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Community-Driven Place Making

The Social Practice of Participatory Design in the Making of Union Point Park

In neighborhoods throughout major American cities, grassroots efforts in community revitalization are reshaping the public processes and institutional framework involving the design and development of public space. Treating the public realm as both a physical space and an expression of relationships between multiple institutions, organizations, and individuals, this study examines the social and political epistemologies and processes behind the creation of a waterfront park in Oakland, California. It also presents a framework of community-driven practice in the making of the public realm, based on converging theories of social movements and planning and a critique of the current participatory design model.

Introduction

In the recent history of American cities, no other actors have claimed more growth and influence than community-based organizations. In urban neighborhoods throughout major U.S. cities, community organizations in the form of community development corporations (CDCs) have been an important grassroots force in revitalizing local communities against conditions of economic and social decline. From assuming an advocacy role in the 1960s to adopting a focus on low-income housing development in the following decades, many CDCs have expanded their role to the improvement and creation of public spaces in the last forty years. These place-making efforts have served as catalysts to social and economic revitalization in disadvantaged communities. Armed with grassroots networks, political capital, and financial and technical know-how, these groups no longer operate solely in modes of protest and resistance. Instead, they have become important players in transforming physical and social spaces in the interests of communities and neighborhoods. The active construction of place by these civil society groups has defied the increasing privatization of the public sphere and the model of government-sponsored public work proj-

ects based on set criteria and procedures. The rising influence of nonprofit organizations and the growing practice of community-driven place making signals a need to reexamine the practice of community planning and design and the role of civil society forces in the making of the public realm.

This article examines the community-driven construction of the public realm in the case of Union Point Park, a nine-acre waterfront park proposed for a former industrial site in the Fruitvale district of Oakland, California. The development of the park was initiated by the Unity Council, a local CDC that has undertaken dozens of projects in developing a comprehensive strategy of community revitalization in Fruitvale. Based on participant observations, we look at the multiple layers of actions undertaken by the Unity Council in the development of the park.¹ Using the extended case method, this study draws on converging theories of social movements and group processes in planning to develop a framework of mobilization, discourse building, and political crafting in examining the creation of Union Point Park.² In analyzing the social mobilization in the creation of the park, we look at how the Unity Council developed its grassroots networks in a multi-ethnic community to sup-

port the initiative. We also examine how it mobilized a wide range of actors across public, nonprofit, and private sectors to participate in the planning and design of the park.³ In examining how discourse building is linked to the park's conceptualization, this study assesses how the Unity Council purposefully framed its objectives and justified the creation of a major open space in the community. In particular, we examine how the Unity Council, along with other actors involved in the planning and design process, facilitated the construction of place identity for an area in a waterfront industrial district. In terms of political crafting, this study examines how the Unity Council managed to seize critical political opportunities and negotiated between competing interests to realize the project. By focusing on the broader social and political making of a community-initiated project, we provide a critique of the limitations of predominant participatory design approaches that focus narrowly on the binary interaction between designers and users. Based on the case of Union Point Park, we argue for a community-driven practice that explicitly incorporates the understanding of mobilization, discourse building, and political crafting in the making of the public realm.

Reconstructing the Public Realm: Civil Society and Grassroots Urban Politics

In examining grassroots urban politics and the making of the public realm in American cities, it is important to begin with an understanding of the restructuring of state/society relationships in the United States. In neighborhoods throughout American cities, the proliferation of community-based social service organizations and the formation of issue-based coalitions and public/private partnerships signal a shift away from government as the source of public goods. Instead, the public realm is shaped by “governance” of different organizations and agencies from the public, nonprofit, and private sectors.⁴ Cooperative alliances such as issue-based coalitions and public/private partnerships are increasingly popular and are characterized by the interpenetration of organizational actors from public agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and private corporations. Given continued state divestment and reallocation of resources, communities are developing both approaches that necessitate new relationships between different sectors and forms of decision making that are more collaborative and informal in nature. With the changing state/society relationships also comes a new form of urban politics and grassroots deliberativeness. To acquire resources for community development, grassroots groups articulate and organize around shared interests and engage in new identity formation. They also acquire technical expertise, either through organizational building or networking with outside groups. The move away from government control and predictable paths of problem definition, negotiation, and implementation also opens up divergent interpretations of social problems and the competition between different frames of understanding.⁵ These changing relationships and conditions reaffirm the understanding of city as both a physical space and an expression of social relations.⁶ This interdependent relationship between the state and civil society suggests a more fluid boundary

between the multiple sectors, which reflects how the public realm is accordingly conceptualized and constructed.

Fallacy of the Current Participatory Design Model

Public participation has been an important mechanism for local communities to influence the making of public space. Emerging from the civil rights movement as a response to the lack of public involvement in decision making, participatory planning and design has been the primary means for responding to community issues. Over the past forty years, a sophisticated repertoire of participation methods has been developed. Specific techniques of participatory design now include computer simulations, gaming exercises, design charrettes, visioning, and a host of feedback instruments, ranging from visual preference surveys to focus groups and citizen polling. In addition, consensus building, conflict resolution, and organizational participation have served as tools to combat problems associated with public process.⁷ Despite these positive developments, however, there is still room to ask: Is the current participatory design practice adequate in confronting the changing public process of place making?

Increasingly, many design professionals who utilize a participatory approach are expressing skepticism over the prevalent participatory design model. Randolph Hester, a prominent participatory practitioner, argues that participatory design and planning is so institutionalized and parochialized that it no longer meets many of its original goals.⁸ He further argues that, although community participation has become more mainstream in professional practice, it is more productive in defending exclusionary groups than in promoting the public good.⁹ Contrary to its original moral purpose, participation is often used to satisfy mandated requirements and is not intended to fully engage the community.¹⁰ As a result, public participation has become a highly bureaucratic and standardized process. This institu-

tionalization has resulted in narrowly defined boundaries and problems to avoid conflict and make channels of control clear. In addition, because many projects take a considerable time to be implemented, citizens often lose interest and commitment. Similarly, frustration grows when commitments to public priorities are not implemented due to cost overruns, backroom deal making, or de facto decision making.

These and other experiences raise fundamental concerns about public participation when narrow interests benefit from project outcomes and when it is unclear whose voice is being represented. The problems of participatory design reflect the limitations of the current model, one that emphasizes a “neutral” framework for decision making and that privileges rational discourse over conflict and difference.¹¹ By taking on an increasingly narrowed scope and by focusing primarily on the interaction between professionals and users, the dominant participatory model has overlooked the broader cultural, social, and political dynamics in the changing institutional framework and public processes. By adhering to procedural appropriateness rather than seeking opportunities outside given problems, the outcomes of participation have often become irrelevant in the face of social and political forces. Together, these inadequacies have greatly limited the effectiveness and legitimacy of participatory approaches and the role of design professionals in engaging with grassroots efforts.

Framework of Community-Driven Processes

The focus on broader community-driven processes in the construction of the public realm provides a critical perspective with which to transcend the binary relation between professionals and users and the limited model of participatory design. The recent converging theories of social movements and group processes in planning provide a useful framework for examining grassroots community actions.

In analyzing the emergence and development of social change, recent social movement theory has recognized three broad sets of factors: mobilization structure, political opportunity, and cultural framing.¹² *Mobilization structure* refers to the informal and formal vehicles through which people mobilize and engage in collective actions. The existence of networks, collectives, and related social movement organizations are important to resource mobilization, as are external resources, internal innovations, and social capital. Social movements are also shaped by a broad set of political constraints and opportunities that are unique to the given context in which they are embedded. The existence of *political opportunities* determines the degree to which groups are likely to be able to gain access to power and to manipulate the political system. Finally, *cultural framing* refers to the shared meanings and definitions that people bring to a situation or problem and that mediate between opportunities and organizations. In social movement theory, particular focus has been directed toward movement actors, the purposeful framing of problems and issues, and the construction of an identity around movement activities. The purpose of framing is to produce and maintain meanings for movement constituents, countermovement constituents, and society at large.¹³ Although isolated for the purpose of this discussion, mobilizing structures, cultural framing, and political opportunity are highly interactive and can be recognized as interrelated processes.¹⁴

Recent development in planning literature on group processes and consensus building parallels these comparative theories of social movements. Some researchers have argued that consensus building creates three types of shared capital among the participants: social, intellectual, and political.¹⁵ Social capital — in the form of trust, norms of behavior, and networks of communication — creates the potential for serious discussion to take place among otherwise conflicting stakeholders. Intellectual capital — in the form of agreed-upon facts, shared problem definitions, and mutual understand-

ings — not only provides a common basis for discussion and moves the players toward agreement on policy issues, but also allows them to use this shared information to coordinate many of their actions. Political capital, in the form of alliances and agreements on proposals that provide mutual gain, creates the possibility that proposals will be adopted and implemented.¹⁶

In treating the public realm as both a physical space and a set of social relationships, it is important to examine the multiple processes embedded in place making. This recent development in planning and social movement literature suggests an analytical framework for examining the community-driven processes in the making of the public realm, specifically in terms of how resources and social networks are mobilized, how issues and ideas are developed and framed, and how responses to political opportunities are crafted. In the following study, the framework of mobilization, discourse building, and political crafting is applied to the examination of the case of Union Point Park.

Case Study: Unity Council and Union Point Park

Community-based organizations have served as gatekeepers to many low-income communities. Established in 1964, the Unity Council (formerly Spanish Speaking Unity Council) is an example of such an organization. The Unity Council grew out of the Community Service Organization that was working throughout the southwestern United States and California to help create minority institutions and to develop greater degrees of political and economic power for low-income people.¹⁷ The focus of the Unity Council initially included housing development and the improvement of social services for many low-income Hispanics throughout the San Francisco Bay area. Beginning in the early 1990s, a changing economy coupled with new organizational leadership moved the organization into a more diversified management approach. A major component of this change was the decision to strategically target orga-

nizational resources in the Fruitvale district of Oakland. Today, the Unity Council provides social services, serves as an advocate for community resources, and manages a portfolio of real estate and economic development projects. This comprehensive approach is aimed at improving the quality of life for Fruitvale's families and children.

One aspect of the comprehensive approach has been a focus on parks and open space. As part of a larger economic development strategy, the Unity Council views park improvements as an issue pertaining to both quality of life and social equity. With 0.68 acres of open space per one thousand residents, the Fruitvale district has roughly one-sixth the standard allotment adopted by the City of Oakland.¹⁸ At the same time, the district also has some of the highest concentrations of youth living in the city. To address the problem, the Fruitvale Recreation and Open Space Initiative, or FROSI, was formed in 1995 with the purpose of revitalizing existing parks and increasing the amount of recreational resources in Fruitvale.¹⁹ Around the same time that FROSI was formed, the City and Port of Oakland had begun an ambitious planning process to create a land use and regulatory framework for Oakland's waterfront, called the Estuary Plan. After months of involvement in the public planning process for the Estuary Plan, FROSI launched a community campaign in the fall of 1997 to ask the Port of Oakland to dedicate a nine-acre site along Fruitvale's waterfront, called Union Point, for park use.²⁰ The campaign included collecting more than three thousand signatures for a petition and one hundred letters of support from community-based and non-profit organizations to ask the City and Port to dedicate the land for a public park. Due to growing public support, the City and Port of Oakland agreed to work together to develop a park at Union Point. In February of 1998, the Port of Oakland indicated its willingness to form a project partnership with FROSI and several other agencies and organizations, including the California Coastal Conservancy and the University of California—Berkeley men's crew team

(Cal Crew).²¹ With this new partnership agreement, the site was dedicated for park use (Figure 1), and the Unity Council received a grant from the Coastal Conservancy to lead a process to design Union Point Park.

Mobilization

Lacking resources and technical expertise to implement projects alone, community organizations frequently tap into a larger network of resources.²² The organizational form of these networks is multiscalar in nature, involving other nongovernmental organizations at the local, regional, state, and national levels. Although seemingly hierarchically coherent, these multiscalar alignments are heterogeneous in

nature and are defined with particular issues or goals in mind. The effort to develop Union Point Park reflects this pattern of mobilization. In 1997, to create a base of community support, the Unity Council began an outreach effort to organize and educate community residents about the potential park. Key community organizations met several times to brainstorm about effective ways to leverage their resources and political connections. These efforts helped to build trust, cooperation, and a sense of solidarity. Other community groups from Fruitvale and the adjacent San Antonio district helped to collect petitions, cosponsor events, and organize constituents to attend important public meetings on short notice.²³ To express their support, community members (in particular youth and seniors) made their presence known by attending public events and participating in the community design process. Organizations representing different ethnic groups also lent their support throughout the process by writing letters and assisting with the coordination of the Earth Day celebration at the site.

A parallel organizing strategy involved Unity Council staff participating in citywide forums through which new networks were established with a variety of nonprofit organizations throughout the city, including civic clubs and environmental, public health, and youth development groups. Prior to the creation of the FROSI partnership, the Unity Council had not been actively involved with parks and open space issues. To manage the design of Union Point Park and coordinate the community participation process, the Unity Council worked closely with University of California–Berkeley faculty and students, and several other organizations and agencies, including the Trust for Public Land and the Coastal Conservancy. Drawn from a local and regional network of organizations and agencies, a coalition emerged around the project that was both multisector and multiscalar in nature. This organizational form served as the primary mobilizing structure to support the park and helped to garner resources for park development. The coalition that formed around

the park brought together diverse stakeholders around a common goal: to create a new waterfront park in Fruitvale.

Discourse Building

The social mobilization and the subsequent support for Union Point Park would not have been possible without a discourse-building process that purposefully framed the needs for, and meanings of, open space in the district. In the initial phase, Unity Council staff spent months talking to community members about the lack of open space and access to the waterfront, the concentration of youth living in the area, and the location of Union Point as an opportunity to provide a new park that would benefit the youth. The Unity Council developed a work plan for this campaign and assembled information packets for distribution to different segments of the population. Supported with demographic information and park-related statistics about the community, the information showed the benefit of a new waterfront park at Union Point, and defined the campaign in simple terms. It discussed issues in ways that would resonate with a diverse population. Community organizers then went door to door, met with community groups, collected petition signatures, and distributed sample letters of support. In addition, Unity Council staff developed a slideshow to present to twenty-two different groups—including community organizations, local schools, churches, and businesses—to introduce Union Point as the future site for a neighborhood park. They also solicited feedback from community members on their preferences for park programming.²⁴ To involve the local youth in the design process, the Unity Council and a group of U.C.–Berkeley students organized a design charrette that included the participation of more than sixty teens. (See Figure 2.) The workshop produced several visions for the park created by the youth.

An Earth Day event created an opportunity for many community members to visit the site for the first time. It served the purpose of bridging the gap

1. The Oakland estuary and the site of Union Point Park. (Courtesy of the Trust for Public Land.)



between the abstract idea of a new park and the real experience — being outdoors, on the waterfront, on a clear day, with a host of other people reinforcing a positive experience. At the event, public comments were solicited through both walking and boat tour site surveys. Students from U.C.–Berkeley developed the survey and led tours with Unity Council organizers.²⁵ This survey solicited feedback at designated locations within the park site. The surveys and tours were given in Spanish, Vietnamese, and English to maximize participation from the different language groups. The event was also important for building a new identity for the former industrial waterfront site. Specifically, the Earth Day celebration provided a crucial context within which to articulate the ecological connection of the site. In addition, multicultural performances by varying youth groups, together with a Native American ritual, contributed to the creation of a cultural identity for the park. The assembly of elected officials and project partners signified the collaboration among the different actors and stakeholders. Through the petition drive, community presentations, preference survey, and Earth Day event and youth workshop, a common understanding about the project's importance in addressing a resource disparity had been consolidated. As a product of the discourse-building process, this common understanding was important to the collaboration among the different nonprofit groups and public agencies. Different groups may have supported the project for different reasons, but all concluded that a new park was needed for the community.

Political Crafting

In examining the political process in the development of Union Point Park, it is important to look at how Unity Council crafted its actions in response to the political and institutional opportunities present at the time. Specifically, three geographic scales of policy — local, regional, and state — provided a series of timely political opportunities to move the

project forward from its inception to securing resources for park development. At the local level, the adoption of the City of Oakland's Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Plan in 1996 provided a policy rationale and justification to pursue an open space strategy in the Fruitvale district. The Open Space element underscored the unequal distribution of open space resources throughout the City of Oakland. According to the city's statistics, the lower income Fruitvale and adjacent San Antonio districts contained significantly less open space in proportion to their populations than did the more affluent north Oakland neighborhoods. In addition, these low-income districts contained the highest concentration of youth in the city. This significant policy document provided an opportunity for the Unity Council and other community organizations to assert the park equity issue.

Locally and regionally, another opportunity was presented in the form of the Estuary Plan. The purpose of the Estuary Plan, a joint undertaking by the City and Port of Oakland, was to create a land use and regulatory plan for development along Oakland's nineteen-mile shoreline. Capitalizing on the public rhetoric to reconnect Oakland's neighborhoods to the waterfront, Unity Council staff actively participated in this lengthy planning process and demanded that Fruitvale residents be provided public access at Union Point, the largest remaining vacant stretch of land along Fruitvale's shoreline. The potential linkage to a regional open space system was critical to the Unity Council acquiring much needed resources. The San Francisco Bay Trail, a directive of the Coastal Conservancy, provided the policy rationale for the agency to get involved with Union Point Park. To assist the project that would complete a vital portion of the trail, the conservancy provided a generous planning grant to design the park. (See Figure 3.)

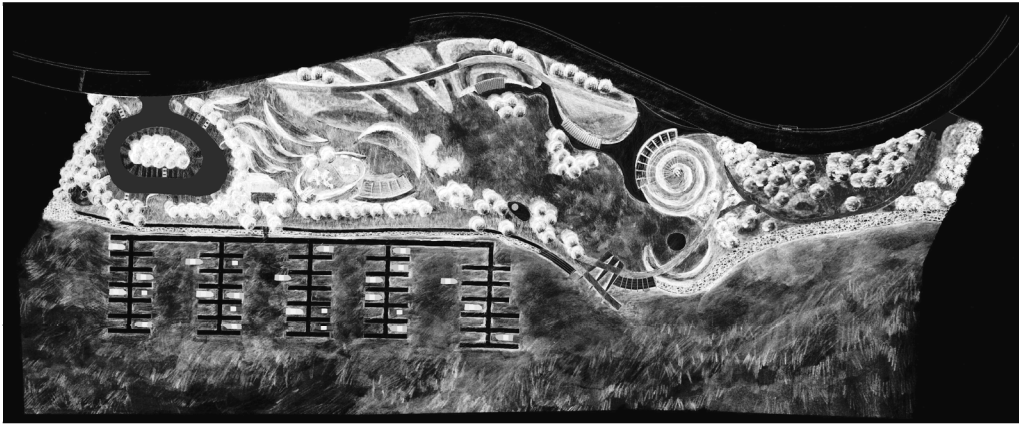
Aside from the work of funding agencies and supporting organizations, many of the project's activities were conceived with a conscious effort to target elected officials. Local politicians attended

2. Youth design workshop. (Photo: Jeffrey Hou.)

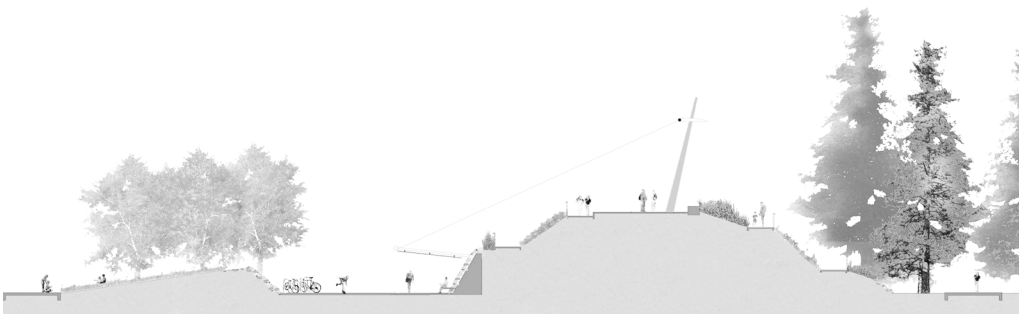


highly visible events organized by the Unity Council, and were present at key Port and City Council meetings. Along with access to the polity at the local level, efforts at Union Point also attracted the attention of elected officials in the state capital. Antonio Villaragosa, then California State Assembly Speaker and the first Latino to hold that position, cosponsored a bill to create a statewide bond measure to fund open space projects. Through the Trust for Public Land's contacts, the project was brought to the attention of Speaker Villaragosa, who was looking for a site to announce the bond measure and bring attention to open space disadvantages in low-income, urban neighborhoods.²⁶ A large press

3. Site plan of Union Point Park.
(Courtesy of Pattillo & Garret Associates and Mario Schjetnan Garduno of Grupo de Diseno Urbano.)



4. Section of Union Point Hill.
(Courtesy of Pattillo & Garret Associates and Mario Schjetnan Garduno of Grupo de Diseno Urbano.)



event was held at the park site, attended by both local officials and community members. A local youth participating in the project caught the attention of Speaker Villaragosa and was invited to testify before a state subcommittee regarding the future bond, which would pass the following year. The effort helped to put Union Point Park on a short list of priority projects at both the state and city levels, leading to several million dollars in funding for the initial phase of park development.

Design Process and Outcomes

In examining the community-driven place making of Union Point Park, it is important to look at how the design process and outcomes reflect the multiple processes in the making of the park. A testimony to the social mobilization in the development of the park, the program development and master plan were driven by group collaboration. The design of Union Point Park is best described as an interdisciplinary collaboration among landscape architects,

architects, planners, and artists, along with local residents. This collaboration was highly participatory, and promoted dialogue and sharing based on a priori principles and goals. Group collaboration in this context recognized the knowledge of the community, and it was the role of the designers to reveal and translate this knowledge into physical form. One example is the inclusion of a tall hill, located to capture views of the estuary and surrounding area. The genesis of this idea came during the youth charrette, when one of the teams suggested a viewing tower that would be a romantic place to bring a date and escape the close supervision of adults. The design of the primary viewing hill now serves multiple functions, and includes a lookout terrace, sheltered seating, and an entry plaza that includes a bus stop. (See Figure 4.) Another example of shared meaning and group collaboration involves the contribution of a local artist. The artist's observations of the estuary and the patterns of waves lapping up against the water's edge led to the design of a series of wave-like earth mounds throughout the site. (See Figure 5.) However, although the initial inspiration for the park's design came from the artist, there is no single author for the conceptual design of the park. These mounds serve only as an organizing element. As such, individual creativity was expressed through specific design elements that complemented existing principles and goals.

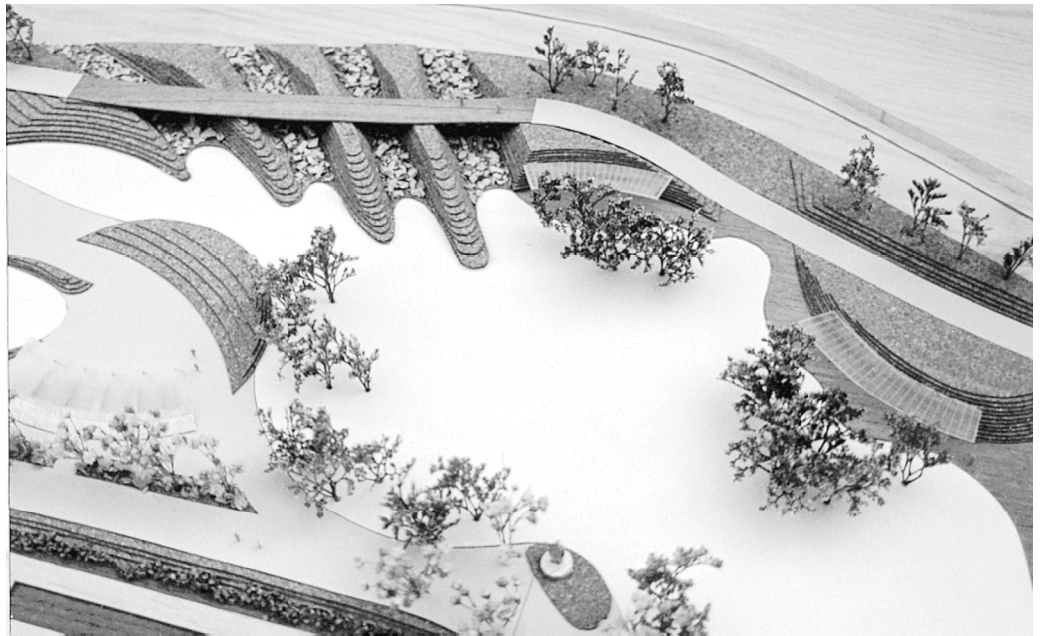
A product of the discourse-building process of the park, the design of Union Point Park is a deliberate attempt to reflect the population of the Fruitvale and adjacent San Antonio district, which comprises the most racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods in Oakland. First, the park design responds to issues of diversity by providing a variety of settings either familiar to, or congruent with, different groups of people.²⁷ Results emerging from the surveys, tours, and workshops provided a collection of information and design ideas that complemented the values and needs of the community. These led to the development of the programmatic

5. Model detail of Union Point Park.
(Courtesy of Pattillo & Garret Associates and Mario Schjetnan Garduno of Grupo de Diseno Urbano.)

elements in the park.²⁸ However, rather than singularly representing the respective cultures, park elements are combined to create a composite design that serves different uses and functions. Places for fishing and large group picnics are two sites that reflect the cultural heritage of Latino and Vietnamese immigrants as expressed by these groups living in the community. Other park elements that respond to group-specific issues include a restaurant that will provide employment and training opportunities for youth and a visible and secure bus stop for seniors, many of whom do not own a car.

In addition to the program elements, the park design reflects the transcultural identities and hybrid conditions that give meaning to new immigrant experiences.²⁹ A sculpture to be located at the park illustrates this point. Originally, city staff had outlined requirements for the sculpture to commemorate the Peralta family, whose original hacienda once occupied what is now Fruitvale. However, the Unity Council and partnership representatives felt strongly that the new sculpture should represent the collective identity of Fruitvale, and in particular women's contribution to the cultural and social development of the community. The sculpture by artist Scott Donahue, entitled *sigamē* ("come follow me"), depicts a woman wearing elements of historical garments that represent the different races and ethnicities that have shaped the history of Fruitvale.³⁰ Important dates and names of local women are engraved on the sculpture. The significance of this public art piece is twofold: first, it problematizes the idea of "memorial" — the social construction of leadership and the valorization of a certain histories over others — and, second, the sculpture raises the level of awareness about hybrid and transcultural identities.³¹

Reflecting the political crafting in the development of the park, the design process of Union Point Park itself also needed to respond to the volatile political realities embedded in the project. After the initial design was complete, the coach of Cal Crew demanded that public access to the waterfront be



restricted in an area near the team's boathouse and threatened to pull out of the project unless the community capitulated to his requests. This ran counter to how the community and design team envisioned the location of the park, given its importance as the most desirable place along the water's edge. Unity Council staff worked closely with the design team to develop a solution that could accommodate Cal Crew's demands. The idea was to create an elevated walkway so as not to obstruct the movement of rowers between the boathouse and boat dock — thus cutting off public access to the water's edge at the most desirable location on the site. The design solution, a risky attempt to negotiate a compromise, satisfied the Port of Oakland, who then agreed to stand behind the proposal, thus isolating Cal Crew if they decided to stand firm with their position. The coach's bluff was called, and Cal Crew eventually withdrew from the

project, resulting in a design that is now fully accessible to the public.

After two years of community organizing, planning, and conceptual design, the final master plan was completed and approved by the City and Port in 1999. Since then, a design team has been hired to further refine the design and provide working drawings for the first phase of park development.³² Although groundbreaking was to take place within several years of master plan approval, funding delays and further environmental assessment pushed back groundbreaking until the spring of 2003.³³ Given the strong community and political support, however, the park project is expected to be implemented. Currently, a master agreement between the different parties is being negotiated that would give the Unity Council the primary responsibility for design implementation and construction management.

Juxtaposition: The Community Process and the Participatory Model

In analyzing the development of Union Point Park, the framework of mobilization, discourse building, and political crafting provides a useful template for examining how a community-driven process succeeded in developing an open space initiative and creating broad support for a major urban park in a disadvantaged neighborhood. In the case of Union Point Park, the Unity Council was able to develop a coalition around the project from a grassroots and citywide network of supporters, manage the process of decision making, and orchestrate events at key times throughout the process. Pertinent information was used to frame issues, and resources were garnered to plan and design the park amidst a series of constraints. The prevalence of contaminated industrial lands in communities of color combined with the lack of open space and waterfront access in the Fruitvale district were used as ways to purposely construct and frame issues from the start. Given the immigrant and international community that lived in this part of Oakland, ideas of diversity and culture were critical in creating a collective identity for the park distinct from Oakland's other neighborhoods. This collective identity was also important to the broad support for the park and to collaboration among the different individual and organizational actors. Lastly, the Unity Council and key allies capitalized on the timing of policy issues at the local, regional, and state levels. This helped to provide visibility for the project in decision-making forums and gather public resources for planning, design, and implementation.

Juxtaposed against the prevalent participatory and professional practice in planning and design, the framework and evidence of community-driven processes reveals important gaps between the two modes of practice: community process and participatory design. First, the success of the community-driven process relies significantly on mobilization of community members and stakeholders across tradi-

tional boundaries. It requires collaboration between professionals and citizens and between the public and nonprofit sectors. In the case of Union Point Park, the nexus of mobilization and group relationship centered on the Unity Council, a community-based organization whose capacity and credibility were built over years of work at the neighborhood level. In addition to social mobilization that involves networking and collaboration, the process of community-driven place making requires a discourse-building process with purposeful framing of issues and construction of meanings. The collective process of creating a shared understanding of open space issues in turn helps form a coalition of citizens, nonprofit groups, professionals, public agencies, and elected officials. Finally, in a community-driven process, the success of a project relies significantly on the understanding of the political and institutional opportunities and the social and political mobilization around those opportunities. In the case of Union Point Park, the design itself is a politically negotiated result reflecting institutional constraints along with mutual and competing interests.

The processes of mobilization, discourse building, and political crafting directly respond to the major limitations of the current model of participatory design. The multiscalar and multisector mobilization addresses the pitfall of emphasis on the binary interaction between designers and users. This mobilization process allows the place-making process to engage a broader network of stakeholders and constituents and utilize a wider set of resources and skills. The building of discourse provides a deliberative process that allows the issues concerning a project to be critically examined. It also allows for construction of new frames of reference that respond to the conflicting realities of urban communities. Through a collective discourse-building process, shared meanings and understanding provide foundations for broader support and collaboration. Finally, political crafting strategies address the difficulty of implementation that is often associated

with projects involving public processes. By skillfully crafting responses to important political opportunities, community actors can effectively produce outcomes and results that meet the needs of the communities.

However, although the processes of community-driven place making offer promising approaches to address the interests of the community, they also present profound challenges to the existing professional and institutional practices in planning and design. The complexity and fluidity of the processes and relationships present a dilemma to the prevalent practice that is still based on rational decision making and the compartmentalization of different sectors and phases of a project. The everyday experiences associated with project tasks and decisions often do not coincide with the normative expectations of professional practice. Collaboration, community outreach, and coordination, although important to successful outcomes, can be sources of frustration for practitioners that translate into additional time, energy, and cost overruns. Projects such as Union Point can take a significant amount of time to realize and involve many entities throughout the life of the project, which presents a dilemma for a practice accustomed to clearly defined deliverables and timelines. In addition, these types of projects are dependent upon changing funding cycles, availability of resources, and contingencies related to formal approval. Finally, the process of collaboration also raises the issue of ownership and control between conceptual design and design execution over the life of a project. In the case of Union Point Park, the project sponsors have carried forward ideas from the conceptual design phase. The close involvement of such sponsors early in the process appears to have resulted in a relatively seamless relationship between design concept and execution.³⁴ Nevertheless, it remains to be seen if this will change with subsequent phases and whether the community will have another opportunity to provide input.

Conclusion: Toward a Community-Driven Practice

To address the gap between community-driven processes and the participatory design model, arguments for an alternative practice are needed. In the context of changing public and institutional processes, as well as dynamic social and cultural transformations in urban communities, the traditional model of participatory design and practice is no longer adequate or effective in addressing the complexity and fluidity inherent in creating public places. To become socially and politically relevant to the ongoing urban transformations, an alternative approach should recognize the multiple parties involved in the production of the public realm in a community-driven process. Specifically, an alternative practice should move beyond the binary professional-user relationships to address the broader social and political processes in place making and community building. In particular, it should encompass active engagement in social mobilization to involve institutions, organizations, and individual actors seldom discussed in the design process. An alternative practice should also actively engage different actors in the framing of problems and solutions, and should seek and reconstruct the meanings and identities of place. Finally, an alternative approach needs to build knowledge about the political world as well as seek related opportunities present in the local context. The work of the Unity Council in the development of Union Point Park provides a model of such alternative practice. As is evident in the case of Union Point Park, it is through a multifaceted social and political process and purposeful framing and identity building that a design of public space begins to emerge and embody the complexity and richness of contemporary social, cultural, and political spheres.

Notes

1. Michael Rios was the team leader for the master planning of Union Point Park at the Unity Council. He oversaw the community process and the planning and design of the project, and coordinated the collaboration of the different nonprofit organizations and public agencies. Jeffrey

Hou worked with Randolph Hester in coordinating the participation of the Environmental Planning Studio at U.C.—Berkeley in the master planning of the park.

2. See Michael Burroway, “The Extended Case Method,” in *Ethnography Unbound* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

3. The project partners in the planning and design of the Union Point Park included the Unity Council, the City of Oakland, the Port of Oakland, the California State Coastal Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land, the University of California—Berkeley Crew Team, the University—Oakland Metropolitan Forum, the firm of EDAW, and Landscape Architecture faculty and students at University of California—Berkeley.

4. William R. Potaschuck, Jarle P. Croker Jr., and William H. Schechter, “The Transformative Power of Governance,” *National Civic Review* 88/3 (Fall 1999): 217–247.

5. See Armand L. Mauss, *Social Problems as Social Movements* (New York: Lippincott, 1975); and Stephen Hilgartner and Charles L. Bosk, “The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model,” *American Journal of Sociology* 94/1 (July 1988): 53–78.

6. See Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford, U.K., and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1996).

7. See Henry Sanoff, *Community Participation Methods in Design and Planning* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), pp. 14–36.

8. Randolph T. Hester, “A Refrain with a View,” *Places* 12/2 (1999): 12.

9. Randolph T. Hester, “Participatory Design and Environmental Justice: Pas De Deux or Time to Change Partners?” *The Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 4/4 (1987): 289–299.

10. Mark Francis, “Proactive Practice: Visionary Thought and Participatory Action in Environmental Design,” *Places* 12/2 (1999): 62.

11. Leonie Sandercock, “Cities of (In)Difference and the Challenge for Planning,” *DISP* 140 (2000): 7–15.

12. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald. “Introduction: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes—Toward a Synthetic, Comparative Perspective on Social Movements,” in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1–20.

13. See Doug McAdam and David A. Snow, *Social Movements: Readings on their Emergence, Mobilization, and Dynamics* (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 1997).

14. See Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999).

15. Judith E. Innes, Judith Gruber, Michael Neuman, and Robert Thompson, “Coordinating Growth and Environmental Management Through Consensus Building.” *CPS Report: A Policy Research Program Report*, University of California at Berkeley, California Policy Seminar (1994).

16. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

17. Terry Alderete, “The Unity Council: 35 Years of Making a Difference in the Fruitvale,” *5 De Mayo Magazine* (1999): 60.

18. These figures come from the Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation element of the City of Oakland’s General Plan.

19. Funded by Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest funds and a HUD Community Outreach Partnership Center grant, FROSI included the Unity Council, the City of Oakland, the Trust for Public Land, and the University—Oakland Metropolitan Forum.

20. Prior to 1997, the Port had been negotiating with the University of California—Berkeley men’s crew team (Cal Crew) for exclusive use of the Union Point site as the future location of Cal Crew’s boathouse. A previous campaign led by the Unity Council forced negotiations between the Port and Cal Crew to stop immediately until the Estuary Plan was adopted.

21. The conservancy is a state agency that funds public access projects along the San Francisco Bay and California coastline.

22. Margaret Weir, “Power, Money, and Politics in Community Development,” in *Urban Problems and Community Development* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 1999), pp. 139–192.

23. The community groups included Asian, Latino, and African-American organizations, as well as youth organizations, schools, and churches.

24. At the community presentations, activity preference surveys were distributed and used to solicit feedback. The activity preference surveys consisted of visual images illustrating park activities. Participants checked off their top preferences from a list of fifteen choices. A total of 435 community members responded to these surveys.

25. These students were enrolled in Environmental Planning Studio (LA205), Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning, under the direction of Professor Randolph Hester.

26. Communication with Andrew Haupt, Trust for Public Land project manager.

27. Information about desired uses was obtained through different survey instruments in Vietnamese, Spanish, and English.

28. The top five elements included a children’s play area, locations for picnics and barbecues, a bus stop and shelter, a large area for informal play, and an area for community events. Together, these features were translated into specific design elements that provided a physical setting for park activities. Related elements for the first phase included a semi-enclosed space defined by small mounds for children of different ages, picnic areas for large group gatherings protected by fan-shaped pergolas, an entry plaza that provides visibility and a shelter for a bus dropoff area, a great lawn that provides ample space for informal recreation and sports, and a ceremonial circle defined by topography and connected to the great lawn to function as a stage for community events.

29. Nezar Alsayyad, “Hybrid Culture/Hybrid Urbanism: Pandora’s Box of the “Third Place,” in *Hybrid Urbanism: On the Identity Discourse and the Built Environment* (Wesport: Praeger, 2001), pp. 1–20.

30. The sculpture has been temporarily installed in front of Oakland City Hall until the first phase of construction is complete. Subsequently, the sculpture has created a controversy among local feminists—equally divided in support and in opposition to its depiction of women.

31. See Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995); and Gail Lee Dubrow, “Claiming Public Space for Women’s History in Boston: A Proposal for Preservation, Public Art, and Public Historical Interpretation,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 13/1 (1992): 111–148.

32. Design development and construction drawings are being developed by Pattillo & Garrett Associates and Mario Schjetnan, Grupo de Diseno Urbano.

33. Communication with Chris Pattillo, principal-in-charge of project design development and construction documents.

34. Communication with Joan Cardellino, Union Point Park project partner and representative of the California Coastal Conservancy.

