SPACES AND VALUES

Thoughts from Sustainable Creative Communities
Burning Man convening at Esalen, October 2016

COLLABORATORS

Leiasa Beckham, Sam Bloch, Christopher Breedlove, Kim Cook, A. Dara Dotz, Harley K. Dubois, Heather Gallagher, Marian Goodell, Peter Hirshberg, David Koren, Josette Melchor, Jon Sarriugarte, Jenn Sander, Neel Sharma, Matt Schultz, Neil Takemoto, Heather White, Mike Zuckerman

INTRODUCTION

It's time to think big about socially conscious real estate development. Our creative culture has grown to a point where we are now a broad constellation of organizations, entities, and movements that share similar values. At the same time, our values (broadly based on participation and inclusion) have been tested by recent events, including the 2016 election and Ghost Ship fire in Oakland and its aftermath. It is a time when we need to work together to better articulate our values, develop plans for how to advance the causes we care about, and reach out to and communicate with those who may not understand or be aligned with our movement of movements.

Those of us who are starting this conversation met at Esalen in October 2016, convened by the Burning Man organization at a Symposium on Sustainable Creative Communities. We are a group of professionals working in real estate, community empowerment, and urban rejuvenation who have taken the initiative to propose a framework for how our movement can expand from this point forward. We expect to add many others to this conversation.

THE PROBLEM

We are living in a challenging time for those working in artistic or creative areas. Resources are scarce and tough to access, and the idea of abundance can feel remote and out of reach. With an increasing distance in the United States between those of significant means and those who are struggling to make their way in the world, it can appear impossible to achieve an environment in which stability and success are attainable. In addition, the fundamentals of running an arts-oriented not-for-profit or creative business are extremely challenging, and seem to become more challenging all the time, as costs nearly inevitably increase faster than income.

However, at the same time, on a global basis, more people than ever (roughly 3.2 billion) are now online and have more agency than ever before. Global poverty has been reduced dramatically in recent years, with the rate of poverty now lower than 10% for the first time in world history. It is clear that conditions can seem hopeful or bleak depending on the frame that we apply: things are paradoxically both getting better (more equal) and getting worse (less equal) all the time, depending on how we look at it.

We believe profoundly in a world in which everyone has equal access to resources and equal ability to chart their own destiny. As professionals working in community planning and real estate, we view space as an important tool in creating change. Our spaces and places are a reflection of our values, and the way that we utilize the built environment to the benefit of our communities. This reinforces, extends, and communicates our values within our communities and to outsiders.

One of the key challenges that we've found in moving the conversation forward is mindset. We see a predisposition in creative communities towards thinking along the lines of learned helplessness. This mindset can manifest itself as "collective defeatism" and resistance to change. Reinforced by a position of scarcity, it can be difficult to refocus and imagine oneself as sitting at the center of opportunity. We would like to see our culture move to a collective optimism and "prosperity consciousness." We have to move in this direction, and fight to expand our conception of what is possible, in order to create change in the mindset of our community members and as a result in the physical environment. Here's a brief outline of how we see the aspects of these two mindsets.

Scarcity Mindset		**Prosperity Mindset**
Fear of outsiders		Hospitable to outsiders
Resistance to change		Embraces change and leverages it for their own benefit
Belief that it's all been tried before and nothing new is going to work		Optimism in the face of uncertainty
Sense of being a victim of circumstances and outside forces		Planning for success in preparation of opportunity
Challenge in defining a collective problem		Building a platform to receive prosperity
No ownership of land		Collective ownership of land
No equity		Shared equity

THE SOLUTION

We believe that the solution to material challenges begins with the articulation of shared values among and between our communities in order to change the prevailing mindset, expand the sense of what is possible, and lay the groundwork for material change.

We define our shared values as the following:

- **INCLUSION** - We reach out and proactively invite a diverse spectrum of participants to join our broad movement of movements. Everyone is welcome.

- **PARTICIPATION** - Every human being has something to contribute, and that everyone should be encouraged to participate and be heard. The invitation to participate should be active and intentional, and it is important to be culturally sensitive with the invitation.

- **EQUITY** - We believe and work for a world in which everyone is provided an opportunity to be an owner, a true stakeholder in our society. We need to provide creative approaches to ownership in order to increase participation in shared equity.

- **CREATIVITY** - We believe that people are fundamentally, intrinsically creative, and we work for a world in which everyone is encouraged to create and share.

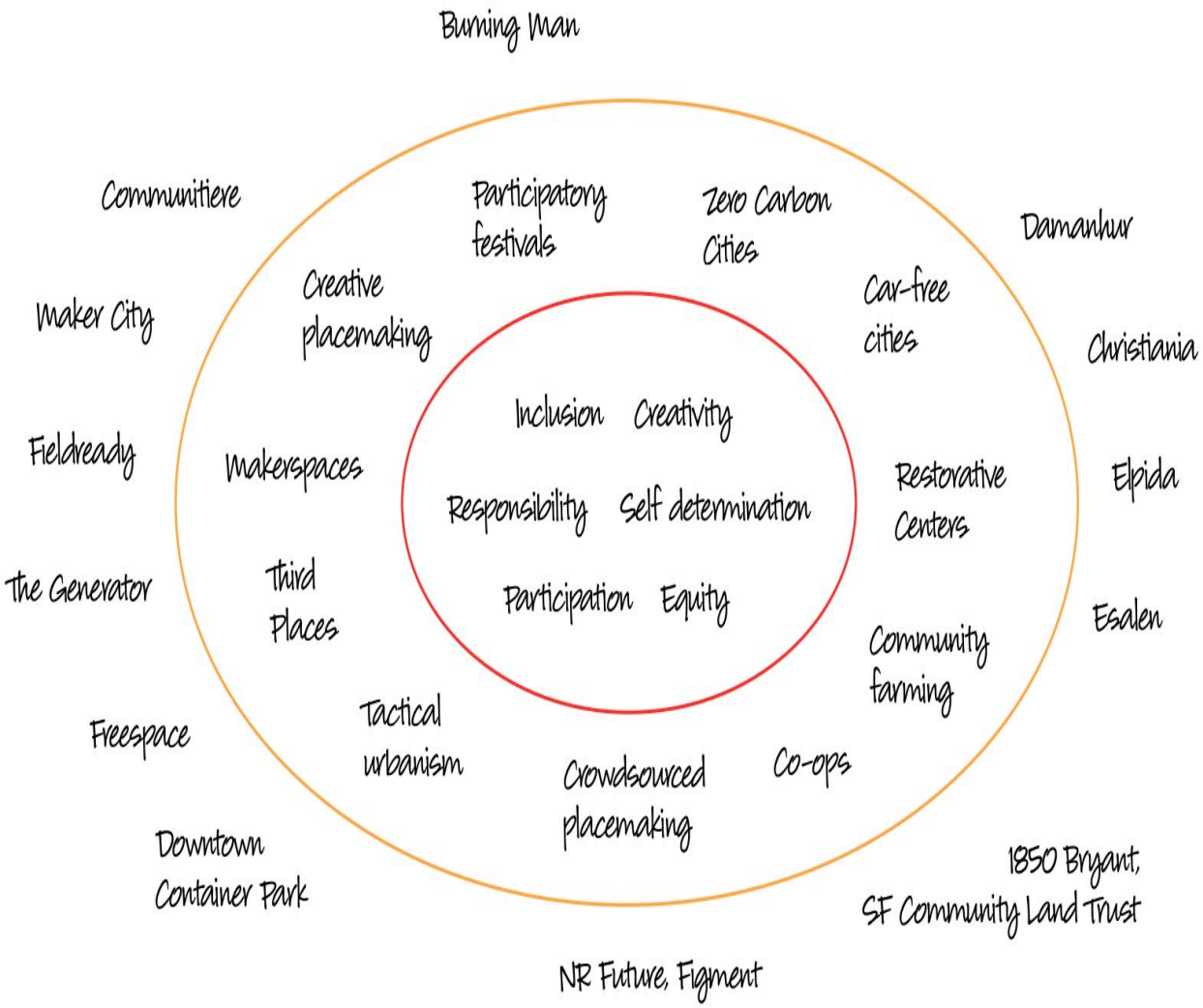
- **SELF-DETERMINATION** - Important collective decisions are made by people who work together to determine their own shared destiny.

- **RESPONSIBILITY** - Those in leadership roles need to take responsibility for others, and to create and hold a safe space in which they can live, work, and create.

Under these values, we propose to develop a broad consortium of allied partnering organizations working in the arts, real estate, community development, and related areas who will work together to create a more inclusive, more equitable, and more creative society. While we originally came together under the auspices of Burning Man, many of us have been working in this arena for decades and acknowledge that Burning Man is one node in a broader constellation of allied organizations.

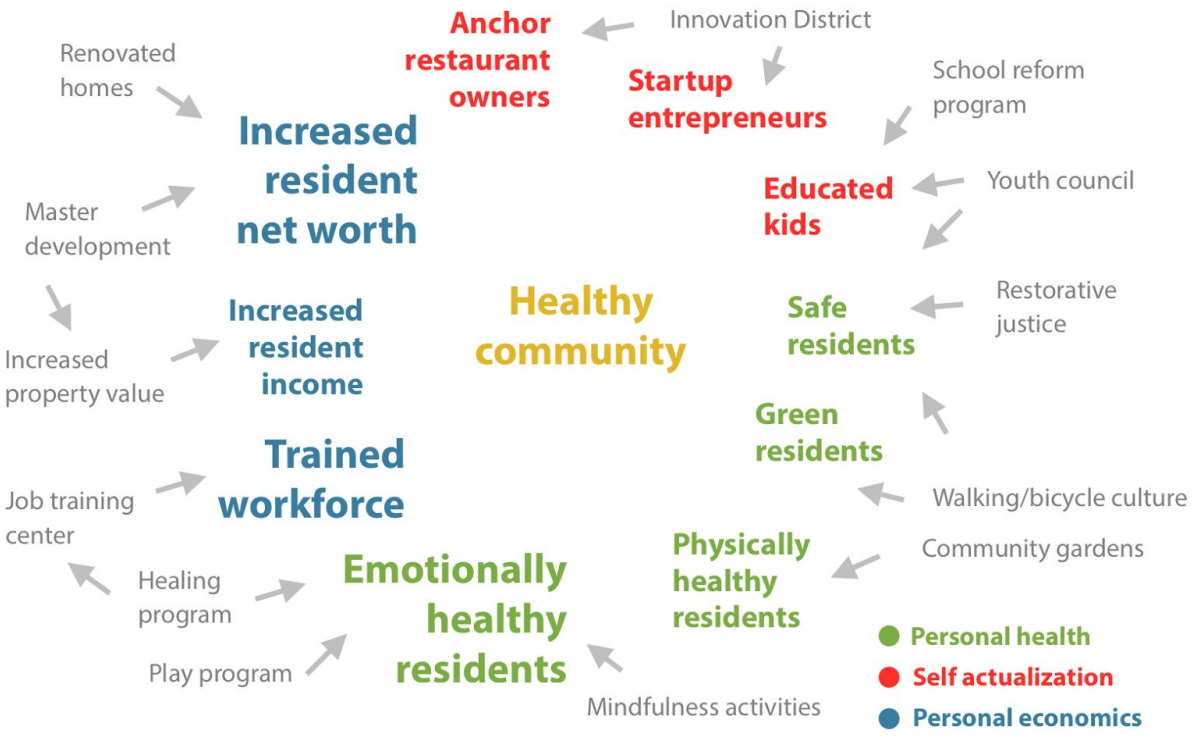
This broad alliance can then collaborate to share resources, convene gatherings, and approach funding sources in concert to achieve significant societal impact in fostering and promoting these values, the change in mindset that must be affected, and the material changes in how resources are allocated in our world. This is not theoretical; this is real. We know and have seen that, when these values are in place, cities and communities flourish. At a time of rapid societal change, creative spaces are where learning and incubation happen, and where our culture is nurtured, developed, and shared. And yet artists and creatives, while typically a key driver of development and urban revitalization, do not typically participate in its upside.

We imagine a future state in which the spaces that we create and manage are themselves active carriers and proponents of our shared values, where they aren't simply "owned" by a landlord and leased to a tenant, but where the spaces are supported by a broad network of citizen and organizational stakeholders for the benefit of everyone. But working toward this state requires that we first develop our coalition and then move forward with intention to develop our vision further and identify specific actions to move us closer.



Appendix

One of a set of recommended readings is this article on collective impact: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/**collective_impact.** That provides an excellent framework for how conscious real estate development can be leveraged to bring collective impact, collective positive change to a community, which is how the conversation between David Koren, Leiasa Beckham and Neil Takemoto at Esalen 2016 led to the first draft of this paper. Below are three diagrams that begin to illustrate some (not all) of the collective problems, solutions and benefits that a collective impact approach in real estate development can address.

Solution: Collective Impact

Solution: Beneficiary Benefits