its size and in the backgrounds of the people who lived nearby.

VZW Toestand quickly built the Allee into an inclusive social space, one that is undergirded on the principle of equity and trust. Instead of becoming a place to host a party for friends, the site

has become a place for anyone to do anything, as long as it remains positive and people feel welcome. The group reached out to local groups to curate the programming. Today there is skateboarding, North African chefs, print-making, and Brazilian dances. VZW recognized an immediate gap in society and almost by chance fell into the answer: giving people a place to call their own, where they mattered, where they could come anytime, and where they could pursue the fullest version of themselves.

Place-Focused Institutions

The stories from Moabit and Molenbeek are primarily the result of a dedicated individual or group. However, these same individuals often translated their early success into institutional support for expanded programming; some even built new organizations themselves. In other instances, institutions and foundations acted as the drivers of innovation by their grant-making. In any event, success in creative placemaking is often characterized by a supportive institution — foundation, government, individual — and a dynamic group of cultural actors.

“ *It opened up spaces of new connection among groups that did not normally talk to each other.* ”

Europe, as described, has a rich legacy of public support for the arts. However, in the past decade, just as in the United States, a group of institutions has emerged that are focused on place-based cultural policy, squarely focused on ideas of identity, equity, and agency.

The Bosch Foundation is one of Europe's major foundations, started in 1964 as per the will of Robert Bosch, the early 20th century industrialist. Among the five focus areas of the foundation is civil society, a focus that deploys strategies to address the changing nature of German, European, and global society.

While always interested in culture and cultural grantmaking, the foundation noticed that artists made excellent negotiators and intermediaries in complex political scenarios. The group thought that by embedding artists in civil society processes, the outcomes would become more successful and place-specific. Combined with their interest in urban development, the foundation, with MitOst, a cultural producing organization, created the Actors of Urban Change (AOC) program.

AOC grants seed funding to groups in places across Europe and elsewhere, to create collaborative, civic-minded projects. They deliver this in various cycles, with ten grantees in each cohort. The groups include an artist and a member, each of the private and public sector. This three-part organizational structure brings together different views and prerogatives and gives them means to think about an issue in that community. The seed money is used to undertake a project — perhaps a festival, an educational activity, a public art project — that can help address a range of challenges. These projects almost exclusively deal with placemaking and cultural activities.

A great example is the VivaCidade project in the small town of Aveiro, Portugal, which is known for its salt production, its seaweed farming for fertilizer manufacturer, and for its beautiful tradition of tile-making. The city was characterized by urban voids thanks to suburban growth in the surrounding area. The AOC project was intended to fill those voids with installations and regular programming, but also to connect with other demographic groups, like university students and the elderly. This simple premise was challenging, but ultimately rewarding. It

opened up spaces of new connection among groups that did not normally talk to each other. It taught citizens about how their local government worked (e.g. applying for permits), and it created a sense of civic pride in the community

The intended impact of projects like VivaCidade and other AOC is not just that the event or intervention is successful and creates change — although this is hugely important — it is also aimed at equipping individuals with new forms of knowledge and power. The teams involved leave the work with confidence in their ability to make change and have control over their environments. The work builds people's capacity. Ultimately, AOC is playing a long game and looking toward horizons that are years, if not decades, away.

MitOst, the cultural operator of the Actors of Urban Change program, plays an important role as an intermediary and thought leader. Given their experience working in the arts sector, they support the local grantees with resources and expertise. As a larger organization with governmental experience, they also work with public entities and foundations to manage their relationship with the local actors. MitOst acts as an important mediator in this space, ensuring that place-based arts practices are true to both place and to the arts.

Another MitOst initiative, Tandem, demonstrates this principle. It pairs two artists from different geographies together and asks them to create shared work in both of their communities. The project thus works in a bidirectional way: It builds capacity in two individuals and it makes sure this new dialogue is accessible to the residents of each artist's hometown. Tandem is focused on both people and place, and the relationship between the two. Tandem has multiple tracks of work. For example Tandem Schaml is focused on interchange between the European and Middle Eastern communities.

The European Cultural Foundation (ECF) has played an important role in place-based cultural policy innovation and development. Founded 60 years ago by the Swiss/French philosopher Denis de Rougemont in Geneva under the leadership of Robert Schuman, who was instrumental to the early architecture of the European Union, the ECF was, from the beginning,

focused on European integration and recognized that cultural heterogeneity could become an impediment to that integration. The private non-profit, based now in The Netherlands, builds transnational collaboration via culture. One of its early successes was developing the Erasmus Program, widely considered one of the most important policy initiatives of postwar Europe, which gave European citizens the freedom to attend universities across national borders.

The foundation's work is broadly defined, but loosely speaking, it serves as a thought leader, grantmaker, and convener for innovative cultural policy. Increasingly, this policy has focused on urban development and placemaking. In very general terms, Creative Europe, the EU's cultural policy arm, has focused on culture as a tool for foreign policy and external relations, i.e., promoting European culture abroad. The ECF has doubled down on policies that impact the important social and economic issues of communities. It has supported civil society development and convenings of important arts funders, and helped to support transnational cultural policy initiatives. Much like the National Endowment for the Arts, the European Cultural Foundation has leveraged its position as a respected thought leader and used its initiative to spur others to make similar changes and investments.

Policy Recommendations

In both the United States and Europe, creative placemaking has expanded at a quick pace in the past decade. The concept of a discipline has emerged, despite many of the practices having a history that dates back centuries. The notion of a discipline has helped to evolve arts and cultural policy and to advocate for its expanded role in society. At the same time, creative placemaking has no caretaker. It is merely the sketch of an idea sustained by a range of actors, including foundations, cultural organizations, community groups, and artists.

This transatlantic perspective has allowed for an understanding of shared needs and opportunities that could be developed with a coalition of arts-based leaders. The following recommendations should be considered for further development.

Importantly, the cultural policy community should take care in identifying those who will be responsible for shepherding this thinking; Who has agency and why is that voice best suited to lead? This could come from a mixture of sources: government agencies, philanthropic coalitions, or cultural membership organizations.

Connect artists and cultural organizations with social service training. Many creative placemaking or social practice-based artists work in that field for their interest in affecting social change. However, most of these individuals received training as artists or practitioners, where the curriculum was grounded in technique or the theory of practice. Many artists, no matter how comely, face steep challenges when working with a politically active community group or navigating the frustrating bureaucracies of a city government. Similarly, many cultural organizations have found that because of their interest in social change or supporting their community, they have been asked to perform the functions of a social service organization: addressing homelessness, youth unemployment, or single parents.

A key recommendation is to provide social-service, communications, and partnership training to artists and cultural organizations. Many feel that such training will dilute the authorial intent of the artist and dull the creative intent; this can be avoided by carefully crafting training that is geared for artists and preserves the ability to think intuitively, take risks, and operate with improvisation.

Springboard for the Arts, a nationally-oriented organization based in St. Paul, Minnesota, has been building curriculum around community-based arts for just this very purpose: to ensure that artists are equipped to work in new and impactful ways, while preserving the freedom for creativity. In Los Angeles, the Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI) has long supported artists with training and toolkits; they are increasingly providing resources to those who would like to work in communities in a social practice way.

Identify and support intermediary actors between the cultural and other spheres. Artists think and talk in certain ways. City council, neighborhood groups, and corporate boards communicate in very different ways. The most successful creative placemaking

projects have been those where somebody had the means to communicate across these perspectives, defend both, and find compromise. While many artists have wide-ranging abilities to empathize and connect, working in the public realm is challenging.

The concept of the intermediary has emerged as an important one for the future of creative placemaking. The intermediary is an organization that enables cultural work in communities, has a natural ability to connect with residents, can defend a balanced sense of equity, and can talk comfortably to people in positions of power.

Examples of this concept are abundant. MitOst, described earlier, provides direct funding for artist-led projects, but also maintains and cultivates relationships with the public and private sector. By balancing these relationships in projects like Actors of Urban Change or Tandem, it can protect the interests of both. Andreas Krüger, the developer responsible for the Modulor development in Berlin, talked about serving as that intermediary — unintentionally — between the art and design community and the municipal government and the value of this perspective.

Consciously developing this role, either by building organizations that can serve in this fashion or by working with individuals who have this sensibility, could support richer, deeper engagement of the arts in public issues.

Finding new ways of knowing. Most investment in creative placemaking and social-practice arts come from foundations or government; very few individuals support this work, yet. As such, knowing the impact of these investments is an extremely important, albeit challenging task. Should funding be continued? What kind of projects are most effective? What was the actual impact on a place?

Early forays into modeling the impact of creative placemaking were grounded in qualitative, data-driven techniques. However, early feedback showed that this approach was difficult and imprecise.³¹

For example, how do you measure the impact of a park activation project when the data collected is measured at a city or county scale?

In recent years, organizations have adopted a hybrid approach to evaluate creative placemaking, one that uses qualitative measurement — interviews, reports, and reflections — and other sources of quantitative information. Additionally, the amount of research in the last decade concerning the ability of the arts to make change has grown exponentially. Significant research shows that in areas such as public safety, health, and the environment, art can have a meaningful impact. This information can help to build inferences about impacts, whether or not they can be directly measured.

A menu of curated evaluation techniques works best. Evaluation should not be endlessly difficult. It should breed confidence in partners, allow a team to adjust their strategy, and inspire future work.

Many actors across the world are thinking about this very subject. MitOst is imagining a similar strategy toward the evaluation of its AOC program. Arizona State University is committing resources to think about impact and evaluation in creative placemaking. A next step would be to pool resources and insights across the world into a shared platform for the evaluation of arts-based community development. This common platform would not only provide more consistency, but it would inspire confidence in non-arts-based partners and investors.

Embed culture in systems and institutions. Much of the creative placemaking space is dominated, for obvious reasons, by cultural actors. While these groups have been tremendously innovative and effective, the next chapter in art-based community development is to embed arts-based practices into other systems and organizations, making the case that this kind of practice will improve their own work, whether that be in affordable housing, infrastructure, or transportation.

Early examples of this practice have been demonstrated in several city governments. For example, Amanda Lovelee is the St. Paul, Minnesota artist-in-residence, where she has free reign to think about innovation and creativity within the large

31. Ann, Markusen, "Fuzzy Concepts, Proxy Data: Why Indicators Would Not Track Creative Placemaking Success," *International Journal of Urban Sciences*, 17.3, 2013.

governmental bureaucracy and to develop projects that make residents' interactions with the city richer. Similar opportunities exist in spaces like water management, where many large water utilities are using the arts to engage communities in deeper, more meaningful ways.

Making the case for this type of embedding will happen naturally as a result of the first three policy recommendations. With artists trained to work in diverse sectors, intermediaries able to host those artists, and an understanding of impact that these artists can play, many corporations, utilities, or governments would be much more likely to invest in arts and culture.

Listen to youth. Community-based arts includes a rich tapestry of cultural practices and styles. This should be celebrated and encouraged. However, across both sides of the Atlantic, many of the most powerful examples of creative placemaking involve youth, whether they be young children in grade school or teenagers in high school. The potential impact of this cohort is enormous.

Youth have a formative connection to culture, whether that be popular music, dancing, Youtube videos, or literature. This connection ties together powerful feelings of belonging, identity, and self, and it ties these feelings to one's place in the world.

While creative placemaking has had a strong relationship with youth, it has not yet interrogated this connection at a deeper level. How can we connect to youth in more meaningful, personal ways? Most of the creative placemaking professionals are adults. Youth can more palpably feel when "something is at stake." We can help support this feeling and make sure that the "thing at stake" is the future of our communities.

The views expressed in GMF publications and commentary are the views of the author alone.

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