ONE

Introduction

Defining Place, Defining a Field

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Place has always mattered to people and the economy, in ways that are constantly evolving.

In the nineteenth century, America's cities grew to become not only centers of commerce and trade but also powerhouses of invention and industry. Within these cities, the various needs of manufacturers, artisans, retailers, and other businesses determined where and how they clustered, giving rise to the growth of downtowns, industrial districts, and surrounding enclaves of worker housing. The demands for place dramatically changed during the twentieth century, however. The advent of the automobile, coupled with new infrastructure investments, new housing and land-use policies, and changing demands of industry, led to the movement of people and jobs from

central cities to greener, and whiter, suburban pastures—while leaving many, predominantly Black and brown, urban communities in economic and fiscal decline.¹

But these patterns are not static. As with past innovations, the digital revolution is disrupting growth and development patterns. The new economic geography that is emerging is one of polycentric megaregions, where jobs, people, and amenities concentrate at key nodes in both historic urban cores and suburbs.² Older cities and regions have had limited success in consolidating governments to encompass this new reality, leading to a fragmented landscape replete with city centers, mature and emerging suburbs, exurbs, and rural towns, often with different jurisdictional boundaries.³ Yet larger or more consolidated regions are not necessarily more efficient or effective at providing services or managing resources.⁴ Indeed, Jane Jacobs once described a region as "an area safely larger than the last one to whose problems we found no solution."⁵ There is simply an inevitable mismatch between the boundaries of our formal government units, the scale of different markets, and the way we actually live our lives.⁶

One consequence of this fragmentation is sustained and growing place-based inequality. Even as many downtowns, waterfronts, and innovation districts have in recent decades seen significant revitalization and reinvestment, concentrated poverty and racial segregation remain persistent in neighborhoods across the regional landscape. Traditional units of government are less able than ever to understand and, ultimately, help meet the needs of places within a region and network them together efficiently and equitably.

These uneven patterns of economic growth and governance require a shift in the way places are governed and managed—one that acknowledges the changing socioeconomic realities of place and the pressing need to bring inclusive economic growth and prosperity to more people and places. Making this shift successfully could unleash a new era of inclusive American growth. Perhaps sensing this, many residents, philanthropies, and businesses have responded by attempting to do this work themselves, organizing at the hyperlocal level new

forms of governance to improve places' economic competitiveness or advance social equity, among other goals.⁸

This chapter introduces and offers specific definitions for *place*, *placemaking*, and *place governance* to explain exactly what is meant by "the hyperlocal level," and make available to the reader and our coauthors a consistent, shared vocabulary. Next comes a review of the literature relating place governance to the issues of segregation and inequality and the role place governance has in addressing, or exacerbating, them. Finally, the chapter foreshadows the explorations of various dimensions of place governance offered in chapters 2 through 8 of this volume.

What Is Place?

Where is the hyperlocal level? To answer this question, we begin from John Agnew's three-part definition of *place* as a "meaningful location." All places consist of:

- Location (macro)
- Locale (objective)
- Sense of place (subjective)

Location refers to the context within which the place is situated—for example, the location of a ship is in the ocean or a port, or the location of a neighborhood is in a city, and so on. Proceeding from this idea that some larger ecosystem is the setting of a place, for the purposes of this book, the location is a metropolitan area, or "region," containing one or more primary cities, suburbs, and rural areas that are related and connected to one another by daily labor flows. As such, places must be smaller than regions. These "hyperlocal" places are within, or sometimes straddle, the areas bounded by legal jurisdictions recognized by state constitutions (for example, counties, cities, townships, parishes, boroughs, etc.).

Locale refers to the "material setting for social relations." We know and recognize neighborhoods as the locales surrounding our homes. However, as noted by Emily Talen, the historical typology of this "spatial unit that people relate to" also includes locales defined by specific anchors or "clusters of related land uses" beyond housing, such as community, recreation, consumption, institutional, infrastructure, or economic assets. ¹⁰ These clusters, or "activity centers," also are places with unique governance challenges. ¹¹ The scope of this book, and our definition of place, is inclusive of both residential neighborhoods and activity centers. We are investigating here the relationships—civic structures—we create to manage assets and negotiate needs within these places.

Sense of place refers to "the subjective and emotional attachment people have to a place." A shared sense of place can be thought of as a legible meaning for the place based on a "reading" of its collective assets. This sense is critical—it is the primary source of the legitimacy, reach, and leverage of any attempt at place governance. By combining this meaning with the previously specified location and locale, we arrive at a concise definition of *place* for the purposes of this book:

Place: A neighborhood or activity center, within or cutting across a local government unit, composed of a meaningful collection of assets in proximity to one another.

What Is Placemaking?

Because of the importance of sense of place to the very definition of place, governance actors have a stake in shaping who is and is not included in the place, as it is the interpretation, feelings, and desires of included people that determine a place's identity. However, David Harvey notes that, in today's fragmented and uneven metropolitan context, "ideals of urban identity, citizenship and belonging . . . become

much harder to sustain."¹² The cultivation of a sense of place by place governance actors also often has a cyclical character: A shared sense of place creates the foundation for place governance among a group of insiders, and place governance aims to further define that sense of place for that group. Ultimately, despite the "mushiness" implied by the subjectivity and negotiability of sense of place, it grows from a personal judgment that gives it a powerful, authentic core that matters to people and drives concrete action.

Actions that establish, shift, enrich, or complicate a place's identity are part of defining a place. While in the original anthropological sense *placemaking* as a term referred to the acts of settlement, construction, and dwelling by everyday people, the term has been adopted by the design, urban planning, and place management professions to describe actions that "make our places meaningful," including both "daily acts of renovating, maintaining, and representing" and "special... one-time events" like a celebration or the opening of a new facility. Placemaking today describes both a distinct professional practice as well as an activity that everybody does, but with a crucial distinction: A professional class engaging in these activities without the participation of the people who use a place is appropriative place-taking, not placemaking.

Placemaking: Daily and special acts to make a place useful and meaningful.

Placemaking includes an enormous range of activities at many scales. Each one is a "framing action" in that "every time we decide to do something, we are simultaneously deciding not to do something else. . . . Placemaking thus includes and excludes people in every intervention . . . [and] privilege[s] ways of working at the expense of alternative methods." ¹⁴ It is this very process of filtering and refinement that adds specificity and meaning to a place, while also "constructing community" by setting boundaries on who and what is

included and represented—and who and what is excluded.¹⁵ In the act of placemaking, individuals or groups are projecting preferences or desires about what they want a place to be, expressing their sense of place, and ultimately claiming and exerting a sort of power.

There are many disciplines that want to change places, often motivated by ambitious objectives such as racial equity, environmental justice, or wealth building. In fact, both experts and advocates have long been aware that, because place influences so many different outcomes for people, there is a need for a more expansive kind of placemaking that acts not just on what a place is but also how it works in relation to other places and in its regional context. Individual, often siloed, approaches from the economic development and community development fields, the smart growth movement, and the placemaking movement have had limited traction and success at achieving this kind of change on their own. A "transformative placemaking" approach—as defined by the Brookings Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking—aims to encompass insights, methods, and goals from all these domains.¹⁶

Transformative placemaking: An integrated framework and practice for realizing a holistic set of economic, physical, social, and civic outcomes for places.

What Is Place Governance?

Broadly, the concept of governance refers to a shift from twentieth-century government structures, in which the public sector exerted full control, to a hybrid structure in which governmental and nongovernmental actors collaborate and share control and influence.¹⁷ The acts of collaboration and sharing are definitional here. Governance is the difference between people and/or organizations acting (or reacting) in isolation and, instead, co-creating with one another. When applied to the

act of governing urban places, place governance often manifests as a collaboration among public sector actors (state and local governments), private sector actors (retailers and business owners), civic sector actors (foundations and nonprofits), and citizens (residents and users) to cogovern a specific location through a narrow or wide span of design, maintenance, programming, and service delivery activities.¹⁸

Governance is a capacious concept that covers an extremely broad range of actors and actions. People in proximity organize to create place governance structures to fill gaps that arise from the treatment of places strictly as mutually exclusive collections of public and private property. Governance acknowledges the reality of places as emergent entities that are not fully public but are clearly not private either. The aggregate dynamics of places, which include both positive and negative spillovers resulting from the complex mix of commercial, residential, recreational, and myriad other activities that are constantly changing within them, suggest a simple yet specific definition of place governance.

Place governance: The collaboration of actors across sectors to make decisions that help shape the economic, physical, and/or social dynamics of a specific place.

Today, there are uncounted thousands—likely tens of thousands—of place governance structures in the United States and around the globe. What all these structures have in common is that they use a specific geographic grounding to situate their work, which may be called "place-based," "place-rooted," or "place-conscious." These structures may be made up of one or more organizations operating in a single or overlapping geography, including private civic or business institutions, such as a neighborhood association or a chamber of commerce; community-based nonprofit organizations; public-private entities such as business improvement districts (BIDs); or formal public entities like New York City's community boards, Los Angeles's

Main Street Development Park Community Conservancies Development Organizations Authorities Corporations Land Trusts Business Improvement Districts Private Public Tenant Neighborhood Neighborhood Associations Associations Councils Homeowner's Chambers of Advisory Associations Commerce Neighborhood Commissions Community Boards

FIGURE 1-1. Common Examples of Place Governance Organizations on a Spectrum from Private to Public

Source: Authors' analysis.

neighborhood councils, or the District of Columbia's advisory neighborhood commissions. Figure 1-1 summarizes these forms on a spectrum from private to public.

Place governance organizations have a huge range of missions and capacity. At one end of the range is place management, the targeted delivery of services, beautification, and programming in particular areas—such as a park or public plaza—shown to require special funding and maintenance outside of what the public sector can or should provide. Activities and services could include neighborhood watches, community cleanups, events, or the deployment of "clean and safe" teams. However, this type of normative place management may appear from one perspective as stewardship and from another as policing, erasure, or sanitization of people, cultures, behaviors, or values that are not preferred by a dominant group. In response to this critique, numerous scholars and practitioners have advanced the concept of "placekeeping," proposing a practice dedicated to "the active care and maintenance of a place and its social fabric by the people

who live and work there."²¹ This implies both a bigger timescale and a more holistic sense of what is valued and how returns are measured, "not just preserving the facade of the building but also keeping the cultural memories associated with a locale alive, keeping the tree once planted in the memory of a loved one lost in a war and keeping the tenants who have raised their family in an apartment."²²

Near the other end of the range of place governance activities is place production, the literal building or development of places. Historically undertaken in the United States primarily by the private sector and occasionally by the public sector, new organizational forms are attempting to combine the motivations and accountability frameworks of the public and private sectors in public-private partnerships (PPPs). Public-private partnerships have long functioned as quasi-institutional venues for reworking state-market relations at the local level, including the widespread privatizing of core public sector management and social service delivery.²³ At their best, effective PPPs allow public governments to gain from business know-how, such as brokering deals and financing, and allow businesses to profit from normalized ties to government, through, for example, buy-in from agencies and quicker turnaround from regulatory bureaucracies. Through collaborative, interdisciplinary, networked leadership, cities are able to "think like a system and act like an entrepreneur."24 Figure 1-2 frames this range of activities as a cumulative ladder of place governance.

Does Place Governance Contribute to or Combat Place-Based Inequities?

As with any shift in power and control, place governance is controversial. Proponents argue it is an efficient, effective approach for tackling place-based challenges and promoting economic development without the hinderances of governmental bureaucracy—and a way to make improvements to places that governments cannot, will not, or should

ACTIVITY MOTIVATION What does the organization do? Why? Advocacy Strategy POSITION PLACE Vision Develop-PRODUCE PLACE ment Projects Retention/ Recruitment ACTIVATE PLACE (e.g., of businesses or residents) INVEST IN PLACE TEACH PLACE Branding and Marketing CELEBRATE AND SHARE PLACE **Events** Maintenance CLAIM PLACE "Clean and Safe"

FIGURE 1-2. The Cumulative Ladder of Place Governance

Source: Adapted by authors from James Yanchula, "Finding One's Place in the Place Management Spectrum," Journal of Place Management and Development 1, no. 1 (2008).

not undertake.²⁵ Aside from efficiency, they contend, place governance can be used to promote equity because it restructures resources toward places with serious challenges and redistributes them on the basis of locational need rather than arbitrary circumstance.²⁶ They point out that place-focused organizations are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between economic development and social justice by making a case for inclusive growth, ideally by ensuring that local stakeholders have voice and agency in proactively determining desired outcomes for their place and the strategies and investments needed to achieve them.²⁷ Such entities also provide an organized structure through which stakeholders can vet and react to proposed investments from public or private sector actors (for example, real estate developers) while providing those actors with an organized group with whom to work to coordinate public input.

However, it also is possible that place governance represents additional fragmentation of an already fragmented local government landscape. Critics argue, for example, that this new form of governance formalizes another phase of decline of the public sector, where any success of private sector management in delivering municipal services delegitimizes local governmental authority. The privatization of public services and the creation of hyperlocal funding sources to do so can represent a form of hoarding that serves narrow interests, diverts dollars from under-resourced neighborhoods, and creates wealth-based disparities in the provision of public services. As noted by Harvey, it simply may be the latest attempt of "the neoliberal project over the last thirty years . . . towards privatizing . . . control" over capital surpluses. On the surpluses of the provision of public services and the creation of public services.

A second, related, critique is that place governance potentially can create "spillover effects" in which place-based challenges (such as housing affordability, crime, and homelessness) simply are displaced between two neighborhoods rather than addressed holistically for the well-being of entire cities or regions.³¹

Finally, most place governance organizations are siloed to serve a specific constituency within a place, such as homeowners or renters, landowners, or business tenants. Emily Talen contends that this restricts participation and thus legitimacy, leaving place governance "in constant search of authenticity" and "easily challenged as inefficient and backward."³²

A major challenge in understanding the field of place governance, or carrying out a critically reflective practice as a member of it, is that the devil is in the details. The benefits and critiques enumerated here both can be true of a given organization or place at the same time. Just as every place is unique, so, too, is every place governance arrangement. The same emergent quality of place that defines and motivates place governance also complicates any effort to generalize about it.

That said, questions of power and accountability clearly are central concerns of a just place governance practice.³³ Who has the power? Who

are organizations accountable to? How can accountability be operationalized, measured, and monitored? Proponents argue that place governance organizations are politically accountable as long as they provide annual reports, audits, and reauthorization requirements, yet others are not so sure given the methodological difficulties in isolating the effects of governance to specific management practices and the dearth of consistent, formal accountability structures.³⁴ As a whole, the field still lacks a comprehensive understanding of the kinds of metrics place governance organizations regularly track (or even should track) and how often and in what ways they share them to ensure accountability.

There also is a pressing need for place governance models that are more inclusive across siloes of constituencies. Harvey warns that "the right to the city, as it is now constituted, is too narrowly confined, restricted in most cases to a small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more after their own desires."³⁵ Place governance could represent a mechanism to organize more expansive and inclusive movements to gain control of capital and democratize the right to the city—or the exact opposite.

John R. Logan and Harvey Molotch discuss this polarization in terms of the conflict between "use" and "exchange" values in places. They distinguish individuals and groups for whom place is primarily precious in terms of use value (that is, as the venue for life) from "place entrepreneurs," for whom place has an exchange value as a commodity. In their terms, the question is whether place governance is a system for organizing inequality or for harnessing a finer balance between a place's exchange and use value.³⁶

In short, while place governance holds significant potential to give stakeholders a structure through which to share their vision and ideas, voice their concerns, advocate for investments, and codesign plans and strategies with others both inside and outside their place, scholars and practitioners have raised concerns about its impact on the public sector, wealth-based inequities, neighborhood spillover effects, and the well-being of vulnerable populations and citizens at large. More research is needed on how place governance organizations remain

accountable to society and track outcomes to ensure such negative effects are not proliferated.

Understanding Place Governance: Challenges, Opportunities, and Models for the Future

The intersecting crises of 2020 and beyond—including the coronavirus pandemic, social revolt over police brutality, climate catastrophes, and an economic recession—revealed that the current structure of many place governance organizations may limit their ability to meet the changing needs of places. For example, organizations dependent on revenue from events that were incompatible with stay-at-home orders and social distancing found themselves without the resources to fully respond to the distress of the workers, residents, and businesses in their places. Similarly, downtown organizations that derive their revenue from property assessments dominated by top-dollar office real estate are still confronting the fact that many post-pandemic adaptations will likely result in reduced assessments—and that their boards often are dominated by actors invested in the status quo. Meanwhile, new place-based collaborations, such as the movement for mutual aid, have sparked and flourished in response to the crises but have not yet gained recognition as formal place governance entities—and it may be they never will.

This is a timely moment to connect the healing of people and places—but the place governance field will need to adapt to these changing realities to do so. This may mean redrawing boundaries, sharing control in new ways and with new actors, and creating formal and informal mechanisms to build trust and innovate new models. The purpose of this volume is to explore these issues over seven chapters, covering the challenges and opportunities of place governance as well as models and innovations that could help today's organizations evolve to more effectively serve more people in more communities.

Place governance in the United States did not spring into being in the civil rights era, or as a contemporary craft of neoliberal policymakers. There have always been common-pool resources—"the commons"—and a need to manage them. Place governance as a mechanism for formalizing and managing aspects of American civic life has its roots in the colonial period, and modern place governance organizations have many precedents. In chapter 2, author Alexander von Hoffman provides a delightful and thorough history of American place governance as an undertaking of both elites and everyday citizens. His able telling illuminates for readers how we arrived at the place governance we see today, which is critical to understanding how it could and should evolve.

While they may exist in a similar legal framework, all place governance organizations do not serve the same mission or stakeholders. Each organization uniquely fits within a broader jurisdictional geography and governmental context and represents a particular attempt at collaboration between a mix of actors from different sectors, both within and across the places they govern. In chapter 3, legal scholar Sheila R. Foster dissects four distinct models of place governance with differing mixes of private, public, and community leadership and involvement to examine who governs, what is at stake, and how tensions and trade-offs are negotiated in each case.

At this point, it is already clear that different place governance models are suited to differing ends. In chapter 4, Juliet Musso uses a case study from Los Angeles to examine three kinds of place governance structures—BIDs, neighborhood councils, and community land trusts—exploring how each possesses different dimensions of power that influence how, how well, and to whose advantage they govern the places in their purview.

With authorizing legislation in all fifty states and the District of Columbia, BIDs have become a relatively ubiquitous form of place governance. However, there is considerable variation in the size, structure, and function of BIDs between states and, even, neighborhoods. In chapter 5, author Jill Simone Gross zooms in on this type of place governance structure to interrogate who benefits from place governance, who is accountable for its oversight, and why

some BIDs become "community builders" while others become community "breakers" or "erasers."

Perhaps no social challenge embodies inequity and exclusion more than homelessness, and organizations that manage common spaces often are on the frontline of this complex issue. In chapter 6, authors Elena Madison and Joy Moses provide an overview of homelessness in the United States and explain why people experiencing homelessness are concentrated in particular public spaces. The authors discuss how conventional place governance models often are, at best, limited in their success in supporting unsheltered people or, at worst, employ practices openly hostile to them. Finally, the chapter surfaces promising practices from the field to better address the needs of people and places challenged by homelessness.

There is nothing particularly American about the mandate or the models for stewardship of place. In fact, place governance is an organic construct in communities all over the world, and many innovations in place governance, such as BIDs, originated and evolved beyond U.S. borders. In chapter 7, through a comparative study of governance efforts in Seoul, Rotterdam, Porto Alegre, Berlin, and other cities around the globe, author Nancy Kwak's analysis yields critical insights into how to thread the needle of inclusive growth at the place level.

Last, in chapter 8, authors Tracy Hadden Loh and Nate Storring synthesize key lessons for readers that resonate across the individual chapters, supplementing them with insights distilled from interviews with contemporary U.S. place governance leaders. The authors spotlight best practices for accountability as well as efforts to bring place governance to more people and places through new financing, organizing, and ownership models. They conclude with an attempt to grapple with the inherent messiness of place governance with a call for a polycentric approach to understanding, stewarding, and improving our urban landscape.

This is a pivotal moment to document the current state of place governance. Every structure can be used for ill or good. So how do we

maximize the potential to yield positive impacts and minimize the risk of harm?

This volume aims to help answer these questions by deeply exploring both the tensions and opportunities of governing places in an increasingly fragmented, and inequitable, economic landscape. In so doing, we hope to provoke new thinking about how, why, and for whom place governance matters, and highlight practices and models for creating more connected, vibrant, and inclusive communities.

NOTES

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