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How Arts and Cultural Strategies Create, Reinforce, and Enhance Sense of Place

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Arts and culture strategies help to reveal and enhance the underlying identity — the unique meaning, value, and character — of the physical and social form of a community. This identity is reflected through the community's character or sense of place. A community's sense of place is not a static concept; rather, it evolves and develops over time, reflecting the spectrum of social values within and around the community.

In this way, the community character of a city, county, town, or neighborhood can be seen as a story or narrative of a place. Planners and community members can come together to reveal and burnish this narrative through:

- an articulation of the historic, cultural, economic, and cultural context of the community;
- a commitment to the reinforcement and enhancement of the community's identity; and
- the implementation of policies, regulations, and incentives that support and enhance this evolving identity.

present, and future social values.

Awareness of community identity and character is strengthened by the consideration of all community interests in decision- making processes; the integration of arts and cultural resources with civic visioning programs; and the

balancing of the inherent conflicting nature of past,

Keypoints

This brief explores how arts and culture strategies can be used to understand community context, celebrate community character, and ultimately create, reinforce, or enhance sense of place.

Artistic and cultural inventories allow a community to begin to understand the historic, cultural, economic, and social context of a community — an essential foundation for developing and building sense of place.

A creative community vision can continuously evolve and embrace new ideas while balancing the inherent conflicting nature of past, present, and future community values and culture. Such a vision must reinforce and embrace the changing climate, culture, and character of a place.

Preserving and enhancing the local identity, uniqueness, and arts and culture assets of a community require that local decision making, planning processes, policies, and regulations reflect and support community character.

Arts and cultural programming plays an important role in providing education about the historical and cultural context of a community and in providing opportunities for participation in community life through festivals, events and performances, interactive classes and workshops, and a variety of other activities.

Each key point is explored in greater depth on the following pages.

Keypoint #1

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Understanding Community Context

Helping a community begin to understand its historic, cultural, economic, and social context is an essential foundation for developing and building sense of place. This context includes a variety of community characteristics: population, demographic, and linguistic characteristics; physical and natural resources; cultural history; climate; customs; landscape features; design and architectural elements; local educational institutions; and temporary artistic and cultural exhibits, events, and spaces. A comprehensive reading or inventory of place can help a community begin to develop a voice for its narrative.

The urban planning process plays an important role in assisting residents as they inventory and explore their community context. In this way, the planning process provides a grounding mechanism to ensure that the wealth of information latent in the community is revealed, enhanced, and maintained over time. This allows a narrative about the authentic elements of a community's talent to emerge and thrive.

Artistic and cultural inventories allow a community to assess its historic, cultural, economic, and social context. These inventories include the identification, assessment, and mapping of a community's artistic and cultural resources. Conducting such an inventory allows planners to play a role in revealing the creative assets of a community. This role is strengthened by collaboration with other stakeholders, such as artists or representatives from cultural institutions. Arts, cultural, and educational institutions are particularly skilled at capturing these special qualities and helping citizens understand their community through new eyes. An inventory can often be the first step in community character discovery — or a guided visioning exercise that engages residents from all segments of a community's population in an interactive, creative process of developing a vision for the future of the community.

According to the Culture, Creativity, and Communities Program at the Urban Institute, however, traditional cultural inventories conducted by local governments often overlook nontraditional cultural resources, venues, and activities. Cultural inventories typically focus on cataloging the variety of arts and cultural organizations within a community, analyzing aspects of the natural environment (such as natural and archaeological resources), and describing traditional arts and cultural sites such as theaters, galleries, and other performance or exhibition venues. By expanding the scope of a traditional cultural inventory, planners can better explore the wealth of artistic, cultural, and creative opportunities at the municipal and neighborhood levels.

A comprehensive artistic and cultural inventory combines quantitative and qualitative methods and includes a variety of stakeholders — such as artists, residents, and community cultural workers — in community-based participatory research into the artistic, cultural, and creative characteristics of a community or neighborhood. Such a comprehensive inventory may include the following:

- population and demographic information
- local social and architectural history
- languages spoken
- food culture
- unique customs
- current landscape
- scale of existing buildings (residences, as well as commercial, governmental, and institutional buildings)
- public spaces
- transportation infrastructure
- temporary markets and fairs
- patterns, colors, and materials of buildings
- natural resources
- native plants
- street, business, and community signage
- art forms
- special places
- local educational institutions (colleges, universities, etc.)
- arts institutions (museums, theaters, historic homes, etc.)
- galleries

As one example, the Boston Indicators Project — a partnership among the Boston Foundation, the City of Boston, and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council — explores, measures, and assesses the values, resources, and assets of the city and its residents within the context of civic vitality, cultural life and the arts, the economy, education, the environment, health, housing, public safety, technology, and transportation. The project relies on the interaction and participation of a broad range of stakeholders (from schoolchildren and engaged residents to academic and communitybased experts to public officials and policy makers) to achieve its goals and objectives.

In an effort to better understand how Boston's growing ethnically and culturally diverse population — which comprises more than 50 nationalities and ethnicities and more than 100 languages and dialects — is expressing its presence in the city and the region, the project and the Mayor's Office of New Bostonians developed the Greater Boston Cultural Resources Survey. This survey was designed to "assess movement along a continuum of cultural expressions, as groups develop resources to transact their own businesses, move toward reflecting themselves to the larger community, and grow in ways that begin to reshape the cultural landscape of the city."[1] The survey invites residents to share "insider" information about the city's cultural and ethnic heritage, commercial establishments, traditions, resources, and amenities. It asks respondents to share their knowledge about a variety of community activities, places, spaces, events, and resources, such as:

- religious organizations or places of worship
- informal gathering spaces (beauty salons, cafes, parks, corners)
- sports or recreational clubs or teams specific to an ethnic or cultural community
- social or cultural clubs
- restaurants, grocery stores, or specialty stores that serve or sell products specific to an ethnic or cultural community
- arts and cultural venues or public art that celebrate a specific ethnic or cultural heritage
- nonprofit organizations that serve a specific ethnic or cultural community

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- festivals or parades that express or celebrate the heritage or the presence of an ethnic or cultural community
- places where people can purchase books or music relating to an ethnic or cultural community
- major institutions or parks that celebrate the cultural heritage of an ethnic or cultural community
- books, websites, or tours that speak to or about an ethnic or cultural community[2]

KEYPOINT #2

Reinforcing Sense of Place: Celebrating Community Character

While an inventory of place provides the initial context for building sense of place and establishing community identity, the combination of context and the reinforcement of the current climate and culture of a place create community character or identity. Reinforcing sense of place therefore requires first a comprehensive understanding of a community's historic, cultural, economic, and social context, and second a vision for the future that continuously evolves and embraces new ideas while balancing the inherent conflicting nature of past, present, and future community values and culture.

Community character is something a community has inherently, not something that can be applied like makeup. It is conveyed by not only grand buildings and public spaces but a whole range of urban elements: residences of all sizes and scale; commercial, government, and institutional buildings; street cross-sections; street furniture and graphics; public places, large and small; ceremonial buildings; informal activities such as street markets and fairs; and the food, language, and personalities that contribute to a community's narrative. Only through the understanding and reinforcement of its character can a community flourish civically and economically. Planners are uniquely qualified to guide citizens in this pro- cess of discovery and celebration of community character.

Ybor City — the Latin Quarter of Tampa, Florida — is known as a center of the cigar industry but also as a vibrant, multicultural melting pot. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Ybor City was home to more than 230 cigar factories, as well as many Spanish, Cuban, African, Italian, German, and Jewish immigrants. During the 1950s and 1960s, federal urban-renewal efforts aimed at slum clearance and interstate freeway construction disfigured Ybor City. The preservation of architectural and streetscape features that indicate the neighborhood's multiethnic heritage — second-floor balconies, ornate cornice and tile designs, five-globe street lamps, wide sidewalks of hex-shaped pavers, decorative shop windows, wrought-iron benches, and ornate curlicue light fixtures — is due in large part to the work of the Barrio Latino Commission, Tampa's first architectural review commission, created in 1959. The 1983 Ybor City Historic District Revitalization Plan resulted in more than $12 million in private investment to revitalize the neighborhood. The City of Tampa relaxed the district's zoning laws to permit nighttime uses, such as bars and clubs, to attract tourists and visitors. While these efforts worked as stimulants for economic development, Ybor City quickly became a popular entertainment district, attracting a young, rowdy crowd at night but very few people during the day. Through community involvement — as well as the collaboration of a variety of institutions, including the local development corporation, the city planning office, and the historic district — Ybor City is once again experiencing a wave of revitalization efforts. With the introduction of the Tampa Electric Company streetcar line, the revitalization of historic buildings, new infill housing to the north and south of the historic core, and a variety of new businesses and restaurants, Ybor City continues to balance its multiethnic heritage with the goals and needs of current residents. The 2004 Ybor City Vision Plan continues to guide the area's redevelopment efforts. In 2008, Seventh Avenue in the heart of Ybor City was selected as one of American Planning Association's Great Streets in America on account of its history, character, and evidence of strong community involvement.[3]

KEYPOINT #3

Local Implementation Framework

Artistic and cultural inventories, community visioning processes, arts and culture programming, master plans, and public financial investment in urban design and placemaking are important elements of an overall strategy that planners can use to explore community context, embrace and nurture community diversity and uniqueness, and build upon and celebrate community character.

Preserving and enhancing the local identity, uniqueness, and arts and culture assets of a community require that local decision making, planning processes, policies, and regulations reflect and support this community character. Local government programs, policies, and regulations that incorporate the underlying philosophy or identity of a community can provide a framework for decision making, encourage development that is place based, and reinforce the cultural goals and vision of a community. This framework supports the work of civic leaders and community advocates and can help bring new allies, talent, and ideas into the planning process.

Public Art Master Plans

Public art — such as memorials, historical monuments, installations, murals, sculptures, mosaics, decorative features, and functional elements — is an important element in placemaking. Unlike art in private spaces, public art is ideally site-specific and attuned to its social, economic, and environmental context. Public art can contribute to urban design and the revitalization of civic infrastructure; enhance and personalize public space; comment on environmental and social conditions; and activate civic dialogue.

The development and adoption of a public art master plan provides an opportunity to establish a shared vision for a community's public realm and to coordinate the activities of multiple stakeholders — planners, artists, arts and culture–related nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders — in shaping that realm. More and more communities are developing and adopting public art master plans for the purpose of demonstrating a longterm commitment to the central importance of public art in the planning, design, and creation of public space.

In 1988, the City of Phoenix adopted the first citywide public art plan in the country. Public Art Plan for Phoenix: Ideas and Visions gave the city a "clear vision and path for public art to become an effective tool of urban design." Since the adoption of this innovative plan and its revision in 2006, public art has played an important role in shaping the city. The original plan identified working zones and opportunities to strengthen the design of the city through more than 70 public art projects related to the design and construction of buildings, outdoor urban spaces and networks, and infrastructure. The plan update built upon the original vision by addressing the need to "strengthen creative partnerships with the public and private sector; improve the sustainability of projects and initiatives; cluster projects to maximize public benefit; and improve the care and maintenance of the city's public art collection.

In another effort to recognize and commemorate a place's history and legacy, the Durham, North Carolina, Office of Economic and Workforce Development and the Parrish Street Advocacy Group partnered to develop the 2008 Plan for Public Art on Parrish Street. The plan builds upon the Durham

Cultural Master Plan, the Downtown Master Plan, and additional public and private planning projects. Through public art, it addresses the need to catalyze economic development activity while celebrating the story of African American entrepreneurship, empowerment, and economic innovation on Parrish Street, which in the early 20th century was known locally as "Black Wall Street." The plan "establishes a bold direction in which many types of art form the epicenter of downtown while their execution honors successful public art processes, urban land use planning structures, and landscape design strategies for artistic consideration."[4]

Another example comes from Arlington County, Virginia, which is committed to "encouraging excellence in the design of public buildings, parks, streets and infrastructure." The county "recognizes that public art, along with architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, graphic design, and historic preservation, is one of several tools the County can use" to create "strong, meaningful connections between people and places." Since 2000, the Arlington County Board has supported public art as a tool for promoting "design excellence" and a "high-quality public realm." In September 2000 and December 2004, the county board adopted a public art policy and public art master plan, respectively. The public art policy established the board's commitment to public art, while the plan outlined a strategy for commissioning art projects and provided details on priorities, locations, and themes for those projects. The plan also established goals to integrate art with architectural, landscape, and infrastructure design of capital projects; to coordinate the efforts of various county departments, commissions, and residents to identify and implement public art projects; and to focus staff time and financial resources on projects with the strongest placemaking impact.[5]

Public Investment in Urban Infrastructure

The design of urban infrastructure, such as architecture, streetscapes, transportation facilities, and so on, presents an opportunity to interpret the many constituent elements of a sense of place: the natural environment, history, culture, language, and other aspects of local environmental, economic, and social conditions. Through the development of creative streetscape design, transit facilities, street signage, and other infrastructure, artists can inform, educate, and comment on these local conditions.

For example, through investment in the integration of public art in water and sewer infrastructure, the City of Calgary, Alberta, provides essential services to residents while also enhancing sense of place. The city takes pride in the intact ecosystem of the Bow River, which flows through the city and provides residents with a sustainable source of drinking water, recreational opportunities, and world-class trout fishing. As a result, the city's Council and Department of Utilities and Environmental Protection (UEP) created a Public Art Plan for the Expressive Potential of Utility Infrastructure to engage artists in utilizing public art to raise awareness of water as a critical and finite resource, foster environmental stewardship, and continuously engage residents in education about UEP services, infrastructure, and the surrounding watershed. The plan outlines how the city can integrate public art into its utilities and environmental systems to map the relationship between the man-made and natural watershed of the Bow River. The plan creates a "conceptual framework and visual tone for how UEP wants citizens to recognize and respond to its infrastructure." This plan reveals the "untapped potential" of infrastructure as a unique, artistic, and cultural asset to the community and lays the foundation for realizing infrastructure's expressive potential.[6]

From Austin, Texas; Portland, Oregon; and New York City to Louisville, Kentucky; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and Mount Clemens, Michigan, cities and towns across the country are combining the utility with aesthetics by allowing local artists to design and sculpt innovative and creative bicycle racks. These racks not only provide bicycle parking but also draw attention to bicycle parking as an important element of street furniture. Combined with other aesthetically pleasing street furniture, artistic bicycle racks create an interesting environment for residents and tourists and enhance the character of a place.

Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts is a classic case study of how public and private investment in arts and cultural programming and development can assist in overcoming a variety of economic, social, and physical challenges. More than $100 million in public funds and $1 billion in private funds transformed South Broad Street from a declining street into a vibrant corridor that embraces its heritage and provides a home for 23 arts organizations, three major art institutions, three large hotels, more than 20 high-end retailers, more than 30 restaurants, and 1,450 residential units either converted from vacant office buildings or newly constructed.

Efforts to revitalize South Broad Street began in 1978 with the exhibit Broad Street Comes Alive, sponsored by the Philadelphia Art Alliance, which showcased a vision for transforming the street. However, implementation did not begin until the early 1990s. By 1993, the arts organizations, the business community, and the city reached a consensus that Broad Street would require significant public investment for revitalization. With the support of Mayor Ed Rendell, redevelopment efforts finally started. Improvements included the installment of vintage lampposts, sidewalk pavers, planters, bus shelters, and decorative subway entrances. Wide sidewalks accommodated outdoor seating, and mixed use developments provide ample space for street-level retail and restaurants along with a mixture of office and residential space on upper floors. The board and staff of the Avenue of the Arts, Inc. maintain the revitalization efforts and plan a variety of events and programs — such as festivals, parades, recreational activities, temporary and permanent art exhibits, and performances — in collaboration with the arts organizations, retailers, specialty shops, and community and educational institutions along the avenue.[7] According to an economic impact study conducted in September 2007 by Econsult, in 2006 the avenue generated an estimated $424 million, with an estimated $150 million in total earnings, supporting approximately 6,000 jobs.

KEYPOINT #4

Arts and Cultural Programming

Arts and cultural programming provides education about the historical and cultural context of a community and opportunities for participation in community life through festivals, events and performances, interactive classes and workshops, and a variety of other activities. Programming initiates conversation about arts and culture and establishes a structure of happenings and plans that ensure that these activities will continue to flourish. This deliberate continuity will help strengthen creative ideas, inspire citizens, and offer hope that opportunities exist and matter to the community. This increases the likelihood of not only the implementation of arts programs but also their integration with other community plans.

Seattle's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs has established two programs that support community character through financial assistance and programming: the Neighborhood and Community Arts (NCA) Program and a small awards initiative (smART ventures) that invests in community-based arts and culture programs. NCA provides support to neighborhood groups that "produce recurring festivals and events that promote arts and cultural participation, build community and enhance the visibility of neighborhoods through arts and culture."[8] By contrast, smART ventures provides small, one-time financial assistance to "spark innovative ideas and widen arts and cultural participation, particularly among diverse and underserved communities." For example, in 2008, a smART ventures grant provided funding to filmmakers Melissa Young and Mark Dworkin to provide free screenings of their

provided funding to filmmakers Melissa Young and Mark Dworkin to provide free screenings of their documentary Good Food, which explores the meaning of good food and its value to healthy communities.[9]

Another example is City Arts, a nonprofit arts organization based in Washington, D.C., which engages residents in the development of artworks that reflect neighborhood history and culture, provides paid apprenticeships to talented youth artists, and offers arts education to a range of age groups. At the beginning of an artworks project, student apprentices connect with neighborhood leaders, civic groups, and residents to generate ideas for images to include in the artwork. This input makes it more likely that the artwork will pay tribute to the neighborhood's history, present, and future.[10] For example, a Duke Ellington mural, installed in 1997 and expanded in 2004, "contributed to the transformation of the U Street NW corridor into a lively arts and entertainment district." According to City Arts, the mural contributes to the "visual integrity of the streetscape" and instills a "sense of pride in the residents of the neighborhood."[11]

This briefing paper was written by Jeff Soule, FAICP (APA's director of outreach and international programs), Kimberley Hodgson, AICP (manager of APA's Planning & Community Health Research Center), and Kelly Ann Beavers (PhD candidate, Virginia Tech, and APA arts and culture intern).

Endnotes

1. See www.tbf.org/indicators2004/culturallife.

2. See www.tbf.org/SelectSurvey/TakeSurvey.asp?SurveyID=3M09p4KLm753G 3.

See www.planning.org/greatplaces/streets/2008/7thavenue.htm; and www .tampagov.net/dept_ybor_city_development_corporation/information_ resources/2005_vision.asp.

4. See www.durhamnc.gov/departments/eed/parrish/p_advocacy.cfm.

5. See www.arlingtonva.us/departments/ParksRecreation/scripts/culture/ ParksRecreationScriptsCulturePublicArtPlan.aspx.

6. See www.calgary.ca/docgallery/bu/recreation/public_art/uep_public_art_plan .pdf.

7. See www.planning.org/greatplaces/streets/2008/southbroadstreet.htm and www .avenueofthearts.org.

8. See www.seattle.gov/arts/funding/neighborhood_community.asp.

9. See www.seattle.gov/arts/funding/smart_ventures_featured.asp.

10. See cityartsdc.org/documents/CityArtsbrochure.pdf.

11. See www.cityartsdc.org/about.

Arts and Culture Briefing Papers

This is one in a series of briefing papers on how planners can work with partners in the arts and culture sector and use creative strategies to achieve economic, social, environmental, and community goals.

Prepared by the American Planning Association, as part of a collaborative project with the RMC Research Corporation and with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation.

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