

Dear Chinatown, DC: Exploring New Ways of Public Engagement

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Master of Design in Integrative Design

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**Dear Chinatown, DC:
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A Thesis Manuscript Submitted to
The Faculty of the Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design
in Candidacy for the Degree of Masters in Design

MDes in Integrative Design Program

by

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Ann Arbor, Michigan

June 2020

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Abstract

Today, Chinatown's role as a place of cultural heritage, belonging, and identity is at risk of being erased. Past and present residents in Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown experience increased alienation from their own neighborhood.. Through this design-based research project, *Dear Chinatown*, I connect the neighborhood's assets and cultural activities to inform place-keeping strategies in Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown. As capital, privatized interests, and speculative real estate development continues to shape neighborhoods across D.C., the design of participatory planning models led by governing agencies becomes critical. Through principles in place-based education (PBE), participatory action research (PAR) and research through design (RtD) methodologies, this investigation tested and evaluated an approach to public engagement that: 1) generates a proactive versus reactive process model; 2) forms new networks and collaborations and builds capacity; 3) generates a process that is adaptable and flexible; and 4) meets where people are already at and leverages existing assets and resources. The key findings and outcomes of the project revealed the value of new networks and collaborators and intergenerational convening, as well as both the need for improvements and reduction of obstacles in accessibility and data quality.

Social groups within D.C. Chinatown's longtime community are diverse, dynamic, overlapping, and sometimes at conflict with one another. As such, a one-size-fits-all approach to engagement does not work. This project affirms that design for engagement has a role to play in cultivating people's complex ties to place.

Keywords

Chinatown, Washington, D.C., Place-keeping, Place-based Education, Participatory Action Research, Research through Design, Participatory Planning, Public Engagement, Gentrification, Displacement

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all of my advisors, faculty, and colleagues at the Stamps School of Art and Design that helped get this project where it is today.

Thank you to my cohort; Ashley, Colleen, Gowri, and Meg. Thank you for challenging me, keeping me sane, holding me accountable, and helping me slow down a little bit sometimes. Roland, thank you for being our steadfast advocate as our cohort lead. To Andreia, our honorary C4 leader; it was an absolute privilege to be able to work and learn from you for our adventures in Brazil. Allegra and Vida, I want to be as creative and wise as you both when I grow up.

To my project partner Ted and the 1882 Foundation team and community for welcoming me to your community and embarking on this journey. It's been wonderful getting to know you all through this work and I look forward to our continued collaboration.

To my advisors, Nick and Maria, thank you for always listening and understanding me and the work that I want to do (and reminding me what I don't want to do). Thank you for your optimism and enthusiasm about my capacity when I often felt unsure about myself and my ideas.

To friends in Washington, D.C. who gave this project their time and support; Elaine, Phim, Raksa, Khahn, Rebecca, and Leethaa. Thank you for your help to bring the *Dear Chinatown* project to the public. Christina, thank you for your photography skills and documenting this project so beautifully.

To Harley Etienne and my classmates in *URP 583: Race, Place and Social Justice*. The course and our conversations were formative to this work.

To John, thank you for building this program. Thank you for pushing us to be better, more conscientious designers. Thank you for bringing us piles of snacks to get us through our evening seminars.

To Meghan Jellema, thank you for keeping this entire operation working seamlessly. Your patience, dedication, and heart have been a stabilizing force.

To Jennifer Metsker and Ali Shapiro, thank you for making me discover that the writing process is enjoyable.

To Ben, thank you for taking care of us while I was 500 miles away.

To my family. I know I made a stink as a kid but I'm grateful for our weekend trips to Chinatown for lunch and groceries.



Figure 1: Photo looking east at the Friendship Arch in Chinatown, Washington, D.C.

Glossary

Asset Mapping. “Asset mapping is the general process of identifying and providing information about a community’s assets, or the status, condition, behavior, knowledge, or skills that a person, group or entity possesses, which serves as a support, resource, or source of strength to one’s self and others in the community.” (Burns, Pudrzynska Paul and Paz 2011/2012, Lightfoot, Simmelink McCleary, and Lum 2014; Kretzmann and McKnight 1993)

Co-creation. In *The Convivial Toolbox*, Elizabeth B.-N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers define co-creation as the “collaborative creative action, event or artifact. Sometimes used to refer to codesign as a whole, sometimes used to refer to a single event with stakeholders.” (Sanders et al. 2012)

Co-design. A co-design approach leverages the creativity of designers and people not conventionally trained in design to collectively contribute to the design development process. (Sanders and Stappers 2008)

Co-learning. The process in which local experts and professional experts collaborate and as a result, teach each other about their areas of expertise. A mutually beneficial dynamic to strengthen and build capacity for both people with local experts that can provide important insights about a community based on their lived experience and in return, professional experts can provide the tools and resources for local experts to share and disseminate their knowledge. (Mosavel, Gough, and Ferrell 2018)

Community. David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis defines a sense of community through four criteria: 1) feeling of membership or belonging to a group; 2) influence and the sense of mattering to the group; 3) integration and fulfillment of needs by the group, and 4) shared emotional connection through shared history, place, time together, and experiences. (McMillan and Chavis 1986)

Critical Pedagogy. With origins in critical theory, critical pedagogy is an orientation toward teaching that sees education as the means to achieve social change, where education and learning is an inherently political practice and intrinsically connected to issues of democracy and social justice. Introduced in 1968 in Brazil by Paulo Freire and his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, teachers in critical pedagogy believe that the purpose of education is for students to gain a critical lens of the world around them. Shaped by that critical consciousness, learners are then prepared to challenge systems of oppression. (Freire 2014)

Cultural Activity. Refers to existing activities that the D.C. Chinatown community organizations and associations host, these are typically activities and events that are open to the public and include arts, humanities, performance, sports (e.g. volleyball) or religious content.

Cultural Heritage. Both the tangible and intangible assets recognized by a community or group. Tangible assets include artifacts such as pieces of artwork, monuments, manuscripts, and places. Intangible assets may include oral traditional, rituals, and the performing arts. (UNESCO 2017)

Cultural Landscape. Also known as a vernacular landscape, it describes places within the context of Dolores Hayden's book, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. The National Park Service defines this as a place "whose use, construction, or physical layout reflects endemic traditions, customs, beliefs, or values; in which the expression of cultural values, social behavior, and individual actions over time is manifested in physical features and materials and their interrelationships, including patterns of spatial organization, land use, circulation, vegetation, structures, and objects; in which the physical, biological, and cultural features reflect the customs and everyday lives of people." (U.S. National Park Service n.d.)

Cultural Identity. A person's sense of belonging to a culture or a group.

D.C. Chinatown. A geographic neighborhood located in Washington, D.C.'s city center since the 1930s, when Chinese immigrants came here to live and work. From the 1880s to the 1930s, D.C.'s Chinatown was located further south, near Capitol Hill.

D.C. Chinatown Community. The community in this context is referring to D.C. Chinatown's longtime Chinese residents, past and present, and community leaders (e.g. small business owners, religious

institutions, and community organizations) who share a sense of belonging and loyalty to each other and this place.

D.C. Office of Planning (OP). A government agency that is responsible for guiding the long-term growth and development of Washington, D.C. The OP performs planning services for “neighborhoods, corridors, districts, historic preservation, public facilities, parks and open spaces, and individual sites. In addition, OP engages in urban design, land use, and historic preservation review. OP also conducts historic resources research and community visioning, and manages, analyzes, maps, and disseminates spatial and US Census data.” (DC.gov Office of Planning 2019)

Displacement. Displacement is the “forced disenfranchisement of poor and working class people from the spaces and places to which they have legitimate social and historical claim” is the byproduct of gentrification. (Lees et al. 2010). It is the byproduct of the process of gentrification and its remaking of places by the middle and upper classes.

Gentrification. The term gentrification was coined in the 1960s by Ruth Glass, a German sociologist, describing the process in which people of higher socioeconomic classes move into places inhabited by people of lower socioeconomic status. When combined with an influx of capital, goods and services, this process results in gentrification. (Lees et al. 2010; Prince and Prince 2014, Beauregard 1986)

Participatory Planning. Describes the processes facilitated by governance structures that function to facilitate a democratic process for stakeholders and constituents to inform the urban planning process. (Legacy 2017; Monno and Khakee 2012)

Place-keeping. The term has been used to counter “placemaking” (see below) in its reaction to placemaking’s role in gentrification and alignment with private redevelopment interests as a means to achieve neighborhood revitalization goals. Through the concept of place-keeping, the physical and visual image of places are informed by the context of specific histories, and cultural significance by and for people that have historically been unheard or accounted for. (Nicodemus 2008)

Placemaking. Placemaking, or creative placemaking, was amplified by the National Endowment for the Arts and a strategic initiative to describe a democratic process that integrates tools of arts and cultural practice to revitalize neighborhoods. (National Endowment for the Arts 2020; Courage and McKeown 2019)

Public History. Refers to the “employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia; in government, private corporations, the media, historical societies and museums, and even in private

practice.” (Kelley 1978) It also references its function to application to inform real-world issues (e.g. policy creation) and is often associated with a social justice orientation. (Kyvig 1991)

Social Innovation. This project defines social innovation in the context of Ezio Manzini’s scholarship, which “entails a sociotechnical transformation driven by and oriented toward social change.” (Manzini et al. 2015) Co-design through social innovation approaches an expanded definition of collaboration and engagement beyond individuals to encompass larger, societal objectives within an increasingly complicated and interconnected world. (Manzini et al. 2015) “In other words, they are innovations that are good for society and enhance society’s capacity to act.” (Murray, Caulier-Grice, and Mulgan 2010)

Research Through Design. Describes the design research approach that uses the method of prototyping as a tool to surface knowledge. I use design methods and produce artifacts from prototyping as a means to generate knowledge from the testing and evaluation of the prototypes to gain understanding or explanation to a larger question, as opposed to using this information to directly inform a traditional design product (e.g. object, digital application, park, etc.) (Frankel and Racine 2010; Stappers 2007; Herriott 2019)

Sense-making. Sense-making (with a hyphen) as a methodology, developed by Brenda Dervin since the early 1970s, describes the generative process to design for better practices and systems of communicating knowledge, also referred to as “knowledge management.” (Savolainen 1993; Jacobson and Jacobson 2000; Dervin 1998) The methodology acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed and takes that into consideration, as identifying knowledge “gap-bridging” must first identify the specific user-needs. (Savolainen 2006; Dervin 1998)

Sensemaking. Sensemaking (no hyphen), is attributed to research in psychology and Karl Weick’s work which studied sensemaking through organizational behavior and communication. (Dervin and Naumer 2009; Weick 1988; Maitlis and Sonenshein 2010) In this work, he saw that better sensemaking was able to better address organizational crises. (Maitlis and Sonenshein 2010; Weick 1988) Additional theories in sensemaking can be attributed to Daniel Russel, Gary Klein, and David Snowden in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), cognitive systems engineering, and knowledge management in organizations, respectively. (Dervin and Naumer 2009) In its application to design practice, Jon Kolko further expands on sensemaking as an abductive sensemaking tool that externalizes the tacit nature of the design process. (Kolko 2009)

Stakeholder Mapping. Stakeholder mapping is a design research method to visualize the issues that concern each stakeholder group and show the complex relationships and competing interests within the neighborhood. (Stickdorn and Schneider 2011)



Figure 2: Photo looking north at the H Street NW between 6th and 5th Street NW, Chinatown, Washington, D.C.

Preface

My project site, Washington D.C.'s Chinatown, intersects my personal and professional interests. For fifteen years, I worked as a practitioner, educator, and advocate in landscape architecture in New York City, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. In each of these places, I witnessed the increasing power of private interest in controlling neighborhood change from places that used to support everyday life to entertainment and tourism centered playgrounds. I am also a Washington, D.C. resident and a second generation, Chinese American woman. Seattle and Vancouver's Chinatowns are places that hold meaning to me, having grown up in the northwest and raised by immigrant parents.

This work aims to make the space in the process for underrepresented voices in the conversation that cannot access or feel alienated by status quo public engagement processes that shape the planning and design of our cities. We do not adequately interrogate the processes that lead to the displacement and erasure of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color from place. From the United States's colonial origins to urban renewal practices, to housing and neighborhood segregation, to the ongoing physical and spatial manifestations of gentrification today. *Dear Chinatown* is a call to action project for myself and other design professionals that are committed to advancing social and spatial justice in place.

It was my privilege to collaborate with D.C.'s longtime community leadership to contribute to something to help amplify and make visible this resistance and that there are people here and there are stories and experiences about places about why Chinatown is important to both the history and future of place. As I write this, COVID-19 continues to make our systemic inequities much more visible and tangible. It's more important than ever to generate new ways to amplify the strengths and assets of these communities as constant reminders in the public memory of why these places are important to our social and environmental well-being.

1. Introduction

1.1 The City as a Place for Learning Toward Spatial Justice

This thesis explored place-based education (PBE) in the context of the city as a place for learning, accessing local knowledge about the places that matter to people, and the methods and tools used to transform and protect them. While place-based learning is a philosophy and educational model that is traditionally embedded and applied to K-12 education, its application has profound value to continued learning, regardless of age or education status. Essentially, it is a learning that takes place not inside the classroom but directly within the “places we inhabit” (Getting Smart 2017) It’s about the power of place and what it can afford to our learning about issues that affect our everyday lives.

Architect, scholar, and historian, Dolores Hayden, articulated the important role of urban places and their social histories through a decade-worth of research, practice, and corresponding book, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*:

“Understanding the history of urban cultural landscapes offers citizens and public officials some basis for making political and spatial choices about the future. It also offers a context for greater social responsibility to practitioners in the design field.” (Hayden 1995)

To confront issues of social and spatial justice in the built environment, it is essential that design practitioners engage in constant learning about how our systems of oppression are designed, so that we can be better equipped to redesign to dismantle these oppressions, physically and spatially. Toward this effort, PBE philosophies and principles provide important grounding for this project. The city itself plays an important role to make visible the unjust systems that drive neighborhood change. As introduced by David Harvey in “The Right to the City”:

“The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.” (Harvey 2003)

1.2 The Problem Space

Today, longtime, aging residents continue to experience increased alienation from their own neighborhood and Chinatown's role as a place of cultural heritage, belonging, and identity is at risk of being erased. In 2020, Washington D.C.'s Chinatown's longtime Chinese residential population continues to shrink from its peak in the early 1970s. From the 3,000 Chinese residents at the time, it was reported that only 300 Chinese residents remained in the neighborhood in 2015. (Wang 2015, Semuels 2019) The neighborhood's cultural assets are being overshadowed by rising costs of living and rapid commercial redevelopment and existing cultural preservation policies are rooted in expressions of cultural identity through entertainment and tourism. (D.C. Office of Planning 2009 and 2011/2017) Absent are recommendations that recognize the neighborhood's significance from the perspective of its Chinese American community. Furthermore, the processes that inform cultural preservation and planning policies like these are important contributing factors, because City planners don't design for engagement, they hold meetings. And these meetings do not work.

As neighborhoods across D.C. are being shaped in the visions of capital growth, privatized interests, and speculative real estate development but not by people with historical and social connections to these places, participatory planning models implemented by governing agencies become increasingly more critical to redesign.

1.3 Research Question and Opportunity

Through participatory action research (PAR) and research through design methodologies, this investigation tested and evaluated how we can design better public engagement through this driving research question: how can we connect existing neighborhood assets and the 1882 Foundation's cultural activities to inform place-keeping in D.C.'s Chinatown?

Through this project, I explore this question by making the neighborhood's past and present unique cultural assets visible. A series of on-site workshops increased visibility of these assets through a making and sharing station where residents (current and former) can declare their love for the neighborhood, the what and why, through making poster-sized (11-inch by 17-inch) love letters. Through words, sketches, calligraphy or poetry, the project captured the hearts and minds of the community and what they treasure most about D.C.'s Chinatown. *Dear Chinatown* used the activity of poster-making as a tool for communication and to instigate action. Poster-making in public places in Chinatown makes visible the

impacts of inclusive outreach and convening, while initiating a first step toward generating new ideas for place-keeping.

1.4 Project Partner and Collaborators

My partner in this project was Ted Gong, Executive Director of the 1882 Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization located in D.C.'s Chinatown. The 1882 Foundation promotes public awareness of the history and continued significance of the Chinese Exclusion Laws to American civil rights history and immigrant history through programs and projects that preserve and interpret the history of the Chinese in America. (1882 Foundation 2018) The Foundation's name is derived from the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited the Chinese from immigrating to the U.S. and barring citizenship. What was intended to be a temporary moratorium that ended up lasting sixty-one years. This was the first immigration exclusion law in the U.S. (1882 Foundation 2018)

1.5 Project Audience: Stakeholders and Constituents

The primary audience for this project includes current and emerging community leadership, as the sustainability of this project depends on its adaptability and relevance to their priorities and needs. Emerging leadership in this context refers to the Millennial and Generation Z age groups who work with the 1882 Foundation as activists through their direct and complementary contributions as program coordinators, program managers, and neighborhood activism in Chinatown. The future of the neighborhood relies on their individual leadership, skills and collaboration in this effort too.

The secondary audience is the D.C. Office of Planning and corresponding city agencies to showcase how the formation and sustainability of new networks and collaborations require continued, incremental engagement. Only then can we leverage engagement to generate more effective collaboration and empower community members as key decision-makers in the processes of neighborhood transformation.

1.6 The Project and Intended Outcomes

What is Dear Chinatown, DC?



Figure 3: *Dear Chinatown*, DC event flyer, January 26, 2020.

Dear Chinatown is a multimodal making and sharing station for Chinatown’s past and present to declare what they love about the neighborhood and why through the production of poster-sized love letters. Through words, sketches, calligraphy, poetry, or sharing a story, the project captures the hearts and minds of the community and what they treasure most about D.C.’s Chinatown. The act of generating this type of activity in public places aims to evaluate how we can facilitate more inclusive forms of public engagement that make an important first step toward new ideas and initiatives for place-keeping.

Intended Outcomes

Dear Chinatown is a research through design project aimed to test and evaluate the installation as a prototype to gain insights on how we can design for a proactive versus reactive public engagement model. The project challenges traditional public engagement processes implemented by city planning agencies that are instigated by individual project needs but not implemented as long-term efforts to build and sustain capacity for underrepresented stakeholders and constituents to be seen and heard. This project offers insights on how engagement can be redesigned so that those most affected by cultural erasure are made equitable partners in the city planning processes that control neighborhood change.

The project challenges the ineffectiveness of existing public engagement structures and calls for experimentation through expansion of new networks and relationships amongst collaborators, activities,

and experiences. This component leverages different types of expertise and knowledge, both “design experts” and design “nonexperts” in new and complementary ways. (Manzini et al. 2015)

This project also aims to understand how we can design models that are both adaptable and flexible and leverage existing neighborhood assets by meeting people where they are. Through a participatory co-design approach, the project includes a prototype intended to be flexible and adaptable to advance more inclusive public engagement practices that meet the needs and objectives of the team of collaborators to facilitate equitable partnership and value from the project. (Sanders and Stappers 2008) From a strengths-based approach, the project identifies new opportunities and synergies amongst existing neighborhood assets to carry out this work. (Lightfoot, Simmelink McCleary, and Lum 2014) *Dear Chinatown* seeks out places where people are already engaged, such as long standing community and cultural institutions that support a range of cultural, social, and economic needs for the neighborhood.

How it Works

The poster-making station, equipped with a kit of poster-making parts (rubber stamps of geometric shapes, ink pads, 11 x 17 risograph printed paper, and black felt tip markers), asks participants to create their own poster that responds to the following prompt: *What are the things about Chinatown that you love? Where do you walk to, what are the events you love, who are the people you see, the routines and activities you have come to rely on, and the places you miss.*



Figure 4: Left, poster made from Prototype 3. Right, poster making supplies and prompt. (Photo credit: Christina Sanders)

The intention is that the love letters collected from the poster-making session are compiled and displayed in the neighborhood as a collective display of affection. Insights generated from the content from the love letters and from the entire process of engagement associated with the project is to be integral to that story and its dissemination.

Why Love Letters?

The love letter making activity references methods used in both design and art. The “love letter” and its converse, the “breakup letter” is an established design method created in 2009 by Smart Design, a product and service design agency. (Martin et al. 2012) This method is commonly used to solicit user insights in an accessible way about people’s relationship, values, and emotional connections around a particular product or service. (Martin et al. 2012, Smart Design 2010) The *Dear Chinatown* project adapted this method to generate insights about people’s relationship to place. This was further reinforced by a community-art based project by Lindsay Zier-Vogel called *The Love Lettering Project*. (Zier-Vogel n.d.) The project was established in 2004, and continues in cities all over the world, asks community members to write love letters to their city and hides them in locations for people to find. (Zier-Vogel n.d.) With the love letter design method in mind, the structure of the *Dear Chinatown* prompt was also informed by Zier-Vogel’s project.

Dear Chinatown at the Lunar New Year Parade

Dear Chinatown was installed in conjunction with the 2020 Lunar New Year parade and located in front of a residential building in Chinatown known as the Wah Luck House (800 6th Street NW). Built by the city in 1982, the Wah Luck House is one of the last remaining Section 8 affordable housing residences in the neighborhood. Today, it is home to approximately half of the neighborhood’s roughly 300 Chinese residents.

We parked the truck and flanked both sides with each of the red and white striped tents. At one end, the Humanities Truck team set-up their Mobilizing Memories interview station and at the other end, we installed the Love Letters to D.C.’s Chinatown poster-making station. Inside the truck, the Anacostia Community Museum curated a mini-version of A Right to the City’s Chinatown exhibit, and on the outside of the Truck, oral history interviews from the exhibit played for the duration of the event. People stopped by to point out friends and family members they knew in the film.



Figure 5: Photo. *Dear Chinatown, DC* in Chinatown, Washington, DC (Photo credit: Christina Sanders 2020)

Over 80 “love letters” were made to D.C.’s Chinatown that day. We pinned them up as the day went on and collected a gallery of affections to the neighborhood. In reviewing the poster content, topics of heritage, history, belonging, comfort, family, and of course, food, emerged as recurring themes. These insights reinforced what I heard through my conversations and interviews with past residents and longtime community leaders over the past few months. A place that used to be more of a home than it was a “downtown”.

2. Project Background

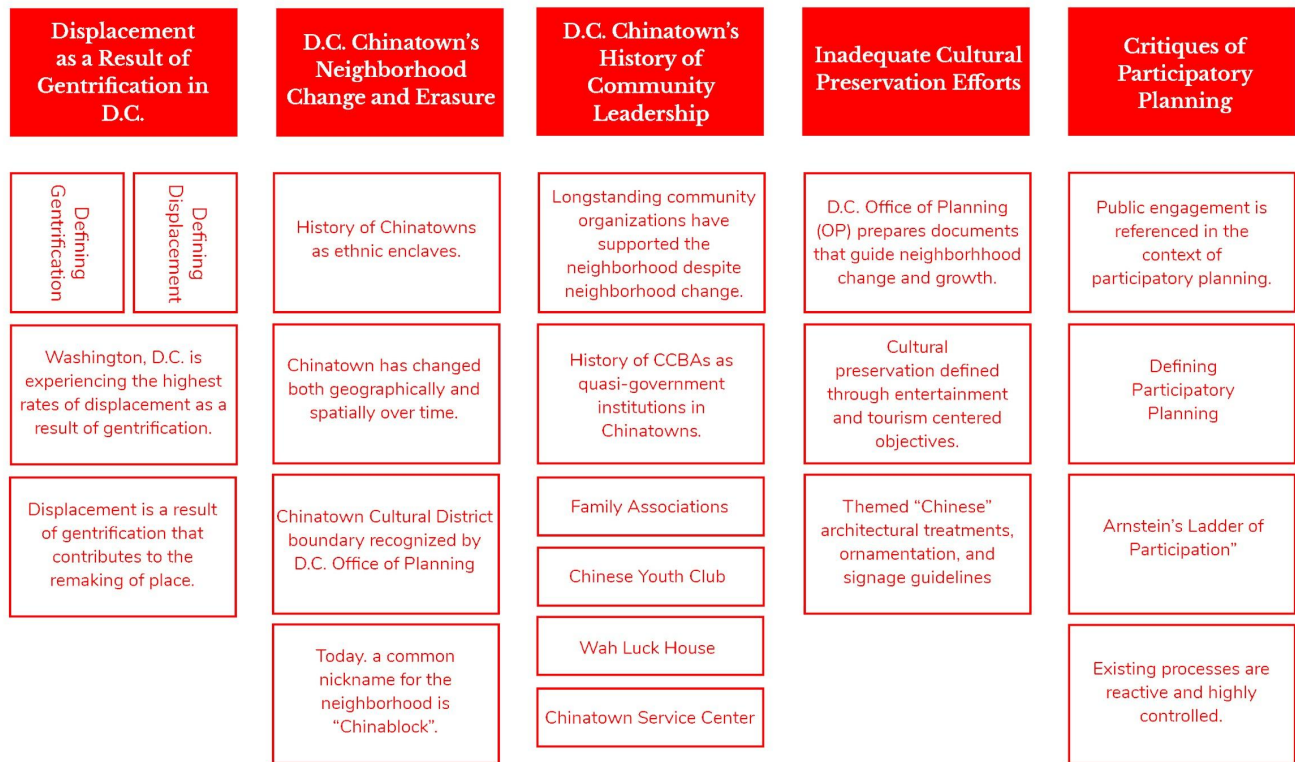


Figure 6: Literature review map

2.1 Framing Gentrification in Washington, D.C.

As neighborhoods across D.C. are being shaped in the visions of capital growth, privatized interests, and speculative real estate development, but not by people who have historical and social connections to these places, public engagement models practiced by governing agencies become increasingly more critical to redesign.

According to an April 2019 report by Robert Stancil, research fellow at the University of Minnesota's Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, between 2000 and 2016 Washington, D.C. experienced one of the highest rates of displacement in the U.S. as a result of gentrification. (Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity 2019, Misra 2019) In neighborhoods across the District, low-income residents are moving out of the city due to a lack of affordable housing options. (Lang 2019) The Mayor's Office responded to this crisis by prioritizing citywide housing targets in the 2019 D.C. Comprehensive Plan, a document guiding city growth for the foreseeable future. (Lang 2019) Per the study, low-income population loss as a

result of neighborhood development (i.e. displacement) was the highest in the Shaw, Logan Circle, Columbia Heights, and Petworth neighborhoods. While there is evidence of some low-income population loss as a result of development in Wards 7 and 8, these neighborhoods are characterized by low-income population growth as a result of neighborhood decline. (Misra 2019)

The term gentrification was coined in the 1960s by Ruth Glass, a German sociologist, describing the process in which people of higher socioeconomic classes move into places inhabited by people of lower socioeconomic status. When combined with an influx of capital, goods and services, this process results in gentrification. (Lees et al. 2010; Prince 2014, Beauregard 1986) The concept was based on Glass’s observations of a working class neighborhood in London and its transformation into progressively more expensive homes occupied by middle and upper class people. (Lees et al. 2010) Changes in housing conditions illustrates one outcome of gentrification processes. Gentrification is a large, multi-faceted process with highly complex relationships in causes and outcomes that affect the physical and spatial characteristics of the built environment. (Clark 2005, Beauregard 1986, Smith and Williams 1986)

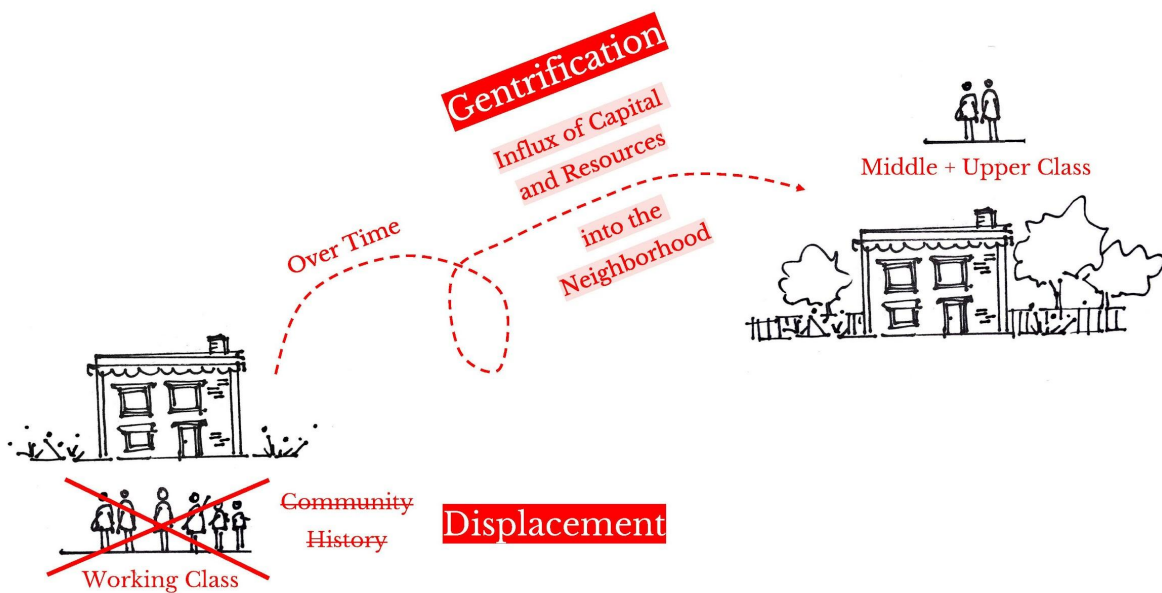


Figure 7: Illustration of the relationship between gentrification and displacement.

Displacement, the “forced disenfranchisement of poor and working class people from the spaces and places to which they have legitimate social and historical claim” is the byproduct of gentrification. (Lees et al. 2010). This is the intersection that this project aimed to address. The byproduct of the process of gentrification and its remaking of places by the middle and upper classes. (Lees et al. 2010).

The effects of displacement are both complex and difficult to measure. In the example of the 2019 report from the Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, the model maps economic expansion or decline against

low income population growth and decline at two points in time; 2000 and 2016. Then measures the net change in population between this 16-year span. While the simplicity of the model is beneficial for its interpretation and replication amongst other researchers, policymakers, and residents. (Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity 2019) Stancil admits that missing from these types of model is why these processes are happening (Misra 2019) Furthermore, studies like these capture information either at the city level or in this case, the neighborhood level, but do not capture the causes, experiences, and observations about neighborhood change from individuals or families. (Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity 2019) The qualitative methods that begin to surface the social histories of place can help to contextualize studies like this, to deepen and illustrate the complexity of these issues.

Dear Chinatown instigates a critical conversation about neighborhood change and questions who is given a voice in planning processes that affect a distinctive community. While not explicitly addressed in the 2019 report, D.C.'s Chinatown's high visibility and invisibility makes for a unique case study in this problem space. It is a small neighborhood footprint, nested within the city's center, which itself has transformed dramatically over the past thirty years. Conversely, D.C.'s Chinatown rarely makes it into the public dialogue on the greater issues of gentrification that Chinatowns across the country face, despite being marked by similar patterns of neighborhood change, albeit at a smaller scale in comparison to San Francisco, New York City, or Boston.

2.2 Washington, D.C. Chinatown Neighborhood Change and Erasure

D.C.'s Chinatown has experienced a number of geographical shifts and demographic and spatial change since the 1880s when the first Chinese immigrants settled in. The neighborhood had previously been home to German merchants and craftsmen and was located approximately one mile south of its current location, near today's Capitol Hill building. (D.C. Office of Planning 2011/2017)

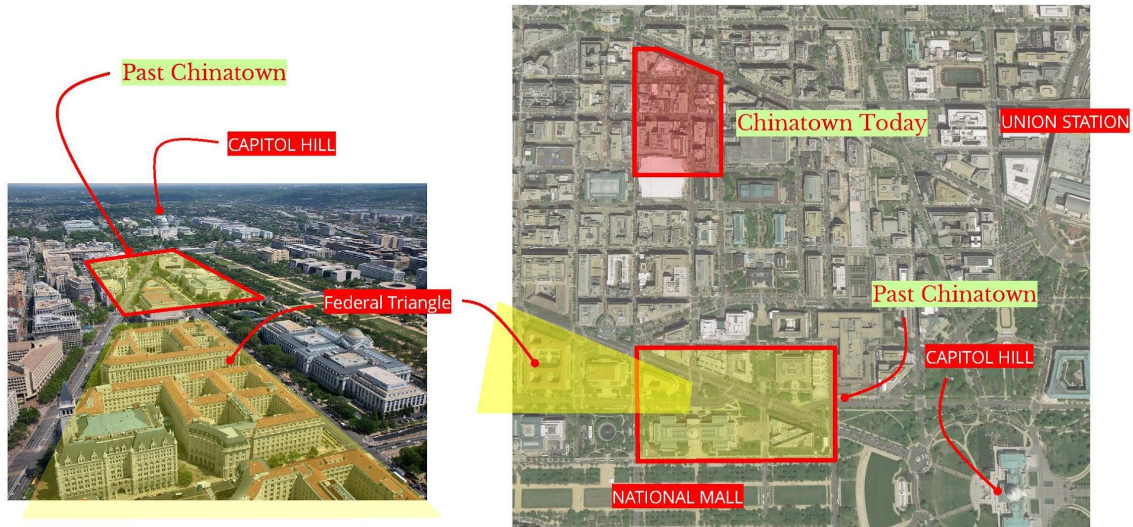


Figure 8: Map of Chinatown, Washington D.C. (Highsmith 2007 and Google Maps 2019)

In the 1930s, residents were displaced to make room for the construction of the Federal Triangle. In response, many Chinese residents moved north, into today's D.C. city center, between Capital One Arena (formerly the MCI Center) and the National Gallery of Art, two prominent landmarks. (D.C. Office of Planning 2017) Before Chinese residents moved in, the area was home to predominantly German residents who faced anti-German sentiments during World War I, and were unwelcomed elsewhere. Around the 1950s and 1960s, African American residents began to move in, and as a result, many synagogues in the neighborhood were converted into Baptist churches. (D.C. Office of Planning 2017)

While shifts in 20th century immigration patterns to Washington, D.C. contributed to changes in resident patterns in Chinatown from the 1930s through the 1970s, neighborhood change accelerated due to urban renewal projects and new investment in the city center. These changes include the construction of the Gallery Place-Chinatown Metro station and the D.C. Convention Center (since demolished and replaced by the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in the Mt. Vernon Square neighborhood, directly north of Chinatown). (Marano 2016; Carpenter, June-Friesen, and Rahbhise 2016)

Today, a common nickname for the neighborhood is "Chinablock," referring to the shrinkage of Chinatown's physical borders over time. It's important to note that while many of the businesses typically associated with Chinatown, such as restaurants, grocery stores, and butcher shops have disappeared, long standing community institutions remained in place for decades.

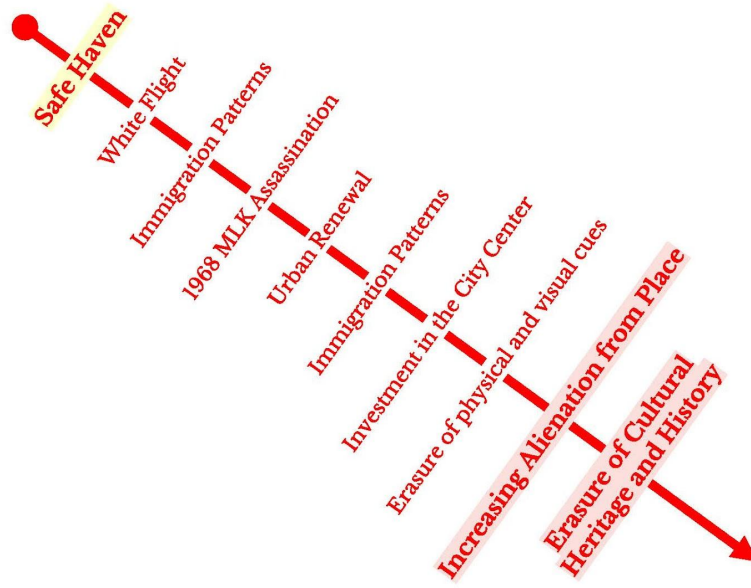


Figure 9: Illustration of interconnected events and processes that contributed to neighborhood alienation and erasure.

2.3 History of Community Leadership in D.C.’s Chinatown

Committed local organizations have worked for decades to support the Chinese community despite external pressure from speculative real estate redevelopment.

The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) in Washington, D.C. was founded in 1947, and has since provided community support and infrastructure, including health care, housing (e.g. the Wah Luck House), and residents grocery shopping at Chinese markets in Virginia. (Wu et al. 2010; CCBA 2020) The CCBA also manages the Wah Luck House and a member of the CCBA’s leadership team is the current property owner. With additional CCBA members, they own a number of commercial and residential properties along H Street NW, including the Cun Yum Buddhist Temple building, across the street from the Wah Luck House. (Gong 2019) The CCBA also hosts a variety of neighborhood cultural events and celebrations. In recent years, the CCBA also partnered with the 1882 Foundation to co-host the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival. (Gong 2019)

An outgrowth of the CCBA is the Chinese Youth Club (CYC), established in Chinatown in 1939. (CYC 2020) With almost 70 years of intergenerational programming, they support the lion dancing, basketball, and 9-man volleyball, (once a fixture in Chinatown public life, with tournaments held on the site where

the Wah Luck House stands today). (CYC 2020) Family Associations¹ have a physical presence in the neighborhood too and contribute to the social fabric of Chinatown.

Between the late 1960s through the early 1980s, past Chinatown residents, such as Harry Chow and colleagues, documented their community work with a series of grassroots community organizations subsidized by the city. Some of these initiatives include the Chinatown Courtesy Patrol, a youth-led neighborhood watch program, a community space, art and cultural classes (including dance, sewing and English language proficiency at the Chinatown Creative Workshop), and a community newsletter, Eastern Wind, to share community events and highlight Chinese American political issues. (Chow 2019)

Community anchors such as the CCBA, The Chinese Youth Club, the Wah Luck House, the Chinese Community Church, the Chinatown Service Center, and numerous Family Associations (e.g. Lee Family Association and Moy Family Association) remain neighborhood assets that fulfil the social support and service to its longtime community and remaining residents (approximately 300 residents according to the 2010 U.S. Census).

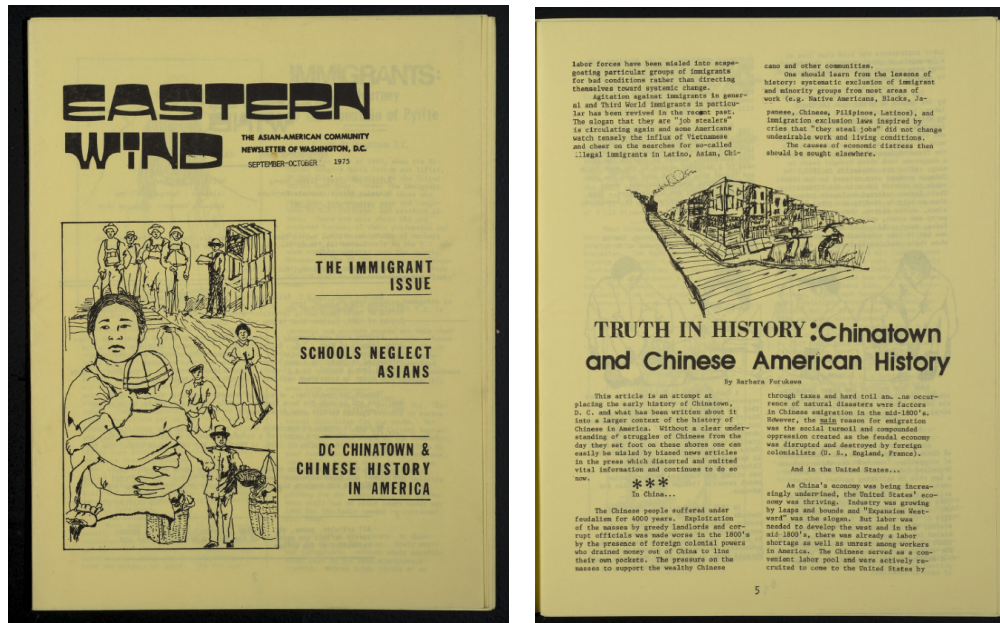


Figure 10: Eastern Wind: The Asian-American Community Newsletter of Washington, D.C. Vol. 4, No. 1 (Eng 1975)

¹ Family Associations emerged in the mid 19th century alongside the beginnings of Chinese immigration to the U.S. They are societies that were established to provide mutual aid and support, such as housing, employment, or financial support. Membership was gained by the same family name, or surname and also functioned as social networks to help substitute family ties while abroad. (Ling and Austin 2010)

2.4 Inadequate Cultural Preservation Efforts

Ongoing preservation efforts by the city do not adequately address the priorities of longtime community members. I reviewed a series of planning documents prepared by or with the D.C. Office of Planning for the neighborhood and the greater city, dated between 1989 and 2017. In the analysis of these documents, an emerging theme was cultural identity defined through entertainment and tourism-centered objectives. Recommendations that recognize the neighborhood’s value and significance to its past and present residents remain absent. As a result, private interests and capital have transformed the once predominantly residential neighborhood into an entertainment and tourism-centered business and commercial hub within a matter of a few decades. (D.C. Office of Planning 2004, 2006, 2009, 2011 and 2017)

Title	Year	How Plan Defines Neighborhood Identity	Central Theme(s)
Chinatown Design Guidelines Study	1989	Design objectives: 1) Chinatowns should have several “must-see!” items 2) Chinatown should have special features to attract personal interest from visitors, to appeal to the individual 3) Washington’s Chinatown should result in more nightlife for D.C. 4) Chinatown should be a family place 5) Chinatown should be a place of excellent examples of Chinese architecture. (D.C. Office of Planning 1989)	Support a world-class destination, nightlife, and family life.
A Vision for Growing an Inclusive City	2004	First challenge to be addressed to be inclusive: 1) Creating successful neighborhoods by: strengthening neighborhood identity, strategically guiding growth, improving environmental health, and targeting investment in neighborhoods. (D.C. Office of Planning 2004)	Address inclusion through stronger neighborhoods.
The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital	2006	“Chinatown presents an interesting case. While on the one hand, preserving Chinatown’s authenticity has to be about more than just preserving facades or using Chinese characters on street signs, on the other hand, there has been a marked reduction in the number of Chinese businesses. It remains to be seen if Chinatown can maintain an authentic role as the center of a dispersed Asian community.” (D.C. Office of Planning 2006)	Stance unclear.
Chinatown Cultural Development Small Area Plan	2009	Summary of goals and actions: 1) Develop Chinatown as a Cultural Destination. 2) Creating a Physical Chinatown Experience. 3) Promoting Chinatown Businesses 4) Living in Chinatown. 5) Working together. (D.C. Office of Planning 2009)	Support tourism, Support residents, and Work together
Chinatown Public Realm Plan	2011	Introduction: “Today Chinatown is one of DC’s premier entertainment and nightlife destinations, drawing people from all over the District and the region, as well as visitors and tourists and it has the potential to be DC’s premier public places too. (D.C. Office of Planning 2011)	Tourism and commercial interests.
Chinatown Design Guide Study: A handbook for designing a cultural district	2011, 2017, 2019	Guidance on Chinese-themed architectural features and motifs including signage, lighting, fencing, landscape, entrances, awnings and canopies, windows and building facade treatments. (D.C. Office of Planning 2017/19)	Chinese themes and motifs.

Figure 11: D.C. Office of Planning documents relevant to Chinatown planning.

The 2006 D.C. Comprehensive Plan², published by the D.C. Office of Planning, guides the long-term growth and development of the city. The document “addresses a range of topics that affect how we experience the city.” (D.C. Office of Planning 2006) The Plan acknowledges D.C. Chinatown’s struggle to retain its identity in the face of new retail, office building, housing, and entertainment development in the neighborhood. (D.C. Office of Planning 2006) It recognizes that although the residential population continues to shrink (to less than 600 residents in 2006), it still serves as a cultural and symbolic hub to over 100,000 Asian Americans in the D.C. Metropolitan area, and remains an important tourist destination. (D.C. Office of Planning 2006)

In subsequent planning documents that build off the Comprehensive Plan’s policies, including the 2009 Chinatown Cultural Development Small Area Plan, Chinatown Public Realm Plan and Chinatown Design Guide Study recommendations rely heavily on enhancement through visual motifs, themed building treatments and decorative site elements (e.g. light poles, trash cans, crosswalk paint graphics). (D.C. Office of Planning 2009, 2011, and 2017) The Chinatown Steering Committee oversees the approval process of the Chinatown Design Guide Study guidelines along with the D.C. Office of Planning.

Public engagement processes are facilitated by governing agencies, such as the D.C. Office of Planning, to inform these types of planning documents. Figure 10 presents examples of three community meeting formats conducted by local governance. One of these examples are Advisory Neighborhood Council (ANC) meetings, regular, monthly meetings that occur in each of the 8 wards in DC. (Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2020) They are highly varied in agenda and content. Conversely, there are initiative based public meetings, such as the 4-year process to update to the city’s Comprehensive Plan and the public engagement process for the Cultural Development Small Area Plan. (D.C. Office of Planning 2006/2020) The Comprehensive Plan guides the framework of subsequent documents that guide cultural preservation in the neighborhood, such as the Cultural Development Small Area Plan. (D.C. Office of Planning 2006) While these meetings have more targeted objectives, they are driven by milestones required to inform and consult the public.

Meetings Type	Advisory Neighborhood Commission ANC)	2019 DC Comprehensive Plan	Chinatown Cultural Development Small Area Action Plan
Frequency	Routine: Monthly	Infrequent: Annual to biannual over 4-Year Process	Very Frequent: Community meetings = Approx. monthly over six months. Added Task Force meetings (five diff. groups) - Approx. every 2.5 weeks over 2 months.

² The D.C. Comprehensive Plan is a planning document defined by six objectives: 1. “Define the requirements and aspirations of District residents, and accordingly influence social, economic and physical development;” 2. “Guide executive and legislative decisions on matters affecting the District and its citizens;” 3. “Promote economic growth and jobs for District residents;” 4. “Guide private and public development in order to achieve District and community goals;” 5. “Maintain and enhance the natural and architectural assets of the District;” and 6. “Assist in the conservation, stabilization, and improvement of each neighborhood and community in the District.” (D.C. Office of Planning 2011)

Agenda	Highly Variable	Consistent	Consistent
Hosted by	ANC Commissioners	DC Office of Planning	DC Office of Planning and Mayor’s Office on Asia and Pacific Islander Affairs
When	2 to 2.5 hours/weeknights	2 to 2.5 hours/weeknights	Not indicated in report.

Figure 12: Table of public meeting formats. (Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2020, D.C. Office of Planning 2009, D.C Office of Planning 2019)

2.5 Critiques of Participatory Planning

“Because planning is the guidance of future action, planning with others calls for astute deliberative practice: learning about others as well as about issues, learning about what we should do as well as about what we can do. So when city planners deliberate with city residents, they shape public learning as well as public action.” (Forester 1999)

This project references public engagement in the context of participatory planning. With origins that date back to the 1940s in Europe, participatory planning is the process that enables citizens to engage in the urban planning system. (Legacy 2017; Monno and Khakee 2012) These practices range from traditional models that control and constrain the type of participation facilitated to others that foster more active and meaningful participation and give citizens a voice in issues that matter to them. (Monno and Khakee 2012; Mouat, Legacy, and March 2013; Fung 2005, Arnstein 1969; Forester 1999)



Figure 13: Illustration of range of participatory planning practice models.

At one end of the spectrum, community and town hall meetings, controlled and limited in scope, are led by governance structures that aim to build consensus. At the other end are models considered more “radical,” that aim to reveal the complexity and wickedness of planning projects and empower citizens to be active participants. (Monno and Khakee 2012; Mouat, Legacy, and March 2013; Fung 2005; Legacy 2017) City government agencies such as planning departments typically facilitate controlled models of participation. Translating this within the context of Sherry Arnstein’s “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,”

this type of participation can only facilitate lower “rungs” on the participation ladder and does not allow for adequate citizen empowerment or key decision-making. (Arnstein 1969)

These traditional models are often criticized as a means to justify decisions already made instead of incorporating insights from public engagement to inform decision-making. (Legacy 2017; Mouat, Legacy, and March 2013; Monno and Khakee 2012) Furthermore, they typically capture insights from only a small number of already engaged individuals who typically have the resources, time, and power to participate. (Mouat, Legacy, and March 2013) This level of “token” participation is problematic on multiple levels; it does not allow for stakeholders to grapple with real complexity of the issues, it leaves important issues unaddressed, and issues fail to be adequately resolved. (Arnstein 1969; Mouat, Legacy, and March 2013) Scholars point that “it is useful to recognize that over time ‘problems’ have typically been understood as something to avoid, resolve or conquer.” (Mouat, Legacy, and March 2013; Purcell 2009)

Neighborhoods across D.C. are being shaped in the visions of capital accumulation, privatized interests, and speculative real estate development, leaving out the people with historical and social connections to place. Responding to these circumstances, the redesign of participatory planning models implemented by governing agencies, in this case, within agencies such as D.C.’s Office of Planning (OP), become increasingly critical.

3. Contextual Review

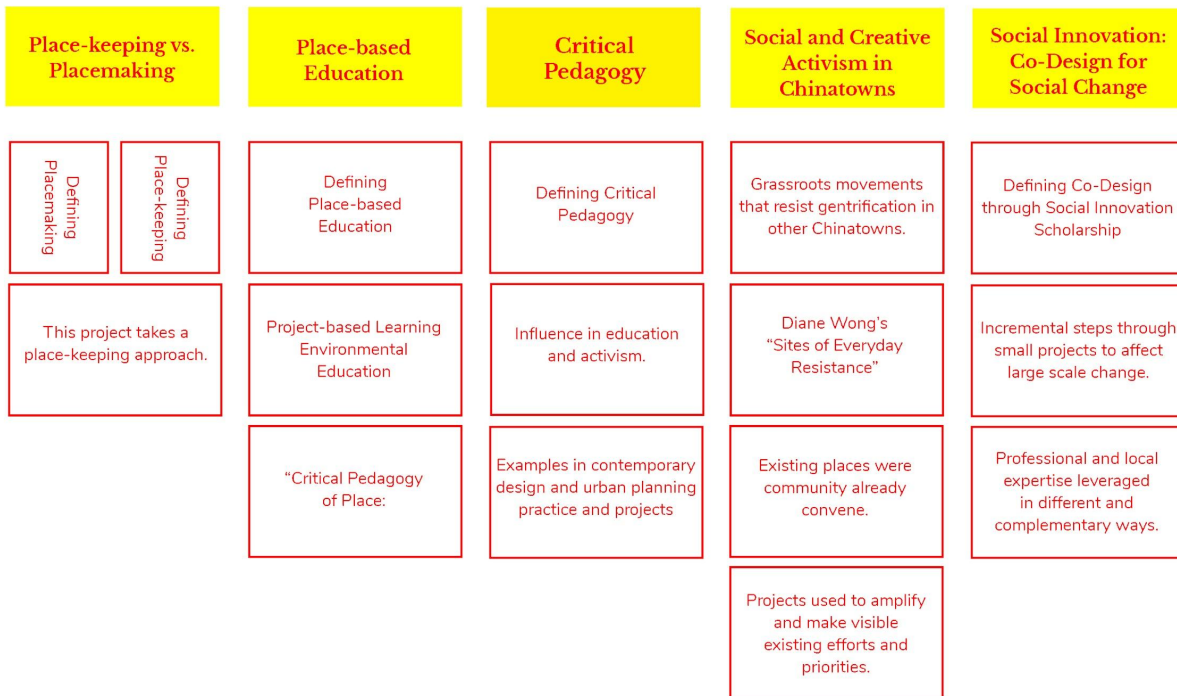


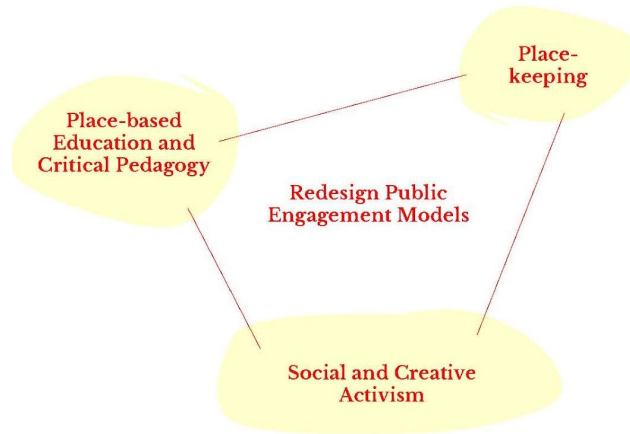
Figure 14: Contextual review map

The development of more “radical” public engagement models respond to the lack of inclusiveness of traditional engagement models controlled by governing agencies. These precedents are embedded within educational models and philosophies in place-based learning, critical pedagogy, and grassroots activism. Through a place-keeping approach in the planning and design of physical places, this project integrates these interdisciplinary areas of knowledge and practices to inform the design of the *Dear Chinatown* prototype.

3.1 From Rapid Placemaking to Patient Place-keeping

Through place-keeping, we can appropriately influence the physical and visual image of places informed by the context of specific histories, and cultural significance by and for people that have historically been unheard or accounted for by placemaking. (Nicodemus 2008) Placemaking, or creative placemaking, was amplified by the National Endowment for the Arts and a strategic initiative to describe a democratic process that integrates tools of arts and cultural practice to revitalize neighborhoods. (National Endowment for the Arts 2020; Courage and McKeown 2019) While well intentioned and collaborative in spirit, real estate development has appropriated the term and techniques to turn image into profit. More specifically, placemaking practices have been leveraged as a strategy for speculative real estate practices to attract more affluent populations to historically disinvested neighborhoods. Typically, in favor of a specific image of place, and as George Lipsitz has argued, that is predominately wealthier and whiter. (George Lipsitz 2011; Bedoya 2013)

Critiques of this practice questions who placemaking serves and who it does not serve. In Roberto Bedoya’s article, “Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging and Dis-belonging, he discusses the blindspots in the advocacy and practice of placemaking. (Bedoya 2013) Specifically, placemaking’s lack of recognition of the United States’ history of political, racial, and class motivations that resulted in land dispossession, residential segregation, neighborhood displacement, and the subsequent erasure of Black, Indigenous and People of Color from place as a result of these processes. (Bedoya 2013; Zitcer 2018) As these outcomes are deeply embedded within issues of power, race, and class, this contextual understanding is critical for design practitioners to address issues of equity in the built environment. In Lipsitz’s call-to-action in “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race,” he notes that, “Environmental designers must begin consciously to write and draw the under-represented and the disenfranchised into their schemes and plans rather than ignoring or excluding such groups.” (Lipsitz 2007)



Figures 15: Illustration of the project's integrative approach.

3.2 Place-based Education (PBE)

PBE is a well-known learning model with origins that date back to John Dewey's 1938 book, *Experience and Education*, that argued for a "democratic classroom" that fostered experiential learning, also known as hands-on or project-based learning. (Armaline 2017; Dewey 1938, Jayanandhan 2009; Smith 2016) PBE gained momentum with the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s. (Armaline 2017; Jayanandhan 2009; Smith 2016) These methods were integrated in nature-based environmental education by the 1980s and 1990s, associated with educators and scholars such as David Sobel and Gregory Smith. Practice and scholarship in place-based education took an important pivot in the early 2000s. In David Gruenewald's (formerly Gruenewald) scholarship on a "critical pedagogy of place," he examines critiques of the lack of place-based education's evidence to confront issues of social justice and environmental justice in its body of work. (Gruenewald 2003; McInerney, Smyth, and Down 2011) He referenced educators and philosophers, such as Paulo Freire, and their work in critical pedagogy to make the case for a "critical pedagogy of place". (Gruenewald 2003) A critical pedagogy framework in place-based learning can bring consciousness to local issues in order to challenge the unjust systems in which they are embedded. (Gruenewald 2003; McInerney, Smyth, and Down 2011) While place-based education specifically focuses on the relationship between the school and community, learning does not and should not stop outside of formal education environments. In alignment with Greenwood's call-for-action for place-based learning, this project leverages place-based education as it relates to on-going education of both design students and professionals, in addressing issues of social and spatial justice in urban places.

3.3 Critical Pedagogy

“Since our place in the world is constantly changing, we must be constantly learning to be fully present in the now. If we are not fully engaged in the present we get stuck in the past and our capacity to learn is diminished.” (Hooks 2003)

With origins in critical theory³, critical pedagogy is an orientation toward teaching and learning that sees education as the means to achieve progressive social change. Education and learning are inherently political practices, intrinsically connected to issues of democracy and social justice. Introduced in 1968 in Brazil by Paulo Freire in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, teachers in critical pedagogy believe that the purpose of education is for students to gain a critical lens of the world around them so they are prepared to challenge systems of oppression. (Freire et al. 2014) Paulo Freire’s approach stemmed from teaching literacy for adult learners. The first step of this approach builds critical consciousness in the relationships of individuals to their social circumstances. Through this consciousness, learners understand how local issues and circumstances are connected to larger, oppressive systems and then prepared to confront and transform them. (Freire et al. 2014)

Place-based learning and critical pedagogy have broad influence and application in working toward citizen empowerment. The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP), a non-profit organization in New York City, believes that “increasing understanding of how these systems work is the first step to better and more diverse community participation.” (Center for Urban Pedagogy 2020) Initiatives such as “Making Policy Public,” and “Public Access Design,” CUP make complex planning and policy processes accessible and understandable through collaborations with community organizations, community members, and designers. (Center for Urban Pedagogy 2020) Outside the U.S., Antanas Mockus and Enrique Peñalosa, former mayors of Bogota, Columbia, found intrinsic value in the city’s physical public spaces and their capacity to bring people together to relate to one another and unite through a “common civic identity.” Each believed that the material, physical public places in the city were the most suitable platforms for reaching its citizens. As such, Mockus was known for locating social programs directly in public places, while Peñalosa worked to expand the city’s network of existing public space. (Berney 2011) In Chicago, Theaster Gates’ Place Lab convenes an interdisciplinary team in law, urban planning, architecture, design, social work, arts administration, and gender and cultural studies to cultivate transformational change in neighborhood redevelopment practices through arts- and culture-led projects “one house at a time” in Gates’ own neighborhood in the South Side. (Gates 2015) This work, starting with Gates’ purchase and rehabilitation of a blighted house for \$18,000 and its subsequent evolution into a performance and

³ Critical theory describes an orientation to the study of social sciences and humanities that aims to reveal and challenge existing and unjust power structures. (Bohman 2019)

exhibition space, has incrementally grown through fostering neighborhood arts and cultural leaders as civic leaders. (Gates 2015, Place Lab 2020) Through this work, they developed “9 Ethical Redevelopment Principles”. (Places Lab 2016) One principle, “pedagogical moments” emphasizes the opportunities for learning and knowledge sharing across this process are vital, “for knowledge and skill sharing is a part of one’s social responsibility, effectively deepening the network of relationships within a community, its ecosystem, and the larger social economy.” (Place Lab 2016)

At the intersection of research and practice, Dolores Hayden’s book *The Power of Place* documents a decade’s worth of work making the connections between social histories of people and their lives and its connections to urban places over time, in order to explore how “communities and professionals can tap the power of historic urban landscapes to nurture public memory.” (Hayden 1995) Leveraging a variety of different mediums and venues (e.g. walking tours, books, public art, public meetings), her interdisciplinary collaborations work to better understand and make visible the stories and history of places from the perspective of the people who have lived their lives there. (Hayden 1995) Similarly, Buscada Studios’s *Intersections Prospect Heights* used temporary exhibits, walking tours, and public conversations to capture conversations about neighborhood change over time. (Buscada 2020) Co-founder of CUP, Rosten Woo’s *Willowbrook Is...* and *Takachizu* both leveraged a multi-model system of community programming, publications, exhibits (both physical and digital) to document the neighborhood through the perspective of its residents. (Rosten Woo 2020; National Endowment for the Arts 2019; Little Tokyo Service Center 2020) Projects like these demonstrate the designer’s role in making visible and tangible concepts of place-keeping, recognizing that places are not blank canvases but rich and complex places of learning.

3.4 Social and Creative Activism in Chinatowns Across the U.S.

Dear Chinatown recognizes the community leaders and activists in Chinatowns across the country that lead grassroots movements within their own communities for generations. In particular, this research acknowledges creative activists who use the arts, design, and cultural practice to build resistance to gentrification through everyday activities and existing community spaces, both formal and informal. These groups demonstrate a history of grassroots-level resilience and resistance to rapid and capital-driven neighborhood change through their own methods, on their own terms.

In Diane Wong’s “Shop Talk and Everyday Sites of Resistance to Gentrification in Manhattan’s Chinatown,” the author reflects on her ethnographic research with neighborhood spaces such as Wing on Wo & Co. to highlight everyday activism in spaces like this multi-generational neighborhood porcelain shop. (Wong 2019, Wing on Wo & Co. n.d.) She makes a deliberate shift away from traditional places associated with civic engagement such as civic organizations, churches, and political campaigns, and

toward places where people already congregate on a daily basis. Specifically, the social activities and informal dialogue of women in the neighborhood, which she terms “shop talk,” that are already used as forums to discuss and strategize around issues of gentrification. (Wong 2019) Wong writes, “I suggest that actively listening to what women talk about on an everyday basis offers tremendous insight into the ways in which political values, ideologies, and practices are formed or negotiated over time in urban immigrant communities.” (Wong 2019) Today, the shop has been passed down to the next generation of ownership. Today, the business has evolved into an intergenerational space for women to come together through their incorporation of community-led art and cultural programming. (Wong 2019, Wing on Wo & Co. n.d.)

At the organizational level, the Chinatown Art Brigade (CAB) is an intergenerational womxn-led artist collective also out of NYC that works with community organizations, such as neighborhood tenant associations, to support and amplify their existing work against gentrification and displacement i. (Yu 2017; Wong 2019) They leverage their skills as artists and a collaborative process with community partners to use “oral histories, storytelling circles, photography, place-keeping walks and mapping activities,” to “co-created the images and content that would be projected in public.” (Yu 2017) In Oakland, California’s Chinatown, Chinatown Improvement was established in 2017 in direct response to City planning efforts inadequate response to the neighborhood’s “needs or vision.” They work directly with local Asian and Chinese community organizations to implement low-cost, yet highly visible projects that are categorized as “Chinatown Clean,” “Chinatown Beautiful,” and “Chinatown Community”. (Chinatown Improvement 2019)

3.5 Social Innovation through Co-Design

Social innovation in this context requires an open ended, participatory process to facilitate large-scale change that is navigated by both experimentation with small-scale local projects, and larger “framework” projects that guide and give definition to the smaller, individual projects that collectively contribute to large scale, transformative processes. (Manzini and Rizzo 2011; Manzini et al. 2015) *Dear Chinatown* uses this approach by taking incremental steps through small projects in order to affect large scale change and leveraging both professional and local expertise in different and complementary ways in order to achieve long-term, sustainable change through design. (Manzini and Rizzo 2011; Manzini et al. 2015)

Design in social innovation is facilitated by a co-design approach in which “both citizens and designers play a meaningful role.” (Manzini and Rizzo 2011) Within origins in PAR, co-design emerges from Participatory Design (PD), which dates back to the 1970s in Scandinavia, in response to the forced introduction of computers to the workforce by management systems. (Spinuzzi 2005; Simonsen and Robertson 2012) Motivated by the need to empower workers and foster democracy in the workplace, researchers introduced collaborative ways for computer developers and workers (i.e. those using the

machines) to work together to design computer technologies that responded to their workflows. Similarly, *Dear Chinatown* leverages equitable partnership and collaboration amongst different project stakeholders including key community leadership, expertise in cultural preservation, public history, and design research, to better address the issues that traditional methods and highly controlled forms of public engagement have yet to adequately address. (Sanders and Stappers 2008)

4. Methodology

4.1 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

This project seeks transformational change in participatory planning practices implemented by governing agencies. To do so, I am working with my project partner and together with our complementary expertise, including local knowledge, experiences, and relationships within this problem space, is a critical working relationship across the entire design research process.

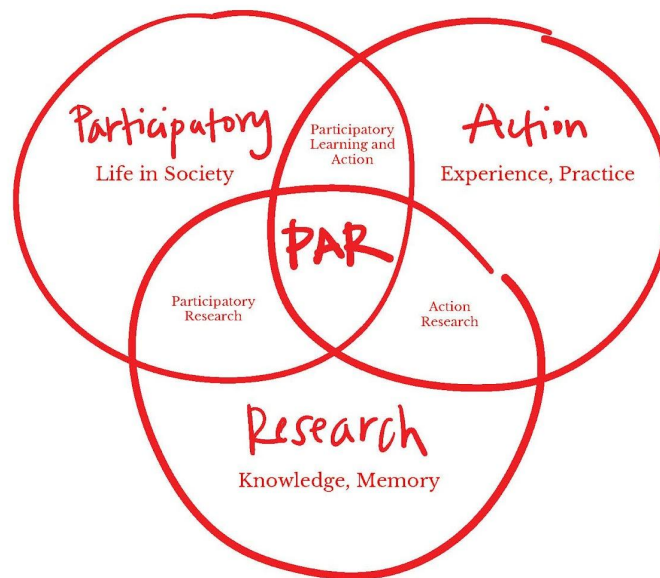


Figure 16: Diagram of Participatory Action Research (PAR). (Chevalier and Buckles 2013)

A Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach was selected due to its alignment with these objectives. PAR seeks collaborative partnership between the researcher and the organization to study and surface practical knowledge that leads to action toward societal change. (Minkler and Wallerstein 2008; Schneider 2012) PAR originated from movements that happened simultaneously but separately, often referred to as the “North” and “South”. Canadian researchers, such as Kurt Lewin, are attributed to the operational characteristics of the methodology, defined by an iterative process of planning,

experimentation, testing, and observation, and evaluation that intends to gain depth and dimension at each iteration of the cycle. (Schneider 2012; Greenwood and Levin 2006) This, integrated with the PAR movements in the South, attributed by Freire in Brazil, Orlando Fals Borda in Columbia, and Anisur Rahman in India. (Schneider 2012) Marxist in origins and in keeping with the philosophies in critical pedagogy, these individuals saw PAR as a means to empower the oppressed by making ordinary people co-researchers and respecting the knowledge of all participants. (Schneider 2012; Reason and Bradbury 2006) PAR's social justice orientation is attributed to Freire, Borda, and Rahman with its focus on the empowerment of historically marginalized and disempowered people and groups. (Reason and Bradbury 2006) Furthermore, working complementary to the project's grounding in principles in place-keeping, place-based learning, and critical pedagogy, PAR's "reflective process is directly linked to action, influenced by understanding of history, culture, and local context and embedded in social relationships. The process of PAR should be empowering and lead to people having increased control over their lives." (Minkler and Wallerstein 2008)

4.2 Prototyping: Research Through Design (RtD)

Prototyping is the creation of tangible artifacts to develop and test ideas with design teams, collaborators, and users. (Martin et al. 2012, Stappers 2007, Kumar 2013) Perspectives on prototyping vary across different design disciplines. Within design literature, definitions are predominantly attributed to product design, user experience design, interface or software design. (Martin et al. 2012) Through a research through design approach, I designed and prototyped artifacts (i.e. poster-making activity, physical installation, etc.) to be used as tools to gain insights on participant engagement through and around the prototype to gain knowledge on how we can better design the public engagement process.

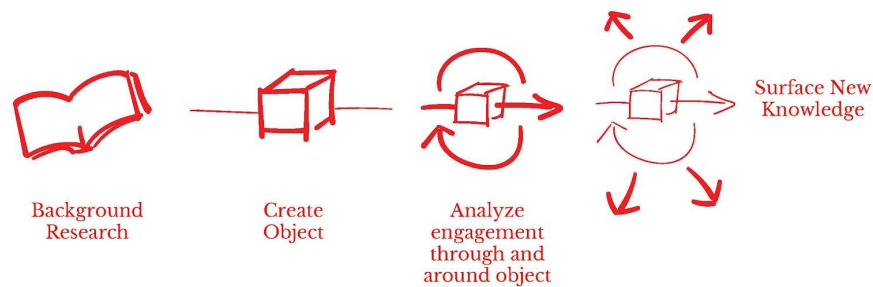


Figure 17: Diagram of the Research through Design (RtD) process. (Herriott 2019)

Toward this objective, this study was conducted through a research through design (RtD) approach, to leverage the design process to generate knowledge that contributes to a better understanding of, and responses to, the problem space, but not forcibly towards the generation of a specific artifact or solution.

(Frankel and Racine 2010) RtD, research for design, and research about design collectively describe the variety of approaches within design research as synthesized by Lois Frankel and Martin Racine and their study of design scholars and educators such as Bruce Archer, Richard Buchanan, Nigel Cross, Christopher Frayling, and Ken Friedman, to name a few. (Frankel and Racine 2010) RtD, also referred to as “applied” design research, where an artifact or process is designed as a means to generate new knowledge in order to seek an explanation to a question or understanding of a “theory within a broader context.” (Frankel and Racine 2010, Herriott 2019) Research for design or “clinical” design research, is design research in the more traditional sense, in that research provides the information that feeds directly into the specific design product or outcome. Third is research about design, or “basic” design research, is the study of design, its history, aesthetics, and design theory, and design activities. (Frankel and Racine 2010)

I find RtD appropriate for this project since “design is both a making discipline and an integrated frame of reflection and inquiry. (Schneider 2007) In this study, I use design methods and produce artifacts as a means to engage in iterative cycles of action and reflection to surface insights from participants’ interactions and engagement with and around the prototypes. (Herriott 2019) In Pieter Jan Stappers essay in “Design Research Now, Doing Design as Part of Doing Research,” he notes that “this is the essence of ‘research through design’, i.e. that the designing act of creating prototypes is in itself a potential generator of knowledge (if only its insights do not ‘disappear’ into the prototype, but are fed back into the disciplinary and cross-disciplinary platforms that can fit these insights into the growth of theory.” (Stappers 2007; n.d.; Cross 2007)

4.3 Analysis and Synthesis through Sense-making and Sensemaking

This project references Brenda Dervin’s sense-making (with a hyphen) methodology, as it aligns with the objectives of PAR and RtD in that its user-centered focus aligns with the role of equitable partnership that aims to leverage local expertise and knowledge that challenges traditional hierarchies in research and knowledge production and decenters the role of the researcher. (Dervin 1998; Jacobson and Jacobson 2000; Savolainen 1993; 2006) To operationalize this approach, this project incorporates sensemaking (no hyphen) tools to synthesize and communicate the insights and data collected through this study with my project partner. (Kolko 2009) As a result, both philosophical motivations and application as a tool for synthesis add value to this study’s design research objectives.

“Sense making” (in general) describes the phenomena of how humans gain understanding about the world around them by a process of filling “gaps” of information informed by existing contextual and historical considerations. (Dervin 1998; Savolainen 2006; 1993; Klein, Moon, and Hoffman 2006) Since the early 1970s, Brenda Dervin built upon this phenomena in the development of Sense-making (with a hyphen) as a methodology, to describe the generative process to design for better practices and systems of

communicating knowledge, which she refers to as “knowledge management.” (Savolainen 1993; Jacobson and Jacobson 2000; Dervin 1998) The methodology acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed and takes that into consideration, as identifying knowledge “gap-bridging” must first identify the specific user-needs. (Savolainen 2006; Dervin 1998)

Then there is sensemaking (no hyphen). Attributed to Karl Weick’s work dating back also the early 1970s, which studied sensemaking through organizational behavior and communication. (Dervin and Naumer 2009; Weick 1988; Maitlis and Sonenshein 2010) In this work, he saw that better sensemaking was able to better address organizational crises. (Maitlis and Sonenshein 2010; Weick 1988) Additional theories in sensemaking can be attributed to Daniel Russel, Gary Klein, and David Snowden in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), cognitive systems engineering, and knowledge management in organizations, respectively. (Dervin and Naumer 2009)

In its application to design practice, Jon Kolko further expands on sensemaking as an abductive sensemaking tool that externalizes the tacit nature of the design process. (Kolko 2009) Design research methods facilitate data synthesis through methods that bring information that is typically internal, such as spreadsheets or a table on a computer screen, and externalizes it in visual and physical forms. (Kolko 2009) This can be facilitated through a variety of methods. For example, iterative sketching or diagramming to show relationships and connections between seemingly disparate pieces of information, or affinity diagramming of post-it note ideas onto a wall to surface recurring topics and themes. (Kolko 2009; Koskela, Paavola, and Kroll 2018) Attributed to philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce, abductive reasoning is attributed to a process that can generate new ideas, and thus, works complementary to the goals of design research and Sense-making as an approach. (Koskela, Paavola, and Kroll 2018) For this study, data collection, analysis, and synthesis were conducted through an abductive sensemaking process with iterative sketching, affinity diagramming, and asset mapping as sensemaking tools.

5. Methods and Findings

5.1 Phase 0a: Inquiry in Participatory Design in Practice

My inquiry process began with a research project conducted over the spring and summer of 2019. From April through August 2019, I interviewed⁴ urban design, architecture, and planning professionals on how participatory design informed their work. Across these interviews, I learned that these practitioners use

⁴ I held in-person and telephone interviews with architecture, urban design, urban planning professionals in Los Angeles, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. My findings from this study included interviews with Monique Lopez at Pueblo Planning, Theresa Hwang at Department of Places, James Rojas at Place IT!, Mike Blockstein, Reanne Estrada, and Amanda Carlson at Public Matters, Courtney Piotrowski at livingLAB, Elizabeth Timme at LA-Más, Alex Gilliam and Renee Schacht at Tiny WPA, and Briony Hynson and Katryna Carter at the Neighborhood Design Center.

design tools to increase the capacity for community groups to advocate for themselves within traditional, inaccessible planning and policy-making systems. These practitioners observed that urban planners have historically acted as gatekeepers. As a result, this has prevented communities from meaningfully engaging in the processes that shape planning policies that affect them. Key insights from these interviews include:

Activist First, Planner-Designer Second: A common theme among the interviewees was a background in activism and community organizing prior to their design and/or planning education and practice. Furthermore, a common theme among these interview participants was their shared values. Each expressed their motivations to confront systems of oppression in the built environment. They work with historically marginalized communities to give them a voice and agency to engage in the struggle to gain the right to the city.

Design as Partner-Facilitator: These practitioners use design tools to facilitate an open-ended process of co-creation rather than guide a predetermined outcome or product. Through the use of design methods and tools, these practitioners are making urban policies and processes accessible to communities so they can advocate for themselves to advance a wide range of agendas important for them.

Using Design Tools for a More Equitable Future: Practitioners are not interested in generating traditional design products as a goal in itself (e.g. traditional design products; a building, a park, a garden). They are interested in initiatives that lead to better outcomes to improve people's lives. By leveraging processes that are inherent in design; synthesis, visualization and storytelling, these practitioners increase the accessibility of planning processes for people to capture and communicate their experiences, issues, and ideas.

Building Relationships and Interdisciplinary Partnerships: Through these interviews, it was evident that the relationships they built over their academic and professional careers were critical to finding project opportunities once they started their own practices. Partnerships are continually formed between different practitioners on a project-by-project basis and across different agencies and institutions, including arts and cultural organizations that have access to funding sources not typically leveraged by traditional urban planning or design projects (e.g. arts and humanities grant funding).

5.2 Phase 0b: Observations through Youth Engagement

That same summer, 2019, I volunteered with the National Building Museum's (NBM) *Investigate Where You Live* summer youth program in Washington, D.C. An annual, 5-week design-based curriculum where participants use cameras, writing, interviews, and the design process to "explore, document, and interpret the built environment in D.C. neighborhoods." Of particular interest to me was this year's focus on "Youth and Outdoor Public Space". I was interested in the exposure to youth perspectives of the local built

environment and I was happy to lend my volunteer support in exchange for the engagement opportunity. (National Building Museum 2020)

On Day 2 of the program, we walked over to the museum's adjacent neighborhood, Chinatown, where students brought cameras to take photos of characteristics of public places in the neighborhood. Then, we held small group discussions back in their classroom about what they found. Participants in my group had similar questions; "Why is this neighborhood called Chinatown?" and "Where are the Chinese people?". I also wanted the answers to these questions. Having my own connections to Seattle and Vancouver's Chinatown as a child of Chinese immigrant parents, I knew the partial histories of these places but only from my personal experiences and observations witnessing neighborhood change. As a four-year resident of Washington, D.C., I had little knowledge of the history or context of this Chinatown.

Then, I began my investigation of community organizations in D.C. Chinatown and contacted the 1882 Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization located in Chinatown, whose mission is to educate the public on the continued significance of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Laws and its continued relevance to America's civil rights and immigrant history. The connection I made that summer set the foundation for exploring and establishing this project partnership.

5.3 Phase 1: Relationship Building through Participant Observation

Trust and relationship building are integral parts of the co-design process. Participant observation allows the researcher to become acquainted with the people participating in this project as collaborators on their terms and in the context of activities and events that are part of their routine and not orchestrated by the researcher. (Jorgensen 2015) When invited to attend 1882 Foundation events, I made it a priority to attend project partner-hosted events. These were valuable opportunities for connection with a range of people who have an affinity with the core values and mission of the 1882 Foundation, and those connected to the neighborhood. Participatory observation activities also supported interview recruiting and network opportunities with stakeholders.

Through participant observation, I was an active participant. (Jorgensen 2015) I attended these events as a participant but I was also introduced as a researcher to event attendees, so they were aware of my research objectives. These event opportunities served multiple roles over the course of the study. I was able to collect data for Phase 2 of the study and my regular attendance to events and programming facilitated networking and relationship building. Getting to know individuals affiliated with the 1882 Foundation helped facilitate interview recruitment. Through participant observation I also learned more about 1882 Foundation's public education work and the breadth of topics, issues, and initiatives that fall under the organization's scope of work.

From September through December 2019, I participated in a range of events hosted by the 1882 Foundation, including a walking tour of the neighborhood led by Harry Chow, past resident and social activist in the 1970s. I also attended the Foundation's first annual Chinese American Women in History Conference, two of the monthly Talk Story events, and joined them as a session panelist at the D.C. History conference. I captured my observations and post-event reflections guided by the following question: how does the community already engage with the 1882 Foundation's existing cultural activities?

5.3.1 Phase 1 Findings

In this phase, I gained insight on the types of participants who attend their events. Event attendees ranged from past and present community leadership, past residents or individuals with some family connection to the neighborhood, and more broadly, individuals who have a broader interest in Chinese American history and heritage, public history, and Asian American and Pacific Islander history and issues. A through line from my engagement with these events was the telling, recording, and dissemination of marginalized histories in American history. Specifically, the stories, experiences and contributions of the Chinese in America. I met many event participants across these events with affiliations with the neighborhood's family associations, the Chinese Community Church, the Chinatown Service Center, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, Chinese Youth Club, and 1882 Foundation's team members.

I also gained insights on the type of engagement that was facilitated by these events. I experienced repeat encounters with participants who I saw as part of the regular 1882 Foundation community. Based on my observations, the majority of attendees at these events knew one another. These regular events are opportunities to come together to not only engage with the content but as a time for socializing and catching-up with one another before and after the formal programming. Key insights included the following:

- Programming focuses on the sharing of stories and memories about history, heritage, and experiences as Chinese Americans in the D.C. area. During their monthly Talk Story events, event MC, Stan Lou, states at the start of each of their monthly gatherings, "our strength as a community lies in us coming together and telling our stories".
- These spaces for socializing as much as they are about engaging with the content.
- Participants engage in a variety of different ways -- they are audience members, event hosts, presenters, and documenters.

5.4 Phase 2: Ecosystem Understanding

To better understand the ecosystem of the problem space, I conducted semi-structured interviews and designed an open-ended survey in the form of a mapping exercise to collect data. I then used asset mapping as a sensemaking tool to visualize and analyze the data collected from the interviews and survey.

5.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allow for depth of insights and the flexibility by both researcher and interview participants to expand or elaborate on specific questions as desired or take the conversation in an unplanned by insightful direction. (O’Leary 2017)

I interviewed 1882 Foundation team members, other community leaders, and past residents. Each were asked to identify what they thought were assets of the neighborhood, both tangible (e.g. places, institutions, landmarks, and people) and intangible (e.g. sense of belonging, safety). Interview participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was appropriate for this study as it leverages the relationships and networks of my interview participants, who hold the knowledge and experience with the community members that are relevant to this study. Recruitment also included participants of different ages to obtain diversity in generational perspective, and diversity of roles and relationships to the D.C. Chinatown community. In preparation for these interviews, I prepared an interview guide to include a brief description of my thesis project, the objectives of the interview, and a list of 10 potential questions. The questionnaire was designed to facilitate participants to reflect on their past and present relationship and experiences in Chinatown and included asset-based questions including 1) what do you consider some of the important places, resources, activities and people in D.C.’s Chinatown today? And 2) What do you want people to know about D.C.’s Chinatown? Semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person, by video conference, and telephone. Refer to Appendix B for the sample interview guide.

Community Leadership	Past Residents	Connected to Neighborhood
Ted	Shirley*	Ali
Shirly*	Jack*	Bianca
Walter	Dennis	Beth
Kai		Raksa
	Total Interviews	11

Figure 18: Table of interviews conducted.

5.4.2 Open-ended Survey

Open-ended surveys are an appropriate method to collect and gather data for the asset map from a large number of participants within specific time constraints. (Martin et al. 2012) Through the survey, I collected data from 20 to 40 event participants. The survey was distributed during breaks or at the end of 1882 Foundation-hosted events.



Figure 19: Photos. Left, map, signage, and “pins” for participant entries. Right, color coded survey entries by age group.

The survey took the form of an interactive display. A 36 x 36-inch foam board mounted map of the neighborhood sat on a table with accompanying survey forms designed to be inserted as a “pin” on the map. Survey respondents were asked the following questions: 1) Identify a place in D.C.’s Chinatown that is important to you (past or present) and tell us why. 2) What do you want future generations to remember about D.C.’s Chinatown? The “pins” were color coded. Survey entries by participants 75 and over were green, 74 to 55 years old were red, 54 to 39 years old were orange, 38 to 23 years old in yellow, and 22 and under in blue. The data collected from this survey contributed to a larger quantity of inputs to supplement the data from the semi-structured interviews.

The survey was conducted through 1882 Foundation hosted events, a predominantly older demographic. During the academic year, 1882 Foundation participants are over 50 years old, as the younger members of the organization, typically college-aged, engage only during the summer when they are not in school.

Survey Entries by Age Group	Number of Survey Entries
75 years old and over	3
74 to 55 years old	13
54 to 39 years old	2

38 to 23 years old	4
22 years old and under	3

Figure 20: Table of survey entries by age group.

5.4.3 Sensemaking Through Asset Mapping

I used asset mapping to surface community-identified strengths and assets of the neighborhood. Asset mapping is a strengths-based data collection method that is a foundation to inform future opportunities to strengthen existing assets or identifies new connections and synergies amongst existing assets that may lead to new proposals for action. (Lightfoot, Simmelink McCleary, and Lum 2014; Kretzmann and McKnight 1993)

I collected neighborhood assets through semi-structured interviews and open-ended surveys with community leadership, participants of 1882 Foundation cultural activities, and past residents. I used Google’s My Maps to document all of the assets identified by participants. These were organized by collection date and color-coded according to the age of the survey respondent. Repeating data points are all included to track how many times a particular asset was identified by different participants.

5.4.4 Phase 2 Findings

In a comparison of themes and topics that emerged from these interviews around the past, present, and future of Chinatown, themes of nostalgia, home, family, social networks, personal identity, and connection to heritage were recurring topics often communicated as a deficit perspective. Expression of a “shrinking” Chinatown was noted. Additionally, a longing for more Chinese businesses and places to eat were common responses on what is missing from the neighborhood today. Finally, participants referenced some of the existing design interventions invested by the city as not particularly meaningful or important to them.

Community Leadership and Past Residents

- “We want to see this Chinatown, that idea of a cultural entity for us and our children, have a cultural heritage.”
- “Not many people realize that it is shrinking so much. I’m sure some sort of do, but outside of the Chinese community, I don’t think people know it is shrinking more and more.”
- “There are real people that live here. People are trying to do the best they can.”

- “I think the most important thing is that [this] was a home within the city.”
- "My family was growing, and my grandmother was coming in from Hong Kong at the time. The four of us are living in a 4-bedroom apartment [in Chinatown]. There was no place to put my grandmother. That was the main reason we moved. She lived with us for a year, but then moved back to Chinatown by herself. Being in the suburbs she couldn't access stuff. She wanted to be independent. Have access to these things. She's lived here since the early 90s. She's lived in Chinatown, 15+ years.”

Other Interviewees with Connections to Chinatown

- “I do believe that Chinese culture is rich in history and Chinese have contributed to social and economic history and I think people need to recognize it and should learn about it beyond the Festival and Chinatown Parade.”
- “People don't realize there are people who consider this place still home and working here for the Chinese community.”
- “Lamps have to have a certain Asian flair to it, and the signs have Chinese characters. It feels superficial and a little oriental.” “Looks like a white person went to Beijing and thought those were Chinese elements, we should use those.”

As part of my sensemaking process, I inventoried the responses to neighborhood asset questions and constructed an asset map for each interviewee and synthesized these individual maps into the following visualization of the neighborhood. A total of 20 existing and 5 past neighborhood assets surfaced during this exercise. Confirmation of these assets were further reinforced by ongoing conversations with 1882 Foundation community members and Ted. It surfaced a footprint that is part of the public memory of past residents and present leadership but not substantively documented in past city planning documents I've reviewed, or can be found in aggregate on a google map.

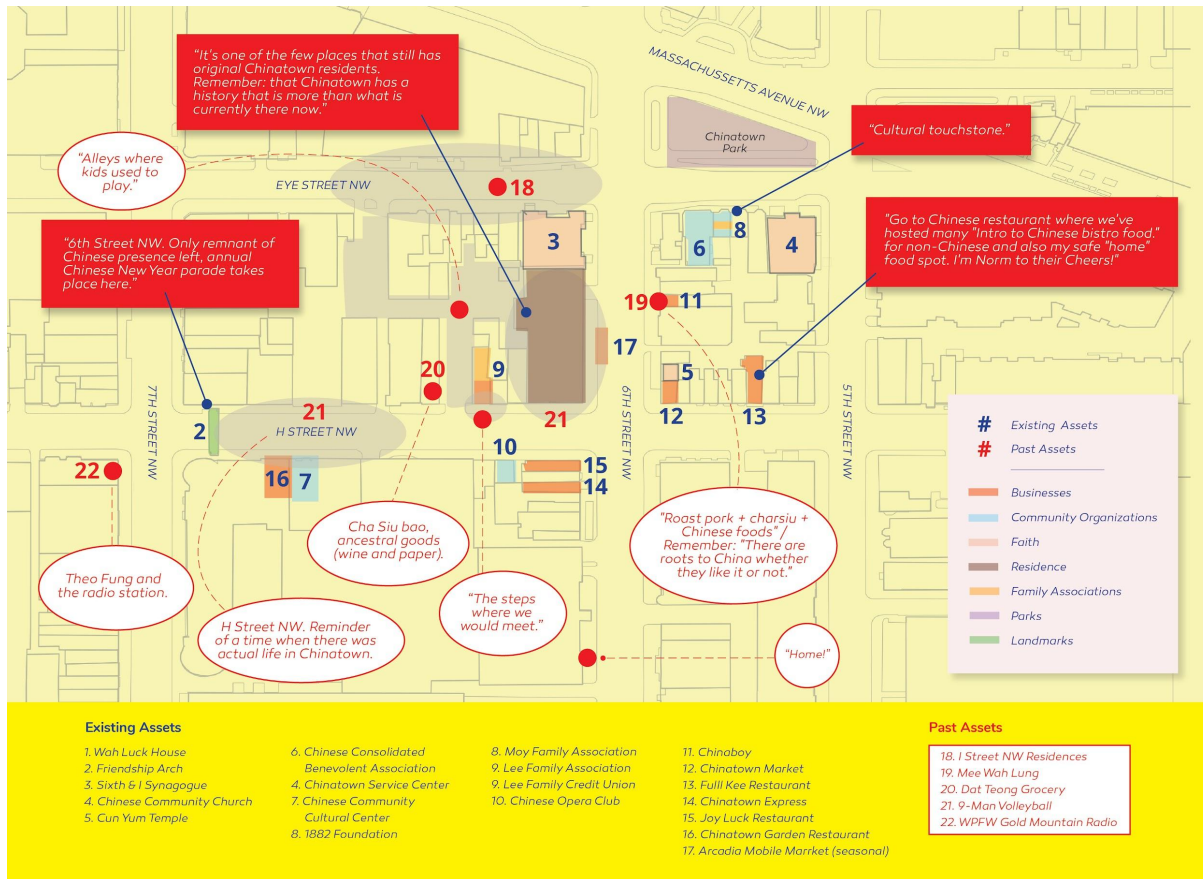


Figure 21: Compiled asset map of Chinatown, Washington, D.C.

5.5 Phase 3: Prototyping: Research through Design

Based on the insights gained from participant observation activities, interviews, and the survey, we moved on to Phase 3. The design, testing, and evaluation of an alternative public engagement model.

5.5.1 Ideation Process: Designing the Prototype

The ideation process is highly iterative and non-linear;. However in reflection of my ideation process, the concept for this project can be summarized in the following three phases: early brainstorming, brainstorming and sensemaking and sensemaking and synthesis.

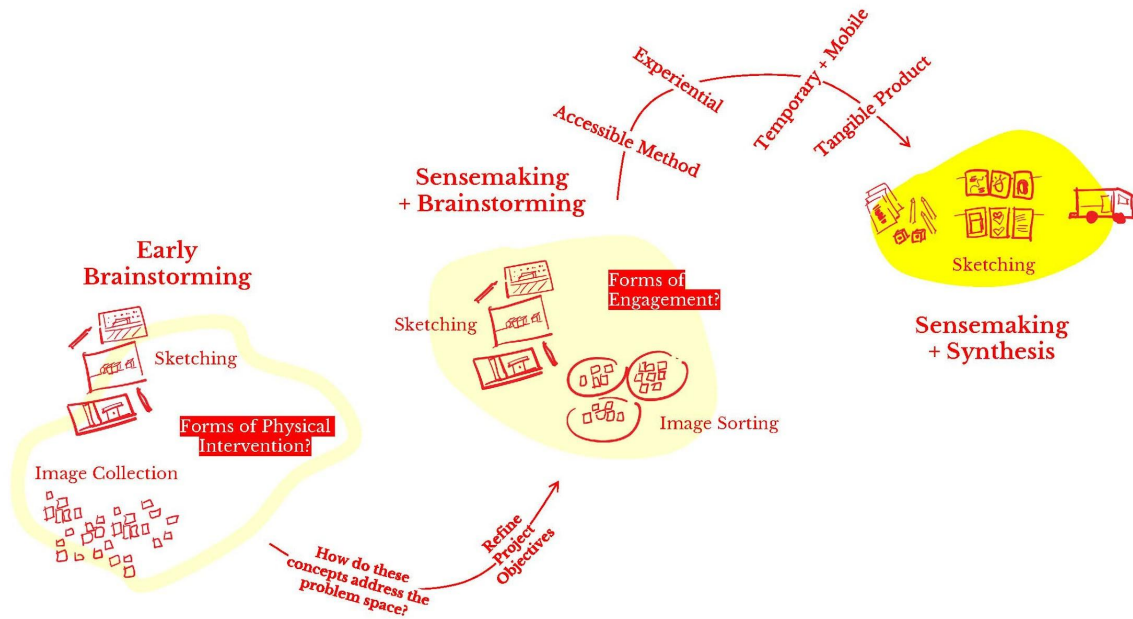


Figure 22: Illustration of ideation process.

Early brainstorming was facilitated by sketching and collecting a variety of different images of physical structures and installations in public places that I uncovered during my contextual review. Early stages of brainstorming aimed to collect a high quantity of ideas, not quality. I used sketching and affinity diagramming to first aggregate the physical interventions that have been used to interpret, inform, and convene people in public places. Sketching, or concept sketching allows the designer to communicate, discuss, and evaluate abstract ideas with others through concrete forms. (Kumar 2012; O’Grady and O’Grady 2017) Iterative rounds of sketching through the ideation process facilitates forward momentum in the ideation process. The concrete forms captured through hand-drawn sketches facilitate responses from peers and collaborators that allow for the generation of more ideas and more refined ideas. (Kumar 2012)

Then I used the affinity diagramming method to sort ideas in the form of sketches and printed images. Affinity diagramming is a method used to organize a large quantity of ideas into categories of themes and topics. (Martin et al. 2012) Multiple iterations of sorting and editing images in combination with iterative sketching led me to organize this information by the desired types of engagement that this prototype seeks to test. Leveraging emerging themes that were to be key components; accessible and experiential, mobile, temporary and tangible product outcome -- these characteristics began to synthesize the *Dear Chinatown* concept.

5.5.2 Prototyping

I conducted a total of 3 prototype iterations that were used to gain deeper insights at each iteration of the prototype about how participants engaged with one another and the prototype itself and to analyze the types of insights participants generated through the poster-making activity.

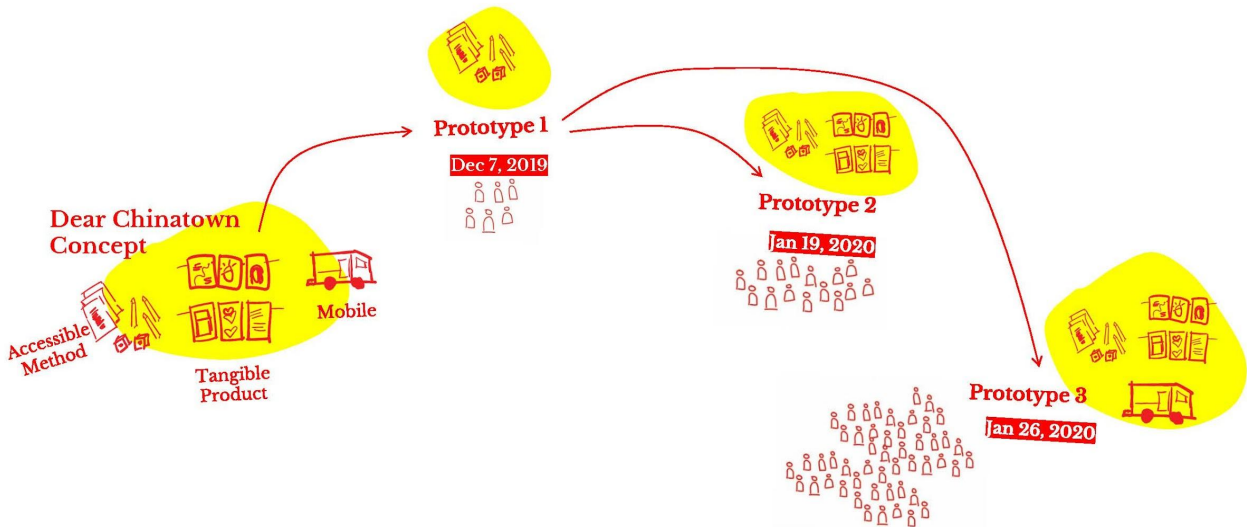


Figure 23: Illustration of prototyping process.

5.5.2.1 Prototype 1: Rapid Prototype Through Workshop

The objective of the first rapid prototype was to test and evaluate the mechanics and appeal of the love letter-making activity and observe how participants engaged with each other through the activity with university students before I tested Prototypes 2 and 3 with stakeholders and constituents in Washington, D.C. I recruited University of Michigan students to participate in this prototype. To facilitate this, I modified the exercises for participants to engage in the activities by thinking about any Chinatown they have a close connection to, not just Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown. I limited the objectives of this prototype to evaluate the mechanics of the workshop and its general appeal.

I conducted a two-hour workshop in the Stamps School of Art and Design with participants recruited through an announcement in Stamps' weekly e-newsletter and an email through the Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies department's student network. I provided a very modest compensation and refreshments to the participants: five self-identifying Asian American students, and one graduate student. The participants engaged in two different warm-up activities to get them thinking about a Chinatown that they have a connection to. The workshop concluded with the prototype of the love letter-making activity. Participants were each given a 24-inch by 36-inch sheet of paper, markers and 15 to 20 minutes to create

a poster based on the given prompt. Then, each participant briefly presented their poster to the group. At the close of the session, I debriefed with the participants and distributed a short, 4 question survey evaluation to complete before their departure: 1) Were the objectives of the workshop clear? 2) Were the instructions for each activity easy to understand and follow? 3) Did you find the subject-matter interesting? If yes or no, please explain why. 4) Any additional comments or suggestions if the researcher plans to host future workshops?

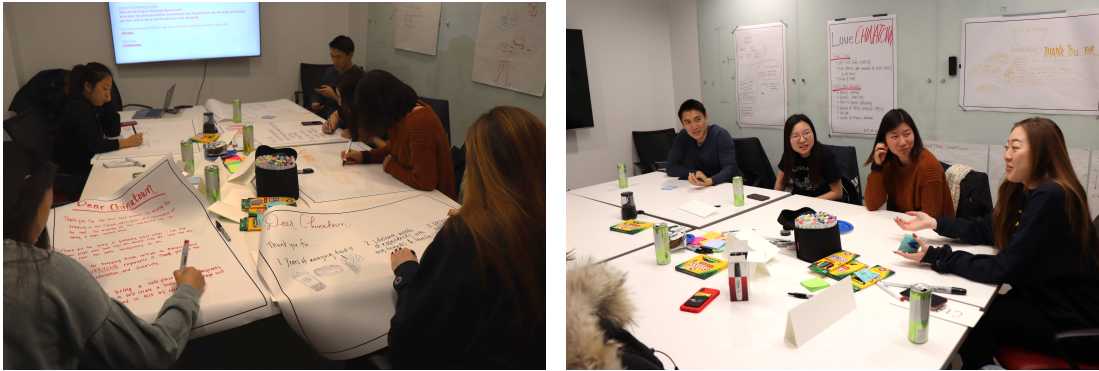


Figure 24: Photos. Left, Prototype 1 poster activity. Right, Prototype 1 post-session debrief conversation.

5.5.2.2 Prototype 1 Findings

Engagement Around the Poster-Making Activity:

Through the poster design, each participant illustrated a detailed story or anecdote of experience they had in their selected Chinatown. While the posters created were more detailed and illustrative than I had anticipated, I didn't expect the conversations from the poster-making to contribute to content other than what was indicated on the posters. I assumed that the posters would hold the majority of the data I needed to analyze. As a result, I wasn't prepared to capture the conversations from the share-out and had to mitigate by writing an immediate post-reflection on what I had remembered from these final share-out conversations. (See Appendix for images of Prototype 1 posters.) The conversation was rich, with topics such as food, family relationships, congregation, celebration, representation, intergenerational connection, getting ancestral and medicinal goods, going to the eye doctor, comfort, and seeing their parents differently in these spaces. Refer to Figure 23 for Prototype 1 poster images.

Engagement with the Poster-Making Activity:

I was impressed with the participants' drawing skills. While only two out of the six workshop participants were students from the Stamps Art and Design School, the majority of the participants were very comfortable with the making activity. Upon first impression, they appeared unintimidated by the scale of

the poster. Participants said they enjoyed working on the posters since it was finals week and it provided a nice break from studying to do something fun, like drawing. However, I observed a few constraints to the making exercise. The conference room we used was small and the tables were not large enough for everyone to lay their 24-inch by 36-inch sheets of paper completely flat. As a result, there was a lot of folding, rolling and unrolling as they made their way across and up and down the poster to draw and write while trying not to bump into one another. Also, to avoid the intimidation of a large, blank sheet of paper, I then redesigned the poster template into a series of 11x17 prints with a “Dear Chinatown” graphic and a background color. Released in 1986 by the Japanese company, Riso Kagaku Corporation, a risograph copier is a cross between a copy machine and a screen printer and uses two separate color cartridges that combined create something like an off register two color screenprint I chose risograph copies to maintain a more hand-made quality than a typical laser printed copy could achieve.

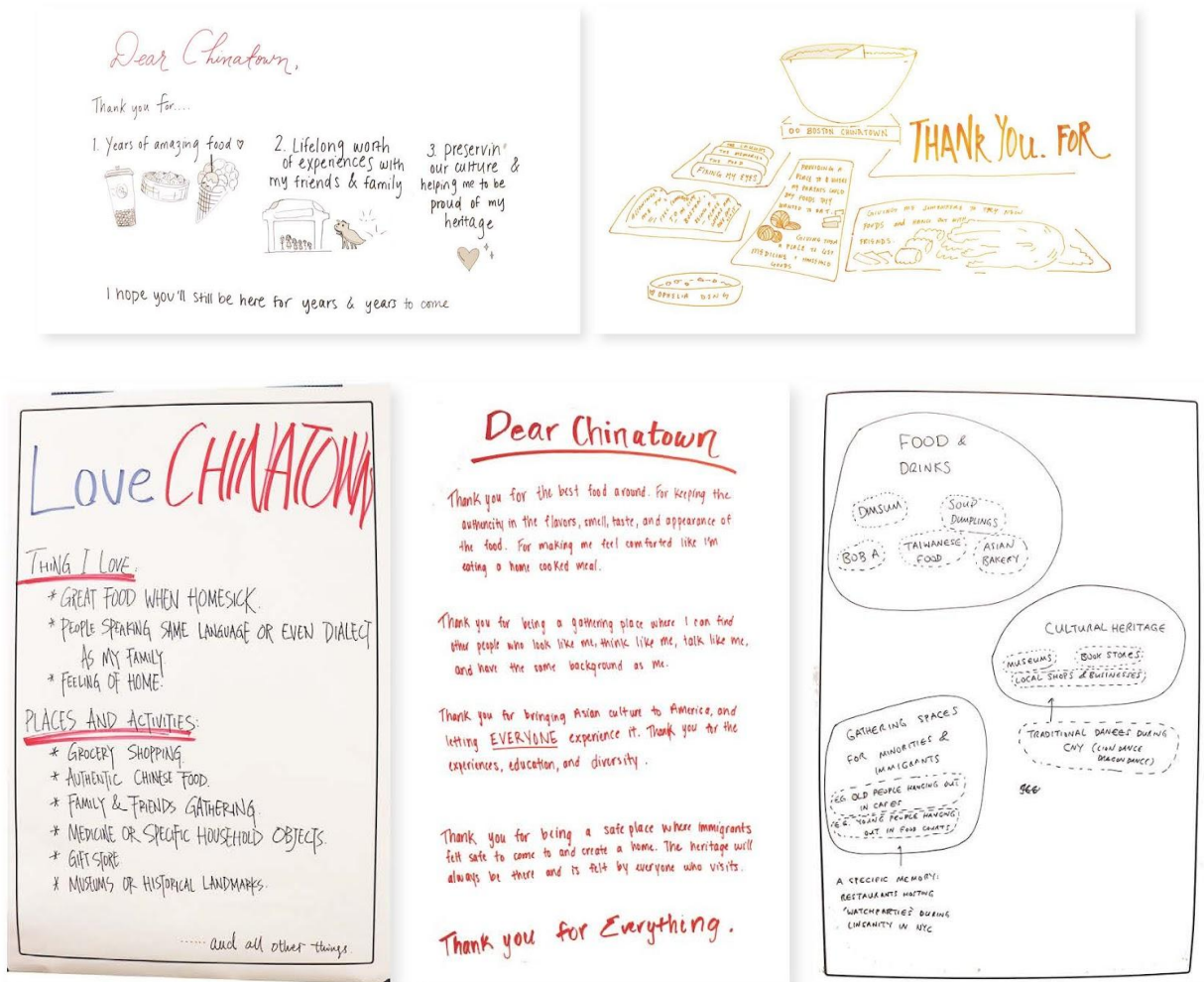


Figure 25: Images of Prototype 1 posters (5 out of 6 made that session).



Figure 26: Images of Prototype 2 posters (6 out of 18 made that session).

5.5.2.3 Prototype 2: Prototype Through Workshop

The objective of the second prototype was to test the accessibility and appeal of the poster-making activity by members of my target audience, the 1882 Foundation’s Talk Story participants. I also analyzed the insights generated from the posters made that day. Talk Story is a monthly event series hosted by the 1882 Foundation, currently hosted in a conference room of a commercial building at the north edge of the neighborhood (600 Massachusetts Avenue NW). The Talk Story audience is predominantly older, with the majority of attendees between ages 50 and 80 years old. This workshop aimed to generate insights on

what Chinatown means to people and the making the artifacts, and to collect the insights generated from the artifacts themselves. Two questions framed the inquiry: 1) how did participants engage with each other in the process of making the artifacts?, and 2) what insights did participants generate about neighborhood assets through the artifacts?

Prototype 2 was evaluated through participant observation and fieldnotes. The posters produced during this workshop were later displayed as examples at the Prototype 3 installation at the Lunar New Year Parade celebration.

The *Dear Chinatown* project was the featured programming for the January 19, 2020 Talk Story. Ted started the event with a forty-minute presentation about the history of D.C.'s Chinatown. I then followed with a fifteen-minute presentation on the *Dear Chinatown* project which then transitioned into the 20-minute poster-making workshop. Participants were given fifteen-minutes and custom rubber stamps, ink pads and black markers to create a poster in response to the given prompt. Then, they were asked to share what they made to other participants sitting at their table. Then, I reconvened the entire group and invited individuals to present their poster to conclude the session.

5.5.2.4 Prototype 2 Findings

How did they engage with others in the process of making?

Out of the approximately 40 event attendees, 18 people participated in the poster making activity. Many of these participants (including those who did not make a poster) engaged in conversations with their friends and acquaintances at the event and others met new people. The Talk Story audience was a mix of past residents, including community leaders with ties to Chinatown but currently live in the near suburbs of Maryland or Virginia, or had general interest in the event topic, as someone that had Chinese family, were Chinese or Asian themselves, or a connection with a Chinatown, not necessarily D.C.'s. No current residents attended this event. I learned that current residents do not typically engage in the 1882 Foundation events since it is a predominantly English-speaking community. Participants ranged from around twenty to eighty years old. Since the workshop was followed by my presentation of the project, the audience was already primed and had a better sense of the task at hand.

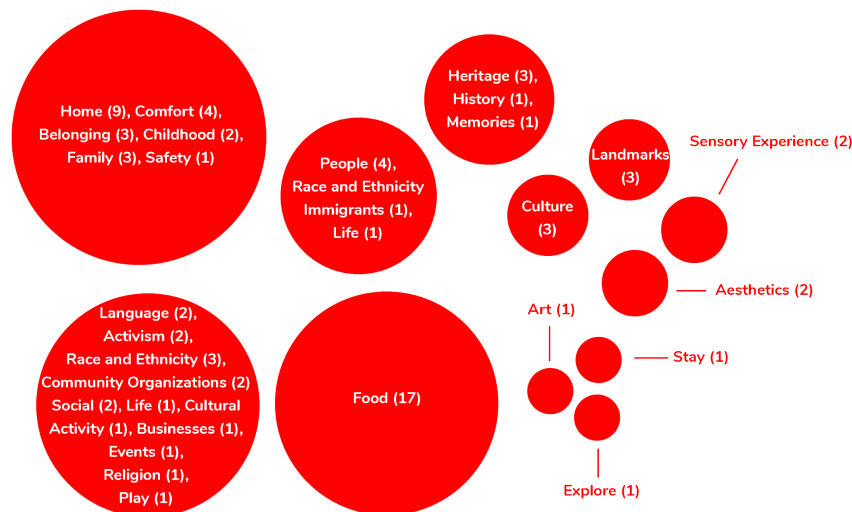
The poster making activity was a catalyst for conversation between the younger and older generations. Younger attendees who appeared new to the Talk Story program sat in between the older, regular Talk Story attendees, facilitating intergenerational exchange. At Stan's⁵ table, participants were sharing stories

⁵ Stan Lou is the Director of the Talk Story program at the 1882 Foundation. Stan was born in Greenville, Mississippi and had a career in the Federal Aviation Federation before retiring in Northern Virginia. In addition to his leadership role at the 1882

with one another while they made their posters. Mohkeed, Ted’s wife and Talk Story regular, mentioned to me after the event that she was skeptical of the activity and didn’t think anyone would participate. However, after her friend Evelyn switched to another table to meet some of the younger participants, Mohkeed enjoyed a conversation with two younger, newcomers --not regular Talk Story participants at her table. During the poster-making activity, Evelyn shared stories with two younger participants about the Moy Family Association building and its history in D.C.’s Chinatown. Michelle, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Maryland (AAPI Historic Preservation and Urban Planning) sat next to Jack Lee, a past Chinatown resident, and had him recite memories of his childhood as she transcribed them and translated it onto a poster for him. Then, they presented the poster together. He’s told his story many times through different avenues (including a one-on-one interview with me), so in his case, the poster was maybe a repetitive task to his oral storytelling. Michelle played an important role as facilitator of the exchange to capture and document Jack’s history and his willing participation.

What insights did participants generate about neighborhood assets through the artifacts?

18 posters were made during the event. Approximately half of the participants had a specific connection to D.C.’s Chinatown. The other half of participants were connected to another Chinatown. I repurposed the posters produced during this workshop and displayed them as examples at the Prototype 3 installation at the Lunar New Year Parade celebration (refer to 5.2.5 Prototype 3). Predominant topics and themes in the posters included ideas around family, comfort, childhood, life, play, and people. Secondary to these themes included topics around food, including types of food, the names of specific restaurants, as well as groceries and culturally-specific goods. Refer to Figure 24 for Prototype 2 poster images.



Foundation, Stan has spent his retirement OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates, where he served as co-president of the Greater Washington DC Chapter and the Vice-President for Education & Culture on the OCA National Board. (1882 Foundation 2020)

Figure 27: Graphic of themes and topics from Prototype 2 posters.

5.5.2.5 Prototype 3: In a Public Place During a Cultural Event

Prototype 3 was the full build-out of the proposed making and sharing station for testing and evaluation. Through it, I evaluated the engagement strategy that was facilitated around the marking of the artifacts (i.e. the posters) and analyzed the insights generated from the artifacts created. The goal was to test and evaluate the prototype with current residents, a representation gap I found from my interviews and survey.

Prototype 3 sought to answer similar questions of the previous iterations: 1) how did participants engage with others in the process of making?, and 2) what insights did participants generate about neighborhood assets? To answer these questions, I used fieldnotes, unstructured interviews with volunteers immediately after the event, and a debrief call with my project partner and collaborators two weeks after the event.

For this prototype, we expanded our collaboration team through my project partner's existing network of collaborators. The 1882 Foundation hosted an informal "history collective," a group composed of friends that meet approximately monthly through a shared interest in the dissemination of D.C. public history. These friends represent a range of cultural institutions including the D.C. Public Library, the Smithsonian Institute, and the D.C. Humanities Council. In October, I gave a short presentation of my research interests, followed by a discussion for feedback to inform the development of my research proposal. During these discussions, the D.C. Humanities Truck was brought to our attention as a potential collaborator. The goal of this delivery truck turned Humanities Truck is to democratize the sharing and production of knowledge with communities across D.C. (Hawks and Hawks 2020) It is outfitted with a recording studio, it can be used for workshops, making space, exhibits or performance venues. (Hawks and Hawks 2020)

The D.C. Humanities Truck, Anacostia Community Museum and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) became key collaborators in the implementation of Prototype 3. The resources and infrastructure provided by the Truck was instrumental to the implementation of the prototype. In addition to its functions as a mini-museum, the Humanities Truck was fully equipped with their own insurance to drive and park the truck, audio-visual equipment, event tents, folding tables, and sandwich boards.⁶ The Humanities Truck also functioned as a beacon for the *Dear Chinatown* installation. The Anacostia Community Museum, an established partner to both the Humanities Truck and the 1882 Foundation, curated the public history exhibit for the interior of the truck. Ted's relationship to the parade's organizers, the CCBA, helped us identify a suitable location for the installation.

⁶ All of this was included through a nominal honorarium as a donation to the Humanities Truck initiative.

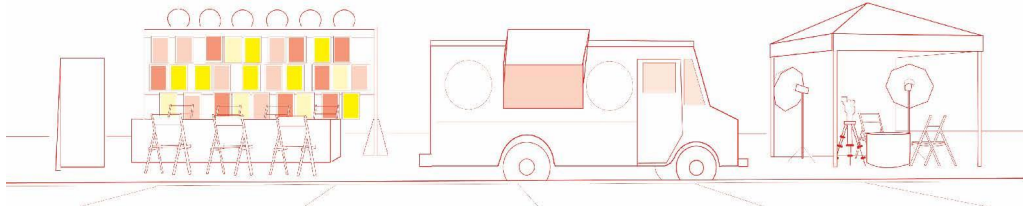


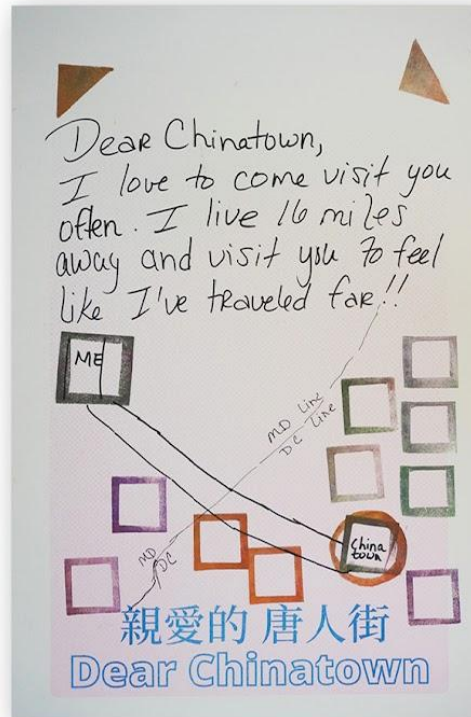
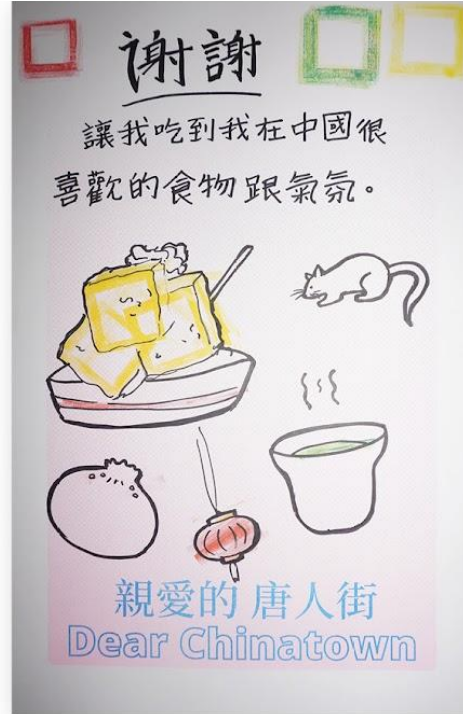
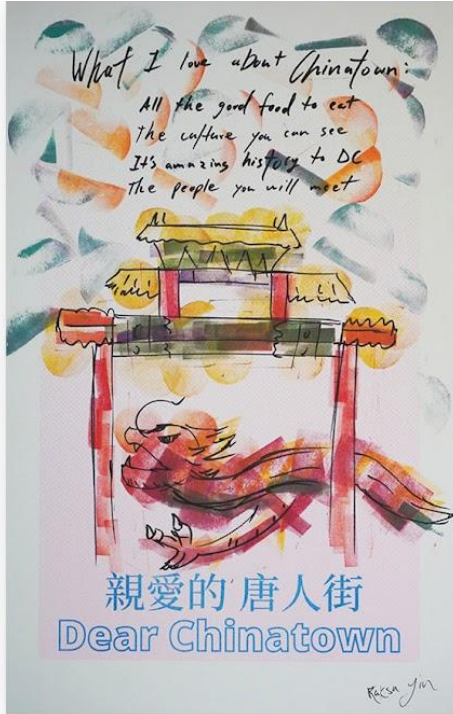
Figure 28: Illustration. From left to right, poster-making station, exhibit truck, and interview station.



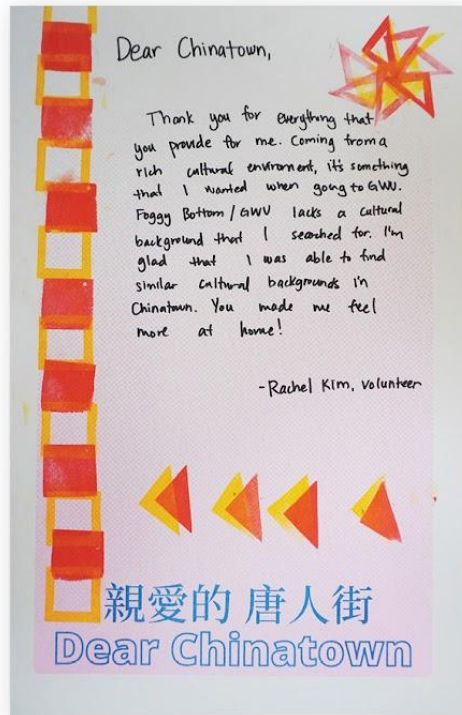
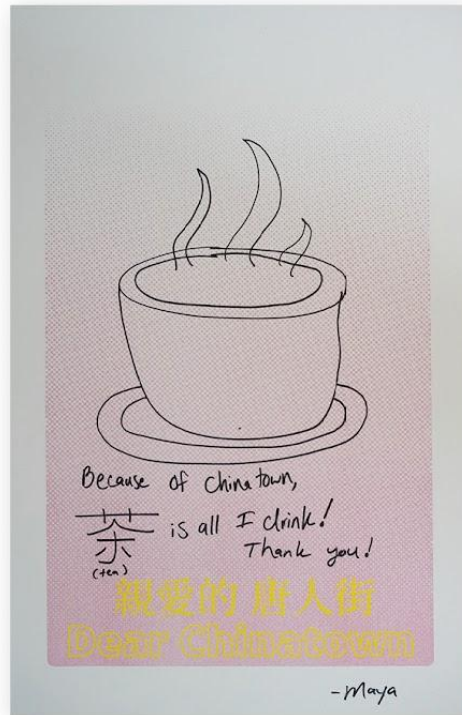
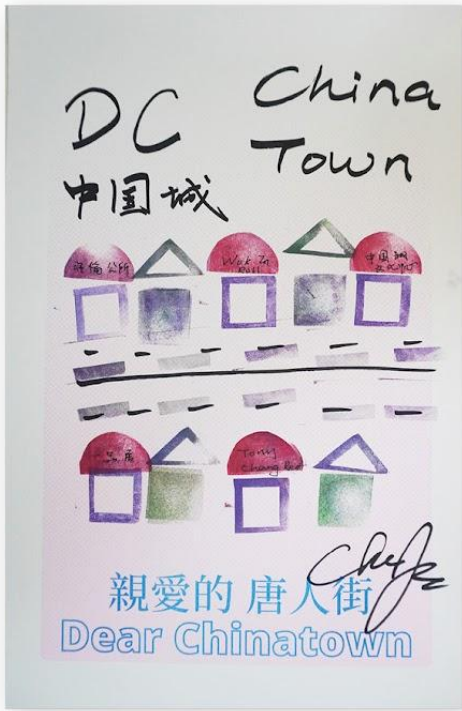
Figure 29: Diagram of confirmed and potential installation locations in coordination with the parade organizers, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA).

Prototype 3 included the full build out of the *Dear Chinatown* installation, which ran from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm on January 26, 2020. At the poster-making station, participants were given 11x17 prints, black sharpie markers, and customized rubber stamps to create a poster to respond to the prompt. Table tents were set-up across the table with instructions that included the prompt for the activity. A waiver was distributed to each poster-maker, for permission to use the posters and its content for future dissemination, such as through a public exhibit.

Six volunteers ran the poster-making station while I concentrated my efforts on observation and fieldnotes as principal investigator. I recruited volunteers through my network of friends in D.C., including one photographer to photo-document and film the day’s activities and one volunteer who speaks both Cantonese and Mandarin, to serve as the translator. The other four volunteers ran the poster-making station by attracting passersby to the table, handing out posters, making sure permission forms were distributed and signed, and pinning up the posters on the display wall that served as a backdrop to the station.



Figures 30a: Images of Prototype 3 posters (9 out of 84 made that day).



Figures 30b: Images of Prototype 3 posters (9 out of 84 made that day).

5.5.2.6 Prototype 3 Findings

How did they engage with others in the process of making?

Scale and Engagement:

The scale of the prototype (50 linear feet of sidewalk frontage) and its alignment with the Lunar New Year parade contributed to its visibility and accessibility. While the scale and spectacle of all of the activity right in front of the Wah Luck House doors sparked residents' curiosity about what was happening.

However, from observation, the festival-like atmosphere of these events may be a barrier for deep engagement. While the poster-making station was an attraction, richer insights and more forms of engagement emerged from Prototypes 1 and 2. By more "meaningful" engagement, that entailed more conversation and sharing. Through Prototypes 1 and 2, participants engaged in one-one one and small group exchanges from their dialogue around the posters. Within these conversations, participants shared stories about their lives and experiences during and after making their posters. Instead, Prototype 3 proved to facilitate more engagement between the participants and the researcher (myself) and event volunteers than among other participants.



Figure 31: Photos. From left to right, poster-making station and D.C. Humanities Truck at the Lunar New Year Parade, January 26, 2020. (Photo credit: Christina Sanders 2020)

Location, Aesthetics and Engagement:

The location and aesthetics of the poster-making station was a catalyst to engagement in some ways and barrier to engagement in other ways. Wah Luck House residents did not participate in the poster-making because they assumed the activity was targeted to children. While the kid-friendly aspects of the poster-making station was a deterrent to older residents. The majority of residents also had no interest in recording their conversations in the Humanities Truck interview station, the smaller of the two tents

outfitted with a small table, to chairs, a video camera and microphone. However, residents lingered in front of the tent, stopping by to check for any free swag to collect. We were directly in front of the Wah Luck House entry where residents were coming in and out on their daily walk. Some stopped to talk to Elaine, who speaks Cantonese and some Mandarin, wanting to know what was happening here. These conversations lasted between five to ten minutes. In one conversation between a longtime resident and Elaine, he noted that despite all of the changes around them, “we have this little block that we call home. Some of us like to walk together. I like to walk by myself, so I don’t get slowed down. Some of the residents play mahjong inside but I don’t because I don’t want to waste my money.” The placement of a new object that generated activity (i.e. *Dear Chinatown’s* poster-making station, interview station, and exhibits) within an everyday public place that prompted enough interest to engage with me and Elaine, both Chinese women in our 30s.

Communication and Language Barriers:

Having a Chinese-speaking translator was very important to the facilitation of Prototype 3. Once residents knew that Elaine could speak Chinese, conversation with residents was easy and open. A few residents stopped by and shared their Chinatown origin stories with Elaine; about their lives in Chinatown and their experiences with neighborhood change over time. Elaine’s language abilities made spontaneous conversations possible with residents. After each conversation, she summarized the conversation to me to capture in my field notes. Having more than one interpreter that day would further improve the communication and participation impediments. I had approximately five to six more individuals that wanted to talk to me but I could not communicate with them in Cantonese or Mandarin and Elaine was already busy talking to other residents. The exhibits inside the truck and the oral history interviews screened on the side of the truck were in English only. This was a popular element to passersby as the film included many longtime community leaders and past residents. Parade organizers and participants stopped to either point out themselves on the screen or a friend or family member they knew. However, it was evident that these elements were less engaging to non-English speaking residents.

What insights did participants generate about neighborhood assets?

There were three different poster colors to choose from: red, yellow, and fluorescent pink. Participants selected a color based on their self-identification within the following categories: past resident (yellow), current resident (red), and everyone else (fluorescent pink). Participants produced a total of eight-four posters that day. Four (4) past residents, fourteen (14) current residents, and thirty-nine (39) other participants that did not fit in the previous two categories, made posters.⁷ Based on the content and

⁷ Based on the content and increased traffic at the poster-making booth through the second half of the day, that prevented volunteers to give verbal instructions to all participants, there are twenty-seven (27) posters that I am unsure whether a color selection was made based on these categories.

increased traffic at the poster-making booth that prevented volunteers to properly instruct all participants, there were twenty-seven (27) posters created that I am uncertain whether they selected a color based on these categories.

Topics and themes that emerged from the posters included cultural heritage, history, belonging, comfort, family, with food and the most recurring topic and ranged from specific food types (e.g. dim sum, noodles, dumplings, bubble tea) to naming specific restaurants in the neighborhood. Inspired by the day’s festivities, many posters included images of the rat to commemorate 2020’s year of the metal rat, and the Lunar New Year weekend. Images of the dragon and Chinatown’s Friendship Arch were also recurring motifs in the posters. Refer to Figure 28 for Prototype 3 poster images.

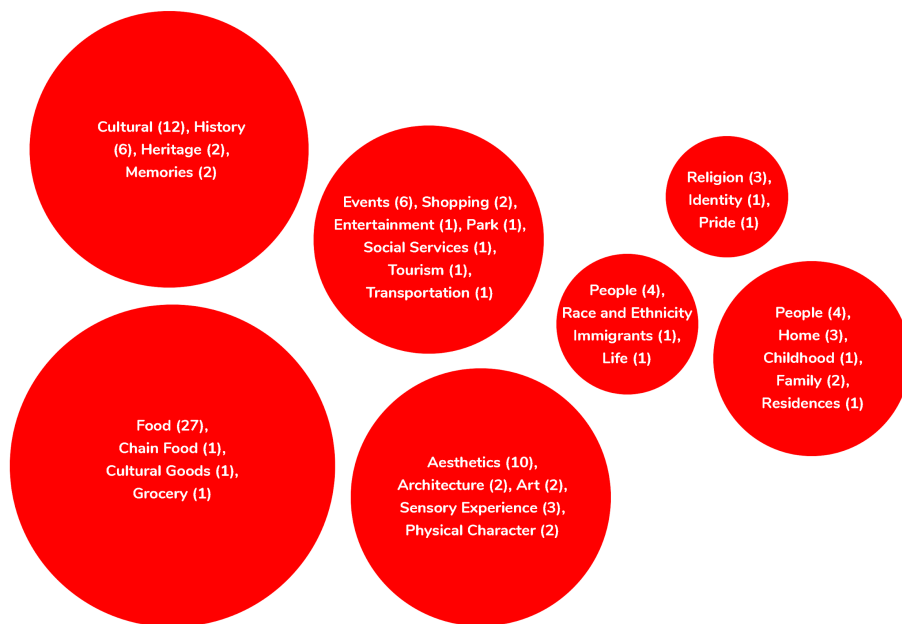


Figure 32: Graphic of themes and topics from Prototype 3 posters.

6. Key Findings

This project sought to better understand the mechanisms to generate better public engagement practices and processes through the following question: how can we connect existing neighborhood assets and the 1882 Foundation’s cultural activities to inform place-keeping in D.C.’s Chinatown?

This project revealed the value of new networks and collaborators and the power of intergenerational convening were important tools to do this work. This study also revealed both successes and on-going obstacles and challenges to consider relative to accessibility and data collection.

6.1 The Formation of New Networks and Collaborators

The development of the *Dear Chinatown* pop-up concept was a successful catalyst to engage new collaborators. The 1882 Foundation's interest in this topic and their willing collaboration was vital to the success of this project. The existing relationships and networks of my community partner were instrumental in the execution of the study (e.g. interview participants, prototype venues) and the integration of other collaborators as the project developed (e.g. D.C. Humanities Truck). We leveraged both common interests and complementary expertise and objectives in public history, cultural preservation, and place-keeping to inform this series of prototypes that surfaced knowledge for all contributors, through interviews, story-telling, and making.

The 1882 Foundation also found value in the installation as a proof of concept opportunity. To demonstrate whether the integration of a community festival component to include different local cultural institutions and content would appeal to the parade organizers to consider for future years of the celebration. Through email exchange with Ted from the 1882 Foundation and Dan from the D.C. Humanities Truck, Ted noted that "the way I see it, this is kind of an experiment. If it works half well, I want to suggest to the organizers that the street in front of the Wah Luck House be a place for community booths. This would restore some of the original activities of the earlier parades that engaged community organizations more. It can be another method to enliven the sense of Chinatown community pride."

6.2 Intergenerational Convening

Across this study, intergenerational exchange and connection also played a key role to share and disseminate experiences, stories, and memories about place. This was particularly evident through Prototype 2, where dialogue around experiences and memories facilitated learning between older and younger generations through the poster-making. For aging leadership and residents, past and present, this type of engagement also serves a critical and timely role in knowledge transfer, as community leadership are also very aware of the need to pass on the value of their work to the next generation of leadership. The 1882 Foundation and its affiliated members and community leaders, the vast majority over sixty years old, are working to preserve the cultural heritage of Chinese Americans in Washington, D.C. through their various documentation projects and curriculum development initiatives for both K-12 and higher education. Their social gatherings through event series such as their monthly Talk Stories, are equally important to the preservation of the stories and experiences through their conveyance to Generation Z and Millennial community members, the future leaders and advocates for the neighborhood. These opportunities for intergenerational exchange serve a vital role in addressing feelings of alienation from the increasing loss of the neighborhood's cultural identity.

6.3 Accessibility

Diversifying prototype methods proved to be an advantage in this study. The differences in format and scope of Prototype 2 and Prototype 3 worked complementary to each other. We collectively engaged different groups with my target audience. While Prototype 2 engaged primarily past residents and current community leadership, Prototype 3 expanded our interactions with a larger representative sample of community leaders as a result of the parade festivities, which many of them are already involved with organizing, and current residents, a predominantly elderly and Chinese-speaking population (e.g. Cantonese, Toisanese, and Mandarin).

The third prototype was able to achieve successful public engagement due to considerations that included geographic location, timing, scale, and variety in programming. We also encountered barriers to accessibility as a result of communication barriers and visual aesthetics of the installation (e.g. not enough translators, the poster-making perceived as too child-friendly).

An important throughline to participant engagement in this study was the role and willingness of my project partner in identifying the appropriate opportunities in which I could conduct these prototypes. Their relationships, networks, and access to the neighborhood's calendar of events and programming was invaluable to this process.

6.4 Data Type and Quality

The scale and type of engagement impacts the type of data generated. Prototypes 1 and 2 facilitated with smaller groups participants in a workshop format were more conducive to conversation and exchange between participants, which generated deeper insights than Prototype 3, despite having generated significantly few posters. However, this does not minimize the value of the insights generated through Prototype 3, they were just different. Locating the installation in front of the Wah Luck House provided access to current residents, a segment of my target audience who I didn't previously engage with over the course of this project. These conversations, while casual, provided the space for them to share their own thoughts, experiences, and memories about the neighborhood. Done again, I would include methods to document these one-on-one and small group conversations.

Changes in site context, both environmental (e.g. indoors versus outdoors) and format (e.g. workshop versus festival), were important considerations when selecting methods for data collection. A myriad of contextual considerations that make Prototype 3 unique from the previous two iterations make for its own unique experience. Also, the mechanisms for engagement for a structured workshop event that occurs indoors look different than engagement in a public place during a public celebration. Moving forward, I

am interested in how to facilitate engagement that both integrates the spontaneous and playful elements of Prototype 3 but also facilitates the interpersonal exchanges and connections achieved by Prototype 2., which also led to deeper insights.

7. Limitations

7.1 Research Instruments and Bias

This study acknowledges that I am the research instrument, so I embed my own perspectives and bias in the coding, analysis, and findings generated from the interpretation of the data from this study.

7.2 Participation

Constraints to participation: Engagement with current residents remained a challenge throughout the project. The neighborhood's remaining, longtime residents are over seventy years old and do not speak English, and given a host of considerations relative to their age, health, and their own day-to-day priorities, their recruitment was not prioritized for the current objectives of the study. Given the circumstances, Prototype 3 was inevitably the most suitable method for their engagement. It did not require their coordination. We came to them but their engagement with us and the installation was at their complete discretion. After Prototype 3, I was in coordination with Ted to visit the Wah Luck House to have casual conversations with residents. However, due to the ongoing flu season and then the pandemic, my visit to the Wah Luck House in early March was cancelled.

I am not fluent in Cantonese and I have no Mandarin-speaking skills, so I was unable to speak with non-English speaking stakeholders and constituents. I mitigated this barrier by recruiting friends to help me with Cantonese and Mandarin translation, both verbal and written. However, there is a missed connection as a researcher who is not able to communicate directly with some stakeholders and constituents.

7.3 Planning and Logistics

This project took on a project site in Washington, D.C. while I was a full-time student at the University of Michigan. The commute between Ann Arbor, MI and D.C. created some inevitable constraints, as it limited my flexibility and availability to conduct parts of this study. I needed to plan at least two to three weeks in advance to schedule flights to correspond with meetings and events. This was mitigated by opening up my schedule during the fall to be there as frequently as needed to attend events, hold

in-person coordination meetings and interviews. This foundational work in D.C. more than I was in Ann Arbor allowed for more flexibility this past semester, and inevitably with the constraints as a result of COVID-19.

Prototype 2 and Prototype 3 were conducted only six days apart, which proved to be challenging due to the scale of Prototype 3. As a result, both prototypes were planned and developed simultaneously due to the small window of time between iterations for reflection and evaluation. Also, in reflection of the scale and scope of Prototype 3, a second principal investigator would benefit this type of project. Volunteer recruitment became vital for all three prototypes, who supported through a range of tasks including photo documentation and observation, and for Prototype 3 day-of event management and running the poster-making station so I was able to focus on observation and taking field notes as principal researcher. In respect to testing and evaluation, controlling variables are key to evaluating the efficacy of the proposals. It was difficult as the sole principal investigator to observe all components with equal attention due to the size of the installation and density of the crowds there for the parade. Again, this could be mitigated in replications or future iterations of this study with the integration of more collaborators.

8. Conclusions and Future Work

8.1 Conclusions

Chinatown's role as a place of cultural heritage, belonging, and identity are at risk of being erased. Displacement as a result of gentrification remains a powerful force that contributes to this erasure and normative public engagement processes remain complicit in these processes. Placed-based education and critical pedagogy play vital roles in the process of learning about the city that is embedded in local knowledge and the issues that matter to the people who have historical and social claims to these places. To make this knowledge visible, community stakeholders must be integrated in equitable and holistic ways throughout the process that aim to contribute and add value to their existing work and priorities.

This project generates a different rationale for public engagement practices. *Dear Chinatown* illustrates that we can do more than hold meetings, and that design for engagement is a dynamic and effective process to solicit substantive feedback, build trust and gain insights toward ideas that support and strengthen a community, not just for the sake of a mandated approvals process. Social groups within Chinatown's longtime community are diverse, dynamic, overlapping, and sometimes conflicting. As such, a one-size-fits-all approach to engagement is fundamentally flawed. *Dear Chinatown* reveals an opportunity to look closer at the mechanics of engagement; both the opportunities to foster more

meaningful forms of exchange, learning, and understanding about place and how to fill the gaps where we are deficient.

Within the context of D.C.'s Chinatown, this project does this by minimizing barriers to communication not only through language but also by diversifying the scale, venue, and methods facilitating interaction and learning amongst participants. Change is constant, as such, engagement models should be seen as longitudinal processes that do not only extract knowledge from the community but engages in an active process to build citizen engagement that grants them true political power in how their neighborhoods are shaped and changed. Also, trust and relationship building takes time. This project built synergies amongst existing strengths and assets of a neighborhood, and embedded these activities within the context of the neighborhood itself and its existing cultural life. The 1882 Foundation's affiliated community, the Lunar New Year Parade, and the Wah Luck House, together with the infrastructure of the D.C. Humanities Truck and the Anacostia Community Museum to facilitate participation, engagement, and learning that also brought value to its stakeholders and constituents. Lastly, it's a project that demonstrates how we can build upon what we have to work with and not start from scratch. It is evident from this intervention that Chinatown, and more broadly, Washington, D.C. is rich with collaborators and resources that can be leveraged as allies toward making a transformational shift in participatory planning. Design, making, public history, cultural preservation, and physical place were integrated in complementary ways to bring this project to life.

8.2 Future Work

My collaboration with Ted and the 1882 Foundation continues, as we disseminate and identify next steps and projects that build off this research and findings.

Public dissemination began in May 2020 through a four-part webinar series hosted by the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), in celebration of Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month. ASLA's headquarters is located in D.C.'s Chinatown, just two blocks from the 1882 Foundation office. It was an important opportunity to give visibility to the unique challenges and histories of D.C.'s Chinatown, which does not receive broad attention due to its substantially smaller footprint in comparison to other Chinatowns across the country. Through this webinar opportunity, me and the other webinar presenters (Landscape Architects) brought our community partners into the conversation about the "Future of Chinatown". Alongside community representation from San Francisco and Chicago's Chinatown, Ted and the 1882 Foundation was given a platform to tell D.C.'s Chinatown story.

Immediate next steps include the dissemination of the study and its findings to key community leaders, specifically to the CCBA members for their feedback, discussion on the project's relevance to their needs

and priorities. Then, with the feedback integrated by the CCBA, we will progress these conversations to include our existing partners and relationships within D.C.'s Office of Planning and the Mayor's Office of Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs. The application and significance of this project beyond Chinatown is important to this work too. I will work with the 1882 Foundation to identify opportunities for public exhibition of the project and its findings to instigate further public discourse on this subject.

We are also actively seeking grant funding opportunities to generate a participatory digital platform where the artifacts, data, and stories collected from the *Dear Chinatown* project and complementary 1882 Foundation project initiatives that document the people's history of the neighborhood can be collected and disseminated. The purpose of the platform is to serve as an advocacy tool that documents the social history of places in the neighborhood. The aggregate and visual synthesis of this information will be used to strategically prioritize future projects that will contribute to place-keeping.

COVID-19 has made the need for this work more tangible and urgent. More questions and considerations must be accounted for now that limitations to interaction together in physical places are uncertain for the foreseeable future. There's no more urgent time to work on ways on how we can remain socially connected during this time of physical distance.

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