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I, Matthew Anthony, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design in Design.

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Losantiville: An experimental design collective as urban catalyst

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Abstract

The Over-the-Rhine neighborhood of Cincinnati, Ohio provides an ideal opportunity to start a design business surrounded by a growing community and rich history. While slowly building the Losantiville design collective, a group of designers realized that their work was playing a larger role in the city. While creating a space where designers can create unique work and collaborate on projects, they realized they would also be building a vibrant community that has a strong identity capable of attracting the many talented creative graduates who had been leaving the state.
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**Introduction**

In the fall of 2009 I helped found a design collective located in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood of Cincinnati, Ohio called Losantiville. Called a collective because of its cooperative nature, Losantiville is a group of designers who share tools, skills, and distribute the costs of the work space. We started out simply wanting a place to develop and showcase our designs but found we could use the space to connect and aid our community with design, be it creating logos or crafting furniture. Our mission is to become a public design center for the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood by fostering meaningful projects and interpersonal interaction between designers, the public, and our local business community to create a Cincinnati design culture.

After a year and a half working in our space, we began to realize that we were creating some of the improvements that others sought for Cincinnati. Some speculate on how to keep young creative professionals here after graduation; we have steadily recruited new designers, and every month we see an influx of design students who are interested in our business model, which might support their work as well. Others are trying to create a unique identity for our city in order to create a vibrant environment, but we are finding ourselves in a position to facilitate creating the types of unique small business identities and collaborations that make the city an exciting place to reside.

The rest of this paper talks about how our basis in being a locally-oriented space, doing new creative work, and collaborating within our community is creating those changes in our city. The
The majority of the argument of the paper is supported under evidence obtained through action research. The design collective has been in an organically changing and evolving environment over a number of years of planning, building, and operating. This espouses the ideals of action research in that our goal for the space is a continuous analysis and improvement of our process and our place in the community. The argument is periodically supported by relevant outside information and examples, but because the paper is focused on our particular situation, the evidence comes primarily from our own experience.

1 Space

A big component of Losantiville is our physical space. Beyond being just a storefront and its functions, we have found the implications of the location of our space are also important in how we identify ourselves. Our storefront exists in a specific neighborhood and city context. Our business also ties into the legacy of our area, taking advantage of current opportunities while nodding to Cincinnati’s history. But while we may reference a city of the past, we want reinterpret our heritage using new technologies and methods to craft a new and authentic local culture.

1.1 Storefront

The seed of the Losantiville idea came from design school classmate and future Losantiville co-founder John Dixon. He mused that spaces were so cheap in downtown Cincinnati that rent on a
storefront studio space could be split easily between a few people. The concept was immediately enticing: young designers can control a store, products, and a message with the city and world-at-large. But what would we do with the space and how would we manage it? Unsure of the more difficult details of making it happen, we let the idea simmer while we went on to finish school.

A few years later four of us found ourselves back in Cincinnati contemplating our future as industrial designers. And while the straining economy was a bad time for the traditional job market, it made a good opportunity to create our own shop. We set out to find a space that could be easily rented by four young designers, with the goal of attracting additional members to help split the associated costs. We were soon renting a shop space on Main Street near downtown Cincinnati, and while there has been a constant struggle to figure out how to run the store aspect, we always shared an interest in working in a collaborative environment. We liked sharing tools and equipment, and for some of us it was our only project space while living in compact urban housing.

The collective format allowed us to start a company when we might not have done so separately and gave us the ability to collaborate and give the feedback we were missing when working alone. It provided a space where we could sell the things that we make. It also would let us connect with potential customers and the community at large to sell and develop our designs. We hoped we could build up a few more members to make the group more diverse while making it easier to pay for the space and necessary upkeeps. Our dream was to have enough surplus to start
acquiring more machinery to make designs.

The first step was to find a physical store space, a commercial property with enough room to house desk space, tools, and ideally an area to showcase our work. We found we could afford a number of spaces because Cincinnati urban plots are extremely inexpensive. Commercial spaces in the area can sometimes cost less than a nice apartment. Splitting between multiple people allowed us to charge reasonable rates between the four founders. With thirteen members currently paying nearly the same rate, Losantiville can now afford to use its greater pooled resources to reinvest in the space.

While starting a shared business is a difficult path, it has been exciting and tangible. Many students have engaged us at Losantiville looking for similar opportunities to start their own projects and make a difference in the world. Companies like Design Impact are expanding and hiring fellows to use design and innovation strategy to help social causes (Hanisian, 2011). Groups like Project H used to work in third world countries making tools like water carriers and learning games, but are becoming focused locally in places like rural Bertie County, North Carolina, and inspiring students to follow suit (“Studio H,” n.d.). A group of three senior industrial design students at the University of Cincinnati are doing a project this quarter working with a local urban high school to get students interested in design through the lens of shoes (“About Us-Tread Project,” n.d.). Another group of three Masters of Architecture students have decided to take their normal six-month internship period and work in downtown Cincinnati, creating unique architecture and furniture solutions instead of joining on with a major
architecture firm with their peers. Cincinnati can leverage that desire for local change by providing an easily accessible platform to do impactful local work.

Cincinnati has an advantage in its great cost of living (Council for Community and Economic Research, n.d.). It allows students to attempt their own business creation without as much monetary risk. In addition to cost of living, many young professionals are drawn to live in urban centers like the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood of Cincinnati (El Nasser, n.d.). Both of these factors drew many of our initial members to the Losantiville design collective, with many living and working in Over-the-Rhine. If the city is looking to attract and keep young professional and creatives in the city, as many other cities are looking to do based on Richard Florida’s recommendations for growing cities (Florida, 2003, pp. xx-xxiv), they should find ways to further encourage these students to settle into the city and facilitate the creation of these new entrepreneurial businesses.

The fact that we at Losantiville share our space and contributions also lowers the barrier to start a new business. Perhaps some of these new businesses might outgrow the collective, but in that sense we are comfortable with being an incubator for these design businesses. The city and entrepreneurial community support many start-up initiatives for branding (Monk, n.d.) and tech start-ups (“CincyTech gets $2M in Ohio funding | Business Courier,” n.d.) but would be smart to also help smaller groups create platforms for growth and success.
1.2 Incubator

One of the draws of having a space to work together is having people around to bounce ideas off of instead of working alone. The Losantiville collective also gives small businesses the structure of an existing space and the safety of a decreased rent. This is initially how Losantiville gained an independent company of designers looking to start a computer-controlled fabrication and design business.

Three industrial designers formed the company Such & Such after graduating from the University of Cincinnati. Their goal is to create a fabrication business that focuses on producing heirloom quality goods using new digital production technologies. Initially, they dreamed of taking this business to Brooklyn, NY, not Cincinnati. After a few initial conversations on how Losantiville could offer space and a safe startup, the trio began to come around to the idea of starting a business in Cincinnati. While Cincinnati is not the same as New York City, and Over-the-Rhine is not quite Brooklyn, it offered a community and a great opportunity in being able to create the kind of design culture here that was already saturated in Brooklyn (Scelfo, 2009). This was enough for the three men to make the commitment to Cincinnati and finance their machine without having to find a primary and secondary job as they might have in New York, allowing them to place their focus on honing their craft and their business.

Such & Such conducts its business here in Cincinnati and thus participates in our culture of making, and inspires an entrepreneurial professional spirit. If business continues to grow, and they need more machines and more space, they could potentially move into their own building.
While the Losantiville space would miss the character that help keep the space vibrant, we would celebrate the success of their business as a success of our own, and a success for Cincinnati. It proves that the Losantiville model is successful enough that it can allow each group to continue to grow at their own pace and produce businesses that will continue to grow and produce more jobs for creative people in the city.

Cincinnati’s accessibility is a large boon for our business. It has allowed a space like Losantiville to exist, and continues to provide exciting opportunities for would be business-owners to share a storefront and attempt their dream jobs. We hope that we can use our shared space to help make students and designer’s goals a reality, as well as helping all the other new and exciting businesses succeed and flourish. Today’s designers coming out of school are bit different and need different incentives to come to a city, and Cincinnati does have a lot to offer to these students trying to start a unique company and make change.

1.3 On Main Street

As a microcosm of the overall Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, Main Street has experienced its own ebbs and tides, perhaps more so than the newly revived "Gateway Quarter" designation of Vine Street that has come into being in the last five years (Wilson, 2009, p. 80). An overall abandonment of the urban core of Cincinnati and many other cities occurred after World War II (Bruegmann, 2006, p. 47). For a number of decades the middle class residents seem to have forgotten about the neighborhood as it drifted into abandonment and low-rent apartments (“Over-
By the nineties the Main Street area had gained popularity as a major entertainment district with many popular nightclubs and bars located there. Unfortunately, the activity of the street was more focused on that late night crowd that came in and left during normal daytime hours. Because of the lack of regular residents and regular daytime businesses, the area did not really climb out of that marketplace (Zummo, 2011). When violence started to climb in the late nineties and culminated in race riots in 2001, the area was again abandoned by both party-goers and long-time residents (Wilson, 2009, p. 80). Recovery afterwards had been slow, but as redevelopment began again in the area in the mid 2000's, much of it centering on new investment on Vine Street, people began to move down to live not just on Vine, but on properties that had been redeveloped earlier in Over-the-Rhine’s redevelopment on Main street (Boyd Walters, 2009, p. 70).

Despite both taking part in the current revitalization of the neighborhood, Vine street and Main street maintain slightly different characters. Because Main street had gone through another limited rebirth while Vine street had sat mainly untouched during the nineties, property prices are lower for properties that were redeveloped and modernized over a decade ago. Vine street boasts newer, more upscale shopping and food, while Main street has more art galleries, used clothing and vinyl shops, and a number of bars. Vine street has attracted new restaurants and businesses capable of affording newly redeveloped spaces with polished new urban loft condos above them also commanding a premium over Main street accommodations. Main street’s
rebirth has been a little more steady and organic. Small changes continue happening over time, and while there is not the same facelift effect of the repainting and refinishing of the previously rough spaces on Vine street, Main street continues to refine spaces that may have already had a previous life in recent times.

Both the gentle renewal of Main street and the transformative work on Vine street are essential to filling this neighborhood to historic densities. Because of demand, both streets are looking at restoring apartments and buildings that have until now been deemed too costly to properly fix and lease. As businesses are now beginning to refill empty commercial spaces and push into many long-abandoned spaces, there is a growing need to brand spaces and products in a way that is reflective of the character of the neighborhood and the city. And perhaps there is an opportunity there for design.

1.4 In Over-the-Rhine

During the mid-1800's, Cincinnati began its climb to national prominence on the backs of many recent European immigrants (Cist, 1859, pp. 165-166). In particular, the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood just north of the main downtown area attracted many skilled German laborers to work and live. A variety of manufacturing businesses that were located along the Miami-Erie canal, dubbed the Rhine by the numerous German residents. Cincinnati became an important source for manufactured goods that could easily be shipped out via boat and by canal (Grace & White, 2003, p. 4). Many immigrants brought with them the skilled trades they performed in
their home countries and were able to start businesses that were quickly in demand in a booming new urban area (International Publishing Company, 1886, p. 147).

Much of the nature of the Cincinnati and Over-the-Rhine (OTR) of the past is what is drawing people back again today. Old OTR’s residents lived and worked in nearby places, which fostered a sense of community (Grace & White, 2003, p. 8). That community engagement is happening again with a wide range of small businesses flocking to the area. One quickly enters a first name basis with the store owners of every shop. The skilled nature of craftsmen and the authenticity of their work are again valued. We are seeing businesses run and staffed by people passionate about the things they are selling. A number of spaces now specialize in making the products they sell onsite like pottery, screen printing, or stained glass.

This connection and craft focus is a big piece of the legacy of Cincinnati inherent in the Losantiville design collective. Losantiville is the original name of Cincinnati and is meant to evoke that time when people had direct contact with the people who made their daily goods (Randall & Ryan, 1912, p. 479). Today connecting people with the designers in order to create new and exciting goods resonates again with the community. Proximity to other people, while before a necessity, is now increasing in value to young creatives and people who want the type of cross-pollination of skills and influences that can only come with density (Meckstroth, n.d.). Despite a tough past, the spirit of Over-the-Rhine can be revitalized in a way that celebrates its strong heritage.
1.5 *New Technology and Old Production*

Technology today has advanced to a point that it allows previous models of self-employed maker-craftsmen available again. This time however, it involves using digital production and computer technologies that before were out of reach of small shops and businesses with footprints small enough to be feasible in a small storefront in Over-the-Rhine. Some of the members are working on such machines now at Losantiville and enabling this type of production.

The machines and software used for rapid and high cost prototyping have dropped drastically in price over the last decade. This has allowed these machines to start to fill new roles, such as producing smaller run production items from custom cars to jewelry (Anderson, 2010). Machines such as laser cutters, powder printers, and various computer controlled cutting machines are within reach of the hobby market for the first time and beginning to form small networks of people who can swap services or parts in small webs of production (Raven, 2009).

The increased availability of these new machines could be paired with new sources of entrepreneurial funding such as Kickstarter.com have allowed physical, scalable businesses to launch with nothing more than a plan and a video (Walker, 2011). The case for local scalability is only strengthened when looking at the strong manufacturing past of the Midwest and
specifically the machining past of Cincinnati. Cincinnati has a storied history in creating precision machines that were used to make other products (“Cincinnati Milling Machine Company - Ohio History Central - A product of the Ohio Historical Society,” n.d.). In a way, Losantiville’s dedication to the new machine technologies is homage to a time when Cincinnati was a leader in production technology

1.6 New City Identity

A lot of Losantiville’s identity is based in the history of the Cincinnati and Over-the-Rhine community. But despite a rich history, Cincinnati is caught amongst Midwestern “flat and empty” stereotypes (Sisson, 2007, p. 454) and is trying to create a new identity. Because of the major consumer product companies located in the city, Proctor and Gamble being the most notable, the city was officially recognized as a state hub of innovation for consumer marketing in 2010 (“Strickland Announces Ohio Consumer Marketing Hub of Innovation and Opportunity in Cincinnati,” n.d.). But despite the professional strength in being able to create exciting identities and strategies to sell everyday home products, they cannot seem to find help figuring out how to market what is unique about our city. A Cincinnati city council member recently asserted that “Our city has no image” and that the city needed to figure out what it is, tasking various public relations and identity groups that promote the city to come back and propose how Cincinnati can project an image (Holthaus, 2011).
But if you look to other popular mid-size cities, places that are pulling in talented college graduates, you will not find the same strategy. Ohio’s Governor Kasich recently lamented that jobs are leaving Ohio and our tech companies like LexisNexis to move to the coasts and cities like Austin because “it’s cool” (Kasich, 2011). And his response was that Ohio needs to become similarly cool to keep those young people here.

Using the given example of Austin, it seems like their success stemmed more from promoting the live music and unique culture they already had rather than trying to find something else they should have been doing. Certainly calling their city the "Live Music Capitol" or telling people to "Keep Austin Weird" has helped propel those elements further, but they existed and thrived before being branded (Gumbrecht, n.d.). Cincinnati thus needs to find and promote the things that make the city unique and different from other locations (Renn, n.d.).

To borrow a lesson from restaurants, regional cooking is allowing cities like Louisville to compete on a national field by providing good quality items interpreted by the culture in the area (Goldman, 2007). In this way it is more relevant to say that Cincinnati should be creating foods, goods and services that are based authentically in our region to create a local identity, rather than relying on marketing to solve it (Renn, n.d.). Losantiville was founded to be a space to create just this type of authentic design.
Losantiville was initially founded as an outlet for creating and distributing designs that we manufactured in the space. Each member of our space has their own goals for what they want to produce, but there has always been a shared interest in craft, authentic materials, and creative reuse.

Items such as John Dixon’s aluminum chair and Such & Such’s wooden slab tables show a commitment to the strength and character of the materials used in construction. The chair was created so that multiples could be made easily if needed, but is still true to the character of the materials used. The seat uses a folded structure that allows it to comfortably shift and move, impossible without the use of metal. The legs are stiff and strong ash wood, providing a contrast and rigidity to the flexible metal seat.
The tables showcase locally milled wood paired with cast porcelain legs. Each is table is completely unique.

By carrying products that are exclusive to our shop, we gain attention from people looking for these types of unique goods. This helps build Losantiville’s profile, as well as our neighborhood and our city as the information travels on the internet. While most of our attention comes from word of mouth and local media like Soapbox (Cunningham, 2011), other nearby shops and galleries are also producing unique goods and events that are getting notice on nationally-popular blogs (Hamada, 2011).

In addition to gaining notoriety from the public, we have also had an increase in membership. As people see our work online and at Final Friday, they contact us about joining our space or about trying to figure out how to start something similar. Our membership has grown from the four initial members to thirteen members in our year and half with a storefront, demonstrating that there is a demand for spaces that allow like-minded designers a place to establish themselves and work together. We have had people as diverse as architecture students doing local co-ops to people with established furniture companies come in and ask us questions about how we operate to see if there is a way that they could get involved. There is definitely an increasing interest in
our work and we hope to use that not only to grow our own group, but also to help the other
businesses in our area.

2.1 Creating for Broader Impact

Beyond just creating personal work, members of Losantiville have partnered with other local
businesses to both produce and sell new designs. Increasing the work that we do with these small
businesses can help to build the economic and cultural strength of our own group, our
neighborhood, and even our city.

2.1.1 The Strength of Small Business

There is much to be said for the overall prosperity and culture of a city based on the major
industries and corporations located there. However, when one thinks about what cities to visit or
live in, it’s the character of the neighborhoods and the activities there that can really make the
decision. The public character of a vibrant neighborhood is greatly affected by the mix of shops,
restaurants, and services that are on the street (Myrick & Madison, n.d.). Richard Florida
described that the large number of these new service-based entrepreneurs a great opportunity for
consultants to help on their way up (Florida, 2010, pp. 120,121). Losantiville can certainly act a
design consultant in a variety of capacities now that we have designers that can diversely cover
branding, website design, photography, and fixture and packaging design.

Helping these small businesses not only adds to the culture of the area by providing new stores
that bolster the uniqueness of the neighborhood, but also is a major economic driver. Economist
and city expert Edward Glaeser described the critical nature of these small businesses in a New York Times editorial:

For 50 years, economists have documented that urban reinvention and entrepreneurship rely on small companies and industrial diversity, not industrial monoliths....Before the industrial revolution, cities were centers of small, smart companies that connected with each other and the outside world. Small companies and smart people are the sources of urban success today.(Glaeser, 2011)

Over-the-Rhine is a neighborhood full of small businesses, without the massive Fortune 500 companies that dominate the main central business district area of downtown Cincinnati to the south. Dan McCabe of the live music haven MOTR pub best sums up the new spirit of Main Street when he says “I love the spirit of adventure on Main Street. You can reach in and affect your surroundings — that is the ultimate creative expression.” (Zummo, 2011) Losantiville has the ability to affect the area using the members’ proficiency in various design disciplines. We can do this by creating unique products for other businesses to sell, help businesses define and execute their identity, as well as work with the artisans, craftsmen, and production companies in our area to create new products outside of our own skill range.

2.1.2 Store Products

One project we are working on is trying to find other stores in our area to partner with on selling our locally-produced items. It helps Losantiville because it is difficult to merchandise our
storefront and allows us the opportunity to be able to partner with stores that have a higher selling potential. Because our members would rather be creating than working in retail, our own storefront works best as a living portfolio or showroom where we can showcase our skills. That way we can take orders to produce custom pieces that really enhance the value of our already made-to-order process. Collaborating with other stores is a way to create a product that is unique to the business and our area.

Many people in our urban neighborhood are looking for goods that are connected to place and are unique to the area where they live. Witness the climbing number of farmers markets around our area and the tripling of the number of markets since the 90’s nationally (Shaffer, 2008). This and the popularity of sites like “The Story of Stuff” show growing interest in understanding how products are made and where they come from (“The Story of Stuff,” n.d.). Designing unique goods for local businesses helps connect them to their customers and makes their commitment to the community tangible in the products that they carry.

Creating unique products is also a chance to gain notoriety for our area and create a unique culture. If products or businesses gain popularity, more people outside of our own city will recognize the city for those things. Collaborating on products is a way of growing an organic identity capable of being recognized on its own, without picking just one element of our culture to push through the traditional media channels. A small clothing design shop nearby was recently featured on a design travel blog called Design Tripper and already international viewers
expressed interest in their products, store, and our city in the comments section (McEwen, 2011). Losantiville can work to create projects that help to get non-design related businesses recognized in the same way.

As a shop we have had a few of our members work on projects that do work with other stores in creating unique products. Chris Heckman produced a limited line of Christmas ornaments for Winter 2010 that were sold in a number of nearby downtown shops. Laser-cut in the shape of the distinctive Over-the-Rhine Italianate architecture, he plans on highlighting a new building each year. A portion of the proceeds gets donated back to the Over-the-Rhine Foundation, a non-profit committed to the historic preservation of the distinctive historic buildings in our neighborhood. Residents in the area clamored to pick up an ornament that reflected their beautiful urban living environment they champion to people outside the city. Chris struggled to keep the ornaments stocked in its four retail locations, selling out of the limited-edition ornaments quickly. It is a good example of the kind of demand people have for objects that are connected to place through theme and monetary good. It also shows how well partnering with
other stores works rather than trying to sell all our goods in our own store front. While there is a commission for selling in other stores, the volume increase and gained exposure certainly makes up for it. There are a growing number of stores in our neighborhood now actively seeking to highlight local work that have customers who want to support local producers.

2.1.3 Cohesive Branding

Beyond just creating designs and new products to be sold in other stores, we want to be able to use the increasingly broad disciplines represented within Losantiville to help the small businesses in our neighborhood in any way. We are at an exciting time period in our neighborhood where many new businesses are starting to fill up long vacant storefronts. Many people recently lost their jobs and are looking to make a career out of their personal passions (Chatterjee, 2011). That is where I think Losantiville could help design and manifest an identity visually through all the touch-points in their space. We now have graphic, digital, industrial, and architectural designers and photographers who understand how to carry a design identity through physical manifestations and the tools to create those physical pieces. Members have already cut signs for a local magazine and created a desk for a neighboring clothing store. It would be great to design and install custom store fixtures for a clothing shop, or create special packaging for a bakery.
Despite the fact that our city is known for its consumer marketing and brand strategy, it is often missing from the small businesses in our area. It seems that not many design consulting firms are interested in figuring out how to help these businesses, presumably because they do not represent a large profit opportunity. However, many small businesses receive loans and grants from local sources when they decide to start a storefront, and it would be worthwhile to suggest that some of that money go into creating a cohesive identity for the shop. If money is going to be spent on relatively expensive fixtures, why not get them custom made locally for nearly the same price.
and increase the uniqueness and local connection of the brand? The Over-the-Rhine Chamber of Commerce issues matching grants up to $20,000 to businesses that meet their criteria and have invested in their shop (“OTR Chamber of Commerce :: Business First Grant,” n.d.). Making a case for design to help out with the shop build-out, or just suggesting that there are local people who can help with the design if they need it might be enough to get these small businesses to consider how a strong brand identity could help their shop succeed.

One of our graphic designers at Losantiville has done a few logo pieces for local businesses, including a photographer and local non-profit. While the people often focus on how “cool” the logo can be she emphasizes that the design identity should carry through to the rest of their existence, in each of their communication and customer interaction points. If an identity really reflects the business and its owner, it should be able to scale beyond a logo on a business card and should be visible on the window identity, the hang, tags, the store fixtures, the website, the promotions, and maybe even unique products. Certainly not all of that is within the budget of many small-businesses, but even a small project can help identify what is unique about a business in one way and how the business owner can take that identity and make sure they use it as a lens that all their products and interactions should pass through.

2.1.4 Collaborative Production

In addition to working with local stores, we want to connect with local manufacturers and artisans to create our work as we imagine it. As many of our members have backgrounds in industrial design, we are interested in being able to create work that can be reproduced in
volume. One major benefit of the advances in recent manufacturing technologies is that it makes it possible to create small scale production runs with precise computer milled molds or a consistently carved and repeated product. While we have many members who have basic understandings of many production processes, there are some interesting results that can be made in partnering with outside skilled manufacturing sources. Working together with one of a few nearby clay studios could allow us to make a limited run production of consistent porcelain goods that neither our studio, which does not have a solid background in clay products, or the clay studio, which does not specialize in more precision molded products, would be able to produce on their own.

Similarly, we want to pursue work with manufacturing resources in town to be able to produce items with materials and methods not possible in our own space. Many manufacturing shops are losing their large run long time clients and are looking for smaller jobs to run. If Losantiville could pre-order enough of an item in the showroom to produce a limited run of around one hundred items, then Losantiville would gain a very unique product outside of normal shop capabilities, such as a more space intensive metal pouring process, and the manufacturing companies would gain work to fill in their budget gaps. Cincinnati has a strong history of manufacturing that is now starting to fade, and it would really highlight this heritage if unique products were being made and sold in the city.
While large manufacturing sites are struggling, the decreased cost of prototyping machines has allowed more hobby woodworkers and tinkerers to buy these machines previously only affordable by high-end fabrication shops. While many of these machine owners just want to cut little things here and there, there are also some that are open to talking to other makers about doing small productions for nominal fees to help pay for their machines.

Figure 5 Material and process origins of two Losantiville products

Chris Heckman’s building ornaments were made by connecting with one such person who owned a laser. This allowed him to work locally and not wait as long or incur the same costs as a custom order online that could be shipping from another continent. Working with hobbyists is not without its pitfalls as there are often no guarantees of production times and finish levels, but
it allows for a more connected and personal relationship that can allow a designer to have more input and control over the production and be able to keep the work local. This connection is an important piece of building that culture in the community and creating the connectedness that is needed to for such a culture to blossom in a city.

3 Collaboration

While the heart of the space is the people who work there, our collaboration should include not only internal collaboration with other members, but also our collaboration with the greater community in which we belong. This not only strengthens our group, but the culture of our neighborhood and city.

3.1 Members

Losantiville’s space functions primarily as a collaborative space for people to work, design, and create. While every member has their own ideas for what they want to accomplish in the space, we have been able to come together on projects that we could not do alone. We have planned and executed large events, such as power tool racing, for gallery nights that would be difficult for any one member to do. We have also pulled on available talent to create quick freelance projects that come up, such as a recent one to design and illustrate a future device for a local engineer. Knowing what our individuals’ strengths are in our collective allows us to form smart teams when we realize we have complimentary skill sets, or just to simply pick someone’s brain about
trying out a new technique in a design. Between all of the members, somebody usually has the knowledge or connection to make ideas happen.

Each member gets a say in how we organize our space and spend our money. Collective meetings help us understand what central issues are, but also lets us plan upcoming gallery events, pitch ideas on new ways we can promote our work, and suggest new tools or improvements to the space. Whatever amount of money we collect from our monthly dues beyond the price of the store rental goes first to pay bills, but beyond that is reinvested by purchasing new tools, consumables like blades and drill bits that might be damaged on Losantiville owned tools and personal tools shared with the group, and in any other material costs for building out and improving the space. Most of our shop tools are shared, so making sure old tools still work and new tools satisfy the needs of the shop is important.

We are starting to codify this internal community and host more internal design review nights to keep tabs on what interesting things people are working on or completing. This can serve as skill sharing, design refining, and a final check as to the readiness to show and sell concepts. It also helps us fully understand and utilize other members’ skill sets, or find a hidden desire to learn more about a subject that someone else has been considering as well.
3.2 Partnerships

Finding shops, artisans, and businesses to partner with is an essential part of how we can make a difference in our community by producing designs. A well connected network of people also makes for a stronger community. Losantiville has found itself as a part of many different groups in our area. Our focus in being designers interested in commercializing products has given us a valuable niche within many of these groups.

Each group and member represents a different way that Losantiville interacts with the larger community and can branch out and make a larger impact. We can work with business members and professional entrepreneurs in being design, production, and innovation experts as well as we can work with technology related groups to find someone who can produce an electronics prototype that we can make salable. Each entity has a specific role and advantage in the network that can help our goals of making unique products in our space and that we can help in return. We want to continue to build this network so that we and the other members know who to turn to when they need anything from a bronze metal casting to venture capital investment.

3.3 Interface

Our retail space should bring people in from the community and start a conversation about how we can create something new and unique for them. As discussed previously, the space does not work as well as a traditional inventory-based store, but more as a showroom of skills and
capabilities, a living portfolio of the work we are capable of producing as individuals and as a group. We hope that it inspires people who come in to dream and consider how we can use our skills to help them. If someone comes in and sees a table they like, they could order one just like it or ask for a small tweak in the design and it would be the same amount of work for our designers. However, the customer gets a unique product and a unique experience, one that used to be common in the past of the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood.

On the Final Friday of every month there is an art gallery walk and celebration in our neighborhood. We use this as an opportunity to be open to the diverse crowd that comes down to Main Street on that night. We have seen a recent growth of college students from the surrounding area coming down to a place that long-time residents used to tell them to avoid. And through our interactions we see more students who are looking to us as a model of what they can be doing after they graduate, with more students and professional asking us how our space functions, how memberships work, and sometimes how they can join.

We want to expand just past Final Friday gallery walks and do another event each month that brings people down specifically to our space. Whether this is classes, workshops, shows, or a fully planned party, it would be a more direct way to interact with parties guaranteed to be interested in a more participatory environment, rather than just browsing on a gallery walk. This could expand to hosting brainstorms or making-based creative lunch sessions for local designers, but they key is to really engage our existing community and build an even wider network.
Hopefully our work within the community and on display will continue to draw people in and make them curious about how to work together. We want our space to not only be collaborative for members, but also the community and neighbors, to be able to dream up new ideas and see them be turned into reality. That is really the beauty of Losantiville, and something that we want to share with everyone.

**Conclusion**

Running Losantiville has been a constant process of evaluating our successes and shortcomings in order to revise our plans and expectations for the space. In that way, action research was the best fit for reporting the work we were doing and how it evolved to show a greater impact on the city. Losantiville continues to evolve as a concept and refine its space. Our results in producing designs that are increasingly connected to the community in a variety of ways, in attracting more permanent residents and members of our space, and in continuing to build a network of partners that we can work with has marked our progress and demonstrates the direction in which we are headed.

The current economic downturn makes investing in our city and its small businesses important to the revitalization of Cincinnati. Through the process of starting a design collective space, Losantiville has found a deeper place for design amongst a growing community in Over-the-
Rhine. By creating unique products in a collaborative setting, we have started to affect the changes that we want to see in the city. Design is starting to be recognized for its role in this transformation, with Main Street being cited as a new “design district” (Cunningham, 2011). If the increased interest and queries we have received over the last few months of our existence is any indication, hopefully it is that we see more creative people drawn to Over-the-Rhine to create something new that will add to this movement. Because the stronger our network and community becomes, the more successful we all will be, creating a unique and vibrant city worth celebrating.
Bibliography


