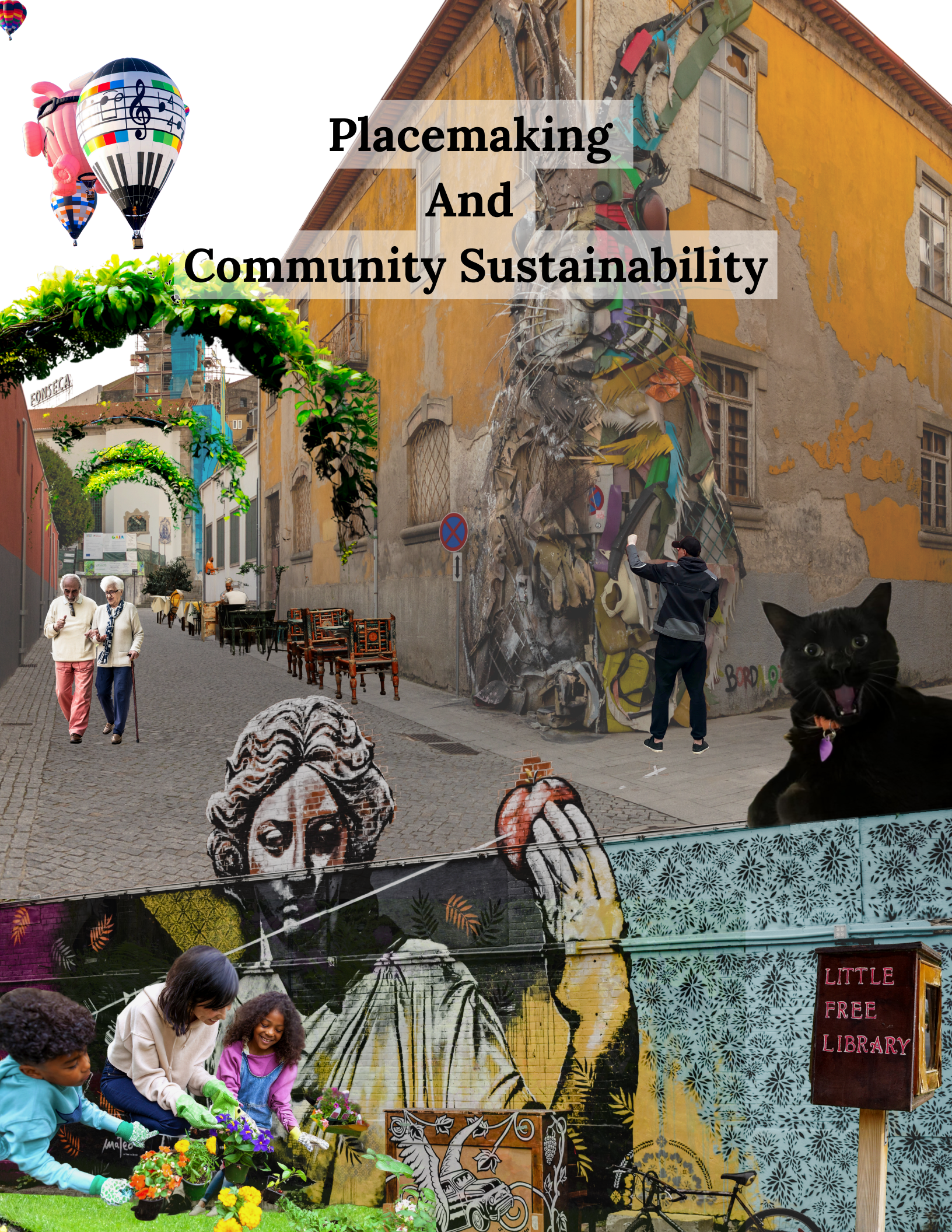
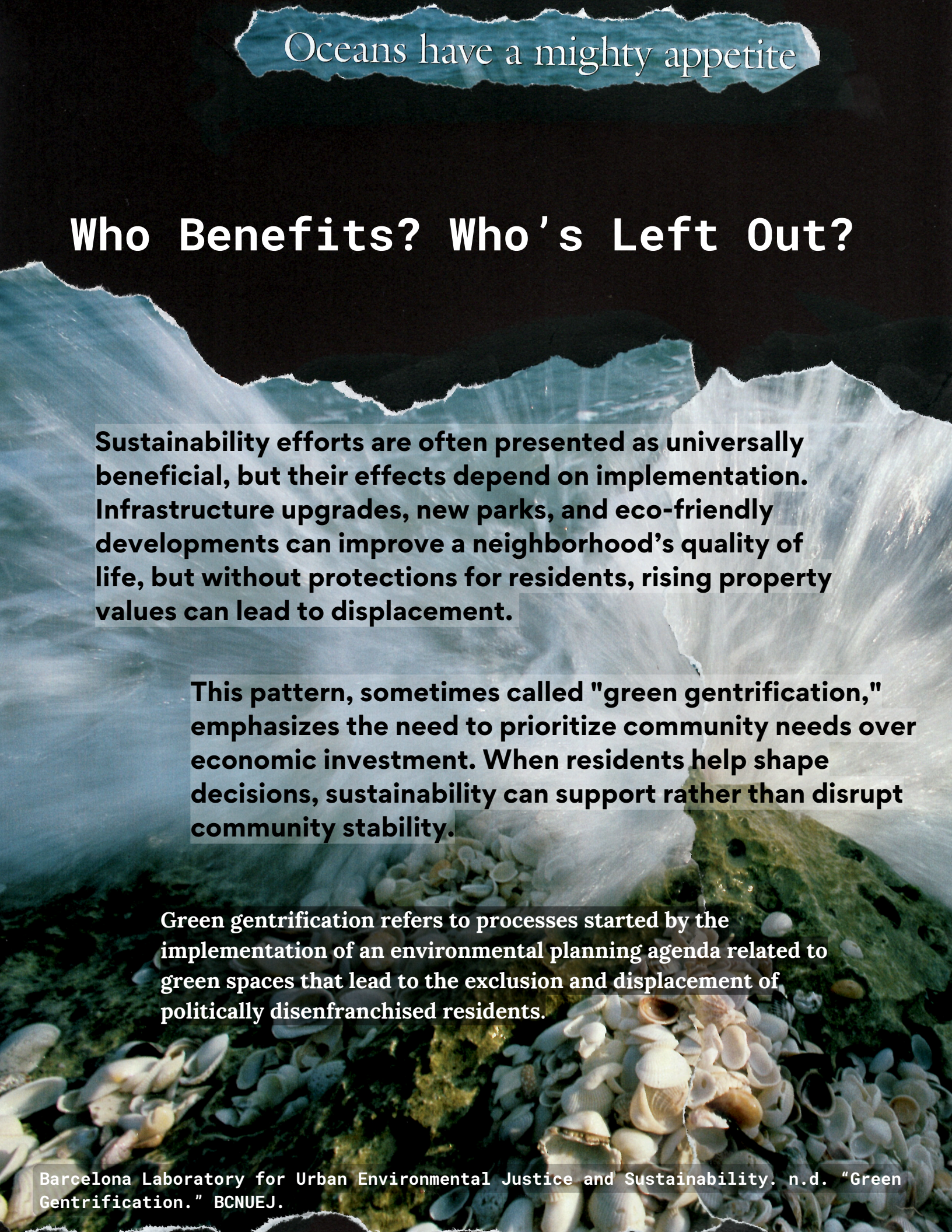
Placemaking And Community Sustainability





Who Benefits? Who's Left Out?

Sustainability efforts are often presented as universally beneficial, but their effects depend on implementation. Infrastructure upgrades, new parks, and eco-friendly developments can improve a neighborhood's quality of life, but without protections for residents, rising property values can lead to displacement.

This pattern, sometimes called "green gentrification," emphasizes the need to prioritize community needs over economic investment. When residents help shape decisions, sustainability can support rather than disrupt community stability.

Green gentrification refers to processes started by the implementation of an environmental planning agenda related to green spaces that lead to the exclusion and displacement of politically disenfranchised residents.

Barcelona Laboratory for Urban Environmental Justice and Sustainability. n.d. "Green Gentrification." BCNUEJ.

Who Shapes Public Spaces? The Power of Creative Placemaking





Changes in Society

Engagement

People

Public spaces shape our daily lives, but who decides what they look like? Placemaking is about creating spaces by and for the people who use them, transforming vacant lots into gardens, painting murals that tell local stories, or installing unexpected gathering places. However, not all approaches to placemaking are alike.



Opportunity



The term is often applied to projects imposed on communities rather than developed with them. When planners and investors dictate what a neighborhood should be, they frequently overlook the people who already live there. This top-down approach, seen in large-scale redevelopment projects and corporate-designed public spaces, often prioritizes newcomers with financial means while displacing long-term residents and small businesses. In contrast, grassroots placemaking empowers communities to shape their own streets and parks, ensuring these spaces reflect local culture and needs.

Place

The Culture

Art and Architecture

The power in placemaking is not evenly shared. Those with access to resources and control over zoning laws often drive projects that leave existing residents struggling to stay. Sometimes what is labeled an improvement leads to displacement, as infrastructure projects tear through thriving districts, replacing local businesses and gathering spaces with developments that serve a different demographic. In response, communities have reclaimed neglected spaces, turning abandoned lots into parks, planting trees, and organizing cultural events to reestablish their presence.

Public spaces tell stories, but who gets to narrate them? In many cities, new developments risk erasing cultural identity rather than celebrating it. Murals and street art often act as resistance, transforming blank walls into visual statements that honor history and challenge official narratives. When traditional planning processes fail to listen, residents take action, whether by repurposing vacant lots or demanding recognition for the spaces that matter to them.

However, reclaiming public space is not without obstacles. Zoning laws, bureaucratic hurdles, and strict regulations can stifle grassroots efforts. In some cities, simple acts like sitting on a sidewalk or feeding those in need are met with penalties, reinforcing the notion that public space is only accessible to those with the right resources and connections. Community-driven interventions, such as guerrilla gardening or pop-up markets, often face fines or forced removal, highlighting the tension between formal and informal approaches to placemaking.

Yet what if communities did not wait for permission? Tactical urbanism embraces small, low-cost interventions that reshape public spaces immediately. Residents frustrated by unsafe intersections have painted their own crosswalks, later adopted as permanent fixtures. Others have built temporary bus shelters, converted parking spaces into pop-up parks, or transformed alleys into gathering places. These efforts challenge the idea that only planners and developers can design a city.



Creative placemaking, a process that integrates arts and culture into community development, provides another pathway for transformation. When done collaboratively, it strengthens neighborhoods both socially and economically. Partnerships between local governments, artists, community groups, and private entities help ensure that placemaking efforts reflect the people they serve. However, these partnerships can be difficult to sustain. Differing priorities, bureaucratic delays, and conflicts over funding often slow progress. Successful initiatives require trust, open communication, and flexibility, sometimes even stepping away from unproductive collaborations.

The impact of creative placemaking extends beyond aesthetics. It can attract investment, support small businesses, and create jobs while also fostering trust and shared purpose among residents. Parks, streets, and plazas become spaces of connection and cultural expression, reinforcing a neighborhood's sense of identity.

A better neighborhood often begins with grassroots action. Whether through pop-up events, community cleanups, or policy advocacy, public space belongs to everyone if people claim and nurture it. By prioritizing collaboration and cultural expression, placemaking efforts can create spaces that are not only functional but deeply meaningful to the communities they serve.

American Planning Association. (2016, November). *Placemaking: An expanding role for planners*. PAS Memo. https://www.planning.org/pas/memo/2016/nov/

Markusen, Ann and Anne Gadwa. 2010. *Creative Placemaking*. National Endowment for the Arts. Washington, D.C., Nowak, Jeremy. 2007. *The Power of Placemaking: A Summary of Creativity and Neighborhood Development Strategies for Community Investing*. The Reinvestment Fund. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Placemakers

Culture

"Creative placemaking is a process where community members, artists, arts and culture organizations, community developers, and other stakeholders use arts and cultural strategies to implement community-led change. This approach aims to increase vibrancy, improve economic conditions, and build capacity among residents to take ownership of their communities."

-American Planning Association

a Piece of History

Creative placemaking blends arts, culture, and design into community-building strategies. It depends on cross-sector partnerships and local engagement, uniting artists, designers, and cultural leaders to drive economic, physical, and social transformation.

Since the 1960s, the concept of "placemaking" has been a cornerstone in community development, representing a comprehensive approach to enhancing local areas. Rather than simply adding housing improving public safety, or making streets more attractive, experience has shown that transforming a community—especially those that have been neglected—requires addressing multiple factors simultaneously to truly improve quality of life.

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

Jane Jacobs (Author, Urbanologist, Community Activist)

Home

Celebrating Architecture and Art

CREATE

Linking the Past to the Future

COMMUNITY

Withintrification?



Withintrification refers to revitalization that's driven by the people already in the neighborhood. It means identifying assets in the community, bringing them together under common objectives, and raising the value of the place from within at a pace appropriate for revitalizing the existing community, not displacing it.

The current residents of the community take the lead in revitalization, rather than newcomers or outside developers telling residents what they need and ultimately pricing them out. The term was coined by University of Pittsburgh professor John Wallace.

Local knowledge is inhabitants' understanding of their daily lives and environmental practices and experiences.

Local residents often have the knowledge needed to make wise decisions about urban form

WHAT IS COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY?

Sustainability is commonly linked to environmental efforts, but it also involves social and economic stability. A sustainable community supports affordable housing, reliable public transportation, accessible green spaces, and economic opportunities while allowing longtime residents to stay in their neighborhoods.

When not shaped by the community, sustainability initiatives can drive up living costs and lead to displacement. A balanced approach requires environmental improvements alongside policies that preserve affordability and social connections.