

The Economic Value of Placemaking in Rural Oklahoma

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DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

- 1 What is Placemaking?
- 2 Placemaking and the Main Street Program
- 3 Placemaking and Oklahoma's Rural Economies
- 4 Conclusion



Which Place Pulls You In?



Which Place Pulls You In?



Built Capital

- One of the 7 community capitals; refers to the **built environment** of the community
- Examples include building stock (quality and architectural styles), infrastructure, housing, telecommunications and utilities
- Three key dimensions
 - **Functionality**: how well does it work? will it need replacing soon?
 - **Distinctiveness**: does it look identical to other nearby communities?
 - **Sense of Place**: are buildings, landmarks, and infrastructure integrated neatly together? do downtown streetscapes provide pedestrians with a sense of safety and enclosure?



What is Placemaking?

- **Placemaking** involves efforts to **rejuvenate a community's look and feel** by shaping the built environment around the community's culture, heritage, and symbolic meanings.
- Placemaking builds from “place attachment”—the bond between people and places—in the process of creating quality places where people want to live, work, and play.
- A key goal of placemaking is to create greater economic, social, and cultural vitality in rural communities aimed at improving people's social, physical, and economic well-being.



Why Care About Placemaking?

The Value of Downtown

- The town square (or downtown) is usually the geographic center of a community. But is it still the center of economic, social, and civic activity?
- Downtown is the “living room” of a community. When a guest walks into your house and sits down, how do they form their first impression?
- The quality of your town’s Walmart reflects back on Walmart. But like it or not, the quality of your town’s central business district reflects back on your town.
- Placemaking alone does not create jobs, but it helps “clean the living room” of your community, transforming it into a place worth investing in. *Place* is inextricably linked to economic vitality.



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What is the Main Street Program?

- A four-point approach with 1,500+ members since 1977:
 - **Organization:** putting a team together, making sure priorities align
 - **Design:** emphasizing the way the downtown looks and *feels*
 - **Promotion:** making sure people (both visitors *and* locals) know about the things happening in town
 - **Economic Vitality:** working to ensure that the new “buzz” around town translates into new businesses and jobs
- The Main Street Program (MSP) is a quintessential example of rural placemaking. It seeks to reshape the built environment (streets, parks/plazas, historic buildings, etc.) into a thriving asset, hopefully spurring investment based on a strong sense of place.
- Placemaking efforts like the MSP are hard to quantify because 1) they are small-scale, 2) there is no central hub for data, and 3) it is not always clear what to measure: is economic vitality only measurable in terms of jobs, or are there other ways to quantify the impact of placemaking?



My Research on Placemaking & Downtown

An Entire Dissertation in Three Bullet Points

- **Study 1:** found that towns in rural Iowa that joined the MSP saw statistically meaningful **increases in new retail jobs and new retail establishments** in the years following program adoption
- **Study 2:** found that, in most rural Ohio towns, houses sold for higher when located further away from downtown; BUT in communities with an active MSP, the reverse was true: **houses sold for higher when close to a revitalized downtown**
- **Study 3:** found that most businesses in the rural Midwest were more likely to struggle (and even go out of business) when located near a downtown business district; BUT in communities with a strong set of cultural anchors (i.e., revitalized downtowns) **businesses had higher resilience and longevity**



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Placemaking is Linked to Community Capitals



- Placemaking is an **investment** in built capital and cultural capital.
- Strong built and cultural capital can pave the way for investments in other types of capital.
- Conversely, weak built and cultural capital can lead to disinvestment and missed opportunities for broader rural community & economic development.



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Placemaking Examples in Oklahoma

- **Oklahoma Main Street Center:** operates out of the OK Dept. of Commerce and helps towns with technical assistance, assists in grant funding, and helps spread new/innovative ideas to its members.
- **Chickasaw Placemaking Initiative:** ten cities in the Chickasaw Nation picked to host a workshop identifying tourism-oriented placemaking strategies in their communities
- **OSU Extension:** Celebrating Retail, Accommodations, Tourism and Entertainment by Building Rural Innovations and Developing Growth Economies (CREATE BRIDGES) program to develop retail, hospitality, and tourism
- **Odds and Ends:** the Route 66 Christmas Chute in Sapulpa, upper-story housing efforts in Talequah, the 1-cent “penny for our city” tax in Ada, Choctaw Nation refurbishing historic buildings as co-working centers



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Parting Thoughts

- Focusing on downtown placemaking is **not** advocating the neglect of other retail and business districts. Rather, it is a recognition that downtown is the community's "living room."
- The Main Street Program is an excellent avenue toward revitalization and successful placemaking. However, there are intermediate steps that communities can take without having to join the program.
- Oklahoma has a rich variety of rural places where visitors can feel like they are *somewhere*. Placemaking efforts help preserve that asset, preventing communities from feeling like *anywhere*.



Two Invitations

- **Do Some Self-Inventory:** think about the assets (i.e., capitals) that your community possesses and reflect on how those assets might be enhanced by placemaking. Example: 2-3 towns in close proximity to a lake (natural capital) but only one has an attractive retail district...which do you think will become the cute tourist shopping destination?
- **Reach Out and Connect:** please share success stories with OSU Extension (my email is on next slide) so we can share them with other communities that are earlier in their placemaking pathway



Thank You!

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