THE PUBLIC: A WORK IN PROGRESS

WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH A PUBLIC KITCHEN?
- mantener la cocina
- juntar personas
- por inger
- so folks can
- public
- share food
- throw parties.

MATS AND CHAIRS A GREAT MEETING PLACE FOR PEOPLE TO PLAY IN THE
THE PUBLIC: A WORK IN PROGRESS

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PUBLIC

noun

1 (the public) [treated as singular or plural] Ordinary people in general; the community; the library is open to the public, the general public have a right to know

adjective

1 Of or concerning the people as a whole: public concern, public affairs
2 Done, perceived, or existing in open view: he wanted a public apology in the Wall Street Journal, we should talk somewhere less public
3 Of or provided by the state rather than an independent, commercial company: public spending, public services

http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/public

THE PUBLIC, all of us “ordinary people” mentioned above, tend to understand and engage with the public sector (things provided by the state) in the arenas that are most, well, public. We engage where we are most directly touched: often as users of public infrastructures (schools, transportation, housing, etc.), or as voters in public elections. However, the element of this definition that says that public refers to things “done or existing in open view” is painfully ironic. So many elements of our government are not open or accessible.

How does the public engage in decisions made by the FCC or the USDA, for example? How does it weigh in on the work of a public prosecutor? Or stand up for public water in Detroit, or public currency (aka cash money) in daily life? We don’t have a decently grounded set of expectations of the public within our shared consciousness. We don’t have means to imagine—let alone demand—more say in regulations, uses of public space, new public rights, etc. This paper exists to help us see the public as a work in progress, and to help us imagine new possibilities for the public in ways that can also help us find new ways to fight for them.
THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PUBLIC

In this paper, when we talk about “the public” we often differentiate between the horizontal and vertical public. By this we are differentiating between the people and the state. The traditional and social (what we call horizontal) public, refers to the people: the greater population, a large set of folks who live together and identify as such, be they a community, tribe or nation. This public has to do with public life, shared spaces, interactions, customs and values. In its more current and institutional (we say vertical) sense, the public has come to mean the state, or more specifically, the services, laws and infrastructures that the state creates or maintains for its population. This includes such things as currency, the military, citizenship and voting rights, laws and regulations, as well as public infrastructures like public schools, hospitals, roads and transit.

To understand the current state of the public in the U.S., it is worth looking back at the roots of public life. In the early colonies, the vertical public was less formal and more able to engage the horizontal public in its actions. For example, early colonial settlers in the U.S. had private farms, but also worked together to maintain common lands that large farm animals could graze on. This common area, much like the one-room public school house, felt very tangible and necessary to the lives of the colonists. And the fact that our government sector is busy cannibalizing itself and selling itself to the lowest bidder is a meta-problem. And the fact that our third sector—those of us in the nonprofit, civil society and social justice work—is busy fighting for our silo-ed issues, means that we aren’t fighting at the scale of the problem. Until we start to change the sectoral imbalance, we’ll all continue to lose on our issues. It’s incumbent that we start to build a new game for creating social justice. For us that starts with a fight for the public.

The result of this has been a widening disparity between the horizontal and the vertical public, resulting in the horizontal public striving to access privately administered goods and services instead of strengthening the vertical public to ensure quality public services via taxation. The horizontal public at present is convinced that taxes are a burden, and life would be better if all things were private, and both the public and private sectors advance this argument. As a result, the problems of the “public” are seen as someone else’s problems, and not something we should have to pay for or a set of assets that we all benefit from.

While some challenges to the functioning of the public have come from expansion and population growth (the U.S. population has now surpassed 300 million), many current dynamics were embedded from the start. As we know, the “We the People” of the U.S. Constitution excluded women and people of color, while the constitution itself included laws for the owning of enslaved Africans and systemic disenfranchisement of Native Americans.

As the U.S. grew beyond the scale where the public meant you and other people like you, it began to mean other people you might not want to know. Now, things that are called “public” are often seen as inferior and for inferior others. What do we mean by this? Critical public infrastructures that serve people across class and race are not commonly referred to as “public”. Note how streets, water in our sinks and toilets, music on our airwaves and police in our neighborhoods are not regularly referred to as public streets, public water, public music or public police. But infrastructures that have been divided between the haves and have-nots—those who can afford the private options and those who must receive the public—are always labeled accordingly. Take public and private schools and universities, public and private hospitals, public and private swim areas, and public housing for example. In these cases, “public” has come to mean less than, and come to mean a resource for people who are seen as less than.

The result of this has been a widening disparity between the horizontal and the vertical public, resulting in the horizontal public striving to access privately administered goods and services instead of strengthening the vertical public to ensure quality public services via taxation. The horizontal public at present is convinced that taxes are a burden, and life would be better if all things were private, and both the public and private sectors advance this argument. As a result, the problems of the “public” are seen as someone else’s problems, and not something we should have to pay for or a set of assets that we all benefit from.

Our public sector now has a crisis of identity. Each traditional role it gives up (public schooling, public safety, public health, even public property), makes it less relevant. Its former strengths—protecting people’s rights, protecting the environment, providing health care to the poor, etc.—are now seen as market inefficiencies. As we speak, the public sector has abandoned the desire or responsibility to privilege or protect the common or the vulnerable.

INSPIRING A FIGHT FOR THE PUBLIC

We believe that if left to its own devices, a very elite slice of the market sector—with global reach, power and extractive capacity—will concentrate most of our resources into the hands of a few, homogenize our cities and communities, and make consumerism the fundamental form of expression and being. Given the current set of levers of change we find ourselves with, the government sector still remains our best hope of curbing the market sector’s effect on our social and economic lives. That said, the fact that our government sector is busy cannibalizing itself and selling itself to the lowest bidder is a meta-problem. And the fact that our third sector—those of us engaged in nonprofit, civil society and social justice work—is busy fighting for our silo-ed issues, means that we aren’t fighting at the scale of the problem. Until we start to change the sectoral imbalance, we’ll all continue to lose on our issues. It’s incumbent that we work to build a new game for creating social justice. For us that starts with a fight for the public.

Our hope is if we can take a fight for the public to scale, we might be able to win. Not just win on one issue or another, but win in ways that generate more wins, win in ways that re-balance the sectors and create more power for the public and less for the private. We might win in ways that make the earth safer, ways that make communities more vibrant, ways that create more accessible, powerful democratic procedures. If we see the vertical public as the body responsible for our rights, the quality of daily life and the delivery of shared infrastructures, we know we have a lot of work to do. This is more than the work of progressive elected officials and more than the work of the social justice sector. This will require the work of many, and to reach that, it must attract and inspire a much wider cross-section of the horizontal public.

How do we do this? We have a hunch that simply using forms of protest won’t work. Protests, while vital in the fights for so many distinct issues, are too easily dismissed by too many to be our primary strategy for the kind of sea change needed. We suggest a less familiar, perhaps more intriguing, way to start...

“PRODUCTIVE FICTIONS”: REAL LIFE INSPIRATIONS FOR THE HORIZONTAL PUBLIC

A stronger public—one that can hold its institutions accountable—requires new visions for horizontal culture and new horizontal publics. There need to be new ways to see and connect among people, new public spaces that encourage dialog and play, and even new public infrastructures that enrich lives and remind us that “public” means all of us. Without these new forms of horizontal publics, there will not be the scale of force to demand the changes needed in the vertical public or state.

For years the Design Studio has been creating “productive fictions”. We create small glimpses into what might be in the world we want, and build spaces where that world already exists. These productive fictions create room for people to jump off our ideas and imagine new possibilities for public infrastructures, spaces and rights that they might want to fight for. We think that by demonstrating to people new possibilities for the public, both vertical and horizontal, we might be able to build a new
kind of politics in the United States. Currently, the political imagination is limited and prone towards private fantasies—massively privatizing schools, “generously” privatizing parks, surreptitiously privatizing voting equipment, etc. We want to go in the opposite direction, creating public fictions for all to share and build on as a strategy for building momentum to change what’s real.

**EXAMPLES OF PRODUCTIVE FICTIONS**

*A Public Kitchen, like a public library*:

Stepping into Public Kitchen, Upham’s Corner residents got to think creatively about how a Public Kitchen—like a public library—could make their lives more connected, affordable and vibrant. For us, each iteration of Public Kitchen is a chance to capture the imaginary about what strong public infrastructure could offer. With it, we wanted the horizontal public to experience new possibilities for being together.

**Dance Court**

Basketball and tennis courts are ubiquitous in almost every town and city. Dance Court asks the question, “If dance courts were part of the ubiquitous landscape like basketball and tennis courts, how would they be used?”

Our first Dance Court experiment included a sound system and DJ that we set up in the local unused tennis court across from the Studio. Sounds simple enough, right? Well, unlike basketball and tennis, the idea of a casual impromptu dance space required tons of paper-work and pre-planning. Permits were required and expected to be applied for literally weeks ahead of time. It is this sort of public space policy that can get in the way not just of dancing, but of a vibrant public life. Multiply this by the fact that poor communities and youth of color are hyper-policed, and you have a tremendous barrier to civic life.

We have many ideas for what a thriving public sector would look like. We frequently work with communities to imagine new uses for public spaces. We regularly imagine new infrastructures that would make our lives healthier, more affordable and convivial. But instead of listing these and advocating for them each as if they weren’t parts of a whole, we share with you our next productive fiction, right here in this paper. The Public Times, reporting on all things public… (and yes, we have many ideas for public media as well!)

One of our Boston participants, Terry Marshall, had this to say about his experience at Dance Court: “I figured ‘Outdoor party? Great!’ but after having visited it, I realized that it was much more. As someone of Caribbean background I know something about public life. It’s called Carnival. But that is a once a year big event. What if the mobile euphoric living experience that is carnival was to be had every day? What if it was a part of everyday life in the same way that one can choose to play basketball or soccer with friends? How would life be different?”

**THE PUBLIC TIMES:**

**REPORTS FROM THE PUBLIC IMAGINARY**

We hope this “first edition” inspires you to join us in imagining new possibilities for the public, wherever you live. We hope it underscores not only that the public is a work in progress, but that its future could be quite remarkable!
CIVIL SOCIETY COURT BEGINS TRIAL FOR FERGUSON POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Ferguson Police Department could lose its accreditation, and cops may face jail time if the department is found guilty of targeting African Americans for acts of violence. The special jury is being organized to look at the situation as both an individual crime and a civil society crime. The jury is made up of civil society leaders, elected officials, security officials, and spiritual leaders from around the nation. This would be the second time in 10 years that Ferguson has lost its accreditation, following the controversial loss of accreditation in New York City after the Supreme Court declined XYD’s “stop and frisk” practices unconstitutional.

Tensions have been high since the incident, but no evidence has surfaced that would indicate the Ferguson police have engaged in actions that could have resulted in the deaths of the victims. However, the Ferguson Police Department has been under scrutiny since the shooting of Michael Brown in 2014, and the department has faced numerous allegations of police brutality and systemic racism.

“Most people in our schools and our sports teams quickly responded with Don’t Shoot!?” says Ferguson’s star quarterback, Justice Pratt. “I didn’t expect that white people or other people would get it. It feels rewarding. Maybe we’re making progress even with this tragedy.”

Meanwhile, civic leaders and volunteer support groups are meeting leading localExisting sessions and public engagement events. The Department of Public Protection (“DPP”) is also making a point to stop conducting with a gathering next month at the Beach Stadium. Thoroughness and objectivity are expected to attend, including President Obama and all local officials for the state of Missouri.

We at Public Times want to salute a new move in public education: Sensory Education. This new direction in education is gaining high. It is not just teaching students the importance of the senses—smell, touch, taste, sight, and hearing—but also including them to understand how senses shape our society, cultural communities, and our collective health.

This addition to the education curriculum is aimed at bringing more of our bodies into the benefits of education. We have at the Open Educational Module are amazed that it’s taken us so long to make such obvious shifts in priority in our schools’ curriculum. We spend so much of our time in school, and most of that time has been taken away from our bodies, except for gym and sports. This shift brings our “being tissue” into the heart of education.

Part of the aim of sensory education is to expand, explore, and inspire our students, particularly kids around taste. Different homes and cultures have different proclivities to different tastes and smells, for example. We’re excited about the possibility for health discoveries, and we’re happy that if all fast foods and restaurant and packaged foods have given us. It’s not only about taste though. We’re also excited about the “Affective Bodies, Affective Lives” elements of the sense curriculum. Learning about how our affects are informed by music, sports, and access to schools, theater, or other big small experiences could help our students learn better to understand what affects them and how they affect their friends, family, and loved ones. With education like this, we might develop more compassion for how we are with each other. It’s a holy goal. But isn’t that the point of education?

Speaking of the Senses...
Subway Needs Some Sense!

BY THE PUBLICTIMES YOUTH EDITORIAL BOARD

The first food chain Subway was recently brought to task for using a misleading advertisement. An ADA in its logo, ADA is a form of plastic used in yoga mats and shoes. In fact, non-exposed emulsion is found in over 70 different packaged foods, including beans, steadings, reactions and other packaged added goods, according to a report by Environmental Working Group (EWG), a nonprofit research and consumer advocacy organization. The use of this emulsion was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration at levels below 5 parts per million, although it is banned in Europe and Australia.

Now let’s stop here. First a plastic is being used in foods made for mass consumption. A plastic, we can account for what the plastic is or isn’t doing in our bodies, although we have reason to believe it’s not doing us any good. Why would our friends in Europe ban it? But what does it mean that we are in five practices of the everyday that train our senses to enjoy eating plastic? We learned in school that from sociology, Pierre Bourdieu says that taste—from one’s style to one’s appetite—is socially constructed. In the processed culture of today, instead of using every day, it is the level of mass consumption. We can see Subway, literally. This is one example of “processed culture” in the USA and its shipping of public life.

It also shapes public health. We are facing health crises like childhood obesity and diabetes. Whether it’s our students trying to eat quick while we pay our parents trying to make ends meet, it doesn’t seem fair. We’ve had little to no protection from corporations’ rights to use plastics or whatever they want to increase the longevity and corporate profitability of products that make but that we cannot eat. Maybe that’s why corporations are coming at the appointment of the new FDA chief Eric Talmage Manning. Manning, known for his strong advocacy around maintaining one’s sickness balance, will be quite hard on processed foods. We the youth Editorial Board are really excited about her standing up for our right to eat real foods.

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Money Flowing Like Water

This week, the Chair of the Federal Reserve, Elmo Oteo, declared that “Money is a cultural commons. Like water, it has to flow, and it’s our job to keep it flowing. People put their trust in money as a facilitator, so it’s our obligation to see to it that it serves them.” Her announcement included a promise to host public meetings to flesh out new ideas for better circulation of currency throughout industries, families, businesses and neighborhoods. She also intends to impose a Currency Police Council, and is looking at a cross-section of experts including mathematicians, geographers, water conservationists, and other needs-system thinkers.

Are you in Line to be Aligned?

Max is Public Alignment Month. “This is my favorite month,” says Clarion Davis, a neighborhood Public Wellness Worker out with five of her colleagues hitting bus stops in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston. “This is one of the months we get to go hard on body awareness in our schools, houses, churches and communities.”

The initiative is part of a larger holistic body wellness initiative—begun last year by Governor DeLusio Cepeda. “I love it,” says Danny Chang, a local community having his alignment checked at his local bus stop. “It’s like a city-wide party. People are on the bus and trains talking to each other about their shoulders and showing off their posture! And, wow, I feel better when my shoulders are back and I’m really breathing.”

PUBLIC POSTINGS:

PUBLIC WELLNESS WORKERS:
135 Positions Open
A project of the NATIONAL HEALTH CORPS

Wellness corps is looking to hire 135 new slots for community wellness workers. The wellness worker positions are three year commitments to working on wellness access and health issues in neighborhoods or ethnic/sexual identity groups. Applicants must demonstrate interest in pursuing a livelihood in wellness defined broadly, spanning the range from public health to direct hands on wellness practices. Applicants interested in gbtq wellness are asked to apply. Look for public Q & A sessions at your local library, park and Public Kitchen. Preliminary applications due MARCH 1ST.

PUBLIC SERVICE BENEFITS INCLUDE:
- Competitive salary, ranging from $50,000-$70,000.
- Access to courses towards your MPH or MD, and other educational opportunities in Public Health.
- Public Servant Housing Benefits.
- Public health insurance (no cost)

Looking Back—How Local Knowledge Helped People Rebuild after Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina damaged more than a million housing units in the Gulf Coast region. About half of those damaged units were occupied in Louisiana. In New Orleans alone, 35,000 housing units — 75% of all occupied units — suffered damage from Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding (The Data Center).

With HUD funds released immediately, the Department of Public Memory gathered local resident leaders, carpenters and cultural leaders to develop plans for rebuilding areas hit by the storm. As soon as it was safe to do so, they convened a wide variety of communities — from Vietnamese fishing communities to indigenous communities to historic African-American communities — to develop site specific architectural and cultural solutions to the devastation left by Katrina.

“We know one thing for sure,” says Avoka Turner, the head of HUD at that time, “New Orleans and the Gulf communities were — and are — rich in local knowledge around building structures for the specificities of that place. Like the shotgun style housing in New Orleans, So we knew we needed to find ways to support and find that knowledge, so we could get through that difficult time and come out even stronger.”

The funding helped thousands of people like fisherman Tony Nguyen, pictured at far right, of Biloxi, MS rebuild his family’s home. It also created over 100,000 new homes with traditional architecture and local materials and employed over 50,000 displaced residents, including Herbert Gettridge, a local building expert from New Orleans (picture at right).

AUGUST IS SALSA MONTH

at the Birmingham Square Dance Court—you can salsa all night every night! The Dance Court staff are excited to announce they are hosting a delegation of dancers from Cali Columbia teaching Cali style salsa the entire month. Don’t miss this opportunity!

FREE AND OPEN TO ALL AGES
DANCE COURT OPEN EVERY NIGHT
6PM-6AM
The Public Times reported on topics as diverse and wonderful as sensorial education in public schools, public health workers doing body alignment at bus stops, and a Department of Public Memory. Its next issue could feature articles about a free, participant-powered outdoor public cinema or the selection of a public policy jury. The possibilities are endless if we can step into the view that the public is still a work in progress and if we can step up to fight for the possibilities that we imagine.

We believe the next step in this work is actually a grand invitation. Just as productive fictions invite their guests to step into something that does not yet exist, this paper invites you, the reader, to step into the notion that the public is still a work in progress. And if you step into that space of possibility, we also invite you to share that space with others: to create more productive fictions, more opportunities for the horizontal public to see itself, to get to know itself, to enjoy itself, to imagine collectively what its rights, needs and desires are.

From there, we believe we just might have the scale of power to rebalance the public and private sectors. We believe an empowered and inspired horizontal public could create the momentum required to kick the vertical public into action. With the support of its 300 million denizens, the government could regain its ability to regulate the private sector, to pass legislation that enhances our lives and protects our rights, and to fund high quality public infrastructures like libraries, schools, and transit. (Not to mention Public Kitchens, Dance Courts and more!)

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO SWEEP PEOPLE INTO A NEW IMAGINARY OF THE PUBLIC? WE BELIEVE WE NEED TO FIND OUT. WE HOPE YOU’LL JOIN US.