
The Arts and Smart Growth: A Translation Paper

William Fulton and Morris Newman

The following essay was jointly commissioned by Grantmakers in the Arts for its 2002 annual conference and by the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities as one in its series of Translation Papers.

Introduction

In recent years, "community building," in every sense, has become a hot topic throughout the United States. Our community fabric – organizations, civic institutions, social networks – is often said to be too fragile to sustain the civic vibrancy required for our communities to thrive. Researchers such as Harvard's Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, suggest that our communities are unraveling because of a lack of "social capital," by which Putnam means "civic engagement, healthy community institutions, norms of mutual reciprocity, and trust."

As communities have struggled to strengthen and rebuild themselves – and in some cases establish themselves for the first time – the arts often have become a focal point. The arts have the potential to connect people within a community in new ways, to bring disparate people together, and to tap into a community's latent creativity. The arts can go a long way toward re-invigorating a community's "soul."

At the same time, the "smart growth" movement has provided a set of organizing principles for communities to strengthen and rebuild themselves in other ways – most particularly in their physical design and geographical arrangement. Smart growth is a movement that focuses on the creation of vibrant and equitable communities, revitalizing older neighborhoods, keeping housing affordable, protecting open space, and creating diverse new communities and neighborhoods that have greater access to mass transit and less dependency on automobiles. In many cities, mixed-use development, including live-work housing, is a popular strategy that combines residential and commercial uses and that provides both customers for local merchants and ridership for local transit.

The arts have become a focal point for community building, while the smart growth movement has become a focal point for creating better places. In some communities, the overlap of these two movements is the key to a community-building

strategy. In other communities, the two movements proceed along separate tracks. The purpose of this paper is to explore the role each plays in building communities and the potential they have to work together to this end.

Communities of Interest/Communities of Place

The term "community" can be confusing because it has such a wide variety of meanings. The biggest disconnect occurs when we use the term interchangeably to refer to "communities of interest" and to "communities of place."

When we speak of "arts communities," for example, we are referring to communities of interest. Artists who consider themselves part of the same community may or may not be located in the same geographical place, but they consider themselves connected nonetheless because of their shared interest. The same terminology is frequently applied to communities of faith, communities with shared cultural or social bonds such as gay and lesbian communities, professional communities, and the electronic or "virtual" communities that spring up as a result of the Internet and online chat groups.

As far back as Alexis de Tocqueville, the American penchant for interest-based communities – an unusually powerful desire to seek out and bond with those with whom we believe we have something in common – has been heralded as one of our strengths. Communities of *interest*, however, cannot fully supplant communities of *place*.

Unlike communities of interest, communities of place are rooted in geography. They are the places where we live, where we work, where we shop. They are where the institutions of our daily lives – schools, churches, community centers – are located. All too often today, these place-based communities are too fragile, too attenuated, or too disconnected to sustain fulfillment and prosperity for the people who live there.

Increasingly, strong communities of interest are being called upon to focus energy on reinforcing and strengthening communities of place.

The Arts as a Form of Community Building

Perhaps no community of interest has played a stronger role in this regard than the arts community. When well

deployed, the arts represent a network of community amenities that is almost unrivaled in its ability to connect people and places in new and strong ways. A great deal of research has been conducted in recent years on the role of the arts in economic development for communities, in revitalizing urban neighborhoods, in strengthening the sense of community in suburban areas, and in bringing vitality to small towns.¹

The arts plays a vital role in serving as an agent for change within communities – by organizing cultural resources to increase community awareness of specific issues. In Vancouver, British Columbia, for example, the Community Arts Council of Vancouver, in partnership with the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, sponsored an “Art & the Environment” initiative specifically to use art to connect artists, environmental agencies, and community members in what the Vancouver Foundation calls “cultural community development.”²

In both the social and physical sense, the arts appear capable of being a powerful organizing tool. Arts activities in urban areas, for example, can create a new and broader sense of community within neighborhoods and connect them to other places in the city. Research conducted as part of the Social Impact of the Arts project at the University of Pennsylvania revealed that, in many cities, arts and cultural activities represent one of the few ways to connect transitional urban neighborhoods with residents from across an entire metropolitan region. In Philadelphia, researchers Mark Stern and Susan Seifert concluded that most arts and cultural activity was concentrated in what they call “pov-prof” neighborhoods – neighborhoods near the center of the city that have a higher-than-usual percentage of both poor people and professionals. But 80 percent of the people who participate in these events came from elsewhere in the metropolis, thereby connecting suburbanites with urban neighborhoods in a way that would otherwise be impossible.³

Increasingly, the arts are also viewed as a way to strengthen the sense of community in suburban areas. Most people in this country live in the suburbs, and suburbs themselves are becoming more diverse. As the McKnight Foundation’s recent report, *a new angle*, points out, a vast number of working artists and volunteer-based arts organizations successfully operate in the suburbs, with the result that artistic and cultural activities are much closer to the daily lives of suburban residents. Concluding that the suburbs contain a potentially vast arts infrastructure – a large number of artists, a significant market, and a considerable donor base – the Foundation challenged the arts establishment in Minnesota to reorient its thinking to recognize the suburbs and even to begin re-allocating its funds so the suburbs receive more support.⁴

The arts, functioning as communities of interest, appear to help establish and strengthen communities of place no matter where the arts communities are found. The potential link to smart growth is rooted in this power. Artists, who often both live and work in the same place – sometimes in the same building – provide an ideal example of the way that communities of interest can coalesce into physical communities.

Smart Growth as a Form of Community-Building

Like the term “community,” the term “smart growth” has so many definitions it is sometimes hard to come up with a consistent one. Generally, however, “smart growth” refers to a series of activities designed to re-orient and re-center the physical design of communities so that the community fabric is strengthened. Smart growth focuses on creating vibrant and equitable communities, revitalizing older neighborhoods, keeping housing affordable, protecting open space, and creating diverse new neighborhoods that are well-served by mass transit and are less reliant than before on cars.

When well deployed, the arts represent a network of community amenities that is almost unrivaled in its ability to connect people and places in new and strong ways.

At its core, smart growth represents an attempt to alter public policy, to shift public and private investment patterns, and to move beyond the incoherent web of auto-oriented development patterns that has emerged across the U.S. landscape in the past few decades. The smart growth movement is not focused exclusively on urban neighborhoods any more than it is on suburban communities or rural towns. Rather, it embodies a series of ideas that can be applied to any of these settings. In fact, smart growth advocates sometimes seek to help these zones fit together more coherently within the setting of a single metropolis or region.

Whether in urban, suburban, or rural places, one of the most important tenets of smart growth is that in order to thrive communities of place need many diverse activities in close proximity to one another. People and activities can interact more freely – and in unexpected ways – when they are close to one another. With diverse activities in close proximity, the fabric of community life is enriched and strengthened.

While the arts can help strengthen communities of place no matter what form the communities take, “smart growth” represents a particular form of community building – a form that focuses on altering the physical environment.

The Intersection of Smart Growth and the Arts

Earlier we said that communities of interest are increasingly being called upon to help strengthen communities of place. The implication here is clear: If smart growth requires strengthening communities of place, then smart growth advocates need the assistance of artists and other interest-based communities.

Generally, “smart growth” refers to a series of activities designed to re-orient and re-center the physical design of communities so that the community fabric is strengthened.

But a corollary is just as important: communities of interest are stronger when they are attached to communities of place. Artists operating individually may connect and interact with one another from time to time, but their interest-based community will be stronger if they are located in close proximity to one another, and if they see mutual advantage in nurturing diversity and distinctiveness in the neighborhoods where they function.

Smart growth needs the arts to help strengthen communities of place, and the arts need smart growth to help strengthen their communities of interest. Together the two fields can form a powerful alliance to strengthen the fabric of communities throughout the United States. Further, this alliance can be important to many kinds of communities and neighborhoods in the United States, not just one. Indeed, as exemplified in the following case studies, the arts and smart growth can work together in urban, suburban, and small-town settings.

Case Studies

Urban Communities

In urban settings, the arts and activities that promote smart growth can work together to revitalize older, distressed neighborhoods by creating spaces for the arts and artists in ways that also restore the urban fabric and reinforce a sense of community. Indeed, the best-known and best-documented evidence of the strength of an alliance between arts and smart growth is found in urban settings. Many urban neighborhoods have struggled so much in recent decades that they need *both* revived communities of interest *and* revived communities of place. In particular, the willingness of artists to live and work in the same location provides valuable building blocks for strong urban communities of place: work, housing, and the social networks that Putnam described as human capital.

Arts organizations are leaders in re-using neglected or under-valued buildings. Sometimes this happens in an unplanned, piecemeal way, such as the ways that certain now-famous arts districts – SoHo or TriBeCa in New York or the South-of-Market district of San Francisco – became popular with artists. In more recent years, some arts organizations, such as ArtSpace Projects of Minneapolis or the Arts Council for Chautauqua County (New York), have learned to combine planning, arts activities, and real estate development in a sophisticated and powerful way with art-related uses becoming a kind of juggernaut to bring both people and their social networks into urban areas. Sometimes public policy makers can combine arts and smart growth policy in a way that reinforces both communities of interest and communities of place. For example, the State of Maryland provides communities with financial assistance to set up “Arts and Entertainment Districts” – but only if they are located inside “smart growth” investment areas targeted by the state.

The most familiar urban role of the arts is to rescue and “reseed” older areas that have fallen into disuse and suffered from disinvestment. Arts organizations do not go to the inner city only in a spirit of altruism, but often with a sense of opportunism. They are seeking affordable space; the positive changes in the neighborhood are a kind of spillover or trickle-down effect. The role of arts organizations in the gentrification of inner-city areas has become a well-worn cliché. A few artists, followed in turn by galleries, coffee houses, and second-hand stores, become the vehicle for reinvestment and in some cases an eventual rush of affluent urban professionals in search of historic real estate at bargain prices.

The Village of Arts and Humanities, Philadelphia

Smart growth is concerned with community as well as with real estate. In some cases, the arts can fill a crucial need by providing education and creating community institutions otherwise lacking in harsh, neglected inner-city neighborhoods. One outstanding example of arts-as-community-builder is the Village of Arts and Humanities in north Philadelphia. (See page 42.) This project began sixteen years ago when artist Lily Yeh received \$2,500 from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts to design a neighborhood park. Working with neighborhood children over a several-year period, she cleared trash, planted trees, and brought a park to life.

Today, the Village of Arts and Humanities is a private, nonprofit community-based organization that is revitalizing several predominantly African-American neighborhoods. The goals of the organization emphasize social and cultural aspects of the community first and physical design only secondarily. Nevertheless, the organization’s growth has increasingly improved the physical environment in a manner consistent with smart growth principles.

The Village serves residents of a 260-square-block area of north Philadelphia with a \$1.3 million annual budget, bringing to the community an unusual combination of artistic expression and land development expertise. The approach of the organization, according to Yeh, is to use the arts as “the bone structure” both for the neighborhood and for the organization’s programs. The group is the beneficiary of a wide range of philanthropic funders – from the William Penn Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts to many smaller foundations.

According to the long-range plan of the Village, building community “implies building people and their physical environment. We build people through education, communal activities, and social programs. We build the physical environment through creating parks and gardens and removing abandoned buildings and constructing new ones.”

Obtaining abandoned property from the City of Philadelphia at no cost, the Village currently owns or controls most of a ten-square-block area known as the Village Neighborhood. In this neighborhood, the arts are a focal point for smart-growth-style community revitalization and arts-oriented public spaces have become the soul of the neighborhood.

Many existing properties have been recast as parks or gardens through the imagination and artistic skill of neighborhood residents. Working with the City of Philadelphia, the Village has completed its Village Homes Project, which provides six new homes for low-income families. This attention to the physical environment loops back to the social and cultural programs, providing venues for cultural and social activities like a “Rites of Passage” ceremony for neighborhood youth, during which the Village parks and gardens become “sacred ground.”

Historic Folklife Village, Miami, Florida

While the Village of Arts and Humanities uses youth and education as a springboard for urban revitalization, the Historic Overtown Folklife Village in Miami aims to use the preservation of cultural history to attract tourism and new investment and to build a work force in one of Miami’s poorest neighborhoods. As part of Miami’s historically African-American neighborhood, the Historic Folklife Village has powerful associations for many people in greater Miami and beyond.

Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields founded the Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida, a nonprofit organization, in 1977. The core of the foundation is a collection of oral history tapes, photographs, and manuscripts comprising the Black Archives. Concerned by what Dr. Fields has described as the neglect of African-American cultural history in Miami, she expanded her work in the 1980s by creating the Historic Folklife Village, a two-block area in Overtown that is intended to be a cultural and shopping district. Dr. Fields describes the

Historic Folklife Village as the direct outgrowth of the Black Archives.

Miami’s Overtown started out as an African-American neighborhood. Several surviving churches in the newly-designated Folklife Village were consecrated in the 1890s, and are among the six buildings in the two-block area that now are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Fields’ intention for the Village is to make it a “living history museum for residents in the region and the visitor-tourist industry.”

The initial step was the acquisition and renovation of the Lyric Theater, a vaudeville house built in 1913 by an African-American developer inspired by the opera houses of Europe. The Black Archives board of directors acquired the building in 1988 and spent much of the ‘90s restoring it with the assistance of grants from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Florida Humanities Council, local city, county, and state grants, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Dr. Fields recalled writing grants from 12 midnight to 6 am, when her children were asleep. With the help of grant money from Dade Community Foundation, the theater re-opened in 2000 as a performing-arts venue, with an emphasis on jazz, the culture of the Harlem Renaissance, and the Black Diaspora. Many people who once lived in Overtown, or whose parents or grandparents lived and sought entertainment in the formerly segregated area, are returning as tourists.

The overall vision for the Village includes ethnic restaurants, African and Caribbean bed-and-breakfast hotels, neighborhood retail, and street festivals. Education is also part of the ambition: the Village is planning to work with six local colleges and universities to train students in business, architecture, hotel management, historic preservation, and marketing. Housing, including loft housing for artists, is another part of the dream. Already completed is the Poinciana Village, a new apartment complex that has attracted, in Dr. Fields’ words, “yuppies, buppies, and cuppies.” (The last acronym refers to Cuban Urban Professionals.) In 1999, Florida’s Secretary of State designated the Historic Folklife Village as a Main Street Community.

Asheville Urban Trail

Asheville, North Carolina has connected history, tourism, and urban vitality. While at 68,000 people the city is not large, Asheville is a regionally significant center. Nestled between the Blue Ridge and Smokey Mountains, Asheville has long been known not only for natural beauty but also for handsome city design – a legacy of the plans done in the early twentieth century by the well-known city planner John Nolen.

The preservation of historic buildings in downtown Asheville is, in some sense, the result of benign neglect.

During the years between the Great Depression and until the 1970s and '80s the city experienced very little development. Today, however, after building on this now-renowned inventory of historic structures, downtown Asheville is a thriving center with more than fifty art galleries and many crafts-related businesses.

In an effort to make downtown Asheville more of a destination, a committee of city officials, landscape architects, and artists created Asheville's "Urban Trail." Encompassing more than thirty pieces of public art along with the city's own landmarks, the Urban Trail forms a "spatial narrative" aimed at making Asheville's story accessible to both tourists and residents. The artworks are not stand-alone objects but are subordinated to a larger, coordinated scheme of educating visitors about the city's history. The art pieces include a bronze replica of author Thomas Wolfe's size 13 shoes, which many children step into while on the tour; a horse-head fountain that replicates an early downtown Asheville civic landmark; and a sculpture that includes five bronze Appalachian dancers and musicians, with a bronze fiddle and quilt set on a nearby bench.

The Urban Trail does more than help revitalize its downtown area. It brings back to life a forgotten history, the neglected stories of women, working people, and people of color.

The Urban Trail is truly a cooperative effort. The trail itself is maintained by the Asheville Department of Parks & Recreation, and the promotion and educational programs are run by the Asheville Area Arts Council. The Urban Trail has proven so popular that more than 100,000 maps are distributed each year. In October 2002, the Urban Trail organized an Urban Trail Arts Festival, using the stations of the trail as settings for what event organizers describe as "enactments, demonstrations and theatrical vignettes."

The specific nature of the story allows the Urban Trail to do more than help revitalize its downtown area. It brings back to life a forgotten history, embedded in Asheville but found in many other cities as well: the neglected stories of women, working people, and people of color. The resurrection of these civic memories through art can help people feel a renewed sense of connection to the city.

Suburban Communities

Arts-based redevelopment in the suburbs holds high promise. While the suburbs contain a potentially vast arts infrastructure of artists, volunteer-based organizations, and donors, many suburban residents are underserved by the arts. Their demand for theater, dance, exhibition, and

performance space is high, and this demand creates opportunities for arts venues and arts-based community activity even in the newest suburbs.

Traditional suburbs have been both targeted as potential new markets by urban arts groups and derided by smart growth advocates as lacking the centered and diverse physical form necessary to establish strong communities of place. These two views need not be mutually exclusive.

Here, the arts and smart growth can work together to create settings that provide both a physical and a cultural focal point for communities that have often lacked one. The addition of new performing arts centers, gallery districts, live-work housing, and educational programs can help create a sense of community, and in some cases, actual physical centers. Traditional suburbs have been both targeted as potential new markets by urban arts groups and derided by smart growth advocates as lacking the centered and diverse physical form necessary to establish strong communities of place. These two views need not be mutually exclusive. Thousands of suburbs contain older downtowns and neighborhoods that can provide a core for revitalization, and, increasingly, newer suburbs seek to create new centers that are vital and intense. Both can nurture and showcase the arts, combining communities of interest and communities of place to strengthen the community fabric in suburbs.

Hopkins, Minnesota, Center for the Arts

One of the most remarkable stories that emerged from the McKnight Foundation study was the way that arts and smart growth combined to help revive the once-bustling suburban main street of Hopkins, Minnesota, a city of 17,000 people located eleven miles west of downtown Minneapolis.

Like many older suburbs, Hopkins suffered a decline in its downtown during the suburban era. At the same time, however, the arts in Hopkins had a significant presence in the form of the Stages Theatre Company. Stages provided both theatrical productions and theatrical education for young people. But for its productions the company used a decrepit community center leased on a year-to-year basis from the local school district, and its offices were not even inside the city limits.

Beginning in 1995, the school district, the city, and the theater company began working with a new group called the Hopkins Area Arts Association (now Hopkins Center for the Arts, Inc.) to plan an arts center downtown. The Hopkins Center for the Arts broke ground in 1997 on downtown land that the city purchased from an auto dealer. Development of the arts center coincided with

the commercial redevelopment of downtown. Patronage for the Stages Theater Company has doubled.

The arts center includes a large theater, a visual arts gallery, multipurpose spaces for rehearsals and community activities, a visual arts classroom, a dance studio, and kitchen facilities for catering. Although the center struggles financially, running at an operating loss of more than \$100,000 per year, it has served as a focal point for the attenuated suburbs west of Minneapolis. Almost half of the patrons come from Hopkins and surrounding western suburbs, and 20 percent of the patrons travel from the central cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul creating a “reverse flow” of arts patronage from city to suburb. Each year more than 160,000 people visit the center to participate in programs provided by Stages Theatre Company, Hopkins School District 270 Community Education program, Hopkins Center for the Arts Inc., and other community groups that rent facilities at the center.

Santa Clarita, California

Many suburban communities apparently believe that the arts need performing arts centers like Hopkins to flourish outside major city centers. In fact, the arts and arts-related businesses can often be found throughout suburbia, in a variety of venues, some institutional and others makeshift. Just as artists and arts entrepreneurs in traditional downtown areas find aging and under-valued properties to work in, so too can suburban artists find low-cost space in or around suburbia, often in aging communities that adjoin newer suburbs or subdivisions.

Santa Clarita, California is a recent suburb that makes an excellent case study of the ways that the arts find venues in a new community that has very little “arts infrastructure.” Located forty miles north of Los Angeles and near a large office-industrial park and a regional mall, Santa Clarita is the embodiment of an “edge city” – a suburb that is economically and culturally self-contained, rather than a satellite of a larger community.⁵

The “new” Santa Clarita includes a “smart growth” Town Center that contains housing, corporate and retail activity, and culture. Yet it also encompasses the Valencia development, a master-planned community designed and built by a single developer over a thirty-year period, and is built on top of other “old” suburban communities and two older towns, Newhall and Saugus, that provide cheap space and a different sense of place. It is the combination of the layers of place-oriented experiences that make suburban culture in Santa Clarita a powerful force.

Two contrasting experiences are typical of suburban cultural experiences. In the Town Center, a private developer provided several performance venues inside Santa Clarita’s regional mall and along Town Center Drive,

a shopping street that serves as the focus of Santa Clarita’s downtown-like environment. Typical offerings include a summer concert series and a jazz series, both free to the public. While some observers may dismiss these performances as promotion for the mall, the concerts do provide performance opportunities for local artists. In addition, the city sponsors a variety of arts activities, including an annual Cowboy Poetry Festival. (Much of Santa Clarita is built on a ranch once owned by Western movie star William S. Hart.)

The combination of layers of place-oriented experiences make suburban culture in Santa Clarita a powerful force.

But the power of the arts in suburban Santa Clarita stretches beyond the Town Center to the older and struggling commercial district of Newhall. Because it contains a number of aging, low-rent buildings, Newhall is a critical arts resource for Santa Clarita. At least two theater groups, one repertory and one equity-waiver,⁶ have converted older industrial or commercial buildings in Newhall. Canyon Theater Guild, which has operated for thirty-two years in several spaces, is currently renting an industrial building on the Sierra Highway, where it offers mainstream fare such as “The Music Man.” Santa Clarita Repertory, on the other hand, is an equity-waiver group that presents edgier fare, such as *New West* by playwright Sam Shepard. The repertory theater is supported by a wide variety of donors, including the Henry Mayo Newhall Family Foundation, a local family grantmaker.

In Santa Clarita, it is the combination of experiences in a variety of settings – all of which have the physical “centeredness” characteristic of smart growth – that brings both coherence and diversity to the suburban arts and culture scene just outside Los Angeles.

Small Towns and Rural Communities

One important principle of smart growth is the preservation of rural communities, and many small towns flounder and fail as their traditional industries dry up. Arts organizations can function as economic development by providing a new economic base for towns that have lost traditional economies in agriculture, manufacturing, or the extraction of natural resources. The arts can also reinforce the “smart growth” character that give many rural towns their distinctive character.

The Arts Council of Chautauqua County, New York

One of the most important tenets of smart growth is the effective re-use of older downtowns and neighborhoods. Such locations are often well suited for “mixed use” projects, such as combining housing and commercial space

in the same building. In the case of Jamestown, a small city in western New York, the moving force in revitalizing the downtown area has been the Arts Council of Chautauqua County, which created a development corporation on its own. The rich potential in the downtown has been realized largely through arts-related projects, thus making Jamestown “one of the 100 best small towns for artists in America,” according to author John Villani.⁷

A century ago, the city was an industrial center for logging, furniture making, and piano manufacturing. Jamestown was also an active tourist center, serving as the connection point for trains and steamers that carried visitors to nearby attractions, such as the Chautauqua Institute and Chautauqua Lake. Both logging and manufacturing declined by mid-century, and Jamestown had become another post-industrial, Northeastern city with an abandoned downtown and growing class and racial tensions.

The revival of downtown Jamestown started with an arts program, specifically an exhibition titled “Seeing,” consisting of photographs of abandoned buildings contributed by local residents. In 1984, the deterioration of the historic Palace Theatre motivated hundreds of volunteers to scrape gum from the old seats. Eventually, volunteers raised \$5 million to transform the theater into the Reg Lanna Civic Center. To parlay this investment into a larger revitalization effort, the Cummins Engine Company Foundation granted \$100,000 to create the Center Development District Plan.

Concurrently, the Arts Council convened an Aesthetic Task Force to explore the potential of other historic structures. It was the first step in a long process of identifying physical assets and imagining possibilities for their re-use.

In Jamestown, a small city in western New York, the moving force in revitalizing the downtown area has been the Arts Council of Chautauqua County, which created a development corporation on its own.

In the late 1980s, the Arts Council took the step, unusual for an arts organization, of forming a Community Development Corporation. Starting in 1988, the new CDC slowly began acquiring dilapidated buildings in a two-block area of downtown Jamestown. Fourteen unsubsidized apartment units reintroduced residential life to downtown. During the next twelve years, the entire block surrounding the Civic Center found tenants for street-level storefronts as well as space in upper stories of previously empty buildings. In 1991, the Arts Council, together with city officials and others, conceived the Lucille Ball Festival of New Comedy to honor the

Jamestown-born comedienne. The success of the Festival and interest in adding to the cultural district led to the formation of the Lucy-Desi Museum in 1995.

Amid the general clamor for better collaboration between government and social services, the Arts Council has been a model of civic cooperation for more than fifteen years. The Infinity Performing Arts Program began three years ago as an “arts as prevention” program. The Infinity Learning Lab was remodeled in January 2002 and is currently home to more than 100 aspiring musicians participating in private lessons, a variety of ensembles, a recording studio, and hip-hop projects.

Creede Repertory Theater, Creede, Colorado

The Creede Repertory Theater demonstrates the way an arts program can provide an economic alternative for a small town, in this case, one that formerly relied on mining.

Creede, Colorado is a tiny town (about 350 year-round residents) in sparsely populated Mineral County, located in the San Juan Mountains at the southern edge of the state just north of New Mexico. The town’s main industry was silver mining, which began to dry up in the 1960s. In 1966, with the hope of developing tourism, the local Jaycees invited different universities to send theater students to Creede with the intention of creating theater during summer months. The only school that responded was the University of Kansas. But this was enough.

Creede Repertory Theatre set up shop in the town’s historic opera house in the late 1960s, and the theater has been in continuous operation since then. More than 16,000 people attend performances annually. The theater has an annual budget of \$500,000, about half of which comes from private donations and grants, including grants from the Boettcher Foundation of Denver, El Pomar Foundation of Colorado Springs, and the Colorado Council on the Arts. With about fifty-five employees, the theater is the largest employer in Creede during the summer months.

The repertory theater has become an anchor for the rest of the town, where art galleries, shops, and fourteen restaurants operate along a quarter-mile stretch that includes the theater building. The theater also has an economic impact beyond the tiny downtown by providing a destination for guests of several dude ranches that operate in the area. This regional cooperation in tourism has not fully replaced the lost jobs of the silver mines, but it has provided a new industry for an impoverished area.

With an attractive, walkable town, Creede is becoming increasingly popular as a location for summer homes, and housing values have responded. After the silver mines closed in the 1980s, homes were priced at about \$20,000; now the average price is around \$110,000. Commercial property values have also risen.

HandMade in America

Rural communities can benefit by working together to create or host programs that offer the kind of “critical mass” for tourism that a single community cannot summon on its own. This is a key strategy for farmers and craftspeople who are trying to maintain their land holdings and not be forced to sell to developers. In the early 1990s, cities in the Blue Ridge Mountain area of western North Carolina faced a quandary: the hilly region did not lend itself to large manufacturing plants, and yet the mountain area was clearly struggling economically from the decline of farming, furniture making, and other manufacturing jobs.

One response was the creation, in 1993, of HandMade in America. Perhaps the most powerful of several ideas offered by this new organization was that of bolstering the existing base of traditional craftspeople in the region. According to the founder and current executive director, Becky Anderson, HandMade’s stated goal is to make western North Carolina “the center for handmade objects in the United States.” Now the arts are a substantial sector in the twenty-three participating counties. A 1995 study by Appalachian State University states that crafts inject \$122 million annually into the local economy. The scope of the study includes suppliers of raw materials, craft fairs and shows, publishers of local guide books, and so on. Surprisingly, the average income for a full-time craftsman is higher than the average salary of a manufacturing worker in the same region.

Another goal was to encourage agri-tourism. HandMade’s best-known program is the Trail System, which seeks to take tourists off the interstate and creates a sequence of arts, traditional crafts, B&Bs, cooking classes, restaurants, and farm tours that provide something for the tourist in search of experiences in addition to mountain scenery. The Trail System takes advantage of a huge, existing tourism business that draws twenty million people annually to established destinations such as the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Biltmore Estate, and resorts in the Great Smoky Mountains. Currently, the Trail System is 200 miles in length and connects 320 private arts- and crafts-related businesses, including potteries, blacksmith shops, glassblowers, etc. “We reversed the traditional economic pattern of things, by bringing the market to the farmer, rather than the other way around,” says Anderson.

Anderson, who says she writes a grant proposal every week, has attracted sponsorship from dozens of organizations, including the Appalachian Regional Commission, Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, and the Pew Partnership for Civic Change.

Opportunities for Funders

Combining smart growth and the arts provides an unusual opportunity for funders to act in cross-disciplinary manner to accomplish multiple, yet complementary community-building goals. Many funders already have made significant progress in melding these two fields and, in the process, making a difference in communities. Nevertheless, we believe it is useful to delineate specific opportunities for arts and smart growth funders to move common interests forward. These include:

1. *Use the intersection of arts and smart growth to work “across boundaries” within and between funding organizations with similar geographical interests.*

It is not uncommon for foundations and other funding organizations to have several program areas that work toward similar goals but that do not do a very good job of working together. In the case of the arts and smart growth, the relationship between the two in building communities is so strong that funders could use this intersection as the basis for cross-disciplinary funding. A single foundation that funds both arts and smart growth projects could provide funding from both programs for different aspects of the same project. Or, an arts grantmaker and a smart growth grantmaker with similar geographical interests could do the same.

2. *Better record the relationship between arts and smart growth in community building, especially in suburban areas.*

We found many stories of suburban communities using the arts to create a greater sense of community, especially programs that take advantage of opportunities in older, smaller suburban downtowns to create or renovate arts activities and arts facilities. But the full impact of the arts in both older and newer “smart growth” suburbs is not well documented. Funders should take steps to document and measure this impact.

3. *Build the capacity of arts councils and arts groups to operate in the community development arena.*

The most powerful stories we found were stories about arts organizations – Village of the Arts and Humanities, the Arts Council of Chautauqua County – that essentially became urban developers to promote the arts and provide an environment where arts could flourish. Many community development entities are focused largely on housing and/or retail development. Funders could help build the capacity of arts organizations to engage in smart growth development, or could pro-actively encourage partnerships between arts organizations and community development entities.

4. *Continue educational efforts that promote the transfer of knowledge and experience across fields.*

There is no one “place to go” to learn about success stories, best practices, and lessons learned about how to combine arts and smart growth efforts. It is fortunate that two grantmakers’ organizations – Grantmakers in the Arts and the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth – have an interest in the intersection and have begun a conversation about it. However, one important opportunity for funders is to create some kind of central and regular forum – a convening, a Web site, or a similar venue – where this information can be shared.

5. *Strengthen connections among professionals and policy makers from both the arts and smart growth fields, including artists, designers, planners, transportation experts, and elected officials.*

There are many voices for better urban form, more walkable communities, and creation of seductive pedestrian environments. But great public spaces do not happen by accident. Artists and other designers that really understand how to create great public places and spaces should be better connected to other sectors to forge combined efforts. The emerging partnership between arts and smart growth funders can help to make these connections.

Conclusion

Although the arts and smart growth are often effective partners, many challenges remain that advocates for each can face together. We mention two here.

A familiar challenge to many urban arts communities is the need to minimize the risk of gentrification. Artists have long been viewed as both the perpetrators and the victims of gentrification in lower-income neighborhoods. On the one hand, artists who move into an inexpensive neighborhood sometimes improve both its reputation and its physical presence which, in turn, can increase rents and drive out lower-income residents. At the same time, as their neighborhoods become more attractive, the artists themselves run the risk of being priced out by real estate speculators and affluent professionals.

This challenge is not new to the smart growth movement or to urban and community revitalization efforts generally. Maintaining a diverse mix of residents – in terms of income, culture, and profession – is clearly an essential part of any effort to build stronger communities. A variety of mechanisms will have to be employed to deal with problems of gentrification. Among the possibilities are creating live/work spaces that are permanently restricted to artists and constructing a mix of housing types with subsidies available to longtime local residents who are not artists. In any case, neither arts nor smart growth advocates can shy away from this tough challenge.

A second general challenge arises from the fact that many artists, arts organizations, and arts participants live and work in suburbs. As the McKnight report found, the suburbs contain an arts infrastructure with great potential. The artists and donors are a resource, but they are an underserved market in terms of facilities and programs. At the same time, most suburban communities built in the last forty years do not adhere to smart growth principles that encourage strong communities of place. By smart growth advocates, the nature of most suburban development might be called “dumb growth.” Suburbs are often sprawling, auto-oriented, and without focus or a center. An opportunity emerges here where the arts and smart growth interests intersect. The combination of arts resources and potential market demand means that arts activities might be able to become a potent force in suburban place-making.

Suburbs are not monolithic in physical terms any more than they are monolithic economically or culturally. Old downtowns, distinctive neighborhoods, and even some new developments provide focus and centers for otherwise undistinguished suburban environments. If a newer suburb lacks arts venues, people appear perfectly willing to travel to an older, nearby suburb that has theaters and galleries, even if they are only rarely willing to go downtown for big-ticket cultural events.

These two challenges – gentrification and “dumb” growth – offer examples of lessons to be learned and opportunities to be found. Advocates in both fields can play important roles in shaping strategies to bring the arts and smart growth together. For many years, smart growth advocates sought to alter public policy on urban design without communicating with artists – or with any other constituency that could benefit from an improved physical environment. Working with the arts could further many smart growth goals. Arts organizations can respond to urban and suburban problems in ways that conventional real-estate-based urban development strategies cannot. Artists and arts organizations have the ability to proceed incrementally, taking advantage of what already exists, and improvising when necessary or possible. Other urban pioneers can do the same, of course, but the arts offer something more. They bring their business, social, and creative connections – their communities of interest – and can help create the human networks essential to making streets, buildings, and spaces into communities.

For the two fields succeed together, artists and arts organizations must be open to the “power of place” that smart growth represents, and they must be willing to accept the “reality check” of urban planning policy and private real estate investment. In return, smart growth advocates must be willing to turn to artists, arts organizations, and arts patrons for an understanding of the nature of their constituency. In the end, there is no

question that the arts and smart growth can learn from each other and build a more powerful sense of community – whether community of interest or community of place – if they work together.

William Fulton is president of Solimar Research Group, a public policy research firm based in Ventura, California, that deals with metropolitan growth, urban planning, and economic development both in California and nationwide. Fulton is economic development columnist for Governing magazine, founding editor of California Planning & Development Report, a monthly land-use newsletter, and writes frequently for the Sunday opinion section of The Los Angeles Times. He is the author of four books, including The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles and The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl, co-authored with Peter Calthorpe. He lives in Ventura with his wife, artist Victoria Torf, and their daughter Sara.

Morris Newman is a frequent freelance contributor to many newspapers and magazines, including Architecture, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, Landscape Architecture, Metropolis, Planning, and Progressive Architecture. Newman has served as a contributing writer and columnist for California Planning & Development Report for many years, where he has documented the latest trends in urban redevelopment and urban design. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, journalist Sharon Bernstein, and their four children.

Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, Psilos, Phil, "The Role of the Arts in Economic Development," National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2001, available at http://www.nga.org/center/divisions/1,118,C_ISSUE_BRIEF%5ED_2225.00HTML; Robert H. McNulty, Dorothy R. Jacobson, and R. Leo Penne, *The Economics of Amenity: Community Futures and Quality of Life*, Washington, D.C.: Partners for Livable Communities, 1985.; working papers presented at "Building Creative Economies: The Arts, Entrepreneurship, and Sustainable Development in Appalachia," available at <http://www.nea.gov/partner/BCE/BCE.html>
- 2 For more information about the Arts and the Environment program, see the Community Arts Council of Vancouver's Web site, <http://www.cacv.bc.ca/>
- 3 Stern, Mark J., "Dimensions of Regional Arts and Cultural Participation in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area," *Working Paper No. 9, Conference Proceedings, "Social Impact of the Arts Project,"* University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work, July 1999. Available at <http://www.ssw.upenn.edu/SIAP>
- 4 Bye, Carolyn, *a new angle: arts development in the suburbs*, Minneapolis: The McKnight Foundation, 2002. Available at: <http://www.mcknight.org/arts/angle.asp>
- 5 An "Edge City" is defined as a suburban center with at least 5 million square feet of office space and at least 600,000 square feet of retail space. Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*, New York: Doubleday, 1991.
- 6 An "equity waiver" theater is a theater with 99 or fewer seats, which is permitted to waive standard contract rules with actors, thus allowing for less expensive productions.
- 7 Villani, John, *The 100 Best Small Art Towns in America: Discover Creative Communities, Fresh Air, and Affordable Living*. Avalon Travel Publications, 1998.

© 2002 Solimar Research Group. Published by permission of the author.

Books and Reports

"Building Creative Economies: The Arts, Entrepreneurship, and Sustainable Development in Appalachia," April 2002, working papers available at <http://www.nea.gov/partner/BCE/BCE.html>

Bye, Carolyn, *a new angle: arts development in the suburbs*, Minneapolis: The McKnight Foundation, 2002. Available at <http://www.mcknight.org/arts/angle.asp>

McNulty, Robert H., Dorothy R. Jacobson, and R. Leo Penne, *The Economics of Amenity: Community Futures and Quality of Life*, Washington, D.C.: Partners for Livable Communities, 1985

Psilos, Phil, "The Role of the Arts in Economic Development," National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2001, available at http://www.nga.org/center/divisions/1,118,C_ISSUE_BRIEF%5ED_2225.00.html

Stern, Mark J., "Dimensions of Regional Arts and Cultural Participation in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area," Working Paper No. 9, Conference Proceedings, "Social Impact of the Arts Project," University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work, July 1999. Available at <http://www.ssw.upenn.edu/SIAP>

Sources for Case Histories

The Village of Arts and Humanities
Lily Yeh
2544 Germantown Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19133
(215) 225-7800
lilyyeh@aol.com

Historic Overtown Folklife Village
Dr. Dorothy J. Fields
5400 NW 22nd Ave., Building C,
Suite 101
Miami, FL 33142
dorothyj@infi.net

Asheville Urban Trail
Joan Farrell
P.O. Box 7148
Asheville, NC 28802
(828) 253-0701
jafarrell@charter.net

Hopkins Center for the Arts
Susan Hanna-Bibus
1010 First Street South
Hopkins, MN 55343
(952) 988-4066
Sbibus@hopkinsmn.com

Santa Clarita
Rosalind Stewart
23920 Valencia Blvd.
Santa Clarita, CA 91355
(661) 286-4012
rstewart@santa-clarita.com

Jamestown
Deidre Olson
Arts Council for Chautauqua County,
116 East Third St.
Jamestown, NY 14701
(716) 664-2465
deidre@artscouncil.com

Creede Repertory Theater
Maurice LaMee
124 N. Main St.
Creede, CO 81130
(719) 658-2540
www.creederep.com

HandMade in America
Pat Cabe
P.O. Box 2089
Asheville, NC 28802
(818) 252-0121
patcabe@handmadeinamerica.com

The Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities

The Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities is a resource for foundations, nonprofit organizations, and other partners working to solve the environmental, social, and economic problems created by suburban sprawl and urban disinvestment. The Translation Paper series, published by the Funders' Network, translates the impact of sprawl on our communities and environment and suggests opportunities for progress through smarter growth policies and practices.

The Funders' Network can be reached at the Collins Center for Public Policy, 150 S.E. Second Avenue, Suite 709, Miami, Florida, 33131, (305) 377-4484, bstarrett@collinscenter.org, www.fundersnetwork.org.