LOCAL PROJECT CHALLENGE: Accelerating the SDGs

PLACE LEADERSHIP PROJECT
WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES

Capitol Riverfront: Reconnecting People to the River
H Street: Connecting Communities through Culture
Rosslyn: Reinventing Public Space for Social Gathering
Congress Heights: Using Art to Revive the Soul of the City
Downtown Fredrick: Reinvesting in Main Street USA

Project Overview
The Place Leadership Project is a community-based participatory research project exploring place-based leadership and innovation hosted by Georgetown University’s Urban & Regional Planning Program. The project seeks to accomplish three overarching goals:
1. Convene a community of place management practitioners across the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region and regularly engaging with regional professionals at the forefront of this quickly evolving field. This includes a diverse array of place-based stakeholders across governance structures (BID’s, Main Streets, Civic Partnerships, Public, Private etc.) in order to position the Washington, D.C. region as an international leader in place-management innovation.
2. Establish a standardized framework for performance reporting across the region informed by research into dominant metric regimes. This standardized reporting will allow for the accurate analysis of managed urban districts across the region to facilitate ongoing progress in reaching outcomes indicated in SDGs 11, 13, 16 and others outlined below. Our emphasis is on feasible professional practices that can be implemented within an uneven landscape of organizational capacity and thus achieve the goals of the SDGs at a hyper-local scale.
3. Elevate the innovative local practices of place management and place-based performance management onto a global stage of discourse and work towards proactively leading local communities into a position of alignment with the SDGs.

Project Process
The Place Leadership Project has a three-pronged process which seeks to simultaneously build upon academic research while providing actionable resources to place management practitioners.
- Convene independent research focused on regional place management organizations, their places and their organizational practices.
- Engage with community stakeholders at bi-annual convenings and focused workshops to learn the state of professional place management practice and the concerns of the greater public. Convenings help to inform academic research and make it practical.
- Report on best practices in metric gathering observed in the field and develop recommendations for further refinement of the practice in order to meet SDGs.

Community or other engagement:
The Place Leadership Project, through the Georgetown Urban and Regional Planning program, hosts two on-campus convenings per year which are free, open to the public and advertised. Each event focuses on a relevant topic in place management like mobility, equity and emerging practices. Additionally, the project is in constant communication with dozens of local organizations and participates in a research collaboration with: IDA, DC BID Council, District of Columbia, ULI, APA, Brookings Bass Center. We work with these groups through smaller workshops to gain insight into place management needs and reporting practices. Our website then communicates our findings to our partner network and others.

SDGs considered or implemented
The Place Leadership Project views all of the SDGs as important and inter-related sets of goals which can in-part be achieved through intentional interventions in place. We believe that by conducting research and engaging with local organizations we can build a network of partners committed to tracking progress and achieving SDGs. In this context, SDGs 11, 16 & 17 may be thought of as the avenues through which many of the other goals can also be met.
Project Impact
So far, the Place Leadership Project has brought together hundreds of stakeholders, organizations, and community members from across the DC region to discuss some of the most pressing challenges taking place in our cities. Examples include reducing congestion and emissions at our mobility event and grappling with the meaning of equity in public space at our inclusive spaces event. In addition, the gatherings have provided opportunities to connect across silos and build important personal and professional relationships.

Project Outcomes
Beyond the impact that comes as a result of building connections between place leaders, there are some concrete steps which our research hopes to achieve. This includes:
- The creation of a standardized metric reporting regime will enable accurate benchmarking and reporting amongst urban districts throughout the region regardless of local jurisdiction or organizational structure.
- Data from this reporting regime will assist in making the most informed decisions, at both the district and local government levels, to reach SDG goals.
- Partnerships supported by the PLP will help foster greater connections between community leaders and create more cross-jurisdictional knowledge sharing.

Project Takeaways
Place is an important component of any community. Leaders and community stakeholders should be concerned with how broader goals are actually implemented at the scale of an urban district or specific place. Through partnerships, professional place management practices and better metric reporting to track progress, regions can begin to achieve the more sustainable world envisioned by the SDGs.