

Share-it Square

Intended change:

1. Building community relationships by fostering communication, sharing and collaboration;
2. Providing a gathering place and a neighbourhood forum;
3. Enhancing safety and liveability through traffic calming and beautification.

Placemaking Strategy: tactical urbanism [unsanctioned]

Tactics for placemaking:

- Community building through events
- Political activism
- Visible presence in an unexpected place (painting an intervention / share-it)

Scale: street, block

Location: Intersection - SE 9th Ave & Sherrett St, Portland, Oregon USA

Placemaking Actors: Neighbors (including the initiator, Mark Lakeman, an architect and urban designer); City transport authority (Portland Bureau of Transportation); former Councilperson and Commissioner of Transportation (Charlie Hales); Mayor (Vera Katz); City Council

Design response: (Tangible outcome).

This creative expression was influenced by the placemaking movement and permaculture. The intersection was painted with four trees, the Tree of Life and its four seasons to represent the natural environment. The directions of the intersection were symbolised with different paintings of animals, a dandelion and even a dinosaur being helped by superman. The different symbols painted into the intersection represented the different cultures present in the community. There is also a mini library (book station) in the corner where people share and exchange books. The intervention provided a new narrative of the space as 'commons'.



Output

Intersection painted by the community

Outcome (Relationships built)

Social cohesion: enhanced shared childcare; more adults interacting with kids on the street" [2]

Ongoing social gatherings including marriages and birthday celebrationsX

Legacy

Continued evolution of the space: people building saunas, installing gardens and painting each other's houses. [2]

Clear governance process to coordinate further permits for street painting projects.

Foundation of City Repair, by Mark Lakeman. A volunteer-run non-profit that facilitates artistic and ecologically oriented placemaking, creating public gathering spaces and facilitating creative placemaking.

Annual Village Building Convergences celebrating and planning intersection interventions along with other placemaking initiatives [5].

Multiple Awards: 1997 Citation Award; 1997 People's Choice Award from the Portland Chapter of the American Institute of Architects; 1999 Governor's Livability Award from Oregon Governor Kitzhaber and the Oregon Livability Award.

Implementing Placemaking Strategy:

The project was a community-initiated and community-built placemaking exercise that took place in 1996. It sprung out of a conversation between Mark Lakeman and “a bunch of children of [social] activists of the 60s and 70s” [1] who wanted to bring back the sort of outdoor public gathering places that exist in traditional villages but were missing in cities and neighbourhoods. With the limited resources available, they started with a community tea house built out of recycled materials for about \$65. The tea house operated every Monday night where neighbours would socialize over desserts and tea they brought to share. Attendance quickly scaled, from 25 people in the first week to 35 in the next, to upwards of 500 so that people were overflowing into adjacent yards and into the intersection. Lakeman describes these hundreds of homes as “landlocked houses, defined by busy streets, no parks or public squares there, except for that little tea house”. [1]

City official became aware of the tea house and ordered it to be demolished for failing to comply with city codes. Neighbours banded together and called the Portland Department of Transportation asking to present a proposal they thought could have a restorative effect on the neighbourhood, improve livability and slow traffic. They were refused, with one city official notoriously saying, “And besides, it’s public space, so no one can use it.”

Neighbours – from kids to grandmothers – then came together over a weekend and, without permission, painted a mural on the street and built little structures in adjacent yards: “a place for neighborhood news, a rebuilt 24-hour [now solar] tea station, a family-sized bench, a kid’s clubhouse, a place for art and poetry, ... a stage, and a little library” [1] – using paint and plywood people had in their garages, along with driftwood gathered by the neighbourhood kids and their families from the beach. Lakeman noted that, at one point during the painting, a police officer (“Ed”) stopped by the intersection, got out of his car, looked around, and just said “I ain’t touching this”. Apparently, Ed never reported them. Lakeman noted that they’d befriended Ed over the teahouse, and he commented, “of course your friend isn’t going to crack your skull for painting circles on the street” [1].

When transportation officials found out about the street mural, they threatened to sandblast it off the street, prompting Mayor Vera Katz and the City Council to intervene. [3] The mayor recognized that the project was successful at both calming traffic and building community, as well as being aligned to the city’s goals around livability, sustainability, walkability and safer streets [2]. Transportation officials, inclined not to be risk-takers or approve projects outside their usual remit, became more supportive after the elected officials and a former Councilmember and Commissioner of Transportation (Charlie Hales) gave their blessings. [3] The city later passed an ordinance allowing people to do “intersection repairs” throughout the neighbourhoods of Portland.

References:

[1] Transcript of full interview with Mark Lakeman for *First Earth: Uncompromising Ecological Architecture*, 2009, documentary directed by David Sheen, <http://www.davidsheen.com/firstearth/interviews/lakeman.htm>.

[2] Brook Jarvis, “Building the World We Want: Interview with Mark Lakeman”, *Yes! magazine*, 12 May 2010, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness/building-the-world-we-want-interview-with-mark-lakeman>.

[3] Sarah Kavage, “Governance: Reclaiming the Grid: Portland’s City Repair”, *The Next American City*, Issue 3,

October 2003,

https://web.archive.org/web/20080101050954/http://americancity.org/article.php?id_article=64.

[4] Alyse Nelson and Tim Shuck, “City Repair Project Case Study”, student project for 2005 Design Activism subject, University of Washington, Seattle, <http://courses.washington.edu/activism/students.htm>

[5] <https://villagebuildingconvergence.com/>

[6] www.cityrepair.org

[7] www.facebook.com/pages/Share-It-Square/243684742339494