



WE'VE PLACE *and beyond...*

rebuilding the

*POST-INDUSTRIAL/POST-RECESSION CITY
through bi-continental collaboration*



RISD/DESINE Lab
Javeriana/PEI
Central Falls, Rhode Island

2015 RUDY BRUNER AWARD PROJECT DATA



PROJECT DATA

Please answer questions in space provided. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

Project Name **We've Place** Location **741 Dexter Street** City **Central Falls** State **RI**
 Owner **City of Central Falls**
 Project Use(s) **Public Plaza/open space/gathering space**
 Project Size **.125 acres** Total Development Cost **\$20,000**
 Annual Operating Budget (if appropriate) **NA**
 Date Initiated **February 2014** Percent Completed by December 1, 2014 **100%**
 Project Completion Date (if appropriate) **July 2014** Project Website (if appropriate) **NA**
 Attach, if you wish, a list of relevant project dates

Application submitted by:

Name **Elizabeth Dean Hermann, Ph.D.** Title **Professor; Founder/Co-Director, RISD/DESINE Lab**
 Organization **DESINE Lab, Rhode Island School of Design**
 Address **2 College Street** City/State/Zip **Providence, RI 02903**
 Telephone (**617**) **306-1754** Fax ()
 E-mail **ehermann@risd.edu** Website (if appropriate) **desinelab.org/**

Perspective Sheets:

Organization	Name	E-mail
Public Agencies City of Central Falls	Stephen Larrick, Dir. of Planning	slarrick@centralfallsri.us
Architect/Designer DESINE Lab/RISD and PEI/Javeriana University	Daniel Feldman, Co-Director, DESINE Lab	namdlef@gmail.com
Developer NA		
Professional Consultant NA		
Community Group 1 Budare Grille	Jairo Echeverry, Owner	budaregrille@gmail.com
Community Group 2 Segue Institute for Learning	Angelo Garcia, Founder/Exec. Director	<Angelo.Garcia@segueifl.org>

Please indicate how you learned of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence. (Check all that apply).

- Direct Mailing
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2015
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
PROJECT
AT-A-GLANCE



PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

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This sheet, the Project Data sheet, and the representative photo will be sent to the Committee in advance as the *Project Overview*.

Project Name	WE'VE PLACE		
Address	741 Dexter Street	City/State/ZIP	Central Falls, Rhode Island 02863

1. Give a brief overview of the project. Approximately 500 words.

WE'VE Place is a .125 acre public plaza built primarily of locally-sourced recycled materials and volunteer labor in economically-depressed Central Falls Rhode Island. The plaza occupies a central location on a busy through road connecting neighboring Pawtucket and towns to the north. The plaza, built on an unpaved parking lot adjacent to the city's largest middle school and local restaurants and markets, serves as a "check dam" of sorts by providing a visible destination, an identity, and a gathering place connecting off street parking on side streets to businesses on the main commercial route. WE'VE Place was built over 6 weeks in summer 2014 as the first built work of an on-going intercontinental collaboration between DESINE Lab at the Rhode Island School of Design (an applied research lab focused on the role design can play in addressing social and economic empowerment of post-conflict, post-disaster and post-recession societies), PEI (the social innovation and unsolicited projects lab of the Architecture Department of Javeriana University (Bogotá, Colombia) and the City of Central Falls.

Central Falls, Rhode Island's smallest (1.29 sq.mi.; pop. 19,416), densest, most culturally diverse (65% Latino, most Colombian American), and most economically depressed community suffers from high unemployment, low home ownership, degraded physical infrastructure, crime and drugs, few public amenities, minimal open space, run-down commercial streets and scarce street trees. As a city that had all of its high school teachers fired in 2010 due to poor student performance; went into state receivership in 2010; went bankrupt in 2011; and had its Mayor thrown out for corruption in 2012, Central Falls is a city that is looking for innovative ways to move forward and rebuild its social, economic and physical foundations.

The collaboration between DESINE Lab, PEI and the City began under the leadership of newly-elected 27-year old local-born Colombian-American Mayor James Diossa and his 24-year old Director of Planning, Stephen Larrick. Both are demonstrating great willingness to take risks and innovate as they seek solutions while facing limited fiscal resources. The three-way academic-government partnership became a way to leverage local expertise, the universities' pedagogical objectives, and city needs. The process began with DESINE Lab completing a proposed strategic physical master plan for the city in the spring of 2014. This provides the framework for the partnership's various and evolving efforts, which occur on many scales and in varying timeframes. One of these is a six-week summer design-build academy, where faculty and students from RISD (and its sister institution Brown University) and faculty and students from Javeriana University's Architecture Program come together in Central Falls to realize small catalytic steps in the larger master plan.

We've Place was initially carried out with borrowed money, locally-sourced recycled materials (including 16,000 bricks from demolished buildings in the city), and free labor provided by students, faculty and community volunteers. Over time, with money trickling in from local politicians, local businesses, the universities, many individual contributions, and the City, project costs were covered. Since finishing the project, WE'VE Place has been the site of numerous school activities, fundraisers, cultural events and general daily use as a park. DESINE Lab has now begun work on summer 2015 where the goal is to replace the City's Community Center, lost during the bankruptcy. For this, partnerships are being forged with the State's Board of Health, the Pawtucket/Central Falls Community Development Corporation, and Osram Sylvania, the last large employer in the city which permanently closed its manufacturing plant in September 2014.

2. Why does the project merit the *Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*? (You may wish to consider such factors as: effect on the urban environment; innovative or unique approaches to any aspect of project development; new and creative approaches to urban issues; design quality.) Approximately 500 words.

As the first tangible piece of a multi-pronged, multi-scalar, evolving urban re-development strategy being conceived and realized through a bi-continental, multi-university-government partnership, WE'VE Place sets a unique model and high standard for Central Falls' development and next steps, as well as other similar community development processes. Central Falls was at the forefront of the American Industrial Revolution and in achieving that status, began a long history of relying on immigrant labor for the textile mills. The last wave, and the community that now represents more than 60% of the city's population, came in the 1960s as highly-skilled labor from the textile producing centers of Barranquilla and Medellín, Colombia. Yet within a decade the industry was dying in New England and first moved in the 1970s to South Carolina, and by the late 1990s, had left the US for China. This socio-economic shift resulted in widespread unemployment with Central Falls becoming the first American city to go bankrupt following the 2008 financial crisis. While some parts of Central Falls have begun to see recovery, in particular the city's school system, the city as a whole has not recuperated. For many, WE'VE Place has become one of the first real indicators that things might be getting better. The fact that the plaza was built by students from both local schools and one from their country of origin, greatly moved the community, leading them to bring food, tools and materials during the building process, and to join in the work itself. Moreover, the community commented throughout the building process on the quality of the design and construction. Retired welders, machinists and masons offered lessons to students and local volunteers on how to perfect skills, and passersby remarked that they had never had anything as nice in town. Many expressed eagerness to help next summer, and many have begun to propose new initiatives that they think the city would benefit from. The plaza, along with its ceramic tile mural referencing the immigrant trail to Central Falls, has become enough of a symbol for Central Falls that its now appears on the City website homepage.

So, not only does the plaza represent the first step in a process and partnership that is somewhat unique and can provide a model for other largely immigrant post-industrial communities and those emerging from recession, it has become part of the identity of the community while establishing a platform for community members themselves to be empowered to share their expertise, develop new skills, and lead such creative actions on their own, even when money isn't readily available.

2015 RUDY BRUNER AWARD PROJECT DESCRIPTION



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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1. Describe the underlying values and goals of the project. What, if any, significant trade-offs were required to implement the project? Approximately 500 words.

WE'VE Place public plaza was built with the belief that our post-industrial under-resourced communities, while often in a state of physical degradation, with wide-spread unemployment, low home ownership, corruption, crime and social instability, are, at the same time, sites of strong community bonds, social activism, resilience, and often untapped expertise. Our goals, while not fully recognized in phase one of this on-going relationship with the city, fall into two main categories social and economic.

SOCIAL

WE'VE Place plaza offers a much needed public outdoor gathering space for the city and an outdoor classroom and performance space for neighborhood schools; it helps create local identity; it helps strengthen community and empowers individual residents by bringing neighbors together in the shared act of supporting and building this public amenity and planning future initiatives.

The plaza is intended to create a place of beauty and pride within the city's main commercial area where business's put attention and resources into the interiors of their shops and restaurants, and not into their storefronts, with the belief that the public realm is not worth investing in as it is unsupervised and unsafe, prone to theft and vandalism, and in a constant state of decay. As is evident from comments by both residents and members of the government, it was initially thought that the plaza could cause more problems for the city by either attracting drug dealers or by being a hangout for unemployed and disenfranchised youth. It was with these concerns in mind that we left the site visually porous and removed barriers and fences that could create blind spots. An unexpected benefit of this decision is that the unobstructed view of the space has created an even greater sense of ownership and stewardship by adjacent residents and business owners.

ECONOMIC

WE'VE Place aids in providing access to services and helps local economic development by offering a place to sit, socialize with friends, and attend public events before and after shopping or eating in local businesses. Since the plaza opened, local businesses have started serving meals-to-go for those wanting to eat outside. Individuals, schools, the city and cultural organizations are already planning food and craft markets, music, and dance performances for next summer. Regularly planned events will ensure increased activity on the street. The hope is that with more activity, and the promised repaving and sidewalk improvements to Dexter Street, businesses will upgrade their storefronts and new businesses will move into vacant properties.

TRADE-OFFS

The trade-offs for this project were primarily due to limited financial resources. While the quality of the craftsmanship was quite high, especially considering the plaza was built by students and not professionals, shortcuts had to be taken. We could not afford a proper bed of sand and a weed barrier under the brick paving, and the oak trellis, while heavily weatherproofed, will probably not last more than a few years and will need to be rebuilt out of more durable materials. Maybe most significant though is the lack of water and electricity (post construction) needed for watering plants and lighting. This will be an ongoing concern until the city can provide these services.

2. Briefly describe the project's urban context. How has the project impacted the local community? Who does the project serve? How many people are served by the project? Approximately 500 words.

Central Falls is a 1.29 square mile city located in the Blackstone River Valley stretching from Providence, RI to Worcester, MA. Along with its sister city Pawtucket, RI, Central Falls was the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. Much of its history and growth was driven by the textile mills, and its population has been a largely immigrant one from the beginning. From the 1960s onward, immigration was primarily from Latin America when highly trained, but cheap, labor was sought for the struggling textile industry. By the 1970s, textile manufacturing had moved to South Carolina. By the late 1990s, it had left the US for China. This socio-economic shift resulted in widespread unemployment. Central Falls became the first American city to go bankrupt during the 2008 financial crisis. Today, this city of 19,416 has an unemployment rate of 10.4%, a median home price of \$104,800, and 24% home ownership. The population is predominantly Latino (70%), with minorities of European immigrants (15%), Chinese (5%), and North American (10%).

WE'VE Place plaza was built along the main commercial street and adjacent to one of the larger schools in the city in order and serves the Central Falls community as a whole, as well as people from neighboring towns who patronize local businesses.

The project has impacted the community through both its process of coming into being and the possibilities it offers as a public space. The presence of 60-70 university students, half of whom were Spanish speaking and from the country of origin of the majority of the local Latino population, became a point of interest and a source of joy for both neighbors and business people. The students were quickly adopted by locals and the sharing of activities surrounding the World Cup provided a strong bond. The presence of the students helped create curiosity and interest in the project, and great anticipation of the return of the next group next summer.

The plaza itself has become a source of pride for the community, especially for those who participated in the process and/or live or go to school close by. It is used daily by those taking a shortcut from Cowden Street to Dexter, and by those seeking a place to spend time with friends and family. Several community events have been held in the space since the project was finished in mid July. Many more have been planned for next year, we are told. For residents living on the opposite side of the city, there may be less awareness of the plaza, despite much pre-summer distribution of information about this annual event and invitations to participate. Next summer's effort, a community center, will be built on the opposite side of town.

The entire community has access to the plaza 19,416; 600 students in the adjacent Segue School use the plaza regularly. Six restaurants and their patrons are within a block of the plaza.

3. Describe the key elements of the development process, including community participation where appropriate. Approximately 400 words.

In fall 2013, DESINE Lab at RISD's three Co-Directors started conversations with the City of Central Falls about establishing a bi-continental partnership between universities and local government where members of the partnership represent local academic institutions, a university from the country of origin of the majority of Central Falls residents (Colombia), and the City. DESINE Lab is an applied research lab focusing on design as strategy in the context of social and economic empowerment. The Lab's three co-directors have built their careers around linking design to international community development, community empowerment, capacity building, innovation and entrepreneurship, and issues of social justice. It is through one of the director's former faculty position at Javeriana University that the third leg of the partnership was born.

- The process began with DESINE Lab completing a master plan for the city that outlined an overall vision for physical and social coherence, public amenities, and economic growth. The plan laid out small to large steps and strategies ranging from the development of public space and community identity at critical intersections throughout the city, to a proposal for an industry-academic innovation lab in the former Osram-Sylvania plant which would cross-pollinate between Brown, the Rhode Island School of Design, and Osram Sylvania and the fields of neurology, health, engineering and kinetics, and light and energy.
- The Dexter Street plaza (WE'VE Place) was chosen as the first summer design-build effort after the City identified the unpaved parking lot as one of the few properties they could offer.
- The remainder of the academic year was spent refining the plans for summer, an information drive within Central Falls focusing on citizens, business owners, schools and the elderly so that citizens would be both informed and feel welcome to participate.
- Fund raising efforts including applying for grants from the State of RI, local Arts organizations, the RI Foundation, local representatives, and businesses headquartered in RI. While many important contacts were made, this effort led to little support initially.
- Meetings were held with local community leaders, the local business owners association, library and school officials, and government representatives so as to make the process as inclusive as possible. All pointed out the need for public space and a new community center (targeted for summer 2015).
- June 8, 2014, the work on site began with Angelo Garcia, Principal of the Segue Charter School offering unused classrooms as work space during the effort. Throughout, neighbors and nearby businesses showed great generosity in offering water, electricity, tools and equipment, food, and shade.
- A fund raiser/party with donated music, food, a capoeira performance, and impromptu soccer match was held halfway through the six weeks in order to welcome the community to the project.
- Following this, donations began to trickle in from local representatives, businesses, individuals, and the City itself which offered \$10,000 toward completion.
- A final community party was held in mid July to celebrate the opening of the plaza, with the Mayor and his staff leading the formal inauguration. At this time, students led a "name the plaza" event and encouraged the public to leave comments and suggestions on a large chalkboard placed on site.
- Following completion, planning began immediately for summer 2015.

4. Describe the financing of the project. Please include all funding sources and square foot costs where applicable. Approximately 400 words.

The project was financed through a variety of means once the community development grants we had applied for did not come through.

Students' tuition	\$6000
Senator contribution	\$2000
City Representative Contribution	\$500
Recycled bricks at a discount	\$.25/brick
Roofing material donated	(\$?)
Steel columns and welding at a discount	ca. \$900
RISD Provost donation	\$5000
City of Central Falls donation	\$10,000 (of which only about \$6000 was spent due to most supplies having already been purchased by the time the money became available)

The overall cost of the project was under \$5/SF (\$20,000 total)

5. Is the project unique and/or does it address significant urban issues? Is the model adaptable to other urban settings? Approximately 400 words.

WE'VE Place is part of a larger strategy for urban revitalization within under-resourced communities that is, we believe, replicable elsewhere. The plaza itself is somewhat unique to its circumstances but the larger strategy of bringing the city together with both local universities and a university from the country of origin of the majority of the local population, is a collapsing of local and global histories, economies, populations, and responsibilities that is rather unique, we believe. How this partnership and its ambitions will play out in the long run is still to be seen, but by disseminating information about the effort, both locally and in Colombia, we are hoping to generate more interest and more funding by both public and private organizations.

What has already occurred though, is that in addition to our summer partnership with Javeriana University, we have come together with them again and with the University of Oregon's Portland Architecture program (another partner of DESINE Lab) to form the Bi-Coastal Bi-Continental Urban Lab (biC²) where each year, starting in 2015, we will be holding "Urban Conversations" (in Central Falls on a rotating basis) where people and organizations from across the US and Latin America which are operating at a grass roots level and actually achieving social and economic empowerment through innovative means in economically stressed communities, will come together to share strategies and lessons learned. These are not intended to be conferences with audiences, but rather, intense conversations between those actually doing the work on the ground. The framing of each conversation will be generated from critical issues being addressed by the host city of a particular year. The site of the conversations will rotate between Central Falls/Providence / Portland / Bogota. These conversations as well are replicable.

2015
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
COMMUNITY
REPRESENTATIVE
PERSPECTIVE



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This sheet is to be filled out by someone who was involved, or represents an organization that was involved, in helping the project respond to neighborhood issues.

Name	Jairo Echeverry	Title	Owner
Organization	Budare Grill	Telephone	(401) 475-0533
Address	716 Dexter Street	City/State/ZIP	Central Falls, Rhode Island 02863
Fax	----	E-mail	budaregrille@gmail.com

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Signature ?		Date	Nov. 28, 2014
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1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play? Approximately 400 words.

The students came to have lunch here every day, the kids working on the project, and I thought it was an amazing thing they did for the community - taking their summer to do something like this for a city like Central Falls. It was very nice, very nice for you all to do that. What role did I play? I don't think I played a role. I was just "the Food Man!" I just really liked having the kids here. It was nice to have them here that summer doing the project. It was really nice!

I guess (in terms of my role) it was bigger, as I gave them a place to gather and I gave them an office space. The kids would come in here to use the internet. They would talk about the project, and talk about ideas for the project. It was like a little hub. I did donate food to the fundraiser, and helped make connections in the community.

2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project? Approximately 400 words.

My biggest concern was that I didn't think anyone would care for it and, I was wrong I think. You see it now, its there! No one is letting anything (destructive) happen to it.

I think the people here have used it a couple of times (for major events), and there was something planned there for the other day but they had to cancel it due to weather. They waited to long and its too close to winter. And I see the kids from Segue School there on the nicer days using a large chalkboard on the plaza.

I want to do something there. Next year I want to use it for a block party - bring a band, have some food, have a grill. We're right here so I can make *arepas* and just run them over. I can grill all the meats there, that's pretty easy. I talked to the Mayor and he said he wouldn't even charge me to use it, you know not charge me if they have to have a policeman over there (during the event). I'll probably make a donation to the city though for them letting me use it.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

3. Has this project made the community a better place to live or work? If so, how? Approximately 400 words.

Before there was just an abandoned building there, and it was torn down and then there was just an empty lot full of rocks. It was ugly, not nice. You guys brought something nice. Something to look at and something that could be used by the community. And I'm sure it will be even more used next year. It will be used a lot more. You guys finished late in July and there were only a few weeks left to summer when it could be used. Next year with the whole spring and summer people will use it more. I hope so anyway.

I want to see people utilize it more and I want to plan something too. I want to do something in appreciation, in celebration. I thought of doing something here but over there would be much better. You know, if every couple of weeks there was something going on there, especially on the weekend, it will draw people's interest and it will slow them down (as they drive through the city) because they will say "there's always something happening over there!" And they'll be interested in looking. The city needs to plan events there. It's all psychological. If they never see anything happening, nobody will want to go in there. It's just like a business, if it's not busy, people don't want to go in. If things are moving though, people say "Oh something must be happening. Let's go check it out." So, I think next year we'll see much more use.

4. Would you change anything about this project or the development process you went through? Approximately 400 words.

I think the kids should have better tools. I remember seeing everyone take down a concrete wall with a sledge hammer. That was intense. I almost went and rented you a jackhammer. That was dangerous with the rocks flying everywhere. I'd like to see them have better equipment to work with, more safety lenses and workboots. Construction is dangerous. Someone can get hurt. It's good you are going to have safety training next year. I had a similar issue at my house and I ended up renting one of those hand-held hammer drills and it was awesome compared to doing it with a sledge hammer.. It made it so much easier. It went right through. No impact on your hands. Nothing flying around in your face. I wish I had bought it because I rented it three times and I could have just loaned it to the kids.

As for your plans to build a new community center next summer, I honestly can't believe they did away with the community center. I don't know what happened exactly. A community center is a good idea though. Any extra-curricular activity for kids in a city like Central Falls keeps them away from trouble. It keeps them out of trouble. It keeps them occupied. I think anything that gives the local kids something to do after school is good. Some kids don't want to go home. They still want to hang out with their friends. So with a community center they would still have a chance to hang out with their friends but be supervised.

I think it's a great idea. You know, it would be expensive to do something like what we used to have here (the community center was lost during the bankruptcy and is now part of the Segue Charter School property). I used to go there as a kid and play basketball. I was swimming there. There are still basketball courts in town but they turned the one on Cowden and Illinois Street, I think, into soccer though. More kids are playing that now than basketball. There are courts though at Higgenson but they don't keep the lights on. I heard there is a problem with the light, I don't know what the issue is.

Central Falls is different from when I was a kid growing up here. It's rougher. It's different. There wasn't so much crime. Theft. I see certain people, groups of people who aren't good for the city. I don't remember seeing that as a kid. I don't know whether it was better policing or there were just better people in the city. I don't know what's happened but there are some scary people out there.

Central Falls fell into this period of time where no one cared. The city fell into that place where no one cared so, for awhile, this city was abandoned. I mean, we didn't even have a city government. There was no mayor. It was a mess. But it's definitely changing. It's coming around. I keep hearing a rumor that they are going to do Dexter Street over and that would be huge. They say they are going to do the whole street, the sidewalks, the lighting. I don't know if they are going to put trees in though. But, that would be awesome. This street is so bad. It hasn't been done in so many years. People drive by here and if the streets had lights so people feel safe at night, it would be huge! I see more businesses beginning to take pride and making their businesses nicer. This is good cause we had all these boarded up houses and empty retail spaces. So now it's turning around and it's a matter of keeping it going and keeping the businesses here.. You know, to be honest, it's not the neighborhood that's keeping me going. It's the people who pass through, people from out of town who come to eat here. Our reviews online are awesome and I want people to come here and see that Central Falls isn't a bad place. The Mayor's got the right idea. He took on a mess though and it's going to take time.

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This sheet is to be filled out by someone who was involved, or represents an organization that was involved, in helping the project respond to neighborhood issues.

Name	Angelo Garcia	Title	Founder/Executive Director
Organization	Segue Institute for Learning (Charter School)	Telephone	(401) 721-0964
Address	325 Cowden St. Central Falls, RI 02863	City/State/ZIP	Central Falls, Rhode Island 02863
Fax	----	E-mail	Angelo.Garcia@segueifl.org

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Signature ?		Date	December 9, 2014
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1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play? Approximately 400 words.

We were first approached by city folks about the RISD project about seeing whether our school would be interested in offering some space for visiting artists and we were more than happy to accommodate. The hope was that we would also be able to see the project as it developed, so we used the project for our students who were here for the summer program to watch the progress of the work being done. So we did offer space and throughout the course of the summer, while we were having class, our students were able to interact with the visiting artists just because they were seeing them around our school and they could interact and ask questions about the project.

Part of what I did by inviting them into our school was to orient them to the Segue story and what we do here at our school; how we started a full service community school; how we work with students and families. The background story of our school is very much about exercising and mobilizing the community which mirrored a lot of what DESINE Lab was doing by way of engaging local businesses, local politicians, and local stakeholders in the development of the project. Our students were actually able to see the beginning, middle and end process of the plaza as it came together and we incorporated that into some of the lessons we used here this summer by way of asking how we mobilize the community. This was part of our humanities activities where we were asking "how do you get support for things you are trying to accomplish? How do you get people to work together?" The process of making the plaza mirrored a lot of what we need to be talking about in our classrooms.

2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project? Approximately 400 words.

Some of the concerns I had were about how are we going to maintain this incredibly beautiful space? What would we be able to do as a school to support that? By virtue of proximity, we tend to mind the area a lot. So, when our students are engaged in community clean up projects we ask how can we remain engaged in a space so it remains in that condition and doesn't get abandoned or destroyed in any way. So I think our students and the city have done a good job of that with this plaza. The other question was how do we promote the plaza so folks are using it for what its original intent was, which is a gathering space and a space to celebrate. So, there is work to be done there but I am happy to see it remaining in the condition it was in when completed.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

3. Has this project made the community a better place to live or work? If so, how? Approximately 400 words.

Before the plaza, the space was just a collector of trash, an area where folks would dump stuff. It wasn't maintained. It was an abandoned lot and the city struggled a lot with the crime factor. Folks used it as a quick "get out of Dexter Street" and then they would come into the neighborhoods here. It was a place for folks to hide because the bushes had grown tall, there was a lot of garbage, and there were fences that blocked views of what was happening. It was a scary place for our students to walk. We were always concerned about their being near what was perceived as a dangerous area. The intersection of Dexter and Coden is already dangerous due to the traffic. The clearing and opening up of the plaza site now gives folks a direct line of vision so they no longer have to worry about walking by and seeing activities that they shouldn't be seeing.

The plaza gives an element of 'out-of-the-box' thinking, which is so important for people in the community and those who don't know anything about Central Falls. When people see how folks from RISD and another country would want to come here and work with us, it's a big wake up call for those who believe this can't happen in a place like Central Falls because its poor and riddled with crime. The plaza and the activity surrounding it put our community in a really positive light. As a long-time resident it was very exciting for me to see this happening. I also think it offers an element of culture by virtue of the fact that its surrounded by restaurants from all parts of Latin America. The plaza helps tie all these different cultures together by being here.

We use the space, even when we don't have official city permission, for a classroom or other purposes. We wanted to hold an autumn festival there but for some reason the city didn't ok it then. I think it should be even more actively used for performances and other events. Because we start school in early August, our students hang out there. We have mobile picnic tables that we take there for classes.

We need community buy-in to support both the programming, policing and maintenance of the space. The space is not a playground, and I think this is good. We also need cultural spaces for performances, festivals, food markets. Segue and other schools can become partners in hosting events every month and inviting other groups and people to join in. There might be ten events throughout the year but people expect them and look forward to them.

4. Would you change anything about this project or the development process you went through? Approximately 400 words.

One of the things I would have liked to see was more outreach to all organizations within the city such as Progreso Latino, the Learning Community, and Children's Friend and Services. It would have been good to have them involved. The decision makers in City Hall may be two times removed from the people who live here. They aren't hanging out in Central Falls on a Sunday afternoon. The community can have a greater stake in such efforts from the beginning if they feel included. So, how do we better get all of them involved. With the plan to next build a community center it would be good to get folks involved in the conversation earlier.

So I would suggest inviting everyone to the party and, even if they don't show up, you can say they were all invited. We don't need endless community meetings and we realize you had many of those during the master plan process, but maybe we could put comment cards in the markets, the library and here at Segue. Or DESINE Lab could set up a blog or a Google Doc so people can say what they think the area should be best used for, or say, "this is how I could use that area," and then they would promote it to their kids and families. J

I may be wrong, but I felt that decisions were made more in conversation with the Planning Office and only certain parts of the community and I would have liked to have seen even more engagement. But I do realize that no one even knew what space they would be given to work in until right before the summer work started.

2015
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
PUBLIC AGENCY
PERSPECTIVE



Please answer questions in space provided. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

This sheet is to be filled out by staff representative(s) of public agency(ies) who were directly involved in the financing, design review, or public approvals that affected this project.

Name	Stephen Larrick	Title	Director
Organization	Department of Planning, City of Central Falls, RI	Telephone	(401) 727-7480
Address	580 Broad Street	City/State/ZIP	Central Falls, RI 02863
Fax	-----	E-mail	slarrick@centralfallsri.us

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Signature ?		Date	December 5, 2014
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1. What role did your agency play in the development of this project? Describe any requirements made of this project by your agency

The City of Central Falls (CF) Office of Planning and Economic Development (OPED) was a full project partner and played a facilitating and coordinating role throughout the pre-project/planning and design-build phases of the "WE'VE Place" public plaza project. Context sensitively is of utmost importance in our low-income community, and, as a result OPED was intimately involved in a long planning process that preceded the actual project work but helped to align RISD DESINE Lab objectives with those of City Hall and of residents. This involvement included attending meetings, providing feedback on student work, and connecting DESINE Lab to various community actors. This process resulted in the creation of a better-informed master plan and a better-informed design-build approach.

When the time came for implementation, OPED worked directly with the DESINE Lab to identify a main-street site that both met project goals and fit within the City's vision. Once the site was identified, OPED helped to build political support within the administration and among local politicians and eventually secured a letter granting permission to use the site for the project. City Hall provided materials, equipment, and staff time to help with construction efforts. All permits and fees normally assigned to contractors were waived. OPED also helped secure \$10,000.00 from the City of Central Falls in order to purchase additional project materials. City staff monitored the project site during construction, and helped to promote the project through social media. At the project's completion, OPED staff attended several meetings and community events to help promote the new public space and message the project to the community. OPED has also begun the process of working with the Planning Board and City Council to change the zoning of the plaza from Commercial to Recreational.

At the project's outset, CF City Hall and OPED worked with DESINE Lab directors in order to define project requirements. From a process point of view, the City required that the community be involved and informed throughout, a requirement to which DESINE Lab held true with various outreach events and through the open inclusion of interested residents in the physical construction/installation, and naming of the space. From a design point of view, the City also required that the space be handicapped accessible and give adequate consideration to stormwater drainage on site. Both of these design concerns were adequately addressed as well. Finally, the City required that the project be fully completed during the DESINE Lab's aggressive six-week timeline, and, although it came down to the wire, this schedule was achieved.

2. How was this project intended to benefit your city? What trade-offs and compromises were required to implement the project?

How did your agency participate in making them? Approximately 400 words.

WE'VE Place Public Plaza was intended to benefit the City of Central Falls in a number of ways both physical and symbolic. The aim was to support local businesses, foster a communal sense of place, and restore a symbolic community pride through resident empowerment. This was accomplished through the transformation of a blighted, underutilized vacant lot into a vibrant communal place for passive recreation, connection, and performance. In itself this physical transformation presented a community benefit, but taken in the context of the neighborhood and community it achieved much more.

WE'VE plaza is sited on Dexter St., a main commercial corridor within Central Falls, and one major intentionality of the project was to support nearby mom-and-pop restaurants and shops by providing a public outdoor space with seating to eat or relax. Another practical objective was for the space to serve as a connection between an underutilized off-street parking lot and the Dexter St. commercial district, making the lot both more visible and better physically connected via the formalization of a pedestrian desire path. This aspect was important as business owners had indicated a need for adequate customer parking during initial community outreach. In addition to supporting the businesses on Dexter Street, the goal was also to build a communal resource that could be utilized by the neighborhood residents and nearby schools. Through conversations with the Segue Institute for Learning (a Charter middle school located across the street from WE'VE place on Cowden Street) we discovered a desire for an outdoor classroom space and for additional spaces for public performance. WE'VE plaza therefore incorporates a stage/performance area, as well as a small stepped area which doubles as "stadium style" seating to accommodate outdoor lectures. In addition, the nearby residential neighborhood consists of predominantly multifamily buildings with cramped, small apartments and little, if any yard space. The City of Central Falls as a whole in fact contains the least amount of open space of any community in the state. For this reason it was crucial that WE'VE Place provide a passive recreational "Third Space" to serve the needs of nearby residents.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the project intended to restore pride and empower residents in the wake of the City's recent history of educational crisis, political corruption, and municipal bankruptcy. This intention was manifest in the use of recycled materials from Central Falls--bricks that were made into a beautiful plaza patchwork, or glass that was remade into a thoughtful mosaic mural--almost to suggest that the City itself could be remade into something more. The involvement of residents throughout the design/build process also speaks to this intention of community empowerment. Many of the residents involved had never thought the existing vacant lot could or would be made into a beautiful public space, and as a result many were willing to help in the effort. The hope is that this first effort will lead residents to expect more from their government and to feel enabled to demand it.

From its inception the project involved key tradeoffs that had to be made by City Hall. The vacant lot on which WE'VE plaza is located had been previously slated to be developed as a paved asphalt parking lot. Some residents, businesses, and political voices were in favor of this option as there was a perception of a lack of parking in the area, but ultimately, additional parking could not be achieved within the scope of a new public space and the project opted instead to better connect an existing underutilized parking lot to the street. Other tradeoffs involved a lack access to water and electric on site leading to scrapping original plans for a communal sink/kitchen area and modifying plans for additional lighting to accommodate solar lights.

3. Describe the project's impact on your city. Please be as specific as possible. Approximately 400 words.

The WE'VE project has had a big impact on the Dexter Street neighborhood and on the City. For very little cost to taxpayers (only about \$10,000 in funds plus the involvement of municipal staff) the community gained a unique, beautifully-designed public space where there had once been a vacant lot acting as a gap in the urban fabric. Young residents can be seen hanging out in the space after school, employees can be seen taking a lunch break in the space on nice days, and events have already been held in the space on multiple occasions, including school events and performances, and a community celebration of Day of the Dead.

Councilwoman Stephanie Gonzalez who represents the Ward in which the project is located has applauded the effort and called for more collaborations of this kind to involve the community in improving our public spaces. One of the biggest impacts of the WE'VE place project has been the willingness of resident to engage with and take ownership of the plaza. On multiple occasions I have met residents of the neighborhood, who have told me that they love the space so much that they come by every day to water the plants and pick up any trash. One young resident even asked me to take his picture in the plaza so that he could make it his "profile picture" on Facebook.

In a community like ours that has been faced with corruption and crisis, many residents have disengaged and opted out of the public process. But these are not the behaviors of the apathetic or disengaged, but of residents who care about a public project and want it to succeed. And for Central Falls, that is a big impact.

4. Did this project result in new models of public/private partnerships? Are there aspects of this project that would be instructive to agencies like yours in other cities? Approximately 400 words.

The WE'VE project took on a unique model that involved bi-continental and government-academic partnerships and a lighter, quicker, cheaper approach to tactical urban placemaking interventions. Part of the success of this model came from thinking big and thinking globally, even when working at the scale of a small neighborhood project. By creating connections between Colombian architecture students in Bogota and Colombian immigrant communities here in Central Falls, RI, new cultural understandings emerged, and these understanding made the project meaningful in ways not often achieved in design. This kind of thoughtful approach to process was coupled with a pragmatic and thrifty approach to implementation.

Community fundraisers and donated materials helped offset costs, as did donated labor in which students and even some residents benefited from learning construction skills. We hope to further improve upon this component of the model in future projects by creating more opportunities for residents to gain skills and to take on agency in shaping public spaces in the City.

Design partnerships with Universities are often attempted, but in many such arrangements students design from the classroom and rarely interact with the community, let alone understand its context. Other cities that are looking toward university partnership should be sure that, as was the case with the WE'VE place project, a substantial portion of the project schedule is allocated for meaningful engagement and planning with the subject community.

2015
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
ARCHITECT
OR DESIGNER
PERSPECTIVE



Please answer questions in space provided. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

This sheet is to be filled out by a design professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services. Copies may be given to other design professionals if desired.

Name	Daniel Feldman	Title	Architect / Co-Director, DESINE Lab at RISD
Organization	DESINE Lab at RISD	Telephone (617)	767-1318
Address	2 College Street	City/State/ZIP	Providence, RI 02903
Fax ()	----	E-mail	namdlef@gmail.com

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Signature ?  Date December 2, 2014

1. Describe the design concept of this project, including urban design considerations, choice of materials, scale, etc. Approximately 400 words.

WE'VE Place was conceived as an open flexible space that could serve nearby schools and the community at large as a public 'living room' to be used for gatherings, performance and markets, while remaining available for limited parking on an as-needed basis, due to the site still being officially designated a parking lot at the start of the project.

The plaza, completely ADA compliant, is divided into five main zones:

- a lower sitting area adjacent to Dexter Street, the main commercial corridor on the west side of town, bus stops, and the adjacent Mexican restaurant. This lower 'room, open to the street, is framed by plantings, a seat wall and stairs for gathering.
- a long broad ramp bordered by a seat wall which connects Dexter Street to the middle of the site.
- the large flat central zone with a flowering magnolia and large mosaic mural with an abstract depiction of the immigrant trail to Central Falls.
- the open pavilion at the back side which creates a sense of boundary as well as a gateway allowing expansion of activities into the adjacent city parking lot. This offers shade and shelter from the rain.
- the trellised platform, connected to the pavilion, which offers places to sit and perform. At the same time, the platform acts as a large 'table' for spreading out goods during produce markets and craft sales.

WE'VE Place was designed to mark one of the important cross streets in Central Falls, Cowden Street, which links the City's two main commercial streets, Dexter and Broad, with Illinois Street (midway) which connects the high school to the south with a proposed new park and river access to the north. While our master plan identified four east-west cross streets deserving to be reworked as primary pedestrian-friendly connectors through the city, Cowden stands out for being home to several of the City's schools, the closest being the Segue Institute for Learning, a community-based charter school serving 600 students from 6th to 8th grade. Students from Segue as well as residents of surrounding neighborhoods cross through WE'VE Place on their way to and from school, markets and restaurants. The plaza was designed to offer the school outdoor classroom space as well as a place for special events and play. It was designed to be both a forecourt and spillover space to local businesses, and an eddy within city flows offering quiet respite or a center of activity to all members of the community.

The material of the plaza and inspiration for its use was the industrial past of the city. The many mill buildings which have been torn down over the years returned as 16,000 recycled bricks making up paving, walls and stairs. Local welders provided industrial steel for the many columns, the local roofer provided the corrugated steel roofing material, local gardens provided many of the plants, and neighbors gave left over tile and glass rods for the mural.

2. Describe the most important social and programmatic functions of the design. Approximately 400 words.

The most important aspects of the design include its role as a pedestrian crossroads within the city, and its offering of an attractive human-scaled set of flexible spaces which can be used for quiet seating, gathering, performance, parties, markets, or rallies. The spaces are all ADA compliant (as tested over the summer by several wheelchair users who complimented the student-builders on that aspect of the design), visually and materially unified. At the same time though, they offer unique qualities and different scales to meet the needs of various user groups at once. The lower room is for quiet sitting or meetings; the middle flat zone and large ramp are for active use; the trellis area is for staging or sitting; and the pavilion is for shade, shelter and offers an elevated position from which to view activity in the plaza or in the parking lot behind (such as impromptu soccer games).

The openness of the plaza is important socially as well as it's visual porosity allows adjacent businesses and homeowners to feel connected and a degree of stewardship. It allows residents and police to keep watch over the space during times of less active use and during the evening. And it welcomes all passersby by not creating obstacle, gates or walls.

ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

3. Describe the major challenges of designing this project and any design trade-offs or compromises required to complete the project. Approximately 400 words.

For us, design and the physical creation of the project were inseparable.

Design of the project began late due to not knowing until late May what land the city could make available to us, and then not having the students together before the six-week period began. Once the students from Javeriana, RISD and Brown were assembled in early June, we began. Over the course of the first week, presentations were made by RISD and Brown DESINE Lab students who had been involved in the master plan effort for the city over the past academic year, as well as by city officials, Angelo Garcia, the Founder and Executive Director of the Segue charter school, and others within the community. Three rainy days holed up in the Segue School were followed by several days on site laying out the project at 1:1 scale, refining layout and dimensions, calculating material needs, tracking down potential suppliers, and beginning to break ground. The time involved doing the above, then training students on safe equipment use, breaking ground, and further refining the design meant that the actual building of the project lasted closer to 4.5 weeks, rather than all six. Again, this was in part because it was the first year of the program. Going forward, design will have to be completed before the start of the time on site to ensure quality and full development of ideas, and to ensure adequate time for building. This means the review of design proposals as they evolve will be a three-way conversation via Skype.

The greatest challenges in making WE'VE Place a reality were time, money and, as this was our first year, not yet knowing where to source materials and expertise. While this became easier over the six weeks, every summer promises to bring some of the same issues to the fore - especially having the necessary funding in place.

Not having the financial resources available that we ideally would have preferred meant that not all parts of the construction could be done as we would have preferred. All labor was by hand as we could not afford heavy equipment for excavation or lifting columns and the prefabricated roof into place. While we managed, these were the moments where we worried most about the students' and volunteers' safety. Likewise, we couldn't afford the materials we should have used to create a proper base for the paving. As the site had recently been regraded with compacted fill for its former short life as a parking lot, we hope this will not be a problem going forward. We also had to compromise on lighting - again cost and lack of an electrical hook up - and because of no water on site, a large public sink we had purchased from a demolition company and had hoped to install in the plaza for use during markets and food events. The city will be providing these services later but, for now, we are still using neighbors' hose hook ups and have installed inexpensive solar lights.

4. Describe the ways in which the design relates to its urban context. Approximately 400 words.

WE'VE Place plaza relates to its social, programmatic and physical context in a multitude of ways.

The project directly tackles the city's rundown state following the economic downturn, abandonment of property, a flood of foreclosures, bankruptcy and state receivership. Central Falls, once the center of America's Industrial Revolution, by 2011 was no longer place of any significance in its own right, but instead a blighted and forgotten backdrop for those moving from Providence and Pawtucket to Cumberland and Lincoln.

This project, therefore, was part of an attempt to create a series of "check dams" - urban spaces which created reasons for those living in the city, and those passing through, to slow down and interact. With one of DESINE-Lab's core values being social empowerment, this project aims to celebrate urban life and change attitudes toward public space. By establishing the first step in demonstrating how public space can revitalize an area, this project, and those that will follow, hopes to inspire community members to take actions themselves which can change the conditions around them and improve the quality of their lives.

The plaza offers a variety of spaces, sitting possibilities and shelter for people from all age groups to use and enjoy. It works well for both small groups and large gatherings, and both active and less active use. It creates a physical connector between a nearby school and the surrounding neighborhood and the main commercial street. It creates a point of visual enrichment and a place of respite within a dense commercial zone offering little public space or shade. Through successive years of the RISD/Javeriana/Central Falls partnership, WE'VE Place will eventually be part of a chain of public spaces linking the western side of the city and its north-south thoroughfare back to the eastern north-south commercial zone and the river which surrounds the city on two sides.

We've Place relates materially, historically, culturally and emotionally to its urban context and residents as well. Recycled bricks came from demolished mill buildings that marked the start of the American Industrial Revolution, and were the site of employment for the many waves of immigrants who built their new American lives in the city. The welding, roofing and demolition business's involvement brought these local assets into the public spotlight. The ceramic tiles and glass rods used in the mosaic mural wall were from local families and a local jeweler whose family-owned business (now closed) had been there for many generations.

The mural depicts the immigrant trail to Central Falls and the interweaving of lives and cultures that make up this rich and diverse community. The plaza was designed keeping in mind that most of the residents in the city come from cultures which spend much of their time outside in public spaces. The city currently offers few spaces that can serve this function and most of the existing open space is along the river corridor or at the fringes of town and not in the middle of the city where schools, businesses and adjacent residences can help enliven such space while benefiting from its proximity. Being central also means more people can access the space, and one group of equal concern to us as school children or young families, was that of the elderly who currently live in high-rise silos with little opportunity to interact with the larger community.



population: 19,416 (2014)

area: 1.29 sq mi (3.3 km²), the smallest and most densely populated city in the smallest state in the U.S.

immigration: Early immigrants to the area came from Ireland, Scotland and French Canada to work in the textile mills. In the 1960s, mill owners recruit Colombians to work in their factories.

Today the city is 65% Hispanic with a majority Colombian.



WE'VE Place



left:
Pawtucket/Central Falls
train station (built 1916 -
closed 1981)
photo: Flickr:t55z

Central Falls Parks &
Recreation Building
(sold in 2011)
photo: AP/Michael Dwyer



right:
Homes in Central Falls
during recent recession.
There were more than
300 foreclosures in
Central Falls during the
height of the recession,
and roughly half of the
city's multifamily homes
were boarded up.

Photos (top to bottom):
<http://wpri.com>
<http://affordablehousinginstitute.org>
<http://www.http://affordablehousinginstitute.orgsws.org/>



bottom:
Broad Street businesses
during recession
photo: Christopher
Capozziello for MSNBC





top two images:
abandoned house at 741 Dexter Street (photo: Google Earth)

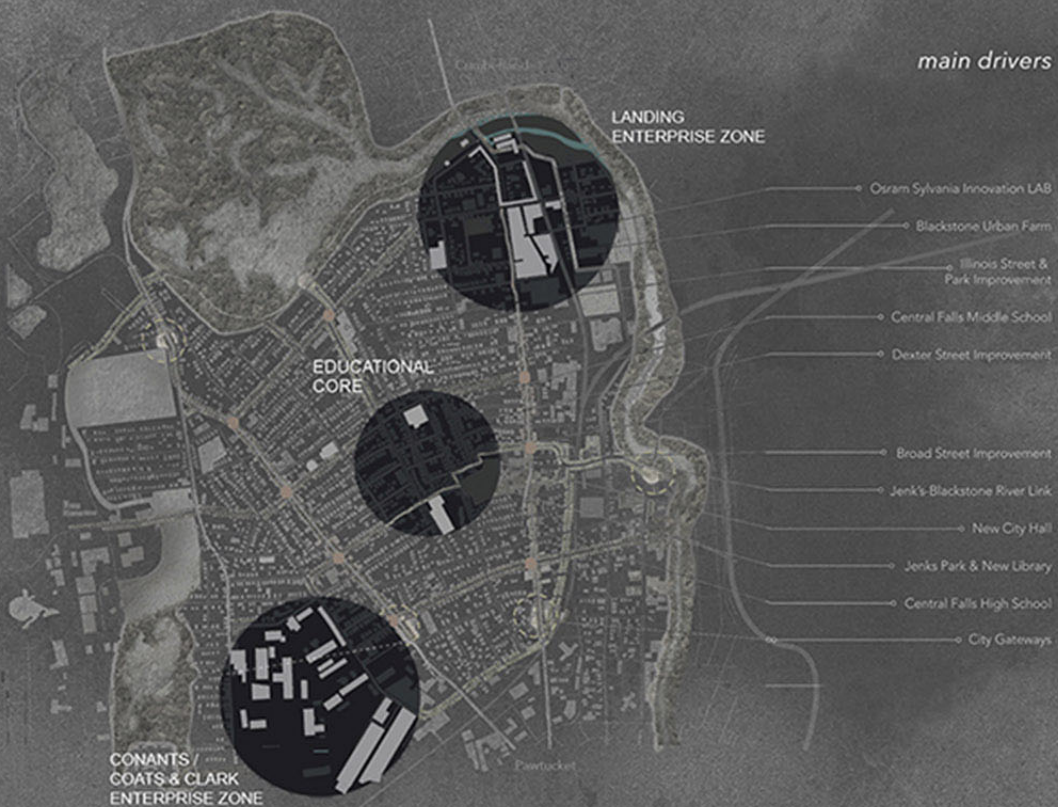


above:
unpaved parking lot at 741 Dexter Street at start of project
photo: E.D. Hermann

Central Falls master plan



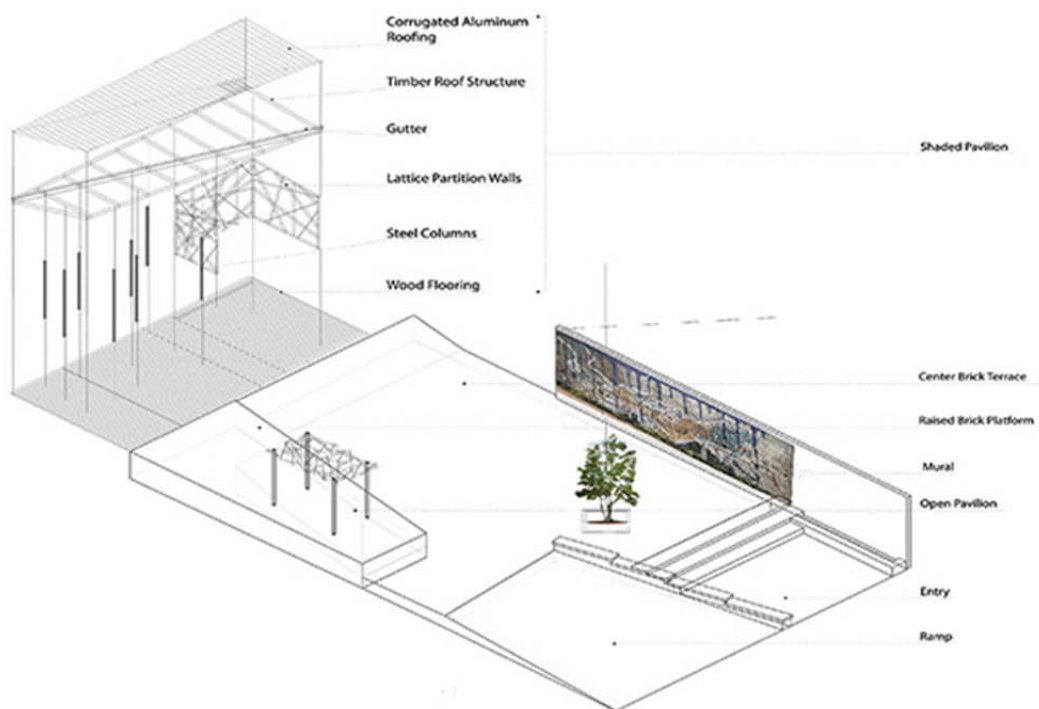
main drivers





PUBLIC PLAZA | PARK
WEST ELEVATION







Brochure for the bi-continental partnership between RISD/DESINE Lab, Javeriana/PEI and Central Falls, RI



Testing ideas onsite, following three rainy days of design workshop in the neighboring Segue Charter School



Laying out the project with materials found on site



Work begins (all work on the project was done by hand due to extremely limited resources)





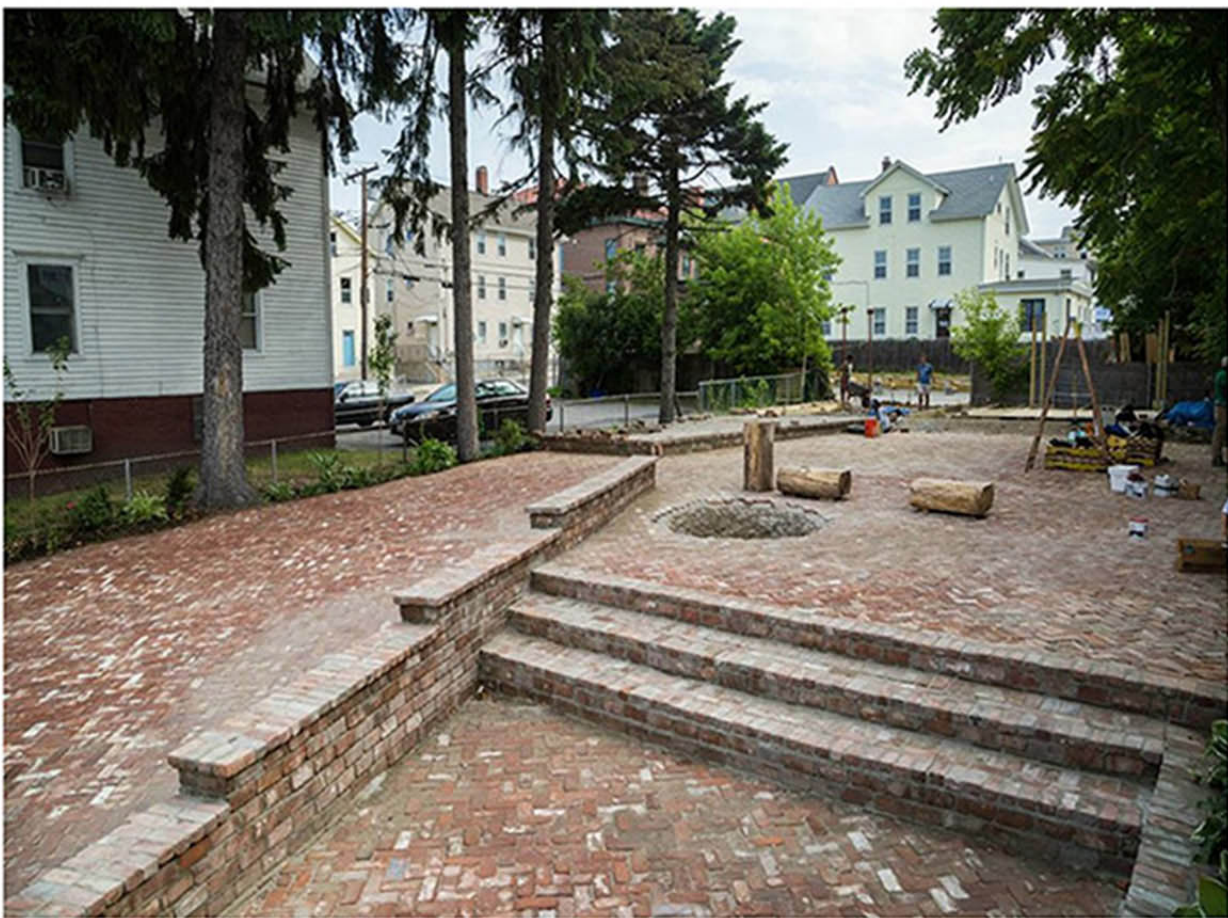
16,000 bricks came from demolished buildings in the city



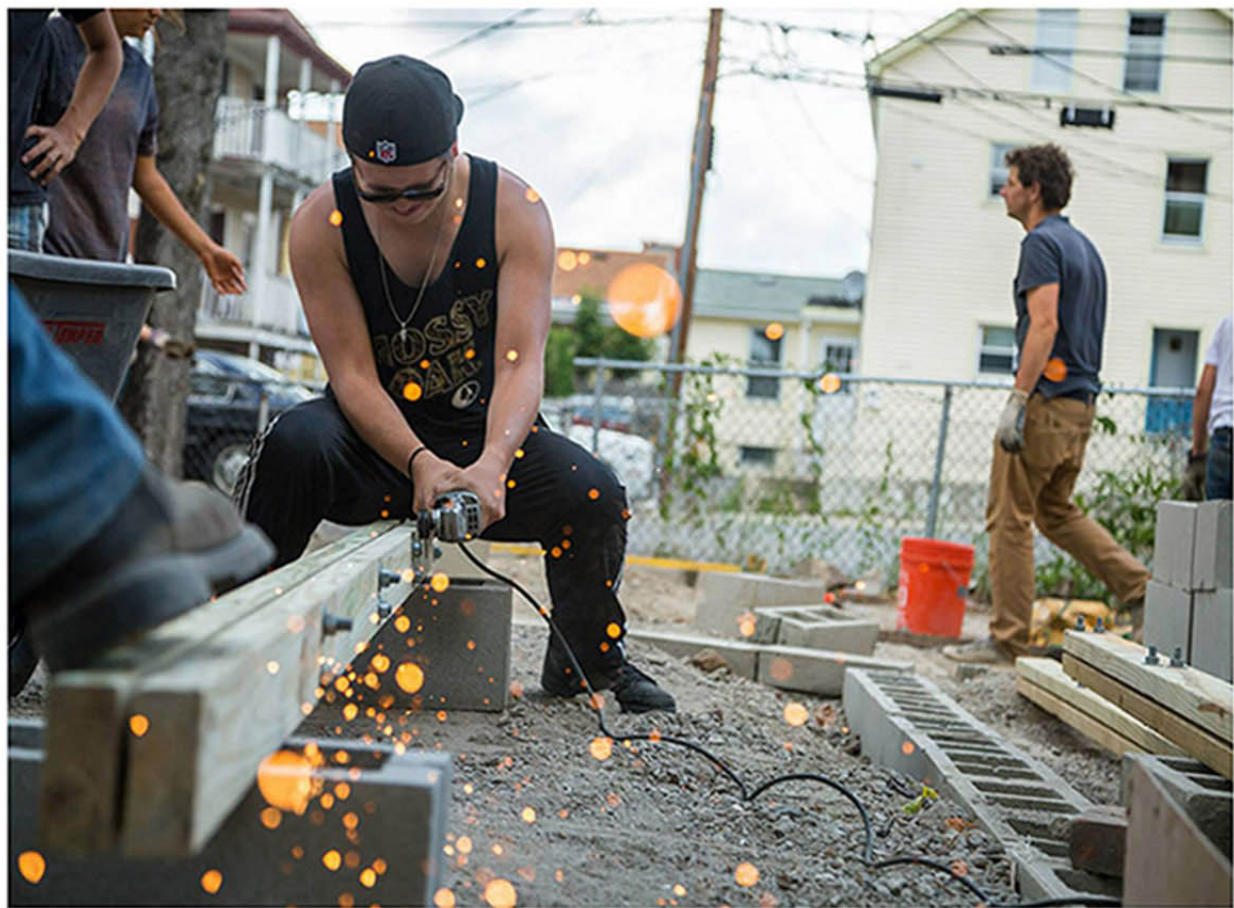
An inclusive effort



Midway through effort (plaza still considered "temporary")



Brickwork nearing completion (plaza now deemed "permanent")



Laying the foundations and decking



Electricity and water were supplied by neighbors (the city will supply these to the site, and install lighting and hose hook ups, once the legal status has been changed from parking lot to public open space)



Prefabrication of the roof in adjacent city parking lot



Erecting the roof



No cranes or lifts - sheer strength



Laying out the trellis with oak floor boards resued from the trash





Finishing touches



Roof material donated by local roofing company M.Barboza and Sons



Planting pachysandra before watching the World Cup



The magnolia arrives



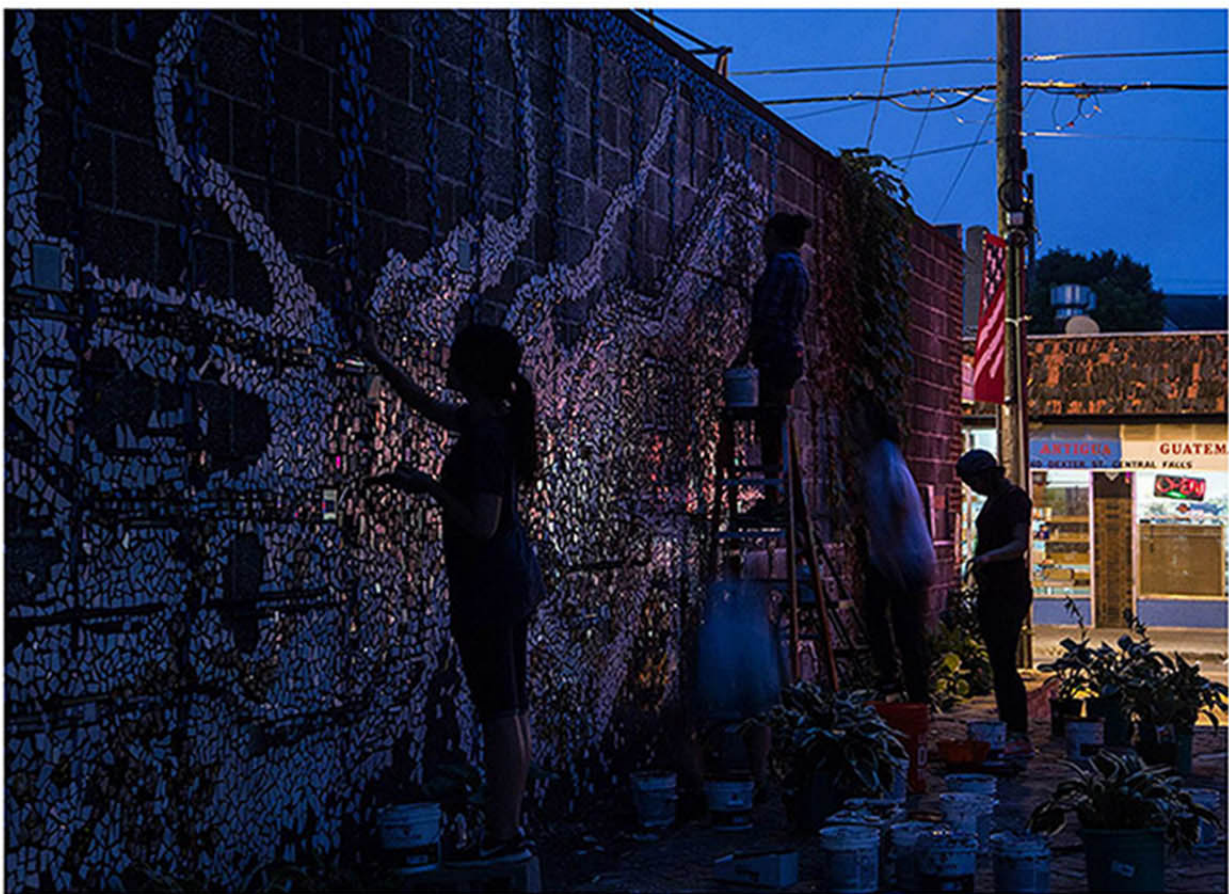
The mosaic mural wall, referencing the immigrant trail to Central Falls, was made with donated ceramic tiles, glass rods, and artifacts found on site



Neighborhood children help build the mural



In the last week and a half, construction continued late into the night



The mosaic mural wall comes alive at night by reflecting passing car lights and the changing traffic signals at the nearby intersection



Project completion



Rhode Island School of Design and Pontificia Universidad Javeriana



Finished plaza



View from Cowden Street parking lot



Summer use



Winter



Fund raiser soccer game



Opening celebration



Naming the plaza



WE'VE (done it!) Place became the name, a celebration of the textile history of the city and the re-emerging community spirit



WE'VE
built a public PLACE

2014