

UC Berkeley

Places

Title

Public Places: Collaboration, Reclaiming [PLACEMARK Award: Hugh Hardy]

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3wd7p7hn>

Journal

Places, 14(2)

ISSN

0731-0455

Author

Hardy, Hugh

Publication Date

2001-11-01

Peer reviewed

**Public Spaces:
Partnership, Collaboration, Reclaiming**

The projects that follow, a sample of HHPA's recent work, illustrate themes of collaboration and public-private partnership that are reviving and expanding the possibilities for urban public places—and which Hardy feels are central to so much of his firm's work. Indeed, through his passionate, persistent civic involvement, as well as his work with cultural institutions and public-private partnerships, Hardy has established a model of public-spirited practice.

The conventional wisdom is that our culture's interest in public space is waning. Charles Moore's observation nearly forty years ago that the best new American public space was Disneyland, and that you have to pay to use it, seemed prophetic to many of us at the time.

But now I think that Moore was onto something else: American public space is evolving, not evaporating. With this evolution has come a necessary diversification of the processes used to design and operate public space, and that, in turn, has revealed new opportunities for creating public space where there had been none before. Three themes—partnership, collaboration and reclaiming—underscore what is happening.

Partnership. The notion of public-private partnership is almost a cliché these days. Yet it is fundamentally important: You can't operate a city without public institutions, and those are in place because of individual private interests.

Cities have a public realm and a private realm, and it is how these come together that defines life in the city. At the most basic level, streets are public and the buildings that front them are usually private, and it is the interface between the two that makes a city work.

The possibility of a private organization assuming responsibility for a park or plaza seems laudable to me. That's why I found Bryant Park's public space so interesting. It doesn't just take care of itself: it is managed, programmed and paid for by a private entity. But the space is completely public, remarkable in its ability to absorb all kinds of people. It is what one hopes for in the city.

Part of a citizen's responsibility is to help take care of things. The thought that the government should do it all, even if there were enough public funds to do so, would not provide as good a result as we have now, where there are responsibilities both ways.

Collaboration. Working and living in a city is a form of exchange, a form of sharing interests in which each participant contributes something to the whole. City life depends on a sense of civility, you do have to stop at red lights, after all. That is the implicit bargain in the business of people living close together.

In architecture, working collaboratively helps strengthen your ideas. Design is a selective process of making choices. You start out with general questions, such as how should we organize this site, then proceed to specific ones, such as where is the front door? In a collaborative situation, you're forced to articulate what you're trying to do, and seeing other people's reactions helps you understand your own concerns. Some of the greatest projects in this city are the results of collaboration. Certainly Rockefeller Center is better than any one of the individual designers who worked on it could have done by themselves.

Reclaiming. One of the most fascinating opportunities in the design of public space is to make



Left: Bryant Park.
Photo © Elliot Kaufman

Right: Urban square at
Bridgemarket. Photo
© Peter Aaron/ESTO

places accessible, especially to reclaim places that laymen or even professionals would not think are valuable. This theme is evident in all the projects featured here—from Bridgemarket to the James A. Farley/Pennsylvania Station Redevelopment, from Bryant Park to the 110th Street Streetscape, we are opening and reopening places that had fallen out of people’s conception of the public city.

The restorations we’ve done are a reclaiming of a different sort, a reconnecting of people to the city’s architectural and urban heritage. For us to do that, we have to be able to read the original design intent. Of course we really can’t put ourselves in the designer or the architect’s shoes, but we can certainly capture the spirit of their

thinking. I’m positive of that, because that’s the nature of the whole creative life: We receive messages from our forebears through the work that is there, and hope to be sufficiently clear in creating new things that people in the future will understand what we were trying to do. That is, I suppose, a form of collaboration as well.

—Hugh Hardy