Bond Case Briefs

Municipal Finance Law Since 1971

How Placemaking Can Empower Urban Communities, Not Tear Them Apart.

Late last month, *The Guardian* published a piece with the somewhat incendiary title "How placemaking is tearing apart social housing communities." The article tells a distressing story of a local east London council forcing the relocation of social housing residents so the estate could be refurbished, and how years later, hundreds of units remain empty as displaced residents have yet been able to return. The details as described are a little murky — or perhaps I just got lost in the British English — but the author, Nye Jones, was crystal clear on one point: placemaking was to blame.

Having just launched the new Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking, I was understandably anxious about how Jones was defining placemaking, as by the article title alone I was confident he didn't get it quite right. More than that, I had the foreboding feeling that placemaking might now be on the same slippery linguistic slope as "gentrification" — a word that Jason Segedy, in a recent City Observatory article, suggested has become "useless," with no agreed upon meaning.

Upon opening The Guardian article, I was even more disheartened to see in the subtitle that Jones was actually conflating the two terms, referring to placemaking as "gentrification by any other name." Indeed, Jones goes on to say that "placemaking" reflects developers' quest for culture and luxury whereby social housing tenants are "shooed out of the way" to make room for the affluent. So if I understand correctly, it appears that "placemaking" is now being used — by Jones and others in the UK, anyway — to describe the phenomenon of displacement once connoted by the now meaningless term "gentrification." Yikes.

Continue reading.

The Urban Institute

Jennifer S. Vey
Senior Fellow – Metropolitan Policy Program Director – Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking

Wednesday, January 16, 2019

Copyright © 2026 Bond Case Briefs | bondcasebriefs.com