

## **Designing and Making Choices as a Community — That's Placemaking**

Placemaking advocate Mark Lakeman says citizen-driven design of public space a growing trend

City Repair co-founder Mark Lakeman has been involved in placemaking, citizen-driven co-design of community spaces, for 17 years. His motivation and drive has in no way slowed down, especially now as the movement increasingly picks up.

“It seems like there’s a tremendous amount of interest,” says the Portland, OR native. His tour schedule leading community workshops has been especially active over the last month.

“People seem to be understanding what we mean by placemaking — even within the realm of architecture and planning, which has been kind of insulated in a way. As a culture, we’ve been thinking that the professional design culture already has a handle on this. But I think there’s understanding that placemaking is really a function of participation — in designing and making choices together as a community.”

“There’s a distinction between architecture, which has a few people making decisions, and then placemaking, which ultimately needs to be a reflection of the people — so they see themselves in their environment,” he says.

Mark sees growing appreciation of the movement among policymakers and especially among community residents.

As the son of active parents who were both architects and planners, Mark was raised with bedtime stories about ancient villages his mom visited where “people would

dance in the streets and everyone knew each other and crime rates didn't exist," he says.

Mark was inspired by these stories and by his father's pursuit to create the first public square in Portland — Pioneer Courthouse Square, an urban park "affectionately known as the city's living room." This seeded his sense of agency and an understanding that he would one day have the opportunity to make a difference.

"I wish everyone could feel in their blood that they are placemakers — that it's their birthright and destiny to create a world that meets their needs," Mark says.

"There isn't a difference between what you're capable of and what you actually do in your life. This terrible dissonance is what's ruining our world."

The non-profit placemaking organization, [City Repair](#), was created to address the design failures its founders saw in colonial settlements and traditional North American city grid designs. "A culture focused on mutual benefit has been zoned away," Mark explains. Various functions in people's lives, like where they live and work, where their food comes from and who they interact with, have been designed as disparate pieces.

"All of these things should have been brought together from the beginning and propelled participation. Instead, they were laid out to become a product.

"Everything that's been playing out as a result — dissociation, isolation, fracturing — it's because they weren't designed in relationship to each other," he says. "With placemaking, everybody — even a little kid — can get practice thinking about how all these pieces relate. It's a way to bring things back together."

[Our Eco Village](#), an initiative on Vancouver Island, is one of the best examples of reuniting these functions that Mark has seen in the world, he says.

"All of the pieces of that eco village were all functioning in separate zones. It wasn't legal to live where you farm or to have a business where you live in that rural context, and the eco village merged these different functions into one zone that enables people.

“This concept is probably the most sustainable at all because it enables you to localize all these functions into one place,” he says.

Mark hopes that through placemaking, people can fuse the fractured pieces of North American society.

“That’s the beautiful thing,” he says, “Placemaking enables you to bring back together everything you care about into one thing — like caring about alternative currency, grassroots democracy, ecological building, engaging people in a process and engaging youth. It even has social justice implications as you’re building something that’s ecologically sustainable,” he says.

“If people do this work without trying to win or lose, without trying to make bureaucrats feel badly, but just stand up together in a spirit of co-operation where they stand their ground and say, ‘this is our home; we have no other place,’ I think they can never lose,” he says. “That’s what we’ve seen.”

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