



CREATING CONNECTION IN THE SPACES IN BETWEEN. SHIPPING CONTAINERS AS BUILDING BLOCKS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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The impact of farmers markets, pop up vendors, art installations and seasonal outdoor events on community building is plentiful. It can boost support to local businesses, create opportunities for community engagement and social interaction and enhance the image of the neighbourhood. It can be a small spark that ignites entrepreneurship, home ownership and gentrification. Consider the LX Factory in Lisbon. LX Factory is located in the heart of the Al-cântara district, a former industrial area and one of the most prominent manufacturing complexes in Lisbon's history. It is home to art studios, farmers markets, gastronomy, and event space. Moreover, it has revitalized an industrial zone into a thriving commercial, residential and artistic design district. London's Boxpark shipping container mall, and others like it, offer a solution for temporary installations and allow for the creative reuse of utilitarian objects to build vibrant markets and enhance the public realm.

April 2019, marked the opening of Toronto's much anticipated second shipping container market. Stackt Market transformed a 2.6 acre city owned Bathurst Street parking lot that is situated north of the GO train commuter rail line into a destination that features retail shops, food services, a brewery and artist studios. Stackt aspires to transform the vacant land into a cultural community hub. To accomplish this objective, the design concept extends beyond a temporary opportunity to animate and optimize an underutilized area. To enable place making and community development, the design looks to maximize the animation and commercial success that is present in the neighbouring communities.

As a privately operated public space the Stackt design includes elements to encourage both active and passive users. Those who are motivated by the introduction of a novel retail experience have over 30 vendors to choose from and the green space provides other users with an opportunity to sit and enjoy the activity of the passersby or be entertained by the passing trains, a delight for kids young and old. For many Torontonians and visitors, the market becomes an animated transition space and serves as a bridge to other neighbourhoods. The less visible Tecumseth Street entrance connects the Niagara and Wellington West neighbourhoods with the market and, to a greater extent with the City Place and Fort York communities.

In addition to offering retail space for creative entrepreneurs who otherwise may be unable to afford a commercial space, shipping container markets present a unique opportunity to inspire curiosity, draw community to an other-



wise underutilized area, and animate a space with the aspiration that it will draw the public realm once the redevelopment is complete.

Community building is one part design, and one part programming. To that end, Stackt will be host to outdoor moving screenings, skills development workshops and event space will be made available to support local initiatives and city wide events such as Earth Day or NXNE.

Although inspired by successful international examples, Stackt is building community from a blank slate. In contrast, Market 707 - one of the first container markets in the city - which is located on Dundas near Bathurst, was an addition to the Scadding Court Community Centre. With a much smaller geographic footprint that is confined to the frontage on Dundas St., Market 707 faced limitations to its design. However, its objectives were similar to Stackt. Market 707 was intended to animate the streetscape, link surrounding communities and revitalize an underused transition zone in an urban setting. In 2013, after only three years in operation Toronto Urban Design Awards presented Market 707 with the Special Jury Award. In their comments they praised the Market 707 visionaries for their ability to transform the relatively banal community building frontage on a busy street corner into a thriving civic marketplace.

The success of Market 707 was fueled by the existing adjacencies, a community centre, a swimming pool during the summer, a skating rink during the winter and the lively Alexandra Park. Previously, the frontage along Dundas St. was used only as a transition space to get to these destinations. Now users are stopping to enjoy the international food selection, getting their bike repaired, simply sitting on the picnic tables to take in the sights and sounds of the city or to enjoy a break during their commute across the city.

Through shipping containers Market 707 has effectively supported entrepreneurship, enhanced the public realm and connected neighbourhoods. Very early indicators are forecasting similar success for Stackt, curiosity has been attracting many users and the active and passive spaces appear to be performing as expected. However, Stackt lacks the immediate adjacencies that are so prevalent at Market 707, therefore, after the initial curiosity subsides it will be up to the design and programming to entice return visits and further investments in community building. All of this under a defined timeline, Stackt's lease on the city land runs until September 2020, after which the plan is to convert the lands into a public park.

The potential legacy of Stackt and Market 707 could be the success of finding opportunities in the spaces in between. Being able to build a community spirit and hub in a space that was deemed less desirable can have the potential to influence the decision makers at City Hall to take further chances on other under utilized areas by investing in temporary installations that can enhance the public realm, build community and change a city.