Amplifying
Creative Communities
New York City

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Parsons
Desis
Lab

THE
ROCKEFELLER
FOUNDATION

PARSONS THE NEW SCHOOL FOR DESIGN

A Parsons DESIS Lab Project
Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability Lab
The New School

AMPLIFY

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The Lower East Side and North Brooklyn

Our current ways of living are proving unsustainable. But how can we change them? Communities are no longer waiting for new technologies, stronger regulations or market shifts to bring on more sustainable futures. People are taking the initiative to create new ways of meeting their everyday needs. They are organizing ways of improving the quality of their lives and the environment by sharing. Community carpooling, time-sharing, community gardening - we call these Creative Communities. This is the basis of the project "Amplifying Creative Communities in New York City" led by DESIS Lab and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation Cultural Innovation Fund 2009.

The Amplifying Creative Communities project aims to document urban activism initiatives in New York City and to help those initiatives become easier to implement and more enjoyable through design. It proposes that designers, academics, students, organizations and urban activists join forces to identify individuals and communities that are creating more sustainable ways of living and working. The underlying principle is that new ideas for the future can be better shaped by learning from current successful practices. Part of the Amplify model is that designers and community leaders co-design new scenarios and service concepts that solve issues pertaining their everyday life in their specific communities by connecting with existing action and networks.

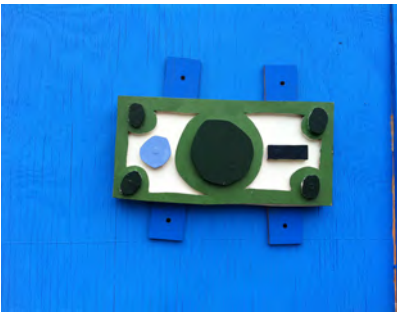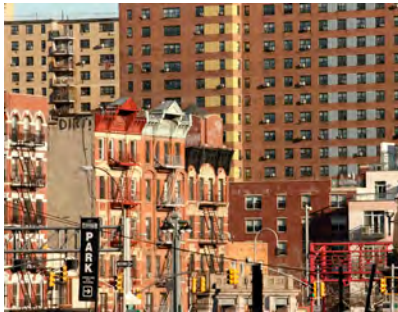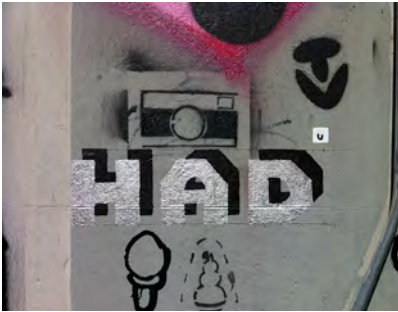Lower East Side

North Brooklyn

IMAGE: SAVETRI LOPEZ-NEGRETE

Lower East Side

North Brooklyn

IMAGE: SAVETRI LOPEZ-NEGRETE

IMAGE: SAVETRI LOPEZ-NEGRETE

IMAGE: SAVETRI LOPEZ-NEGRETE

IMAGE: SAVETRI LOPEZ-NEGRETE

Lower East Side

North Brooklyn

Lower East Side tenement buildings

A sign of one of the Lower East Side Community Gardens signifies the diverse nature of this community.

The project makes use of exhibitions as a stage to create social conversation around sustainable lifestyles and initiatives occurring at the community level. In 2010, Amplify promoted its first exhibition at the Abrons Center in the Lower East Side area of Manhattan. In 2011, a second show took place at Arts @ Renaissance (the art space of the North Brooklyn not-for-profit organization St. Nicks Alliance) as the culmination of the second Year of the Amplify project that focuses on Williamsburg and Greenpoint in North Brooklyn.

The project "Amplifying Creative Communities in New York City" takes a localized approach towards new ideas that can make the transition to more sustainable societies. In particular it proposes to:

- Look out for Creative Communities in New York City who are taking quiet but significant steps toward more sustainable ways of living and working

- Work with these Creative Communities to learn about their social innovations

- Design with these Creative Communities to expand the capacity of their innovations

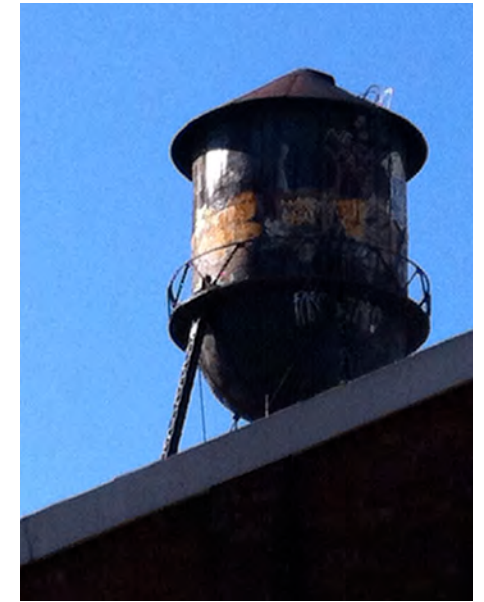- Broadcast what we have learned about social innovation to other communities.

This project represents one answer to how designers and planners can generate sustainable and socially innovative solutions to urban problems. Our starting point is that sustainable social innovation is present in hidden, less evident forms, in small self-organized groups that seek to improve their lives and environment through collaboration. An important task of designers and planners is to identify and disseminate such innovations, to amplify them. In practice, DESIS Lab proposes to conduct Amplification process with communities is New York City so to improve and expand their social innovations.

The Amplifications are articulated around three main actions:

- **Mapping** sustainable social innovations. This is being done through Parsons' student work within some courses, where they learn ethnographic research and documentation for design. They interview residents and conduct photographic surveys among other techniques. Their findings have been uploaded on the Green Map platform and constitute the main database of the project.

Watertower, an infrastructure that has been one of Brooklyn's icons.

- **Communicating** innovations through **exhibitions** to stimulate change within communities. In this project, exhibition is considered a research tool. We designed the first exhibition in the Abrons Art Center at the Henry Street Settlement in the LES where we did not show final results but rather a work in progress and solicit the feedback from the public regarding some specific questions.

- **Identify and codify design expertise** to transform local non-profits into amplifiers of social innovation. As one of the outputs of the project, we worked with Parsons' students and the design firm IDEO to design a series of **toolkits** aiming at either improving existing initiatives or making new social innovations more accessible to the general public. These toolkits took the shape of either "Getting started" toolkits (sort of DIY manual to start up a new activity targeting the potential activist), or "Organizers' toolkits" (a set of guidelines/ tools to help existing local organizations coordinating collaborative activities with different entrepreneurs) or even "Instructables" (a set of step-by-step instructions, presented as a story-board targeting final users performing a simple solution).

The Farmers Market at McCarren Park
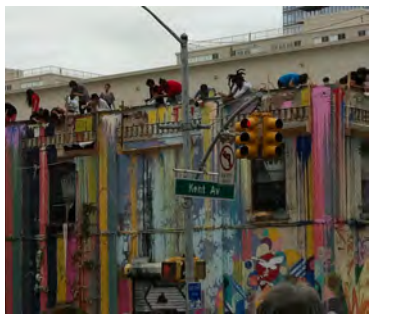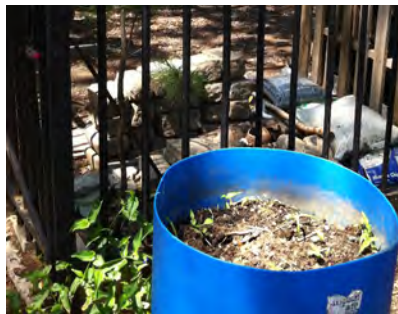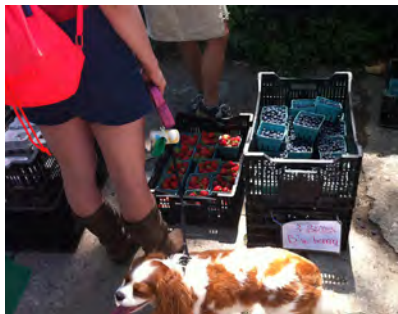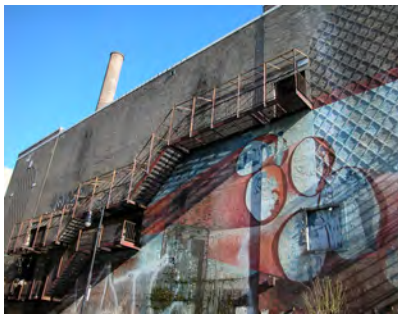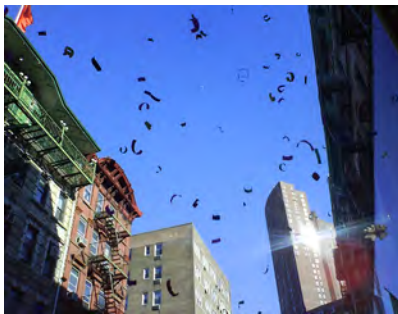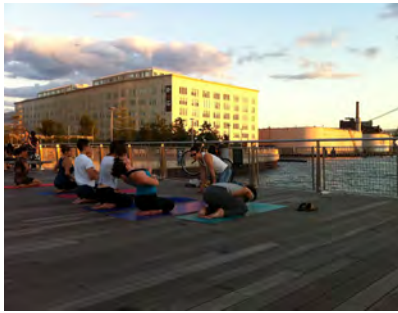
AMPLIFY

Lower East Side

North Brooklyn

IMAGE: SAVETRI LOPEZ-NEGRETE

Lower East Side

North Brooklyn

The project conducted two amplification processes in two different neighborhoods, starting in the Lower East Side neighborhood of Manhattan. DESIS Lab is partnering with the Lower East Side Ecology Center, a local not-for-profit organization, to reach out to local innovators. During the first year, the DESIS Lab researched and analyzed the ways in which the Lower East Side configures as a diverse mix of communities currently under pressure of gentrification. This research has revealed different layers through which social innovation materializes, from informal impromptu practices, historical results of local politics such as community gardens, to formalized efforts such as local non-profits.

Amplifying Creative Communities Year 1:
Lower East Side, Manhattan

New York City is an extremely rich environment for alternative solutions, new lifestyles and social innovations. The Amplify project started as a collection of existing sustainable initiatives carried out by creative citizens in specific areas of the city. In 2010, we partnered with The Lower East Side Ecology Center, a local environmental action not-for-profit, to identify examples of social innovation and urban activism on the Lower East Side neighborhood. The main focus was the creation of an exhibition as a research process, using both low and high tech interactive tools to collect data from the public and engage local community representatives in a dialogue that involved designing new scenarios for localized collaborative services.

On the Lower East Side, we found a neighborhood marked by diversity, both ethnically and demographically, with residents who are cooperative and resourceful. An area also known for being a traditional immigrant and working-class area of the city, in recent years, the Lower East Side has suffered from a rapid process of gentrification that threatens its rich

cultural diversity and history. Our research revealed different mechanisms through which social innovation materializes on the Lower East Side through informal spontaneous practices; formalized efforts of local nonprofit organizations; and products of local politics such as community gardens, the most visible examples of Creative Communities on the Lower East Side.

Amplifying Creative Communities Year 2:
Williamsburg and Greenpoint in North Brooklyn

In the second year of the project, the team expanded the interface with the community by refining the use of participatory design methods and tools. In preparation for the new exhibition in North Brooklyn, the team conducted extensive in-depth research with community activists and innovators in partnership with a social scientist trained in qualitative methods. Specifically, beginning in May 2011, the Amplify team interviewed civic organizations and leaders in Williamsburg and Greenpoint to uncover innovations at work in these communities. The results were synthesized in four short films, shown in a two-week exhibition, designed as a stage for a sequence of workshops involving multiple groups of stakeholders.

Various housing units in the Lower East Side.

The diverse cultural identity that signifies the Lower East Side.

IMAGE: SAVETRI LOPEZ-NEGRETE

The visual language of street art and graffiti seen in North Brooklyn.
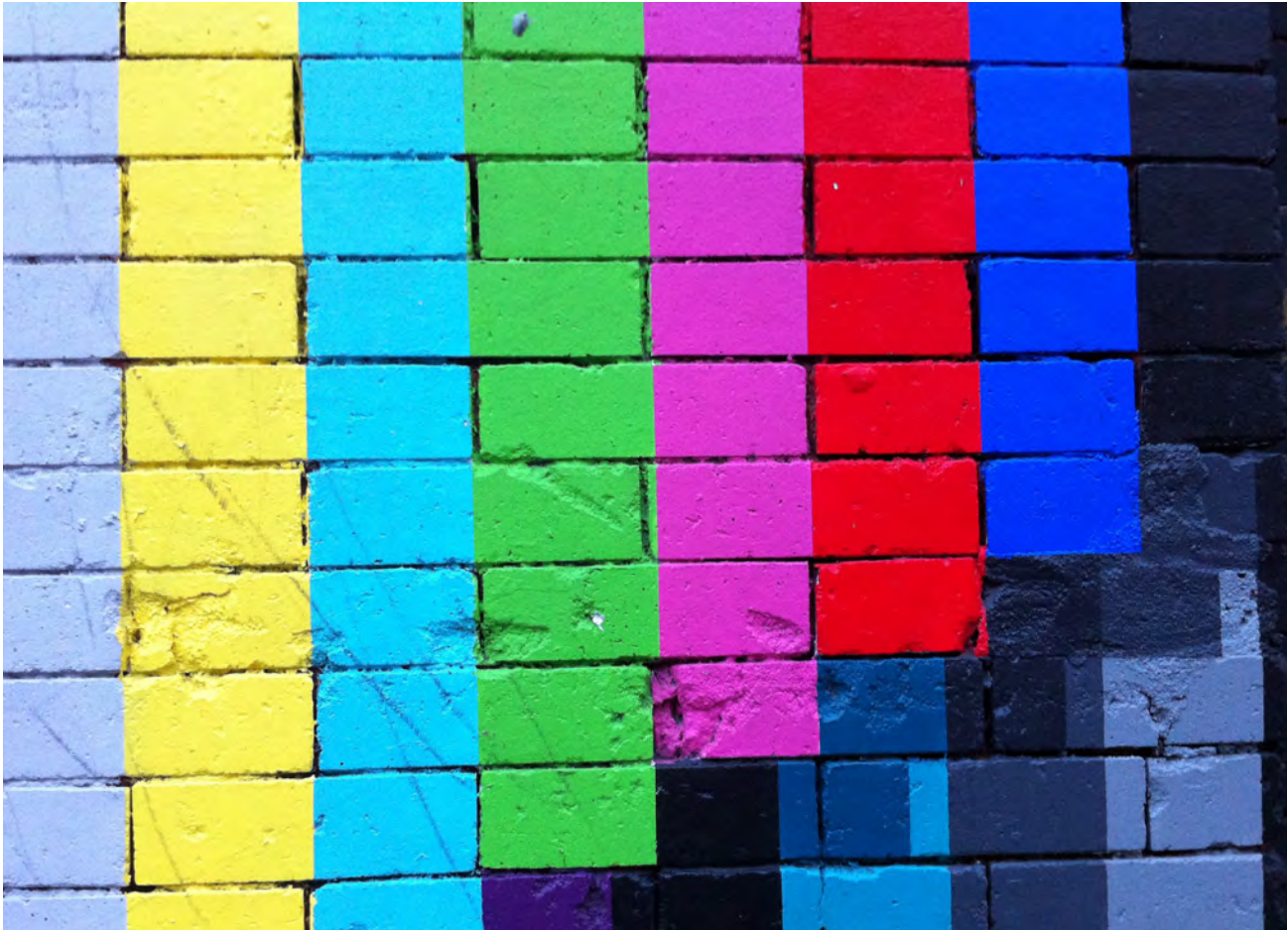
IMAGE: MAI KOBORI

Image from visiting community gardens in McCarren Park.

IMAGE: MAI KOBORI

AMPLIFY

Lower East Side

North Brooklyn

AMPLIFYING CREATIVE COMMUNITIES NEW YORK CITY LOWER EAST SIDE

AMPLIFY

Lara Penin, Eduardo Staszowski

The Lower East Side was chosen as the initial site for this project "due to its high population density, diverse ethnic communities, history of resistance to gentrification and strong political capital. The Lower East Side Ecology Center described the neighborhood's transformation from the 1980's – when it was reminiscent of a burnt out city in post-war Germany – to the present time in which there are over 50 thriving community gardens that connect local residents and increase their cohesiveness" .

The LES is a neighborhood in the Southeastern of the NYC borough of Manhattan. Its boundaries have been a source of controversy, with historical boundaries changed by real estate dynamics. In this project, we have adopted the boundaries suggested by the Community Board 3 outline: 14th Street - Pearl, East River to Bowery/4th Avenue.

In terms of demographics, the LES is a historically heavily populated area in the city. Jewish immigrants were the majority in the area. Currently, its ethnic diversity is remarkable, with a significant Asian/Pacific Islander presence (35%) that is geographically concentrated in Chinatown, below Canal Street as well as a considerable Hispanic presence (26%), enough to create a Hispanic nickname for the neighborhood "Loisada".

The neighborhood's economic profile, albeit in rapid transformation is still pretty low. It has traditionally been an immigrant, working class neighborhood, but it has undergone rapid gentrification in recent years. The median annual income in 2006 was $36,500, which is 46% of the citywide median income of $76,800. 49% of population receives income support (such as public assistance, SSI, Medicaid.

With the decay of the tenement buildings due to new city laws, owners were faced with increasing real estate values. Burning down and demolishing buildings became a cheap measure to guarantee minimum gain for owners. The remaining empty lots were quickly taken by crime alarming the local population. The famous "Green Guerrillas" and other organizations helped the local population to transform empty lots into enjoyable gardens but above all, these physical changes helped transforming the whole perception of the area. According to Elissa Sampson, activist, geographer and long time resident of the LES the community gardens are one of the reasons for the revival of the LES in the 70's and 80's. A city program, Green Thumb, helped providing technical assistance to gardens and the gardens flourish. The 1990's saw further change in the neighborhood, dramatically affecting the gardens. The new mayor Giuliani did not renewed the gardens leases and the whole real estate dynamics would change, increase property value. Many gardens were swallowed by new developments and some of the historical ones disappeared forever. Since the gardens were greatly connected to each other, this felt as a major loss for the whole community. Still, 44 community gardens have survived.

A Green Map documenting 17 community gardens out of 44

Even if the LES was a deliberated choice in the project, it was truly surprising for the researchers to learn about the importance of the community gardens in the neighborhood, its spectacular diversity and their significance for the everyday life of residents. They also represent the most important urban activism manifestation in the LES.

We documented a selection of these gardens, and interviewed its members to understand their efforts and motivations. Our hypothesis was that participants in the gardens were likely to be also involved in other innovative and sustainable endeavors within the community. In fact, our research helped uncover

"below the radar" initiatives that were happening on a micro level and hidden from the sight of the general public.

Students from the Design and Management program at Parsons the New School for Design have documented 17 of LES community gardens through interviews, photography, and film. A Green Map was created aggregating all the data collected by students.

Urban activism in the LES: following the leads from the lead of community gardens

A closer look at the results of the research with garden members led us to identify creative solutions for everyday life developed by garden members as well as the main areas of unmet needs and service demands of the neighborhood community.

We selected 9 gardens with potential strong urban activism stories and organized them into a matrix, extracting four main areas representing a mix of existing cases of social innovation and urban activism as well as perceived demands of new collaborative services. Some of the criteria for this analysis were the potential for local job creation, micro-entrepreneurship as a possible response to gentrification, and retention of the active and traditional communities.
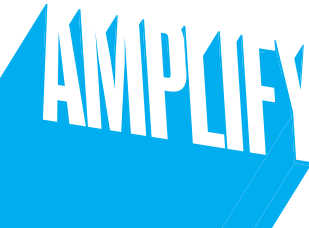The areas identified were:

· Taking care of the elderly
· Eating Healthy
· Retaining Cultural Identity
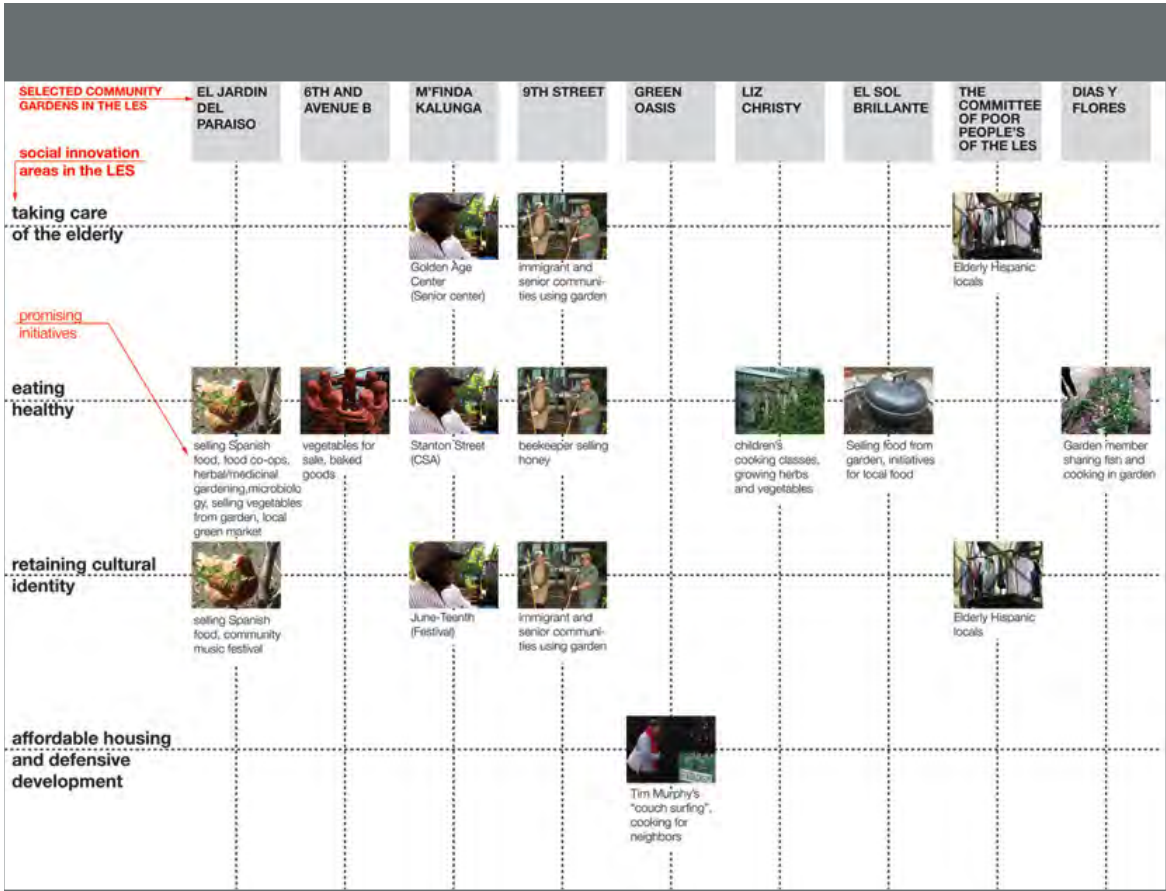· Home Services (affordable housing and defensive development)
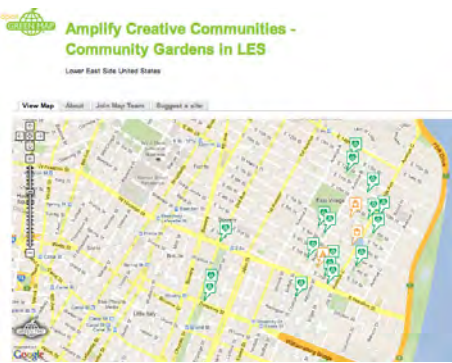
Community gardens identified and tagged in the Green Map platform helped researchers spatially understand how many garden still exist today.

Learning from urban activist and gathering leads.

Analytical graph visualizing the main social innovation typologies occuring in selected LES community gardens.

This investigation was being carried out by students of the Independent Studies course being held at the Environmental Studies program (administered by New School's Tishman Environment and Design Center). The students in this course used the community gardens research along with an in-depth investigation on existing cases in order to inform the development of new service scenarios and toolkits. The results were displayed as part of the Amplify exhibition.

Exhibition as a Research Tool

Exhibitions are normally set up to show some final product. Within the Amplifying project process, the exhibition is used as a research tool. It aims at establishing a public conversation, consulting the general public about some specific issues, showing some in-progress results and hypotheses.

The exhibition was organized in five installations occupying Abrons' two main galleries. Each installation was dedicated to a particular aspect or theme presented through visuals and interactive features using an array of different media, from posters to live plants, from videos to iPods. The public participation was promoted though a combination of both high-tech and low-tech systems, facilitating the participation of people from the most diverse background and ages. Children were often seen enthusiastically interacting with the different elements.

Each of the five installations prompted specific public responses according to the specific questions formulated to the public. The five installations are detailed in the next several pages.
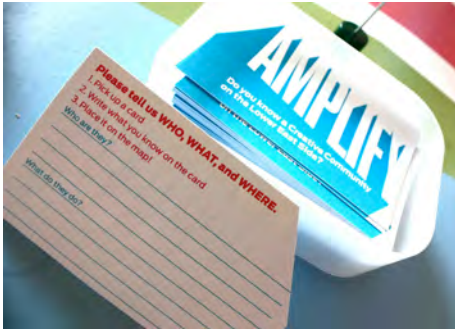
Cards were displayed during the exhibition to promote participation from the public.

Information was gathered based on audiences' knowledge of social innovation and participation.
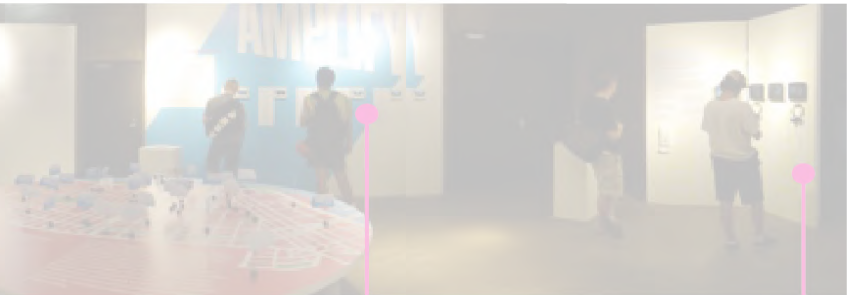

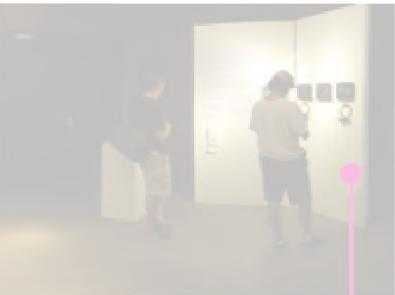Children fascinated by the interactive hi-tech installations.

INSTALLATION 1:
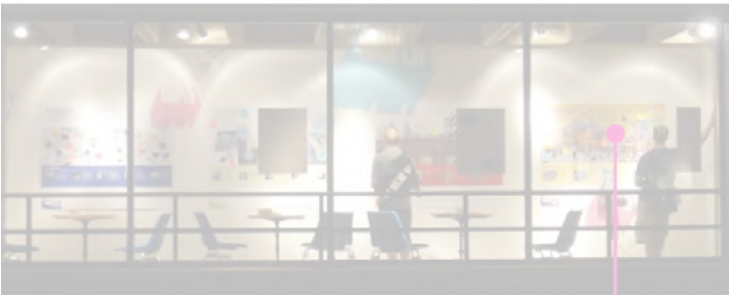Lower East Side Community
Gardens Wall

INSTALLATION 2:
Interactive 3-D Green Map
Table

INSTALLATION 4:
Creative Communities
Worldwide (iPods)

INSTALLATION 3:
Social Innovation Corner
(four films)

INSTALLATION 5:
Amplification by Design: four
social innovation scenarios for
the LES

Installation 1:
Lower East Side Community Gardens Wall

This installation showcased 18 community gardens as examples of urban activism in the neighborhood. Each planter represented one garden. The text description applied to each planter is the result of Parsons' students research, in which they interviewed gardeners and produced a report and content for the digital Green Map online. A participatory method was used to accurately portray each garden. Garden members were invited to take part in an event (Happy Green Hour, August 3rd) where they created physical representations of their respective gardens using their own plants and other objects. This collaborative installation was intended to enhance the self-awareness of community gardens as gateways for other forms of social innovation. Since the gardens were greatly connected to each other, this felt as a major loss for the whole community. Still, 44 community gardens have survived.

IMAGE: SAVETRI LOPEZ-NEGRETE

View of Installation 1, with plants representing LES community gardens, the plant crates were prepared in a pre-opening community event called Happy Green Hour.

INSTALLATION 1:
Lower East Side Community
Gardens Wall

INSTALLATION 2:
Interactive 3-D Green Map
Table

INSTALLATION 4:
Creative Communities
Worldwide (iPods)

INSTALLATION 3:
Social Innovation Corner
(four films)
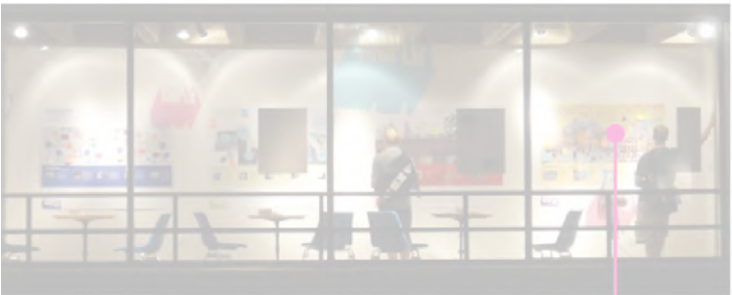
INSTALLATION 5:
Amplification by Design: four
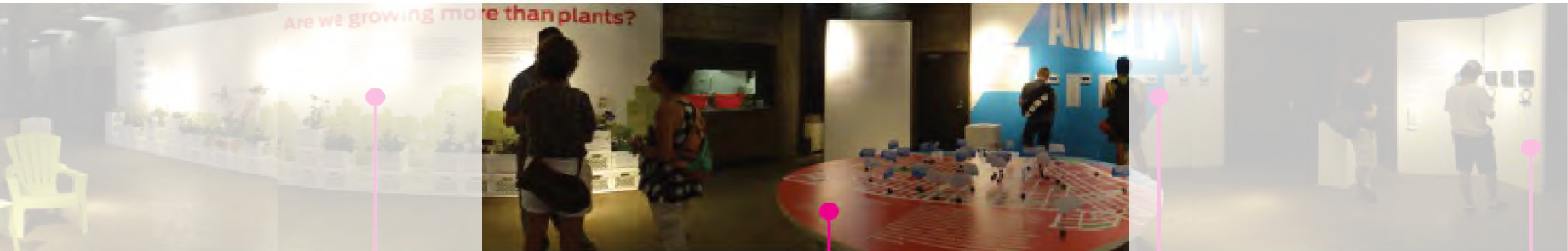social innovation scenarios for
the LES

Installation 2:
Interactive Green Map Table

A physical version of the online Lower East Side Green Map highlighting the neighborhood's Creative Communities was installed on a specially designed table. Index cards were available to enable public participation. In this section, we wanted visitors to help us identify other social innovation initiatives on the Lower East Side. The question to the public was: "Do you know a Creative Community on the Lower East Side?" The public's input will led us to other initiatives and further mapping of urban activism in the neighborhood.

This crowd-sourcing mechanism turned out to be a very effective instrument to capture the voice of the community, gathering over 60 responses. The results helped to reveal specific areas of interest of social innovation in the LES. It also proved to be very effective in the identification of specific organizations and initiatives that the public retained as important vehicles or manifestations of social innovation.

The interactive 3D table with index cards to enable public participation.

INSTALLATION 1:
Lower East Side Community
Gardens Wall

INSTALLATION 2:
Interactive 3-D Green Map
Table

INSTALLATION 4:
Creative Communities
Worldwide (iPods)
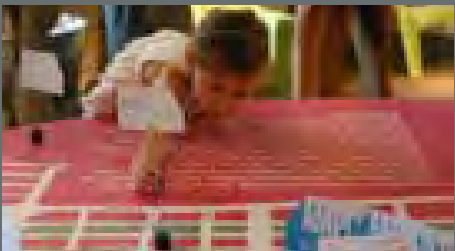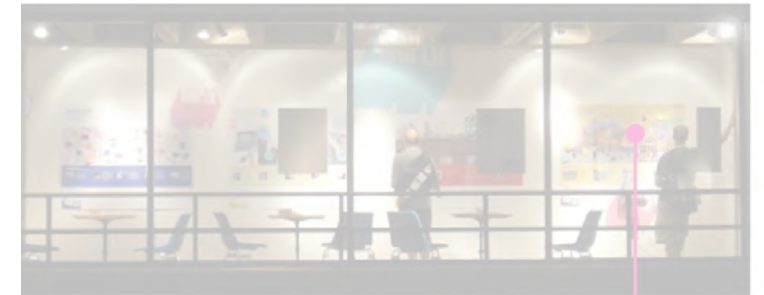
INSTALLATION 3:
Social Innovation Corner
(four films)

INSTALLATION 5:
Amplification by Design: four
social innovation scenarios for
the LES

Installation 3:
Social Innovation Corner (films)

A closer look at the research with garden members led us to identify creative solutions for everyday life that members had developed, as well as four main challenges or areas of unmet needs. Parsons students designed four short videos with stories about local demands, unmet needs and existing innovative solutions in the neighborhood related to each of the four areas. The videos are summarize on the next page.

In this section the public could use cards to answer the questions: "How can social innovation make a difference on the Lower East Side? What are the main issues at stake?"

How to take care of the elderly
Traditional forms of support like senior centers are receiving fewer resources from the government. How can we take this problem as an opportunity to rethink senior-focused services on the Lower East Side?
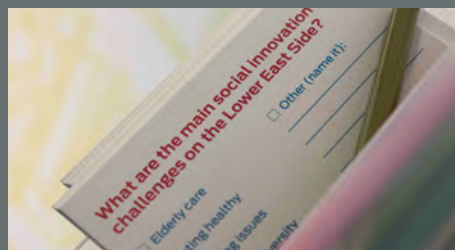
How to eat healthy
Obesity, diabetes, and health issues related to food are a national and local challenge. How can we make the community's alternative food systems such as urban agriculture, food co-ops, and community supported agriculture groups more accessible to the entire Lower East Side population?

How to improve housing and home services
With the pressure of gentrification, living on the Lower East Side is becoming more and more difficult to afford. And community bonds are fraying. Can we imagine collaborative services that respond to these challenges?

How to benefit from our cultural diversity
The Lower East Side has historically been a melting pot of the most diverse communities, accommodating people from all over the world. How can we transform this wealth of cultures into a productive celebration rather than a community characterized by language barriers and separation?
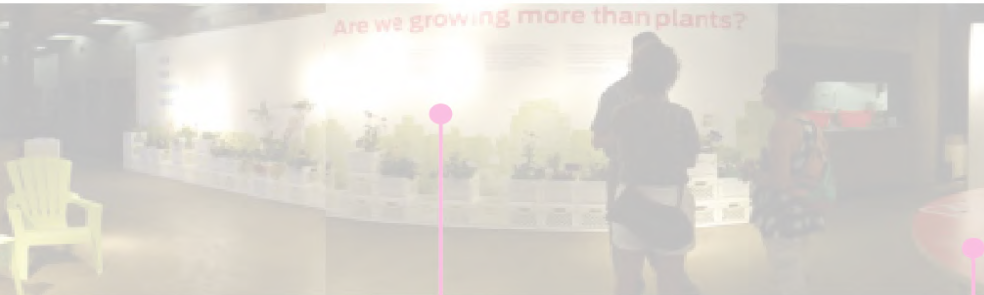
INSTALLATION 1:
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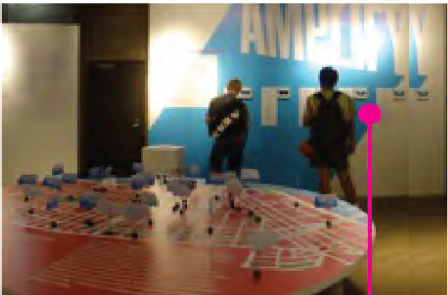
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Worldwide (iPods)

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(four films)

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Amplification by Design: four
social innovation scenarios for
the LES

Installation 4:
Creative Communities Worldwide (iPods)

In this section, visitors were invited to browse through international stories displayed on wall-mounted iPods to learn from their successes and choose ones that could be started up on the Lower East Side. A selection of case studies from global projects provided an international perspective on existing social innovation concepts and Creative Communities worldwide, from cities in Italy, South Africa, The Netherlands, Brazil, China and many others. Each of the five iPods contained a sequence of 12 case studies of one of the five categories: transforming public space, enabling entrepreneurship, caring for people, bonding and bridging, and promoting cultural empowerment.

The question to the public was: "Should we be doing something like this here on the Lower East Side?" A voting system using stickers allowed the public to select the most inspiring international case studies.

Users browsing through the cases and using the voting system with stickers.

INSTALLATION 1:
Lower East Side Community
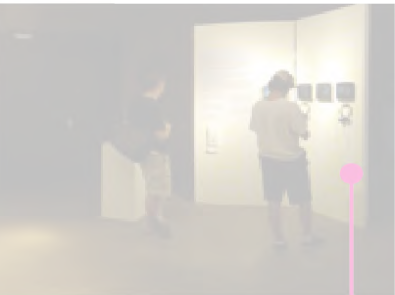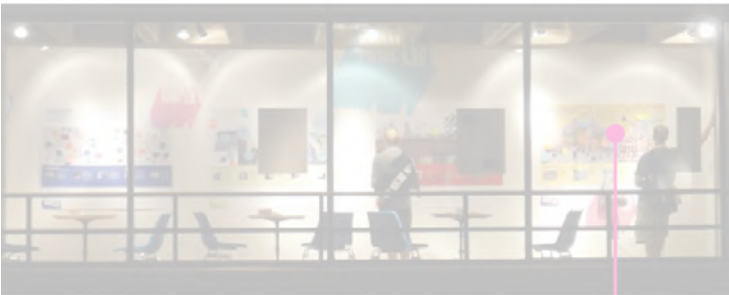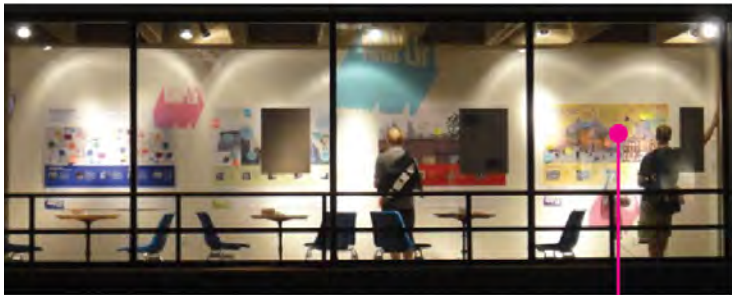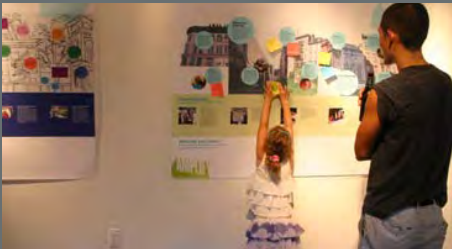Gardens Wall

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INSTALLATION 4:
Creative Communities
Worldwide (iPods)

INSTALLATION 3:
Social Innovation Corner
(four films)

INSTALLATION 5:
Amplification by Design: four
social innovation scenarios for
the LES

Installation 5:
Amplification by Design: four social innovation scenarios for the Lower East Side

Scenarios are tools to stimulate a conversation about the future. They are specially constructed stories about different possible ideas, aimed at deliberately exploring alternative futures and understanding their implications, presented as informal visual narratives, with tentative strategies to solve a given problem).

Following the research synthesized through the four short films showed on the INSTALLATION 3: Social Innovation Corner, students in the course ("Amplify! Social Innovation"2) produced the Scenarios for New Collaborative Services shown in this installation. Students were asked to develop scenarios made of a cluster of three to five service ideas that responded to the mix of demands and examples of existing cases of social innovation/urban activism. The development process spanned through several weeks during the months of June, July and August and involved various iterations with project partners IDEO.

The scenarios were exhibited through posters in the small gallery space. The installation was designed to collect feedbacks from the exhibition public through post-its. The students collected these comments and re-worked their ideas accordingly. The scenarios were further debated on the Design Workshop on August 10th, when students presented their scenarios and participants discussed their feasibility, usability, adequacy to local conditions, hypothesizing about possible features of each proposal. The scenarios have focused on the four areas identified earlier:

· Taking care of the elderly
· Eating Healthy
· Retaining Cultural Diversity
· Living Together (Housing and Home Services)
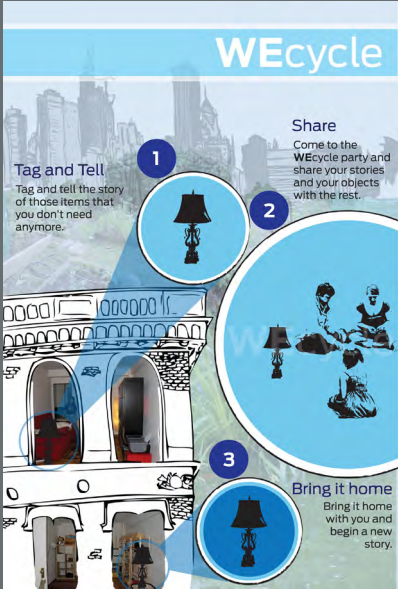
One of the examples of the tool-kit that was developed during the workshop with IDEO.

Image of Interactive 3-D Green Map Table that gathered responses from the pubic on social innovation in their community.

Community garden installation.

The exhibition at Abrons Art Center represented an important channel for discussing our project hypotheses with the local community. The DESIS Lab team analyzed the data collected in the exhibition, which resulted in the following research findings. Nevertheless, some initial findings are worthwhile mentioning, as follows.

The installation that generated the most response from the public was the Interactive 3-D Green Map Table (INSTALLATION 2). The rationale behind this installation was first to help us verify the understanding of the concept of Creative Community by the public, second to enlarge our initial collection of existing initiatives in the neighborhood and finally to create a sense of awareness and encouragement among the residents (assuming that if they knew more about these initiatives they could possibly engage with them or start a new one, inspired by what they learned).

Our team has transcribed and analyzed the responses from the PUBLIC's eight main categories of interest: Public Space, Businesses, Education Initiatives, Advocacy Groups, Food Initiatives, Housing and Charity. The top category, with 17 cases identified by the visitors was in the field of 'Arts and Culture' highlighting the close association that the visitors perceive between culture, arts and social innovation on the Lower East Side. The public has mentioned a great variety of cases from established cultural organizations to more independent groups, and a diverse set of manifestations including the preservation of cultural heritage, new forms of experimental artistic organizations and the empowerment of particular ethnic groups. A notable case is the Bullet Space, an abandoned and burned-out East Village tenement in the 80's, squatted by poets, performers, anarchists and artists who renovated the building. In 2009, the city gave legal ownership to the squatters and the official status of a Manhattan co-op to the building.

The Public Space category was the second largest group identified, with Community Gardens representing 30 percent of the cases (matching many gardens represented in Installation 1). Most notable in this category is the Neighborhood Preservation Center (an organization dedicated to facilitate and encourage citizen participation) that offers offices, meeting areas, an online resource database and a library to support the development of other organizations concerned with the preservation and improvement of the urban environment.

The third largest category is Businesses. Deeper research is needed to validate the cases within this group in terms of social responsibility or sustainable innovation. Here visitors pointed to a variety of cases such as an independent bookseller, a barbershop, a skate shop and an architectural firm.

In the Education category, The Cornelia Connelly Center stood as a good example of an organization concerned with inclusiveness and education for low-income communities. On the Lower East Side, our research found other organizations dedicated to these issues such as the Lower Eastside Girls Club, which was created to address the historic lack of services available to girls and young women in the neighborhood.

Another case that looked particularly interesting to us was The Trade School, a project supported by an organization called About OurGoods: a community of artists, designers, and cultural producers, which was created to barter skills, spaces, and objects and help independent projects to be developed. The Trade School project for example turns storefront spaces into platforms for learning and a place where artists and other experts can teach others in exchange for basic items.

In the Advocacy category, we discovered a variety of cases with organizations supporting groups with special interest aimed at influencing the public opinion or policymakers from sustainability and environmental awareness to the defense of workers and immigrants' rights.

In the Food category, the community gardens appeared once

AMPLIFY

more as a major social innovation driver reinforcing our hypothesis that members from these communities are also involved in other socially innovative activities as in the case of the Green Oasis Community Garden where members cook and eat the food grown in the garden together.

The category of Housing presents a small number of cases even if the neighborhood has been suffering the negative effects of gentrification in recent years.

Lastly, and, surprisingly to us, the category with the least cases are related to Charity considering the existence of many philanthropic networks supporting low-income residents and immigrants in the area including the Henry Street Settlement, the historic not-for-profit social service agency where the Amplify exhibition was held. On the other hand we can assume that the visitors interpreted correctly our message that social innovation is not necessarily related to extreme social problems or poverty, but to creativity, culture and sustainability.

As in the first collection of cases developed by students in the project preparatory phase the majority of activities identified by the visitors included more structured organizations, non-profits and businesses and less small groups operating in more informal ways. An attempt to quantify the relationship between the informality and formality of these operations revealed that only one case showed an activity developed in completely disenfranchised way, where most of the cases identified were already operating regularly, legally established and recognizable. A deeper investigation on all the cases would be necessary to evaluate them from an organizational perspective and their innovativeness and responsiveness to social challenges.

In brief, the analysis of the data collected during the exhibition shows:
• The crowdsourcing method turned out to be a very effective way to capture the voice of the community, gathering circa 60 responses. It also proved to be very effective in the identification of specific organizations and initiatives that the public retained as important vehicles or manifestations of social innovation.

• The larger amount of cases belonging to the Arts and Culture category demonstrates the close association that the visitors perceive between culture, arts and social innovation on the Lower East Side.

• Community Gardens appeared once more as a major social innovation driver on the Lower East Side reinforcing our hypothesis that members from these communities are also involved in other socially innovative activities.
• Weaker signals of innovation are difficult to capture. Informal but innovative activities developed by smaller groups are still hidden from the general public and continue to work in disenfranchised ways. Visitors interpreted correctly our message that social innovation is not necessarily related to extreme social problems or poverty, but to creativity, culture and sustainability as well.

• Innovation needs to be nurtured and would benefit from the support of existing organizations in the neighborhood that could connect them with more organizational resources and tools.

Amplifying Creative Communities North Brooklyn

In North Brooklyn

Lara Penin, Laura Forlano, Eduardo Staszowski

In the second year of the project, the Amplify team worked closely with a social scientist in order to conduct qualitative interviews with social innovators and activists in North Brooklyn. Specifically, in order to learn about social innovation in North Brooklyn, the Amplify team worked with ioby (in our backyards), an online micro-philanthropic organization that focuses on environmental issues, to identify people and organizations engaged in social innovation and activism in North Brooklyn. Between May and July 2011, the team conducted in-depth, one-hour interviews with 30 activists, entrepreneurs, policy makers and educators.

The interviews clustered around four main themes: local food, sharing economies, environmental well-being and alternative transportation. The Amplify team used these themes as the basis for the exhibition and the Amplify by Design workshop, which is described further on. Based on the methods and findings from the first iteration of the project, the team determined that the research results needed to be translated into a media format that is efficient in communicating personal narratives unearthed by the interviews.

Two teams of filmmakers reviewed the research material (including the interview transcripts and analysis) in order to produce four short films using their own sensibility to tell unique stories about the local social innovators. The filmmakers then conducted additional interviews with social innovators and activists while, at the same time, expanding the project by engaging subject experts crafting compelling new narratives.

Still images taken from videos that captured the four themes: local food, alternative transportation, environmental well-being, and the sharing economy.

The three workshops discussed here (Amplify by Design; Recipes for Change and Open Design) each explored the relationship with the community in different ways and at different levels of analysis. However, each workshop made a unique contribution from the perspective of using design methods to amplify social innovation.

In the case of the Amplify by Design workshop, we worked at the macro or neighborhood level, relying heavily on the extensive qualitative research, which revealed four areas of interest or themes through which social innovation is already occurring in North Brooklyn. The workshop itself was organized around a generative design process articulated around key consultation moments with community leaders and experts. For the Recipes for Change workshop, we worked at the micro or individual level, with the goal of streamlining an enabling toolkit for potential social innovators while at the same time creating an opportunity for sharing and networking between current and aspiring innovators. Finally, in the case of the Open Design workshop, we worked at the organizational level, based on a design brief that catered to the needs of the host institution, St. Nicks Alliance. In this case, the combination of multidisciplinary experts, in particular designers, social scientists and technologists was also unique.

Workshop
Amplify by Design

Workshop
Recipes for Change

Workshop
Open Design

☐ Groups / Themes
🟡 Design students
🟡 Student leaders
🔵 IDEO facilitators
🟢 Parsons faculty
🔴 Community leaders

5 days
40 hours
30 participants

☐ Groups
🟡 Local project leaders
🔵 New project leaders
🔴 Fundraising experts

1 days
6 hours
20 participants

☐ Groups / Themes
🟡 social scientists
🔵 Designers
🔴 Community Leaders

1 days
8 hours
35 participants

Comparative analysis of workshops in terms of participants and duration
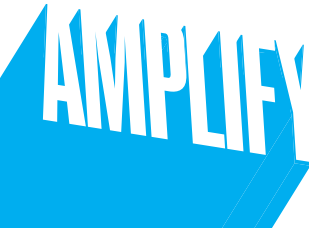
Amplify by Design Workshop

The first workshop, which was led by a team from the IDEO design consultancy in New York, involved graduate students in the MFA in Transdisciplinary Design program at Parsons The New School for Design as well as local community organization representatives. The students were challenged to design scenarios, service ideas, toolkits, and policy recommendations around the areas of social innovation identified in the exhibition.

The narratives from the field research were synthesized in short videos, which were essential to help the project team frame the broader design briefs that were used to launch the workshop.

Images from the workshop, Amplify by Design

Theme	Design brief
Theme 1: Amplifying Healthy and Local Food Initiatives Access to fresh, locally produced, and chemical-free food is becoming a priority for many families. There are many interesting sustainable food initiatives in the North Brooklyn neighborhood: a thriving farmers market, cooking clubs, community supported agriculture group, community gardens, composting initiatives, restaurants sourcing local and organic produce.	How can these initiatives inspire us and help us amplify the access to healthy and local food in North Brooklyn?
Theme 2: Amplifying Sharing Economies Sharing is about optimizing the use of existing resources. It is a phenomenon that is quickly spreading throughout Williamsburg and Greenpoint. It is challenging and transforming the way people live, work and consume. Not only do sharing initiatives reduce environmental impact but they also strengthen social ties within the community. North Brooklynites share spaces for living and working as well as sharing their skills and resources to save money and the environment.	How can we amplify the idea of sharing so that more people can benefit from it and improve the quality of their lives and the neighborhood as a whole?
Theme 3: Amplifying Environmental Well-being North Brooklyn is a place in transformation. This once industrial and manufacturing powerhouse is quickly becoming predominantly residential. However, the legacy of its industrial past still lingers with both positive and negative implications. Urban activists in the community are fighting for more open and green spaces, proposing solutions for vacant lots and dilapidated structures; and, advocating for the revitalization of the waterfront.	How can we amplify our capacity to influence the transformation of the city and give the community the tools to voice their opinions and concerns?
Theme 4: Amplifying Alternative Transportation With a growing population and saturated public transportation services, people are looking for alternative modes of transportation that keep our streets clean, calm and safe. North Brooklyn has a bicycle culture of its own that manifests across different cultures, whether they are Latino, orthodox Jewish or hipster. There are bike clubs, bike repair classes, bike racks, bike rentals and even vending machines for bike parts. These initiatives demonstrate how the neighborhood is open to embrace smarter solutions.	How can we amplify and diversify sustainable modes of transportation?

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Recipes for Change Workshop

The second workshop, which was led by ioby, involved community representatives who were invited to test a toolkit designed for community groups wanting to launch sustainable innovation projects. The "Recipes for Change" toolkit enables community leaders to propose and implement sustainable initiatives in their neighborhood. The toolkit contains stories from different projects and project leaders have contributed by describing the initiation of their idea, the fundraising process they went through, lessons learned, challenges and obstacles they went through their project implementation. The Recipes for Change toolkit is an amplification mechanism per se, and the workshop have gathered people with ideas but who haven't started yet to formalize a project with others who already have a project in place.

Images from the workshop, Recipe for Change

Images from the workshop, Recipes for Change

Open Design for Organizational Innovation Workshop

The Open Design workshop was as part of a National Science Foundation-funded research project on "Design Collaboration as Sociotechnical Systems" at Cornell University. The purpose of the workshop was to bring together 30 designers, social scientists and practitioners to use design methods in order to address the organizational challenges of the St. Nick's Alliance. This workshop incorporated the idea of open design, which is about bringing non-designers and end-users into the design process for the purpose of creating accessible, available and sharable ideas. Open design is the application of forms of organizing based on open source and creative commons to the design process in order to generate ideas that can be widely shared and used (van Abel et al., 2011).

This workshop employed ethnographic research and a scavenger hunt in the neighborhood surrounding the St. Nick's Alliance in order to engage participants in thinking about the mission and vision of the St. Nick's Alliance, and how it is embodied in parts of the neighborhood. Workshop participants were asked to form teams of two to three people, partnering with individuals from other disciplines as indicated by the different colored dots. Participants were encouraged to take on the role of a local stakeholder (i.e. resident, parent, homeless, local business, local politician etc.) in preparation for the design challenge in the afternoon. Each team had one hour to explore the neighborhood, documenting their team's journey with photos, notes, sketches and artifacts that they encountered along the way.

The design challenge focused on the following four themes: Telling Our Story, Staying Connected, Finding and Mobilizing Resources and Engaging End-Users. One working group of five to seven people was created for each theme, and each working group had one facilitator with training in design methods as

well as an observer with training in social science methods to document the process with notes, audio, video, photos and artifacts. Groups were asked to use brainstorming and prototyping to create one idea that addressed the design challenge. Specifically, the groups were charged with considering the ways in which St. Nick's might create transformative organizational changes in order to address their challenges. Groups had approximately 45 minutes to one hour for each of the following three phases: brainstorming, prototyping and finalizing their ideas. At the end of the workshop, groups were asked to present their results in a three minute presentation in one of the following formats: 3-minute skit, video or script; storyboard, scenario, blueprint or customer journey map; map, sketch or set of photos, and/or a short written statement. The materials created during the workshop were contributed to the exhibition at the end of the day.

Images from the workshop, Open Design for Organizational Innovation.

Images from the workshop, Open Design for Organizational Innovation

4 Evaluation, Lessons Learned, and Insights

Lara Penin, Laura Forlano, Eduardo Staszowski

Project Evaluation:
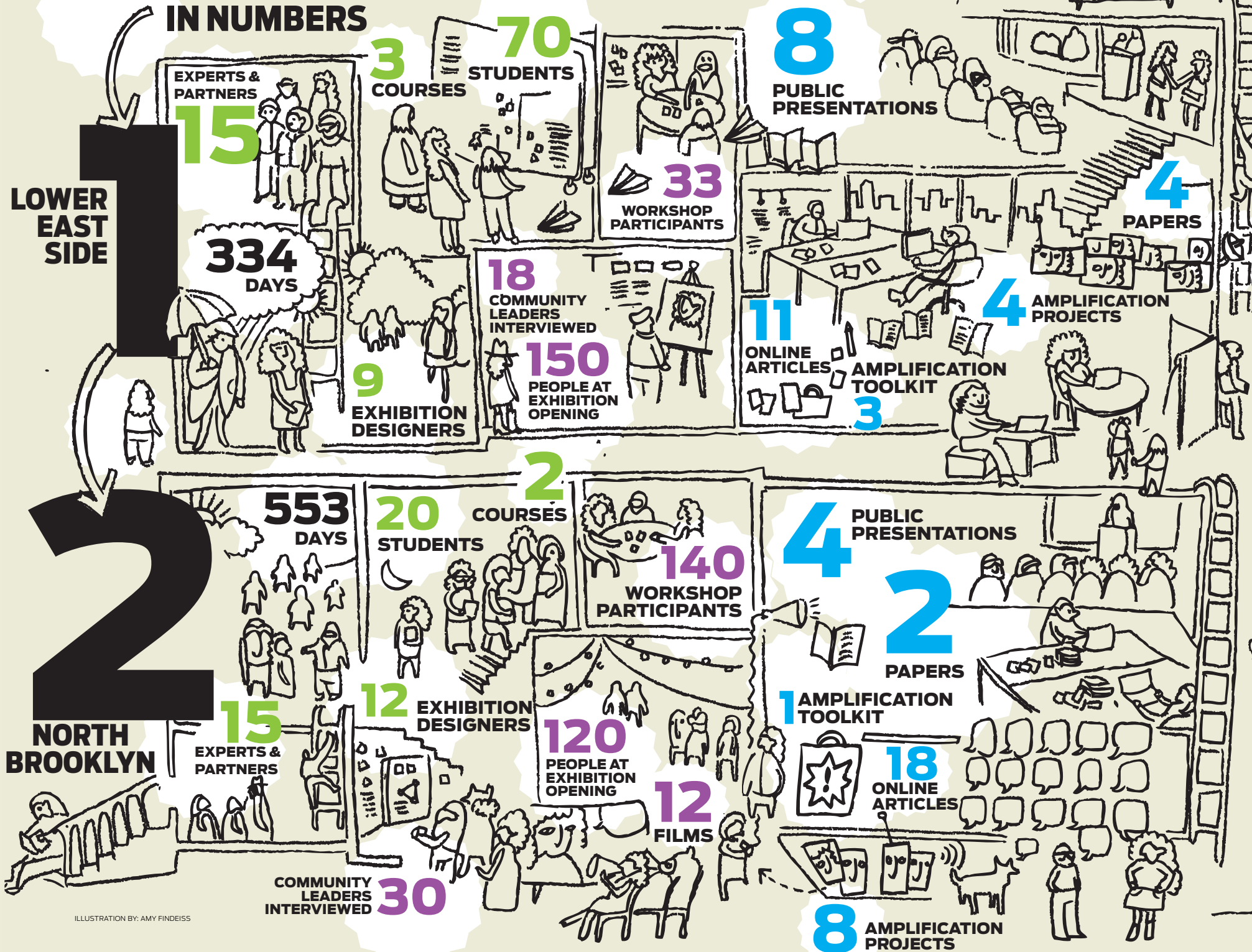### Quantitative And Qualitative Assessment

To measure the effectiveness and outcome of this project, it is essential to refer back to our original objectives, which were "to strengthen and multiply existing small group neighborhoods sustainability projects as incubators of creative ways to live more sustainably."

The hypothesis was that if we are to "ensure that NYC remains the cultural hub that it is today, New Yorkers will need to find creative ways of living more sustainably." And instead of previous flawed sustainability campaigns, the Amplify model proposed "a community-outreach model that strengthens and multiplies EXISTING sustainable initiatives drawn from WITHIN local neighborhoods." The amplification model described in the project proposal would "unfold in three phases: 1.) Interactive Public Exhibition; 2.) Mapping Local Cases; 3.) Design Strategies Workshop (to craft service-design toolkits to facilitate ongoing implementation by non-profits within each of the neighborhoods)."

Determining the project effectiveness and success requires quantitative and qualitative analysis of specific phases/ actions carried out as part of the amplification model in the two different neighborhoods (Lower East Side in Manhattan, and Williamsburg and Greenpoint in North Brooklyn).
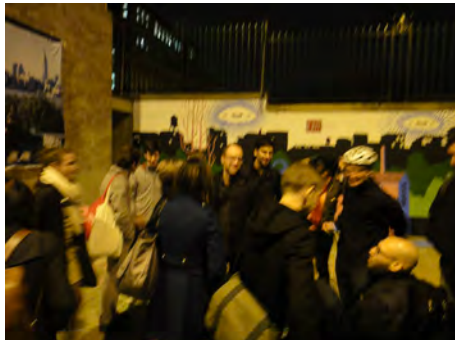
AMPLIFY
IN NUMBERS

4 FILMS

3 COURSES

70 STUDENTS

8 PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

1 LOWER EAST SIDE

EXPERTS & PARTNERS **15**

334 DAYS

33 WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

4 PAPERS

18 COMMUNITY LEADERS INTERVIEWED

150 PEOPLE AT EXHIBITION OPENING

9 EXHIBITION DESIGNERS

11 ONLINE ARTICLES

3 AMPLIFICATION TOOLKIT

4 AMPLIFICATION PROJECTS

2 NORTH BROOKLYN

553 DAYS

20 STUDENTS

2 COURSES

140 WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

4 PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

2 PAPERS

1 AMPLIFICATION TOOLKIT

18 ONLINE ARTICLES

15 EXPERTS & PARTNERS

12 EXHIBITION DESIGNERS

120 PEOPLE AT EXHIBITION OPENING

12 FILMS

30 COMMUNITY LEADERS INTERVIEWED

8 AMPLIFICATION PROJECTS

ILLUSTRATION BY: AMY FINDEISS

Exhibition opening in the Lower East Side in August 2010

Exhibition opening in North Brooklyn in November 2011.

One of the films documenting a personal narrative.

We propose a quantitative assessment based on measuring the three phases/actions for each neighborhood/year by looking at some basic numbers. We have specifically looked at numbers that will evidence public participation and engagement as well as dissemination through different channels as a way to determine if the project reached its objectives and to what extent.

We understand that the numbers can help prove the project success but need to be articulated in a broader qualitative perspective, in relation to specific aspects of the project, as we propose on the next page.

High number of visitors in both exhibitions. The numbers on the illustration may not signify much alone but pictures below show that both galleries were considerable full of visitors, with peaks of public in the first hour of the openings. The number of visitors in the North Brooklyn exhibition was slightly lower than the first one in the Lower East Side. One has to consider location (Manhattan versus Brooklyn) as well as season (summer in the first year versus fall in the second) when comparing the two numbers, leading to the conclusion of comparable results in terms of public traffic, and in both cases, successful public exhibitions.

Moving from just mapping creative communities to mapping and documenting them through films based on personal narratives. Mapping is a powerful tool for populations gaining knowledge about their own territories. We have indeed recognized this through the partnership with Green Map System, an organization doing just that very successfully for many years all over the world.

In addition to mapping, we identified a new opportunity in terms of casting light on creative communities and making their voices heard by a larger audience. Short documentary films collecting personal stories of local social change emerged

as an incredible powerful tool to amplify positive social change and create environmental awareness. The project has in fact invested (in the second year) in the production of such films and uploaded them online as a main channel for diffusion. Many online articles have embedded the films in their own websites, demonstrating a successful diffusion of the films.

High number and high profile workshop participants. In the project first year in the LES, a single workshop was promoted at which students presented ideas for new sustainable ideas/scenarios in the LES to a public comprising mostly designers as well as some residents. A final plenary session was conducted with a lively debate around LES most pressing issues and on how to incorporate new ideas and diffuse success stories. The main challenge was to assure participation of community representatives. The results of the workshop were good on their own and the main lesson learned was to refine the orchestration of participants and workshop objectives. This lesson learned informed the development of a much more refined version of workshops for the second iteration of the project in North Brooklyn. Instead of a single workshop, Amplify North Brooklyn promoted five different workshops, each one exploring different local challenges and bringing different groups of participants tailored to each workshop question/approach. That ensured a much more focused action and meaningful results.

Developing toolkits that build upon successful stories. In the second year of the project, we partnered with the non-profit organization ioby, in order to develop the amplification toolkit. The toolkit "Recipes for Change" is available online and builds on ioby's success and expertise on promoting small local projects. The toolkit comprises of a collection of initiatives and projects that were implemented thanks to ioby's support in raising funds, project design and implementation. In addition, it contains a step-by-step guide to help new social-environmental entrepreneurs to start-up their own project. The purpose of the workshop was to refine the toolkit and test it

Image from Amplify by Design Workshop.

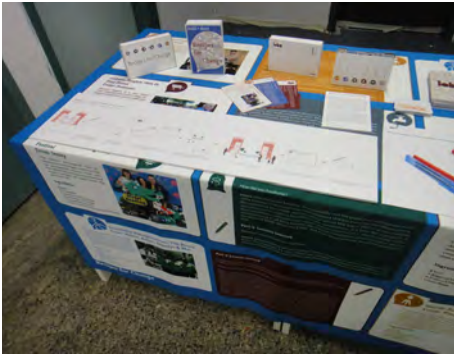Image from Open Design for Organizational Innovation.

Image of IOBY tool-kit, "Recipes for Change" used during the workshop.

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Various articles written by Amplify Team

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Public recognition and dissemination of the Amplification
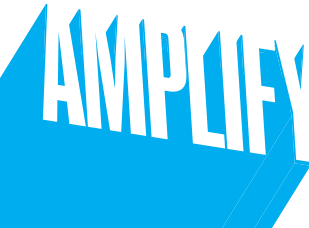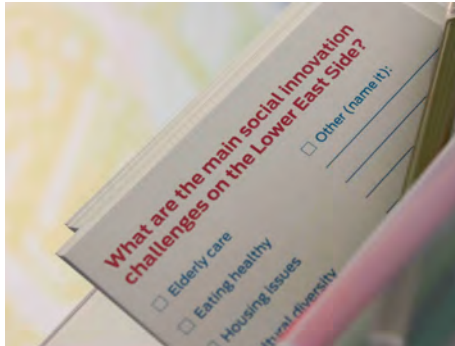
Low-tech index cards used for public engagement.

Image from visiting community gardens in the Lower East Side.

model. Over the past two years, members of the Amplify team have given public talks in New York, and in different cities in the country and internationally; written both scientific and non-scientific articles. The Amplify project was mentioned and cited in different online publications and public venues. Overall, the Amplification model has been validated by its peers as an effective design-driven approach to promote and catalyze social change.

Lessons Learned from the First Iteration

DESIS Lab believes that the results of the project Year 1 were extremely positive and satisfactory, with clear tangible results such as the exhibition, website, design workshop and digital maps. Some important lessons learned from the first year can be highlighted:

Interactive exhibition: a voice to the community

The exhibition held on the Lower East Side was designed as a research and awareness tool, an instrument to communicate with the local community and prompt a dialogue about its own understanding of social innovation and sustainability and how these can improve the community's wellbeing and livability. This dialogue was extremely rich and rewarding. The public has shown that it wants to voice its ideas, it just need proper vehicles.

In particular, the crowdsourcing method turned out to be a very effective way to capture the voice of the community, and very effective in the identification of specific organizations and initiatives that the public retained as important vehicles or manifestations of social innovation.

Interactive tools: the right combination of low tech and high tech to optimize participation

The use of the right interaction tools was essential for a successful public engagement. The exhibition used both low
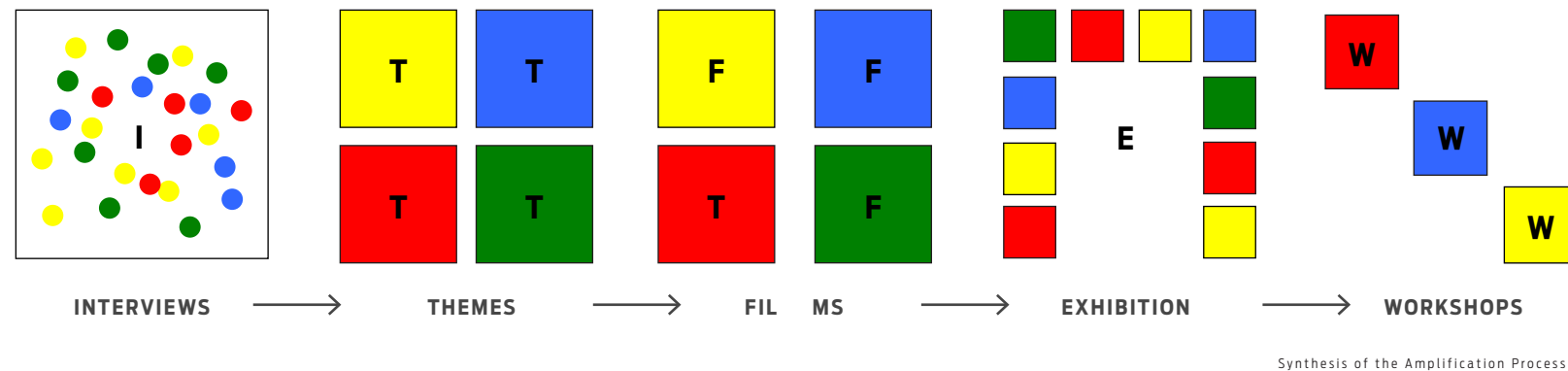
tech (e.g. index cards) and high tech (e.g. iPods) interactive features so to enable the participation of people from various ages and backgrounds. Nevertheless, the low-tech interactive table map and its index cards was the most successful interaction tool. The public was less responsive with the films (where we had similar cards asking the public their opinions about the videos).

The exhibition venue: the right mix of history, prestige and dynamism

The Abrons Art Center at the Henry Street Settlement was the perfect venue for our exhibition not only for its excellent physical installations but mostly because of its importance for the neighborhood. Abrons has been carrying out a long tradition of offering social service and arts programming to Lower Manhattan. The support from the Abrons team and infrastructure was essential to guarantee the success of the exhibition.

The tip of the iceberg approach: Social Innovation and Community Gardens on the Lower East Side

The investigation approach was based on the hypothesis that community gardens were the "tip of the iceberg" of social innovation in the area. The very nature of the community gardens, based on collaborative work among its members (as a general rule, community gardens members contribute to the maintenance of the garden in return to membership) would prompt other kinds of collaborative behavior and lifestyles among its members, gardeners were more likely to partake in other kinds of collaborative activity. By following the leads from the community gardens, we identified some specific areas of interest of social innovation on the LES (Taking Care of the Elderly, Eating Healthy, Retaining Cultural Diversity, Housing/ Collaborative Home Services). In addition, it was essential to establish a direct conversation with the public (through the interactive exhibition) to unveil other equally important social innovation areas such as the field of 'Arts and Culture' highlighting the close association that the visitors perceive between culture, arts and social innovation on the Lower East Side.

AMPLIFY

Synthesis of the Amplification Process

INTERVIEWS → **THEMES** → **FIL MS** → **EXHIBITION** → **WORKSHOPS**

Insights about the Amplification Model from the Second Iteration

This project makes a number of important contributions to the practice of design for social innovation as illustrated by our methodology. First, we argue that engaging a multidisciplinary team including social scientists, designers and filmmakers is critical to the data collection, analysis and construction of a compelling narrative about social innovation. Second, we argue that the creation of an exhibition as a studio environment situates the workshop in the midst of the data and narratives from the field research. Third, we argue that emerging technologies such as mobile and wireless technologies are integral to engaging participants in the exhibition and supporting the role of design for social innovation

Multidisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity

The decision to approach this project from a multidisciplinary perspective featured into the process in two ways. First, the methodology relied on a close relationship between a social scientist and designers. And, second, the workshops convened multidisciplinary groups with the purpose of exploring new approaches to design methods.

Our decision to engage a multidisciplinary team that included social scientists, designers and filmmakers in the second year of the project had a number of significant advantages from the perspective of understanding the local context and storytelling about social innovation in North Brooklyn. While it was considerably more time and resource intensive, the thirty in-depth qualitative interviews allowed for the creation of a rich data set of compelling narratives around the four themes. This is because by conducting one-hour interviews rather than the

shorter interviews that are more common in design research, the team had a much larger corpus of data with which to work. Through the research process, team members were challenged to view the interviews from a number of different perspectives. From the social science perspective, the interviews described and allowed for a deeper understanding of the people, processes and contexts at work in the realm of social innovation in North Brooklyn. As a result, the project is well-equipped to make contributions to scholarship about social innovation. From the design perspective, the interviews opened up opportunities for amplification of existing social processes and possibilities for social innovation, which were illustrated in the exhibition. Specifically, the interviews were used in the Amplify by Design workshop as a basis for the development of four new design projects. From the filmmakers' perspective, the interviews allowed for the construction of a compelling narrative, which was used as the basis for a series of short films. As a project, the objectives, goals and lens of analysis shifted throughout the process of data collection, analysis and storytelling.

In addition, the Open Design workshop was deeply interdisciplinary in that roughly one half of the participants were social scientists and one half were designers. In this workshop, social scientists, who for the most part, are not trained in design methods were engaged in the process of designing solutions that responding to a design challenge about organizational innovation. However, social scientists do have deep knowledge about the ways in which organizations communicate and coordinate information as well as the constraints on the generation of new ideas and solutions to problems that face non-profit organizations such as lack of time and resources, which was important for situating the work of designers.
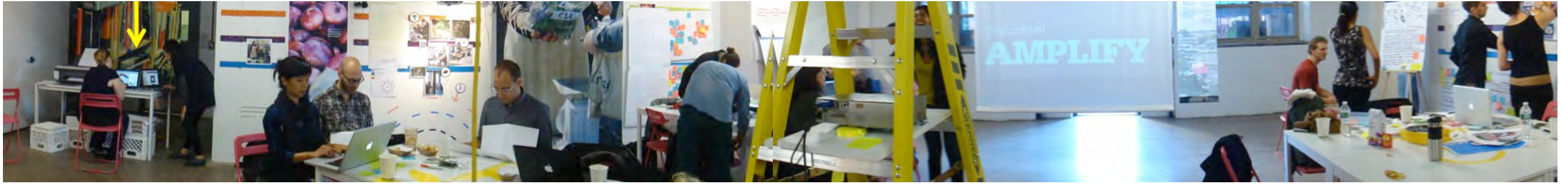
The studio space in use during the workshop Amplify by Design

Exhibition as Studio

IMAGE: BEN FERRARI

IMAGE: SARA SOFFER

In contrast with Amplify Lower East Side, Amplify North Brooklyn wanted to expand and multiply the modalities through each engagement with local community. One of the main design strategies used by Amplify North Brooklyn to engage communities and stakeholders was the concept of "exhibition as studio". The exhibition space was conceived as a stage on which the sequence of workshops happened. Their processes and results were incorporated in the space that as a consequence kept evolving throughout the two weeks that it was open to the public.

In fact the exhibition/studio space is the application of a service design approach into community engagement by setting the stage and orchestrating the activities for interactions to happen, e.g. engaging and focusing different communities and stakeholders around specific objectives. We may define the exhibition/studio space as design for social innovation

The contextual research mentioned above is the result of data collected and synthesized beforehand presented through a combination of images, films and text (see Figures 7 and 8) and constitutes a first layer of content/data on which was presented through a combination of images, films and text and that constitutes a first layer of content in which participants were immersed and that they helped transform. As a result, the exhibition per se can only be defined as an event in constant state of emergence, never solidifying its content but rather allowing and actually depending on its constant transformation and re-interpretation by its ever-changing audience/participants/makers. It only exists when people occupy its space and utilizes it as an envelope for conversation.

Documentation becomes then a critical component of the process since only through systematic documentation the impact of the many activities/workshops can multiply its ephemeral and experiential nature. The Amplify team commissioned videos covering each of the workshops that occurred at the exhibition space and the organizations involved are using this material to advance their conversations for example through the analysis of the projects generated during the workshops.

IMAGE: SARA SOFFER
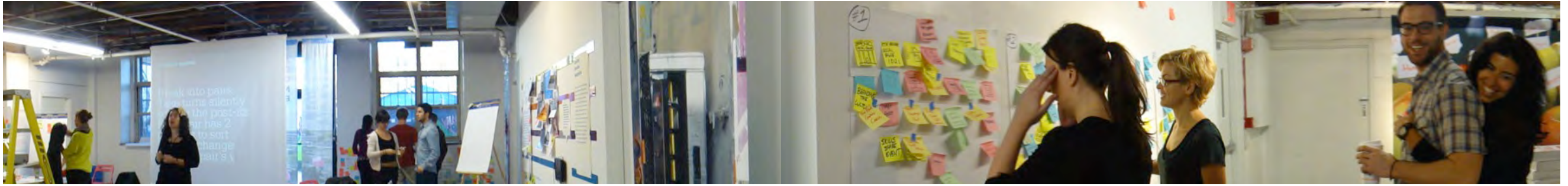
Amplify exhibition is a platform for design research. It curates some contextual research and presents it in a way that mobilizes it as the focus for a series of workshops with social service system design experts and local community representatives. As propositions emerge from those workshops, they are incorporated into the exhibition, and only at the conclusion of the exhibition-as-platform are there 'results.'

Main features of the "exhibition as studio" at Arts @ Renaissance, the community art space at St. Nicks Alliance.

Emerging Technologies

Emerging technologies have great potential to engage participants and support the role of design for social innovation. Specifically, while new media art galleries have long employed digital technology to engage participants as an integral part of their exhibitions, larger, more established institutions such as the Modern Museum of Art (MOMA) in New York have only recently begun to incorporate technology into their displays for the purpose of allowing audiences to interact with art pieces. For example, the MOMA's "Talk to Me" show, which opened in June 2011, included a pre-exhibition website for the contribution of ideas as well as QR codes and Twitter hashtags for individual art pieces.

With these trends in mind, we see three opportunities for emerging technologies in supporting design for social innovation in relation to this project. Specifically, we would like to discuss the ways in which emerging technology was used in the following contexts: during the workshops, after the exhibition and in future design for social innovation projects. First, during the Open Design workshop, participants were challenged to use social media to take pictures of the neighborhood and post them on Twitter with the hashtag #odoi11 as part of a scavenger hunt. Teams were asked to post comments and photos about the neighborhood that represented a series of themes related to the St. Nick's mission including family, home, economic development, opportunity, culture, community and sustainability. Despite the fact that it was raining, teams took advantage of the opportunity to explore the neighborhood, taking hundreds of photos and posting an interesting stream of tagged comments and images on Twitter. When participants returned to the workshop, the Twitterstream was projected onto a large screen so that everyone could share their experiences from the ethnographic research and walking tour in North Brooklyn.

Second, after the exhibition, digital platforms were used to archive an online representation of the exhibition. Finally, we expect that emerging technologies will play an important role as touchpoints and interaction channels in future design for

social innovation projects. In particular, future iterations of the Amplify project might explore the design of enabling systems to connect citizens, promote information/knowledge sharing, and community location-based reporting to improve the success of community groups to collaborate among themselves and the city.

IMAGE: BEN FERRARI

Images of various technological devices utilized during the Amplify Exhibitions.

IPODs utilized to display various creative community case studies around the world.

Spin-offs

Parsons DESIS Lab concludes the Amplify project with the strong belief that it has produced excellent impact in the sociocultural panorama of the city. We are thankful to the Rockefeller Foundation, which without its support this project would not have been possible. We started this project with the idea that the city shelters a multiplicity of positive micro-realities that if leveraged and connected can help leveraging social innovation as a powerful force towards positive sociocultural change. The project results lead us to believe that this was a good hypothesis. And Amplify wanted to demonstrate that it was possible to ignite social change through design.

From the community engagement perspective, the amplification model demonstrates the validity of a contextualized approach that looks at specific communities and neighborhood and speaks to their own existing strengths and capabilities. It also demonstrates the ways in which capturing and disseminating local voices and stories can be a powerful knowledge-sharing tool as well as its effectiveness in promoting situations such as workshops and exhibitions where local connections can be made.

From a design perspective, the amplification model demonstrates innovative uses of design capacities to orchestrate and implement such extraordinary situations, events and experiences that are conducive to productive interaction. And how classic modalities such as exhibitions can be shaped towards new uses such as in "exhibition as research" and "exhibition as community studio".

Finally, as next steps for the amplification model, Parsons DESIS Lab is currently launching two new initiatives/ spin-offs that derive directly from this project, which are described below.

Project Title: Amplify Soundview
Project outline: Over the last several years, New York City has focused on improving water quality and revitalizing the waterfront for public and private use. However, not every neighborhood has received equal attention and resources. Parsons DESIS Lab will work with City Parks Foundation (CPF)

through Partnerships for Parks, a public/private program with the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation, in order to involve the local community in stewardship and conservation of their waterfront open spaces around the Soundview Park in the Bronx where there is little local recognition of the Long Island Sound as a resource, minimal access to the water, and limited access to funds that could improve the waterfront. Building on the Amplifying Creative Communities project methodologies Parsons DESIS Lab will contribute to the design and organization of activities within a community-wide festival at Soundview Park and help individuals and organizations to become leaders in their communities and support the revitalization of neighborhood public space. The project will start with a studio course within Parsons Transdisciplinary Design MFA course in fall 2012. In this project, Parsons DESIS Lab team and students will collaborate with CPF and the MIT Mobile Experience Lab (part of the DESIS Network) to explore the use of emerging technologies for storytelling, mapping and community location-based reporting.

Project Title: Public and Collaborative NYC
Public and Collaborative NYC (http://nyc.pubcollab.org) is a program of activities developed by Parsons DESIS Lab to explore how public services in New York City can be improved by incorporating greater collaboration of New Yorkers in the design and delivery of services.
Public & Collaborative NYC is grounded on the assumption that New Yorkers, especially as they become ever more connected, can collaborate with each other and with government to improve their lives. In partnership with the Public Policy Lab (PPL), a New York City nonprofit dedicated to improving the delivery of public services, and the New York City Department of Housing Preservation & Development (HPD) we will explore ways to facilitate the involvement of community residents in the development of housing-related services in neighborhoods with significant public and private sector investment leveraged by HPD.
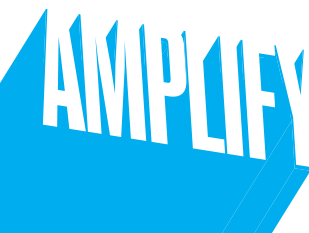
AMPLIFY

Amplify's Contribution to Design

and Social Innovation *

Cameron Tonkinwise

Social Design is an absurd term that nonetheless circulates widely. It is absurd because it assumes that there is such a thing as asocial design. While there certainly is a lot of antisocial design (designs that do social harm to their producers or waste receivers, and sometimes even their users), the fact that any successful design is going be used by people makes it inherently social. This is why designers are constantly being lectured by 'design thinkers' to spend as much time studying people practicing everyday life in their natural (built) environments as designers usually spend crafting materials in blessed isolation. When it tries to refer to a particular kind of designing, Social Design seems to refer to two kinds of projects:

Co-Designed Social Solutions
Heightened sensitivity to the particularities of the communities impacted by social problems and solutions has promoted the idea that designers should work more closely with those communities in the ideation phase as well. Participatory design again is not new, having been developed as a process in relation to architecture more than 2 decades ago, but there has been a resurgence of participatory design in relation to interaction design, and it has moved into a different context through crowd-sourcing.

Different again, but very important in relation to social innovation-based design is when the communities facing social problems innovate their own solutions. The role of the

* Article originally published in Core77.

designer is then one of making existing lay designs more robust (by making them more efficient, convenient and/or elegant; sometimes also more financially sustainable), and either scaling them up for larger application or translating them for replication in other contexts. Again, the politics of these 'amplifications' can be complicated, as one particular people's ideas are 'industrialized' by being redesigned for others to adopt.

Design-Engabled Social Innovation

Innovation, as opposed to problem solving, often involves developing better ways of living where they were not yet being demanded. In retrospect those innovations appear to solve a problem that was just not yet adequately recognized. Humans have an incredible ability to cope with problematic situations by denying their existence. It sometimes takes an entrepreneur to reveal a problem by developing a solution. In other domains, the problem is large and not yet well-defined, like sustainability. In these contexts, social design refers to the design, less of solutions than, alternatives. It involves:

· finding or creating new ways of living and working
· the promotion of those alternatives
· the creation of opportunities for people to find out about and try out those new ways of living and working
· demonstrations of the viability of alternatives in a range of value systems
· provocations to communities that help them to

The Amplifying Creative Communities project, following the DESIS model, focuses on the last two kinds of social design. It listens to, observes and works with communities to:

· find social problems
· find innovative solutions to those social problems that   may exist already in that community
· find innovative alternative ways of living and working that may exist already in that community question how they currently live

· make existing solutions or alternative ways of living and working in that community more robust and/or more widely adopted
· translate existing solutions developed by communities elsewhere for the local contexts of that community,   either as solutions to existing problems or as alternative ways of living and working

In addition to there being a confusion of different kinds of social designing, there are also a confusing set processes that social designing, whatever its aim, tends to use. What follows is the terminology that the Amplifying Creative Communities project adopted to weigh up how it could best do its work of co-designing social solutions and design-enabled social innovation:

Platforms

Platforms seem to be to 'social business design' what portals were to the first dot.com era. Platforms are areas that can focus social design work. Whether a physical location or online, or a combination, a platform convenes background research, tools and appropriate people, allowing focused work on problem-solving or innovation with particular communities around particular themes.

The rationale for a platform is that other kinds of problems – business innovation, policy formulation, education, for example – have dedicated institutions in which solutions can be developed and applied. Social issues arise when problems manifest that lack an institution which can resource work on those problems. Digital domains and social software have enabled the creation of almost-free platforms – the primary cost is the service system design of the technologies into a productive and elegant platform - allowing social issues to convene a combination of expertise, community knowledge, and cognitive surplus.

There is an existing food movement in North Brooklyn. This system map was developed by a team investigating opportunities in the food systems.

The Alternative Food Economy is a project proposing to reinforce distinct aspects of alternative food systems through staged interactions: Aaron Cansler, Amy Findeiss, Mai Kobori, Anke Riemer, and Grace Tuttle.

There seem to be three kinds of problems that platforms attempt to solve:
 · curating conversations that are otherwise distributed across different social media or in times and physical places that others cannot get to.

· making contributing convenient so that people can quickly get up-to-speed and participate in working on social problems or innovations in timely ways

· making contributions relevant by allowing unified messaging about a project-managed process

· providing a historical record that allows cumulative work as well as versioning, ensuring that distributed work not get ephemeralized

Platforms may have more or less designed processes and structures to make contributions convenient or relevant – see Formulae and Toolkits.

The Amplifying Creative Communities project has for each of its two years used an exhibition as a platform. Rather than the exhibition being of completed research, summarizing what has been done, the Amplify exhibition is instead a platform for the design research. It curates some contextual research and presents it in a way that mobilizes it as the focus for a series of workshops with social service system design experts and local community representatives. As propositions emerge from those workshops they are incorporated into the exhibition, and only at the conclusion of the exhibition-as-platform are there 'results.'

Slowscapes, a project that addresses issues of transformation in North Brooklyn: Aabhira Aditya, Bland Hoke, Elie Kahawaghi, Jayson Rupert, and Ben Winter.

Themes
Innovating alternative ways of living and working is both a complex and a wicked problem. It is complex in that many different kinds of social issues are interlinked; a change in one will lead to a change in many others in not always predictable ways, especially over time. It is wicked because, of course, people are involved, and people are not consistent or unchanging, so the conditions in which work is done is constantly changing. To deal with such situations, it is necessary 'bound' conversations so that some criteria can be developed by which to evaluate what should be done. These rationales limit the complexity somewhat and attempt to keep conversations at least temporarily focused on agreed-to terms-of-engagement. Ideally, the themes chosen to focus social design work structure larger, later interconnections. For example, working on Food Systems is a way to approach community health, and environmental health; but it is also a way of working on financial viability, insofar as food production can provide employment or even livelihoods outside conventional employment-based economies.

An important example of poor framing of social problems/ innovation work is 'sustainability.' It does not help how broad and contested this term is to talk of the triple-bottom line. Sustainability is merely a placeholder for a community deciding what it is going to value.

The Parsons DESIS Lab brings together Design, Social Innovation and Sustainability. To some extent, The DESIS approach should be read backwards: it defines sustainability as ways of living and working that are innovated by creative communities, with their inherent focus on local economies, that are consequently smaller and slower, without severing connections to neighboring and international communities. DESIS therefore seeks to lend design research and practice to the social innovation of these 'slow, local, connected,' (Ezio Manzini's phrase) alternative ways of living and working.

Within this broad approach, DESIS Labs always follow the priorities of local communities. For either iteration of the Amplifying Creative Communities project, initial research involved interviews with 'gateway' community organizations (i.e., visible and well-established community initiatives that could guide us to less visible initiatives: the Lower East Side Community Gardens in Year 1; and NW Brooklyn organizations known to ioby) to learn about local priorities. In Year 1, these were identified as:

Taking Care of the Elderly
Eating Healthy
Living Together
Retaining Cultural Diversity

In Year 2:
Healthy and Local Food Initiatives
Sharing Economies
Environmental Wellbeing (the waterfront)
Alternative Transportation

Methods

Social design has tended to go hand-in-hand with 'design thinking.' The latter tends to refer to the use of design processes in traditionally non-design domains, whether business management or social issues. In such cases, designing is reduced to a creative process, a method that can be applied to any context. Ordinarily, this means a sequence, in one or other order of:

Experiential Research
In live contexts; interacting with people in the situation for which the designing is happening

Creative Ideation
Through techniques that encourage a high quantity of divergent ideas

Multiple Low-fi Prototyping
Of material interventions in the situation, early in the process, often as part of the experiential research process

Method of ideation and voting on ideas through stickers.

Scenario Story-telling
That communicate valuable propositions for material interventions in rich pictures that emphasize how they will be experienced.

1. The longest involved graduate students of the MFA in Transdisciplinary Design at Parsons The New School for Design, and local community organization representatives, and was led by IDEO.

2. The second involved project partner ioby.org and comprised community representatives testing a guide designed for community groups wanting to undertake environmental improvement projects.

3. The third involved project partner Greenmap Systems, exploring how mapping could promote sustainable innovations in the NW Brooklyn area

4. The fourth was organized by Laura Forlano as part of the Cornell University's NSF VOSS Grant on Design Collaboration; it brought together a range of academics and practitioners in the field of urban informatics and set them to work on some issues briefed by the community organization hosting the exhibition following some observational research in the neighborhood

5. The largest was the Share NYC event organized by project partner Shareable.net which broke into 3 working groups on its second day (following the first day's panels by sharing economy activists and entrepreneurs) to explore

a) the processes of establishing new sharing economy social enterprises
b) ideating sharing economy responses to the needs that emerged from the Amplifying Creative Communities research in NW Brooklyn (facilitated by the MFA Transdisciplinary Design students)
c) the Solidarity Economy as models for how to amplify the projects being started by the Occupy movement's Alternative Economies working groups

Bridget picks up some free compost from the North Brooklyn Compost project, gets some seedlings from her neighbor and gets to work every morning growing an edible garden.

One day Bridget wasn't able to find a spot on her street though she did find an available spot on an adjacent street in front of a restuarant that just picked her fresh mint for their cantaloupe salad.

Park-it, a project that was developed to investigate community health and wellness through the act of reclaiming car infrastructure for community use: Steven Dale, Eulani Labay, Mihn Le, Rachel Lehrer, Kiersten Nash, and Kelly Tierney.

Brooklyn Stoop, a project looking at opportunities in the sharing economy of North BrooklyN. Designed by Francis Carter, Howard Chambers, Jacqueline Cooksey, Amanda Lasnik, Kiersten Nash, Jayson Rupert, and Kelly Tierney.

Formulae

Design, the art of mass production, is always looking for templates to make its processes for getting things 'to scale' more reliable. As the field of social design matures, patterns emerge about how this kind of work can be done and these can then be turned into meta-heuristics. These kinds of 'formulae' are especially useful for curating large-scale conversations such as occurs on crowd-sourcing platforms, though there are clearly risks of reductivism.

At the beginning of its second year of research, the Amplifying Creative Communities leaders were in discussion with IDEO about using their Open Innovation Platform. As a result, a DESIS formula was developed, and though the project did not in the end use IDEO's platform, the formula was used to structure the initial interviews with local community representatives that generated the Themes for the second year's exhibition:

(Creative Communities + Underutilized Resources) x Social Problems = Social Innovations toward more Sustainable Futures

Creative Communities

All DESIS work begins with the presumption that creativity is not only the remit of creative professionals, that there are communities who can be very creative in response to developing ways of living and working that are more resource productive – though these communities are often innovating more out of necessity than choice (due to the withdrawal of government services and the disinterest of market forces in meeting those needs). A challenge however is the dominance of 'cultural' notions of creativity. Sometimes in communities there are creative organizations targeting social design work, but more often creative people are directing themselves toward the production of cultural artifacts and events. Identifying these sources of creativity in a community, and redirecting them to

work on social issues was what this component of the formula tried to accomplish.

Underutilized Resources

As economic restructuring takes place, there are often spaces and even equipment that are abandoned or not used to capacity. Redeploying these toward the task of social design work can be a crucial part of social innovation. These could be anything from spaces that can become platforms for conversations and creative work, to tools that can be used as the basis of new kinds of livelihoods. If in a good condition and appropriate to the task, these can resource the social designing of creative communities; if not, creative communities can work first on redesigning those resources into equipment that can enable alternative ways of living and working.

Social Problems

As noted above in relation to Themes, social innovation work requires focus. So this formula allows communities to nominate their priority issues.

Social Innovations toward more Sustainable Futures

The formula therefore identifies agents (creative communities), means (underutilized resources) and ends (solutions to targeted social problems). The intention was that the formula would allow users to move from problem-solving to innovation, by mix-and-match-ing different agents, means and ends, responding to existing social situations in novel ways.

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Recipes

Previous DESIS research projects have synthesized large data sets of cases of social innovation toward more sustainable societies into a series of model scenarios, often grouped under themes. The Creative Communities project for instance promoted a series of model 'Collaborative Services,' centered around micro-businesses (or barters) within apartments, with one tenant producing meals for others, another performing laundering services, or childcare services, another running a walking bus, etc. The aim of each model is to articulate key aspects of the shared provisioning, from the service flow to some of the key pieces of equipment. These recipes are very schematic and would require detailing particular to each context, but they nevertheless afford quick ways of promoting the adoption of innovative ways of living and working.

In social innovation work, these kinds of how-to guides, are often called toolkits. It seems that the social design thinking world is saturated with toolkits right now, but this is perhaps because the word is taken to refer to everything from methods cards to software programs. At the Parsons DESIS Lab, we have been reserving the term toolkits for literal kits of physical tools (see Toolkits in next page); so Recipes by contrast are more like guidebooks: verbal (and pictorial) descriptions of how to create particular instances of alternative economies.

The primary community partner for the second year of the Amplifying Creative Communities project was ioby, a platform for crowd-resourcing local environmental improvement projects. ioby's primary function is to provide small community groups with the not-for-profit tools to fund-raise through micro-donations. However, ioby is not only the passive recipient of projects, but also an advocate of environmental initiatives. To this extent, it also provides project management advice to small groups. Over its 3 years of operation it has enabled a wide range of projects, so as part of its role as Amplify Partner, ioby worked with Clarisa Diaz [http://www.placesforall.com/] to produce a set of cards with recipes for different kinds of environmental initiatives, from community organizing, through government approvals, to fund-raising tips. This almost industrializes ioby's capacity to facilitate environmental change.

Tool-kits

When creative communities innovate new ways of resourcing everyday life, they tend to do so with what is at hand. They struggle with inadequate tools because they do not necessarily have the skills to find or build more appropriate ones, but also because they have strong enough commitments to the initiative to 'make it work' despite their not-ideal means. The DESIS method involves lending design expertise to social innovators precisely so that bespoke tools (and service flows) can be developed that would make the lives of those innovators easier. In so doing, the improved social innovation can be more sustainable; both in the sense that it is more systemically efficient, and in the sense that that group of innovators will be more likely to persist with what they have created, with what is now more resilient to changing circumstances. These service innovation improvement tools can also then be given to other communities who might then be enabled to replicate those innovations. If I am interested in starting a home day-care or home restaurant or home laundering service, then having access to a kit that would make my home safer for children, or up to health standards for meal production, or semi-industrialized for larger loads of laundry, would greatly increase the likelihood of me succeeding.

The MFA Transdisciplinary Design students involved in the week-long Amplify workshop facilitated by IDEO developed proposals for toolkits in each of the Thematic areas. A group working in the area of Sharing Economies designed a portable set of stairs. The intention was to create a mobile ''stoop stop' for: convening small groups of community members who could build the social relations necessary for subsequent sharing of resources; or for creating observation posts for community members wanting to re-imagine an area of their neighborhood, like a dangerous intersection or a vacant lot.

A tool-kit that was created during the first year of Amplify Creative Communities for the Lower East Side Community.

An example image of ioby's Recipes for Change cards designed and developed by Clarisa Diaz and Erin Barnes.
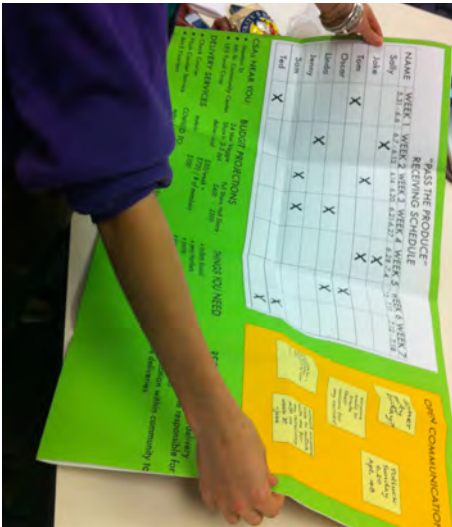
One of the tool-kits developed during the first year of the Amplifying Creative Communities in the Lower East Side.

The MFA Transdisciplinary Design students with the IDEO team.

AMPLIFY

Amplification tools:

a map of materials, stories and ideas
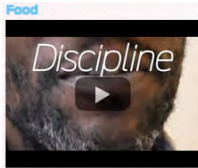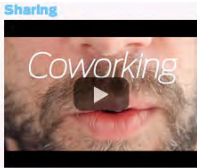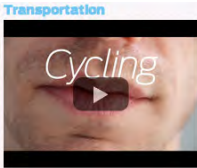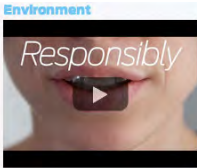
Amplify Creative Communities : Lower East Side	
Stories	
Ideas	
Tool-kits	

Amplification Tools from Lower East Side

Amplify Creative Communities : North Brooklyn

Stories	On Eating Local http://amplifyingcreativecommunities.net/brooklyn_on_eating_local.html	On Sharing http://amplifyingcreativecommunities.net/brooklyn_on_sharing.html	On Wheels http://amplifyingcreativecommunities.net/brooklyn_on_wheels.html	On the Waterfront http://amplifyingcreativecommunities.net/brooklyn_on_the_waterfront.html
Community Voices	Food Discipline http://amplifycreativecommunities.net/brooklyn_food.html	Sharing Coworking http://amplifycreativecommunities.net/brooklyn_sharing.html	Transportation Cycling http://amplifycreativecommunities.net/brooklyn_transportation.html	Environment Responsibly http://amplifycreativecommunities.net/brooklyn_environment.html
Ideas	ALTERNATIVE FOOD ECONOMY http://www.amplifyingcreativecommunities.net/2011AmplifyByDesign.pdf	BK STOOP Brooklyn STOOP http://www.amplifyingcreativecommunities.net/2011AmplifyByDesign.pdf	PARK IT http://www.amplifyingcreativecommunities.net/2011AmplifyByDesign.pdf	SLOWSCAPE http://www.amplifyingcreativecommunities.net/2011AmplifyByDesign.pdf
Tool-kits	build + share lab5 Recipes for Change http://amplifyingcreativecommunities.net/RecipesforChange.pdf			
Articles	UrbanOmnibus Amplify: Creative and Sustainable Lifestyles on the Lower East Side — on view through 9/15 http://tinyurl.com/cs77qvm	SHAREABLE : CIVICSYSTEM How Do Things Ever Change? http://www.shareable.net/blog/how-do-things-ever-change	core77 "Politics Please, We're Social Designers," by Cameron Tonkinwise http://tinyurl.com/7a4sao	

Thank you

Lower East Side Exhibition Credits
Direction: Lara Penin and Eduardo Staszowski
(DESIS Lab, Parsons The New Scnool for Design)

Research and planning: DESIS Lab at Parsons The New School for Design
Lara Penin, Eduardo Staszowski, Cameron Tonkinwise, Nidhi Srinivas, Savitri Lopez-Negrete (Research Assistant).

Scientific Consultants: Ezio Manzini and Anna Meroni (Politecnico di Milano)
External Observer: Laura Forlano (Cornell University)

Exhibition Design: Pure+Applied
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Lower East Side case collection and scenarios design:
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·Adam McClelland, Filmmaker and Rachel Lehrer, Producer - Small Rebel Army Media Group
Speaking mouths vignettes:
Produced by Rachel Lehrer, Mai Kobori and Ben Winter with the support of Adam McClelland and Antonio Greene

Muralists: Charlotte Gudmundsson and Garrett Koepicus
Photography: Sophie Butcher and Eduardo Staszowski
Artwork and sculptures: Annie Varnot & Friend

Project partners and workshop leaders:
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ioby: Erin Barnes, Brandon Whitney, Clarisa Diaz
IDEO: Duane Bray
Shareable: Milicent Johnson

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Good ideas can be
AMPLIFIED.

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