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Creative placemaking and the NEA: unpacking a multi-level governance

Eleonora Redaelli

Arts and Administration Program, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, USA

ABSTRACT

The role of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in shaping the arts and cultural sector is not well understood. In this paper, I focus on the development of the governance of the creative placemaking policy to unpack the complexity of the role of the NEA. Governance is used to refer to collective action designed to achieve a general interest through different actors from both the government and civic society. I use intergovernmental relations theory to capture governance dynamics in creative placemaking. In particular, I focus on three main tools developed by the NEA to spur a multi-level governance: research, grants, and partnerships. What emerges is that the role of the NEA in the development of the creative placemaking policy is multifaceted as it includes offering and leveraging funding, shaping the conversation, providing insights, and spurring collaborations. These actions create a multi-level governance based on a dynamic exchange between national and local governments, and the involvement of a variety of actors from civil society.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to better understand the role of National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in shaping the arts and cultural sector in the United States through an investigation of the governance of the creative placemaking policy. Given that the NEA does not have mandating power like other federal agencies, often its role is not clearly understood. NEA actions do not include rulemaking or enacting enforcement through administrative law, such as the Department of Agriculture and the Environment Protection Agency, and its activity is studied mainly in its role as a grant-maker (Mulcahy 1985; Miller 2000; Shockley and McNeely 2009). Drawing from Mettler's (2011) theory claiming that in the United States collective action is often embedded in the submerged state, where the government is disguised and the actors appear to be from the private sector, I focus on the development of the governance of the creative placemaking policy to unpack the multifaceted role of the NEA.

Creative placemaking is a popular idea in the arts and culture sector, but is still a fuzzy concept that offers an unstable signifier based on a fractured and loose web of rationales and justifications (Gadwa Nicodemus 2013; Bonin-Rodriguez 2015). In this paper, I

consider creative placemaking as it developed as a national policy in the United States. Traditional ways of thinking about *policy* imply that the term signifies a series of rules and regulations directed by a chain of command (Salamon 2000), whereas I consider policy not as a rigorous mandate by the government, but rather a set of directions for collective action resulting from the collaboration of a group of actors in which the government has a leading role. This conceptualization of policy requires attention to issues of governance, changing the focus of policy analysis from subsystems and policy-making to dynamics of governing (Jochim and May 2010). *Governance* refers to collective action arrangements designed to achieve a general benefit (Healey 2004) and steps away from an account of formal structures or procedures of government (Cars et al. 2002). This study is based on the idea that general interest is pursued through the action of different actors from the government and civic society (Pierre 2000) and on a constructivist approach to policy (Fisher 2003). Understanding governance entails to deconstruct a policy and unpack its goals, the role of the actors involved, the steps in the development of the policy process, and the output of each tool.

The perspective adopted in this paper to examine creative placemaking governance is intergovernmental relation theory (IGR). IGR highlights a multi-level governance model based on negotiated relationships between different layers of government and external actors (Peters and Pierre 2001; Radin and Posner 2010; Andranovich and Anagoston 2015). Through this perspective, instead of a centralized hierarchy of agencies delivering standard services, what emerges is a mosaic of tools developed by the federal government to develop and implement a policy. In the case of the NEA and creative placemaking the main tools were identified as research, grants, and partnership.

This analysis of the creative placemaking governance is structured as follows: in the first section, I will review the term creative placemaking, exploring the connections with its emergence in the cultural policy realm and the urban affairs literature. In the following section, I will introduce IGR theory as a lens for my analysis and the choice of policy tools as the unit of analysis. Then I will proceed with the description of the three main policy tools used in creative placemaking policy multi-level governance and the resulting governance features. I will conclude by highlighting the insights achieved with this analysis about American cultural policy.

2. Creative placemaking in the US

Creative placemaking is an idea that is gaining traction in the field of arts and culture and even new job positions are created including this objective in the job description. The works and projects associated with creative placemaking may not be new, but the framing, interest, and available resources are fresh and are rapidly evolving (Gadwa Nicodemus 2013). Creative placemaking *policy* is rooted in the research and language developed in the white paper 'Creative Placemaking' released in 2010 (Markusen and Gadwa 2010). This white paper was commissioned by the Mayor's Institute of City Design, which is a leadership initiative of the NEA, created in 1986 in partnership with the United States Conference of Mayors and American Architectural Foundation, to provide support to mayors in transforming communities.¹ The white paper claims that placemaking led by arts and culture contributes to livability, economic revitalization, creative entrepreneurship, and cultural industries competitiveness. Most importantly, it calls

for an intergovernmental policy platform that could help foster this kind of community development in American communities of all sizes. The aim is to join forces across functional missions of government agencies to promote and evaluate initiatives and disseminate the results. Wyszomirski (2000) points out how the shift from a specific discipline or arts organization to larger policy concerns is a mark of maturity that can better relate the arts to public purposes. As creative placemaking is serving a public purpose by addressing community concerns through the innovative power of the arts, it seems that this framework gives to the arts a solid standing in the policy realm.

The idea of *placemaking* emerged among urban professionals and scholars in the late 1950s. They addressed the placelessness caused by the sterility and abstraction of modernism through urban activities aiming to develop a sense of place (Lang 1994; Aravot 2002). This set of activities was referred to as placemaking and different theorists have defined it in different ways. Alexander (1977) claimed that placemaking was important on any scale, from a veranda overlooking a public path to whole regions, whereas Jacobs (1961) praised the liveliness of street of Greenwich Village. Lynch (1960) highlighted how people and their activities are as important as the city's physical aspects in urban design. Also, major works in the social sciences have helped to articulate the discourse about space, introducing placemaking as framework for an urban design that would take in consideration more humanistic and social elements (Tuan 1977; Sime 1986). The most recent literature has studied placemaking as the art of creating community (Schneekloth and Shibley 1995). A location is not, in and of itself, a community. However 'place provides an important mobilizing discourse and identity for collective action' (Martin 2003). Fleming's (2007) work, alongside his active role as a founding chairman of the Cambridge Arts Council, developed the discourse about placemaking paying attention to the role that both public art and urban design have in interpreting community. Jackson (2011) developed this idea and focused on the roles that artists play as co-creators of innovation in the community.

As for the conceptualization of creativity, *creative placemaking* refers to an innovative way of thinking about the community. It is about bringing the imaginative power of artists to solve community issues. The goal is not to increase the presence of the arts, but rather using the arts to pursue community outcomes. Therefore, not everything an artist does contributes to creative placemaking. The creative output needs to impact the community either from a social cohesion, or an economic development perspective. The point is to bring community development and the arts together, as in the past they were considered to be two distinct areas of policy action. Scholars in urban affairs have used the term creativity in a similar way, depicting the creative city as a place that supports innovative ways of dealing with social and economic issues in urban policy-making and community planning (Healey 2004; Borén and Young 2013). Moreover, it is important to notice that creativity is context driven and each community has different ways of expressing creativity. What is creative in one circumstance may not be considerate creative in another (Landry 2000).

Focusing on *creative placemaking policy*, scholars have highlighted two main characteristics of this policy: the place-based focus and the new role for artists. First, central aspect of this policy is a paradigm change, from allocating resources directly to arts organizations in order to build a strong art infrastructure, to a platform constructed from hybrid disciplinary materials: urban policy, economic development, artistic practice, and cultural expression among them (Bonin-Rodriguez 2015). This implies the cooperation of a wide group of stakeholders (Gadwa Nicodemus 2013). Focusing on both intrinsic and

instrumental values, creative placemaking projects speak to the broad concerns of public policy, most legibly housing, urban growth, stability and vitality, and even health, wellness, and lifelong learning. Finally, placemaking proposes to highlight the heterogeneous potentiality of place-based cultural and artistic practices. In so doing, it addresses previous concerns that pointed out how America's public institutions did not embrace cultural democracy (Graves 2005).

Second, this place-based policy moves away from an artists' subsidy policy (Grodach and Silver 2012), and brings the artists to the center of their community, highlighting their creative mindset as great potential for the larger benefit of their place. In fact, the intersection of placemaking and creativity is the notion that artists' skills lend themselves to a greater public purpose beyond the confines of a disciplinary-specific work. In particular, Bonin-Rodriguez (2015) enhances how this policy is reframing what artists can do and where they produce their work, giving them a leading role in the community. 'Art is not merely about its representation of lives, but also about its direct engagement with various publics and public issues' (Bonin-Rodriguez 2015, 141). Artists are seen as entrepreneurs who can creatively contribute to the issues of the community instead of as a starving group longing for public funding (Guo 2015).

Considering policy as a set of directions for collective action for public purposes, in order to understand the role of the NEA in the creative placemaking policy I will unpack its governance features. To carry out this exercise I will use IGR theory that makes visible colors, patterns, and terrains in the political landscape that are normally obscured, moving away from a simplistic conception of federalism based on a linear and hierarchical model (Wright 1978). In public policy literature, the interest for IGR has sparked several theories providing different explanations of the chain of program implementation, some focusing on the vertical systems of bureaucracy, others on the horizontal systems of networks (Agranoff 2007; Provan and Kenis 2007; McGuire and Agranoff 2010), and others on the tools (Salamon 2000). In the following section, I will describe how a main thread in IGR highlights the multi-level governance of American policy and I will explain how government tools are an informative unit of analysis for unpacking features of governance.

3. Intergovernmental relations and policy tools

The interest toward the analysis of IGR emerged in the context of the European Union, within research attending to how the integration of different states worked, whereas in the United States emerged within discussions about the evolution of federalism (Wright 1978, 1990). There have been administrative reforms that changed the relationship between the federal government and state and local authority (Peters and Pierre 2001) and intergovernmental programs have been the rule more than the exception (O'Toole 2004). Scholars of political science point out how the policy agenda of the federal government became more complex over time, including areas where historically it did not have any role (Andranovich and Anagoston 2015). The involvement of the federal government in new areas has been accompanied by the reliance on third parties and indirect governmental tools to implement national programs, while trying to minimize the role of the national government and involving third parties at the local level (Radin and Posner 2010). All of these changes spurred an intergovernmental debate, promoting new theories of American federalism (Conlan and Posner 2009).

In particular, what emerges from these government's changes is a multi-level governance model, interlocking different vertical levels of the government, leveraging intergovernmental relations, and engaging the resources of independent actors in order to enhance a highly pluralistic society (Radin and Posner 2010). In this context, intergovernmental relations are becoming increasingly negotiated and contextual, moving away from a more legalistic relationship based on a 'command and control' nature (Peters and Pierre 2001). A multi-level governance involves different tiers of government and key actors in the external environments (Andranovich and Anagoson 2015) and refers not just to negotiated relationships between institutions at different levels, but to a vertical 'layering' of governance processes at these different levels (Peters and Pierre 2001). Moreover, it involves different dimensions of the policy process.

If in a legalistic relationship based on command and control, the common tool used by the federal government is that of the mandate as an affirmative obligation for states and local governments to take action on a specific issue (Posner 1998), what are the tools used to develop a collective governance? Instead of the centralized hierarchical agencies delivering standardized services, what exists in most areas of public policy is a dense mosaic of policy tools. Salamon (2000) describes these changes in the scale and scope of government action as a public administration revolution impacting its basic forms.

A massive proliferation has occurred in the tools of public action, in the instruments or means used to address public problems. Where earlier government activity was largely restricted to the direct delivery of goods or services by government bureaucrats, it now embraces a dizzying array of loans, loan guarantees, grants, contracts, social regulation, economic regulation, insurance, tax expenditures, vouchers, and much more. (Salamon 2000, 1612)

I chose to focus on tools as the unit of analysis to better understand the role of the NEA through the dynamics of governance in the creative placemaking policy. Tools are the optimal unit of analysis to understand the role of federal government in a multi-level governance because they develop collective action and not merely government action. In fact, other entities are involved in the action structured by the tools developed by the government (Howlett 1991; Salamon 2000). This focus will allow me to observe the role of different actors in several phases of the policy-making process and to highlight the impact and outputs they foster.

4. Three different tools for multi-level governance

Some scholars consider tools as instruments for policy implementation (Agranoff and McGuire 2004); others consider tools as instruments to structure the overall collective action and not just its implementation (Salamon 2000). Drawing from this latter idea, tools offer a means to map the features of governance in the development of a policy, such as issue definition, institutions involved, and the resulting outputs. For the following analysis I identified three tools used by the NEA to structure collective action in creative placemaking: research, grants, and partnerships. In this section, I will provide an overview of the three tools including a conceptual clarification and an historical background within the creative placemaking policy developed by the NEA.

4.1. Research

Considering policy-making as a constant discursive struggle over the definitions of problems and the categories used to describe them (Fisher 2003), a crucial tool for governance in this process is research. This is a vital tool because it determines the beginning and life cycle of a policy. As Innes (1990) argues, knowledge shapes public action, establishes agendas, and frames problems, setting the terms of public discourse.

In the case of creative placemaking, research had an essential role in framing its main ideas through white papers and assessing empirical cases through the use of indicators. A white paper is a study that provides information about a specific topic and aims at offering recommendations for action, in particular within the government (Stelzner 2007). As mentioned in the previous session, the creative placemaking policy is rooted in the homonymous white paper commissioned in 2010 by The Mayor's Institute of City Design, a leadership initiative of the NEA. The key concepts and recommendations came from merging scholarly literature on urban revitalization and the role of arts and cultural investment, as well as hundreds empirical studies and offer in-depth analyses about the local efforts developed through the nation (Landesman 2013). Therefore the framing is new, but the work has been unfolding organically (Markusen and Gadwa 2010).

The conceptual underpinning of this white paper is in the work developed by the Rockefeller Foundation and the University of Pennsylvania under the title of the Social Impact of the Arts Project (Chu and Schupbach 2014). In particular, within that project Nowak's (2007) study was very influential, as it situated arts-based work in the language and context of community development. Another fundamental study for delineating the concept of creative placemaking is the three-year study by the L. Knight Foundation and Gallup 'Soul of Community' (Gallup 2010). They studied how people perceive a sense of belonging to community and place (Bonin-Rodriguez 2015).

The key concepts highlighted in the white paper are that creative placemaking brings together partners from different sectors to shape physical and social characters of places around arts and culture. It can occur at scales as large as a multi-stage region and as small as a rural town, and suggests several different ways to foster the existing creative milieu. The outcomes are livability and economic development.

This white paper provided the conceptual framework for the policy that developed through the other two tools: the grant Our Town and the partnership ArtPlace. This broad framing helped to win unprecedented action for arts and culture and created new interest for researching this topic (Markusen and Gadwa 2010; Gadwa Nicodemus 2013). In 2011, the NEA's Office of Research and Analysis issued a call for papers measuring the economic activities resulting from arts and culture. The Brookings Institution hosted a one-day symposium to feature the works selected and finally, Michael Rushton release an edited volume that collected the contributions under the title 'Creative Communities: Art Works in Economic Development' (2013). In 2014, another white paper was released based on a convening organized by the NEA in collaboration with ArtPlace. 'Beyond the Building: Performing Arts and Transforming Place' (Moran et al. 2014) which brought a new focus into the frame of creative placemaking. They fleshed out how performing art organizations, and the artists they engage, impact places through their artistic practice. These findings emerged from the interviews of the 26 organizations participating in the convening.

In addition to framing the discourse about creative placemaking, research had a great impact in developing indicators to measure its success. The search for meaningful indicators has greatly impacted knowledge in public policy and shaped the way policy decisions are made in different policy arenas (Innes 1990). From 2012 to 2014, the NEA sponsored the Urban Institute to work on the report ‘Validating Arts and Livability Indicators’ (Morley and Winkler 2014a, 2014b) with the aim to evaluate the measurement of successful creative placemaking through four dimensions of livability: residents’ attachments to community, quality of life, local economic conditions, and arts and cultural activity. The results and recommendations were based on a set of 23 potential indicators capturing data already available from contingent research. At the same time, Artplace worked on developing indicators focusing on measurement of vibrancy around three main areas: people, activity, and value. These efforts helped to connect the communities with a holistic way of thinking about their arts and cultural projects. At the same time, recent scholarly work has pointed out how both these efforts to develop indicators raised several concerns, in particular in regard to the fuzziness of the concepts selected and the consequent inaccuracy of the resulting data (Gadwa Nicodemus 2013; Markusen 2013; Morley and Winkler 2014a, 2014b).

4.2. Grants

After releasing the white paper *Creative Placemaking*, the NEA enacted a new grant called *OurTown*, aiming to support creative placemaking projects. Grants defined the era of cooperative federalism, beginning with the New Deal and carrying through the Great Society period and beyond (Radin and Posner 2010). Some of the key features of grants are that they are quite indirect, relatively noncoercive, and moderately visible (Beam and Conlan 2002). Grants that are financed by a government donor leave discretion over the operations in the hands of the recipient organization. They are noncoercive in the sense that they do not restrict behavior, but rather encourage a specific action. Grants are not as visible as direct federal operations such as Amtrak or the Postal Service, however major initiatives are covered by the press. Moreover, some scholars also point out how federal grants are used as carrots to entice, stimulate, and encourage local governments and third parties to join in implementing national programs (Radin and Posner 2010).

Our Town addresses one of the goals of the NEA’s strategic plan: to foster engagement with diverse and excellent art and the related objective to improve livability of places through art (Morley and Winkler 2014a, 2014b). The grant supports creative placemaking projects, in which creative placemaking is defined as ‘when artists, arts organizations, and community development practitioners deliberately integrate arts and culture into community revitalization work – placing arts at the table with land-use, transportation, economic development, education, housing, infrastructure, and public safety strategies’ (NEA 2015a).

In 2010, on the 25th anniversary of the funding of the Institute on City and Design, the NEA not only commissioned the white paper, but also created a City Design 25th Anniversary Awards grant to test if there was interest from communities in federal funding for creative placemaking initiatives (Chu and Schupbach 2014). Given the success of the pilot grant, the year after, the grant program *Our Town* was launched, aiming to support

creative ways to improve community development with artists taking the lead. Between 2011 and 2014, the NEA awarded 251 Our Town grants in 50 states and the District of Columbia. These grants have reached 200 communities ranging in size from small towns such as Conneaut Lake, PA (population 600) to large cities like Phoenix, AZ (population 1.5 million). In 2015, the NEA awarded 69 Our Town grants totaling almost \$5 million in support of 35 states and Puerto Rico (NEA 2015b).

Our Town applies an urban policy ethos to an artistic practice (Bonin-Rodriguez 2015). This systemic way to think about the role of the arts and culture in the community was developed by two NEA leaders whose backgrounds influenced this perspective. Joan Shigekawa, senior deputy chairman since 2009, had an extensive experience working with foundations, such as The Rockefeller Foundation and The Nathan Cumming Foundation. Rocco Landesman, chairman since 2009, came to the NEA from the world of commercial theater. They both believed in the importance of promoting the arts as contributors to the community, and moving away from the policy paradigm that claim they needed to be supported. Collaborations between government and nonprofit entities would be a key factor. In fact, one of the requirements of the Our Town grant is that the nonprofit organizations applying for funding need to partner with local government to implement their initiatives.

Among the basic mechanisms of grants operations are monitoring and evaluation (Beam and Conlan 2002). These steps are important not only for an assessment of the efficiency of the grant as a tool for policy, but they also further increase information for the research tool. In fact, the NEA created a website called Exploring Our Town, showcasing examples of projects funded. This collection analyzes success by looking at process, setting, and the type of projects completed and highlighting lessons learned. This material adds to the conceptualization role that the NEA manifested when I analyzed the research tool, as it reinforces how creative placemaking should be carried out and frames the way to think about it. At the same time, it confirms the noncoercive features of a grant. Even though the NEA provides language and patterns, there is a lot of freedom in the possible initiatives that could be funded and each community has a lot of wiggle room in coming up with the project that better fits the needs of the place and better expresses the local arts and culture. Moreover, as Rodriguez-Bonin remarks, this grant program leaves room for leadership to the artists.

Even though these placemaking efforts occur in the context of a grant program, the leadership position asked of artists turns away from the ‘tactics’ practiced downspout of hierarchically shaped policy operations, challenging artists to form relations with those who stand to benefit from placemaking operations. (Bonin-Rodriguez 2015, 136)

4.3. Partnerships

In his vision for creative placemaking, Rocco Landesman aimed to make private investors aware of the crucial role of the arts and culture in urban revitalization (Pogrebin 2009). At the same time, he aimed to scale up the resources in the field, but not exclusively through Congress appropriation (Pogrebin 2011). The white paper was the first crucial step in articulating the framework for such a vision and the main enactments were the Our Town grant and the creation of a partnership ArtPlace. Public–private partnerships are not unusual for the American government. Every major policy initiative launched by the federal government since World War II has been managed through public–private

partnerships (Kettl 1993). However, in the arts sector this policy tool has not been quite as popular and ArtPlace represents a novelty, especially considering the wide range of organizations involved and the complexity of the multi-level governance at play.

‘But the ArtPlace idea is big, certainly bigger than anything ever done before ... and has the potential to be a ‘game changer’, (Eger 2011). ArtPlace is a collaboration among six federal agencies along with two White House offices, 15 leading national and regional foundations, and six of American largest banks. Nonprofit Finance Fund serves as investment and grant manager for the collaboration. Their website claims

ArtPlace is a ten-year project in service of permanent change, thus our emphasis is not on creating a permanent institution, but instead on strengthening the field of people and organizations working to position arts and culture as a core sector of community planning and development. (ArtPlace 2015a, 2015b)

In 2011, the NEA and its leader Rocco Landesman launched ArtPlace after working on the recruitment of the numerous partners in close collaboration with Luis A. Ubiñas, the president of the Ford Foundation, who is serving as the chairman of the ArtPlace Presidents Council (Pogrebin 2011). ‘We need to communicate that the arts are as important as ever, that they can’t be left behind, that they can’t be dropped to the cutting-room floor,’ Mr Ubiñas said (Pogrebin 2011, C1). ArtPlace brings artists, arts organizations, and artistic activity into the suite of placemaking strategies pioneered by Jane Jacobs (Bennett 2014). She believed that community development and placemaking needed to be locally informed, human-centric, and holistic. On this premise, ArtPlace is making a big investment in sharing the understanding that every community includes artists and every artist works and lives in a community.

ArtPlace is not considered a mere grant-maker, as much as ‘an accelerator of creative placemaking’ (Coletta 2012, 3). This goal is supported through four core areas of activities: a yearly national grant program, a one-time grant program investing \$18 million for nongovernmental organizations with a primary mission in community development interested in including the arts permanently in their work, field building strategies to connect the practitioners in the field, and research to document and disseminate successful placemaking practices. Since 2011, ArtPlace has funded 227 creative placemaking projects, totaling \$67 million. The 2015 award amounted to \$10 million dollars (ArtPlace 2015a, 2015b).

On the ArtPlace’s website, executive director Jamie Bennett explains creative placemaking as follows:

In creative placemaking, ‘creative’ is an adverb describing the making, not an adjective describing the place. Successful creative placemaking projects are not measured by how many new arts centers, galleries, or cultural districts are built. Rather, their success is measured in the ways artists, formal and informal arts spaces, and creative interventions have contributed toward community outcomes.

ArtPlace also developed an operational definition in the form of a grid to help communities map out what they stand with their creative placemaking projects. On one axis they listed five types of stakeholders such as government, commercial, nonprofit, civic, and philanthropy; on the vertical axis they listed the ten sectors that capture the majority of work taking place in communities: agriculture and food, economic development, environment, health, housing, immigration, public safety, transportation, workforce development, and education. With this grid, they invite the community to see what role

is played by the arts in each box and identify areas where both arts and culture can be improved, or are already playing a leading role.

5. Governance features

Research, grants and partnerships are the main tools used by the NEA to spur a multi-level governance that shaped the creative placemaking policy. Deconstructing this policy highlighted the main features of the creative placemaking multi-level governance (see Table 1). Overall, these three main tools created the goal and language of the policy, carried out the different stages of the policy process, produced different outputs, and involved different IRG actors.

For certain aspects they are linked in a linear way. For instance, the white paper is at the foundation of both the grant and the partnership, and for other aspects they are complementary or even overlap in what they need to accomplish, that is for example, the grant and the partnership both provide economic support. Moreover, in order to emphasize the link among tools, it is worth noticing that the white paper was commissioned by the NEA through The Mayors’ Institute on City Design, which is also a tool created by the NEA for transforming communities through city design.

The goals of the policy are summarized in the definitions of creative placemaking. Each of the three tools puts forward a definition that emphasizes a slightly different angle. The white paper emphasized strategic action among cross-sector partners, a place-based orientation, and a core focus on arts and cultural activities. The Our Town grant underscores

Table 1. Governance features of creative placemaking policy.

Governance features	Research	Grant	Partnership
Definitions	In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities.	Creative placemaking is when artists, arts organizations, and community development practitioners deliberately integrate arts and culture into community revitalization work – placing arts at the table with land-use, transportation, economic development, education, housing, infrastructure, and public safety strategies.	In creative placemaking, ‘creative’ is an adverb describing the making, not an adjective describing the place. Successful creative placemaking projects are not measured by how many new arts centers, galleries, or cultural districts are built. Rather, their success is measured in the ways artists, formal and informal arts spaces, and creative interventions have contributed toward community outcomes.
	Cross-sector	Integration	Artists as community innovators
Dimensions of policy process	Agenda setting and evaluation	Policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation	Policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
Outputs	Theoretical direction and empirical assessment	Economic support	Economic support, change normative expectations, field building
Federal government roles	Insight, not oversight Centralizing	Decentralizing Funder	Collaborative
Local government roles	Laboratory	Implementer	Collaborative
Third parties roles	Knowledge building	Managing	Steering, financing, managing

the importance of integrating the arts in community revitalization projects. Finally, ArtPlace brings to the forefront the artists and their leading role in developing community outcomes. Overall, research has emphasized how the difficulty in understanding what creative placemaking is emerges when it comes to issues of measurement and evaluation, taking into consideration that some concepts are still fuzzy and difficult to be quantified (Gadwa Nicodemus 2013; Markusen 2013; Morley and Winkler 2014a, 2014b).

The outputs of research are theoretical directions and empirical assessment, while grants and partnership provide economic support. Moreover, the partnership creates also leverage of funding, changes normative expectations, and develops field building. Each tool has also a role in shaping the policy in the policy process: research develops agenda setting and evaluation, whereas both grants and partnership cultivate policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

The NEA emerged with a strong ability of involving different stakeholders, creating a variegated multi-level governance. Its leading role in the multi-level governance is played out by providing directions and insights through research, assuring funding for economic support and involving several different actors of civil society. The NEA moved away from the subsidy model, and in framing the idea of creative placemaking created awareness about the contributions of the arts to urban revitalization and community, spearheading a change in thinking about the arts. This paradigm shift was promoted through the stages of the policy process, from the conceptualization of the goal that defined what creative placemaking aims to do, all the way to implementation and evaluation. The development of research in preparation of the white paper and the monitoring and evaluation tools brings the conceptualization role of the NEA at the forefront. Through theoretical direction and empirical assessment the NEA shows an insightful role, instead of one of oversight as related to a policy when it functions as a rule. 'Under his chairmanship, the NEA expanded its repertoire, becoming as much as a think tank as a funding agency' (Bonin-Rodriguez 2015, 132). Moreover, the NEA promoted the creation of the partnership ArtPlace, leveraging funding devoted to creative placemaking projects from banks and foundations, besides creating the new grant Our Town.

The local government is the only branch involved among the other levels of government. The state government did not emerge from the mix of government actors and seems not to have any role in this policy. IGR theory explains that institutional relations do not include all the intermediary levels, even though governance is developed in a vertical layering of processes (Peters and Pierre 2001). Local governments are involved in the implementation of creative placemaking projects, but their role in the policy was also that of a laboratory, considering that the white paper collected several examples of creative placemaking projects through the country to help shape the concepts defining the goal of the policy. Historically, many national programs have their origins at state or local level as policy laboratories for innovation (Nathan 2008). This attention to previous work developed at the local level is a very exciting way to frame a policy based on a bottom up process.

As for third parties, several kinds of institutional actors have been involved in different stages of the process, delivering different outputs: scholars and think-tanks, banks, foundations, and arts organizations. Scholars and think-tanks, such as the Urban Institute, contributed to the knowledge building necessary to frame the policy-making discourse. Banks mostly contributed financially and foundations were involved for both financing and steering purposes. Foundations have had a shaping role for the arts infrastructure in the US.

Certainly, the financial contributions have been determinant, but it has been demonstrated that their impact goes beyond that (Toepler 2010, 2013). In particular, the Ford Foundation had a leading role in involving large foundations and giving to the arts and establishing 'matching grants' as a system to leverage funding and establish a pluralistic institutional funding system (Smith, Anheier, and Hammack 2010; Redaelli 2012). Once again, in July 2010, the Ford Foundation had a steering role in promoting policy change, convening a meeting considering a new creative agenda for the United States. Arts organizations are the third party that animated the projects involving artists and the community at large in various forms. Their work inspired the white paper and fueled succeeding research. Their role is prominent, as they are the ones shaping the projects, bringing arts and culture in the community. They are enacting the policy and implementing the overall framework.

The relationship between the NEA and the third parties is quite complex. McGuire and Agranoff argue that networks of nongovernmental organizations have not displaced the power or centrality of government agencies in America (Agranoff and McGuire 2004; McGuire and Agranoff 2010). There is a mutual influence between public agencies and the network of organizations interested in the implementation of a policy. The tools of third-party government are both decentralizing and centralizing. Decentralizing, by inviting in third parties as federal implementers, and centralizing, by permitting the federal government to gain access to authorities, resources, and political consent that it would never be able to achieve on its own (Stoker 1991; Radin and Posner 2010). This aspect emerges also from the creative placemaking policy. The NEA seems to function with a centralizing role that coordinates the third parties, gaining access to broader resources and political consent and provides a theoretical framework through research, but this centrality is not so evident and can be described as a submerged state (Mettler 2011). At the same time, the provision of grants decentralizes its influence by delegating the content of implementation of the policy to local actors.

6. Conclusions

A tool-centered approach to multi-level governance in cultural policy provided several insights into the different features of creative placemaking governance helping to articulate the actions of the NEA and offering an understanding of its complex role in shaping the arts and cultural sector. In particular, this analysis of the creative placemaking policy showed the primary role of NEA as promoting a multi-level governance for the development of a new policy. In this process NEA actions include shaping the conversation, providing insights, offering and leveraging funding, and spurring collaborations. These different aspects illustrate features of decentralization through the involvement of third parties and, at the same time, features of centralization through the promotion of a framework that crafts the language, ideas, and concepts for public debate. The research carried out by the NEA shows that the federal agency is looking at what is happening at the local level to frame a national discourse that is created through a bottom up process. In fact, the white paper was written assessing arts projects in local communities around the country and the evaluation processes for the Our Town grant helped refine the indicators of success based on the responses from the community. Finally, the involvement of third parties such as banks and foundations through the partnership ArtPlace created an impressive leverage of funding and broad civic society attention and support to the idea of creative placemaking.

This analysis contributes to the field of American cultural policy by more broadly helping to realize what the term policy implies in this context, by unpacking the features of the multi-level governance involved. In particular, the lesson derived from this study is threefold. First, cultural policy is not solely about funding and requesting money, but it includes framing the debate about arts and culture and its role in the community. Second, cultural policy is not just about a mandate from a federal agency, but involves input and ideas from several different actors of civil society. Finally, even though the term policy implies a link to institutionalized processes, it is important to highlight that in this context this link means being supported by the institution, but not having to conform to the institution. The NEA does not give any directive in terms of content, and the only strict requirement for the projects is that they need to have a creative impact on the community.

Creative placemaking has been unfolding organically and this analysis helped to understand its value in enhancing a highly pluralistic society. This study focused on how the NEA became part of the conversation and created a policy to contribute at the development of this idea. Future research could further investigate how local governments, arts organizations, artists, and the community perceive the policy operation unpacked in this analysis, providing further insights in the governance dynamics of cultural policy. For example, how are partnership negotiated between the NEA and third parties? An empirical study could shed light on how the creative placemaking definitions are played out in specific communities and how the role of arts is perceived by considering the opinions of the artists, community members, public officials, administrators, and staff of arts organizations. What are some tensions between the different stakeholders? How are local context influencing the artistic decisions? In particular, it might be important to better understand how the shift from what artists can do and where they produce their work is actually happening in the communities.

Note

1. The Mayor's Institute of City Design organizes six to eight two-day sessions around the country bringing together 20 people, half mayors and half leading design experts. Each mayor presents an issue from their city, and the group engages in finding possible solutions.

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Notes on contributor

Eleonora Redaelli is an assistant professor at the University of Oregon. After working for public and private institutions in the cultural sector in Italy, she received her Ph.D. at The Ohio State University and taught in the Arts Management program at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. She specializes in cultural policy, cultural planning, and arts management education. Her works appear in *International Journal of the Arts in Society, City, Culture and Society, Urban Affairs Review, Cultural Trends, Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society, Journal of Planning Education and Research, and Urban Geography*. In 2015, Palgrave published her book *Arts Management and Cultural Policy Research*, co-authored with Jonathan Paquette.

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