

City Planner, do your thing!

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CASE
IN
POINT
2008

Developing
creative tools
& techniques
to encourage
democratic
citizenship

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Abstract

Generating an open dialogue about places and how they change is the key to developing and broadening the scope of public awareness on important issues that effect our everyday lives. One of the eight points stated in the *CIP Statement of Values and Code of Professional Practice* is to articulate these values and to communicate "their importance to clients, employers, colleagues and the public" (CIP, 2008). These values address many of the issues that effect the quality of life of people in places. Are we succeeding at communicating relevant planning issues to the public? More often than not our audiences are limited to colleagues, clients and select members of the public.

As planners, we are experts on the way cities work and we have a responsibility to engage the public on issues that effect their experience of places. Raising awareness will enable people to better participate in the process of placemaking. How can we engage the public to be more invested in an active and democratic citizenship? There are many creative

tools now available that can be used to encourage a dialogue about places. Exhibitions, publications, websites, and public lectures are some of the many dynamic communication tools that can be used creatively to broaden the scope of "public" and expand awareness of key issues. Creative projects are a means to inspire citizens to think about the places they live, work and play. They offer means to engage citizens at different levels and aim to be informative and accessible. They can be used not only as communication tools, the process of creation itself can become a technique for educating citizens about their built environment.

This case-in-point explores tools and techniques that can be used to encourage democratic citizenship. It discusses the work of the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP), an organization that encourages learning and participation through creative collaboration. The objective of this case-in-point is to inspire planners to actively engage in creating democratic citizenship.

What is “urban pedagogy”? And why is it important to the planners?

Urban pedagogy can be described most simply as the process of educating people about cities—how they work and how they change. The purpose is to better equip citizens to make changes and to better enable them to gain some control in the decision-making processes that effect their everyday lives. Our commitment and caring for the environment in which we live comes from both an emotional and an intellectual understanding of a place (Hough, 1990). While the focus of learning is on the social aspects of the built environment, the built environment is addressed as “the vessel or catalyst for social, economic and ecological change” (Cumberlidge & Musgrave, 2007. 8). At heart of most urban pedagogical teaching is the recognition that cities are always in flux, the process of making cities is ongoing and so through education and learning we are more able to be involved. Urban pedagogy is a way of assuring that everyday people can understand and so participate in the ongoing process of placemaking.

As a city planner in 2008 one is remiss to overlook the importance of community “collaboration” or “participation” in the planning process. These words have become the ‘nom de guerre’ of progressive planning practices. Each time we are involved in making change in a city, there is a recognized opportunity to engage and empower communities in the process. In cities such as Winnipeg planners are required to share the decision-making process with citizens (Council of The City of Winnipeg, 2000). Aside from the benefits of knowledge sharing, both practically



and ethically planners recognize that citizens are experts on their own communities (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995).

More and more planning has come to be about a process of public engagement and interaction. As planner, we have learned from past blunders that ignored the every day lives of people living in communities. Since the early 1990s there has been a global effort to place community at the forefront of the decision making process (Cumberlidge & Musgrave, 2007). We are rapidly moving toward a more participatory culture, not just in planning practice but in the myriad of communication and entertainment devices that we now access through digital mediums (Cumberlidge & Musgrave, 2007). With this in mind, it is important for planners to remain astute the the tools that are widely accessible and used by multiple groups of citizens.

In *The Art Of City Making* Charles Landry identifies the current challenge for planners to become more conscious of the communication devices and mechanism widely accessible to the public and to use these tools to facilitate urban pedagogy (Landry, 2007). He encourages planners to participate in the development of public education and to consider the concept of “Learning Cities.” A Learning City, he explains,

is “a place where individuals and organizations are encouraged to learn about the dynamics of where they live and how it is changing; a place which on that basis changes the way it learns, whether through schools or any other institution that can help foster understandings and knowledge; a place in which all its members are encouraged to learn; and, finally, and perhaps most importantly, a place that can learn to change the conditions of its learning democratically” (Landry, 2007. 311).

Leone Sandercock advocates for a similar process of localized learning through multiple “contemplative or appreciative knowledge” (Sandercock, 2003. 81) approaches. What both Landry and Sandercock describe is very much aligned with the mandate of CUP and other organizations that work to build on the knowledge of locals and on local knowledge. Like many cultural advocates they encourage creative approaches be explored in the planning practice. Exposure to creative thinking, whether it be professional artists or everyday people making things, is inspirational and can lead to a greater understanding. Creatively expressed ideas can provide multiple points of reference and encourage dialogue and participation.

“ A good leader or manager is a person who recognizes creativity and gives it space to flourish, who creates an environment in which exposure to new ideas and experimentalization is rewarded, and who demonstrates by example, taking risks herself” Sandercock, 2003. p216

While this case-in-point focusses primarily on urban pedagogy, similar tools and techniques may be applied to rural and natural settings as well. In *Out of Place: Restoring Identity to the Regional Landscape*, Hough provides a case study of the pedagogical work done at the Petawa National Forestry Institute. He describes the success of implementing an educational program to “give new meaning and significance to the objects, activities, and places that are part of the daily surroundings” (Hough, 1990. 168). The Petawa public education program incorporated story-telling techniques as well used a series of signs to answer very basic questions about how the forests works ecologically, how it is of value is to people, how is it sustained, and how it changes over time influenced by different variables. Hough explains that “knowledge through education of a places environmental or cultural significance changes our attitudes and the way we experience it” (Hough, 1990. 190).

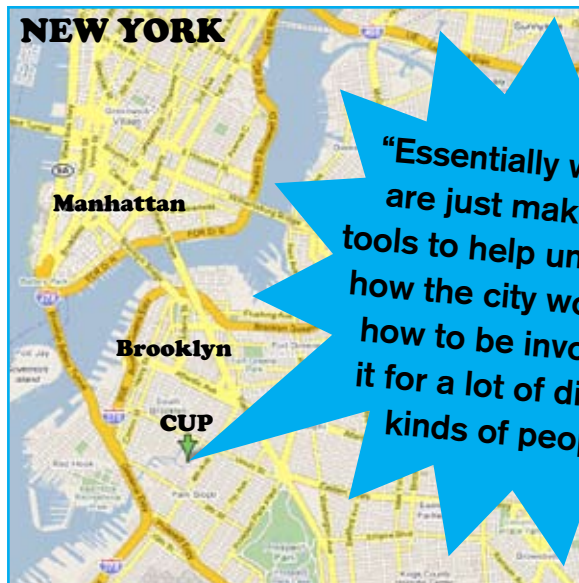
Whether it be the built or natural environment, broadening public awareness about issues that effect our everyday lives and how we experience places is about building our capacity of citizens. It is about giving meaning and significance to the everyday things that we encounter. It is about recognizing that these things are part of a process, subject to the influences of what we know and do. As planners we carry a great deal of knowledge about places. We know the processes that effect change and how to influence the decisions that are made in the process of change. Imparting this knowledge on a greater public will better enable us to create truly democratic places through the collaborative efforts of all citizens.

What is CUP?

CUP began in 1997 as a casual collective of architects, designers, and planners interested in collaborating on projects about cities and how they change (CUP, 2008). Their first few projects were publications and exhibitions that informally sought to educate people about the built environment in clear, creative and engaging ways. The ongoing commitment of the CUP establishers quickly saw it transform from a volunteer-based collective into a designated non-profit organization. CUP's office is based in Brooklyn, New York in the Old American Can Factory (an expansive building that provides affordable office space for the cultural industry). CUP now employs two full-time staff and a part-time grants writer. The staff act as facilitators, "brokering" various sets of actors to collaborate on projects that focus primarily on New York City.

At the heart of CUP's work has been the desire "to create a more engaged, active citizenship for people living in New York City" (Woo, 2007). CUP's work focuses primarily on the social aspects of city making rather than on the physical manifestations—the process, the players and the policy involved with the making of built form rather than the form itself. Investigation and inquiry are essential to the process of knowledge building around the issues that are being addressed in a project. Supporting various collective groups to conduct research in this manner is part of the pedagogy.

While all of the projects initiated by CUP result in some sort of dynamic creative outcome, it is the process as much as the product that achieves their objectives as an organization. These objectives include: increasing capacity of citizens through



"Essentially what we are just making are tools to help understand how the city works and how to be involved in it for a lot of different kinds of people."

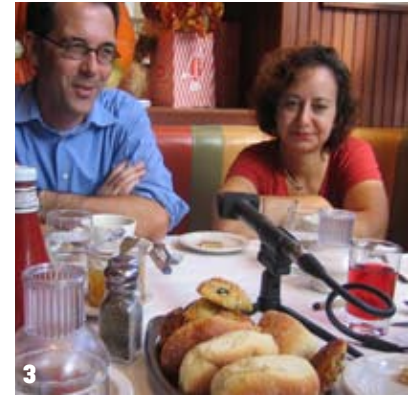
collaborative investigation and project development; making legible the workings of cities in accessible and interesting ways; and providing tools for community advocates to work with (Woo, 2007).

CUP's work is collaborative in the most democratic sense, involving knowledge sharing, collective investigation, individual and joint creative expression, and public education. Through the collective act of research, investigation, learning, conducting interviews and exploring issues that effect everyday citizens CUP initiate projects manifest. The outcomes aim to expose the investigative process, to make transparent the findings and leave them open for interpretation. Projects are most often not conclusive at outcome, rather they expose what was discovered in the process of inquiry. While the process is crucial in pedagogy, CUP is also passionate about assuring that the communication tools developed are not boring nor inaccessible. Their projects are stimulating, legible, incredibly imaginative and sometimes hilarious.

How is CUP funded?

60-70% of CUP funding is through foundation grants, 20% contract work, and 10% private donations

1 Students from the Academy of Urban Planning on a field trip to Queen's Museum 2 Pratt Center for Community Development help to develop community game and toolkit on the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure 3 A professor of historical preservation & the director of planning and preservation at Pratt Center in an interview on the redevelopment of the Fulton Mall in Brooklyn 4 Designer from Project Projects firm discusses the Making Policy Public procedure 5 Speakers on the Tennessee Valley Authority, part of the People & Buildings lecture series 6 CUP staff and Bronx Helpers of new settlement housing, an after school organization working with community, tour the neighbourhood.



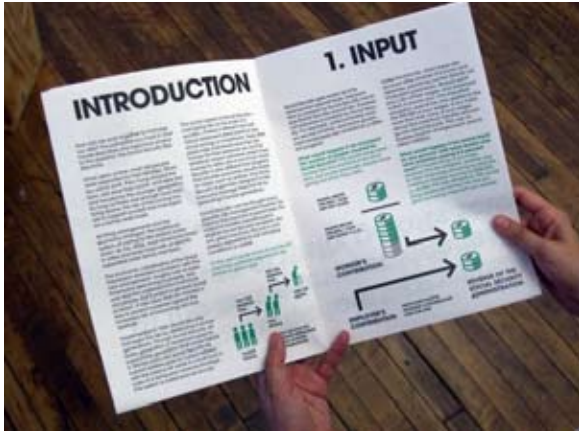
Who does CUP collaborate with?

One of the many roles of CUP staff is to broker sets of different actors including educators, designers, community advocates, activists, policy makers, students, experts and the public, to collaborate. CUP's list of community collaborators is extensive and includes: Pratt Center for Community Development; Sustainable South Bronx; Place in History; the Lower East Side Tenement Museum; Global Kids; the Municipal Arts Society; the Legal Aid Society; City Environmental Justice Alliance; and the New York City Public Housing Residents Alliance, to name just a few. They have also worked with over 700 high school students at institutions such as City-as-School and Bushwick's Academy of Urban Planning. They pair these organizations with highly talented artists, designers, educators,

researchers and activists (CUP, 2008) to develop projects in a myriad of dynamic formats largely informed in the process of collaboration. Their primary audiences are youth, designers (planners, architects) and communities.

CUP's reputation for excellence at what they do now finds them in a position of being sought out by schools, community organizations, and architects as the "go-to guys" with the knowledge and capacity to initiate elaborate projects about urban issues. CUP's exceptional work is beginning to be recognized on an international scale. Most recently their projects have been included in the publication *Design Like You Give a Damn* (2006); and in Rotterdam's Third International Architecture Biennale (2007).

"Encoded in the DNA of what CUP does and how it does what it does is an 'invite everyone to the party' kind of philosophy. You can only make it more interesting by having more participants adding their two cents to how something works."



Some CUP projects

CUP collaborators use various and multiple mediums to actualize their research findings. Their mediums include posters, postcards, brochures, catalogues, websites, maps, exhibitions, toolkits, and interactive curricula. Below are short descriptions of just a few of their projects.

Making Policy Public:

Social Security Risk Management

The Social Security Risk Management poster is the second in a series of posters that pair the information of community advocates and with the skills of professional communication designers. This edition grew out of research “on risk management as a contemporary form of planning” (CUP, 2008). It was initiated following President Bush’s plan to privatize Social Security in the USA. The posters includes a fold-out pamphlet on one side that educates the public about the mechanism of social security and where it can be adjusted. The series Making Policy Public is brokered, facilitated and funded by CUP.

Just In/Justice

In spring 2006, CUP worked with the senior class of the Academy of Urban Planning to investigate the infrastructure of criminal justice in New York City. Students met with dozens of advocates, elected officials, community-based organizations, and academics to learn about the politics and realities of policing and incarceration. Students used the city as a classroom, studying the Department of Correction’s plans to expand the city jail system, the concept of million-dollar blocks, and the shooting of Sean Bell. Working with an art educator, the students created a public exhibition featuring a comic strip series, a giant interactive board-game, and a memorial for Sean Bell.

**To see more great CUP projects visit:
www.anothercupdevelopment.org**



Garbage Problem

Investigating what will happen to New York's garbage with the closure of Fresh Kills Landfill (notably once one of the US's largest landfills) CUP initiated a collaboration between educators, designers and high school students at City-as-School. The outcome included an exhibition, with a park model made of recycled materials, a series of posters, and videos. It is considered one of the most successful of CUP's projects because it achieved many of the organizational goals: it increased capacity of people as citizens both for the collaborators, in the process of investigation, and for a broader audience, in the final product; it took something that was otherwise boring and inaccessible and with the skills of artists, designers and collaborators made it something interesting; and it produced something that is now of use to an advocate as a communication and educational tool (Woo, 2007).

The Programmable City

An exhibition at the Storefront for Art & Architecture, Programmable City was series of works on the regulation and construction of the built environment. This exhibition targeted designers, planners and architects as collaborators and as the audience. It featured a broad interpretation on the regulations around the built form and how it influences what can happen in the city. The exhibition included everything from sidewalk regulations to plexiglass models depicting the effects of the evolution of building codes on built form.

People and Buildings

CUP also initiates a series of monthly public lectures that provide a venue for different community members to present, discuss and "cross-pollinate ideas" on an urban spaces.

"Most people think they should know about something but don't. What works for high school students breaks it down to a level that is also communicating with adults"

Local leaders in urban pedagogy!

The Center for Urban Pedagogy is an incredible example of educating people about the cities in which they live and their role as citizens. However, this model is not only available in centres such as New York. As with most things that take place in larger urban settings, there is generally a local example that is similar, although perhaps at a slightly different scale.

Art City is a community art centre that offers high quality, free-of-charge art programming to all who wish to express themselves creatively. Art City is dedicated to advancing community art practice and inspiring a culture of creativity and imagination. In addition to the quality art programming, Art City also provides a safe place for youth, teens, and adults to express themselves through art, while at the same time imparting artistic skills and fostering positive relationships in a supportive environment. Since Art City opened in 1998, it has become a nationally recognized, precedent-setting art centre and hub of creative activity in the inner city of Winnipeg.

Though the daily programming at Art City is structured for the creation of art for arts sake, the objectives of the organization encompass a much larger scope. Art City understands the importance of engaging and supporting the local community in projects that both encourage artistic practice and build collective community capacity. This requires extensive work upfront to ensure that the programming reflects the interests and needs within the community. It also demands that Art City works closely with other community-based organizations, youth serving agencies, and local businesses within the West Broadway community and throughout the inner city of Winnipeg.

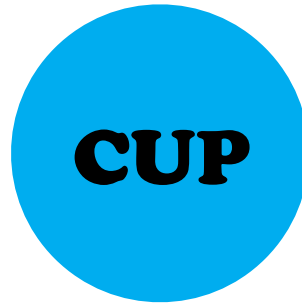
Two recent Art City projects have a direct connection between making art and building on the principles of urban pedagogy. The goal of the Where I Live project was to learn about community geography and history, and contribute to neighbourhood beautification and stewardship. Through a series of art workshops participants analyzed the character of the community through drawing, painting, textile maps, video, weaving materials found during a neighbourhood clean-up, and a mural. The other project is titled Me, We, Everybody. The objective of this initiative is to focus on the principles of diversity, inclusion and understanding through a number of art projects completed over the coming year.

Art City may not be within what some would consider the realm of 'traditional planning'. However, it is definitely contributing to the frontier of planning theory and local planning pedagogy. Through ongoing community engagement, building inter-agency connections, creating dialogue, viewing cities in different ways, and creating new and artistic urban narratives, Art City plays a significant role in the development and evolution.

How can you get involved in urban pedagogy?

It's easy. The next time you engage the public in any sort of participatory planning process, listen to what people don't know. Ask yourself how you can begin to increase awareness around that issue. Find people who are interested in raising public awareness (educators, community advocates, and other planning practitioners) and create learning tools. Start the investigative process rolling by asking questions. Look to local creative organizations for support, for guidance or to participate. Remember to be naively inquisitive, make it simple so that everyone can understand, use your imagination and have fun in the process

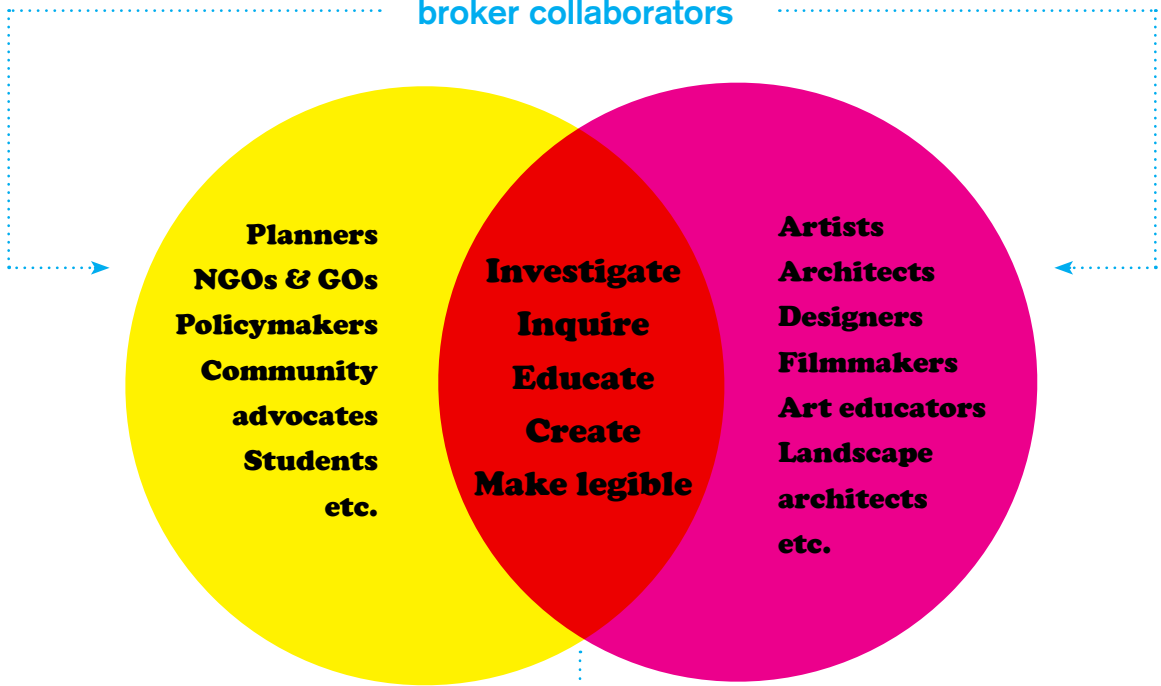
**Facilitating
Urban
Pedagogy**



◀ . . . **You
are
here!**

initiate project
preliminary investigation
acquire funding
broker collaborators

.....▶ Sometimes initiated by
an external organization



CUP▶ broker project actualization
send out press release
generate audience

.....▶ Includes managing & funding
production, raising public
awareness, etc.



What you can do to facilitate urban pedagogy

- * Encourage investigation
- * Facilitate collaborations between different sets of actors.
- * Explore various communication tools
- * Encourage imagination and creativity
- * Ask all sorts of experts
- * Make it public (extend the debate outside the usual circle of players!)

Are there other people that do this kind of work?

www.wimby.nl/index.php?newlang=en
www.projectrowhouse.org
www.hesterstreet.org
<http://solar1.org/education>
www.generalpublicagency.com

What are some Winnipeg organizations that might support this sort of activity?

www.artcityinc.com
www.mawa.ca
www.graffitigallery.ca
www.cedawpg.org
Welcome Place, 195 Carlton Ave.

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