



Rust to Green: Praxis as University-Community Placemaking

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Rust to Green (R2G) is a civic engagement project with the transformative agenda of catalyzing community-driven placemaking in Upstate New York cities endeavoring to transition from post-industrial “rust” to “green” resiliency. At its core, R2G engages university and community partners in co-producing actionable projects that contribute to increasing the quality and health of places and the people who engage with and inhabit them. Guided by the theories and practices of placemaking and democratic civic engagement, R2G is first and foremost rooted in place. For the past five years that place has been the city of Utica, NY.

As R2G’s lead faculty director and the author of this paper, it seems apt to introduce this paper with a bit of context about me. I am a landscape architecture professor whose R2G praxis combines my democratic design knowledge with my commitment to democratic civic engagement at Cornell and within my discipline. For nearly two decades, I have been seeking greater alignment between the public and democratic purposes of landscape architecture and higher education. I align myself with a growing community of faculty from landscape architecture and its sister environmental design disciplines whose teaching, research and practice emphasizes democratic design through placemaking; community and participatory design; social-activist; and public-interest-design. My journey, across two decades, has been similar to that of many of my academic peers. It has been rife with resistances from within the academy and the profession. It has also positioned me as part of a movement that has been shaping and gaining ground within academia’s design and planning fields.

In 2007, I came together with a group of like-minded peers to form the Erasing Boundaries Network with funding from NY/PA Campus Compact and Learn and Serve America. Erasing Boundaries provided a platform and a meeting ground for us to learn and work together to support and strengthen service-learning and civic engagement’s place and value in design and planning. In 2008 and 2011 we convened two major symposia and later produced two edited volumes, *Educating at the Boundaries* (2011) and *Community Matters* (2014). In 2010, R2G’s

launch came at a time when my personal conviction towards civic engagement's role in design education was fully cementing. With a small amount of seed funding coming from a USDA Hatch Grant (Horrigan, n.d.), R2G was framed as a civic engagement action research project with the theories and practices of democratic placemaking at its core. While on paper we attempted to meet the granting agency's mandate for a linear process set to a 3-year timeframe, we remained committed to a process of creating and unfolding R2G collaboratively *with* our community collaborators. Now in our fifth year, R2G has been anything but linear, and its story is complex, messy and still unfolding.

At the most basic level, R2G's story is about activating and enabling a productive and co-creative relationship between university and community participants coming together to explore and address community challenges through placemaking. It is never easy to build and construct an equitable exchange and relationship in which all partners are invited, validated and respected for what they bring to the table. As such, the process and method of relationship building in and of itself becomes a determinant of the kind of relationship that results. This is why R2G's praxis is best framed and defined as *placemaking*. Placemaking is a democratic design process and purpose that fosters greater environmental justice, equity, community empowerment, and ecological and landscape democracy. R2G's praxis represents my effort and aspiration to structure and activate a *democratic civic engagement project* (Saltmarsh, Hartley and Clayton, 2009) with transformative benefits for the places and people it engages in both university and community spaces.

This paper thereby sets out to frame R2G's praxis as being grounded in placemaking, and through examples of R2G in action, to illustrate *how* it is aspiring to achieve the hallmarks of democratic civic engagement. Toward that end, I will first set the stage by characterizing and distinguishing "civic" and "democratic" forms of engagement (Saltmarsh, Hartley, Clayton, 2009) and situating R2G as part of a movement toward democratic civic engagement in design and planning. Next I will elaborate on R2G's praxis and how place, placemaking, and democratic professionalism thread through it. Finally, I will share stories and experiences of R2G's praxis in action. In conclusion, I will offer insights and reflections on R2G challenges.

Setting the Stage

Community engagement in landscape architecture, architecture and planning has been historically marked by "innovation, experimentation, and trial and error" and a deep felt desire to link professional work with social change (Angotti, Doble & Horrigan, 2011, p. 5). Its history is wrought with ups and downs, varying levels of attention to the community-engagement strategies being employed, and struggles against "the constant drift within our professions towards more technocratic and paternalistic relationships with people and communities" (p. 8). Ernest Boyer and Lee Mitang's 1996 report, *Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice*, signified a clarion call to architecture and its sister design professions to become more engaged in societal problems. Further, it called for a deepening of

professional education's commitment to community service and a restructuring of "the process by which students and faculty are engaged" (Boyer & Mitang 1996, pp. 26-28).

Without doubt, the civic engagement record of the design and planning disciplines suggests that they are becoming more engaged in societal problems. Contemporary discourses around sustainability, as well as societal challenges of global dimensions, are encouraging if not demanding greater engagement. Sustainability's paradigm includes core values of "sufficiency, efficiency, community, locality, health, democracy, equity, justice and diversity" (Sterling, 2001, p. 16). It also calls for deeper levels of change within institutions of design education, practice and research, so they can better model and foster those same core values. Opportunities for transformative learning emphasizing relationships, systems, integration, processes, dynamics, wholeness and connectivity (Sterling, 2001) are being found less within the inner confines of campus and more within the world "out-there" through civic engagement.

The meteoric rise of social activist and public interest design in less than a decade reflects a growing desire to attend to design and planning's social, democratic and public purposes and to give greater relevance to the knowledge and expertise designers and planners offer (Abendroth & Bell, 2015; Aeshbacher & Rios, 2008; Bell & Wakeford, 2008; Bell, 2003). This comes as civic engagement is on the rise and universities are taking steps to institutionalize and incentivize civic engagement. Efforts to critically elevate and strengthen the rigor and relevance of community engaged design and planning (Angotti et al., 2011; Bose et al., 2104; Hardin et al., 2006) are further bolstering civic engagement's place in design education and design's role in addressing societal problems.

While more and greater activity is certain, Boyer and Mitang's appeal calls for deep-rooted restructuring of the actual engagement "process" being employed and the purpose it will serve. Many civic engagement activities in design and planning, although employing timely professional techniques and knowledge, still conform to what Saltmarsh, Hartley and Clayton (2009) characterize as being *activity* and *place* focused and therefore achieving "first order change" outcomes (Cuban, 1988, quoted in Saltmarsh et al., p. 12). First order civic engagement models emphasize a relocating of education and research *activities* to a community *place* or location without altering the processes and purposes of the activity or transgressing the university's established institutional culture. They engage students and faculty in the *activity*—the professional practice of landscape architecture, architecture, planning—being applied to a problem in a specific *place*—a site, neighborhood, city or region. While the real world client being served may be an individual or group, the approach maintains that the center of expertise and knowledge production is the university and the design discipline. Such engagements model the normative behaviors and expert-client relationships that dominate in academia and the design professions. They educate and professionalize students to become expert credentialed practitioners who, as social trustees, largely work *for* clients and in the interests of the public good, but not *with* the public (Dzur, 2008).

Truly attending to Boyer and Mitang's appeal in the midst of our contemporary societal context suggests deeper levels of structural change if different relationships and outcomes for both designers and communities are to be produced. The pioneers and early adopters of civic engagement with deeper levels of structural change more closely model what Saltmarsh, Hartley and Clayton define as "democratic civic engagement" (2009). Such projects as the University of Pennsylvania's West Philadelphia Landscape Project and the University of Illinois' East St. Louis Action Research Project (Reardon, 2003; Spirn, 2005), were sustained university-community collaborations using participatory action research processes and methods, and democratic, bottom-up approaches to urban planning. Democratic civic engagement-leaning projects such as these placed greater emphasis on their "democratic" purposes and sought greater university-community reciprocity and the co-production of knowledge to drive local community-based change and problem solving. By emphasizing democratic processes and goals, they challenged and transformed accepted norms and ways of solving problems that universities and professions traditionally adopt. As such, their university-community relationship produced a *with*, not for, relational dynamic.

As Saltmarsh, Hartley and Clayton stress, democratic civic engagement deeply alters university-community relationships and the space those relationships produce. A new "knowledge and learning space" that is shared, co-produced and co-created together by *both* the university and community signals reciprocity, adapts epistemology, and advances "second order change" in university-community relationships (Cuban, quoted in Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p.12). Increasingly, "democratic design" knowledge has been evolving and maturing while being taught, learned and fostered through the civic engagement activities of design and planning faculty and students. Many of these engagement activities have pushed themselves towards and into the realm of democratic civic engagement while others remain activity and location or place focused. Much of the hesitancy to make and risk an advance into democratic civic engagement is the fact that democratic design's participatory, community-engaged, social justice agenda has also left it largely marginalized and dubbed alterative, not mainstream, and subversive rather than dominant in academia and professional practice.

Regardless, as democratic design appears to be gaining momentum, one might speculate and argue that democratic design and democratic civic engagement are uniquely poised to fully embrace one another and become epistemological soul mates. They can work together to strengthen and shape one another and also to enable and produce knowledge befitting of an educational paradigm for sustainability in the environmental design disciplines. Furthermore, they can work together to shape greater sustainability and ecological democracy (Hester, 2006) across scales from the local to the global.

R2G's Praxis

It is toward that end that Rust to Green's (R2G) praxis aspires. R2G's praxis interweaves democratic civic engagement and democratic design, specifically placemaking, into a common armature. In so doing, it aims to produce relationships and a relational dialogic space

engaging university and community participants in the project of collective actionable placemaking in New York's post-industrial Rust Belt.

Rooted in Place and Placemaking

R2G's praxis begins with place and the city of Utica, N.Y. In the words of one R2G Utica partner, "what is important needs to be both the specific place, and the people who occupy that place." Place is a way of knowing or understanding something that relies on an understanding of lived experience and paying attention to the specific and the local (Cresswell, 2004). Places like Utica are not merely neutral or empty spaces, objects or containers. Edward Casey (1996) calls them "teeming place-worlds" we experience, inhabit and live through "habitual cultural and social processes" (pp. 17,19). Places are complex territories with flux, change, disruption and adaptation being among their foremost traits. They are constantly being made and remade, preserved and then founded anew through the interactions, meaning-making and practices of people inhabiting them (Cannavo, 2007). Places and our understanding of them, are thereby continually in the process of being materially as well as socially and politically constructed and negotiated. They are continually being invested with meanings developing through and out of the relationships and interactions of their inhabitants.

Places act on people and people act on places in a dynamic and relational manner. It is people, in places, that must have a direct hand in shaping and directing people-place interactions and steering the direction they take, argues geographer Edward Relph. Places have to be made "from the inside out" and "through the involvement and commitment of the people who live and work in them"(Relph, 1993, p. 34). Henry Louis Taylor, professor of urban and regional planning at the University of Buffalo, agrees. Taylor emphasizes the entanglement of people and place that constitutes community. People-place entanglements further enmesh with the problems and challenges communities face (Shipp, 2014). These linkages, Taylor underscores, are what academic engagement must recognize.

The people act on the neighborhood and the neighborhood place acts on people. Consequently, the neighborhood place will either increase or decrease a person's life chances. The behaviors of individual families are linked to the built environment and efforts to revive distressed communities must recognize this relationship. Academic engagement and service-learning, if successful, must fully embrace this linkage as a means to identify issues relevant to stakeholders and important to fostering relationships. (p.24)

Following Taylor's lead, the first essential ingredient of R2G's praxis is unquestionably the local place and community of Utica, N.Y., and its neighborhoods. In Utica, across scales from city to neighborhood, people-place interactions are producing particular place meanings, which operate to benefit or diminish quality of life. These interactions need discovering, listening to, and attending to by directly engaging them. By positioning itself directly *within* those people-

place interactions, R2G can listen, and also interact with, relate to, respond to, learn from and with those interactions.

One's position and positioning in any community's people-place interactions requires awareness of the risk, opportunity and power it involves. Edward Relph's (1976) dialectic of insideness and outsideness is instructive in this regard. A place's meanings and identities change both depending on one's position and also how that place itself is changing due to forces acting upon it from within and without. Existential insideness in relationship to place develops from living and growing deeply emplaced, and often to the extreme where one's familiarity causes decreasing awareness of how that place is impacting and sustaining one's experience and life. Insideness might manifest in nostalgia, with a clinging to the past and a "taking for grantedness." Such positioning can coincide with a passiveness toward change or even deep cynicism and a "sense of entrapment and claustrophobia from which one must escape" (Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p. 8).

Existential outsideness lies at the most opposite extreme and might manifest itself in feeling a sense of "otherness," alienation and separateness from a place. It can also manifest itself in personal or professional detachment and justify superimposing or applying models, ideas and decisions on a place or commodifying it for economic gain alone. David Seamon offers "shading" to locate insideness and outsideness as lying along a gradient between each extreme condition. He further argues for how insideness and outsideness might work together and help each other by drawing the two closer together. In so doing, they may also act upon or alter one another so that one moves from being a complete outsider toward becoming an empathetic insider (Seamon, 2008) with greater willingness to directly and deeply engage with and strive to understand the people-place interactions and also enable them to respond to change.

Through R2G we are creating a meeting ground for people, from university and community sectors and from extremes of outsideness and insideness. Knowing this, our attitude is to both acknowledge those differences but also consciously act to draw ourselves toward one another through R2G's praxis. We maintain the attitude that Utica, although experiencing serious challenges, harbors the social, material and environmental assets on which its post-industrial future and transformation relies. Our praxis emphasizes identifying and working with assets and engaging in collective acts of change and transformation—placemaking—that in turn draws us closer together. From the outset, the very intention of enabling, rather than diminishing, a narrative of promise and optimism, has positioned R2G as being engaged in not just evaluating or studying Utica as a place, but actually being a participant in adapting and making it into the place its citizenry wants it to become. By positioning ourselves in this way, R2G hopes also to counteract the criticism often leveled at universities that emphasize the negatives and problems of cities, thereby actually contributing to creating a doom-and-gloom narrative and a climate of disinvestment in the local economy and community (Reardon, 2003).

Rooted in place knowledge, R2G's praxis turns to placemaking as its principal design and planning process for engaging diverse participants in relationally working together to create and recreate their place—Utica, NY. Placemaking (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995) aims to create places that are more human and socially responsive, more just and equitable, and more generative of place meanings that reinforce and foster individual and community place identity and attachment (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). The collaborative, participatory and emergent aspect of placemaking emphasizes "process" and "making" as not ancillary, but central. It is in the action or process of making and participating in the making of change that the community and the process are drawn together and co-produce one another (Silberberg, 2013). Therefore, placemaking is an act of community-building and the developing of a community's social capital through its citizenry's involvement in shaping and stewarding their community (Manzo and Perkins, 2006; Mihaylov & Perkins, 2014).

Above all, placemaking is a *co-practice* of collective knowledge construction aimed at materializing combined material social and political transformation—placemaking—in a community or place. As co-practice, placemaking is shared by professionals and non-professionals alike. People enter the space of placemaking with their differences of knowledge, identity, power, and varying degrees of insideness and outsideness. From within the space that placemaking produces, differences are held in healthy tension. Placemaking acts to diminish resistances and expand opportunities for joint knowledge creation; to surface, not suppress, local knowledge and to expand, not shrink, inclusion and participation in design and decision making.

Collaborative knowledge construction, through placemaking, is forming a shared or *dialogic* learning space. Dialogic space is placemaking's discursive and democratic space created through the dialogic practice of engaging participants in collective dialogue, reflection and action aimed at co-examining and co-creating the world around them (Rule, 2004). It is a shared space where local knowledge and professional knowledge are not only exchanged and validated, but also integrated so that together they shape and transform communities and generate new meanings for them (Di Masso, Dixon & Durrheim, 2014). Dialogic space emerges through sustained conversations and dialogues that recognize and affirm the visible and latent relationalities occurring between a place's diverse people and its equally diverse institutions, materials and processes (Pierre, Martin & Murphy, 2011). It makes room for contestation and wrestling with, deliberating, debating and challenging assumptions and positions. It enables expansive inquiry and looking beyond the surface to discover and reveal the underlying social, cultural and political interrelationships producing and influencing a place's current and future direction. Through iterative confirmation and interrogation of context and action framing (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995), dialogic space emerges and enables the process of placemaking to unfold.

Placemaking praxis recasts designers and planners into professional placemakers. While their professional knowledge is de-privileged, their role and contribution is far from diminished. As placemakers, their role becomes democratically positioned and exercised. This removes its

exclusionary position in relationship to other forms of knowledge and other knowledge producers. The placemaker actively engages in facilitating and constructing the dialogic space that legitimizes diverse forms of knowledge that are both local and expert in origin. They employ placemaking methods and practices that help guide, direct and frame placemaking's action, design, dialogue and collective actions (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995; Silberburg, 2013).

Through their actions, placemakers are facilitative of democracy, expanding rather than shrinking the spaces of knowledge exchange and participation. Their facilitative and task-sharing approaches and actions not only mobilize and activate democratic authority, but also model and encourage democratic habits, behaviors and interests of active citizenship, democratic design and democracy. The professional placemaker moves increasingly toward embodying Dzur's model of the democratic professional (2008) who, eschewing the dominance of technocratic expertise, seeks "*the public good with and not merely for the public*" (p. 130). Democratic professionals take a pro-active role in promoting decentralized and socially grounded democratic deliberation and problem-solving, while becoming political actors in mobilizing greater democratic authority (Dzur, 2008).

Enacting R2G's Praxis

R2G's praxis is the process whereby it is undertaking and producing university-community placemaking in Utica N.Y. This praxis is best illustrated through the following set of stories capturing and representing it in action. These stories show how knowledge of place, placemaking and democratic professionalism collectively motivate and frame R2G's praxis and also enable R2G to behave and produce a university-community relationship reflecting the processes and purposes of democratic civic engagement flowing through it. For example, students participating in Cornell's R2G capstone service-learning studio, shared later in this paper, are exposed to democratic professionalism through R2G's praxis. Democratic professionalism's ethics and methods support democratic design and correlate with democratic civic engagement's core concepts. In the R2G studio, students are mentored to be active participants and knowledge producers engaging in community-based placemaking and public problem-solving *with* communities. "The civic corollary to this form of education," underscores Saltmarsh, "is that students are not only active participants in learning—they are educated to become active participants in democratic life instead of being spectators to a shallow form of democracy" (Saltmarsh, 2008, p. 67).

Root Story

R2G's praxis surfaces in the story of how it began. We had only \$45,000 across 3 years (\$15,000/year) being provided as seed funding from USDA Hatch. It wasn't much, but enough to start with. In early 2010, a group ranging from 15-20 participants began convening for bi-weekly group dialogues in Utica. The group represented a variety of individuals and groups from Utica's private and public sector. As Cornell's R2G faculty leader, I played the key placemaker and facilitative role, accompanied by two colleagues with whom I'd launched R2G.

Our convening continued over nearly 8 months and was highly engaged and interactive, using brainstorming exercises and flip charts for real-time recording of the discussions and dialogues as they unfolded. Between weeks, the work accomplished was translated into session notes, communicated back to collaborators and used to identify specific action steps that would either become the focus of subsequent dialogues or be taken on as the responsibility of smaller subcommittees. The group collectively set out their initial mission for R2G Utica and identified priority issues, projects and efforts that university and community partners would work on together.

Simultaneously on campus, our three-person Cornell faculty team convened an R2G inaugural workshop of about 30 Cornell students from multiple disciplines. Here we began exposing the students to concepts related to placemaking, sustainability, resilience, action research, service-learning and civic engagement. As the semester proceeded, we gradually integrated students into the dialogues unfolding in Utica so that they could collaborate and contribute their knowledge to some of the initial study areas and activities being generated. One idea originating from our Utica dialogues was to activate greater awareness of R2G through a summer educational program that would get integrated into the upcoming Utica Monday Nite arts and culture weekly programming. A group of students set to work generating proposals for educational programming aimed at engaging local citizens in learning about Utica's opportunities for urban sustainability. This program had its premier that following summer in downtown Utica, involving the first group of R2G Civic Fellows from Cornell and nearby Hamilton College.

The idea of engaging the area's untapped asset of higher education institutions became another focus for members of the Core, resulting in the formation of an R2G Utica College Consortium. Through our process, university and community partners were shaping R2G Utica into something we all agreed shouldn't become overly rigid, structured or associated with a certain sector or group. Rather we felt strongly that R2G should operate as a "flexible network of university and community partners working together on actionable projects" generated and developed by the network itself. We formed an R2G Utica vision of "growing our city into a resilient, vibrant, sustainable community for the 21st century." It was determined that our mission needed to emphasize action—making and doing—as well as learning as we go. It was crafted as follows:

1. Cultivate an open and dynamic network: *"We can't do it alone."*
2. Identify and nurture our assets: *"Celebrate who we are."*
3. Craft and share adaptable principles, tools and practices to guide the way: *"Learn as we go."*
4. Take action to accomplish our vision of a resilient, sustainable and vibrant 21st Century Utica: *"Don't talk rust, act green."*

As this story shows, R2G's praxis was producing a university-community relationship of knowledge exchange and co-production that was in turn producing not only R2G's paths,

directions and outcomes, but also the meaning and purpose it would have in the community. The idea of calling ourselves the “R2G Utica Core” speaks directly to this notion. Through our interactions as university and community partners we realized that we wanted to be “seeding” rather than leading initiatives. By seeding, our belief was that initiatives would grow and expand from the Core outward and into areas and interests defined and generated by R2G Utica’s university-community collaborators over time. Also by seeding, we would welcome and expand leadership and engagement from a growing number of individuals who would find their contribution welcomed into R2G Utica’s community placemaking sphere or dialogic “space.”

One R2G Utica Core member recalls the experience this way:

Obviously it was a little bit of a learning curve for everybody sitting at the table, the people from Utica as well. We didn’t understand how far reaching this could be when we first got together with Cornell, but I think probably after the second or third meeting, the people on the Utica side were feeling much more comfortable and understood that this was not just simply Cornell coming in here for a few weeks, telling us what we need to do and then disappearing. I think that was the brightest spot in early meetings for us, knowing that this was going to be long term.

When Cornell’s group first came in, I guess we didn’t know what to expect, and what our anticipations were of what would happen, and to what degree they would be participating, and to what degree we would be participating. My initial fear was that we would get more of a kind of lectured-to approach, and we quickly learned that that was not the case, and the case was basically a really give-and-take between both sides of the table as we started to get more and more involved with the descriptive approaches to Rust to Green.

[I was] a little bit [surprised by that]. I think the natural response to being involved in an academic group is that that’s going to be the tendency. You know, basically, professor-student relationship. It has been anything but that. (R2G Core member, 2010)

The Food Project Story

In its formative first eight months, the R2G Utica Core seized on integrating a set of specific R2G principles into the nearly complete Utica Master Plan as well as into the city’s 5-year HUD Consolidated Plan then under development. Among the Core were the City’s Economic Development Director and Director of Parks. For several weeks, attention turned to framing a set of green principles to integrate into both plans. Working together, we were reminded of the city’s high poverty levels and its dramatic food insecurities. This awareness produced a narrative of place that was in stark contrast to the common narrative surrounding Utica’s past history as an immigrant community, and its more recent history as a United Nations refugee resettlement city. Favorite local dishes including Chicken Riggies and Utica Greens trace to Utica’s Italian roots. But the city’s Asian, Latino and Bosnian foods, and the number of

restaurants serving them, are on the rise. Utica is surrounded by dairy farms with Oneida County being one of the largest dairy producing counties in New York State.

By Fall 2010, the Core saw Utica's food system as a focal area to tackle, particularly when the opportunity to apply for a USDA grant materialized. We quickly mobilized and reached out to individuals and groups we felt should be part of the process. But as a flexible university-community knowledge network, R2G Utica was without 501C-3 status, and to apply for funds, there needed to be a lead partner grant applicant. We approached the city to take a lead on what was shaping up to become R2G Utica's first collaborative grant application. They were unconvinced at this early stage about what relevance a food system study and R2G's ideas for a food policy council had to the city's agenda. Next we turned to county government, but they too weren't on board with food systems thinking, nor were they understanding of how city and county food issues interrelated.

Time was short and one of the R2G Core partners needed to step forward to take a lead on what was developing into a proposal involving 27 different groups in the R2G network. Our design was a comprehensive look at the area's food system using a participatory action research methodology. It was R2G Core partner Ron Bunce from Oneida County Cooperative Extension who ultimately stepped in to assume the lead. Our successful receipt of the grant in early 2011 engaged all initial partners along with many others, including the city and county. This initiated a two-year process in which the community's food system was studied through the three lenses of "healthy people," "healthy environment" and "healthy economy." Cornell's R2G faculty facilitated the participatory collaborative research process, working with university students in generating communication tools, mapping and research on various aspects.

A CCE staff member took a lead role in management and coordination while two other R2G Core member groups, the Resource Center for Independent Living and the Community Foundation, engaged their staff in actively participating and also providing space for meetings. Together university and community participants formed a learning community, dividing into separate groups to study "healthy people," "healthy land" and "healthy economy." Within several months it was decided to broaden our reach beyond the city and county's geographic limits and become known as the Mohawk Valley Food Action Network. The collective learning and understanding of both the concept and integrated complexity of the area's food system enlarged as the process unfolded over nearly two years. The 2012 "Setting our Own Table" event on National Food Day brought together all the groups and more than 100 participants to share the network's research and findings. In May 2013, an official Food Policy Council was launched with a mandate for enacting food-system changes benefiting people, the economy and the environment in the City of Utica and surrounding region. As this project continues to unfold, the City of Utica is entirely on board, as is the Oneida County government. Through this food action network, R2G's praxis has been widely successful in enacting change and placemaking in Utica N.Y.

The R2G Capstone Story

Since 2012, I've been teaching a capstone studio at Cornell University, which is R2G's primary service-learning course. The studio emphasizes integration and application of skills and knowledge learned in the landscape architecture major. Most importantly, it introduces students to R2G's praxis by engaging them with R2G Utica community partners on locally identified projects, either newly launched or ongoing.

"It's not your project; it's the community's project. And it's your group project and Rust to Green's project. And I think you wouldn't find that in any other studio" (R2G Capstone student, 2013). The student writing these words was working in Utica's Oneida Square, which is known for its diversity and its many arts and culture assets. It's a neighborhood where the R2G Utica Core began focusing early on. In 2013, twenty-three Cornell landscape architecture students enrolled in the R2G Capstone service-learning studio. Six chose to work in Oneida Square while other similar sized groups set to working with community partners on three other projects—a refugee community garden, a controversial streetscape, and a schoolyard project.

At the point students participate in the capstone studio, they are in their final undergraduate or graduate semester, and while they are on the cusp of matriculating with a professional degree, they have had limited or no exposure to either the theory or practice of placemaking. At the start of a recent course, one student had a hunch it might refer to "the design of a landscape that takes into account the history of the place it occupies as well as the social, cultural and environmental constructs of the place" (R2G Capstone student, 2014), but admits to having "never heard of place-based design prior to this." Others have little practice, but come with a fuller understanding having opted to take my "Placemaking by Design" theory course, even though it is neither required in the major or for the studio.

Teaching this studio is challenging, fast paced and fraught with unpredictability. If I'm lucky, I get assigned a graduate teaching assistant who is knowledgeable about democratic design and placemaking, and is able to assume the responsibilities that a service-learning studio requires. Students are immediately cast into a placemaker role and mentored, by me, to engage in a placemaking process with our R2G Utica community partners. As such, the R2G studio is an entirely new experience for students. Their prior studio experiences, as described by one student, tend to be "very hypothetical, very in-a-classroom." In contrast, "this one (R2G) really taught me to listen and taught me not to just listen to myself, but listen to my classmates and then really listen actively to community members." Another student says, "It is not about our own portfolio, what we do will potentially change the perception of a whole neighborhood" (R2G Capstone students, 2013).

R2G's praxis may be novel to each new cohort of Cornell students, but our sustained community presence in Utica means R2G projects are known for being collaborative, participatory and community-driven. The 2013 studio group's first task was to work with community collaborators to "sketch out" a placemaking script or process for the multi-month engagement. The script's flexibility and open-endedness was particularly concerning to

students who wanted a more exact sense of what products would be produced. In the university-centered studios they are accustomed to, their elaborately illustrated design drawings are the measure of landscape architectural design mastery. Going into this project, neither university or community partners knew exactly what the placemaking process would produce. Rather, with the action framed around creative placemaking (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010), we collectively learned about this approach, with arts and culture at its center, and revealed the presence and potential for creative placemaking in the Oneida Square neighborhood.

Across several months, students engaged in facilitating placemaking workshops employing participatory community design methods. Together partners emerged information, concerns and directions for the neighborhood. While students offered information about the bigger citywide picture of arts and culture, the community partners were most keenly interested in paying attention to the place—Oneida Square—holding the greatest personal and collective meaning for them. An initial meeting involved too much showing and not enough sharing. Given the rigid nature of a board room as the meeting place, interactions were limited and the comfort level of participants was negatively impacted. Participants also wanted to enlarge the group to include others they felt needed to be part of the process. Meetings were moved to a nearby church's community room. Students quickly realized there needed to be more informal opportunities to listen to the community, so they organized a neighborhood tour. The tour revealed a sense of neighborhood "passion and enthusiasm." "I could see through her face pride, sadness and hope," wrote one student. Through the placemaking process, one student realized the importance of hand sketching, saying, "simple hand sketches seem to be the best way to communicate information; the group responded more positively to my quick 15-minute sketch of a small park than they did to all of our carefully put together research graphics and analysis" (R2G Capstone student, 2013).

After repeatedly hearing concerns about crime and safety, another student researched the issue further and unearthed data rating Utica's crime as average and downward trending. It became clear that "perception" was playing a major role in producing Oneida Square's negative reputation and sense of place. Changing perception through creative placemaking would need to be prioritized. The same student further validated community concerns by inviting a local Utica police officer to meet with the group. He confirmed the crime stats and expressed willingness to work with the neighborhood. The group began to see how creative "illumination" and lighting along with signage and programming could work together to foster greater use, activity and a positive sense of place and neighborhood identity. "Working with the community members has really been an eye opener to much of the issues they face. Between crime to city laws and regulations, many are upset and want change, but continue to face many hurdles along the way when they try (R2G Capstone student, 2013)."

R2G's praxis ultimately created a "taking steps" compendium containing a series of short and long term, small and big, creative placemaking ideas and strategies for Oneida Square. This *Taking Steps* compendium is being used to do just that, work on developing and furthering

small steps activating creative placemaking in Oneida Square. One of those steps was an arts and culture festival undertaken by a subsequent R2G studio working with the Oneida Square community. This placemaking event served to bolster neighborhood identity and beautify and enliven Oneida Square.

Many students felt the Oneida Square process and product crossed into a realm of “planning” and beyond what they’d already come to define as the limits and boundaries of their “design” discipline. This is one of those examples of how the “dialogic space” of R2G’s praxis and of democratic civic engagement acts to agitate against professional and academic norms. “I guess in a way we are facilitators and not designers at this point,” says one student. “I am very content about that, but within the group there are different views which are good, but it makes it hard to follow our working process as a whole” (R2G Capstone student, 2013).

While the Oneida Square project moved to the rhythm its partners collectively choreographed, that same spring another group of students tackled the proposed redesign of Utica’s Genesee Street and the controversy surrounding it. This project was politically volatile and fraught with conflict due to City Hall pushing a top-down proposal for traffic calming that required medians along a one-mile length of the city’s most historic street. Pushback and outrage from the community ensued. The city contacted me for input on their plans. I, too, pushed back, raising concerns about the proposed “design,” the lack of options being entertained, the appropriateness of such a proposal in a landmarked district and most importantly, the closed-door process by which it had emerged. I offered to engage the R2G studio in a community-wide dialogue about the future of Genesee Street. They agreed, but shortly began to realize that their plans, instead of being upheld, were being debated and rethought through R2G’s praxis.

Through a series of well-attended placemaking workshops dubbed “Let’s Go Genesee,” university faculty and students were coming together with hundreds of citizens and local leaders to assess and develop the community’s collective sense of viable goals and directions for the street’s future. In effect, we were creating a community-generated program or set of principles on which a future design could be based. Ideally this should have happened long before any design had proceeded. This project is an excellent example of democratic professionalism and of the designer pro-actively taking a role in creating a space for democratic deliberation and dialogue around community-development. This is anything but an apolitical stance. Quite the contrary, the Genesee Project by no uncertain terms angered the mayor’s office and the urban renewal office, which saw its process as a threat to their plans. One student recalls the experience this way:

As landscape architects we work as mediators and can make great advances in a community’s ability to coexist and cooperate with one another... we can broker the exchange between community members in a way that voices and opinions are voiced and validated. We have begun to see, in only a few interactions, that once people feel they have been heard they are more amenable to accepting someone else’s views. At

first, the people on different sides of the table seem irreconcilable, however gradually people begin to come together and become more reasonable the more they interact in a positive setting. (R2G Capstone student, 2013)

Partner Story

Two years of funding from USDA for the R2G Utica food project, as described earlier, amounted to \$100,000. The funds were enough to enable Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Oneida County to wade in new waters and transform how they view their role and relevance in the city of Utica. The experience provided Executive Director Ron Bunce with motivation to further integrate R2G Utica's civic engagement project into his agency. The most visible indicator of that integration is the R2G Utica Urban Planning Studio that is now staffed by CCE and funded by the Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties. This studio, 20 miles from CCE's rural headquarters, is a new R2G Utica community-university hub, located in the heart of Utica's downtown.

Bunce admits to experiencing a steep learning curve when he first joined the R2G Core and network. Placemaking, action research, and participatory design and planning processes were all new concepts and processes for him. But now, he credits R2G's praxis with producing a radically different direction for CCE Oneida County. He recalls our full-day think-tank session when the food project began. This is when, for the first time, he learned how we'd be framing the food project so it could unfold as a placemaking and action research process engaging many individuals and groups across a multi-year timeframe. This was an early indicator of R2G suggesting a role for Extension different from the one it traditionally plays in communities. It was also indication of a relationship, between Extension and the university that was not considered the norm. "One of the things that really has struck me about R2G is that it has created a new way of doing business, a new way of doing Extension," says Bunce (2014 interview).

Bunce believes R2G is producing a new "space" and a new "language" that's changing the way his agency is thinking, working and envisioning themselves in relationship with their community. He claims that R2G has been able to "shine a mirror back at us to demonstrate that we weren't really operating *with* the community" or viewing the community as being "active participants in the process" of problem solving. Other changes Bunce identifies include thinking "more from a holistic place," and using a "more participatory process" to "truly engage the community" in working to address some of the problems Utica's are facing. In these ways, R2G is helping to create a shared language around what current and future programming might look like for Oneida County CCE. It is helping them ask questions like, "What would a nutrition program look like if it embraced the tenets of Rust to Green?"

In Utica's new R2G Urban Studio, CCE's Caroline Williams is working to produce an ever greater role for R2G Utica in the community and to interconnect its university and community knowledge networks. One of the things that she and Bunce underscore is a sense that they've learned, through the R2G partnership, to be more conscious of power and power sharing.

They've become more conscious of "power within our community, but also how that can drive change." Bunce and Williams believe that by working in partnership with the university and Extension, the community is in a better position "to capitalize on opportunities and assets that we already have" and also to recognize, share and use power more effectively. Greater consciousness of power relationships motivates us to ask, says Bunce, "How do we share power? Because I think that's the core tenet of Rust to Green. How do we step back and become a part of the process and not think that we're driving the process or we're making the change or forcing the change, but we're working collectively."

Conclusion

As seen in the previous stories, there are several civic engagement channels supporting and furthering R2G, which have themselves emerged and evolved over the past five years. These have created a continually emerging foundation, as well as a host of considerations, for the praxis of placemaking. While there is evidence that R2G is changing people-place relationships in the community of Utica N.Y., change is not just relegated to an "outside," "out-there" community geography. Rather, change is happening "inside" the combined and shared dialogic university-community space R2G produces and occupies. This new dialogic space is in turn shaping and changing each knowledge sector and its relationship to one another.

This shared university-community space has produced civic engagement courses and experiences for Cornell students as well as students from other Utica area colleges, where they're learning and practicing democratic design, placemaking and democratic professionalism. Since 2010, it has produced more than 40 R2G Civic Research Fellowships engaging students with community partners on summer month projects in Utica. This shared space has produced an R2G Utica program area in Oneida County Cornell Cooperative Extension and the R2G Utica Urban Studio in downtown Utica. It has produced Utica placemaking networks, projects and proposals that are contributing to Utica's revitalization and community development. It has drawn an ever larger group of committed individuals and organizations, from the university and the community, into working on actionable strategies for transforming and collectively steering Utica from rust to green. It has drawn groups like the Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida County into playing a pivotal role in R2G Utica. The Foundation's commitment to "collective impact" and "to creating strong partnerships with the goal of making social impact in our community," (Community Foundation website: <http://foundationhoc.org/>) has led it to support R2G Civic Fellows, engage its leadership and staff directly in many R2G Utica projects, and to providing seed funding to launch the R2G Utica Urban Studio in Utica's City Hall.

This shared university-community space is influencing institutional changes at Cornell, such as R2G's recent move from the Department of Landscape Architecture, where it took root, and into Cornell's Community and Regional Development Institute (CaRDI). R2G's placemaking praxis consistently reveals the complex and interdependent forces at play in producing living

places. What five years has made ever clearer is that diverse knowledge from many sources, not few, is needed to best enact R2G's praxis. In Cornell's Landscape Architecture Department, R2G found itself considerably isolated and limited. The movement into CaRDI provides a direct link to a larger faculty and student knowledge network in Development Sociology, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and across the State of New York. Through CaRDI, R2G positions itself within a unit seeking stronger linkages between community-university knowledge networks to foster sustainable community development.

Existing in parallel with the many encouraging and successful elements of R2G is the reality of uncertainty and unpredictability. This shared university-community space is certainly not cozy, nor easy to produce, sustain or occupy. In Utica, there's a question I still get asked: "How long are you going to be around and working in Utica?" There's fear that "we," the university, will not be staying long in Utica or that the investment of time and resources comes with limits and end points. Such fears are well placed. Universities and academics enjoy the privilege of choosing how long to stay. Can relationships of trust and reciprocity be successfully forged when power and privilege is uneven?

Back on Cornell's home campus, I get asked this: "So you're *still* working in Utica?" I generally remind people that placemaking takes sustained effort and time. Nonetheless, privately I remind myself I'm an outlier. Undertaking such a long-term civic engagement project in a "local" place with shockingly high levels of urban disinvestment and painfully meager flows of development capital is one of those situations most academics will never entertain. When emphasizing democratic placemaking, one finds their position in distinct contrast with an academic culture that values knowledge creation "inside" the university and not "outside" *in* and particularly *with* the local community. One senses that the inference behind the questioning on campus is that working in a place like Utica in this way may not amount to something of significant academic value and worth. R2G might not be garnering major attention by getting headlines, academic accolades or significant research dollars—the gold standards of academia. Nor will it easily merit recognition in landscape architecture and produce generously capitalized award-worthy built works representing the gold standard in sustainable design. Such design that's worthy of praise is what's most often emulated and emphasized in Cornell's Landscape Architecture program. R2G assumes an "other" position beneath the one that's privileged. It's known as design with a small "d." Being associated with community, democracy, placemaking and democratic civic engagement, is by and large the exception, not the norm.

In academia, democratic civic engagement is a counter-normative reality (Scobey in Shipp, 2014, p. 25). In professional design and planning education and practice, democratic design and placemaking are also counter-normative. For professionals and the models to which they conform, democratic professionalism is unquestionably counter-norm. R2G's story is one of becoming ever more deeply enveloped in a counter-normative terrain that its praxis produces and propagates. R2G's praxis entangles university and community and behaves to produce

relationships, knowledge, and changes that are unfolding in real time. For all involved, R2G's journey involves patience, persistence, risk, resiliency and sustained effort across the long haul.

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