



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer Transcript for Episode #066: Creative Placemaking with Mike Marcus

March 30, 2017

Amy Climer: Welcome to The Deliberate Creative Podcast Episode 66. This podcast is all about leading innovation in teams. In today's episode, we are talking about the connection between the physical space and the culture of an organization or community, particularly, how to use space as a tool to increase creativity. I have invited Mike Marcus on the show to talk about Creative Placemaking and he is going to explain how you can use spaces to enhance creativity within your team and within your organization.

Mike is going to share a number of resources with you and I have made this easy by putting them all in the shownotes. You can access the shownotes at www.climerconsulting.com/066. On that website, you will also find 65 other podcast episodes, numerous blog posts and dozens of resources to help you lead your team or yourself to be more creative. If you are inspired by the podcast, please subscribe to it and write a review on [iTunes](#) or [Google Play](#). I would love to get your feedback and hear what you think.

All right, let's talk about Creative Placemaking. Here is Mike. Mike, welcome to The Deliberate Creative Podcast. Thanks for being on the show.

Mike Marcus: Thank you, Amy.

Amy Climer: Start off and tell us a little about your background, who you are and what you do.

Mike Marcus: I grew up in Costa, California in Art District. My mom was a weaver and I grew up in her studio and her studio was part of an art community that was basically an adaptively re-used military base that was decommissioned in the 60s. So for me, I have always been really interested in the intersection of the arts and urban planning and spaces and I have developed a

1



www.climerconsulting.com



career on that and it is really exciting. It is like amalgamation of a variety of different experiences, but it really goes back to my passion for how the creative sector and space comes together.

Amy Climer: What is your role now?

Mike Marcus: I am Assistant Director of Creative Placemaking and Property Development for [The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design](#) in Asheville, North Carolina. We are a national organization that basically serves as the think tank for the field of craft. We are very interested in what does the future of craft look like and how does it intersect with material based culture and other creative disciplines. We have a building that we acquired about three years ago in downtown Asheville that we are redeveloping into a creative campus. So that is my focus, is the redevelopment of that and also building the market locally and regionally for it to be relevant once it is finished with a variety of academic partners.

Amy Climer: Cool and the building is super cool.

Mike Marcus: It is.

Amy Climer: Which is a requirement, I feel like.

Mike Marcus: Yeah. It is a 1912 building that was built as an auto body repair center and so it has a lot of historic character that we are really looking to amplify by not touching the shell and then building out the interior to highlight what is the real treasure of the building, which is the original structure.

Amy Climer: That is cool. So part of your role is creative placemaking.

Mike Marcus: Yes.

Amy Climer: We are going to talk more about that. Can you start off just explaining what is Creative Placemaking? What does that mean?



What is Creative Placemaking? [04:05]

Mike Marcus: I think in essence, Creative Placemaking is the practice of identifying creative solutions that look and feel like a given place or culture or context. It is very specific to its context. In looking at the words, I think it is kind of interesting because it is a newer discipline and practice and it was kind of made official by a report put out by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2010. But placemaking has been around for a while and obviously, creativity has been around for a while.

So parsing out the terms, I am going to start with placemaking and that refers to a collaborative process based on how we shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value for connection between people and the places that they inhabit. Creativity is -- I am sure your listeners know and there are a lot of different definitions around -- but I think of it as the generative capacity to think and act on new ideas, sometimes breaking rules and often solving problems. And so when we bring those things together, it really is a powerful way to look at the authenticity of place and how we use those places. And I think of innovation as how creativity can be applied to a particular context to realize an outcome that brings about change. So really, I see Creative Placemaking as the process of creating process that results in innovation.

Amy Climer: This is awesome. And it is also general, abstract.

Mike Marcus: Yeah.

Amy Climer: So let's get specific. Can you talk a little bit about how are you using Creative Placemaking in the work that you are doing here in Asheville?

Mike Marcus: Sure, yeah. I see Creative Placemaking as being a -- there is a fractal approach. So we are, as an organization, looking at how do we activate a creative placemaking approach on a variety of levels. Usually, the term is applied at a community based level. So pretty broad meta, not necessarily down to an individual workspace. But what we are really looking at is what does creative placemaking look like at a regional level with our assets, what does it look like at a local level, what does it look like at a neighborhood level and then what does it actually look like inside the space that we are creating to be a creative sector hub.



Amy Climer: Nice. Can you give an example?

What Creative Placemaking Looks Like at a Community Level [06:38]

Mike Marcus: At a community level, we have become really aware that the creative sector regionally and locally needs a place to convene and that there is no home for the creative sector here. And so as a result, there are not places where people can come together and know that there are going to be other similarly minded people where ideas can catalyze and projects can evolve from. So creating a space like that we knew is important if we want to look at how craft specifically can influence other disciplines and be a connector. Because if you think about craft, it is everything from the cup that you are drinking out of to the home that you are living into a beautiful sculpture that is made of glass or wood or some other material that is not necessarily conceptually based but more materially based. So it is a very wide discipline or set of disciplines and so creating a home that helps us tell a different story and affect change is kind of one way that we are looking at creative placemaking.

What Creative Placemaking Looks Like at a Neighborhood Level [07:46]

Another is at a neighborhood level we are looking to use our building and our asset to create change from a gateway perspective into our downtown. That the downtown in Asheville as a place is really creative but there are not a lot of built spaces in the downtown that say that and there really are not investments in the arts. So we are looking to use our project to redevelop a whole alleyway and transition that to be -- we would love for it to be called Maker Lane. And then from a street perspective, different sculptural aspects. So that is kind of in the public realm.

And then inside, we are looking at what are the conditions that people need in their own work to be able to actualize their creative thoughts and ideas. And so from looking at a concept that has evolved called Activity Based Working where it is really looking at what are the most appropriate locations within a given space for people to do the different tasks that they go about in a day. So that is active spaces, passive spaces, collaborative spaces, deep thinking spaces. To me, that is creative placemaking kind of at its office level application.

Amy Climer: When you talk about placemaking being contextual, I was thinking how the context today of just what a day-to-day work day might be is so different from 10 or 20 years ago



because of laptops and coffee shops with internet. And so people are often not in their office during the day, they are working in all these different areas and how cool is it to go, hey, I am going to just go down this creative place, whatever it is called, this makerspace or this co-working space and I am going to do my work there and then these ideas I get to bounce around on other people and there is this awesome infusion of ideas that can happen.

Mike Marcus: Totally. I have always been really drawn to urban spaces that are well activated. But the first time I went into a really well done coworking space. I had that same level of excitement of, “Oh, I can be stimulated in all these different ways from an interior space that is designed for me to move through my day in the various moods and emotions that I am experiencing as a human, I am allowed to bring that here. And this place is actually designed for that and as a result, I can be in my optimal performance.” So there are those destination spaces that are coming online all over the country, but there is also a big movement of companies themselves driving that change internally and developing spaces using those same learning outcomes but applied to headquarters or even small offices. And I think that that is a really exciting movement because it is a shift, like you are talking about, in how we actually work as a culture.

And giving people the space to bring their best self or maybe on some days not their best self and that there is an ability you do not have to be in your 10 by 12 office. If we think about collective resources, maybe your 10 by 12 office could be better purposed as a quiet work zone and another person’s 10 by 12 office could be a space built for vibrant ideation and then we think about the kitchen as a collective work area. So it really is just thinking about spaces differently to help people be people in their day-to-day life and work.

How Space Can Impact You and Your Team [11:26]

Amy Climer: I think it is so interesting how much space can impact us. I was just thinking about a client that I worked with and they came to me with this challenge and one of the challenges was they had set up like an open space, like a bunch of cubicles because they wanted to increase collaboration and they wanted those accidental conversations to happen, but the flipside of that was people were not getting any uninterrupted quiet time to work. And so we were exploring how can they infuse that in their space or in their work. We were coming up with all these ideas of headphones and signs on their desk “don’t interrupt me right now. I’m really in a deep



thinking space”. So it is just an example of how space was impacting their creativity and their effectiveness and their efficiency, really.

Mike Marcus: Totally. I think that the open workspace approach is kind of our infancy as a workplace culture understanding what are these new trends and how do we adapt to them. And then learning oh, open workspace, like we went from one extreme to another and now we are finding balance. Open workflow does not work for introverts often, but there is a middle ground that can be really effective in using space more efficiently to achieve those goals that organizations have without leaving out a big piece of their workforce and probably, a big piece of their thought leadership. A lot of folks really, introvert or extrovert, need to be able to take a step back and do deep thinking and open workspace is not conducive to that.

Amy Climer: Right. You need both.

Mike Marcus: Yeah.

How You Can Infuse Creative Placemaking into Your Work [13:12]

Amy Climer: So, let’s say I am listening and I work for an organization and am curious about how might I apply some of these concepts of creative placemaking to my environment. What advice do you have to help someone think about infusing creative placemaking into their work?

Mike Marcus: I think that taking a step back and thinking through that creativity cannot be forced and realizing that people experience creative sparks in many different parts of their life often with that individual there is some consistency to where they experience it. That they will always say I do my best thinking or I have my best ideas in the shower or on a hike. It usually does not involve their office. So I think embracing that and taking a step back and saying, “Okay, what can we do to create spaces that accommodate actualizing the creative spark after it has happened,” and then having somewhat of a methodology to do that.

Using the Asset Based Community Development Approach [14:24]



One method is actually usually applied at a community scale, but I think community can be defined however you wanted to, and that is the idea of [Asset Based Community Development or ABCD](#). And that is really looking at what are our inherent assets as a community, as an organization, as a city, whatever scale you want to apply that to, what are our assets and how do we grow those, versus saying this is what we are seeing other people or other communities or other organizations do, we need to do that. What do we need to basically import into our culture in order to achieve that? From a community or a city scale, that is a typical approach to economic development.

So looking at an organization or a workplace application, in a lot of workplaces their biggest asset are their people and their talent. And so if we do a deep check in as to who do we have and what do they need to be the most successful in their professional and personal lives, it is a really beautiful application of the same set of tools. And asking those people and starting to do a deep dive of what are the optimal conditions for them to be successful and then creating spaces and programming internally that help amplify that.

Amy Climer: So I can see that in two ways maybe; one is, you get your best ideas in the shower, is there a way to replicate that here? Of course, we can get really literal and we can build a shower for you, but are there other types of similar spaces you might have here, but then even after you get those ideas, how do you develop those ideas further and what are those spaces you need to develop those ideas?

Mike Marcus: I think even deeper than that, it is, oh Amy, as an employee, you may be exceptional at whatever your job is, but really your passion is over here. And so by starting to understand what is really your passion and what is your job, oh we are looking at the strategic plan for the next five years, we really are needing to grow in this way. Amy's passion is here, her day-to-day functions are here, how do we really go all in on Amy and then what kind of physical space is then needed for her to be her best?

Amy Climer: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.



Deep Stakeholder Engagement Process [16:59]

Mike Marcus: So that kind of leads from a method perspective there is the [ABCD](#) approach and then part of that is a deep stakeholder engagement process, which does not only involve internal stakeholders but external stakeholders. And so we found at [Center for Craft, Creativity & Design](#) that we really needed to understand a lot of different people and perspectives because we have a lot of different end users and some of them are not as intuitive. And so really taking a step back and mapping who are we affecting or want to affect. That might be our janitors, it might be folks who are literally keeping things working and if that does not go well, it affects everyone.

Amy Climer: Right. And that is the stakeholder engagement.

1. Looking at How Other People Have done it Well [17:49]

Mike Marcus: That is stakeholder engagement and then the third thing I would say is really looking at how other people have done it well. I have found myself I cannot help when I am visiting cities around the country and world to take an hour to go look at really cool spaces. The saying a picture is worth a thousand words, I think an experience, even if it is for five minutes in a space is worth ten thousand. And it might be that this is exactly what I do not want and that is invaluable and then like what is it about this space that makes me not want it? And hopefully, it is actually going into a space and saying, “Wow, this is amazing! What in this space can I replicate in my own or what is creating this vibe that is making this pulse?”

So I have found that there are really amazing spaces that are very unique to a given place. And so visiting those spaces is invaluable. And it is really important because a lot of these are new ideas for a lot of people and being able to show them a space does twenty hours of convincing in five minutes. Because a lot of people do not understand how can I put together offices, open flex space, event space or whatever it is your mash up is that makes sense for you, those things do not go together. And from an older thinking perspective in terms of workplace, you are right, they do not go together, but they are actually the most interesting spaces that are coming



online now. And so it takes somebody feeling that and seeing the sense of energy that is happening in a place or the sense of connection and collaboration that is happening for a light to go off and have that embraced.

Amy Climer: It makes me think about if you are building a home or buying a home or redoing your house, you go and you look at all these magazines and you get ideas and you got to home shows and you go on tours. Because you need some external input to get these new ideas and then you kind of can take what you like and you mash it up and make it your own.

Mike Marcus: Exactly. And I found that actually kind of a synthesis of these three things from an engagement perspective is to invite your stakeholders to do their own research; go online, find images. And it has to be image based, I found, because people get really excited about images. And invite folks to put together images that excite them of spaces and then bring them together and create vision boards, concept boards. Even if it is down to the chair, I personally think most chairs are really ugly and so places with good chairs are really exciting to me. That is a very nuanced perspective. People spend a lot of time in their chairs. If their chair is really unhelpful to them or demotivating, then that is very important for their daily work.

Creative Placemaking Learning Resources [20:56]

Amy Climer: Yeah, I love it. All right, so we are talking about visuals, I am wondering if there are like some resources if people want to learn more about Creative Placemaking, if there are some books or references, websites you would recommend.

Mike Marcus: There are two books from a office scale application of creative placemaking. I would say there are many different scales of placemaking, but from an office scale and kind of innovative space perspective that I have really come to love. The first one is called [Make Space: How to Set the Stage for Creative Collaboration](#). And that is a publication based out of the Stanford Design School and the authors are Scott Doorley and Scott Witthoft. What is really great about that book is that it is very inexpensive solutions to creating dynamic spaces that can be flipped easily, meaning you can reconfigure a space if it is not working or if you want to have a different kind of outcome. So that is a great book.



Amy Climer: I actually, a couple of years ago, found that book in the library and I just thought it was super fun. And so many of the things you could get at the hardware store and implement, which was really cool.

Mike Marcus: Yeah. So that is a great one. The other one that has become my new kind of go-to bible is [called Spaces for Innovation: The Design and Science of Inspiring Environments](#). And that is by Kursty Groves and Oliver Marlow and they are out of the U.K. The U.K. has some really great resources coming out around this stuff. The book is wonderful and it really focuses on the workplace application of innovation.

Amy Climer: That is great. I will put both these links in the shownotes so people can find them easily. So Mike, one of the things I do on the podcast is at the end of episode, I give listeners a weekly challenge, something from what we talked about that they can implement that week. So what might be a weekly challenge you would give listeners?

The Weekly Challenge [22:51]

Mike Marcus: That is a great question. Picking up on the idea of how people can take creative sparks that happen outside of the workplace and then translating how do we optimize those in the workplace, my challenge would be to ask three people when a creative idea strikes for them, what is their optimal environment to further develop it?

Amy Climer: I love that.

Mike Marcus: I think that that starts to get the essence of the three different methods we walked through and it is just a good snapshot of how to start to create different thinking which can hopefully result in change.

Amy Climer: Awesome. Great! Mike, thank you so much for being on the podcast. If people want to learn more about you and the work you do, where should they go?

Mike Marcus: Well, thank you. It is an awesome podcast so I appreciate being included.

Amy Climer: Thank you.



Mike Marcus: Email is great; mmarcus@craftcreativitydesign.org. I am on [LinkedIn](#) and those would be two great places to start.

Amy Climer: Great and I will put those in the shownotes so people can find them easily.

Mike Marcus: Thanks Amy.

Amy Climer: Thank you, Mike. That was awesome. I just learned a ton. Before meeting Mike and before interviewing him, I knew almost nothing about Creative Placemaking. I had heard the term, but I did not really quite know what it meant. Mike, I have been inspired by you probably in a way that you did not quite intend. But what happened is between the time that we did the interview until the time now, when I am recording this ending, I took a look at the space that I work in and I realized I am not being very creative in the space at my desk. I work from home so in some ways I have a lot of control and so I really just spent about 30 minutes today making some changes at my desk space that I feel like will help me be more creative in the work that I am doing. And I find that I kept leaving my desk and going to the kitchen table and it is like, “Hey, I have this perfectly great desk, why am I doing that?” So I made some changes and I am very excited about that. I know that is not exactly creative placemaking, but the conversation about space inspired that, so thank you, Mike.

I hope those of you listening have also been inspired and will think about the weekly challenge that Mike posed. I would love to see your comments and I know Mike would as well. If you go to the show notes page, you can leave your comments on there; how did it go, what happened when you were asking the questions that Mike suggested you ask? You can find the shownotes at www.climerconsulting.com/066. Head on over to www.climerconsulting.com and you will find the shownotes there, all the resources that Mike mentioned, as well as a ton of other resources about creativity in teams. I hope you found this episode helpful and I hope it has inspired you. Thanks again, Mike, for being on the show. Have a wonderful week everyone. Talk to you next time, bye.