

Civic Engagement through Collaborative Art

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Introduction

Income inequality in dense cities results in **social marginalization**, pushing the less socially accepted groups to the edge of society by not being allowed to have an active voice, identity, or place.

Civic engagement programs such as **collaborative art-making experiences** can increase the wellbeing of communities, improve the lives of people, engage citizens in new and enlightened ways, build social networks, and encourage new society leaders.

However, this process is complicated with **participative dynamics** that could eventually overshadow the output for the sake of the social values within the experience of collaboration.

This phenomenon could get more critical when it comes to placing the physical co-created artwork in the urban space, where the collective is accountable for facilitating the **place-making process**.

Keywords: Civic Engagement, Collaborative Art, Marginalization, Urban Informality, Public Space, Urban Design.

Introduction

This paper is composed of three main parts:

First introducing theories about marginalization and social exclusion and how collaborative art practices can improve these conditions.

Second these settings for participation and collaboration will be examined about three projects **St. Clement's Utopolis**, **Bespoke**, and **Women's Center Project**, conducted respectively, in London, Preston, and Paris from 2010 to 2015.

Third part will elaborate on the findings and reflection on projects.

Introduction

As a result of developments within the planning and design fields over the past years, the issue is no longer **if** citizen participation should be part of the design process in public activities, but rather **who** should participate, **which methods** should be applied, **what type of knowledge** will be designed, and **how** will that knowledge be combined into the process.

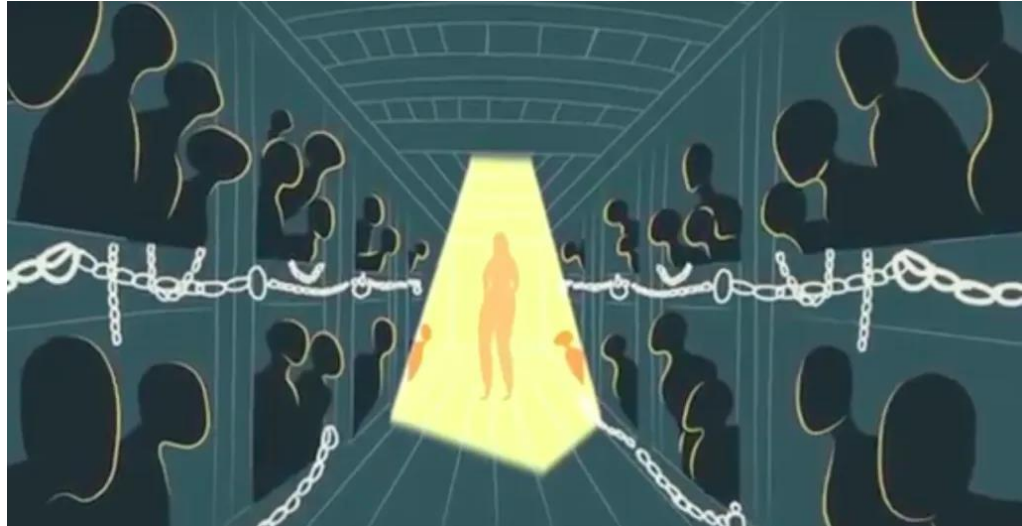
“The moment the city is severed from its social production and seen as an objective and physical entity, it appears to exercise control over the very people who control and use it.” **Raymond Ledrut, 1996**

Background

Marginalization and Collaborative art

Wacquant in ethnologists' *view of places* (2004) hints at six properties of marginality:

- (a) wage labor as a cause of social instability and life insecurity
- (b) disconnection from macroeconomic cyclical growth trends
- (c) territorial fixation and stigmatization,
- (d) spatial alienation and dissolution of 'place'
- (e) loss of hinterland
- (f) social fragmentation.



Art critic Claire Bishop (2012: 12) points out how collaboration is seen as a **“sign of social responsibility due to its critical distance from the individualism of the neoliberal world.”**

While Bishop and Kester accuse each other of placing in jeopardy the political power of art, they do agree on the importance of exploring the types of relations that exist in socially engaged artistic practice.



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“Why do we have to talk again about this binary position when, in my opinion, autonomy and instrumentalization are no longer oppositional strategies?”

Yet, Bishop (2012) claims that art became ‘instrumentalized through collaboration with dominant forces, and thus lost its potential for political intervention.’

Case Studies



Clement's Utopolis

Collective: zURBs

Date: June 2015

Location: St. Clement's Hospital site on Mile End Road in London

Kwon sets up the following equation for this form of community-based art:

‘artist + community + social issue = new critical/public art’ (2004: 146).

Instead of an aesthetic and performative framework, zURBs focused on how best to communicate the project in terms of involvement in the St. Clement’s site and the development of the public artwork, and at the same time how it could be demonstrated an awareness of the problems and challenges potentially faced by the participants in this regard.

“We had to accept that we could not do an exercise that would be perceived as similar to the community design workshop when the construction was already well underway.”



Bespoke

Artist Collective: Justin Miller

Date: March 2010

Location: Callon and Fishwick, Preston



	Question	Options	Votes	Percentage	Total	Source
Q1	Would you miss the Bespoke Newspaper if it was gone?	Yes	97	44%	219	Project Team
		No	122	56%		
Q2	Do you think CCTV is a good or bad thing for the area?	Good	240	73%	328	Project Team
		Bad	88	27%		
Q3	Would you be willing to spend 1 hour per month helping to improve local parks and open spaces?	Yes	77	40%	192	Councillor 1
		No	115	60%		
Q4	Would you like to see a new community centre for Callon?	Yes	113	51%	223	Housing Association 1
		No	110	49%		
Q5	Is local dog fouling a problem that deserves priority attention?	Yes	199	82%	242	Councillor 1
		No	43	18%		
Q6	Do you think that skips [dumpsters] should be provided again, on the Callon estate, later on in the year?	Yes	208	82%	255	Housing Association 2
		No	47	18%		
Q7	Would you be interested in working with [us] and other local residents to ensure that the services we deliver in your area meet your standards?	Yes	90	68%	132	Housing Association 2
		No	42	32%		
Q8	Do you believe easy access to alcohol is a strong contributor to anti social behaviour in Fishwick?	Yes	152	79%	192	Councillor 2
		No	40	21%		

Two opposing people's feedback

“It is good for the community. Communities know they can get together and people can share their opinions.”

“If there [aren't] people in power are seeing what is going on and taking notice of it, it is a futile exercise. What is the point of gathering people's opinions about what is going on if you are not going to do anything about it?”

According to Purcell (2014), “the desire to be ruled manifests itself as a taste for the subtle and seductive oligarchy of consumer capitalism turning us into willing subjects of inactivity and passivity. “

Theory of democracy makes space for political action in which we seek to lay new grounds by extrapolating and amplifying practices, and ideas that are already taking place. Purcell argues that people have the desire to be ruled, ‘to be relieved of the burden of ruling ourselves’ (2014: 93).



Women's Centre project

Collective: Rachel Clarke

Date: May 2013

Location: Paris, France

In this project, domestic violence, voice, disclosure, and vulnerability are intimately linked as the researcher and women explore modes of self-expression that enable sharing within while preserving anonymity.

This, however, does not mean that these forms of community-based collaborations are entirely instrumentalized (as discussed by Bishop) and thus produces passive subjects with no agency or empowerment.

Results

As seen in the examples, there is a high risk of succumbing into totalizing narratives about how these practices are merged with neoliberal structures, logic, and ambitions.

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