

Culture as Animator of Intergenerational Gathering Places

The value of arts and cultural institutions for intergenerational gathering places depends not only on their specific design, but also on how they "animate" diverse gatherings of young and old to associate and mingle. Through this programming, they become "civic glue" and reward any location.

Engaging Older Adults

Americans are enjoying longer and healthier lives. By 2030, more than 20 percent of U.S. residents are projected to be aged 65 and over, compared with 13 percent in 2010 and 9.8 percent in 1970. In 2050, the population aged 65 and over is projected to be 83.7 million, almost double its estimated population of 43.1 million in 2012. 1 An aging nation: The older population in the United States. (U.S. Census Bureau Publication No. P25-1140). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

The vast majority of Americans want to remain in their communities as they age. Contrary to popular belief, only a small minority actually move to warmer climates upon retirement. In 2010, only 3.1 percent (1.3 million) of those age 65 and over lived in skilled-nursing facilities. 2 The older population: 2010 census briefs. (U.S. Census Bureau Publication No. C2010BR-09). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Instead, most Americans choose to age in place, within the same communities where they have long lived. Every community, from fast-growing suburbs to more stable rural areas, will have to adapt to a maturing population.

Although most residents want to age in place, they confront many barriers to remaining active and engaged in their communities. The following are some of the most common barriers:

- A lack of affordable and appropriate housing options
- Few opportunities for walking, bicycling or other forms of physical activity, making it more difficult to remain healthy and engaged
- Inadequate mobility options
- Limited information about available health and supportive services in their community
- Concerns about the safety and security of the community
- Limited opportunities for civic participation, including meaningful prospects for volunteer service and employment

These challenges to aging in place are community-wide concerns that affect residents of all ages and abilities. On a positive note, communities of all shapes and sizes - big cities and counties, medium-size cities, small towns, rural townships, rural counties, suburban bedroom communities and edge cities - are implementing creative solutions to meet the challenges of a maturing America.

Culture, Place and Intergenerational Exchanges

What Partners for Livable Communities believes, and what recent studies are showing, is that effectively highlighting the culture and heritage of a place cultivates attachment to that place, and thus makes people want to settle in that area and lay their roots down. Heritage assets can include a wide variety of community amenities including, parks, squares, plazas, and historically preserved neighborhoods. It is in these places that the renewal of American cities are taking place today, and culture and heritage are at the heart of this renewal. More and more, residents want to preserve the community gathering places that existed in the past, places that provide the nodes of community exchange and that thus hold the most value to their cities.



Arts and cultural institutions are often the nexus for exchanges between patrons of all ages. This type of intergenerational animation is an indicator of both a communities' quality of life as well as its economic competitiveness. Culture embraces a broad range of activities and programs that allow individuals to creatively express their identity and history.

As the baby boom generation ages, the demand for arts and cultural activities will grow. Participation in arts and culture programs has proven health benefits for older adults. However, most communities are unprepared for the coming demand. Providing a range of arts and culture programs attuned to older adults' interests and abilities requires partnerships with youth programs to foster intergenerational learning, as well as with universities, senior centers, libraries, and other groups and institutions. Providing these opportunities can also build a powerful advocacy voice in the community for more funding to libraries, parks and schools.

Local governments can encourage and help fund programs that use arts and cultural activities to bring together different generations and cultural groups. For example, many programs use theater as a tool to educate the community about cultural and generational differences. Some programs, such as that of San Francisco's Planning for Elders in the Central City, use theater as an educational and advocacy tool on issues such as health care and housing. By encouraging partnerships between repertory theaters, artists and community organizations and agencies serving older adults, local governments can create new opportunities to fund and increase the relevance of arts and cultural programs in the community.

What Matters Most

A 2010 major U.S. study undertaken by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, *Why People Love Where They Live and Why it Matters: A National Perspective*, surveys what sorts of resources provide total attachment of people to a community and make them want to put down roots, build a life, and work together to make it better.

Knight and Gallup found three elements that were most important:

1. an area's physical beauty, the preservation of its historic open spaces and buildings
2. opportunities for socialization
3. a community's openness to all people including "new" comers.

According to *Why People Love Where They Live and Why it Matters*, what attaches residents to their communities doesn't change much from place to place. While one might expect the drivers of attachment would be different in Miami from those in Macon, Ga., in fact the main drivers of attachment differ little across communities. Whether you live in San Jose, Calif., or State College, Pa., the things that connect you to your community are generally the same. When examining each factor in the study and its relationship to attachment, the same items rise to the top, year after year:

- **Aesthetics** - The physical beauty of the community including the availability of parks and green spaces.
- **Social offerings** - Places for people to meet each other and the feeling that people in the community care about each other.
- **Openness** - How welcoming the community is to different types of people, including families with young children, minorities and talented college graduates.

Institutions as Fulcrums for Change

Traditional institutions already embedded in many communities--such as: libraries, faith congregations, heritage organizations, universities, community colleges, museums, zoos, aquariums, botanic gardens, and arts and humanities agencies--can take on new roles of social service and economic development to address emerging challenges. As such, they become new resources for a caring community.

- **Libraries** can become anchor tenants in downtown revitalization programs.
- **Parks and recreation departments** can be health and welfare delivery centers.
- **Historical societies** can help launch goal-setting agendas with their communities.
- **Universities** in partnership with towns can become research and policy centers that help solve urban problems.
- **Museums** can be neutral meeting grounds to discuss explosive issues such as racism.

Best Practices

The Queens Museum of Art: Breaking Barriers, Re-Defining Access to the Arts

[www.queensmuseum.org]

The Queens Museum of Art, housed in the iconic World's Fair building of 1939, is set in the nation's most diverse neighborhood that is home to more than 200 spoken languages: Queens, New York. The Museum's mission, "to present the highest quality visual arts and educational programming for people in the New York metropolitan area, and particularly for the residents of Queens, a uniquely diverse ethnic, cultural and international community," rings true to its invaluable presence in the community. Since 2005, the Museum has re-dedicated its programming to reflect and engage the local community, "attempting to exert the same sort of imagination, experimentation, and resources to community engagement as in the galleries, 3 " through a museum department titled The Queens Museum of Art in the Community. Today, the QMA is the marriage of form and function. Expansive, light-filled space houses ambitious exhibitions, forward-thinking educational initiatives and community-minded programming that engages myriad constituencies--residents, tourists, children, artists, individuals with special needs, families, seniors and recent immigrants.

The Queens Museum works tirelessly to engage the community outside its four walls. Not only does the Museum have a full-time community organizer on staff working actively in the immediate Corona neighborhood of Queens, a position currently unmatched by any other art museum in the country, but it provides numerous, ongoing partnerships to community organizations specifically within the immigrant and older adult communities. Catering to the diverse immigrant populations of Queens, the Museum hosts Passport Fridays, sponsored events showcasing a different country every week from South Korea to Colombia to India.

The Queens Museum of Art with the Queens Public Library, one of the largest urban library systems in the world containing 66 branches, created the New New Yorkers (NNY) program - education classes to meet the needs of immigrant adults. The program hosts ESOL classes that teach English as a second language, and provides myriad multilingual research tools, citizenship materials and arts publications.

The Museum operates as one of its feature community engagement programs: El Corazón de Corona or The Heart of Corona Initiative, a project that "aims to address the health of residents and to activate and beautify Corona's public space." The Initiative boasts several cross-sector projects created in collaboration with local health, business, and elected leaders: Beautification and Clean-Up (see Figure 1, below), a Healthy Taste of Corona cook book, and numerous public arts projects as well as popular street festivals such as the recent 107th Corona Block Party, My Street My Home.

The Corona neighborhood is an historic hub of ethnic diversity, home to such legends as Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, and Malcolm X. In the last three decades, Corona has experienced major demographic shifts aligned with national trends; the neighborhood has become home to a steady increase of immigrant populations. As a premiere institution located in the heart of Corona, the Queens Museum of Art engages as a primary stakeholder in the community to serve as a vehicle for community revitalization. With high-quality public engagement programs, the Museum promotes such unique initiatives as: The Immigrants & Parks Collaborative, immigrant-led civic engagement programs in public parks; and The Corona Studio, which curates new works of community- engaged public art to traditionally under-served audiences.

Beyond providing ample community engagement and recreational events, the Museum strives to meet many of the social challenges facing neighborhood residents through the umbrella art therapy program, Art Access which serves community members with special needs. An award-winning program recognized by the Institute of Museum and Library Services for exemplary leadership and community partnership, Art Access was launched in 1983 with a mission to "promote exploration through the arts and to highlight the creativity that exists in all people." Originally, the program was created to provide art education for the visually impaired; today, Art Access has widely expanded its mission and capacity to serve over 5,000 New York City school children enrolled in special education programs each year. The program primarily staffs therapists trained in creative art therapies who are able to adapt their expertise to meet community needs.

Acclaimed programming within Art Access includes: The Autism Initiative, Gallery Gatherings, in-house programming for families hosting children in the foster care system, the Multi-Sensory Tour Kit, Sign Language Tours, and more. This extensive, diverse programming proves the Queens Museum's priority in maintaining an accessible institution beyond the parameters of what most consider eliminating barriers to access: The Museum goes above and beyond opening its doors to simply pave the path for all patrons to first get to the doorstep.

The Queens Museum of Art, through incredible outreach programming designed for the older adult and immigrant populations, as well as those with diverse special needs, proves itself as an institution which extends far beyond its four walls to not only conduct programming in community venues but to also bring back residents to the Museum for engaged learning. The Museum today acts as a good leader and role model for all institutions attempting to break down barriers to access and to reach out to all community residents.



Figure 1: Volunteers from the Corazón de Corona project take a break during the beautification and clean-up of public space near the Museum. Courtesy of Queens Museum of Art.

Key Lessons:

- The Queens Museum of Art breaks down traditional ideas of a museum and its relations to the surrounding community, and rather presents the institution as community-based, structuring a majority of its programming based on community needs and outside of its four walls.
- The Museum uses a community organizer to expand beyond the institution to engage the community in places and with methods meaningful to the residents.
- Access to the arts is considered an inherent right for all residents, especially for those experiencing barriers to access in their daily lives. The Museum provides programming for all specialized populations: immigrants, older adults, and those with disabilities.

Dance Exchange: An Intergenerational Dance Company

Takoma Park, Maryland [www.danceexchange.org]

Based outside of Washington, D.C., the Dance Exchange is an intergenerational company of artists that creates dance and engages people in making art. The nonprofit serves as an incubator for creative research, bringing ideas to action through collaborations that range from experts in the field of dance to unexpected movers and makers. Through these exchanges the company stretches the boundaries between the studio, stage and other environments to make dances that are rooted in the particularity of people and place.

The mission of the Dance Exchange, formerly known as the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, is to create dances that arise from asking: Who gets to dance? Where is the dance happening? What is it about? Why does it matter? The company recognizes the body and movement as an essential resource to understand and investigate across disciplines. Through local, national, international and online projects the Dance Exchange gathers and creates community to contribute to a healthy and more sustainable environment.

In 1975, its founder Liz Lerman began teaching senior adults at the Roosevelt for Senior Citizens, a city-run residential facility in inner-city Washington, D.C. Shortly after, she created "Woman of the Clear Vision," a dance about her mother's death with a cast of professional dancers and Roosevelt residents. In 1976, the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange was incorporated and opened a school for professional and avocational dancers in downtown D.C. Since then, the Dance Exchange has produced more than 100 innovative dance/theatre works, presented thousands of performances and conducted innumerable community encounters. With these activities, the company has reached communities of every size, from Los Angeles to Eastport, Maine, and from Yamaguchi, Japan, to Gdansk, Poland.

According to Lerman: "Sometimes art achieves what therapy, medicine or the best care of health professionals cannot. Sometimes art even achieves something that's beyond the best intentions of the artist. These moments can feel like little miracles when they happen, but they are usually instances of art functioning as it normally does: inspiring motivation, engaging parts of people's bodies or brains that they haven't been using, or allowing them to transcend their environments for a little while."

Dance Exchange breaks boundaries between stage and audience, theater and community, movement and language, tradition and the unexplored. Now under the artistic direction of Cassie Meador, Dance Exchange stretches the range of contemporary dance through explosive dancing, personal stories, humor and a company of performers whose ages span six decades. The work consists of concerts, interactive performances, community residencies and professional training in community-based dance. Dance Exchange employs a collaborative approach to dance making and administration. Recent and current projects include explorations of coal mining, genetic research, human rights, particle physics, ecology, land use and rest in a hyper-driven society.

Drawing on its rich history, and in partnership with MetLife Foundation, the Dance Exchange concentrates the work of its Healthy Living Initiative in two main areas: Arts in Healthcare and Creative Aging. During the 35 years that Dance Exchange has been making dance with people of all ages in community and health care settings, it has regularly seen participants surprise themselves and others by coming alive in unexpected ways. This sense of connection--or reconnection--to life is the essence of wellness. The ability of dance to produce this experience in people seems unparalleled. Dance is an efficient and cost-effective path to wellness for individuals and communities.

Arts in Healthcare

- Artistic work with people in health care settings: The Dance Exchange's multi-disciplinary approach to art combines movement, verbal expression, creative challenge and collaboration. Methods have been used with a variety of people, including those with Huntington's disease, brain injury, dementia, addiction, chronic mental illness and mobility issues.
- Training for artists, health professionals and caregivers: Experiential activities, model teaching and new frameworks help participants explore the ways in which dance and art-making can enhance the effects of therapeutic work and re-energize relationships with patients, family members and the self.
- Creation and performance of new works: The intergenerational Healthy Living Commissions provide research vehicles for dancers and offer fresh insights and experiences in health care, conference and stage settings.

Creative Aging

- Dancers Over 50: Classes, workshops, intensives and institutes for new and experienced dancers over 50 give participants the chance to engage in dance that is artistically rigorous and adaptable for different bodies.
- Intergenerational Projects: Across the U.S. and abroad, Dance Exchange uses its highly respected creative practices to connect elder and younger members of a community together through the exploration of important life themes in workshops and residencies.



Figure 2: Dance Exchange artists Thomas Dwyer, Dante Brown, and Andy Torres. [Photo: Ben Carver, courtesy of Dance Exchange]

Creative Place Making

The role that arts and cultural centers can play in preserving local character and in reinforcing a sense of place across generations has been advanced substantially by the agenda of *creative placemaking*.

There are two forces within the creative placemaking movement. Project for Public Spaces of New York city, initially founded by the leadership of William H. Whyte who wrote the book *Social Life of Urban Spaces*, is led by Fred Kent and has advanced placemaking as a conversation between potential users, i.e., citizens, on what they would like to see as a safe and important gathering place that could advance their enjoyment of such a setting, be it a square, vacant lot, park, or neighborhood gathering place. A new movement in recent years called Art Place, organized by a consortium of foundations led by the Ford Foundation in association with the National Endowment for the Arts, believes that artists can play a critical role of serving as catalyst for such

creative placemaking.

Both Project for Public Spaces and Art Place focus upon the relationship of local people being engaged, from young to old, workers and retirees, from low income to high income, as decision makers on the first steps of creating vibrant community gathering places. Both movements agree that anchor institutions, particularly cultural institutions, play a critical role of offering resources. Both movements agree that the role of the architect, planner or landscape architect in creating such intergenerational gathering places is secondary to the role of engaging the local population in decision-making and priorities of first steps for creating valuable gather places.

The many arts and cultural initiatives noted throughout this chapter, including the Queens Museum of Art, Dance Exchange and the many "creative placemaking" endeavors taking root in countless communities, serve to "animate" intergenerational gathering places, thereby enhancing community livability and quality of life for all ages.

Author

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1 U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration. (2014). *An aging nation: The older population in the United States*. (U.S. Census Bureau Publication No. P25-1140). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

2 U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration. (2011). *The older population: 2010 census briefs*. (U.S. Census Bureau Publication No. C2010BR-09). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office

3 The Queens Museum of Art, "QMA in the Community"

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