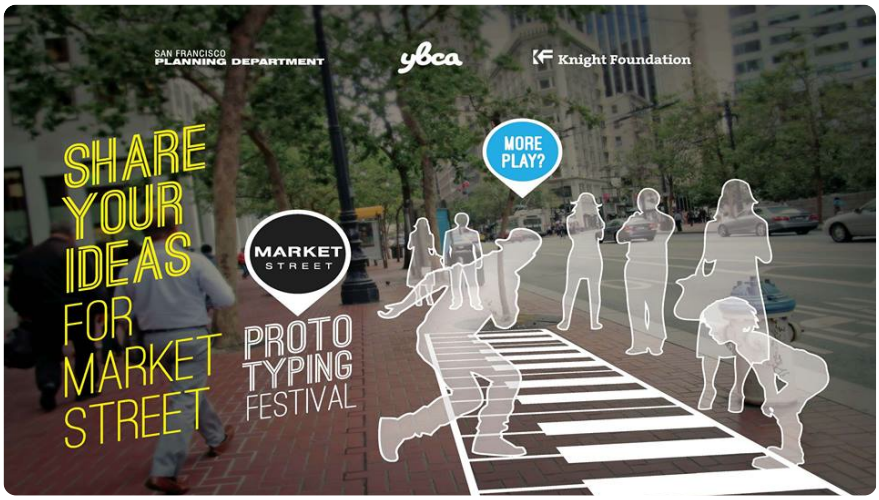
ANALYTICS + DATA

Civic Jazz in the New Maker Cities

The civic innovation movement began when cities started opening up data. Citizens found new pathways to help generate local energy and growth. Now the movement is getting support from the White House and extending to cities around the country. Communities are getting engaged, and Maker Cities are the result.

BY PETER HIRSHBERG SEPTEMBER 13, 2015



San Francisco's Market Street Prototyping Festival was a breakthrough moment for civic innovation.

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San Francisco's Market Street Prototyping Festival was a breakthrough moment for civic innovation.

Our civic innovation movement is about 6 years old. It began when cities started opening up data to citizens, journalists, public-sector companies, non-profits, and government agencies. Open data is an invitation: it's something to go to work on— both to innovate and to create a more transparent environment about what works and what doesn't. I remember when we first opened data in SF and began holding conferences and hackathons. In short order we saw a community emerge with remarkable capacity to contribute to, tinker with, hack, explore and improve the city.

Early on this took the form of visualizing data, like crime patterns in Oakland. This was followed by engagement: "Look, the police are skating by and not enforcing prostitution laws. Lets call them on it!" Civic hackathons brought together journalists, software developers, hardware people, and urbanists. I recall when artists teamed with the Arup engineering firm to build noise sensors and **deployed them in the Tenderloin neighborhood** (with absolutely no permission from anybody). Noise was an issue. How could you understand the problem unless you measured it?

Something as wonky as an API invited people in, at which point a sense of civic possibility and wonder set in. Suddenly whole swaths of the city were working on the city. During the SF elections four years ago Gray Area Foundation for the Arts (which I chair) led a project with candidates, bureaucrats, and hundreds of volunteers for a summer-long set of hackathons and projects. We were stunned so many people would come together and collaborate so broadly. It was a movement, fueled by a sense of agency and informed by social media. Today cities are competing on innovation. It has become a movement.

All this has been accelerated by startups, incubators, and the economy's whole open innovation conversation. Remarkably, we now see capital from flowing in to support urban and social ventures where

we saw none just a few years ago. The accelerator Tumml in SF is a premier example, but there are similar efforts in many cities.

This initial civic innovation movement was focused on apps and data, a relatively easy place to start. With such an approach you're not contending for real estate or creating something that might gentrify neighborhoods. Today this movement is at work on how we design the city itself. As millennials pour in and cities are where most of us live, enormous experimentation is at play. Ours is a highly interdisciplinary age, mixing new forms of software code and various physical materials, using all sorts of new manufacturing techniques.

Brooklyn is a great example. A few weeks ago I met with Bob Bland, CEO of Manufacture New York. This ambitious 160,000 square foot public/private partnership is reimagining the New York fashion business. In one place it co-locates contract manufacturers, emerging fashion brands and advanced fashion research. Think wearables, sensors, smart fabrics, and the application of advanced manufacturing to fashion. By bringing all these elements under one roof, the supply chain can be compressed, sped-up, and products made more innovative.

New York City's Economic Development office envisions a local urban supply chain that can offer a scalable alternative to the giant extended global one. In fashion it makes more and more sense for brands to be located near their suppliers. Social media speeds up fashion cycles, so we're moving beyond predictable seasons and looks specified ahead of time. Manufacturers want to place smaller orders more frequently, so they can take less inventory risk and keep current with trends.

When you put so much talent in one space, creativity flourishes. In fashion, unlike tech, there isn't a lot of IP protection. So designers can riff off each other's idea and incorporate influences as artists do. What might be called stealing ideas in the software business is seen in fashion as jazz and a way to create a more interesting work environment.

A few blocks away is the Brooklyn Navy Yard, a mammoth facility at the center of New York's emerging maker economy. It has 3.5 million square feet and provides makers not only a physical space, but also a way to learn from each other and collaborate. During World War II the navy yard was the epitome of the industrial city — turning out warships and employing tens of thousands. It lay dormant for generations, an anachronistic urban relic. But today it is 100% rented and expanding to 5.5 million square feet. The new navy yard is a living laboratory of a maker city — serving start-ups, design firms, advanced manufacturing companies, as well as traditional industry.

In speaking with CEO David Eirenberg I learned that one thing the navy yard and Manufacture New York have in common are long term, predictable, and affordable rents. Traditional market rents and the attendant short leases and price swings aren't conducive to nurturing a movement and supporting a new ecosystem. So these facilities and many like them are the products of public private partnerships and not-for-profit entities.

In San Francisco this urban innovation movement is working on the form of the city itself. Our main boulevard, Market Street, is to be reimagined, repaved, and made greener with far fewer private vehicles over the next two years. Our planning department, in concert with art organizations here, has made citizen-led urban prototyping the centerpiece of the planning process. It set a design goal, "make this street more engaging, activated, a place of unexpected delight and interaction." Then we invited 50 projects developed by a diverse group of designers, architects, artists. students and urbanists to try their best ideas on our streets. The city temporarily changed its code to allow this.

In SF we're now thinking of the streetscape more like a Lego project, made of convertible spaces that can be updated and changed. Maybe it's an art thing, maybe it's a pop-up library, maybe there's a grid for food-related stuff, maybe it's outdoor ping pong games. How might one program it and constantly change it? Until now we haven't thought of urbanism this way. We've thought of it more like a long, long process that builds something that is going to last a long time.

Similar thinking is emerging in Detroit and Louisville. In fact the Knight Foundation, which funded a lot of this work, brought representatives from 12 other cities to SF this spring, including Detroit, Philadelphia, Tallahassee and Miami.

We need a name for this movement. Surely it's not "The Smart City." That term, also about six years old, suggests a top down and mechanistic approach. For a few billion dollars IBM or Ericsson or Cisco will make your city smart with sensors, control centers and optimization. What we're learning from contemporary civic innovation is that the process of acquiring smarts is a truly inclusive process, the product of many experiments, vendors, and trials. Much like the Internet itself, disparate messy systems must learn to work together. The smartest city is the one that harnesses its people's smarts the best!

The name I

like for this movement is The Maker City. The term is only about a year old. It captures this notion that our cities are laboratories for economic development, entrepreneurship, and cultural development.

They are platforms for experimentation and protoyping ideas. Maker City reflects the emergence of the maker movement and its characteristic “can-do” attitude. It reflects a set of changes that will impact education, economic development, and civic engagement. It could be an important force in re-defining the future of manufacturing in the United States, bringing back local production.

The Maker City Movement

At the White House makers faire last year 100 cities took a pledge to invest in maker spaces, urban manufacturing, maker and project based education, among other goals. Pittsburgh discovered it already had over 200 maker spaces and more than 2000 professionals engaged in making, project-based education or maker manufacturing. By networking these groups together, sharing what works, and learning how to leverage one another they’ve consciously been able to redirect education, economic development and manufacturing towards a more inclusive future.

Today that White House project has evolved into a formal maker city network. With funding from the Kauffman Foundation we are researching, documenting and working to scale the learning in Pittsburgh, Brooklyn, San Francisco, Macon, Detroit and a hundred other U.S. cities and towns.

It’s the genius of America that when we don’t know what the answer is, we experiment in hundreds of ways and endless places. Once, the frontier meant moving west. Today it is this contemporary form of rediscovery and reinvention. This is why Techonomy came to Detroit. Tocqueville saw what we now call social capital at work in 1835 in *Democracy in America* when he wrote about American’s need to associate, saying “Association is the mother of all science.”

Justice Louis Brandeis saw it in our constitution one hundred years later when, in his dissent in *New States Ice v. Liebman*, he wrote, “It is one of the happy incidents of the federal system…that a single courageous state may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country.”

Cities are the great project of our time, the place we express innovation and experiment, the place where we will either invent a more inclusive economy or endure ever more stratification and disparity.

As we gather for Techonomy Detroit, America is replete with experimentation and urgent curiosity. A movement is growing in our cities. It is built on the essential American genius of federation, experimentation, practicality, entrepreneurism, and innovation.

Peter Hirshberg is chairman of The City Innovate Foundation. He leads civic innovation initiatives in San Francisco and founded the Maker City Economic Development initiative, a collaboration of 100 U.S. cities and the White House. He will be speaking at Techonomy Detroit.

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By Peter Hirshberg

Peter Hirshberg has led emerging media and technology companies at the center of disruptive change for more than 25 years. As chairman of The City Innovate Foundation, Peter shapes strategies at the confluence of business an… government. He leads civic innovation initiatives in San Francisco and founded the Maker City Economic Development initiative, a collaboration of 100 U.S. cities and the White House. He has led the development of Urban Prototyping, a global movement that engages citizens in the co-creation and co-planning of their cities. He has contributed to the United Nations Global Pulse initiative for real-time data analytics for international development.

During a nine-year tenure at Apple Computer, Hirshberg headed Enterprise Marketing. He is a Senior Fellow at the USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership and a Henry Crown fellow of the Aspen Institute. Peter is a frequent technology and media industry speaker, having presented at TED, the World Economic Forum, DLD, the Entertainment Gathering, and The Aspen Ideas Festival, where he addressed the General Assembly on their behalf. Peter earned his bachelor's degree at Dartmouth College and his MBA at Wharton.

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