

Art spaces, public space, and the link to community development

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Abstract Recent literature credits community art spaces with both enhancing social interaction and engagement and generating economic revitalization. This article argues that the ability of art spaces to realize these outcomes is linked to their role as public spaces and that their community development potential can be expanded with greater attention to this role. An analysis of the public space characteristics is useful because it encourages consideration of sometimes overlooked issues, particularly the effect of the physical environment on outcomes related to community development. I examine the relationship between public space and community development at various types of art spaces including artist cooperatives, ethnic-specific art spaces, and city-sponsored art centers in central city and suburban locations. This study shows that through their programming and other activities, art spaces serve various public space roles related to community development. However, the ability of many to perform as public spaces is hindered by facility design issues and poor physical connections in their surrounding area. This article concludes with proposals for enhancing the community development role of the art spaces through their function as public spaces.

Introduction

An ongoing concern in a wide range of urban-related fields is the increasing commercialization and privatization of public space. Many scholars cite the rise of shopping malls and other ‘invented streets and reinvented places’ (Banerjee, 2001) as supplanting traditional public space that once provided a site for civic participation and democratic debate (Habermas, 1989) or the

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anonymity, diversity, openness, and spontaneity of the street (Jacobs, 1961). Others argue that public life in fact occurs in bars, cafés, beauty salons, and other ‘third places’ that exist outside home and work life (Oldenburg, 1989). Further, despite the rise of pseudo-public spaces, people adapt and appropriate the street, sidewalk, and other unclaimed, interstitial spaces in many neighborhood and commercial areas (Chase, Crawford and Kaliski, 1999; Franck and Stevens, 2007). These alternative or quasi-public spaces represent sources of local uniqueness that may help to build community interaction and attract neighborhood investment in the face of globalization’s tendency toward homogenization and privatization (Carr and Servon, 2009). As such, they represent important yet often overlooked resources in the community development process.

This article seeks to develop a better understanding of the role of public space in community development through an examination of community art spaces. Flexible and multifunctional, community art spaces not only present art, but often serve as art school, resource and outreach center, and community gathering space. They often work closely with local artists and the communities in which they are located to present and debate local history and cultures and engage in neighborhood improvement projects (Evans, 2001; Borrup, 2006; Grodach, 2008). In these and other ways, art spaces build on local assets to enhance community involvement, interaction, and participation (Stern and Seifert, 1998; Kay, 2000; Newman, Curtis and Stephens, 2003; Matarasso, 2007). Community art spaces are also credited with generating economic revitalization through the adaptation of older, vacant buildings and by attracting visitors who in turn support local businesses and other cultural enterprises (Philips, 2004; Seifert and Stern, 2005). In addition, art spaces may assist in the development of artistic careers (Markusen and Johnson, 2006).

I argue that the ability of art spaces to realize such outcomes is linked to their role as a form of public space and that their community development potential can be expanded with further attention to this role. To what extent do art spaces function as public spaces and whom do they serve? How is the public space role linked to community development? What are their weaknesses and what types of support do they need to continue or expand this role? I address these questions through a study of art spaces in the Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas region. Dallas–Fort Worth provides a rich study site because it contains a wealth and diversity of art spaces. Not only are there many nonprofit organizations, but many municipalities operate their own art space and some are run cooperatively by artists. They are located in the central cities as well as inner and outer suburban areas and represent a range of constituents including specific neighborhoods, city residents, specific ethnic groups, and local artists.

The study is based on a comprehensive inventory of all art spaces in the four counties containing the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth and the suburban municipalities that immediately surround them. Drawing on the inventory, in-depth interviews were conducted with current and former directors, staff, artists, and founders at twelve of the art spaces that reflect the variations in size, mission, programming, and location.¹ The interviews were supplemented by observation of and participation in events at the art spaces and informal interviews with artists and audience members. The next section presents the framework for a public space analysis of community art spaces. Following this, I describe and analyze how the art spaces function as public spaces and the linkages to community development. This article concludes with a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the art spaces and proposals for enhancing their community development role through their conceptualization as public spaces.

Framework for analysis

Public space is defined in multiple ways. It is idealized as a space that facilitates intra-group relations and civic engagement by providing opportunities for open and inclusive participation and interaction among strangers (Young, 1990; Walzer, 1995). Alternatively, it is a source of inter-group association, 'the common ground where people carry out the functional and ritual activities that bind a community' (Carr, Francis and Rivlin, 1992, p. xi). In fact, for many public spaces, 'the dimensions and extent of its publicness are highly differentiated from instance to instance' (Low and Smith, 2006, p. 3). Therefore, determining actual 'publicness' is a highly subjective process – whereas one individual may consider a public space inviting, safe, and accessible, another may feel out of place, disoriented, or threatened there. Interpretations of public space may differ according to an individual's social identity and background, how and why they occupy the space, and a variety of contextual factors (e.g. location, design, access, or sanctioned activities associated with the space). In these ways, a public space may serve not only to bring different groups together or bolster existing community relations, but also can function to reinforce existing social inequalities.

¹ Interviews were conducted at 500X (Dallas), Dallas Contemporary, Fort Worth Community Arts Center, Ice House Cultural Center (Dallas), Irving Arts Center, Kettle Art (Dallas), Latino Cultural Center (Dallas), Mesquite Arts Center, Metrognome Collective (Fort Worth), McKinney Avenue Contemporary (Dallas), Sammons Center for the Arts (Dallas), South Dallas Cultural Center, and with current and former directors of cultural affairs in Dallas and Fort Worth. The bias toward Dallas art spaces reflects city size and concentration of spaces there when compared with the rest of the region.

The social boundaries that define a public space have implications for community development. As [Jacobs \(1961\)](#) long ago emphasized, specific physical characteristics of streets and land uses (e.g. relatively dense, mixed use spaces) can bring together people engaged in a diversity of activities at all hours of the day and night. This, in turn, creates a safe and pleasurable environment, which functions, on the one hand, to reproduce existing social relations and facilitate community bonding and, on the other hand, to create the conditions to support local economic activity. As such, the economic potential of public space is entwined with and may even be dependent on social and environmental features. However, as documented by [Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee \(1998\)](#), when public space is approached primarily for its economic potential, places tend to be uninviting, disconnected, and, often, socially exclusive. Indeed, attempts to reproduce such environments to promote consumption and economic development in business improvement districts and festival marketplaces frequently regulate access through physical impediments or security personnel and technology intended to remove people considered undesirable by management ([Mitchell, 2001](#)). Even the adaptations of our ordinary urban environments by craft and food vendors, street-side garage sales, or graffiti and murals, which both personalize and domesticate urban space, can also demarcate territory ([Chase, Crawford and Kaliski, 1999](#); [Franck and Stevens, 2007](#)). Thus, a public space sends signals as to who belongs and may even serve to normalize and make social differences and inequalities more visible.

This article draws on these ideas and issues to create a framework to evaluate the public space function of community art spaces. Although this literature largely concentrates on publically accessible plazas, streets, and other open spaces rather than civic or cultural institutions, the basic concepts provide a useful analytical framework. For this study, public space characteristics were grouped into two broad categories reflecting, on the one hand, an emphasis on the activities and services that take place within an art space and, on the other hand, the spatial arrangement that enables or hinders this activity as well as the influence of factors in the immediately surrounding area (Table 1). The following sections examine how these public space characteristics affect and regulate social, artistic, and economic activity in and around the art spaces. Of course, because human activity connects interior and exterior spaces, the categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, although programming can affect the level of visitor interaction, characteristics of the facility itself can limit the types of possible programming. Further, given the inherently subjective nature of any public space, these categories are meant as a guide to evaluate

Table 1. Public space characteristics

| Activities and services | Space and surroundings |
|--|--|
| Mission | Interior space design (e.g. arrangement of lobby, galleries, meeting rooms) |
| Programs, events, and other activities | Exterior facility characteristics (e.g. building condition and design, landscaping, signage) |
| Support services (e.g. childcare, handicap facilities) | Urban design (e.g. physical space characteristics in surrounding area) |
| Rules and regulations (e.g. hours and fees) | Streetlife (e.g. nearby community institutions, related businesses, and public spaces) Transportation options and amenities (e.g. sidewalks, parking) Safety and security (e.g. security devices, personnel, lighting) |

the positive and negative public space qualities of art spaces and analyze the relationship to their perceived community development outcomes.

No attempt was made to quantitatively measure or rank the art spaces in terms of their ‘publicness’. Rather, drawing on the knowledge of art space participants, the framework was used as a lens to analyze the community development potential of art spaces and the ways in which this potential can be enhanced. The strength of a public space analysis is that it encourages a more comprehensive examination and consideration of issues not always brought together in the context of art spaces. For example, economic or community development planners may focus largely on the potential economic outcomes and ignore content, whereas arts managers may concentrate more on programming and activities that go on inside the space and may overlook the importance of urban design attributes or transportation access. One weakness of this study is that it does not gauge the effects of public space from the point of view of art space visitors and neighbors and thus does not fully document how different groups or individuals perceive the public space functions of the art spaces. This should be addressed in future research.

Activities and services

The mission statement, which communicates the ideals, goals, and ambitions of an art space, sets the stage for understanding its public space characteristics. Some, like the Fort Worth Community Arts Center (FWCAC), possess a comprehensive mandate geared toward a wide audience. FWCAC seeks ‘to provide accessible and affordable exhibition, performance, workshop, classroom, and office space to artists and arts

organizations in the region, and to serve the general public...in a user-friendly environment'.² Similarly, art spaces in suburban areas are often charged with enhancing opportunities for arts consumption and participation in their immediate communities, which frequently lack many options. As such, the Mesquite Arts Center supports 'multiple arts disciplines' and aspires to act as 'an advocate for culturally diverse arts programs',³ whereas the Irving Arts Center seeks to engender an 'increased awareness' of the arts in its residents.⁴ In contrast, artist incubators like 500X, Metrognome Collective, or the Sammons Center for the Arts serve a more focused constituency. 500X, for instance, describes itself as 'a space for artists to exhibit free of outside influences and dealer restrictions',⁵ whereas the Sammons provides 'a facility for aspiring artists to hold rehearsals, workshops and conferences in pursuit of their craft'.⁶ Still others focus on the representation of specific communities distinguishable by their race or ethnicity: the South Dallas Cultural Center considers itself a 'multifaceted Afrocentric multimedia and fine arts center' that seeks 'to present and produce excellence in the arts of the African Diaspora',⁷ whereas the mission of the Latino Cultural Center is 'to serve as a catalyst for the preservation, development and promotion of Latino arts and culture in Dallas'.⁸ Despite the different missions and types of art spaces, two shared themes run throughout – the provision of a 'community' space and the concern with addressing an exclusion or lack of opportunity through the arts.

Most art spaces present a variety of programs in facilities designed to handle multiple activities. Facilities range in size from the 1000 square foot (93 m²) storefront space of Kettle Art to FWCAC, which is housed in the 77,000 square foot (7,154 m²) former home of the Fort Worth Museum of Modern Art and contains nine galleries and three performance spaces. In addition, many art spaces provide studio, rehearsal, office, and classroom space. For example, the South Dallas Cultural Center's 18,000 square foot (1,672 m²) facility contains galleries, a black box theater, and studios for dance, ceramics, printmaking, photography, and recording, where it presents its arts and education programs. These spaces are

2 Fort Worth Community Art Center. Retrieved on 15 July 2008 from <http://www.fwcac.com/?about>.

3 City of Mesquite. Retrieved on 15 July 2008 from <http://www.cityofmesquite.com/artsweb/>.

4 Irving Arts Center. Retrieved on 15 July 2008 from <http://www.irvingartscenter.com/VisualArts/guidelines.htm>.

5 500X. Retrieved on 15 July 2008 from <http://www.500x.org/500x.html>.

6 Sammons Center for the Arts. Retrieved on 15 July 2008 from <http://www.sammonsartcenter.org/sammons1.htm>.

7 Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs. Retrieved on 15 July 2008 from <http://www.dallasculture.org/culturalCenters.cfm>.

8 Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs. Retrieved on 15 July 2008 from <http://www.dallasculture.org/latinoculturalcenter.cfm>.

programmed by curators on the art space staff, hold traveling exhibitions, and, in many instances, are available for rent to professional and amateur artists and performance companies in the community at affordable rates. Further, FWCAC, Sammons, Irving Arts Center, and Mesquite Arts Center, each provide office and rehearsal space to about a dozen local arts organizations ranging from small city symphonies to ethnic-specific cultural organizations to youth arts groups, which use the art centers as their home base. Similarly, before its recent closure, Metrognome Collective provided studio space for visual artists and local bands alike.

Although facility size may to some extent limit the types of activities that can be presented, particularly by those organizations and events that attract large audiences, almost all of the art spaces compensate for this through active schedules and the presentation of an eclectic range of programs and activities. The smaller visual art spaces like Kettle Art rotate their exhibitions at least once a month and focus on group shows and, as a result, are able to present a wide variety of work by many local artists. FWCAC annually shows the work of up to 1000 artists in about 80 exhibitions (Taylor, 2008, interview), the Mesquite Arts Center holds over 600 arts events (Mesquite Arts Center, 2007), and the Latino Cultural Center hosts over 300 each year (Latino Cultural Center, n.d.). In addition, some art spaces present groups that attract large audiences simply by scheduling multiple performances (Drew, 2008, interview). Even those spaces that focus more on incubating artists than audiences like 500X host events to encourage public participation such as their *Open Show*, an unjuried exhibition that attracts 'everybody from high school students to the Sunday painters to professional artists and professors' (Tosten, 2008, interview). Likewise, juried shows such as the Latino Cultural Center's *Hecho in Dallas* attract many in the local arts community to view and discuss the work of emerging local talent. In these ways, the art spaces not only accommodate the work of artists working in multiple disciplines, but also they represent the interests of multiple audiences.

In addition to gallery, performance, and studio space, a number of art spaces contain rooms for community meetings and special events ranging from gallery talks and readings to artist workshops and, in some cases, weddings. City-sponsored art spaces, in particular, maintain strong education programs in the visual arts, music, and dance. The South Dallas Cultural Center, for example, expands their education programs to additionally offer free literacy, healthy eating, cooking, sewing, and printmaking classes specifically geared toward residents of the majority black neighborhoods that surround them. In addition, the Center provides cultural programming for educational institutions, CDCs, and a merchants' association in its neighborhood. The Cultural Center created these programs to compensate

for the dearth of community services and to build individual and community capacity in a part of the city that has been socially and economically marginalized for decades.

Art spaces attract and engage visitors through their involvement in the surrounding neighborhood in other ways as well. Kettle Art, which is located in the Deep Ellum area, sponsors the Recover Mural competition, a week-long event in which artists paint murals there. Metrognome Collective, even after losing its permanent space, continues to partner with homeless advocacy groups to offer photography classes to the homeless persons in their Fort Worth neighborhood and presents exhibitions of their work. In these ways, the art spaces function not simply as arts providers, but also as outreach centers that work beyond their walls and in their surrounding communities.

Finally, some art spaces engage communities beyond their immediate neighborhoods. For instance, the Dallas Contemporary, a private nonprofit art space, created Art Think to provide visual art education to public school children. Similarly, many art spaces forge partnerships with other organizations beyond their neighborhood. For example, the Ice House Cultural Center partners on exhibits and events with various community colleges and local arts organizations ranging from Oak Cliff Artisans to the Dallas Museum of Art. The South Dallas Cultural Center works with the National Performance Network on the Diaspora program and regularly partners with local African-American arts organizations to present work. These activities bring together similar interest groups and provide an opportunity for many different people who may not normally visit the art spaces to create connections through them.

Space and surroundings

As described earlier, although the art space facilities range in size, all are able to handle multiple programs and activities. They do so, however, not necessarily in facilities built to their exact specifications – in only three instances do they occupy buildings constructed expressly for them. Rather, most art spaces have adapted older, often historic structures to fit their needs. 500X is in a former tire factory and air-conditioning warehouse, Sammons in a former water pump station, the McKinney Avenue Contemporary (MAC) in a space that once fashioned saddlery and other leather products, and the Ice House Cultural Center was built as an ice storage facility. Such buildings provide an ideal site because they are typically adaptable to a wide range of visual and performance art activities and are attractive to audiences because of the similarity to an artist's studio or its historic qualities.

Many of the art spaces are in low density areas on lots with deep setbacks that accommodate their street-facing parking lot. The first experience in entering an art space is therefore from automobile to parking lot to the main entrance located directly behind the lot. The Latino Cultural Center (designed by Ricardo Legorreta) and the Irving Arts Center are the only two that contain an exterior public space, a plaza and sculpture garden, respectively, rather than a parking lot as their central outdoor spaces. Although, here too, if traveling by automobile, one still moves directly from the open expanse of the street-facing parking lot to the main entrance. Further, although nearly all of the art spaces are located on streets with sidewalks, many are small and the surrounding area lacks other pedestrian and bicycle amenities such as trees, benches, or bike racks.

Although the exterior space of most art spaces are oriented toward the automobile, virtually all are accessible by public transportation. With the exception of the Mesquite Arts Center, whose city does not possess public transit and is not well-served by the Dallas system, all are on or near one or more bus routes. Further, some central Dallas spaces are near an existing light rail line and will gain increased service when a new downtown line opens in 2009. Still, as discussed in what follows, because the spaces are designed foremost around the automobile, access for some visitors may be diminished.

Finally, most of the art spaces are located in areas disconnected from vibrant commercial or neighborhood life. Although many of the private nonprofit spaces manage to find a location central to where many of the artists that they serve live and work, with few exceptions, most cannot afford to rent a space in a busy commercial or entertainment area. In fact, Kettle Art, located in the Deep Ellum district in Dallas, benefits from discounted rent (Campagna, 2008, interview), and the MAC, which is located in an active but gentrified area of Dallas known as Uptown, obtained its site through a benefactor (Bloch, 2008, interview). Some, like the Sammons Center, are physically isolated. Although the Sammons is located in a beautifully restored historic building with convenient auto access near downtown, its only neighbors are the tangle of streets and adjacent tollway that surround it. Its small driveway and poor signage, due to historic preservation ordinances, make it difficult to spot for infrequent visitors. Similarly, although the FWCAC is located in the Fort Worth Cultural District, it too is physically isolated from the surrounding neighborhoods. Despite its high-profile location adjacent to internationally known arts institutions like the Kimball Museum, the Amon Carter Art Museum, and the Fort Worth Museum of Modern Art, the cultural district itself is essentially a single-use area defined by culture. The suburban-style campus contains various large civic and cultural buildings set in a grid of streets and

open, grassy areas. As such, despite the proximity of other cultural institutions, there is no public streetlife in the traditional sense, no immediately adjacent commercial activity, and virtually no arts-related activity has appeared nearby. With the exception of the annual day in the district, an event in which all cultural institutions are open free of charge and dance and music performances are scheduled outdoors throughout the afternoon, the arts institutions operate in their own adjacent bubbles.

Given the isolated location and the lack of pedestrian activity surrounding many art spaces, the potential for crime and vandalism would seem to increase. However, only in rare instances do the art spaces report this. For instance, the Sammons' isolated location has meant occasional problems such as the theft of copper from air conditioning units (St Angelo, 2008, interview). According to the director of the South Dallas Cultural Center, which is located in an area portrayed in the local news media as plagued by high crime, there have been very few incidences in her twelve year tenure as well (Meek, 2008, interview). Nonetheless, the problematic physical characteristics described earlier may not only inhibit the economic potential of an art space, but also may affect the perception that it and its surroundings are unsafe or inaccessible which, as noted in what follows, may disproportionately inhibit attendance by specific groups.

Public space roles

The art spaces perform as public spaces in five ways, although these are not mutually exclusive. First, as a result of the diversity and sheer number of programs and events, most art spaces claim to attract and represent diverse audiences.⁹ As the director of the Latino Cultural Center explains, she strives to present eclectic programming because 'that's the way to broaden the audiences. Some audiences will be interested in film, and others in poetry or in dance Coming here for a film may expose them to the galleries' (Drew, 2008, interview). Some spaces represent diverse audiences through the presentation of many different artistic mediums, materials, and themes – the Dallas Contemporary and Kettle Art, for example, have held exhibitions with themes ranging from Formica to cartoon art. Still others present the work of a variety of ethnic-specific organizations to appeal to a wide audience. Many attempt to expand

9 Unfortunately, none of the art spaces has the financial ability to conduct audience profiles, and those that keep track of visitor numbers do not maintain uniform methods for counting visitors. For example, of the Mesquite Art Center's over 104,000 visitors, 98,000 are attributed to 'arts groups' only and not specific type of event or companies. FWCAC includes all events in their audience count but lacks data for many of these.

their work and audience through the various partnerships and outreach programs described earlier. Because these programs forge connections with groups not intimately involved with the art space, they enable the art spaces to expand their audience. Finally, some seek to diversify their audience through activities that are not arts-related. FWCAC, for instance, hosts many events for Latino and African-American groups including weddings and the meetings of ethnic-specific associations, which they credit with helping to expand and diversify their audience for arts events (Garcia, 2008, interview). As a result, rather than having a limited audience consisting solely of regular patrons, most art spaces claim to be home to multiple users or owners of the space.

Second, by providing a wide variety of activities aimed at different audiences, the art spaces create opportunities for community engagement and interaction within and between groups. As the FWCAC's former director believes, the Center is 'a real catalyst for bringing lots of different people together . . . because of the diversity of programming and the fact that the exhibit spaces are free, a lot of different kinds of people come together from all walks of life People feel comfortable going here, they know they don't have to dress up, the parking is easy, and it's very welcoming' (Garcia, 2008, interview). Moreover, art spaces serve to connect and put communities on display. As the director of the Mesquite Arts Center claims, unlike galleries or theaters dedicated to a single company, 'the fact that you have in 32,000 square feet [2,973 m²], a variety of arts expressions – theater, literary work, and all kinds of music . . . – and that my neighbor is in *The Bonechiller*, which is on stage now in the black box theater, or because a City Council member is playing the judge at one of the productions for the community theater They don't come together in production, but they come together in space'. Similarly, a former 500X member explains that art spaces purposefully 'create a space where people can come in and gather and look at art and socialize with each other. I mean, these gallery openings are great places to come in and talk to people and meet people from the neighborhood' (Tosten, 2008, interview). In addition, the art spaces create opportunities for interaction within and between groups through their partnerships and outreach programs.

Third, the art spaces often provide a venue for underrepresented groups to enhance their visibility. Some, such as the South Dallas Cultural Center, use their exhibitions to feature artists of color, which have been historically underrepresented in mainstream arts institutions (Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach, 2004). Others broaden artistic representation in their city by serving as a *de facto* home for ethnic-specific and other arts groups that cannot support a dedicated space of their own. Gallery and theater rental

enables artists of all backgrounds to present shows that are too large or not profitable for a gallery or that are simply not possible at other venues in the area.

Fourth, some art spaces seek to become a nucleus for more individualized communities. One of the founders of 500X wanted to create that art space to 'empower' artists: '[500X] gave us a great deal of positive energy, encouragement and inspiration among each other. And networking with each other – we would share information on who was showing where, and we would literally assist each other in the development of a career as an artist' (Hippis, 2008, interview). These art spaces can help to launch artistic careers by building on already established social connections. At Kettle Art, 'some of our star artists are graffiti writers that I knew way back in the day. I never did graffiti, but I'd always help them out and employ them to assist me on large [mural] projects because they could handle it. And they've gone from doing things on the street for nothing to doing legitimate art and earning a decent living' (Campagna, 2008, interview). Indeed, spaces like 500X, Dallas Contemporary, Kettle Art, and Metrognome Collective offer aspiring artists the opportunity to enhance their portfolio, learn how to put on an exhibition, and interact with their peers in a mutually supportive environment and, in the process, make connections in the local arts scene that can help them find work (De Anda Tosten, 2008, interview).

Finally, largely because of their strong social roles, the art spaces are positioned to generate local economic activity. On the one hand, as noted earlier, art spaces have the potential to play an economic role by establishing and reinforcing social networks in the wider arts scene, which enhances opportunities for employment and the sale of work at exhibitions. On the other hand, they may do so by simply attracting people to a neighborhood who, in turn, spend money there. However, because most are not in areas with compatible community and business activity, they are not able to capitalize on this role. In this regard, location is especially important. For instance, visitors may chose to attend an art space function because they can also attend activities at other arts institutions or shop or eat at nearby businesses. This clustering of compatible activities creates a synergistic effect in terms of both economic and social activity (Jacobs, 1961). Indeed, art spaces, like any community institution or 'third place', both define neighborhood life and hinge on it. As one of the owners of Kettle Art explains, 'If [I] just walked a couple of blocks from here, I guarantee [I'll] run into at least a dozen people [I know]. Even on a dead night like tonight.... And that's a neighborhood. Not like the neighborhoods in Dallas for the most part' (Campagna, 2008, interview). Further, as at other art spaces, many of the artists who exhibit at Kettle Art also live in the area, which reinforces the integration of community interaction and the

neighborhood economy as artists and others spend money at neighborhood businesses or work in the area (Hopper, 2008, interview; Tosten, interview, 2008).

The ability of an art space to realize each of these roles is reinforced by the physical arrangement of the interior and exterior spaces of the facility and the characteristics of the surrounding area. In most instances, the interior lobby serves as a public meeting ground, but galleries too can serve a social function as visitors meet and discuss work. The director of the Mesquite Arts Center feels that the interior organization of its space enhances audience interaction: 'What I've seen occur more often than I can even name to you, are when those different audiences come together at intermission or before concerts or plays or literary events begin because of the configuration of this space. You have a shared lobby/main gallery area between the two major performance areas – a black box theater on the south end and a concert hall on the north end – where those people are going to intermingle, and there's art in the middle' (Templeton, 2008, interview). In addition, classrooms and meeting rooms provide a space for social interaction for children and adults. Beyond the walls of the facility, art spaces help to enhance the perception of safety in their neighborhood by bringing people to an area at all hours. This is particularly important for women, children, the elderly, and handicapped persons who more often experience fear in public space (Wekerle and Whitzman, 1995). However, as discussed in what follows, in most instances, the exterior facility characteristics and that of the surrounding area hinder their public space roles.

Public space weaknesses

Despite these strengths, a number of issues impair the ability of some art spaces to perform as public spaces. First, some unintentionally insulate themselves from their surrounding communities. One former member at 500X criticizes that art space for its lack of community involvement despite their location in central Dallas near multiple minority communities that lack opportunities to participate in the arts in their neighborhood. In explaining the lack of outreach, this artist pointed to the difficulty of overcoming the social or racial boundaries that can exist between the art space and its surrounding communities: 'There was never any serious effort. Mostly because everybody there at the time was white . . . and they didn't know what was going on [around them]. They didn't really try to interact with any other people. And it's hard to start a dialog – it's hard on both sides – because some are suspicious of people. They see white artists coming in [and] kind of think, "Well, they want to exploit us."'

An art space may be insulated because of a weak physical presence in its surrounding community as well. In addition to the fact that most activities take place inside the building, many facilities are set far back from the street and behind their parking lot, lack an exterior gathering space on the premise, have poor signage, and generally have few windows to allow views into the building from the street. The latter is due to gallery and theater space, which take up much of their small facilities. Each of these factors can make the facility indistinguishable from its surroundings and less inviting to those not already involved with the art space. This, in turn, reduces the symbolic impact of those art spaces wishing to establish a community presence not only in their neighborhood itself, but also in the larger sense of representing overlooked artists and attracting nontraditional audiences. In other words, for those art spaces responding to the exclusion of particular social groups, the building itself is sometimes a missed opportunity to make their presence known.

Second, community art centers that attempt to appeal to every possible interest group risk alienating important constituents. At FWCAC, artists were initially uninterested in the Center's community-focused mandate, fearing they would be associated with low-quality, amateur work (Garcia, 2008, interview; Taylor, 2008, interview; Watkins, 2008, interview). Although the Center has worked hard to overcome this stigma through its exhibitions and the formation of an artist advisory committee that provides programming advice, it still struggles with this image.

Third, diverse programming does not necessarily guarantee broad representation or that different groups will interact. For one, those art spaces that attempt to represent people from diverse social backgrounds typically do so through the presentation of different artistic mediums or subject matter, which does not in and of itself guarantee that they will attract racially, ethnically, and financially diverse audiences. Further, if an art space does attract a diverse audience or arts organizations, this does not ensure that different groups will intermingle. However, this issue is often more complex. For example, the Irving Arts Center was built eighteen years ago to serve a diverse group of local arts organizations including the Academy of Bangla Arts and Culture, the Irving Black Arts Council, and the Irving Symphony Orchestra. Where the Center once reflected community demographics, today it struggles to serve the city's rapidly growing Latino population. Moreover, in terms of performing arts, the Irving Arts Center in some ways serves more as a private clubhouse for these organizations than a public space. Like other art spaces that provide office, rehearsal, and performance space, they do not impose a term limit on the length of residency or other restrictions on space use. As a result, they serve a group of *de facto* resident organizations, which restricts the use of the facilities by

other groups and limits the overall audience. As the Irving Arts Center's director claims, 'with the exception of about five of [the arts organizations], they're private clubs . . . I have one group that has an audience consistently of 240 – the same people' (Huff, 2008, interview).

Finally, accessibility is a concern both in terms of programming and in the design of the facility and surrounding spaces. Accessibility issues influence the composition of an art space's users or audience and, therefore, on its ability to bring together different groups and provide opportunities for social interaction or, conversely, to inadvertently reinforce existing social divisions. In terms of programming, although many offer youth arts programs, classes are rarely scheduled to coincide with events for adults, thus making attendance by families more difficult. Further, most lack the resources to provide support services such as childcare, which would allow for greater participation, particularly of single-parent households.

Most accessibility issues at the art spaces, however, are due to aspects of the physical space and surroundings and likely have a disproportionately negative impact on lower income, minority, and special needs groups. Although the art spaces may serve as successful public spaces through their activities and interior spaces, from the outside, few of the art spaces seem designed to function as inviting or accessible public spaces. For most, the main exterior public space is the parking lot and there is little consideration of the visitor experience before he or she enters the building. Few are handicap accessible, largely because they lack the resources to provide wheelchair ramps and related services. The vast majority of the art spaces are accessible by multiple modes of transportation. However, as the dominance of the street-facing parking lots, deep building setbacks, and lack of pedestrian amenities imply, the art spaces are designed predominately around auto access. In fact, although many art space websites provide directions by automobile and some emphasize the availability of free parking, none offers assistance to visitors using public transit. These are significant oversights given that many of the art spaces seek to represent and serve a diverse public and that some are geared toward serving lower income and minority populations, who are disproportionately public transit riders. In addition, most of the art spaces are not located in immediate proximity to other community institutions and related businesses, which can negatively affect attendance, social interaction, and, therefore, the role in economic development. For instance, although the variety of activities keep the art spaces busy during both daytime and evening hours and none charges a fee to enter galleries, the location can create a perceived lack of safety, which may impact attendance by certain groups. In short, each of these factors may hurt an art space's ability to attract and serve its constituents and target audience.

Conclusion

This study shows that art spaces can serve a variety of public space roles, which are related to community development. In so doing, most do much more than act as art house. All provide an important resource for their constituents and many art spaces act as institutions engaged in wider community development work. First, by providing events and meeting spaces, not all of which are arts-related, art spaces serve as social gathering places and are perceived to catalyze social interaction both within and between different groups of people. Art spaces reinforce their role as facilitator through the wide variety and quantity of arts and educational programs and activities that they offer. Second, art spaces assume a leadership role by spearheading projects in their immediate community and often work in partnership with other local community organizations. Because residents and audiences are often involved in this activity, it likewise boosts community participation and capacity. Third, each of these roles helps to create and reinforce a positive and often distinct community identity and creates a sense of belonging for participants. Fourth, by attracting visitors from both within and outside the immediate neighborhood, art spaces may generate local spending and tourism, although in most instances studied here, this potential is squandered because they are not located in close physical proximity to neighborhood commercial establishments. Finally, many art spaces provide assistance directly to local artists, which further contributes to local economic development and individual betterment.

As would be expected, different types of art spaces fulfill these roles to varying degrees. Suburban art centers, in particular, attempt to fill a void in their communities by providing a comprehensive array of usually mainstream arts events to citizens who have little exposure to live arts activity. FWCAC is similar but, in addition to its community emphasis, also focuses on building the careers of local artists and so attempts to represent and build multiple communities. Other art spaces focus on specific constituents such as local artists, ethnic communities, or neighborhood residents. Given their more focused mandate, these spaces may in fact be more tightly linked to reproducing the identity and membership of their targeted community. Conversely, art spaces that attempt to be everything to everybody risk alienating important constituents, as they struggle between artist representation and serving a broad public as FWCAC illustrates. Despite the ideal of openness and mixing, like any public space, these art spaces are either geared to a specific constituency or experience conflict over representation and use.

The physical characteristics of an art space and its surroundings play a key but secondary role in its function as public space. Although it is difficult to determine the full extent to which facility design, a lack of surrounding streetlife, or transit access influences this role, improving physical connections and resolving access and design issues would likely enhance the ability to perform as a community public space. In terms of facility design, most art spaces are inwardly focused – although they contain interior gathering spaces (lobby, conference rooms, galleries, etc), there is little to connect them physically or visually to their immediate surroundings or neighborhood. In this regard, incorporating more clear signage, banners, public art, plazas or exterior gathering spaces, and landscaping, particularly in parking lots, could enhance esthetic appeal for visitors and catch the attention of passersby, as well as establish a stronger identity for the art space and the groups it represents. Enlisting the involvement of local artists is one way to harness an existing strength and realize their mandate to bring about these improvements. New facilities should be located in areas that already have a high volume of foot traffic and in either neighborhood commercial centers or adjacent to compatible activity. Addressing these issues can additionally assist in improving the perception of safety and, therefore, attendance by many potential users. Further, the art spaces could better promote public transit access by providing information on their website or working with their respective cultural affairs agency to create promotions and marketing with transit authorities. This is particularly important for those art spaces that strive to serve a wide range of communities or those communities lacking many opportunities to participate in the arts.

In addition, although interior spaces typically provide opportunities for social interaction, more attention to the scheduling of activities and events can improve access and enlarge audiences. For example, although many spaces offer youth arts programs, they are rarely scheduled to coincide with events for adults in afternoons and early evenings. Providing a source of educational childcare could enhance visitation. In addition, regular activities that encourage casual visits rather than organized events alone would increase steady use of the art space and reinforce its role as a community center. Finally, the art spaces need to develop a better understanding of their visitor demographics and could better market their events and activities. Although virtually all spaces noted that both were needed but outside of their budgetary capabilities, low-cost marketing and survey efforts are possible. An informative, easy-to-navigate, and up-to-date website, which all of the city-sponsored cultural centers in Dallas lack, is one example. Pursuing community rate advertising in local media outlets is another. Although

collecting visitor demographics is difficult, art spaces could set out surveys for visitors to complete as they leave the galleries or during intermission at performances. In these ways, art spaces can improve their community development roles by building on their already strong role as public spaces.

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