

Sense of (Municipal, Digital) Place:
Connecting Concepts of Sense of Place
to the Municipal Website of Philadelphia, PA

Teresa Arnold

University of Oregon

Arts & Administration

2012

Project Approved by the
University of Oregon
Department of Arts Administration



John Bennet Fenn III, Ph.D., Advisor

5.7.12

Date



/ Teresa J. Arnold, MS.

6/7/12

Date

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Oregon in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. John Fenn, my research advisor, for helping me to explore, connect, and articulate the relationship between the abstract concepts surrounding sense of place as they intersect with digital culture. Through this work and your guidance I have been able to expand my own interests and knowledge within new contexts.

To the Arts & Administration Department, I have always appreciated the many facets of arts culture work that can be explored in this program. Because of this I have been enriched deeply through coursework and dialogue with a group of peers that has a diversity of talents and interests.

To my colleagues, what a journey this has been! It was my pleasure to get to know you all, and I am so grateful to be entering this field with you. I hope we will continue to be a supportive network for each other as we move through our careers in the cultural sector.

To my good friend Johanna, thank you for supporting me through this process. Your friendship has made this journey in Oregon a very special one.

To my partner Charlie, thank you for your patience and love. I'll be home soon.

Teresa J. Arnold

860-670-5488 trsarnold1@gmail.com

Summary

A dependable professional dedicated to enriching lives through arts and culture.

Education

Master of Science: Arts Management, Certificate of Nonprofit Management

University of Oregon, 2012 Concentration: Community Arts

Bachelor of Fine Art

University of CT, 2002 Concentration: Graphic Design

Skills

- Microsoft Office
- Adobe Design Software
- Social Media
- Wordpress
- Client Relations
- Event Planning
- Marketing and Advertising
- Memberships and Sales
- Grant Writing
- Customer Service
- Record Keeping
- Time Management

Professional Experience

Contemporary Culture Coordinator UO Cultural Forum, Eugene, OR, 2011/12

- Coordinated five multifaceted, diverse events drawing audience members from both the UO and the greater Eugene Community
- Built partnerships with campus and community organizations including the Outdoor Program, the UO Health Center, the School of Education, and other organizations
- Maximized a small annual budget through leveraging resources, including sponsorships from such organizations as Oregon Humanities, the Latin America Solidarity Committee, and the Office of the President.

Business & Policy Chair UO Sustainability Center Board of Directors, 2011/12

- Facilitated meetings of the Board to guide productive goal setting and dialogue
- Reviewed project proposals and awarded over \$30,000 in funds to campus projects
- Effected policy change in support of community building as a criteria of sustainability projects

Assistant Manager of Administration U.S. Census Bureau, Norwich, CT, 2010

- Managed administration department and a staff of 24 clerks including training and scheduling
- Oversaw weekly payroll for a staff of 1200 office and field employees
- Worked with a highly functional team of five managers to ensure all operations ran smoothly
- Received positive results on all regional audits
- Learned to function with flexibility in a fast-paced environment

Supervisor of Technology U.S. Census Bureau, Norwich, CT, 2009

- Prepared and led team training sessions on knowledgebase software
- Supervised support staff in providing service to over 1000 field employees
- Worked closely with the manager to ensure team success and efficient operations with a focus on providing excellent service

Professional Experience, continued

Director Fred Astaire Dance Studio, S. Windsor, CT, 2005-2008

- Managed annual calendar including regional and local events
- Planned and oversaw all marketing, including web, print, and television
- Conducted ongoing community outreach through fundraisers, fairs, and expos
- Produced monthly, quarterly, and annual reports, used data to identify strengths and weaknesses and addressed these through staff training sessions
- Recruited, trained, and produced top teachers in the region
- Implemented effective office operations systems and oversaw all lead tracking and sales presentations

Internships

Communications Oregon Folklife Network, Summer 2011

- Developed content of and launched the first newsletter
- Researched content for, developed and formatted multi-page program application to reinstate the Traditional Artist Apprenticeship Program
- Established grants database in Excel and identified viable grant funding opportunities
- Implemented communication plan strategies including the roll out of a new membership program

Artistic Administration Oregon Bach Festival, Summer 2011

- Maintained accurate production schedule utilizing Quickbase
- Collaborated with the Hult Center Box Office to manage all complimentary ticket requests
- Assisted in overseeing contract and rider details of national and international performers

Cultural Asset Mapping City of Eugene, Fall 2010

- Collaborated with City staff to identify cultural assets in downtown Eugene
- Designed simple coding system to make data collection easy and efficient
- Conducted field data collection

Awards & Honors

Graduate Teaching Fellowship - University of Oregon, 2012

Grants Fellow - Sustainable Cities Initiative, University of Oregon, 2011

Recognition of Achievement - US Census Bureau, 2010

Top Teacher, Monte Brock Division - Fred Astaire Dance Studios, 2005

Studio Rated #1 - Advocate's Annual Best of Hartford Reader's Poll, 2005

Professional Development & Volunteer Experience

Association of Fundraising Professionals - Member, Present

Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art - Member, Present

Emerging Leaders in the Arts Network - Member, Present

Willamette Valley Music Festival - Volunteer, 2012

Oregon Art Summit - Volunteer, 2010-11

Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce - Member, 2008

South Windsor Chamber of Commerce - Member, 2005-2008

ABSTRACT: In an increasingly digital culture, people are adapting to the sourcing of information largely through web technologies. The world wide web has created a virtual environment, separate from our physical space, that in many ways can inform our interactions with our physical environment. There is great potential for the internet to serve as a tool for municipalities to encourage dialogue, visitorship, investment, and civic activity through their websites. As an aspiring arts administrator with an interest in placemaking, I approached Philadelphia's municipal website seeking to find out how I could access Philadelphia through this portal, as a potential resident and employee in the cultural sector. Throughout, I have sought to identify those aspects of the website that enable or hinder my ability to develop a sense of Philadelphia as a place to live and work.

KEYWORDS: Placemaking, Sense of Place, Representation

Table of Contents

Advisor Approval Page	2	
Acknowledgements	3	
Resume	4	
Abstract and Keywords.....	6	
Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Design		
1.1 Problem Statement and Relevance	8	
1.2 Methodological Paradigm	10	
1.3 Definitions	12	
1.4 Benefits of Study	12	
1.5 Strategy of Inquiry.....	13	
1.6 Guiding Questions	14	
1.7 Selection of Site	15	
Chapter 2: Literature Review: Sense of Place		
2.1 Introduction	16	
2.2 Sense of Place as a Tool	17	
2.3 Gauging From Afar – The Internet	19	
Chapter 3: Literature Review: Municipal Websites		
3.1 Introduction	21	
3.2 Challenges	23	
3.2.1 Understanding Online Communication Architecture	23	
3.2.2 The Internet Enables Location-less Communities.....	24	
3.3 Role of Municipal Websites in Placemaking.....	25	
3.3.1 Trending Discussion	25	
3.3.2 Shaping Place	27	
3.3.3 Social Capital	29	
Chapter 4: Case Study: Phila.gov		
4.1 Choosing Philadelphia, PA	32	
4.2 Content Analysis	33	
4.2.1 Cultural Content	33	
4.2.2 Building Social Capital	35	
4.2.3 Themes and Representation	38	
4.2.4 Case Study Conclusions	41	
Chapter 5: Wrap-up for Arts Administrators.....		44
References.....	48	

Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Design

1.1 Problem Statement and Relevance

Culture is changing. It is becoming more networked, with horizontal information flows and decentralization of content production. People are able to publish, engage, and communicate with vast networks at any time. Such changes disrupt old models and infrastructure. They change where and how we consume culture and provide new and increasing variety in the ways we can engage with it (Newman, 2010). The internet has also emerged as a new “third place” where people spend time connecting with others, socializing, playing games, or sharing various types of information including photographs and news (New Media Consortium, 2007). As the internet has become a mechanism for sourcing information for nearly any topic, so has it become a major tool in reshaping communications and influencing people’s choices about where to eat, shop, play, travel, work, and live, bringing with it a plethora of new research opportunities:

...because information and communications technologies have permeated so many areas of contemporary social life and to such an extent...social scientists are increasingly reaching the conclusion that they can no longer adequately understand many of the most important facets of social and cultural life without incorporating the internet and computer-mediated communications into their studies.

(Kozinets, 2010, p.2)

The basis of this project comes from my experience as an arts administrator interested in placemaking, and my awareness of the expanding digital environment. Furthermore, I am a regular person facing some major life decisions, like “Where do I want to live, work, and raise a family?” I am looking towards the internet for the information I need in order to make some of these decisions – and I am not the only one. About 60 million Americans reported that the internet played an important, or even crucial, role in helping them with at least one major life decision between 2002-2004, according to the Pew Internet & American Life project study on *The Strength of Internet Ties* (Boase, Horrigan, Wellman, & Rainie, 2006). These decisions included:

- Getting additional training for a career (21 million)
- Choosing a school (17 million)
- Finding a new place to live (10 million)
- Changing jobs (8 million)

The report also indicates that the internet played a major role in the decisions people made about helping another person with a major illness, making financial investment decisions, and dealing with ones own health issues.

Given that there are now both physical and virtual places, I have been exploring my many options of a physical space via the virtual one. Through this process I gained an interest in how one translates to the other. How deeply can a person engage with a physical space via the internet? As a graduate student at the end of my academic work, the goal has been to find a place where I will thrive both professionally and personally. Since municipalities exist as defined places, they presented a logical starting point to explore the relationship between sense of place offline and on.

As discussed more throughout this paper, an initial literature review showed that sense of place is largely tied to a combination of social construction, tradition, heritage, and the various environmental elements of a place. Furthermore, the emergent digital culture in which so many of us function is impacting changes in people's daily habits and behaviors and the way we source information for making important decisions. Municipal websites, because they are online hubs for information about specific places, are a natural first online stop for people seeking information about places. As these websites were originally developed with the intention of offering city services online for convenience, they may not fully utilize their capacity to represent their place to broader constituencies or to apply the lateral information flow that the web enables.

1.2 Methodological Paradigm

I place myself into a post-positivist framework, acknowledging that there may be a multiplicity of viewpoints with inherent value in each. This particular frame of reference allows room for the complexities of the ideas and perspectives of the space in-between opposite, black and white perspectives (O'Leary, 2010). Given the rapid cultural shifts of the information age, I believe it is important to acknowledge the plurality in opinions, literacies, and frames of reference that will factor into the research at hand. The emergent literacies of our networked world and the participatory culture it enables, as Jenkins suggests, result in a shift in the focus of literacy from individual expression to community involvement. This shift includes the development of social skills through participation in collaborative online environments and networking. In the new media contexts that we navigate, integrate, and negotiate, "the social production of meaning is more than individual interpretation multiplied; it represents a qualitative difference in the ways we make sense of cultural experience, and in that sense, it represents a profound change in how we understand

literacy.” (Jenkins, n.d., p. 20).

My own methodological paradigm can be further identified within social constructivism. This research topic deals with an investigation of digital culture from the perspective of a professional in training for work in the cultural sector. It includes exploration of sense of place, placemaking as a cultural practice, and the related role of municipal websites in a digital culture. It is important to note that my bias as a researcher is largely informed by my status as a graduate student exploring the impacts of technology on society and its role in democratizing information and facilitating participatory culture. Additionally, I approach the concept of culture broadly, recognizing that there are many various aspects of civic life and that each individual may participate in a unique combination of these, but that collectively these aspects comprise the scope of cultural activity in a place. I am now approaching graduation and hope to gain employment in a community that has opportunities for me to participate in the activities I enjoy most. Using the internet to source information is a primary way in which I am gathering information to help me make the best decision about where I may want to spend the next few years (or more) of my life, both personally and as an arts administrator.

With my chosen career path in arts administration and interests rooted in place, this master’s research project presented an opportunity for me to explore my future options through the lens of a cultural worker and arts manager. As VanMeter and Murphy write in their article titled “Placemaking 101”, for the Philadelphia Social Innovations Journal, “great, vital Places...are imperative for cultivating creative and cultural life. That said, placemaking is critical to supporting the arts and culture, especially as culture impacts community. People need more great places, and they’re out there for the finding and the recognizing, not only the inventing. As the needs of arts and cultural communities change, venues that support

them must also evolve.” (2012, p.1). This indicates a direct connection between the role of arts managers and placemaking that is responsive to the cultural needs of communities.

1.3 Definitions

Placemaking – A creative process used to elevate communities through supporting, elevating, and fostering the rich cultural aspects of a place.

Sense of place - The unique and collective components of an area that create a community identity, recognized in the history and traditions as well as the values and activities of the people.

Digital Culture – Refers to the networked systems of new media and the cultural responses and shifts as it (willingly) adapts to pervasive media.

Culture – Broadly, the various elements of community life that could range for example from local sports teams to cherished arts institutions.

1.4 Benefits of Study

A colleague, in from out of town, was recently a guest at my home. Between gatherings and events, she was surfing the internet looking for a new home. Having recently moved to a region with which she is not familiar, she does not have extended knowledge about various areas – like whether they are safe, fun, active, quiet, and close to or far from desired outlets for recreation. The frustration was evident – you can’t know how well you will enjoy being in a place without a *sense of place*. This is a purely anecdotal indication of the point of this master’s research project and the potential benefit. It seeks to identify to what extent a sense of place can be gauged or interpreted on the internet, to meet the needs of people using it to make significant decisions that impact their quality of life. More specifically, it does this within the context of municipal websites, focusing particularly on the municipal website of Philadelphia, PA – a place I am particularly interested in and curious to

see how well I can gauge via the internet. The outcomes could prove to be useful for understanding the challenges in both conveying and interpreting sense of place in digital, municipal contexts. It may also help begin a discussion about how municipal websites can reconsider their content and function in ways that enable placemaking and deliver a better sense of place for potential constituents. Additionally, this research asks the question “How can municipal websites convey and strengthen the cultural sector, at a time when so many cities are looking to revitalize Place?”.

1.5 Strategy of Inquiry

The project component of my master’s research was a focused case study on the municipal website of Philadelphia, PA: www.phila.gov. Earlier planning for the project accounted for comparative case studies. However, working specifically within one case study allowed for greater specific analysis of the various components at play in this work: sense of place, the emergence and function of municipal websites, and how to approach the intersection of these as an arts administrator seeking to impact the experience of place through my work. As an artist and professional, I am personally aware of the “intrinsic value of the arts and culture” in supporting what Jeremy Nowak refers to as the architecture of community (2007, p. 4). In *The Power of Placemaking*, a report on creativity and neighborhood development, Nowak describes the importance of social capital in placemaking and the power that cultural engagement has in bringing a community together. He cites research from the Social Impact of the Arts Project, or SIAP, and The Reinvestment Fund (TRF), suggesting that cultural engagement indicators can be important predictors of market improvement (2007).

The combination of a literature review on sense of place, placemaking, and municipal websites, along with conducting a case study based on a city that has a seemingly

thriving cultural scene that is also home to extensive and recent research on revitalizing place through cultural engagement, allowed me to identify some key players in placemaking practices (including local government, urban planners, landscape architects, and cultural workers). I was able to examine how the arts administrator plays a role in the process of creating place, and the aspects of sense of place that can be (or already may be) applied in the specific digital environment representing a municipality. It also allowed me to make recommendations regarding how a website might function as a helpful tool in these practices, and how arts administrators might approach municipal websites in their own work.

1.6 Guiding Questions

I approached the phila.gov website interested in learning about the cultural sector in the city as an indication of the potential to engage in work aligned with my career goals, and in a broader sense to learn how the arts and culture sector is represented online. I was also interested in how accessible information would be about the various arts and culture organizations through the website, such as how many there are, of what kind, and what role they play in the experience of the city. Questions guiding this aspect of the inquiry included:

- To what extent can I access the cultural sector of Philadelphia via phila.gov?
- How does the website enable or facilitate greater strength and visibility of Philadelphia's arts and culture organizations?

From a non-professional perspective, I was interested in developing a sense of the scale to which I could gather whether or not Philadelphia might provide the right community for me to live and work in. Content analysis for this aspect of the research was guided by these questions:

- What themes emerge when exploring the phila.gov website? For example, these could be social, cultural, functional, or aesthetic, for example.

- What type of engagement does the website foster? For example, what types of community activities are presented? These might include civic committee meetings, community celebrations, or ways volunteer engagement opportunities.
- How does the website function as a representation of a physical place? Or, what are the various elements of this place that collectively create the community, as can be seen on the website?

1.7 Selection of Site

The criteria for selecting a site were based on my personal endeavors as an arts administrator. As a professional, I have a desire to work in a place that is culturally active and where creative job growth has a positive outlook. The selection was also personal. I enjoy living in walkable communities that have plenty of arts and culture embedded in the everyday experience of the environment. I have both been to Philadelphia and become aware of the extensive cultural work being done there through my various assignments as a student. For example, while conducting a cultural asset mapping project, I came upon the Social Impact of the Arts Project conducted through the University of Pennsylvania, and during a media arts and social impact class learned about community based media projects, such as those conducted by the Scribe Video Center. Gaining awareness of projects like these sparked my interest in how I could find out about the cultural activities in various places I had been considering as the next stop along my journey. When searching online for information about a specific township, often the first site to appear is the municipal one. Since Philadelphia was emerging in my life as a city actively engaged in placemaking, as presented by projects like SIAP and the Scribe video documentaries, I focused specifically on investigating Phila.gov, drilling into three to five layers of links from the homepage to do so.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Sense of Place

2.1 Introduction

A place might be thought of as a geographic location, a set of coordinates, or an area on a map or the spot under a rock. However, it may be more appropriate to refer to these as locations. Cox illustrates the difference between a location and place by describing place as the product of the discourse of the people and the rhetoric that their discourse promotes (2000). The Oxford English Dictionary defines place as “a portion of space in which people dwell together” (Cox & Holmes, 2000). Places assume social, cultural, and personal identities through their transformation from a geographical location into a dwelling. The distinctiveness of the cultural and physical components of a place become the aspects that people grow attached to. Some say that the more distinctive a place is, the more attachment people have to it (Buntin, 2009). The identity of a place is found in its history, language and customs. It is in the local politics, infrastructure, and seasonal nuances, to name a few (Cox, 2000). Scott describes place as “a locus of dense human relationships (out of which culture in part grows)”. Culture and place are intertwined, with culture having place-specific characteristics that help differentiate places from each other (1997).

Some sentiments of place definitions are closely related to concepts regarding sense of place. My literature review revealed that sense of place relates to both physical and cultural landscape, where the cultural landscape is comprised of various components, and “made by minds and hands together...the minds and hands of many human agents working individually and collectively over time” (Ryden, 2006). Geographical features combined with the shared experiences, unique traditions and cultural values within an area blend together to create a sense of place. Reknown author Wallace Stegner captures this concept nicely:

A place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, lived in it, known it, died in it -- have both experienced and shaped it, as individuals, families, neighborhoods, and communities, over more than one generation. Some are born in their place, some find it, some realize after long searching that the place they left is the one they have been searching for. But whatever their relation to it, it is made a place only by slow accrual, like a coral reef. (www.importanceofplace.com)

A common theme throughout this investigation into sense of place is the grounding of the definitions in a physical, rather than virtual, world. The physical world is tactile - it has hugely varied histories and nuances. However, people are quickly adopting activities in a more digital place-scape, but this environment is far newer and far less visible.

2.2 Sense of Place as a Tool

Many narratives depend on sense of place to ground important contextual factors. For example, creative writers portray a sense of place to provoke responses in the reader by creating an evocative setting that appeals to multiple senses and reflects the personality of the characters (Bonaci, 2012). Implementing strategies to convey sense of place is relevant in a variety of story-telling mediums. In broadcasting, a study commissioned by the Public Radio Program Directors revealed that what people really valued in local radio boiled down to, that's right, sense of place. Elements related to the environmental, historical, and cultural dimensions of a community were recognized as the elements that gave stories meaning and connected them to the audience (Grech, 2011).

Just as books and radio shows strive to communicate the special qualities that give depth to a narrative, municipalities are discovering the benefits of creating and conveying a

strong sense of place. Latorre describes placemaking as a process that “capitalizes on a local community’s assets, inspiration, and potential”. Municipalities may choose to turn to placemaking as a way to elevate their communities. This practice, which can improve communities both socially and economically, can be approached with methods that are community centered and encourage public participation, collaboration, and transparency. These are the methods employed by The Project for Public Spaces, a New York Based organization focused on authentic placemaking (Latorre, 2011). The Project for Public Spaces, or PPS, recognizes the impact of people’s environments on their quality of life and ways of communicating with each other. Their work method utilizes a holistic approach that begins with listening to the community. Their placemaking efforts are not limited to the physical environment – they also apply it to digital environments, and aptly refer to it as digital placemaking. This process takes into account the increased popularity of the internet, and utilizes the web platform to bring people into the process of placemaking. This can also be called Open Source Placemaking, a practice that connects to the Open Government movement. According to an online post by Latorre, Vice President of Digital Placemaking at Project for Public Spaces, the results of PPS’s digital placemaking projects have proven “that digital engagement enhances and amplifies authentic placemaking at the citywide or district wide scale.” Latorre suggests that “We are in an age of sweeping change. Communities engaged in placemaking benefit from the acceleration that authentic community-centered digital methods can enable.” This is due in part to the nature of communication and public discourse today, which occur across a wide variety of media channels (2011). If sense of place contributes to perception about place, what is the role that media can play in helping to create it? Further, we know from Nowak (2007) that arts and culture are integral to the revitalization of place. In the context of digital placemaking, what does this say about the

technological role of municipalities already engaged in placemaking offline, and how arts and culture based placemaking practices translate to the online environment?

2.3 Gauging from afar – The Internet

To what extent can I grasp the sense of a place online? As Bonaci mentioned, when sense of place is used as a tool for shaping perception and narratives, it appeals to all of the senses (2012). The internet is largely visual and sometimes auditory, but I have yet to come across a computer that emits scents based on what I am observing, I cannot touch anything that is represented, and I certainly cannot enjoy the tastes of the local food culture by observing a list of restaurants. Van Kranenburg (2008), in his discussion on the Internet of Things, reveals that as technology becomes more pervasive, it will change our experience of place, but in ways that are not visible:

Cars have become spaces with navigational systems, and consoles, like Nintendo DS and Sony PSP, have wireless capabilities and Linux kernels installed. We are witnessing a move towards pervasive computing as technology vanishes into intelligent clothing and wearables, smart environments (which know where and who we are) and pervasive games. We will see doors opening for some and closing for others. Mimicry and camouflage will become part of application design. iPods will display colors and produce sounds that correspond to your surrounding” (p.17).

Technology from this perspective is entwined with the way we will (or already might, in some places) experience, and sense, place. However, much literature on sense of place considers themes grounded in a traditional and physical reality.

The sensing of places considers social and geographical contexts, and according to Hay, having insider status and local ancestry in a place are important factors in developing a

more rooted sense of place (2002). As a website viewer, this positions me well into an “outsider” status. In most definitions of sense of place, social connections are frequently discussed, with additional mentions of the impact of the physical environment. While meaning is constructed socially, physical components of an area contribute to experiencing it through visual and tactile qualities, like geographical features, weather, and scents. To further illustrate the connection between social and environmental construction of a place, consider that rural areas may take on an identity related to the notion of “wilderness”, where meaning may stem from things like recreational activities such as hiking, backpacking, or hunting. (Stedman, 2003). If the two major components of sense of place can be broken down to social constructions and the physical environment, how can it be represented via pixels on the world wide web? Social construction certainly exists online, in emergent ways largely under investigation, but without typical geographical borders and without the meanings that the physical qualities of place inspire: “Experiences are linked to the environment in which they occur; physical landscapes, by virtue of certain characteristics, enable or constrain a range of experiences that shape meanings” (Stedman, 2003, p 674).

Throughout my content analysis of Phila.gov, it became clear that gauging a sense of place online would come from examining community initiatives, drilling into the information available about the cultural sector that would be meaningful to me, and depending on the inferences of my findings. This process is likely to turn up varied results for different individuals, as each person may approach their inquiry of a place seeking something slightly or vastly different from another.

Chapter 3: Literature Review: Municipal Websites

3.1 Introduction

In my junior year of high school I wrote a forty-three page thesis on The Theme Park Influence on Urban Development, which explored how commercial placemakers could attempt to encode our experiences with our environment. That was 1996. The internet had recently made its way into peoples homes. Chat rooms were the newest rage, and everyone used AOL. Clinton was the president, and it was during his second term in office that e-government began to evolve, with the goal of putting people online rather than in line and migrating tasks like downloading and submitting forms (Jensen, n.d.). While at first the worldwide web was a portal to online versions of every company's glossy brochure, it was still evolving itself into a vast participatory network, and while top-down governmental communications were transferred to this electronic medium, people were finding new ways to connect with virtual communities (Ridings & Gefen, 2004).

I look back at that thesis I wrote about theme parks influencing our interactions with the world as one of the first precursors to my interest in place. This Master's Research Project takes into consideration the new digital environments that we navigate daily. I looked specifically at municipal websites, the context in which they have emerged, and juxtaposed these findings with concepts of sense of place, choosing Philadelphia, PA as a case study. Throughout, my own lens as to what information is meaningful to my professional and personal endeavors has been at play.

The majority of municipalities in the U.S. do have a website. They were developed in response to the evolution of e-government during the Clinton administration (Jensen, n.d.).

Using the Internet to research information about townships and municipalities reveals a series of lists of municipal websites. Musso reveals that as of 2000, a disconnect existed between what these websites presented (which often consisted of cursory information and the migration of some activities one may formerly have gone to the town hall to take care of) and the variety of possibilities for engagement in arts, work, culture, travel, recreation, and commerce that can be informed or initiated on the websites that represent places (2000). Understanding how internet users look to this medium as a means of engaging with their community, or other communities, is an essential consideration as people live more connected lives through their computers and web technologies and on mobile devices. Based on the literature available about municipal websites, it does not appear that cities and towns have harnessed the dynamic capabilities of the internet to best represent the culture of the place that their media signifies, or to engage their constituencies online to inform their lives as community members both online and off.

As I have begun to research places, for personal/professional reasons related to finding employment as an arts administrator in a community that I would thrive in, I have been surprised and disappointed by the municipal websites that serve them. Just like many people, I socialize, seek information, exchange advice, and make decisions based on my online activity (Boase, 2006). I have often turned to municipal websites to observe what community activities are taking place, how I might get involved with the community as a resident, or what values the community holds in high regard. Unfortunately, I am often left searching for blogs and forums about people's experiences in a place to gain a better view of what it may be like. I believe there are many opportunities for municipalities to encourage dialogue, facilitate participation in local events, and spark innovation in placemaking through a greater understanding of how people function in and through digital culture, and that

doing so will help to convey clearer online representations and a far greater sense of place among municipal websites. Further, as the arts play an integral role in placemaking offline, I believe that it is logical for cultural organizations to be a major player in how place can be shaped, informed, and inspired online as well.

3.2 Challenges

The research regarding sense of place in direct relationship to municipal websites is scarce. In one study that observed how these sites function in relationship to the internet, it was suggested that their primary role is to disseminate information from the city government to the people, and to provide the same services you may get in person online instead, enforcing consumer type interactions (Musso, 1999, & Jensen, 2010). I was able to identify two specific challenges that municipalities likely face in regard to representing or facilitating the creation of shared cultural experiences through their websites. The first of these is that online communication architecture functions differently than the traditional top-down flows of many institutions. The other is that the internet enables location-less communities that take people away from their immediate, physical environment.

3.2.1 Understanding Online Communication Architecture

In a study investigating web technologies for local government reform, findings revealed that municipal websites have a history of functioning “heavily in the areas of enterprise and service provision functions, rather than facilitating communication between residents, access to policy makers, or democratic discourse generally”, thus failing to take advantage of the electronic communication capabilities of the Internet (Musso, 1999, p.2). This is incongruent with how the world wide web functions. “The architecture of the Internet...requires true, engaged conversation” (Newman, 2010, p. 13). Musso suggests that greater attention on municipal websites could be paid towards “...the relationships between

government, citizen, and society at large” (1999, p. 3). From a policy perspective, the decision to mount a municipal website may be based on attempts to stay technologically “trendy” or to fulfill bureaucratic directives without a good understanding of communication principles and practices (Jeffres & Lin, 2006). Unlike traditional one-way information transfer styles of the past, the internet is a community of living interactive knowledge and learning. James Marcum describes the sea of media devices and internet technologies that continue to proliferate as having created a “continuous participatory event” that “engages “growing multitudes of people in an unprecedented new conversation” (Marcum, 2002). The media can no longer be considered “mere channels of communication”. Instead, they can be viewed as the “infrastructure of the living (perceived) environment.”(2002). For municipalities this indicates the need to figure out what societal functions their websites can perform as part of the social system of an information age (Jeffres & Lin, 2006).

3.2.2 The Internet Enables Location-less Communities

Another hurdle that municipalities face in generating greater sense of place via their websites has to do simply with location. Multiple observers have suggested that the internet has the effect of pulling people out of their immediate environments and into location-less virtual ones (Jeffres & Lin, 2006). Yet the literature reviewed on the subject of sense of place mostly addresses elements of interaction and activities within the physical environment. This further compounds the difficulties of building an understanding of how to transfer and engage a physical community within an online space. Additionally, dystopian critics argue that the internet may have negative impacts on factors of sense of place because it may weaken social contact with kin, friends, workmates and neighbors, and may contribute to a decline of public community including gatherings in public places and volunteership. (Quan-Haase, 2002).

Just like the downtown café and public park, some consider the internet something of its own place. In a study concerned with changes in communication, the internet is described as a new third place, "where people connect with friends, watch television, listen to music, build a sense of togetherness with people across the world, and provide expressions of ourselves which are themselves forms of communication" (New Media Consortium, 2007, p.3). It reports that new avenues of interaction are unfolding at a rapid pace. The Internet is a digital environment where more and more people spend more and more of their time (Buntin, 2009). Marcum (2002) previously took the idea of "environment" a step further, suggesting that the culture of web technologies and media devices is better described as a visual ecology because "ecologies are interactive, encompassing both the subject and the environment as they interact with and influence one another dynamically, as a system" (p. 190). Yet, this place – the one enabled by the internet – is invisible. Quan's report finds that the internet is well integrated into our everyday lives, where activities online are extensions of those performed offline. The Boase (2006) study agrees that the internet seamlessly blends in with our in-person and phone encounters. According to these accounts, the internet is a space in which we supplement our offline activity.

3.3 Role of Municipal Websites in Placemaking:

3.3.1 Trending Discussion

There is certainly potential for municipalities in considering how to go about placemaking to achieve their desired results, and how to fully utilize their website to meet their agendas. Economic factors can play a major role in the decisions that municipalities ultimately make. In his study on government reform through websites, Musso touches on the element of economic motivation:

A municipality interested in furthering economic development could employ a website to build the local economy in numerous ways. It could attract tourists and new businesses through the advertisement of recreational or business opportunities. To promote business development it could supply support services and ease local regulatory processes. A town may build the local business information infrastructure by providing information on economic development programs, links to economic development officials, employment listings, advertisements or links to local businesses, and links to the Chamber of Commerce or other business organizations. (1999, p. 6)

He goes on to note findings suggesting that market-oriented reform models can be limited by this “reduction of governance to an instrument of economic interest” that ultimately “demeans the role of the citizen” (1999, p.6). Indeed, a similar discussion has been happening around placemaking as an authentic way to cultivate and elevate communities. This approach can have the result of building great places in socially inclusive and creative ways, versus the perhaps more commercially driven approach of determining what a community needs without participation on the part of the people within it. A brief but concise summary of this discussion (and currently much investigation) is well put in a recent blog post by Ian David Moss, Research Director for Fractured Atlas. The post considers outcomes of creative placemaking:

[Creative Placemaking] gives us few tools to understand how to pursue arts-led economic development while avoiding the thorny problems of gentrification. Any thinking around policy interventions must acknowledge the possibility of negative impacts as well as positive ones. In the case of creative placemaking, an attendant worry is that longtime residents of

transformed neighborhoods won't have asked for the change, and may be adversely affected by it. To date, there is little shared understanding of how creative placemaking projects that benefit all community residents are distinguished from those that simply replace poorer residents with wealthier ones (2012).

Placemaking, for the purposes of this paper, is thought of more as a community process than an economic strategy, though positive economic results may certainly be a product of strengthened communities.

3.3.2 Shaping Place

Latorre frames the digital shaping of place by building upon previous concepts of place-shaping, considering Winston Churchill's notion that "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us", followed by Marshall McLuhans concept that "we shape our tools and they in turn shape us". Keeping with this pattern, Latorre suggests that we shape our media, which in turn shapes us, a thought not unlike Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase: "The medium is the message". Cities today are seeking new ways to improve their places (Latorre, 2011). Planners recognize that distinctive qualities of place increase people's attachment, and with this in mind choose to create or preserve elements that enhance sense of place. Beginning to recognize the value that websites hold as tools in shaping the special narratives about a place is an important element for placemaking because so many people source their information on the internet and engage in online communities. With sixty million people identifying the use of the internet in making a major life decision between 2002-2004 (Boase, 2006), it would be logical to suggest that with increased internet use has come an increase in the number of decisions being affected by information found on the web. Municipal websites can help inspire participation in a broad range of placemaking

initiatives. The internet can offer “cities new opportunities to communicate with their constituents at a time when metropolitan areas struggle with their community identity and cohesion due to continued urban decay for some and a declining job base for others” (Jeffres & Lin, 2006, p. 957).

In order to create a great place, it is necessary for many constituents in the community to play a role. Latorre describes the digital placemaking process as having the potential to reboot the connection between a municipality’s grassroots, bottom-up efforts and top-down initiatives (Latorre, 2011). This is a key point deserving of consideration in re-envisioning municipal websites as agents of placemaking. To successfully implement any developmental agenda, cities may need to nurture grassroots support (Jeffres & Lin, 2006), and may utilize their website as connector and communicator that facilitates collaboration, draws interest from potential tourists, residents, and investors, and mobilizes social capital locally.

Greg Clark, a Global Advisor on City Development, acknowledges that many components make up a great city on a global scale, including students, businesses, festivals, institutions, and so on. He also recognizes that in our highly technological society, many of these components are mobile, and that competing for them requires demonstrating a city identity that is both honest and consistent. In the information Clark provides at www.globalcityforum.com, he reveals how the city identity can function as a “collaboration mechanism for the many stakeholders...that want to show what the city can do.” One visibly important aspect of Clark’s suggested method of establishing this identity is that it accounts for the whole of a city – all of the parts that must be active in the process of making it a great place – rather than delegating the task of “branding” to one entity. Furthermore, it touches on how the content available about a place is what creates meaning

for people trying to gauge it. In his discussion, Clark highlights steps that can be taken to not just appear to be, but actually be, a great place. One step in this process calls on a city to know itself deeply through knowledge of the people that built the city, the values and vision that has led it, and the role the city has and can play on the lives of people who live in and visit it. Another step calls for the “Building of a family for the city”, wherein the role of the city is to build a “family” of organizations that together have a stronger impact on the place. Clark also calls for making the content about a place meaningful. The personality of a place comes to life when it is described in ways that have relevance and meaning, which indicates how it may help people or organizations fulfill their aspirations (2011).

3.3.3 Social Capital

Though the term “social capital” itself has some varying definitions, the commonality of most descriptions is that they “focus on social relations that have productive benefits” (Claridge, 2004). As has been alluded to in previous sections, placemaking takes many active constituents, and many stakeholders must play a role in the process. Arts and culture practices are familiar with drawing on many parts to complete projects and therefore build community, leading Nowak to report that due to their “interrelated webs of universities, cultural institutions, design firms and culturally diverse populations, all of which help attract creative workers and spur creative content, cities are naturally positioned to take advantage of [the creative] sector” to help define their post-industrial relevance (n.d., p.4). Carol Coletta, President of ArtPlace America, operates the organization based on the idea that communities need human capital in order to succeed economically (Berkovitch, 2011).

Empirical studies and theoretical debates on social capital demonstrate a growing consideration of the significance of human relationships, networks, and organizational forms regarding quality of life. Democracy, cross-sector cooperation, and regional development

patterns along with perceptions of government institutions and political involvement all tie into social capital. Additionally, social capital is an important factor in creating social cohesion. It has been charged with lowering crime and improving both public health and economic problems (Ridings, 2004). Clark (2011) alluded to the importance of social capital in his discussion of the city's role being the creation of a "family", and Latorre (2011) addresses this point by suggesting that open government can bridge grassroots efforts and top down agenda. Nowak describes social capital as "the relationship glue through which individuals, families, and social networks navigate opportunity, social conflict, and various institutions." (n.d., p.4).

Herein lies what could be the great missed potential of municipal websites: their structures may do little more than recreate the brick and mortar establishments they signify, like city hall. In a study conducted on a sample of 270 municipal websites in California to determine the use of communication technology to further governance reform, it was determined that most were poorly designed and there was little innovative technological application. It concludes that even those sites that do apply some innovative uses of communication and web technology are doing so in practice of good management, rather than good and innovative democracy (Musso, 1999). In regards to sense of place, this is important because under-utilizing the communication potential that the internet presents may hinder a municipality's ability to maximize social capital through this platform.

There has been some research directed towards understanding how social capital plays out in a digital environment. These studies raise questions as to whether the location-less nature of the internet draws people into far-away communities, thus diminishing social capital within a physical environment, or whether it simply replaces the dominance of some activities associated with social capital like emailing versus holding frequent meetings. Some

analysts see the internet and the activities it enables as integrated components of everyday life rather than an external world unrelated to our immediate and physical reality. Quan-Haase indicates that there is not necessarily less social capital as a result of the web, but instead that activities related to social capital are less public, with some aspects embedded in community activity and social networks online. Observing community relationships is therefore more difficult, as more people are engaged in the space of their own home rather than in public areas. In this way, online communication actually serves to fill in communication gaps between face-to-face meetings. It is also important to note that these findings do not associate extended internet use with greater organizational involvement, but they do associate information seeking online with being more likely to engage with organizations offline.

Chapter 4: Case Study: Phila.gov

I have broken this chapter down into a number of sections, beginning with my reasons for choosing Philadelphia and www.phila.gov for my case study. The chapter continues with sections on cultural content and social capital building, as well as several that relate to the guiding questions that framed this analysis. These were:

- To what extent can I access the cultural sector of Philadelphia via phila.gov?
- How does the website enable or facilitate greater strength and visibility of Philadelphia's arts and culture organizations?
- What themes emerge when exploring the phila.gov website?
- What type of engagement does the website foster?
- How does the website function as a representation of a physical place?

4.1 Choosing Philadelphia, PA

My reasons for choosing to study Philadelphia, and more specifically its municipal website, are both professional and personal. My interest in Philadelphia is not new; I had been accepted to the Arts and Administration program at Drexel University in Philly. Passing that up was not an easy decision, but I had a hunch that I ought to explore the Northwest for my two years of graduate school. After all, the UO is located in Eugene, OR, and the city website at the time I was looking at it touted that the city is “a great place for the arts and outdoors” – two things I love. In my first term of school I was part of a team conducting a cultural asset mapping project as part of the Sustainable Cities Initiative. My research uncovered Stein and Seifert's work on the Social Impact of the Arts Project, produced out of the University of Pennsylvania. This work approached creative placemaking

from the perspective of community engagement and cultural clusters as an aspect of neighborhood revitalization. This was one work of several that set a path through my graduate career that would explore cultural sustainability. Now, as I approach the end of my work at the University of Oregon and return to the East Coast, Philadelphia is once again among my top choices as a place to live and work. Aware of Philadelphia's reputation as a culturally vibrant city and the related career opportunities, it fit my interest in exploring how I could access a place and how deeply I could engage with it or come away with a strong sense of it, solely through its municipal website.

4.2 Content Analysis

4.2.1 Cultural Content

To begin with, it should be understood here that my definition of cultural content is broad in that I view not only arts-related, but also community-related information, to fall under the umbrella of "culture". A detailed grouping of links, neatly organized, at the bottom of the phila.gov home page led me easily to cultural information. This page included direct and clearly described links to the Office of Culture and Creative Economy, the Mural Arts Program, faith-based initiatives, Art in City Hall, Parks and Recreation, information for non-English speakers, and an exhaustive, image rich historical archive. By following the link to the Office of Culture and Creative Economy, I was able to easily locate the vision plan for Creative Philadelphia, which recognizes the cultural sector as an important element in producing social cohesion, creating vibrant neighborhoods, attracting and retaining workers and businesses, and having a positive economic impact. Throughout my research, as may have been evident earlier, it became a concern to me that re-envisioning municipal websites to convey a greater sense of place might be motivated largely out of a desire to build creative economy, using the website as a tool for branding. So I appreciated what appears to be a

deeper understanding of the role of a vibrant cultural scene within Creative Philadelphia's vision plan, which addresses not only economic development, but also quality of life and education. Its goals include making the arts accessible and relevant to as many residents and visitors as possible as well as making rich cultural experiences a regular part of all Philadelphian children's lives.

The Art in City Hall program invites artworks that are both formal and informal, collaborative and juried, from professional and emerging artists as well as from both students and seniors. It recognizes informal arts as an important vehicle for education and neighborhood transformation. To see art from residents of all ages welcomed into a public space is a strong sentiment in favor of community inclusion. The sense that Philadelphia believes in creating a community that values equity and inclusion was further demonstrated within the Global Philadelphia page, where a message from Mayor Michael Nutter addresses the quickly growing immigrant population of the city. To assist non-English speakers, this page is a resource for direct access to interpreter services in nineteen languages. Information about the extensive mural arts program in Philadelphia can also be investigated at length and is only two very clear links away from the homepage.

There is more than one way to access all of these departments from the homepage. While the link at the bottom of the page is fairly straight forward, I can also navigate to get to any of these from the departmental drop-down menu. Of the 100 departments listed there, twelve were related to arts and culture information. Some not mentioned above include Philadelphia More Beautiful, PhillyRising, and Philadelphia Reads. The combination of cultural information available on these pages is the type of meaningful content that can attract someone, for example, like myself. Or, at least, it is the information that can help me form an opinion about what this place is like, in accordance with what I am looking for from

a place. This is an important point, because as was pointed out by Clark (2011), learning to appeal to broader constituencies requires providing the type of meaningful information that a variety of people are seeking. Certainly, as was demonstrated by the figure of ten million people using the internet to help them make decisions about moving (Boase, 2006), municipal websites have a large role to play in delivering this information.

4.2.2 Building Social Capital

The second major strength of phila.gov is its function as a civic catalyst. Philadelphia is one of about 100 cities nationwide participating in Cities of Service. This presented a clear relationship between the previous literature review discussing the value of social capital, and the use of a website to do so. The Cities of Service Program requires that each city has committed to the development of a comprehensive plan to connect volunteers with established community partners to address areas of great need. Leadership as a City of Service is demonstrated by having:

- Published or publicly announced a comprehensive service plan
- Hired a municipal Chief Service Officer, or
- Launched Impact Initiatives in key areas, such as Education and Youth, Health, Neighborhood Revitalization, Preparedness and Safety, Sustainability, and Veterans.

In 2010, Philadelphia received a \$200,000 grant as a leader in the Cities of Service project. These funds are dedicated to the hiring of a Chief Service Officer who is responsible for establishing a city-wide plan to increase volunteerism that targets the city's greatest needs.

Philadelphia's service plan identifies three such areas for focused volunteerism. These are education, community vitality, and infrastructure. Within the specified areas, the plan targets creating volunteer opportunities that impact educational outcomes, making volunteerism accessible for citizens of all ages, and supporting both public and private sector

efforts. The plan, which identifies a lack of a clear mechanism for citizens to engage as volunteers in city-led opportunities, was established following an eight-month assessment and consultation process that “engaged service experts, nonprofit organizations, grassroots community groups, faith communities, schools, colleges, private sector partners, and public agencies in examining the city’s current service landscape and its challenges” (Nutter, 2010). Five major “impact initiatives” were outlined, including the lead coordinator, key partners, metrics for measuring outcomes, and the timeline for activity:

1. Graduation Coach Campaign targets getting adults involved in helping students earn a high school diploma.
2. College Access Writing Clinics target college student volunteerism at regularly held writing clinic sessions.
3. Public Service Area volunteerism has the goal of strengthening local community group capacity to revitalize neighborhoods through partnering with City agencies and both nonprofit and forprofit entities. These partnerships allow for the leveraging of resources and assistance with volunteer management.
4. Volunteer Afterschool programs seek to provide engaging after school activities in libraries and community centers.
5. Green Philly, Grow Philly seeks to harness volunteer capacity to plant 300,000 trees in Philadelphia by 2015.

The use of Philadelphia’s municipal website as a place to engage with the Serve Philly program appears to be the solution to one of the five cross cutting initiatives in the plan: “The Mayor’s Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service will develop and manage a one-stop-shop for Philadelphians interested in connecting with one-time and ongoing

volunteer opportunities” (Serve Philadelphia, 2010, p. 8). An easily visible link on the homepage brings site visitors to a page where they can explore ways to engage in their community. They can do this by interest, skill, or available opportunities. As I write this, some of the newest opportunities include volunteering for the West Park Arts Fest, as a museum docent, or with the South Philly Neighborhood interview project. I found this particular area of phila.gov particularly exciting as a future nonprofit manager, because in addition to having targeted volunteer needs advertised, any Philadelphia organization can post their opportunities on this page. This demonstrates a sort of partnership between the city and all of the many organizations that create the network of that place.

Serve Philly, by identifying the needs of the community and then connecting various organizations with a major initiative to address these needs, is exemplary of the type of community reflection and creation of a family network described by Clark (2011), and the bridging of government and community organizations described by Latorre (2011). Serve Philly, in my opinion, is an excellent example of how a municipal website can promote active community engagement to better a place. The volunteer opportunities included in this project are not the only outlets for getting involved in Philadelphia, however. People can also practice being active citizens through a local reporting system. Philadelphians can submit fraud tips, complaints, concerns about things like abandoned cars and pot holes by going to the 311 link or dialing 311 on their telephone. If using this service via the telephone, a live representative handles the concern and connects the caller to the information they need. Service request results can be tracked at the webpage, and a running twitter feed displays current 311 news. This service enables simple and active civic engagement for Philadelphians. Additionally, though it is not the focal point of this

particular paper, it is worth noting that phila.gov also enables a host of interactions through social media. This includes a Facebook page, Twitter feed, RSS, and Flickr account.

4.2.3 Themes and Representation

When I think about sense of place and how it might be conveyed, the picture in my mind is that of a more visual (as opposed to textual) representation that would include ways to access place through picture rather than words. However, gauging Philadelphia by its website and brief drill down into the most obvious sub-pages required much more analysis of textual content by which to make inferences about the city. As the major function of municipal websites relates to their original goal of providing services online, the service provision component of Phila.gov is by far the most prevalent. My analysis sought to uncover common themes that might represent the culture and values of the city. The most easily identifiable of these were sustainability, a commitment to youth and education, and cultural equity.

Though this paper does not focus on sustainability outside of alluding to some cultural aspects, it is something that is personally important to me. Though my primary interest in sustainability is cultural, many aspects interest me. When it comes to sustainability, Philadelphia has big goals. In fact, Mayor Nutter seeks no less than to make Philadelphia the greenest city of all. From the topics list on phila.gov I can access information about a variety of sustainability initiatives, along with progress reports about them. I was able to see that Philadelphia's Office of Sustainability has identified the importance of local food, setting the goal of bringing local food within ten minutes of 75 percent of residents. The project also seeks to create demand for this food and support food entrepreneurs while also combating hunger. A "Clean Kitchen, Green Community" project is also underway to help divert food

waste from landfills through a private-public partnership and the involvement of community groups. In yet another project, the city seeks to plant 300,000 trees by 2015 and increase the number of trees in all neighborhoods by 30% by 2025. At the start of this research I noticed a banner on the homepage that advertised free trees to residents, and upon finding this information I discovered why. The tree project is meant to increase tree cover (cooling households in the summer), decrease air pollution, decrease storm water runoff, and increase property values. On the architecture front, the Mayor's Office of Sustainability is developing a green building program as a resource for builders and homeowners. To reduce energy use, the city website connects residents and builders to EnergyWorks – a public program that guides efforts towards energy efficiency through resources and financing options.

Admittedly, I don't have the personal knowledge to evaluate how affordable this organization actually makes greening your home. Philadelphians are encouraged to recycle, through a rewards initiative, and a long term sustainability plan looks ahead through 2035. This is a portion of the information highlighting the most visible aspects of Philadelphia's sustainability plan, as presented within a short drill down of the phila.gov homepage.

Another evident theme that can be inferred from the phila.gov website is that the city has a strong commitment to its youth and their education. This is an interesting thing to consider because it suggests that there is a significant problem requiring much attention. Then, on the other hand, the apparent commitment to addressing the issue makes evident the interest of the City in greatly improving as a place. One major education initiative underway is Philly Goes 2 College, which looks to engage all levels of the community in supporting young people on the path to a college degree. Philadelphia Reads is another highly identifiable initiative that addresses younger children's education through mentorship and after school programs. Updates on the Mayor's education goals are available, as well as

resources for families. This element appeared in both the cultural information I was able to collect as well as the information about Serve Philly. Just as serving the youth was an element in the Serve Philly plan, making the arts accessible to all Philadelphian children was listed as a goal in the Creative Philadelphia plan as well.

Interested largely in the culture-related content on phila.gov, one of the most notable themes visible to me was the attention paid to equity and community. This was evident in arts and culture sections as well as across various other topics on the website. For example, consider the Art in City Hall program, which promotes creative inclusion across ages and abilities, along with the Housing Development Corporation and Housing Authority's role of keeping housing affordable, accessible, and safe for low and moderate income households. The Mayor has a commission on People with Disabilities that provides a forum for the disabled community to comment on city programs and services, as well as a Commission on Services to the Aging which provides free services to residents and employers age fifty-five and above. The strategic plan of this commission specifically identifies the value of the aging population and how the city intends to honor that by ensuring that "seniors can access critical resources that will support them as they age and enable them to remain in their homes and in their neighborhoods" The plan "also seeks to give [seniors] more opportunities to continue to engage with others and contribute to their Communities" (p. 2). (Nutter, M., Johnston-Walsh, B., & Velez, L., n.d.). Philadelphia also seemingly devotes a large amount of energy to community building at the neighborhood level. The PhillyRising Collaborative targets those areas within the city whose problems require coordinated support by multiple agencies and works with the community to establish a vision for the future. In addition to this, the Mayor's office of Neighborhood Services creates partnerships between residents and businesses to establish more sustainable communities through improving the

appearance of neighborhoods and eradicating blight, touting over seven million pounds of trash and debris removal over the past year, as well as the cleaning of graffiti on 101,576 properties. The Office of Neighborhood Services webpage asks residents to get involved with these projects, stating that “Only through the combined efforts of community organizations, business associations, elected officials, city, state and federal agencies working together can the quality of life truly improve in neighborhoods throughout the city”. This information recalled the SIAP project I had come across, and its focus on neighborhoods versus a singular cultural district. This study evaluates clusters of cultural assets at the neighborhood level, and was a precursor to the amount of work occurring at the neighborhood level as evidenced on phila.gov.

4.3 Case Study Conclusions

The exploration of phila.gov exemplified many key points of my literature review. It provided me with information regarding the approach on behalf of the city regarding placemaking through the Creative Philadelphia report. Through ServePhilly it actively utilizes the internet to harness the energies of the residents in making Philadelphia ever better. Through observation of the site overall I was able to grasp a commitment to providing services and engagement opportunities to diverse ages and races, supporting a tone of inclusion and equity. It was also evident that the city is caring for its future with multiple initiatives geared to support youth, and that the city is highly motivated in moving towards sustainability in multiple ways. However, throughout this process I did not see a clear linkage to the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, which seemed quite strange. In fact, I still think I must have missed it somewhere along the way. It was at the website of the cultural alliance that I have been able to identify the potential for work, and stay abreast of news

related to the cultural sector specifically in Philadelphia, and it was surprising not be able to navigate there from phila.gov, particularly from the arts and culture page.

There's also the proverbial elephant in the room to consider in regards to any findings in this case study. Without being in Philadelphia physically, I cannot evaluate how well my inferences match the actual experience of being a Philadelphia resident. The goal of this research was to determine how well a sense of place could potentially be understood through or presented on a municipal website. As noted in the problem statement in chapter one, millions of people approach the internet for information about major decisions, including career changes and moving to new locations. Given the very visual nature of the internet, lengthy textual review might not be an enticing way to get such information. However, based on my experience reviewing phila.gov, taking some time to identify the aspects of civic life that are addressed through current strategic planning sheds some light on the direction of the community. Being able to easily locate documents that reveal a strong commitment to the arts and culture sector was, for me, enough information to keep Philadelphia at the top of my places-to-be list.

On phila.gov I was able to find the type of information I was looking for, regarding cultural initiatives, arts activities in the city, and community engagement opportunities. It was also clear that the city has identified the website as a tool for building social capital, and I was able to infer from the many initiatives underway those issues that Philadelphia is seeking to address. While sense of place, it seems, has not yet been defined in relationship to a website, Phila.gov demonstrates that there are ways that a website can facilitate place-making. By developing a strong understanding of the needs of the community and embracing the power that the arts holds for revitalizing communities, and then utilizing phila.gov as a tool for connecting people with organizations to address targeted community

initiatives, this city and its website provide a good example of how an online space can support placemaking. Overall, this case study was exemplary of the how municipalities can begin to approach application of the internet in the placemaking process because it provides extensive information on the practices and plans of the city in regard to strategies to strengthen arts and culture, and the reasons for doing so. It also seeks to enable people to become engaged with activities that the City has identified as important to the future of the community. A next step for research would be to establish a set of methods, standards, and best practices in online placemaking to help guide the evolution of physical place in this electronic, information age.

Chapter 5: Wrap-up for Arts Administrators

There are several recurrent themes throughout this research, to be summarized in this conclusion. Arts and culture are inherently proactive placemaking components that rely on social capital and have a positive impact on community development. Further, arts and culture are the manifestation of expression stemming from experience, tradition, and observations about the elemental and cultural environment and exploration in and around it. In other words, sense of place is evident through the arts. Additionally, the rising popularity of creative placemaking has arrived at a post-industrial age that has seen the rise of pervasive networked technology, dubbing it the information age.

This research project explores the intersection of place in this information age, where people connect, create, socialize, and source information through a networked, participatory system. In this space there are new possibilities for arts and culture professionals, potentially in collaboration with city officials, to identify new strategies of placemaking. Offline activity can be enhanced, informed, and inspired through online modes and digital communication flows. For example, a simple tickler on a website allowing people to answer a question such as “What do you love about this city?” would both provide a place for community members to reflect on their place, communicate a wide array of benefits of a place to internal and potential stakeholders, and allow city planners to identify aspects of the place that were most loved. Likewise, asking what people would like to see more of would allow city planners to identify missing assets that could greatly improve the experience of a place. This information would be useful to website viewers seeking information that exhibits

the experience of being in a place, and it would also enable arts and culture institutions to identify programmatic needs.

Future arts managers may turn to municipal websites to gain a better understanding of the cultural strategies being employed by a municipality, which could inform their participation and advocacy within the sector. For example, if there is no information regarding arts and culture initiatives, a first step would be to advocate for the inclusion of the arts in the future vision of a place. If there are strategic community plans focused on the arts, professionals should have access to collaborating in such initiatives. This could foster the building of a strong network of organizations dedicated to creating a vibrant cultural sector. Potential investors in the cultural sector might better be able to perform preliminary research on places to “set up shop” by being able to identify a lack of particular arts and culture programming and offerings in a community, and by gauging the level of community interest in the arts.

Based on my experience throughout this research, there are some basic key elements that arts administrators, or even relocating arts enthusiasts, can look for on a municipal website in order to identify aspects of arts and culture in a place. These are a combination of functional, aesthetic, and content based aspects:

- Is there an Arts and Culture link on the homepage? Places may or may not separate this information from what is available to tourists. In the Philadelphia example, the information available at the arts and culture link was geared towards the City itself, its plans for the future and strategies to reach its cultural goals. Visitor-based information is more akin to an events calendar for trip planning.

- Within any available arts and culture information, are there current activities, statistics, strategies, and plans available? How deep of an understanding can you establish about the values a place has regarding cultural development?
- Is there a public office dedicated to arts and culture? Is it accessible, and does it present information about their function, goals, and plans, and work that has already been accomplished?
- Does the city have a slogan? What does it say about the place, and what information on the website backs it up? For people comparing places or just seeking information about places online, simply stating something to be true does not qualify as meaningful content without being substantiated.
- Are there ways for community organizations to promote opportunities on the website? Most arts organizations function with the help of volunteers, as do many other types of organizations. How does the municipal site help connect community members and organizations? As an arts administrator, the possibility for any resident to find out how to get involved with your organization may greatly assist your outreach efforts.
- What attributes of the place are immediately evident? Is the information static, requiring clicking on links to get everywhere, or are there visual and changing components that provide up to date information (beyond things like school closings)? For example, I just discovered that my hometown is introducing First Friday cultural events, but when I visited the town homepage (one day prior to the first event) this was not evident.
- Can you get to the website of the arts and cultural council of the town from the municipal website? Even if a municipal site determines that it is not dedicated to

being the resource for arts and culture information, connecting site visitors to the appropriate resource can fulfill a similar function.

- Does there appear to be any online cultural asset data collection, which can be entered by any site visitor? As more communities engage in placemaking, some are utilizing the internet to allow artisans and community members to submit information about the arts scene within that place. This can be used to gain valuable insight about what creative activities community members are engaged in, which can be used, for example, to implement cultural events.

These questions would also be appropriate for city staffs to ask themselves, particularly if arts and culture play a role in how they seek to define their place. The notion of placemaking offers rich ground by which municipal websites can be re-conceptualized within a technologically networked culture.

References

- Ryden, K. C. (January 01, 2006). Panel: Intersections of Place & Space with Visual Culture - Why Your World Looks the Way It Does and Why It Matters: Cultural Landscape as Visual Culture. *Visual Arts Research*, 32(63), 73.
- Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy. *Creative Philadelphia Vision Plan*. Retrieved from <http://creativephl.org/post/13979660253/mayors-cultural-advisory-council-presents-vision-plan>
- Berkovitch, E. (2011). New Formula: *Grassroots Arts Philanthropy Booms*. Retrieved from <http://adobeairstream.com/art/new-formula-grassroots-arts-philanthropy-booms/>
- Boase, J., Horrigan, John B., Wellman, B., & Rainie, L. (2006). *The Strength of Internet Ties*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project.
- Bonaci, S. (2012, February 4). Sense of Place In *Finding Acorns – a blog about creative writing*. Retrieved from <http://www.findingacorns.com/2012/02/sense-of-place.html>
- Bunton, S. B. (2009). *Virtual Sense of Place-Terrain.org and the Online Nexus of Literature*. Retrieved from <http://www.terrain.org/ecomedia/>
- Claridge, T. (2004). *Social Capital and Natural Resource Management*. Unpublished Thesis, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.
- Clark, G. (2011). *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful Cities*. Retrieved from <http://www.globalcityforum.com/en/global-city-blog.aspx>
- Cox, H., & Holmes, C. (2000). Loss, healing, and the power of place. *Human Studies*, 23(1), 63-78.

- Finnemore, Marilyn. (2011, June 14). [Web blog post]. Retrieved from [www.importanceofplace.com/search/label/Importance of Place](http://www.importanceofplace.com/search/label/Importance+of+Place)
- Grech, D. (2011, August 30). Local Radio with a Sense of Place. [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://transom.org/?p=19888>
- Hay, R. (2002). Sense of Place in Developmental Context. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, volume 18(1), pp. 5-29.
- Jeffres, L. W. and Lin, C. A. (2006), Metropolitan Websites as Urban Communication. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11: 957–980. doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00303.x
- Jenkins, H. (n.d.). *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. Chicago, IL: The MacArthur Foundation.
- Jensen, M. J. (2010). Images of Citizenship: A Content Analysis of Local Government Websites in the United States. *158109131198*.
- Kozinets, R. V. (June 22, 2010). Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online. *International Journal of Advertising*, 29, 2, 328-330.
- Latorre, D. (2011, September 22). Digital Placemaking – Authentic Civic Engagement [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.pps.org/digital-placemaking-authentic-civic-engagement/>
- Marcum, J. (2002). Beyond Visual Culture: The Challenge of Visual Ecology. *Portal: Libraries and The Academy*, 2 (2), pp 189-206.
- Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service (2010). *Serve Philadelphia-A Blueprint for Promoting Service as a Strategy to Impact Challenges and Strengthen Communities*. Philadelphia, PA.

- Moss, I. (2012, May 9). Creative Placemaking Has an Outcomes Problem. Retrieved from <http://createequity.com/2012/05/creative-placemaking-has-an-outcomes-problem.html>.
- Musso, J., Weare, C., & Hale, M. (1999). Designing with web technologies for local governance reform: good management or good democracy?. *Communication Abstracts*, 23, 5.)
- New Media Consortium. (2007). *Social networking, the "third place," and the evolution of communication*. Austin, TX: New Media Consortium. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED505117&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED505117
- Newman, B. (2010). Inventing the Future of the Arts: Seven Digital Trends that Present Challenges and Opportunities for Success in the Cultural Sector. Clapp, E. (Ed.), *20under40: Re-inventing the arts and arts education for the 21st century* (pp.3- 19). Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse.
- Nowak, J. (n.d.). The Power of Placemaking – A Summary of Creativity and Neighborhood Development: Strategies for Reinvestment.
- Nutter, M., Johnston-Walsh, B., & Velez, L. (n.d.) *Mayor's Commission on Aging Strategic Plan 2011-2013*. Philadelphia, PA. Retrieved from <http://www.phila.gov/aging/>
- Quan-Haase, A., Wellman, B., Witte, J., & Hampton, K. (2002). Capitalizing on the Net: Social Contact, Civic Engagement, and Sense of Community.
- Ridings, C. & Gefen, D. (2004). Virtual Community Attraction: Why People Hang Out Online. *JCMC*, 10 (1). Retrieved from http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue1/ridings_gefen.html

- Scott, A. (1997). *The Cultural Economy of Cities* (pp.323-339). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Stedman, R. (January 01, 2003). Is It Really Just a Social Construction?: The Contribution of the Physical Environment to Sense of Place. *Society & Natural Resources*, 16(8), 671-685.
- Stern, M., & Seifert, C. (2010). Cultural Clusters: The Implications of Cultural Assets Agglomeration for Neighborhood Revitalization. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, volume 29 (262). Retrieved from <http://jpe.sagepub.com/content/29/3/262>
- The National Endowment for the Arts. (2010). *Audience 2.0: How Technology Influences Arts Participation*. Retrieved from <http://nea.gov/research/new-media-report/index.html#>
- Van Kranenburg, R. (2008). *The Internet of Things: A Critique of ambient technology and the all-seeing network of RFID*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Institute of Network Cultures.
- VanMeter, P. & Murphy, L. (May 2012). *Placemaking 101*. Retrieved from http://www.philasocialinnovations.org/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=429%3Aplacemaking-101&catid=57%3Aperspectives-and-predictions&Itemid=102&limitstart=3
-