Place-Building Theory: A Framework for Assessing and Advancing Community Engagement in Higher Education

Michael J. Kimball and **David F. Thomas**
University of Northern Colorado

Place-building theory, originally developed to assess corporate social responsibility, explains to what degree an organization values and invests in its geographical and social location. Different lines of inquiry— descriptive, evaluative, and prescriptive—elucidate how the organization values place, which in turn suggests its type, its strategies for building place, and recommendations for how it might move in a desired direction between the ends of a place-building continuum that includes four organizational prototypes—exploitive, contingent, contributive, and transformational. In this paper, we introduce place-building theory, the notion of the placekeeper (place-based stakeholder), and apply the theory to assessing a university's community engagement. We then demonstrate how a university course can use the place-building method to discover perceptions of the university's place-building role held by students, staff, administrators, faculty, and community partners as a way to engage students and other placekeepers in assessing, advancing, and critically examining community engagement in institutions of higher education.

What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. Architects talk about the spatial qualities of place; they can equally well speak of the locational (place) qualities of space. The ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (Tuan, 1977, p. 6)

Place-building theory, originally developed to assess corporate social responsibility (Thomas, 2004), explains the degree to which an organization values and invests in its social and geographical location, its "local community"—i.e., how it actively creates place from space (Tuan, 1977). In a sense, all community engagement, whether it be participatory and reciprocal or technocratic and linear, represents a kind of place-building practice whose outcomes— economic and social relations, ethical conduct, construction and treatment of built and natural environments—embody a set of intrinsic beliefs and values motivating engagement strategies.

Discovering these motivating factors affords opportunities to clarify, debate, and transform them as well as to assess, enhance, and realign their concomitant strategies. Place-building theory's origins are situated in the desire not only to identify and define motivating factors and strategies, but also to engage *placekeepers* (place-based stakeholders) as participants in

an evaluative and proactive process. It is with this in mind that we have applied place-building theory to community engagement in higher education.

In this paper, we show how we have expanded place-building's focus on corporate social responsibility to include a broader scope of institutional social responsibility through a new orientation that explores how universities build place and how place-building researchers, including student researchers, in partnership with other placekeepers (i.e., community partners, staff, faculty, students, and administrators) can initiate and facilitate intentional and potentially transformative place-building work.

In the following pages, we introduce place-building theory by discussing its interdisciplinary origins; two perspectives on place held by organizations; and Thomas's research defining a continuum of place-building by organizations ranging from exploitive to transformational. Further, we describe how the place-building framework possesses *descriptive*, *prescriptive*, and *evaluative* lines of inquiry for assessing and improving higher education institutions' community engagement work. Next we briefly discuss relations between place-building and corporate social responsibility and how these two concepts speak to a new focus for place-building research and application— the university. We describe how we incorporated the place-building framework into Kimball's applied anthropology course as a community-engaged research project and we offer a general discussion of the university as a context, and community-engaged research as a vehicle, for place-building and place-building research. We conclude with recommenda-

tions for how place-building theory, combined with community-engaged research, might be employed as a useful framework for assessing and advancing place-based community engagement in institutions of higher education.

Place-Building Theory

"Place-building" as a concept has been referenced by sociologists, geographers, and other social scientists interested in matters such as enterprise movement, community and systems sustainability (Schneider, Brief, & Guzzo, 1996), sustainable development, and enterprise attributes of communities (Hudson, 2001; Jacobs, 1984; Sagoff, 1996; Schoenberger, 1997; Wright, 1994). Sense of place, community development, corporate culture, and organizational behavior have been investigated by sociologists (Gans, 2002; Gieryn, 2000), geographers (Agnew, 1987; Entrikin, 2000; Seamon & Buttimer, 1980; Tuan, 1977; Werlen, 1993), anthropologists (Geertz, 1983; Wright, 1994), environmentalists (Gustafson, 2005; Snyder, 1995), and business researchers (Delheim, 1986; Hatch, 1993; Thomas, 2004; Thomas & Cross, 2007).

Place is defined as both geographical and social, and is organized around the meanings individuals and groups give to a place in its setting (Rodman, 1992). Places take on the meaning of events that occur there, and their descriptions are fused with human goals, values, and intentions. These "shared meanings," held in common by the collective, are historically generated and tend to be durable (Alvesson & Berg, 1991). Geographers refer to place as "context," explaining how social relations attach to space and place and only secondarily to people (Staeheli, 2007). Place, therefore, is described in this sense as a setting for social action. An organization can impact a given place in ways that influence social action, often on its own terms and seeking a certain outcome. As Entrikin (2000) states, "Place shares meanings or interpretive frames of events for different actions, and second it provides resources for action" (p. 6). Thus, place as a platform can mediate between individuals, social groups, organizations, and broader political structures (Thomas & Cross, 2007).

Therefore, place is not merely a phenomenon that exists in the minds of individuals but also a social construct that develops from and becomes part of everyday life and experiences. The ordinary routines of life produce places that are meaningful, sacred, and special to individuals, organizations, and communities (Williams, 1989). Thus place is not "discrete" or merely local. Place is seen as an intricately binding locale with broad processes and, with other locales, binding processes and constructs that are themselves constantly in flux (Massey & Jess, 1995).

Using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967), Thomas (2004) and Thomas and Cross (2007) derived place-building theory from the work of organizational researchers such as Morgan (1997).

Two Organization Perspectives on Place

All organizations have an agent perspective which connotes the viewpoints they have about how they conceptualize themselves in relation to place as well as the meaning they give to place, which then influences their goals, contributions to place, and all variety of their behavior. There are two types of agent perspectives—one conceptualizes organizations and their success as interdependent with the well-being of place and the other conceptualizes organizations and their success as independent of place.

Organizations with the *interdependent* perspective view themselves as members of a community and recognize that organizations and places are mutually dependent on each other. Interdependent organizations consider themselves responsible for the well-being of a place, view their success as intimately tied with the greater well-being of the place, and actively seek a variety of opportunities to invest and contribute to the multiple aspects of a place. In contrast, organizations with an *independent* perspective view themselves merely as occupants of place and economic agents of place rather than integral members of place. Organizations seeing themselves as independent agents focus their activities on satisfying internal organizational goals while viewing the realms of place as resources to satisfy their needs. In other words, an independent perspective views a place as serving the organization and not vice versa. These organizations view their primary responsibility to their shareholders, not to the places in which they do business. They consider generating jobs and tax revenues as their primary, if not only, contribution to place. Independent organizations are not committed to the well-being of place and will only maintain the relationship as long as it benefits their organizational goals (Thomas, 2004; Thomas & Cross, 2007).

Place Building Dimensions

Place-building theory explains how an organization values place on five dimensions: nature, social relationships, material environment, ethics, and economic relationships.

Nature. This dimension includes the natural, as opposed to human-made, elements, forces, and spaces, such as the landscape, earth, geography, and natural resources. How does an organization relate and contribute to nature and the environment?

Social relationships. This dimension includes the full spectrum of interactions between an organiza-

tion's employees and stakeholders and among and between other organizations. How does an organization encourage the development of social capital? How is certain space treated that reflects the culture and values of the organization?

Material environment. This dimension includes human-made buildings, roads, and other structures such as the buildings an organization occupies and how that space is treated, including interior office spaces. This also reflects the value placed on the building's architecture, landscaping, and historical significance (if any).

Ethics. This dimension includes the organization's practices and its implicit and explicit contract with the community. How are an organization's practices modeled in its industry, its culture, and with all its placekeepers?

Economic relationships. This dimension includes the organization's level of investment in the fiscal well-being of the community. How does the organization attract skilled labor to the community? How does it seek to improve the economic viability of the community? How does the organization create new opportunities for economic growth?

Four Types of Place-Builders

How the organization values place suggests its type, its strategies for building place, and recommendations for how it might move in a desired direction between the ends of a place-building continuum. Thomas (2004) has subjected this continuum, with four benchmarks representing types of place-building organizations, to both quantitative modeling and continuous empirical testing.

Four distinct *place agent identities*—transformational, contributive, contingent, and exploitive—further elucidate the interdependent and dependent agent perspectives described above. Place agent identities reveal how organizations conceptualize themselves as social actors in relation to the places in which they are located. The four types differ in how they conceptualize themselves as agents, the value they assign to the realms of place, their corporate culture, and their strategies and behaviors. *Transformational* organizations conceptualize themselves as change agents acting to improve the lives of individuals and groups in a place. *Contributive* organizations conceptualize themselves as investors and contributors to the well-being of places in which they operate. *Contingent* organizations view themselves simply as participants in places. And *exploitive* organizations view themselves as independent agents with little to no obligation to the places in which they are located.

Each of the four types of organizations create institutional missions which demonstrate different levels of commitment to place well-being. Organizations with the same agent perspective, but different agent identities, develop similar although not identical missions and strategies, which include similar commitments to place well-being. Organizations with an interdependent agent perspective strive for a relatively equal balance between place well-being and their own success, whereas organizations with an independent agent perspective put much more emphasis and weight on their own success with little or no concern for place well-being.

Transformational organizations. Transformational organizations view themselves as critical agents with a mission and focus on improving life and creating positive change for both the organization and the place (Thomas, 2004; Thomas & Cross, 2007). The transformational organizational culture is highly focused on team learning, collaboration, openness to change, and building partnerships. They view themselves as *interdependent* members of a place, rather than independent members, and their success contributes to advantage beyond that of the organization (Thomas).

Transformational place-builders demonstrate an *integrative* strategy that focuses on building a shared vision with the community and holding itself accountable to the community for the quality of its contribution to place. Their behaviors are not solely for public relations advantage but an effort to surpass trends and regulations, perhaps even at a cost to the organization (Thomas & Cross, 2007). Their strategies include initiating new policies and business practices for protecting the natural environment, neighborhoods, cultural heritage, local economy, and other local resources (Thomas & Cross).

Contributive organizations. Contributive organizations view themselves as being contributing members of a network of community leaders who share a common ideology. Their identity as a local contributor is affirmed by engaging with local organizations, fundraising, and by philanthropy that builds place (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh & Vidal, 2001; Schneider, Brief, & Guzzo, 1996). In contrast to transformational organizations that view themselves as responsible for the well-being of place, contributive organizations view themselves as contributors to the well-being of place. The organizational culture is focused on "giving back" and conforming to local norms and values (Thomas, 2004).

Contributive organizations value place first for its social relationships and second for its economic opportunities and potential for business growth. These organizations need a place that needs them, where they can simultaneously prosper and give back. They practice an *integrative* strategy that cultivates their role as a key contributor in their commu-

nity through the network of organizations that facilitate social and philanthropic activity (Thomas, 2004; Thomas & Cross, 2007).

Contingent organizations. Contingent organizations view themselves as disassociated and autonomous agents. They narrowly define "organizational social responsibility" as obeying existing laws, regulations, and ethical codes, and make a concerted effort to act accordingly. Rather than viewing themselves as interdependent with place (transformational), or key members of place (contributive), they view themselves as control agents.

Contingent organizations practice a *separatist strategy* that centers on a plan that distinguishes the organization in terms of its economic power. Contingent organizations value place for what it provides for the organization, such as workers for its labor force. They practice philanthropy only as a method for advancing their own causes, not out of any intrinsic commitment to place, and their principle contribution is economic as well as adhering to laws and regulations (Thomas & Cross, 2007).

Exploitive organizations. Exploitive organizations view themselves as occupants of place and are isolated from the values of the community. They are active users of the local economic, cultural, social, and political resources, valuing place as a commodity that they utilize to their greatest economic benefit (Entrikin, 2000; Rodman, 1992; Sagoff, 1996). They largely plan and organize to control space in which short term organizational goals trump local needs (Thomas, 2004), and their preference is to be granted the rights and legal protections typically afforded only to individual citizens (Vogel, 2005).

Exploitive organizations' mission to achieve their goals determines their organizational philosophy, and it is usually practiced by deliberately targeting certain places for the potential to extract resources without accountability for the risks posed to the local population. While these organizations may employ local people, they practice a *separatist* strategy in which they are not invested in ways that contribute to a sense of place. Exploitive organizations are likely to leave a place once they have determined they do not fit or the return is not as lucrative as originally anticipated (Thomas & Cross, 2007).

Each of the four types stands out from the others in their perspectives on place and the consequences of their actions. Transformational organizations orchestrate their contributions in ways that transform themselves and place. As agents of change, they are distinguished from other organizations in that they view place in a holistic manner in which all five dimensions are interactive and interdependent. Consequently, the practices of transformational organizations contribute to place well-being through learning and teaching in partnership with other organizations and community entities (Thomas, 2004; Thomas & Cross, 2007).

Place-Building Lines of Inquiry

A line of inquiry connotes a vantage point or point of departure from which to understand an organization's place-building identity. Place building has three lines of inquiry. The first is *descriptive* in the sense that the organization's place-building identity reveals how an organization values place (Thomas, 2004; Thomas and Cross, 2007). The organization's valuation of place informs its strategic actions and its interactions within the community, determining how the organization designates the use of space in ways that ascribe meaning and reflect the organization's culture. This means that place-building is also *evaluative* in the sense that it reveals how an organization determines the significance, worth, or condition of a place, and how that organization assesses or estimates the quality or condition of a place relative to its role. Finally, place-building is *prescriptive* to the extent that an organization specifies, generally through its mission statement, its intentions toward the wider community, i.e., how it will use resources and engage in activities that impact the community, and what social and ethical responsibilities it acknowledges and strives to meet. Below, we provide more detail on how these lines of inquiry articulate with the four organization place-building typology.

Descriptive Line of Inquiry

Place-building research operates in a descriptive mode when it identifies how an organization values place.

Transformative organizations. These organizations value place in terms of advocacy for investing its assets to build competitive advantages for both place and organization. They a leadership role as "place advocate" in advancing construction of new organizational competencies that improve community well-being.

Contributive organizations. These organizations value place in terms of its *social network* in which its contributions are intended to gain it recognition as a member of the community. They strategically move the organization into supporting roles in the community where the firm finds a sustainable fit.

Contingent organizations. These organizations value place primarily in *measureable terms*, i.e., what contribution does place return on its economic and financial worth and/or what it can afford and negotiate. They negotiate contributions and value place for its economic and political advantage, provided they advance the organization's mission.

Exploitive organizations. These organizations devalue place in quantifiable terms that describe place

as a product or commodity. The organization negotiates its position in the community without regard to the impact of its operations and operates outside acceptable practices—no local knowledge of the place and its historic or cultural history.

Evaluative Line of Inquiry

Place-building research operates in an evaluative mode when it identifies how an organization assesses and estimates the value(s) of what place offers, what it provides or furnishes in the way of resources to the community and the organization.

Transformative organizations. These organizations determine the value of place based on the shared qualities of all five place-building dimensions (economics, ethic, social, nature, and the built environment), each of which is viewed for its intrinsic values that gain prominence from an integrated and complex setting in which it operates interdependently or symbiotically

Contributive organizations. These organizations determine the value of place based on the their relationship to some propositional good, such as the "fit" or the "match" between the organization's goals and the place's contributions.

Contingent organizations. These organizations calculate the value of place in terms of its worth based on what it can contribute to the organization, i.e., what a place affords that can enhance the organization's market position and business model.

Exploitive organizations. These organizations assess the value of place primarily as an economic factor. They monetize place and spaces as resources for their own purposes.

Prescriptive Line of Inquiry

Place-building research operates in a prescriptive mode when it identifies, typically through an organization's mission statement and business model, how the organization orders the use of its strategic resources and assets to, for example, restore or protect place (nature); attract new businesses and industries that build commerce (economic); create new opportunities to invest in community (social and economic relationships); or represent its social contract or responsibility to its stakeholders (ethical relations).

Transformative organizations. These organizations commit resources and assets to lead and create new opportunities for civic participation and economic partnerships and collaborations. They advocate for change and improvements consistent with their business mission and purposes.

Contributive organizations. These organizations commit resources and assets to help build place, and seek membership in similar organizations as a method for building business and enhancing its rep-

utation as a contributor.

Contingent organizations. These organizations engage in the conditional development of resources and assets to attain some good or purpose for the organization's benefit.

Exploitive organizations. These organizations capture financial gains through aggressive and self-centered strategies that often de-value place. They perceive place as an acquisition or commodity.

Place-Building and Institutional Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a concept and process has a deep and rich history, arguably extending back hundreds of years and encompassing much debate and diversification within the business community (Carroll, 1999). Among the varied definitions of CSR that have arisen over time, there have been emphases on everything from philanthropy to broader commitments to community wellbeing through business practices and corporate resources (Kotler & Lee, 2005), to establishing long-term commitments to social issues, initiatives, and forming strategic alliances (Smith, 1994).

Thomas and Cross (2007) draw a connection between the active and collective process of constructing place from space and the active role that organizations play in driving and facilitating this process. Using this perspective as a frame, they propose a new CSR definition, "one that defines corporations as agents, whose actions, values, behaviors, and strategies contribute in myriad ways to the social construction of places (p. 34)." Thus, with this definition—in effect, one for Place-Based CSR—they make explicit the implicit relations among place-building, collective entities (social groups, organizations, corporations), social responsibility, and agency.

Place-Based CSR and the University

Corporate Social Responsibility, despite its roots in the world of business (Carroll, 1999), offers a model that appears to be equally applicable to the world of higher education. For example, Wood (1991) defined a corporate social performance model whose components speak to higher education's recent trend toward engaged universities (Mayfield, 2001). Wood's model includes three principles of corporate social responsibility: (a) the Principle of Legitimacy, which says that society grants legitimacy and power to business, and in the long run, those who do not use power in a manner which society considers responsible will tend to lose it; (b) the Principle of Public Responsibility, which says that businesses are responsible for outcomes related to their primary and secondary areas of

involvement with society; and (c) the Principle of Managerial Discretion, which says that managers are moral actors, and within every domain of corporate social responsibility, they are obliged to exercise such discretion as is available to them toward socially responsible outcomes (p. 696).

When this perspective is brought to bear on another trend, universities' increasing investments in "placemaking" strategies (Stout, 2008)—i.e., town or city planning initiatives to improve quality of life and enhance the university brand—it is possible to recognize the emergence of a place-based institutional social responsibility phenomenon. In this case, it might be appropriate to replace Wood's (1991) use of the term "society" in her Principle of Legitimacy with the word "community"—society grants legitimacy and power to business, and in the long run, those who do not use power in a manner which the community considers responsible will tend to lose it. For this purpose, we adopt Stoecker's (2003, p. 41) parsimonious definition of community as "the people living with the problem and those organizations that they democratically control." Therefore, we assert that the theory of organizational place-building can be applied to institutions of higher education. How do colleges and universities, through the eyes of their placekeepers, perceive and enact their relationship with their geographical and social location?

A University Example

The authors' collaboration began in 2008 as we discovered intriguing and potentially productive overlaps in our research and teaching interests. Kimball was asked by his Department of Anthropology to design and deliver an undergraduate applied anthropology course. Applied anthropology, arguably anthropology's fifth field or subdiscipline (Baba, 1994)—the traditional four being archaeology, cultural anthropology, physical or biological anthropology, and linguistics—is especially well-suited for community-engaged research because of its collaborative, solution-oriented mission and methods. Given his interests in service-learning and engaged scholarship, Kimball wanted the course experience to include engagement with the community and to contain typical service-learning components such as academic rigor, reciprocity, and reflection.

Place-building research, like anthropological research, uses a mixed-methods approach with a heavy emphasis on rigorous analysis of qualitative data for inquiry and theory-building. This, in addition to their respective fields' shared interests in the concept of place as it manifests individually and collectively, quickly made it clear to both authors that there was great potential for a collaboration that incorporated research methods training, community-

engaged research, and place-building theory into an applied anthropology curriculum. To date, we have constructed four, interrelated projects over the last four years. Due to our own University's aspirations to develop a "University District" (University of Northern Colorado, 2012), we decided to construct our 2010 and 2011 community-engaged research around the identification and analysis of perceptions of our University as a place-builder.

In brief, the curricular component of our Institutional Review Board-approved research design consists of academic preparation (course work on the history and theory of applied anthropology, place, and place-building); methodological training in research design, semi-structured interviewing, transcription, and open-code transcript analysis (LeCompte, 1999); implementation of the research project (disclosure and discussion of study cohorts, formation and deployment of interview teams, transcription and data analysis); meaning-making of project results through mid- and end-of-semester reflection papers, in-class discussions, and group process interpretive work; and a final report and poster presentation at our University's annual engaged and applied research symposium.

The design for our 2010-11 community-engaged research consists of study cohorts and use of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Our cohorts thus far have been drawn, through convenience sampling, from populations we believe to be placekeepers in our community, i.e., representatives of community-based organizations engaged in partnerships with the University and the University's administrators, students, staff, and faculty.

In addition to being required to serve as student researchers, our students were also invited to participate as subjects of the place-building research by completing a pre- (during the first week of class) and post- (during the last week) administration of Thomas's *Place Building Survey* (PBS).[1] Researchers have used the PBS in previous years to explore differences in place-building characteristics between various organizations and groups. In each case, the survey responses from the organizations under study were judged to be highly reliable for respondents, with a reliability coefficient of 0.923. The PBS is presently used in various research settings involving organizations across industry, size, and national borders.

The PBS is composed of 29 Likert-type items represented in the four types of place-building organizations. The PBS uses a seven point response scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The goal of the PBS analysis for our project was to focus on the differences within and between our cohorts' responses and pre/post test variation in student assessment of our University's place-building strategies.

In the 2010 fall semester, research teams of two to three students interviewed faculty members and representatives of community-based organizations. Their research protocol consisted of semi-structured interviews designed to elicit interviewees' perceptions of our university's place-building role. In addition, student participants and interviewees were invited to complete an online or paper version of the PBS whose results were incorporated into in-class, guided, and collaborative interpretations of qualitative data; an end-of-semester focus group with the students; and into the second author's own, broader place-building research.

During the fall 2011 semester, through a grant from our university's Provost Fund for Scholarship and Professional Development, we introduced a participatory research model by building iPad technology into our research design. Each team, again consisting of two to three student researchers, administered the PBS to an assigned interviewee who, this time, represented a faculty, staff, or University administrator. In addition, students taught their interviewee how to use the iPad device and Evernote®, a commercially available application, with which interviewees captured and annotated images that visually summarized their perceptions of the university's place-building role along each of the five place-building dimensions. After processing the surveys, students shared the results with their interviewees and conducted a semi-structured interview around the images and annotations they had gathered. Data analysis, interpretation, and incorporation proceeded in a way similar to the 2010 protocol.

Products from our research include PBS results for students (pre/post) and interviewees; coded interview transcripts; focus group transcripts; charts depicting the location of interviewee perceptions and survey results along the place-building continuum; images and annotations (2011); student memos on their observations; and final reports presenting students' interpretations and syntheses of results. At the end of each semester, we conducted a focus group with students, which explored the meaning they were making from their interviews after considering key quantitative results from both their own and their interviewees' Place-Building Surveys. We asked the students to reflect on the interview results and discuss their insights, motivations, and experiences with respect to the research process and results.

Based on the focus group data, we have realized that in addition to engaging placekeeper groups in the process of participatory research, the curriculum appears to have had a noticeable impact on students' awareness of variation in placekeeper perceptions (e.g., they report having been previously unaware of faculty perspectives and how they can differ from those arising from other placekeeper groups); awareness of how the University values and enacts place; and perceptions of themselves as transformative place-building agents.

Community-Engaged Place-Building Research in the Curriculum: Implications and Prospects

The place-building framework not only offers a method for describing, evaluating, and prescribing a university's location on the place-building continuum; it also offers a *process* for identifying tension for change among placekeepers and a *structure* for defining, debating, and envisioning a university's commitment to institutional social responsibility. The participatory nature of the design—the opportunity for students to serve both as researchers and study participants and for interviewees to interact with place-building perspectives and data through their interviews, PBS results, and the images they captured with the incorporation of iPad devices—initiates a dialogue between students and their interviewees, between interviewees and place-building researchers, potentially among placekeepers and between placekeeper groups (community partners, staff, administrators, faculty, students) that allows the community to unpack its perceptions of and define its vision for the university's place-based community engagement mission.

An applied anthropology curriculum is just one context in which place-building research can be embedded. It could be adapted with relative ease to a variety of courses, disciplines, and educational levels, including geography capstones, sociological research methods, environmental studies, organizational psychology, communication, business, higher education, and student affairs leadership courses—in other words, wherever there is room for an interdisciplinary, participatory, mixed methods, and community-engaged approach to assessing and negotiating place-based institutional social responsibility.

Of course, the place-building framework is efficacious outside of a community-engaged curriculum as well. Indeed, Thomas's place-building research in business and municipal organizations is conducted exclusively outside of this context. Thus, the place-building method could be employed in a variety of other ways in higher education, such as strategic planning initiatives; unit- or university-level self-studies; and assessments of community-university relations and partnerships. Participating in place-building research offers the potential for any place-keeper to gain insight into their role in institutional, organizational, and individual place-building, which reflects on the institution's perceived level of com-

munity engagement.

In addition to its utility in applied and participatory research, it is useful to simultaneously see place-building as a theoretical paradigm for reflexive inquiry into community engagement itself. Butin's (2007) perspective (see also Chupp & Joseph, 2010) on status quo service-learning and social justice education sheds some light on this perspective. As part of his critique, Butin argues that both of these movements have been slowed by a kind of dilution:

> The top-down nature of such knowledge production and dissemination supports a perspective of service-learning first and foremost as a "technical" practice of (simply) an effective pedagogical practice without the attendant complexity or controversy. Likewise, social justice education—through the less-threatening discourses of "diversity," "multiculturalism," and "fairness"—has come to signify a stance available to all concerned with education…. Dilution thus serves, within both service-learning and social justice education, as a way to make initially difficult practices amenable to all with the consequence of undercutting and avoiding the very difficulty originally meant to be engaged. (p. 178)

Arguably the same critique may be levied against community engagement, especially at the level of the institution. In their pursuit of a competitive advantage, e.g., with help from the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement classification (Carnegie Foundation, 2012), institutions of higher education can inadvertently dilute the complexity and controversy inherent in the construction and practice of community engagement by reducing it to a set of inventories (e.g., How many service-learning courses do we offer? How many of our students are engaged in service?), tag lines, and compelling human interest stories without critically examining the core values and strategies that undergird community engagement itself.

As we show in our university example above, place-building theory offers a lens through which this practice can be assessed and potentially transformed within the context of a participatory research framework. In addition to this evaluative approach, which recognizes the interdependence of organizations, placekeepers, and place itself, we also advocate using place-building theory to identify and address contested perceptions and values.

Through the act of gathering, validating, and interpreting placekeeper perceptions and experience, researchers and their collaborators intentionally identify and address structural inequalities, dissonances, hidden curricula, etc. We can evoke and communicate the polyvocality of placekeepers; we can uncover, illuminate, and engage with tensions that exist among competing narratives and meta-narratives.

This approach, in concert with a participatory process, allows us to embrace the contingent nature of engagement and continue to transform community engagement from a technical practice to a deliberative, reflexive, and transparent institutional place-building paradigm.

Notes

[1] Readers wishing to review or complete the Place-Building Survey may contact David Thomas at David.Thomas@unco.edu

References

Agnew, J. A. (1987). Place and politics. Boston: Allen & Unwin.

Alvesson, M., & Berg, P. O. (1991). *Corporate culture and organizational symbolism: An overview*. New York: W. de Gruyter.

Baba, M. 1994. The fifth subdiscipline: Anthropological practice and the future of Anthropology. *Human Organization*, *53*(2), 174-186.

Carnegie Foundation (2012, February 4). *Community Engagement Elective Classification*. Retrieved February 4, 2012 from: http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php

Carroll, A. (1999). Corporate social responsibility: Evolution of a definitional construct. *Business and Society*, *38*(3), 268-295.

Chaskin, R. J., Brown, P, Venkatesh, S. & Vidal, A. (2001). *Building community capacity*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Chupp, M. G., & Joseph, M. L. (2010). Getting the most out of service learning: Maximizing student, university and community impact. *Journal of Community Practice*, *18*(2), 190-212.

Dellheim, C. (1986). Business in time: The historian and corporate culture. *The Public Historian*, *8*, 9-22.

Entrikin, J. N. (2000). *The betweenness of place: Towards a geography of modernity.* New York: Routledge.

Gans, H. J. (2002). The sociology of space: A use-centered view. *City and Community*, *1*(4), 329-339.

Geertz, C. (1983). *Local knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.

Gieryn, T. F. (2000). A space for place in Sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *26*, 463-496

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Gustafson, P. (2005). Meanings of place: Everyday experience and theoretical conceptualizations. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *21*, 5-16.

Harper, K. (2009). New directions in participatory visual ethnography: Possibilities for Public Anthropology. *98th meeting of the American Anthropological Association*, November 17-21, 2009, Philadelphia, PA.

Hatch, M.J. (1993). The dynamics of organizational culture. *The Academy of Management Review*, *18*(4), 657-693.

Hudson, R. (2001). *Producing places*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Jacobs, J. (1984). *Cities and the wealth of nations*. New York: Random House.

Kotler, P. & Lee, N. (2005). *Corporate social responsibility: Doing the most good for your company and your cause*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.

LeCompte, M. D. 1999. *Essential ethnographic methods: Observations, interviews, and questionnaires*. Lanham, VA: Alta Mira Press.

Massey, D., & Jess, P. (1995). *A place in the world? Places, cultures and globalization*. New York: Oxford Press.

Mayfield, L. (2001). Town and gown in America: Some historical and institutional issues of the engaged university. *Education for Health*, *14*(2), 231-240.

Morgan, G. (1997). *Images of organizations*. (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rodman, M. C. (1992). Empowering place: Multilocality and multivocality. *American Anthropologist*, *94*(3), 640-656.

Sagoff, M. (1986). Values and preferences. *Ethics*, *96*(2), 301-316.

Schneider, B., Brief, A.P., & Guzzo, R.A. (1996). Creating a climate and culture for sustainable organizational change. *Organizational Dynamics*, *Spring*, 7- 18.

Schoenberger, E. (1997). *The cultural crisis of the firm*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Seamon, D. and Buttimer, A. (1980). *The human experience of space and place*. London: Croom Helm.

Smith, C. (1994). The new corporate philanthropy. *Harvard Business Review*, *72*(3), 105-116.

Snyder, G. (1995). *A place in space: Ethics, aesthetics, and watersheds*. Washington, D.C.: Publishers Group West.

Staeheli, L.A. (2007) Place. In J. Agenew, K. Mitchell, & G. Toal (Eds.), *A companion to Political Geography* (pp. 157-169). New York: Blackwell Publishing.

Stoecker, R. (2003). Community-based research: From practice to theory and back again. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *10*(2), 35-46.

Stout, A. C. (2008). *New towns from gowns: Urban form and placemaking at college campuses*. (Masters thesis.) Retrieved March 28, 2011 from: http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/44345.

Thomas, D.F. (2004). *Toward an understanding of organization place building in communities*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Thomas, D.F. & Cross, J. (2007). Organizations as place builders. *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management*, *9*(1), 33-61.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

University of Northern Colorado. *University District*. Retrieved February 4, 2012 from http://www.unco.edu/universitydistrict

Vogel, D. (2005). The low value of virtue. *Harvard Business Review*, *83*(6), 26.

Werlen, B. (1993). *Society, action, and space: An alternative human geography*. London: Routledge.

Williams, R. (1989) *Resources of hope: Culture, democracy, socialism*. New York: Verso Publishers.

Wood, D. (1991). Corporate social performance revisited. *The Academy of Management Review*, *16*(4), 691-718.

Wright, S. (1994). (Ed.). *Anthropology of organizations*. New York: Routledge.

Authors

MICHAEL J. KIMBALL (michael.kimball@unco.edu) is an associate professor of Anthropology and directs the University of Northern Colorado's Center for Honors, Scholars & Leadership. A 2006 winner of Maine Campus Compact's Donald Harward Faculty Award for Service Learning Excellence and 2007/08 Robert O. Schulze Chair in Interdisciplinary Studies, Kimball collaborates with Thomas on place-building research, teaches community-engaged and local and international service-learning courses, and co-leads university strategic planning and initiatives for engaged scholarship and learning.

DAVID F. THOMAS (david.thomas@unco.edu) is an assistant professor of Management. He is responsible for the program development of the University of Northern Colorado's Entrepreneurship program. This innovative program concentrates on the applied aspects of entrepreneurship with an emphasis on supporting student start-up opportunities and collaboration with the Northern Colorado business community. University of Northern Colorado has recognized his contributions to students and faculty as both advisor of the year and professor of the year in the Monfort College of Business. His research has pro-

duced a new model for describing and evaluating how organizations contribute to their communities. His models have been instrumental in helping communities recruit and retain best fitting firms. Thomas serves as a board member on the Rocky Mountain Initiative Institute and is actively involved in community development initiatives in the region.