

The Transformative Power of Friction: Inclusive Community Centered Visioning in Manhattan's Chinatown

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This case study discusses how friction plays a transformative role in reshaping relational dynamics within the context of community and public decision-making. We explore concepts of pluralism and emphasize the value of embracing conflict arising from a multiplicity of voices. Within the context of a visioning process concerning the redevelopment of a community center—70 Mulberry Street—in New York City's Manhattan Chinatown, we interrogate how friction mediated by ontological and community-centered design approaches can address power hegemonies in public discourse and exercise inherited memory and literacies to reconstruct local worlds. Keywords: community-centered design, pluriversal design, transformative paradigm, pluralism, public decision-making, community engagement, design research, Chinatown, co-design, power dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

“My grandfather arrived in Chinatown in 1903. And for nearly 120 years since then, my family and I have been a part of this community. Throughout all this time, 70 Mulberry Street has been a cornerstone in the neighborhood, whether as a beloved public school, or community cultural hub, or an entry point for generations of immigrants and I, myself, have worked in Chinatown for over 40 years and participated in numerous programs there. We are the current guardians of a neighborhood legacy.”
—Manhattan Chinatown Community Member

The description above of 70 Mulberry Street—a 130-year-old historical and cultural landmark in New York City's (NYC) Manhattan Chinatown—reflects the central role 70 Mulberry Street occupies in the lives and memories of generations of Chinatown residents. From its origins as Public School (P.S.) 23 in the late 1800s to its transformation into a community center in the 1970s, the building has played a central role in the lives of Chinatown's residents with a history that is deeply woven into the community it serves (NYC Municipal Archives, 2020). In January 2020, a five-alarm fire destroyed a significant portion of the building which disrupted and displaced a range of organizations and activities centered at the site, and ultimately spurred the City of New York to launch a 90-day community visioning process to determine its future. An exploration of the complex position 70 Mulberry Street occupies in the material landscape and in a range of cultural systems of meaning, as well as the degree to which those networks could be destabilized through its

destruction or re-definition, help illustrate the importance of engaging a community-led visioning process to produce outcomes that reflect community priorities, cultural identity, and heritage.

70 MULBERRY STREET

The history of 70 Mulberry Street closely mirrors the evolution of Manhattan’s Chinatown. With the oldest record in the municipal archives pertaining to a construction application permit with the Department of Building in 1891, the building was initially designed and operated as a 31-classroom elementary school with a capacity for approximately 1,700 students. It was first designated as Public School No. 23 and later The Columbus School by the New York City Board of Education (NYC Municipal Archives, 2020). The school opening coincided with a significant transformation in the surrounding neighborhood due to an influx of people of Chinese origin in the 1870s, which was driven in part by direct immigration to work in New York City’s port as well as by eastward migration from the American West in response to anti-Asian discrimination (Lin, 2010).

Many participants in the community visioning process offered histories of how their families sought refuge in Manhattan’s Chinatown in response to anti-Chinese violence in the western United States. In 1880, the name “China Town” was first used by the New York Times to refer to the neighborhood formed between Mott, Pell, and Doyers streets (NYC Municipal Archives, 2020). The unveiling of the Calvert Vaux-designed Columbus Park and the growth of the Chinese community, from between 700 and 1,100 residents in the 1890s to more than 20,000 by 1960, marked this period of change.

The demographic shift described above was driven by a range of factors including immigration reforms such as the Magnusson Act (1943) which repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), and the Immigration and Nationality Act (1965). Chinese immigration in the latter portion of the 20th century caused a shift in the demographics of the community and the student body at P.S. 23 (Kwong, 1996). During this time, Manhattan’s Chinatown saw a substantial influx of immigration not only from China, but also Southeast Asia, Korea, the Philippines, and other Asian countries to the United States.

During the visioning process, many participants described 70 Mulberry Street as a sanctuary for newly relocated Chinatown residents and a vital aspect of the Asian American and Chinese American migrant experience in New York City. Community members often described the building as a physical artifact of often otherwise intangible individual, familial, and communal histories of immigration:

“It remains as a physical reminder of the collective history and generations of residents who attended that school, and have fond memories of that school and received an education that impacted the rest of their lives.”

—Community Member, Community Engagement Workshop

“When my family escaped the violence out west in the nineteenth century, they found refuge in New York’s Chinatown. And the first generation of Americans and my family were educated at 70 Mulberry. These were my grandparents, my parents, my aunts, my uncles... This building is historic, and it means a lot to my family. But it’s also part of the cultural fabric of Chinatown. And I would hate to see it become torn down like the old Penn Station.”

—Community Member, Community Engagement Workshop

In the mid-1970s, 70 Mulberry Street underwent a transformative shift from a school to a community center that served Chinatown. When the last class of P.S. 23 graduated in 1976, the building was repurposed as an all-age community center. The building was then occupied by community activists tied to the emergence of the cultural heritage movement in Chinatown.² Chinatown stakeholders were able to secure public support to house a range of cultural and social service organizations offering services for community use in the building eventually leading to 70 Mulberry’s current tenants. As described in Jan Lin’s (2010) *The Power of Urban Ethnic Places*, 70 Mulberry Street evolved over the following decades into a home for community-based organizations as the building was recognized as a “focal point for outreach and former community residents with memories of attending the school” (p. 212). As of 2020, the building was owned by New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services and hosted five organizations, including the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA), the Chinatown Manpower Project, the Chinese-American Planning Council, H.T. Chen & Dancers, and the United East Athletics Association which offer a range of program offerings. The building covered a gross area 41,358 square feet across five and half floors with a total of seven units. It housed the archives of MOCA and the Chinatown Senior Center, operated by the Chinese-American Planning Council.

However, despite Chinatown’s prominence as a burgeoning ethnocultural enclave from the 1970s to the early 2000s, several factors led to economic and population decline in the area. Post-9/11 security measures, including the closure of Park Row to civilian traffic, disrupted major tourist routes and negatively impacted local businesses. The decline of the garment industry, once a major source of employment in Chinatown, also led to job losses and economic uncertainty for many residents. These economic challenges, combined with rising living costs in New York City as a whole, contributed to the decline in the Asian American and Chinese American populations within Chinatown. Census data from 2000 to 2020 reveals a 30% decrease in the Chinese population, despite satellite Asian and Chinese communities in surrounding NYC areas like Sunset Park, Bensonhurst, and Flushing witnessing significant growth. This demographic shift expanded Chinatown’s current population beyond first-generation working-class immigrant to encompass more second- and third-generation Chinese Americans and individuals from other Asian ethnicities (Kwong 1996).

Amid these demographic changes, 70 Mulberry Street continued to hold historical and architectural significance. The building occupies a prominent location within the historic core of Chinatown, which was jointly designated as a historic district with Little Italy on the National Register of Historic Places in 2010. The building's architect, Charles B.J. Snyder, also designed New York City landmarks including Erasmus Hall High School and Morris High School. While 70 Mulberry is not officially designated as a New York City landmark, it is listed as a contributing building to the Chinatown National Register Historic District (National Parks Service, 2010).

Beyond its architectural and historical value, 70 Mulberry Street served as a symbol of intangible heritage and cultural traditions that had been preserved with the aging population of Chinatown. Several benefits, tangible and intangible, of the building were mentioned during the community engagement meetings, spanning from the building's rich immigrant history, long-standing historical connection, architectural legacy and difficult to replicate details such as the rusticated brownstone ashlar base, the corner tower, and brick facade.

“[My mother] is a member of the Chinatown Senior Center, which has been there for about 40 years and used to take up the entire ground floor. She wants to remind everybody that it was a very important gathering place for about 300 seniors. Each and every day, five days a week, it was a gathering place for lunch. On top of that, the other uses were musical performances. There were dance classes, Tai Chi classes, drawing classes, computer classes and English classes. So there were a lot of uses in there that we would like to see restored.” —Community Member, Community Engagement Workshop

“I think it is vital that the arts, particularly the performing arts, [the organizations could] still have a home at 70 Mulberry. Organizations like Chen Dance Center provide dance training and performance opportunities to thousands of Chinatown residents and NYC public school students and draw in people not just from the Chinatown community but all over NYC.” —Community Member, Community Engagement Workshop

“It is a place for immigrants coming to the community and a place where they can build friendship, sense of community, interest and appreciation for arts and culture.”
—Community Member, Community Engagement Workshop

In January 2020, a five-alarm fire severely damaged the top floors of the building, including destroying its brick walls and corner tower. In response, the New York City Department of Buildings (NYC DOB) issued a vacate order and required the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services (NYC DCAS), the building's owner, to demolish a portion of the structure. Concurrently, the five community-based tenant organizations relocated and began offering some of their services in reduced capacity at interim locations (New York City DCAS, 2020).

“70 Mulberry Street is very important to the heart of culture in Chinatown. It was devastating when it burned. Please keep the spirit of that building alive and make it stronger.”—Community Member, Community Engagement Workshop

“Its [legacy] is the physical aspect of the building, the beautiful brownstone, arches to the entrance, the pattern of the windows, the beautiful color of the brick corner tower that towers over Columbus Park and was this community’s version of a new Italian Campanella. It is the quality of the masonry. It is the physical presence in the heart of Chinatown. It is the long connection to the community, and is the crucial services provided by the tenants in that building for tenants who deserve to be back PS 23 building and classroom in that building, with a better, more purpose-built facility than they have ever had before.”

“Tenants need to re-establish their homes at 70 Mulberry as quickly as possible. However, with that said, there does not need to be a choice between expediency of rebuilding and preservation of our community’s history. Both can happen with a sensitive architectural design of this space. This needs to be addressed and not pushed to the side.”—Community Member, Community Engagement Workshop

Fearing the complete demolition of the building, Chinatown community members organized a protest and demanded a community visioning process. This protest emerged in the context of other tensions including, among others, historical divestment in Chinatown, compounded by the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy; challenges posed by the pandemic, exacerbated by an upsurge in acts of harassment and violence against people of Asian descent; and ongoing community protests against the proposed borough-based jail program in Chinatown (Amandaloro et al. 2020). In July, 2020, in response to community demands, the City of New York committed \$80 million to redevelop 70 Mulberry Street, signaling a commitment to supporting its continued role as a community resource for future generations. This commitment marked a significant departure from the historical narrative of disinvestment in the area.

In response to community expectations for an inclusive and transparent community visioning process, the City engaged 3x3, a community-centered design agency, to co-lead and facilitate a shared vision for 70 Mulberry Street. NYC’s Department of Citywide Administrative Services also formed an advisory committee consisting of building tenants and representatives appointed by elected and community officials.

TENSION IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT CONTEXTS

The individual and communal impacts that emerged from the fire at 70 Mulberry Street can be viewed through the lens of Mindy Fulilove’s (2016) *root shock*, which encapsulates the short- and long-term impacts to individuals and communities associated with the “traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one’s

emotional ecosystem” (p. 11). With examples such as the razing of Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, and the widespread urban renewal processes of the 20th century that displaced entire communities, Fulilove argues such disruptions can have lifelong effects beyond the immediate traumatic instances of loss in the form of disrupted and disbanded emotional and cultural systems. The fire at 70 Mulberry Street sparked a shock wave of disruption to a web of relationships and shared meanings woven together through the existing and constantly transforming processes and relationships associated with the site. As such, the community-led visioning process associated with 70 Mulberry provided an urgent opportunity to provide space for members linked to those ecosystems to attempt to simultaneously limit further disruption and conversely participate in the process of place-making that would support an outcome aligned with their collective needs and perspectives.

The mere existence of a community engagement process, however, does not necessitate meaningful or distributed participation and engagement in decision making among participants. Often when the means of design or decision-making are constrained to technocratic processes driven by so-called *expert* knowledge, friction – or the potential for friction – presents a risk to be managed and controlled under the guise of rationality or morality. Often to the effect of manipulation and trust deficits. According to Chantal Mouffe’s (1999) critique of deliberative democracy, “every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power that always entails some form of exclusion” (p. 756). Instead, Mouffe emphasizes the need for an *agonistic* democratic approach that grapples with the complexity of power emerging from the network of differences within pluralist societies (Mouffe 1999). Sherry Arnstein’s (1969) *ladder of citizen participation* framework offers a valuable tool for classifying and addressing the nature of participant agency and power in decision making processes, ranging from nonparticipation to meaningful citizen power. Arnstein developed the tool in response to her experiences working at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development from 1967 to 1968 as the chief advisor on citizen participation in the Model Cities Program, a vehicle for urban renewal, where manipulative engagement tactics were employed in order to maintain status quo power hegemonies. The framework calls for engagement processes that avoid forms of nonparticipation and tokenism and strive towards “citizen” co-production.³

Participants in such processes bring to the experiences a range of individual, organizational, and cultural identities and perspectives, many of which may come into conflict through a period of renegotiation and redefinition given the destabilization spurred by the fire at 70 Mulberry Street. In our experiences, these differences in subjectivities manifest in the form of highly divergent expressions of desired outcomes. The preliminary consultation conducted by 3x3 with the advisory committee, together with the analysis of reported community protests and the review of letters received from local residents, revealed a diverse set of often conflicting priorities and perspectives regarding the future of 70 Mulberry Street, such as

preserving or demolishing the remaining building structure and architectural elements; employing adaptive reuse strategies or prioritizing new interior space planning; retaining existing building height and floor areas or making expansions; and retaining or extending programming. The emergence of these divergent perspectives and agendas serves as an indication of the manner in which power, friction, and complexity manifests in participatory urban development processes.

It is also important to acknowledge the tension that is inherent in visioning processes. As Peter M. Senge (1990) points out in ‘The Fifth Discipline’, creative tension emerges when there is a gap between a vision and a reality citing an example of a rubber band stretched between two poles, one pole representing a larger vision and the other representing the current reality. Resolution or release occurs when one pole moves towards the other. Such tension often leads to feelings of anxiety, discouragement, or even hopelessness, or emotional tension. This creative tension manifested in the case of 70 Mulberry Street most evidently where community members expressed concerns about feasibility within the context of an unfolding COVID-19 pandemic.

“Is \$80 million guaranteed? Where can we see it?”

—Community Member, Community Engagement Workshop

“We do not know where that number [\$80 million] is coming from...”

—Community Member, Community Engagement Workshop

Recognizing the inherent potential for friction between diverging perspectives in the context of visioning in response to a crisis, 3x3 embraces an ontological and community-centered design approach, which is aligned with the core principles of the *transformative paradigm* and *pluriversalism*. We draw from Anne-Marie Willis’ (2006) notion that when we design our world, our world designs us back, which is to say that “design designs”. When communities have the right to self- and collective-determination to design their own pathways, not only are participants transformed, but new nonexploitative ways of being are created out of the dreams, desires, and friction held between a multiplicity of stakeholders. In the words of anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2017), in “...the transition from the hegemony of modernity’s one-world ontology to a pluriverse of socionatural configurations; in this context, *designs for the pluriverse* becomes a tool for reimagining and reconstructing local worlds” (p. 4).

ONTOLOGICAL AND COMMUNITY-CENTERED DESIGN

Inspired by philosopher and social critic Ivan Illich (1973), we drew upon our foundation of co-design and ethnographic-inspired tools with an intention to support co-production that acknowledges “both memory and the inheritance from

the past as creation,” (p. 7) supporting community rights to open political processes, tradition, myth, and ritual in order to foster a diversity of ontologies.

3x3’s approach centers a multiplicity of historically excluded perspectives and lived experiences in decision-making to not only co-create more effective, contextualized strategies but to generate positive spillover effects that can lead to more just systems over time. Such spillover effects rely on reframing relationships with reciprocity to establish transformative trust – trust that takes a dynamic energy and force of its own – towards an infinite game.

Connected to concepts such as relational design and relationship ethics, community-centered design sits within a broader transformative paradigm a framework that addresses dynamics of power, privilege, and inequity in mixed-methods research. The transformative paradigm is part of a lineage of justice-focused research and design schemas, such as liberatory design, equity-centered community design, participatory design, and critical emancipatory research.

Community-centered design is one application of a transformative paradigm that values communities as experts and agents of their own lives. A core tenet of this approach relies on engaging audiences as key stakeholders to co-create shared visions for community investments and build shared ownership over their success. It is based on principles of transparency, accountability, reciprocity, restoration, and equity. The following subsections describe notable concepts and strategies underneath our broader principles.

INVERSE POWER MAPPING

Drawing upon a conceptual foundation rooted in network theory, *power mapping* refers to the analytical process of identifying and analyzing the distribution and dynamics of power within a given context (Barabási and Pósfai 2016). Conventional power mapping frameworks are predominantly used by social designers in social change campaigns to identify influential or powerful individuals and groups with the goal of strategically engaging them to advance project goals. The resulting maps serve as a form of social network analysis that illustrates the sphere of influence of a given person or group. The role of relationships and networks assists in identifying the relevant *nodes of power* that “should” be engaged in the process in order to advance desired outcomes. Another version of power mapping involves mapping stakeholders along the axes of influence and interest. Similar to the previous tool, it is primarily used to identify sources of power and formulate strategies for influencing influential individuals.

Rather than approach the power map with an aim of influence or even manipulation, an inclusive approach can identify and build upon power held among historically excluded individuals and groups. In our experience, the inclusive approach facilitates transparency and shared understandings of community networks and, in doing so, encourages participants to identify strategies for strengthening

networks. Not only is it helpful to build a shared understanding among participants of the power dynamics in relation to an issue or context, it can also be helpful as a tool for de-homogenizing stakeholder groups for the purposes of equitable representation in a process.

Within the context of the 70 Mulberry Street community visioning process, 3x3 collaborated with the Advisory Committee to develop a visual map of stakeholders considering those who: (a) may have experienced significant impacts from the fire, (b) belong to historically marginalized groups, or (c) face substantial barriers to engaging with the community visioning process. It should be noted here that this tool is useful to ensure the *intentional inclusion* of stakeholders, particularly those historically excluded from public deliberation processes who often face barriers to participating due to information silos or other accessibility factors such as language and time poverty. This tool helped determine accessibility accommodations for the public process to enable more equitable representation that can start to address historical power disparities.

Acknowledging that stakeholder maps rest on many assumptions, particularly depending on the biases of who is “in the room”, we continued to vet the map with a broader set of stakeholders engaged with different Chinatown communities to evolve the map and continue identifying accessibility accommodations necessary for the engagement process. We also factored in inputs from the community letters to develop strategies for more equitably creating a shared vision and build trust with community members.

Intersectionality and Representation

Intersectionality is an analytical framework coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) for understanding how aspects of one’s social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination, privilege, and oppression. Rooted in research and activism of women of color, intersectionality can be traced back to Sojourner Truth’s 1851 speech “Ain’t I a Woman” and connects to ideas about *positionality* that emerged during Progressive movements of the ‘60s when social scientists questioned whether objectively observing a phenomenon without being influenced by your own background was possible. First coined by Linda Alcoff (1988), it understands one’s position not as innate or inherent but rather as created by social and political forces that are constantly changing.

Many planning scholars have drawn from social justice scholarship to argue for an emancipatory planning paradigm, one that challenges hegemony and seeks equitable and meaningful representation for participants in planning process (Connolly and Steil, 2009; Friedmann, 2003; Miraftab, 2009; Peattie, 1994; Sandercock, 1998s, 1998b). Intersectionality and representation provide useful frameworks for engagement designers to: (1) interrogate their ability to interpret and steward knowledge about the experiences, perceptions, opinions, and desires of those they seek to engage; (2) surface and address power dynamics within a given

context; and finally, (3) ensure equitable representation of the plurality of voices, perspectives, and experiences to ensure that engagement does not lead to the substitution of one prevailing group of voices with another. While equitable representation is a core principle of a community-centered approach, it is important to acknowledge that no single individual possesses the ability to fully embody or serve as a representative for a whole community. As Crenshaw (1991) argues, “The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference... but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences (p. 1242).

3x3 applies the outputs from power mapping and related exercises focused on positionality and reflexivity to systematically and intentionally design strategies for more inclusive outreach and engagement, including ensuring appropriate cultural competencies are in place. Collaborative data collection and analysis associated with the power mapping exercises provides the opportunity for participants to interrogate not only the mechanisms and positions of power in a given context, but also the complex and multifaceted aspects of individual and group positionalities that help inform ways to make the engagement more accessible and therefore more inclusive.

In the 70 Mulberry context, 3x3 employed multilingual engagement designers proficient in English, Mandarin, and Cantonese, owing to their Chinese and American backgrounds. As a result of their positionalities, the engagement designers were capable of navigating nuanced cultural and linguistic contexts throughout the engagement process. This approach promoted an orientation toward cultural understanding and recognition of intersectionality, which supported more open and flexible interactions and resulted in deeper and more meaningful insights.

Additionally, we learned that older individuals associated with the visioning process often encountered a convergence of obstacles that could limit their participation in the process, such as limited English proficiency, limited digital access and literacy, and greater needs for social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing these challenges, our team worked with community partners to reduce barriers to participation such as by posting flyers via the senior center bulletin board and engaging community partners to providing assistance in participating in digital engagement sessions.

Trust and Accountability

Trust and accountability are fundamental aspects of various domains, including interpersonal relationships, organizational dynamics, and societal structures. Trust refers to the reliance and confidence individuals place in others. The inclusion of varied perspectives, even if they are contradictory, necessitates the design of a facilitation mechanism that incentivizes disagreements rather than trying to foster consensus (Miraftab and Wills 2005).

Convergent thinking, with its greater emphasis on commonalities over differences, facilitates alignment on shared values, identification of areas of

agreement, and establishment of communication bridges across stakeholders with otherwise diverse perspectives and belief systems. In contrast, carefully navigated explorations of divergent thinking, can promote the acceptance of many ideas by recognizing the value of varied mental processes. Within the framework of agonistic pluralism, the practice of divergent thinking can foster an inclination among individuals to examine a wide range of viewpoints in an impartial and non-judgmental manner. This approach cultivates a sense of curiosity and a readiness to actively embrace the new or unexpected.

The presence of opposing priorities can provide a fertile ground for insights and ideas (Farjoun and Fiss, 2021). However, the question arises as to how an engagement designer may establish a framework in which different various stakeholders can engage in both collaboration and compete for their interests simultaneously, while maintaining a level of constructive behavior that prevents the breakdown of the situational coalition.

3x3 strives to create spaces within our engagement processes that facilitate convergent-divergent thinking, with explicit acknowledgment of the nature and validity of varying viewpoints concurrently held by different stakeholders. Engagement Designers are faced with managing participant expectations regarding the emergence of such differences and alignment with the intent of engaging participants productively with a diverse range of potential pathways. Exercises associated with this approach include value storytelling which does not only help you see how divergent perspectives can be but also facilitates understanding. The value storytelling can also help facilitate the dissemination of rich personal and intergenerational memories and experiences. This practice grants stakeholders valuable perspectives into diverse worldviews empathy and fostered comprehension, thereby unveiling shared principles and similarities among everyone involved, irrespective of their distinct perspectives.

The process encountered numerous problems in establishing trust. The problems were addressed by our team through the implementation of measures aimed at promoting transparency and authenticity throughout the process. Two feedback loops were established in our project. The first feedback loop was implemented following the ideation phase, while the second feedback loop was implemented for the design phase. The team showed a strong dedication to maintaining transparency in both information sharing and decision-making throughout the entirety of the project. The facilitators fostered an environment conducive to iterative processes and experimentation. They operated under the assumption that the answer would emerge via the combined knowledge of the stakeholders, without prioritizing one perspective over another.

In order to further build trust with community members, our team collaborated with the advisory committee members, community-based groups, and community leaders to effectively engage community members using their preferred modes of communication. The employed strategies included the distribution of flyers directly

to business and property owners using door-to-door visits, as well as the use of established WeChat groups to disseminate information to service recipients and residents. The community groups and members of the advisory committee assumed the role of proxy engagement designers during the distribution of surveys. They used familiar modes of interaction to create open lines of communication. This approach prioritized the internal dynamics and perspectives of the community, rather than imposing external viewpoints. This strategy also aimed to reduce the risk of outsider's perspective dominating the process.

Creating an enabling environment was also crucial to fostering open-mindedness, ambiguity tolerance, and the recognition of diverse viewpoints. Our team created various avenues for stakeholders to share and deliberate on the issues and opportunities related to the reconstruction of 70 Mulberry Street. A virtual town hall style was implemented to facilitate the participation of all stakeholders, enabling them to articulate their issues and pose questions within a unified platform. Listening and design sessions were carried out with smaller groups in order to build and prioritize a shared vision and identify potential opportunities. Our team successfully involved a range of 100-150 individuals in each of these formats. Furthermore, individuals were incentivized to engage in a survey, resulting in the acquisition of 551 replies, as well as the sharing of letters and documents.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of this case study has revealed how friction, mediated by ontological and community-centered design approaches, can address power hegemonies in community and public decision-making. The study underscores the importance of embracing pluralism and recognizing the value inherent in the conflicts that arise from a multitude of voices.

The study shows how friction, when harnessed through inclusive, community-centred design, can lead to transformation outcomes in public decision-making. It demonstrates the potential for diverse perspectives to co-exist, intersect, and converge, resulting in a shared vision that reflects the richness of a community's heritage and the aspirations of its community members. This case study offers valuable insights and a potential model for community-driven initiatives that seek to navigate complex power dynamics and honor cultural legacies while envisioning a more inclusive future.

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NOTES

1. While using the terms like “Asian American” and “Chinese American,” it is important to acknowledge that not every individual categorized under these terms may necessarily identify as American, underscoring the multifaceted nature of personal identities and lived experiences. It is also important to note that designations “Asian American” encompass people who trace their roots to more than 20 countries in East and Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent, each representing a rich mosaic of cultural diversity (Pew Research Center n.n.). Within this broad spectrum, more than 59 different languages other than English are spoken, illustrating the linguistic diversity within these communities (U.S. Census Bureau 2022).

2. Jan Lin's Power of Urban Ethnic Places briefly describes how some of the significant shift in the building came about. As Lin describes, “The New York Chinatown History Project was started in 1980 by Charlie Lai and John Kuo Wei Tchen... As the story goes, the two turned their cultural activism to the streets when they began to notice the treasure trove of community artifacts that were being left on Chinatown sidewalks by older households and commercial merchants making way for new immigrants... When they moved into P.S. 23 in 1984, their first exhibition chronicled the quiet but heroic struggles of the Chinese American laundry worker... When the NYCHP became the Museum of the Chinese in the Americas (MoCA), it decided to stay in P.S. 23 because according to Fay Chew, it recognized the school building as an artifact itself, meriting historical preservation... A series of alumni reunions of former students of P.S. 23 exhibition provided an opportunity for reunion in the spirit of intercultural remembrance and dialogue while also forming a collection of artifacts and stories that would subsequently form the exhibition “What Did You Learn in School Today? P.S. 23, 1893-1976.” Lin also mentions the shift of MoCA into a new 14,000-square-foot space at 211-215 Center Street and the continuation of the old space at P.S. 23 as an archival and research center. Our team was not able to find documentation on how other community groups came to occupy P.S. 23 and eventually became the tenants of 70 Mulberry Street.

3. In Sherry Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation," the term "citizen" is used to refer to individuals who are part of a community or society, and it represents a broad and inclusive concept of participation in a democratic society. In Arnstein's framework, the term "citizen" does not necessarily imply formal citizenship in a legal sense (e.g., being a citizen of a specific country with associated rights and responsibilities), but rather it encompasses all community members who have a stake in the decision-making processes and outcomes that affect their lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the way Chinatown communities engaged with the community visioning process. Due to the need for social distancing and health precautions, many traditional in-person methods of community engagement became limited.

Ethical considerations are paramount in community engagement projects. To keep the text short and focused on the main argument, we did not discuss ethical issues such as informed consent, privacy, and conflicts of interest. These considerations should guide the entire community engagement process, ensuring that it aligns with ethical principles and respects the rights and privacy of community members.

It's essential to recognize that the insights and strategies presented in this case study may not be universally applicable. Different community visioning projects in diverse contexts may require different approaches. While our findings offer valuable lessons, their applicability should be assessed within specific contexts.

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