

# Place making as a form of place taking

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## Residential displacement and grassroots resistance to institutional encroachment in Buffalo, New York

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine perceptions of institutional encroachment and community responses to it. Specifically, it focuses on residents' perceived effects of hospital and university expansion and the role of place making on gentrification in core city neighborhoods. This study offers insights into the processes driving neighborhood displacement and the prospects for grassroots efforts to curb it.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected through focus groups with residents and other stakeholders in working class, minority neighborhoods which were identified as being in the early stages of gentrification. Nine focus groups were held across three neighborhoods experiencing institutional encroachment. The analysis was guided by standpoint theory, which focuses on amplifying the voices of groups traditionally disenfranchised from urban planning and policy processes.

**Findings** – The findings suggest that residents perceived institutional encroachment as relatively unabated and unresponsive to grassroots concerns. This led to heightened concerns about residential displacement and concomitant changes in the neighborhoods' built and social environments. Experiences with encroachment also increased residents' calls for greater grassroots control of development.

**Originality/value** – This analysis illuminates how gentrification and displacement results from both physical redevelopment activities of anchor institutions and their decisions related to place making. The conclusions highlight the importance of empowering disenfranchised groups in the place-making process to minimize negative externalities at the neighborhood level.

**Keyword** Place making

**Paper type** Research paper

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## Introduction

Historically, older core city neighborhoods were threatened by institutional encroachment. In the US context, urban renewal was the quintessential example of this ([Anderson, 1967](#)). During the urban renewal era, which was most pronounced in the period following the Second World War through the late 1960s, the local government used the eminent domain process to condemn and level entire urban neighborhoods. Land cleared through the urban renewal process was used for large-scale revitalization projects such as the construction of civic centers and freeways and other public works projects. Urban renewal resulted in massive displacement and social upheaval which produced a backlash at the grassroots level. In addition to [Anderson \(1967\)](#), [Worthy \(1977\)](#) chronicled how grassroots interests asserted themselves to challenge hospitals, universities and other institutional investors who were pursuing neighborhood redevelopment during the urban renewal era.

Today, neighborhoods in older core cities in the USA and abroad are threatened by institutional encroachment. However, institutional encroachment takes a subtler form than its expression during the urban renewal era. It is largely the result of the expansion of urban anchor institutions, such as universities and hospitals, in the absence of the aggressive use of eminent domain. Instead, the new wave of urban redevelopment is characterized as a relatively benign form of institutionally driven revitalization pursued in partnership with the local government. Because place-based universities and hospitals often lead revitalization efforts, it is frequently referred to as “eds and meds” revitalization. Despite the characterization of this type of revitalization as relatively benign, there is growing concern that it has led to displacement and inequitable outcomes for low-income and minority residents similar to the types observed during the urban renewal era.

In his analysis of this emerging phenomenon, [Baldwin \(2015, p. 83\)](#) offers one of the more poignant critiques of the eds and meds model for revitalization, highlighting how it has produced a new form of urban inequality called “UniverCities.” Just as urban renewal led to the displacement of poor, inner-city residents, Baldwin argues that the eds and meds model had led to the upscaling of neighborhoods adjacent to large anchor intuitions and concomitant displacement. By introducing the concept of UniverCities, Baldwin goes a step further, arguing that eds and meds revitalization is accompanied by alterations of the social and cultural landscape of the neighborhoods. This occurs as anchor institutions encourage the development of amenities in neighborhoods that appeal to the tastes of newcomers while alienating long-term residents. These amenities include a mix of services and businesses tailored to the tastes of gentrifiers and commuters, such as gourmet coffee shops, yoga studios, trendy restaurants and jazz clubs. In addition to new development pushing low-income and minority residents out of neighborhoods, Baldwin points out that displacement is also the result of social and cultural shifts prompted by institutional actors engaging in, and encouraging distinct types of place making.

Other scholarship connects Baldwin’s observations to discussions of how place making drives the gentrification process. For instance, [Mallach \(2018\)](#) emphasizes that gentrification is more than an economic process connected to brick-and-mortar projects. Rather, he emphasized that “it raises sensitive social, political, and cultural issues, prompting complex questions about power relationships that underlie urban change, and about to whom a city or neighborhood belongs – or whether the question should ever be asked” ([Mallach, 2018, p. 98](#)). From this perspective, although changes in the built environment are easily identifiable markers of gentrification, the socio-political dimensions of place making constitute the superstructure of the gentrification process. From this perspective, place making is a precursor to changing the built environment. This is the emphasis of [Fraser’s \(2004, p. 454\)](#) discussion of gentrification where he stresses that a “neighborhood’s collective

identity [is a] relational construct influenced by the connections among different groups of actors within a neighborhood and stakeholders at the municipal, state, federal, and even global levels.” How these actors reframe a neighborhood’s identity is central to the gentrification process and directly influences its expression in the built environment. The social, political and cultural context forms the foundation of place making and brick-and-mortar projects that it spawns.

This article builds on this framework by refocusing the analysis of gentrification and displacement on social, political and cultural dimensions of place making. This is done through an examination of residents’ and grassroots stakeholders’ perceptions of place making activities associated with eds and meds expansion in core city neighborhoods. The article focuses on anchor-driven revitalization in Buffalo, New York. Through this analysis, this research offers extensions to this line of inquiry by examining how low-income and minority renters, homeowners and other grassroots stakeholders perceive the dynamics of anchor institution expansion in core city neighborhoods. It also explores their perceptions of the scope of access grassroots groups have to decision-making in the urban revitalization process.

The next section places our analysis in the context of prior research focusing on gentrification and institutional encroachment. The literature review focuses on the need for greater community input in the institutionally-driven place making process. This section is followed by a discussion of the methods applied to our analysis. Then data are presented to illuminate grassroots perceptions of institutional encroachment in the place-making process, their relationship to gentrification and displacement, and subsequent calls for greater institutional accountability and community control. Finally, we offer concluding remarks on the implications of our research findings.

### **Institutionally driven place making and calls for community control**

This article builds on prior research examining processes of gentrification and institutional encroachment. In particular, it focuses on the role of anchor institutions in the urban revitalization process. Prior research has argued that anchor institutions play a growing role in the revitalization and gentrification of core city neighborhoods (Adams, 2003; Bartik and Ericcek, 2008; Sterrett, 2009). Although some of the initial discussions of anchor institutions in the urban revitalization process focus on the synergies and benefits of hospital and university expansion in core city neighborhoods impacted by decades of disinvestment, subsequent scholarship argues that institutional investments in inner-city neighborhoods can also result in neighborhood disruption and residential displacement (Silverman *et al.*, 2014; Hyra, 2015; Ehlenz, 2016; Mallach, 2018). This article offers extensions to these observations by linking them to the place making literature. As Fraser (2004), Baldwin (2015) and Mallach (2018) highlight, gentrification and displacement results from both physical redevelopment activities of anchor institutions and their social, political and cultural activities related to place making. However, the impact of the latter is somewhat muted in the literature.

To address this gap in the literature, we argue that the social, political and cultural activities of anchor institutions are central to the construction of neighborhood identity and form the foundation of place making, which creates a rationale for the brick-and-mortar projects associated with gentrification. Thus, this article focuses on how institutional actors encourage distinct types of place making that reinforce social and cultural shifts at the neighborhood level. Their active engagement in place making is often overlooked, though it forms the foundation for gentrification. We build on Masuda and Bookman’s (2018) critique of neighborhood branding efforts. In their critique, they contend that neighborhood branding enables gentrification and the dispossession of the poor. Consequently, they argue

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that disputes over the trajectory of a neighborhoods undergoing institutionally driven revitalization are often decided by the place making process.

[Garcia \(2018\)](#) adds to this perspective, highlighting how low-income communities use symbols, such as flags, to articulate neighborhood identity. In that example, the display of the Puerto Rican flag by low-income residents is described as a place making tool deployed to stave off gentrification. In other contexts, institutional stakeholders' appropriate local identity to thwart grassroots efforts to resist gentrification. [Curran's \(2018\)](#) analysis of gentrification in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood exemplifies how the revitalization processes centers on how residents, city planners, policy makers and developers jockey to control, interpret and authenticate neighborhood identity. In the case that Curran examines, place-making activities focused on framing the neighborhood's Mexican identity. Similarly, disputes over the naming of public schools, neighborhood streets and other community boundaries have been seen as reinforcing institutional efforts to transform neighborhood identity ([Hwang, 2016](#); [Lyons and David, 2017](#)).

Other scholars recognize how disputes over place making and neighborhood identity reflect the exclusion of grassroots concerns in the neighborhood revitalization process. For instance, [Omholt \(2018\)](#) points out that in practice, strategies for inclusive place making processes are often lacking. [Fincher, Pardy and Shaw \(2016\)](#) distinguish between the theoretical treatment of place making and practitioners' application of place making to urban development. They argue that theoretically, place making has a normative and moral dimension compatible with social equity goals. However, urban development practitioners approach place making as a design-based and physical planning process, "divorced from the socio-economic landscape of people and place" ([Fincher et al., 2016](#), p. 518). As [Zenker and Seigis \(2012\)](#) suggest, the introduction of broad-based public participation in the place making process can help to mitigate conflict and create space for discussions of social equity. Recognizing this, [Herezniak \(2017\)](#) offers additional suggestions to enhance public participation in the place-making process. For instance, she describes how practitioners can broaden the scope of public participation through with the application of social media and other new technologies to place making activities.

In addition to the growing attention to the need for public participation and more inclusive place making, grassroots calls for greater institutional accountability and community control in the neighborhood revitalization process have gained credence. These calls have manifested themselves in a number of ways. One example is the community benefits agreement (CBA) movement ([Parks and Warren, 2009](#); [Wolf-Powers, 2010](#)). CBAs allow coalitions of labor and grassroots organizations to negotiate for concessions with anchor institutions in the development process. These concessions include amenities such as affordable housing, improvements to schools and community facilities, public parks, enhanced public access to new development areas and other neighborhood amenities that enrich the quality of life for residents. The scope and character of many of these amenities are shaped by place making. In addition to their impact on physical redevelopment, tools such as CBAs should be viewed as mechanisms to create space for community controlled place making that informs urban planning and produces more equitable development outcomes.

Another emerging effort to enhance institutional accountability and community control in the neighborhood revitalization process involves the creation of community land trusts (CLTs). These are nonprofit organizations, established to receive vacant property from municipalities and other landowners, so it can be redeveloped as affordable housing, commercial space, and for other civic purposes identified by residents and grassroots stakeholders ([Grey, 2008](#); [Davis, 2010](#)). CLTs hold the deed to properties and lease them to

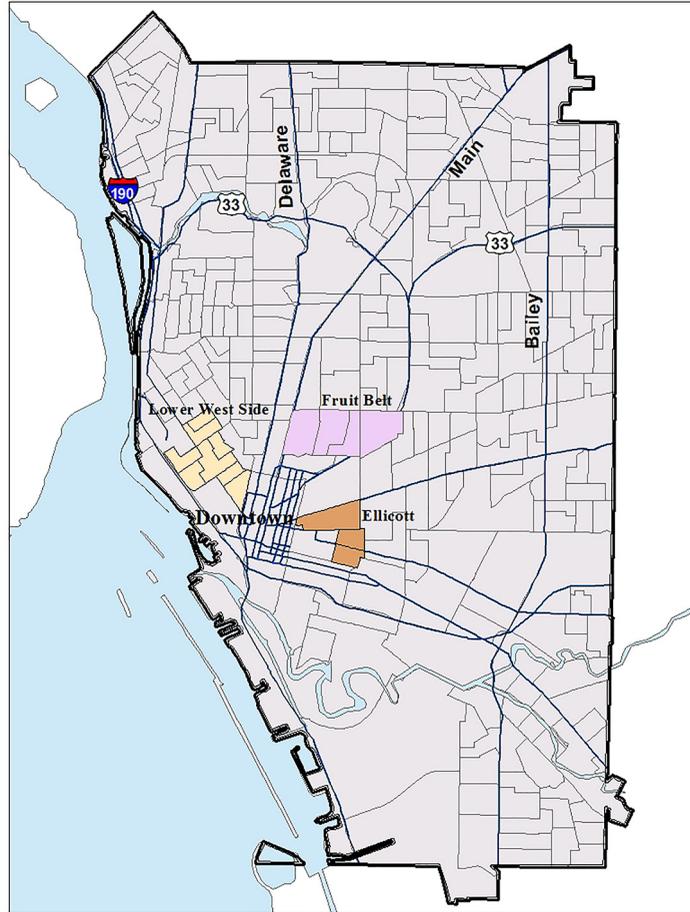
developers and homeowners. Because the land that improvements are made to remains in control of the nonprofit, it benefits from the CLT's tax exempt status. In exchange for lower taxes, developers and homeowners agree to deed restrictions that keep housing and other improvements on the land permanently affordable. In addition to control of land use and development decisions, CLTs give grassroots interests greater influence in the place making process. Like CBAs, CLTs serve as mechanisms to carve out space for community controlled place making and equity planning, which forms the foundation for subsequent brick-and-mortar development.

## Methods

This article draws from data collected in Buffalo for a larger research project called "Turning the Corner" which was done over a one-year period, in collaboration with the Urban Institute and partners from other cities across the USA[1]. The research team was composed of the coauthors of this article who drew from over a decade of experience working in the study neighborhoods and interacting with residents and stakeholders. The project applied a community-driven methodology designed to amplify the voices of minority and working-class residents. It paralleled some of the tools and techniques applied in other community-based analyses (Walker and East, 2014; Sandoval and Rongerude, 2015; Keita *et al.*, 2016). The focus of the Turning the Corner project was to identify planning strategies to address negative externalities caused by neighborhood change and heightened risks of displacement because of revitalization. The three neighborhoods examined in the analysis were identified in collaboration with city-wide stakeholders from local government, the nonprofit development community and higher education using an adaptation of the methodology developed by Lisa Bates (2013) to identify neighborhoods at risk of gentrification and displacement.

The three neighborhoods (Lower West Side, Ellicott and Fruit Belt) are shown in Figure 1. The neighborhoods are all located adjacent to downtown Buffalo. Table I displays the population and housing characteristics of the study neighborhoods, the city of Buffalo and Erie County which is the county Buffalo is located in. Across all measures, the study neighborhoods were distinct from the rest of the city and county. In 2016, the study neighborhoods had higher concentrations of African American and Hispanic residents, vacant property and renter occupied housing units. The study neighborhood was also distinct in terms of population and housing trends between 2010 and 2016[2]. It experienced the most rapid rate of population decline (-15.7 per cent), the highest rate of African American population loss (-29.9 per cent), the most pronounced loss of housing units (-11.1 per cent) and the largest decline in renter occupied units (-10.1 per cent). These trends reflected a shift in the neighborhoods, suggesting that displacement and alterations in the built environment were occurring consistent with early stage gentrification. After selecting the three study neighborhoods, the research team worked with a community advisory panel composed of representatives from each of the study neighborhoods to identify renters, homeowners and other grassroots stakeholders to recruit for focus groups. The community advisory panel was composed of renters, homeowners and representatives from community-based organizations. Members of the community advisory panel provided the research team with contact information for individuals to recruit to participate in the focus groups.

A total of nine focus groups were held across the three neighborhoods experiencing encroachment because of institutional investments. Separate focus group were held in each neighborhood, one with renters, one with homeowners and another with grassroots stakeholders[3]. Table II displays the characteristics of the focus group participants. The focus groups were held during the fall of 2017, each had an average of 6.4 participants, and



**Figure 1.**  
Three study  
neighborhoods where  
focus groups were  
held

each lasted approximately 2 h. The data collected from the focus groups were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using ATLAS.ti software. The selection of focus group participants and analysis were guided by standpoint theory, which focuses on amplifying the voices of groups traditionally disenfranchised from the planning and policy processes (Adler and Jermier, 2005; Anderson, 2017).

### **Institutional encroachment**

#### *Changing land uses and renaming neighborhoods*

Buffalo is a shrinking city that has experienced decades of population decline, employment losses, housing abandonment and property demolition (Silverman *et al.*, 2013; Silverman *et al.*, 2016; Weaver *et al.*, 2017). However, there has been growing boosterism among city officials and local development interests. It has formed a foundation for place making efforts

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	Study neighborhoods	Buffalo, NY	Erie County, NY
<i>Population 2016</i>			
Total population	10,528	258,989	922,129
<i>Percent change 2010-2016</i>	-15.7	-2.6	0.1
<i>Race 2016</i>			
Total White	3,656	124,581	722,667
<i>Percent change 2010-2016</i>	-8.9	-10.7	-2.6
Total African American	4,324	96,576	123,382
<i>Percent change 2010-2016</i>	-29.9	-5.9	0.2
<i>Ethnicity 2016</i>			
Hispanic	3,481	28,118	46,752
<i>Percent change 2010-2016</i>	1.1	14.0	15.9
<i>Housing 2016</i>			
Total housing units	6,312	130,977	421,361
<i>Percent change 2010-2016</i>	-11.1	-5.9	0.2
Total vacant	1,300	21,309	38,539
<i>Percent change 2010-2016</i>	-15.7	-19.1	-9.0
Total occupied housing units	5,012	109,668	382,822
<i>Percent change 2010-2016</i>	-9.8	-2.8	1.3
Total renter occupied	3,642	64,274	133,007
<i>Percent change 2010-2016</i>	-10.1	0.4	4.0

**Table I.**  
2016 Population  
and housing  
characteristics of the  
study neighborhoods  
and the city of  
buffalo, New York

**Source:** US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006-2010 and 2012-2016 five year estimates

Variable	Value
Average focus group size	6.4
Percentage homeowners	34.5
Percentage renters	29.3
Percentage other stakeholders	36.2
Percentage males	38
Percentage females	62
Percentage 18-35	8
Percentage 36-64	32
Percentage 65 and over	60
Percentage white	22.5
Percentage black	63.3
Percentage Latino	10.2
Percentage other	4

**Table II.**  
Characteristics of the  
focus group  
participants (N = 58)

in revitalizing areas and articulated a narrative arguing that the city has begun to reemerge from a long period of decline and dormancy. As an article in *City Journal* described this boosterism has amplified, “nascent revitalization in select urban neighborhoods [that] has prompted a flurry of articles depicting the city as a paradise for young, hip millennials” (Remn, 2015). Boosters point to investments by local hospitals, universities and other anchor institutions as evidence of revitalization in the city. Despite the presence of some new investment in and near downtown Buffalo, the long-term trajectory of the city and the region remains unchanged. According to the Cornell Program on Applied Demographics (<http://pad.human.cornell.edu/index.cfm>), Buffalo is projected to continue to lose population and

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housing stock into the future. This raises questions about the spillover effects of anchor institutions' investments in low-income, minority neighborhoods that abut against their campuses and physical plants.

The three neighborhoods examined in this study have been at the epicenter of anchor-driven revitalization efforts in the city. Each has been impacted by the recent expansion of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), the University at Buffalo (UB), D'Youville College, and other healthcare and higher education institutions in the city. Although these changes affect all of the study neighborhoods, the intensity of institutional factors driving neighborhood change varies because of the proximity of specific anchor institutions to each of them. For example, the Lower West Side is most affected by institutional pressures from D'Youville College and other anchor institutions in downtown Buffalo. The Ellicott neighborhood is most influenced because of its proximity to downtown Buffalo and endangered by spillovers from residential and commercial development in that area linked to the expansion of anchor institutions in the other study neighborhoods. The Fruit Belt is confronted by institutional expansion of hospitals, the medical research center, and UB's medical school.

During focus groups, residents and other stakeholders discussed the magnitude, scope and impact of this expansion. One renter from the Fruit Belt neighborhood made this comment about the BNMC's expansion:

The campus sits on a 120-acre site adjacent to downtown Buffalo and directly in the Fruit Belt neighborhood. Presently there are estimated 17,000 employees working at the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus with a projected 12,000 more employees and students in the region in 2018. The University at Buffalo is in the process of completing a \$375 million medical school, currently constructed a \$40 million parking ramp on East North. The Conventus Medical Family Center just opened up in 2015. That was another \$100 million. Kalida Health announced the grand opening of the Oishei Children's Hospital. Another \$250 million, and \$7 million just got allocated for Allentown [an adjacent neighborhood] so it can be connected as a hub to the medical campus. Not one dollar has poured this way towards the Fruit Belt neighborhood, and not one dollar of those millions of dollars has been allocated for any minority businesses. So the effect that they have on us here is? You can answer that. No progress with them or a relationship with them. We need to be included in what's going on as they sort of gentrify and push the residents here in the Fruit Belt out without a word.

Like this resident, other stakeholders verbalized concerns about what they labeled medical campus "encroachment" and the displacement they perceived it produced. The general sentiment was that anchor institutions did not serve the interests of residents living in surrounding neighborhoods. As one renter from the Ellicott neighborhood put it, "It's sad that over there in the Fruit Belt, not only UB, but also the cancer center takes so much out of the Fruit Belt and then they want to build things just for the cancer center or UB."

Residents' and other stakeholders' concerns about institutional encroachment were most pronounced when they discussed the issue of neighborhood identity. In a number of instances, residents and other stakeholders discussed how encroachment transformed the identity of their neighborhoods. One way this occurred was through the process of renaming neighborhoods by institutional actors. One stakeholder described his experience in a planning meeting hosted by the city when he realized that the name of his neighborhood had been surreptitiously changed:

People in the meeting, residents, they were saying, "we're concerned with the Fruit Belt being taken over by the medical campus. Speculation, and things like that." They were told, "Oh no, no, no that's not going to happen." Then on the map it shows, rather than saying "Fruit Belt" it says "Medical Park."

Other residents raised similar concerns about seeing their neighborhood's name changed in plans when they attended public meetings hosted by the City and developers. One homeowner commented that, "when you look on maps you don't see it anymore, it's considered the Medical Park, or whatever, they have erased us with a big eraser off of the city map." Another homeowner pointed out that the change of the neighborhood's name had also been adopted by commercial websites and on social media, commenting that, "it's up on Snapchat, if you know what that is, it will say "Medical Park," and I'm like, 'no I don't live in the Medical Park!'"

The renaming of neighborhoods by institutional actors was one way that place making was used to transform the community's identity. Another way this occurred was when boundaries of neighborhoods were redrawn. A homeowner in the Ellicott neighborhood made this comment about how redrawing boundaries impacted neighborhood identity:

We could have lived anywhere in the city. We chose to live down in this neighborhood because they were part of downtown. It's been interesting because I feel we were sold on being part of downtown and then they tried to disenfranchise us from downtown. So little things like the zip code. Zip codes are really important because zip codes tell banks about the people, everything. So if you look at us, we're in 14204. But guess what, you go one block up there in 14203. Guess what? 14203 is downtown. 14204 is not. That has a huge impact on our home values, on the banks. I'm still pissed about that. So you want to talk about a change, one of the changes is we were told we were downtown and then they changed the zip code. Not only did they change the zip code, but then they changed where we get our mail. Again, we used to get our mail right there on Washington. So we were downtown. Then, all of a sudden, I get something in the mail and now our mail is on William Street, past Fillmore. I'm going 20 blocks in the other direction, when I used to go two blocks to get my mail. So I think that there's been a smoke and mirrors trying to disenfranchise us.

On one level, changing the name or boundaries of a neighborhood has symbolic effects on its identity. On a more substantive level, it has implications for everyday experiences and residents' quality of life.

#### *New faces and the disruption of everyday life*

On a more micro level, institutional encroachment was evidenced by changing residential demographics. These demographic changes were driven by institutional stakeholders' emphasis on mixed income development as a component of place making. [Fraser \(2004\)](#), [Mallach \(2018\)](#) and [Fincher et al. \(2016\)](#) highlight how promoting a social mix is a component of the gentrification process. In low-income, minority neighborhoods, this often translates into the introduction of new residents to a neighborhood who are non-minority and relatively affluent. In terms of place making, this also involves the introduction of lifestyles and uses of public space that conflict with existing neighborhood norms and social institutions. One renter in the Fruit Belt described how place making that guided the BNMC expansion had changed the neighborhood's residential composition and daily use of public spaces:

What I see is white people not being afraid to come into a black neighborhood. A lot of things I've heard over time about white people is they don't like to come to the inner-city of Buffalo because they're scared, or they don't like to come to the bars because they think something is going to happen. It's negative. But I see white women, young white women, they'll walk 5 or 6 blocks to their cars they park here in the Fruit Belt. Another thing I've seen is, 3 o'clock in the morning, I see a white woman in spandex pants jogging down Jefferson, down Masten, walking their dogs.

The changing composition of a neighborhood has other implications over who occupies public and private spaces. For instance, a homeowner in the Lower West Side neighborhood commented on the relationship between increased rents and encroachment due to the

expansion of D'Youville College, saying that "you can end up with like a dorm next door, because they can split up the rent and it becomes reasonable if you've got four people."

Changes in occupancy patterns inevitably spill over into public spaces and impact social interactions. This is a reflection of place making becoming manifest in the daily lives of residents. A renter on the Lower West Side described how the growing number of college students living in the neighborhood increased nuisances, such as parties on the weekends. She described this encounter with a college student leaving a party next door to her, "I came from a Halloween party myself, but I'm like, 'Oh my God,' I pulled in front and he's like 'are you my Uber?' I'm like 'no, I live here! Have a good night.'" Nuisances caused by institutional encroachment were not limited to late-night interactions with college students. A number of concerns were identified by residents and grassroots stakeholders related to parking congestion on neighborhood streets. One renter in the Fruit Belt neighborhood described how parking congestion was a direct result of anchor institution expansion, changes in norms driven by institutional place making, and a shift in the sense of who belonged in the neighborhood:

What's happening is the workers don't feel like they should have to pay for parking. They got enough parking lots, but they don't want to pay for parking. I don't agree with them because it's a state job first of all, and I feel like you make enough money to pay for parking.

An increased sense of entitlement to public spaces, on the part of BNMC workers, facilitated by place making led to competition for street parking. This had a direct effect on residents' quality of life. Another renter in the Fruit Belt made this point about the ways parking congestion that resulted from institutional encroachment affected residents:

Older people couldn't get rides or couldn't park in their own driveways because people blocked their driveways. They're needing medical care and things like that, and they couldn't get it. Another thing was, when relatives or somebody came over they had to park blocks over to get to the property.

For residents, institutional encroachment resulted in a change in the fabric of neighborhood life. In some cases, new, unfamiliar people were encountered on the streets. In others, overflow parking and commuter traffic led to disruptions in everyday life. Although residents were not always physically displaced from their homes, they were socially and culturally displaced as institutional place making altered social relation and transformed the sense of who had a right to use public spaces.

### **Calls for greater institutional accountability and community control**

There was a general sentiment across the neighborhoods that residents lacked access to decision-making processes related to urban revitalization. Their lack of access to these processes resulted in their forfeiture of opportunities to participate in place making. This is encapsulated in the following comment made by a renter in the Ellicott neighborhood:

I think gentrification is a wonderful thing, however it just seems that when it comes into an urban community it doesn't look so wonderful for those who live there. So I think when developers decided to come into a community, and if the community is forthright, if they're there sitting at the table, at the drawing board, and make some very profound requests, and they don't come to fruition it's kind of disheartening. I believe that if these developers are really community minded, it would seem to me that at the outset [there would be] inclusion in the implementation.

The lack of access to the urban revitalization process was perceived to be because of institutional indifference. As a Fruit Belt homeowner observed, there was little investment in

the neighborhood because, “the leadership at the University is not open to it.” A renter in the Ellicott neighborhood added that, “developers love brick-and-mortar more than they love people.” When these perceptions are considered against the backdrop of institutional place making, the lack of consideration of existing residents and grassroots stakeholders results in their growing alienation from their neighborhoods and a loss of their sense of place.

A stakeholder described the problem of institutional indifference leading to a lack of access to benefits emanating from anchor driven revitalization while reflecting on his experience at a ceremony where a plan for the BNMC expansion was unveiled:

You can’t build this oasis of medical resources and use all this public and private money and not begin to connect to the neighborhoods. We didn’t want that model, but that’s exactly what happened. They did it anyway. I’m listening to people talk about the billions of dollars and how wonderful this is, etc. I was sitting next to a person and they were clapping and everything else and I said, “wouldn’t it be great if you had this big medical campus with all these resources, if they would just walk out the door two blocks away and provide services to the children and seniors right across the street?” And this person was flabbergasted, “well, what does that mean?” I said, “you have the highest level of poverty right across the street, and they’ve got some of the worst health outcomes in the area.” So I explained it to them.

Residents and other stakeholders expressed frustration with efforts to gain access to decision-making processes related to urban revitalization. They recounted the numerous attempts to negotiate for neighborhood improvements and linkages to development, only to be met with indifference or unfulfilled promises from institutional actors. A Fruit Belt homeowner summed up the situation saying that anchor institutions, “have a moral obligation to fulfill what they say they want to fulfill, if you’re not going to do it, don’t say it.”

Setbacks in efforts to increase the level of community control of the urban revitalization process came in the wake of repeated attempts to negotiate with anchor institutions. One of the earliest efforts to enhance community control and gain access to the place making process involved a grassroots campaign for a CBA linked to the BNMC expansion (Patterson *et al.*, 2017). The goal of the campaign for a CBA was to redistribute the benefits of new development to long-term residents and historically disenfranchised groups. However, efforts to get a CBA in Buffalo were thwarted. Instead of negotiating an agreement with residents, the BNMC drafted a report with recommendations for non-binding linkages between the medical campus and the surrounding community (Patterson *et al.*, 2017). The process that produced the report and its recommendations was insulated from grassroots interests and heavily dominated by representatives from anchor institutions, state and local government officials who were sympathetic to the interests of the BNMC, large nonprofits and local construction firms (Silverman *et al.*, 2014). As a Fruit Belt homeowner put it, “since 2010 we were trying to get a community benefits agreements and things like that, it’s a skeleton.”

In addition to the campaign for a CBA, Buffalo had a sustained grassroots campaign to create a CLT in neighborhoods threatened by gentrification. A Fruit Belt homeowner described the rationale for a CLT in this way:

I’m all about the land trust, because I understand clearly that if we do not get control of this land our neighbors are going to get pushed out. I have no misunderstanding of that. And you know what? I’m sorry, but the land doesn’t belong to the City. I understand they own the titles, and the deeds, and all of that, but the land belongs to the people. And, it’s time for the City to do right by this community. It’s time for them to do right by these people. Aside from that, it’s time for these other entities under the umbrella of the medical corridor to come back and have a conversation with the community that says, “how can we begin to bridge that gap that we should have bridged

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at the very beginning of the structures and begin to invest.” I mean, “we’re here and we’re growing. We’re not going anywhere. So let us turn around and begin to invest in this community.”

This sentiment, which represents grassroots, calls for increased control of the place making process and the brick-and-mortar development that emanates from it, has gained traction. In early 2018, the City of Buffalo agreed to transfer 20 properties to a CLT that is in formation in the Fruit Belt. This is the first experiment with this model for community controlled development in the city’s history. The CLT represents a positive step, but as of this writing, it is not clear what impact it will have on amplifying the community’s voice in place making, and subsequently curbing displacement and other negative externalities.

### Conclusions

This article focuses on how institutional encroachment and place making transforms neighborhoods’ built and social environments. Data from focus groups in Buffalo highlight how the expansion of anchor institutions and their engagement in place making transforms the built environment, neighborhood identity and everyday life in urban communities. Often the benefit of this transformation accrue to anchor institutions, while low-income, minority residents cope with negative externalities in a disproportionate manner. This outcome is partly the product of the exclusion of low-income and minority residents from place-making processes that create a rationale for subsequent brick-and-mortar projects and the transformation of social relations that take place in these new spaces.

This article also shows that against the odds, residents sometimes make incremental progress in their efforts to influence place making and gain a semblance of community control. In Buffalo, this was illustrated in residents’ and other stakeholders’ accounts of past efforts to negotiate a CBA and create a CLT. Although these efforts are often discussed in the context of redistributive economics and the ownership of property, we highlight how these types of grassroots initiatives also represent efforts to insert residents’ perspectives in the place-making process.

Although often fleeting, efforts to negotiate CBAs and create CLTs would benefit from public measures such as the adoption of local ordinances requiring developers to enter into development agreements with residents, and the provision of technical support to grassroots groups interested in incorporating as nonprofits to pursue equitable development (Belongie and Silverman, 2018). In addition to public measures designed to empower community-based organizations, there is a need for residents to develop a critical consciousness of how elements of institutional place making, that outwardly appear benign, can have disruptive effects on social norms and the use of public space as development unfolds. The need for the development of a critical consciousness was alluded to in analysis of focus groups from Buffalo, but it had not come to fruition. To realize this type of critical consciousness, raising grassroots mobilization would need to follow the approach to praxis suggested by scholars and activists such as Freire (1970) and Horton (1997).

In a recent analysis of place making, Fincher *et al.* (2016) describe how this type of critical consciousness can be applied to place making in a manner that gives voice to disenfranchised groups. They argue that on the surface, conventional approaches to place making facilitate the transformation of minority, low-income neighborhoods into mixed-income, mixed-race neighborhoods. In contrast, they argue that grassroots engagement informed by critical consciousness can reveal that conventional approaches to place making often serve as a veneer for gentrification and displacement. From their perspective, the development of a critical consciousness allows residents and grassroots

stakeholders to articulate alternative approaches to place making which can inform subsequent brick-and-mortar development. Place making informed by critically conscious residents and grassroots stakeholders is more likely to produce an alternative approach to place making that advocates for sustainable models of minority, working-class neighborhood development. The formulation of alternative and competing place making strategies can temper institutional models that lead to gentrification and displacement. In sum, it is argued that in places such as Buffalo, supportive public policies and critical public discourse about gentrification can formalize the role of residents in the place-making process and help to create a more even playing field in the urban revitalization process.

## Notes

1. The Urban Institute (<https://www.urban.org/>) is a nonprofit research organization based in Washington, D.C. It conducts research on a breadth of policy issues affecting cities across the USA to inform public policy.
2. American Community Survey (ACS) data presented in [Table I](#) were downloaded from the Social Explorer ([www.socialexplorer.com/](http://www.socialexplorer.com/)). The United States Census Bureau's Statistical Testing Tool was used to compare the per cent change reported for 2010 and 2016. The comparison showed that the per cent change was statistically significant for the city of Buffalo and Erie County. The analysis could not be conducted for this measure in the study neighborhoods because margins of error were not reported at the block-group level in the 2010 ACS estimates.
3. Grassroots stakeholders included: staff and administrators from community centers and neighborhood-based organizations, ministers from local churches, minority real estate agentstable based in the neighborhoods and others in grassroots leadership positions.

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