



Learning from WITH ART:

the role of art and artmaking for community planning

Abstract

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The process of artmaking and its ability to explore complex ideas relating to community planning and development has increased in prominence within planning practitioner literature. The ability of artmaking to act as a vehicle to explore, shape, and reflect community identity has long been recognized within the arts, yet only recently have the valuable lessons from artmaking been actively promoted for community planning. Community planning is a process through which people collaborate and engage with each other, their community, and with society with the intent to shape urban spaces. Throughout the process of community planning initiatives, complex ideas, issues, and emotions are often raised. Although a variety of planning tools exist to help capture community conversations, it can be difficult for these tools to fully grasp and convey the meaning, immediacy, or depth of complex issues that are often present within communities. WITH ART, a Winnipeg based collaborative arts program, nurtures the exploration of complex community-based issues through artistic creativity. The structure of WITH ART demonstrates how community-based art and artmaking can be used as a complementary model for community planning practices.



Image 1: Artmaking is a hands-on process that can complement community planning processes. (William Eakin, 2012)

Introduction

The emergence of planning literature that highlights artistic and creative planning processes demonstrates a growing awareness of the role of art and artmaking for community planning. Although few examples of planner-led artmaking processes exist, numerous well-established art programs run by non-profits or public agencies can offer insight into artmaking as a complementary model for community planning. WITH ART is a Winnipeg based collaborative arts program. Working with a professional artist, participants of WITH ART not only create artwork but through the process of community-based artmaking, uncover and address the

complicated issues that can arise during community planning processes. Upon exploring the connections between community planning theory and artmaking, a discussion about WITH ART will demonstrate how community planning best practices are established and how community-based art and artmaking may be used as a model for community planning practices.

Background

Community planning theory and planning practitioner literature highlights how planning issues are becoming increasingly complex. The complexity of community planning is the result of a need to consider many planning variables such

as land uses, zoning, housing, and transportation. To help address the challenges of complex community planning issues, community-based artmaking is being recognized as an additional or alternative model to complement community planning practices. Community-based artmaking, or simply 'artmaking' as used here, is defined as the inspiration, ideas, and processes of a community through which art is created. The connections between community planning theory and artmaking are numerous. The topics of community dialogue, inclusive and collaborative participation processes, and empowerment are discussed to illustrate the connections of planning theory to artmaking.

Dialogue is central to community planning, and the importance of providing



Image 2: Artmaking is inclusive, collaborative, promotes dialogue, and facilitates empowerment. (Tricia Wasney, 2008)

opportunities for discourse is a common theme of community planning literature. Sandercock (2012) highlights how planning decisions are intricately linked to how the life and language of a city is translated and discussed through dialogue. The stories and dialogue of a city is shaped not only by the way in which the story is discussed, but by who is telling the story, and by whom the story belongs to (Sandercock, 2012). As communities explore their history, cultural identity, or vision for the future, artmaking fosters an exchange of dialogue and becomes represented through the creation of artwork. The role of dialogue in creating art is an example of how artmaking can support community planning processes.

The ability of art and art making to generate community dialogue is largely due to the **inclusive and collaborative nature** of artistic creativity. Community planning literature defines inclusive and collaborative participation

to be a “multi-dimensional model where communication, learning, and action are joined together” (Innes & Booher, 2004, pg. 422). People of different life experiences, abilities, and disciplines work together and contribute to the process of artmaking. As a result, artmaking fosters an inclusive environment for people who may be typically shut out of conversations or underrepresented to have an opportunity through art to share their story. In addition, the inclusive and collaborative nature of artmaking builds trust, helps resolve conflict, and leads to transparency of dialogue and decisions, all of which are key characteristics of community planning principles (Innes & Booher, 2004; Landry, 2006). The inclusive and collaborative nature of artmaking therefore supports community planning processes.

Community planning is intrinsically linked with **empowerment** (Arnstein, 1969; Innes & Booher, 2004; Kennedy, 1996). Community

planning theory describes empowerment to include a capacity to define one’s interests and develop a strategy to achieve these interests (Illsley, 2003; Shipley & Utz, 2012). However, empowerment is not a “thing” that can be obtained, but rather is a process (Kennedy, 1996). By enabling people to express identity, bond with one another over shared interests, and be involved in decision making, artmaking is an inherently empowering process (Landry, 2006). The ability of artmaking to help facilitate empowerment further reinforces the role of artmaking for community planning.

Although elements of artistic creativity exist within community planning tools, few examples of planner-led artmaking processes exist. However, WITH ART, a well-established art program offers tangible examples and insight into artmaking as a complementary model for community planning.



Image 3: Community-based artmaking is defined here as the inspiration, ideas, and processes of a community through which art is created. (Little DaVinci, 2014)

About WITH ART

In 2002, Winnipeg's Public Art Policy was developed through the Winnipeg Art Council (WAC). With this policy, WAC developed and manages Winnipeg's Public Art Program. The public art program is administered by both WAC Staff and a committee composed of artists, art educators, design professionals, and a representative from the City's Planning Department (Winnipeg Arts Council, 2014). In 2006, the WAC's Public Art Program created WITH ART. WITH ART is based on the belief that



Image 4: WITH ART matches professional artists with community groups to collaboratively work on a piece of art. (William Eakin, 2012)

“with art, communities can explore issues, ideas, and concerns, voice community identity, express historical and cultural spirit, and create dialogue” (Winnipeg Arts Council, 2014). WITH ART matches professional artists with community groups to work collaboratively on a piece of art. To date, WITH ART has facilitated and funded eleven projects, with an additional six in development (Winnipeg Arts Council, 2014).

The structure of WITH ART appears quite simple, yet is extremely effective in fostering inclusive and collaborative participation

for community groups to engage with each other, their community, and with society. Community groups and artists must both apply to participate in WITH ART. Applicants are informed that successful applications are based on a demonstrated interest in exploring community-based issues as well as a commitment to enter the process without a specific result in mind. Artists and community groups are matched based on the compatibility of the artist's art practice in meeting the community's interests and goals. Before creating art, the artist and community group invest in spending time with one another. This process has proved extremely valuable for many WITH ART projects as informal discussion and engagement helps to uncover local knowledge that is later used to shape the art piece. When it is time to start constructing the artwork, both artist and community members are all hands on. When the artwork is completed



Image 5: The Spence Neighbourhood Community Compass symbolizes the meaning of home. (Cam Bush, 2008)

Art & Planning

In addition to WITH ART, a number of programs and initiatives exist in Winnipeg and demonstrate a relationship between artmaking and planning.

Urban Idea was founded to facilitate the exchange of ideas and opinions relating to the quality of life. 2014 is marked the Year of Urban Ideas. A series of upcoming events will investigate the role of art and design in city building.

The Planning and Land Use Division of the City of Winnipeg will be hosting an **Artist-in-Residence**, who will contribute towards a stimulating public engagement process.

Representatives from the Winnipeg Art Council are often involved in the **review of secondary plans**, offering advice for how to best incorporate art into our public spaces.



Image 6: The Elwick Community Centre mosaic represents a diverse and densely populated community who worked together to reflect the spirit of this vibrancy. (William Eakin, 2008)

both the artwork and process of artmaking is celebrated through a public event such as an exhibition or performance.

Although no two WITH ART projects are the same, to help provide context and understanding of the intent and results of WITH ART's collaborative approach to artmaking, consider the following three examples. The Spence Neighbourhood Community Compass was a collaboration between the Spence Neighbourhood Association (SNA) and artist Leah Decter. Through the use of images, text, and native prairie grasses, the compass celebrates the diversity and stories of the Spence Neighbourhood. The Elwick Community and artist Dimitry Melman-Komar targeted their WITH ART project to transform the Elwick Community Centre. Over several months, the bleak and often 'tagged' exterior was transformed with a colourful mosaic designed and installed by community members. The exterior of the

building is now a much more accurate representation of the bustling activity that occurs inside. The play *empty* reflects the diversity of people who utilize food banks and the drama of their stories. Through interviews, surveys, and anecdotes, playwright Hope McIntyre, learned from clients, volunteers, and staff from the Winnipeg Harvest sponsored food bank at the First Unitarian Universalist Church.



Image 7: The play *empty* empowered community members by providing an opportunity for food bank clients to tell their story to a wider audience. (Robert Barrow, 2011)

Sombo A Diba

a dance showcase with the African Community of Manitoba Inc. (ACOMI)
Created by Casimiro Nhussi
through the Winnipeg Arts Council's
WITH ART Community Public Art Program

Saturday, July 6, 8:00 PM
Gas Station Arts Centre, 445 River Ave
Admission is free
Reception to follow

Lessons from WITH ART

Although WITH ART was established less than ten years ago, several thousand people from diverse communities have participated in and been impacted by WITH ART (Winnipeg Arts Council, 2014). WITH ART projects seek engagement from different ages, abilities, and lived experiences, and are a venue for people to connect and bond with each other and with their community. As people learn and work together, leaders emerge, skills surface, and collective wisdom is created, all of which can bring a community together and help address complex planning issues. The reach and success of WITH ART's programs illustrate how impactful and meaningful artmaking can be for community planning. Through its structure and program requirements, WITH ART demonstrates best community planning practices and offers lessons for planning practitioners.

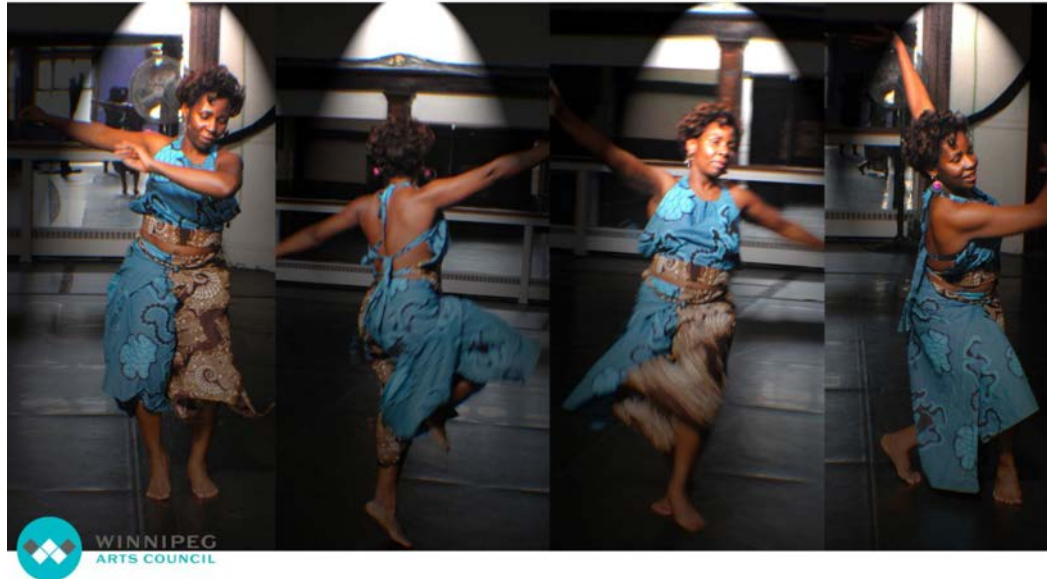


Image 8: When a WITH ART project is complete, the art and artmaking process are celebrated through a public event such as an exhibition or performance. (Gas Station Theatre, 2013)

All WITH ART participants are required to apply to participate. Through the application process, community groups demonstrate a desire and commitment to determine their own future and take control of local issues. For many planning projects, this underlying desire is often the difference between success and disappointment. A dedicated community group is much more likely to prompt dialogue, encourage others to participate, and continue the momentum well after a project is complete. While an application process is not appropriate to all planning processes, WITH ART nonetheless reminds planners that **committed community members are essential** for creating successful planning processes. And since an application process is not always suitable, a lesson that

WITH ART displays is to seek planning processes that foster collaboration with community groups who have a desire to guide the future of their community.

As part of the application process, WITH ART participants are asked to enter the artmaking process without a specific project or partner in mind. Part of the artistic process is not knowing where you will be led to, and if or how you will arrive. By welcoming ambiguity and uncertainty, the outcome of WITH ART projects are not only truly community led but contribute to effective placemaking processes, and as a result are symbolic representations of a community group. By bringing their own ideas or preferences for certain planning and development outcomes, planners can unknowingly influence



Image 9: Community input guides the final decision when matching an artist to community. (Tricia Wasney, 2009)

community planning processes. Although a planner's professional knowledge is invaluable to community development, preconceived notions of planning outcomes may interfere with the voices and opinions of local community members. For this reason, the structure of WITH ART demonstrates a best practice of eliminating barriers to **support the use of local knowledge** for decision-making. Community planning processes can learn and benefit from WITH ART's requirement by asking planners to refrain from proposing personal preferences.

To guide community groups through the artmaking process, communities are matched with professional artists from all disciplines. WITH ART's process of matching a community group and artist raises an important question for community planning processes. When artists apply to WITH ART they become part of a roster. To begin the match process, artists from the roster are short-listed based on the artist's compatibility to help

meet a community's specific goals. The short-listed artists are interviewed and the final match is made. Throughout the matching exercise, representatives from the community group are heavily involved in the decision making process; their input guides the final decision. The involvement of the community group throughout the matching exercise demonstrates best community planning practices of inclusiveness and **transparency of dialogue and decisions**. Is there an opportunity for planning processes to adopt a similar approach of matching a planning practitioners or planning teams skill set with the needs and goals of the community? Opportunities may be present for community planning processes to learn from WITH ART and apply a matching system.

Overall, WITH ART illustrates how tapping the root of artistic creativity can empower people to spark dialogue, take ownership and

control of local issues, and be a catalyst for community driven projects. Leah Decter asked Spence Neighbourhood residents, "What is your home?" Upon reflection, many residents, including newcomers to Canada simply told Leah that Spence Neighbourhood is home; through artmaking, community residents have a renewed sense of ownership to the Spence Neighbourhood. Since the completion of the Elwick Community Centre mosaic, community members not only take more ownership of the community centre but the availability of programming has increased as well and is a direct result of WITH ART. The first table reading of Hope McIntyre's play empty, featured the community members whose story the play is based on rather than professional actors; by having an opportunity to tell their story to a wider audience, community members were truly empowered.



Image 10: Artmaking can help capture the meaning, immediacy, and depth of community-based issues that arise during community planning processes. (WITH ART, 2010)

Conclusion

The use of artistic creativity for community planning practices is not unfamiliar for planners, yet artmaking as a complementary model for community planning remains unconventional. Planners and planning processes can learn from WITH ART. WITH ART's approach to working with community groups who are invested and committed to the project demonstrates a best practice of collaborative planning processes. By matching the skill set of an artist to the needs of community groups, WITH ART displays a best practice of community-led planning processes. Opportunities exist for a wider adoption of artmaking as a complementary model for community planning. Professional artists can support the work of planners by leading community-based artmaking projects as part of the planning process. The work of professional artists

and artmaking, not only helps to address the challenges of complex community planning issues, but brings a community together by creating dialogue, connecting people of different age, abilities, and life experiences with each other and with their community, and by fostering empowerment.

Successful planning means strategically applying our planning tools in a way that puts control back in people's hands. The process of art and artmaking is a complementary model for community planning and an additional tool for planners to better reflect community planning theory in planning processes. When used with other planning tools, artmaking can bring added value to the process by capturing the meaning, immediacy, and depth of community-based issues.

Contributors:

Erika Blackie (MCP, Candidate), recently completed her Master of City Planning coursework.

Jason Granger (MCP), is a University of Manitoba graduate from the Master of City Planning program and is currently working at United Way of Winnipeg as a Community Investment Manager.

Tricia Wasney (MLA), is the Manager-Public Art for the Winnipeg Art Council. Hired in 2002, Tricia helped develop Winnipeg's Public Art Policy and oversees a steadily growing public art program.

Resources

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