

artist. Our participants' design has a collaborative rhythm, in which each piece intertwines together.

We also realized that we need some level of design skills to produce the plan that contains various senses of values. That is, to find elements of excellent designs made by people, to lead people in sharing the aesthetic senses, and to find an answer that allows various aesthetic values to exist together.

For example, among the design group for the mural on the building, while some residents wanted to draw in bright colors, others preferred quiet tones. As a compromise, both bright and quite colored parts were arranged within the mural. Also when the corridor group was drawing the collage by trial and error, features of each plan had to be respected while deciding the design.

DIFFICULTY OF CONTINUAL IMPLEMENTATION

Originally, this project did not start with full approval from Izumi no Ie. In order to implement a successful community design process within a social welfare facility that is run under its existing operations and structure, it is imperative that we have facility staff who share the same passion to change the situation of the facility. Our art project was realized thanks to the support from some members of the staff. But there is always the risk of termination if the facility's position changes. If those staff cannot stand by our side due to any internal reasons, it would be very difficult to work in the facility. Between the first and second terms, we had this particular problem ourselves, but we managed to resume the project, as a result of intense discussions with the staff of Izumi no Ie. This problem will be inherent in such a project that tries to change the existing values and system, which we will continue to face in the future.

CONCLUSION

Community designers can choose from various communication styles. When we select the most open group process without fear of risks, people start to express themselves. When we put the act of design into the hands of the people, we can create designs that allow each aesthetic sense of the people to intertwine together.

It would be too soon to say that Izumi no Ie has changed in only the eight months of our project period. We learned the difficulty of sustaining our collaborative project within an institution run by its own existing system and structure. But this project convinced us that the people, who have been isolated from society for a long time, can regain their own expression and enjoy the creation of new space through adequate community design processes.

INVOLVING COMMUNITY IN THE CREATION OF GATHERING PLACES

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ABSTRACT

The Community Gathering Places program helps realize a vision of healthy and vibrant communities where people take responsibility for creating meaningful, art-filled environments that foster respect and safety among neighbors, nurture young people, integrate beauty and encourage citizenship.

INTRODUCTION

Since it incorporated in 1986, Pomegranate Center experimented with moving art out of the conventional "art" environment of studios, galleries and museums and into the street, the workplace, and the market square. We wanted to demonstrate how artists can work outside the narrowly defined world of art and actively involve ourselves in building better communities. From the beginning, Pomegranate Center has dedicated itself to linking art with social and environmental issues. We strive to connect justice with beauty—concepts that often exist in parallel universes. When we bring them together, the result is greater social vitality.

Pomegranate Center has committed itself to link concerns and disciplines that often exist in separate mindsets. We believe that the complex problems facing contemporary communities can not be solved from any single perspective. Economy, environment, education, the arts, urban design, civic involvement, ethics—these must function together in a coherent system. To promote one interest category at the expense of the others is to do little more than move a problem, and its pain, to a different part of the community. The question is not whether economics is more important than the environment, or education more than the arts, etc. They are all important. The challenge is see their interrelationship and get them working together.

Pomegranate Center's philosophy has been founded on the conviction that the real potential of a community lies in the spaces between interests, disciplines and ideologies. Creation of physical gathering places emerged as a specific and concrete strategy to practice this more holistic philosophy.

WHAT IS A GATHERING PLACE?

A gathering place is a space for the entire community—what used to be called the commons. It usually occupies an

important central location. It is designed to accommodate private and quiet enjoyment for individuals, small gatherings, and community celebrations. Its purpose is to serve all people, from toddlers to old-timers, and everyone in between. For these reasons gathering places must accommodate a spectrum of features: seating in quiet places for reading books or eating lunch, tables for card games or chess, a tot-lot with an adjacent shelter where parents can visit and supervise, as well as an amphitheatre for performances, weddings, and other forms of community events. Gathering places work best when surrounded by stores, coffee houses, restaurants, bus stops, banks, or schools. The more reasons people have to visit a gathering space, the more successful it becomes.

THE NEED

Our work responds to the steady decline of community life we have experienced over the last half century. Because of the rapid change in our society, modern communities are faced with a range of complex issues including sprawl, traffic congestion, environmental degradation, loss of pride and civic identity, and decreased participation in the kind of activities that increase local vitality. Many people have come to feel that the democratic concept of community itself is no longer useful, and that individuals must fend for themselves by exploiting personal advantage. Where it exists this condition has created a society of people confused about their responsibilities as neighbors and citizens. This leads to social fragmentation, ideological polarization, and the inability for the individual to see one's place in the larger world. This creeping ghettoization may one day have us all living in gated communities where the need to engage with the differences of others has been erased from our lives and the lives of our children. To us, this dark scenario cries out for alternatives. A healthy community attempts to turn diverse points of view into gifts that give rise to mutually beneficial cultural and economic relationships. These differences give a community local character and flavor—an identity that builds a sense of belonging and pride.

We recognize that the physical environments of our cities, towns and neighborhoods reflect our psychology and that to find creative solutions we must map both our material and mental landscapes. Well-designed places encourage participation, trust, and a sense of safety. They help us feel at home in the neighborhood. Poorly designed places, conversely, promote isolation, fear of neighbors, and social dis-ease. At Pomegranate Center we work to influence the way our society thinks about communities by connecting the outer and inner realities. Our work, therefore, is both practical and educational. It bridges the hands-on construction of gathering places and public artworks with the ongoing exploration of ideas that make communities healthful and neighbors responsible.

WORKING PHILOSOPHY

- Art belongs in everyday life.
- A community's physical design shapes social and civic behavior.
- Successful gathering places rise from the setting—nature and culture determine their shape and character
- Densities must increase to prevent further sprawl. As they do, gathering places serve an essential purpose as “community living rooms.” They serve as incubators of community life.
- Through inclusive, decisive, honest, grass roots involvement differences between people become gifts.
- Involvement increases pride, ownership and stewardship.
- Community problems can be solved only by crossing professional, ideological, cultural and political boundaries.
- Human beings are a part of the natural environment and not apart from it. We should treat nature as we wish to be treated.
- Something gratifying can always be done right now on behalf of longer range ideas and visions.
- A sense of humor is a survival tool.
- An “early success” project is vital in generating ongoing community participation and support.

We at Pomegranate Center believe that well designed, livable cities preserve open land by encouraging people to live in town. Suburban sprawl creates environmental impact far beyond merely the land occupied by homes and businesses. We are reaching the point at which these impacts destroy the very amenities that people seek in suburban living. In response, communities are beginning to encourage—and, in some cases, mandate—higher density development. Amenities such as gathering places are one of the keys to making increased densities work.

POMEGRANATE CENTER SEVEN-FOLD MODEL

Pomegranate Center's Gathering Places model has seven aspects, each aspect representing an important goal. Our aim is that each project solves more than one problem at the same time. We've been testing this model in many diverse settings since 1991. Hardly any of our projects embodies all aspects of the model. Still, in each project we try to implement as many aspects of this model as is possible.



Figure 1. Design Workshop, Terrace Hill, Redmond, WA.

1. Full involvement of community members in all phases of the process, from conception through construction and stewardship.

No one understands a place like its own residents. Before the design phase begins, we listen to the community's needs and desires and discuss what a gathering place should look like, its use, and its values. This process, and the information it generates, forms the foundation for the project: not only does it provide the vision, but in the process we learn about the talent that resides among the community members: some are good craftspeople or know construction, others have design ideas or know of a source of materials we can use, and others still want to prepare food for the work parties. The design takes into account all these factors. Once we have finalized the design, we invite the community—old and young—to participate in the construction phase. When the project is built, we work with the community to develop events that make use of the gathering place and organize an adopt-the-gathering-place group for clean-ups and basic maintenance. We also encourage the entire community to regroup for annual upgrading of the gathering place.

This participatory process offers an extraordinary opportunity to explore important lessons of citizenship and democratic



Figure 2. Friendship Park, Vladivostok, Russia.

principles, helping people become better prepared for responsible and constructive involvement in society. This is especially relevant because we often do projects with many recent immigrants from countries with little or no participatory experience. Our process provides excellent opportunities for learning teamwork and leadership skills. Indirectly, participants can learn the importance of a democracy: the power of a commonly-shared vision; increased communication, crossing traditional cultural and ethnic lines; marketable skills in construction, arts, and crafts; valued ideas that directly influence and shape the created result. As often as we can we involve youth. For example, we involved over thirty children peeling wood logs that were used to construct mail-box shelters, tables and benches, street lights and a kiosk at Springwood Apartments in Kent, WA. Some of the children were born in Ukraine and were taught this skill during their upbringing. These young people turned into leaders, teaching adults what they knew. We've seen similar emergence of unexpected leadership in many projects.

2. Site-responsive design.

Design must arise from the land, and we try to design gathering places so they appear as if they have always been there. To achieve this timeless quality, we try to acquire the knowledge of the site. Prior to designing, we study the site:

- Where does the sun rise and set? How does the sun move across the sky during the seasons?
- Where do we find summer shade or a warm spot in the winter?
- What landmarks should not be touched: special rocks, trees and other plants, animal trails, etc.
- What materials could be used in the design?
- How do animals (if any) live in this space?
- How does the wind move?
- Does any noise reach the site?
- Where does water drain?
- What are the site's textures—colors, plants, earth forms, human creations?

We discourage any design work until these questions are answered.

3. Continuous process.

We try to compact the entire process into as short a period as is possible under different conditions. The goal is to compress the process so that people who work with us can see their ideas taking shape. This is hard to accomplish in existing systems where the regulations make processes very long

and convoluted, so much so that those who participate at the early stage rarely have endurance to see it through to the end. We've been involved with projects in Mexico, Russia and China where the entire project was designed and constructed in 10 days to 5 weeks. In our model, the same core group of leaders is involved from the initial concept, through design and construction, to eventual programming of the gathering place as well as its stewardship and maintenance. This provides for continuity and a well-earned pride and ownership.

4. Generous use of hand-made elements that bring art, character and uniqueness into an increasingly prefabricated world.

Our projects are filled with details that celebrate human history and the environment. We take into account volunteers who may have little or no artistic or construction experience. Our designs lean toward organic forms. This is in part the result of artistic sensibility. In part it is because it is easier for volunteers to participate in the creation of such forms. In a straight wall, every misplaced stone or brick would show. In a curved wall, on the other hand, mistakes become a part of a character—an expression of the creative force of various people and their sensibilities.

Before there were architects and planners, people were quite capable of building villages and towns that are full of visual mastery, anchored in the knowledge of the place, and extremely smart in the use of local materials. There should be a place in contemporary life for such common sense creations, and we think that community gathering places offer a way to practice everyday art.

5. Design for all generations and many purposes.

A gathering places should be designed with quiet spots for contemplation, areas for play, places for encounters with friends, and areas such as amphitheatres for performances and celebrations. They should be designed for children eager to run and explore, and there should be warm spots where seniors can people watch.

Gathering place is where social encounters happen freely and unexpectedly, contributing to a stronger sense of community,

Figure 3. Strawbale wall at Esperanza Gathering Place, Mattawa, WA.



better relations among neighbors, reduced vandalism and crime, increased safety for children, renewed volunteerism and stewardship, and more everyday beauty.

6. Use of environmentally sustainable practices.

As often as possible, we use salvaged materials from the site or reuse of vintage or environment-friendly materials. We used straw-bale construction, shelters made of small diameter timber that currently have little commercial use, walls using rocks found at the site or salvaged copper, cobblestones and bricks, green roofs, etc. We try to use non-toxic stains and paints.

7. Sacred space.

Medieval cathedrals were ambitious undertakings that involved the entire community in creating a lasting monument of their common faith. Now, in our time, such singular expression does not fit our modern diverse world. However, people need a place



Figure 4. Friendship Park, San Diego, CA.

where the sacred can exist, and gathering places have the potential of creating a metaphor for common life and replicate, in a much humbler way, the cathedral-building experience. In 1994, James Hubbell and I led a team of Russian, American and Mexican architecture students in the creation of the Pearl Amphitheater in Vladivostok, Russia. During the initial week, one of the Russian students mentioned that it was strange to be in the same room with Americans, people portrayed as their enemies. Another student suggested that our proposed park's design should address this historic tension. Then another student suggested that we should design how this tension can be resolved. Yes, said another, we should think of a pearl that starts with irritation and ends in something beautiful. This conversation created a spiritual base that led to the eventual design of the gathering place.



Figure 5. Volunteers stain kiosk at Pickering Farm Community Teaching Garden, Issaquah, WA.

TRACK RECORD

Since its inception, Pomegranate Center has used its skills in service to many diverse projects:

- Eleven gathering places;
- Three friendship parks in far-east Russia, China, and the United States;
- Several community-based plans for parks, trails, and other amenities;
- Numerous public art projects;



Figure 6. Kelkari Amphitheater, Issaquah, WA.



Figure 7. Terrace Hill bus shelter, Redmond, WA.



Figure 8. Salishan Gathering Place, Tacoma, WA.

- Advising municipalities, developers and communities how to integrate social, environmental and design issues (including Chattanooga, Tennessee; Kamenice, Czech Republic; Guan Han, China; Pattonsburg, Virginia; Issaquah, WA; Buriem, WA; Calgary, Canada; Ottawa, Canada, etc.)
- Three performing art festivals and live performance series (over 50 performances);
- Four curriculum programs linking youth with community;
- A creek day-lighting project;
- A teaching garden demonstrating environmentally sound practices;
- Interdisciplinary design workshops focused on sustainable design;
- Numerous lectures and workshops instructing others about Pomegranate Center's philosophy and community-building methods
- Publications (Watershed Waltz; Evergreen Builders' Guide) and various articles

PROCESS

Every project is different. The following outline is to serve only as an indicator for how the process may work. Depending on the situation, proposed steps may be changed, eliminated or added.

Step 1: Project Committee Formation

Assemble a group of dedicated, diverse, and positive individuals to facilitate the project.

Step 2: Project Committee Ground Work

Team members set basic ground rules, attend training workshop, review the neighborhood data—population trends, demographics, etc., acquire baseline neighborhood information, review and refine project timeline, research and form outreach partnerships, and fine tune the project plan.

Step 3: Outreach

Neighborhood Workshop I: engage as many neighbors as possible to identify what assets already exist, identify future needs, and create a menu of ideas for improvements.

Step 4: Initial concepts

Internal Pomegranate Center workshop I: develop design concepts based on the Neighborhood Workshop I ideas.

Step 5: Neighborhood Approval

Neighborhood Workshop II: review, critique and approve design concepts

Step 6: Develop project timeline, budget, outreach materials

Step 7: Finalize design

Internal Pomegranate Center workshop II: develop specific designs; secure permits (if needed)

Step 8: Neighborhood celebration:

Share the project to involve more people

Step 9: Secure support:

Grants, donations, corporate support, in-kind support of materials, volunteer pledges, equipment, tools, and skills

Step 10: Fabrication and construction:

A series of participatory hands-on workshops

Step 11: Develop stewardship strategies:

Examples: Adopt a park, regular events, etc.

Step 12: Grand celebration:

Opening ceremony, recognition, plaques galore, etc.

Step 13: Improved Practices

The Committee assembles project evaluations from all involved, conducts a reflection workshop to extract lessons learned, writes an improved practice summary, develops a report and conducts a post-project survey.