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Cidadania, Arte e Espaço Urbano: Modelos de Revitalização Urbana e Envolvimento Comunitário

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CARVALHO, Claudia P.

Mestrado em Sociologia

Faculdade de Economia da Universidade de Coimbra

claudiap@mit.edu

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### Resumo

Esta comunicação centra-se na relação da actividade artística e cultural com o espaço urbano, partindo da análise contextualizada dos conceitos de cultura, espaço público e comunidade.

Autores como Malcolm Miles (Miles, 1997), Nick Stevenson (Stevenson, 2003), Mark Schuster e Dennis Frenchman (Schuster e Frenchman, 2004), Maria Rosario Jackson (Jackson e Kabwass-Green *et al.*, 2006) e Richard Florida (Florida, 2005) abordam as questões da relação da cultura com o urbano e exploram os efeitos de uma “culturalização” dos espaços públicos.

Por um lado, este trabalho pretende reflectir sobre o papel das dinâmicas culturais e artísticas na revitalização social de três comunidades urbanas da área metropolitana de Boston (EUA). Por outro, analisa a importância destas dinâmicas na criação de espaços cívicos e multiétnicos de participação.

Desta forma, a comunicação detém-se sobre os diferentes tipos de cidadania nas três comunidades estudadas: *Union Square (The Arts District Case)*, *Villa Victoria/South End (The Grassroots Movement Case)* e *Jamaica Plain (The Community and Festivals Arts Case)*.

Palavras-chave: Cidadania Cultural, Envolvimento Comunitário, Espaço Urbano, Práticas Artísticas, Cultura



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In this paper we analyze how physical space in urban settings can be used more creatively and in partnership with community organizations and residents. The study primarily aims to analyze how three configurations of spatial use in urban settings can positively influence the development of civic engagement initiatives. Artistic and cultural practices are specifically analyzed here as the tools that we believe generate this positive impact at the neighborhood level. This study focused on three Boston area (MA, USA) neighborhoods: Jamaica Plain, Union Square and South End/ *Villa Victoria*.

The study suggests that when ethnically diverse city residents reclaim public spaces for face-to-face cultural and artistic interaction, they are in fact putting into play a new form of community-building while also strengthening civic participation. Thus, in this context, urban public space, community and culture are interdependent variables to consider while developing new strategies for community-building initiatives and for advancing what David Harvey describes as, “the politics of participation in the public sphere” (Harvey, 2006).

As Mark Warren, Amitai Etzioni and Saegart and Thompson defend, people need to be strongly connected with their communities in order to be integrated as members of society (Warren, 2001; Etzioni, 2005; Saegart and Thompson, 2001). We argue that the successful appropriation of urban public spaces by the three Boston area neighborhoods analyzed in this study offers useful strategies for continued progress in community-building.

Three main issues are being considered and analyzed within this paper. We discuss how the process of civic participation occurs, through the creation of “Cultural Knowledgeable Communities.”, where cultural resources—like historical and landscape heritage, cultural traditions, artistic expressions, ethnic businesses— become active variables in the cultural rehabilitation of the community’s urban spaces (Charre, 1992; Miles, 1997; Gibbans, 2005). As a consequence, the three neighborhoods are conceptualized as “Connected Communities,” “Clustered Communities” and “Communities of Enclave,” referring respectively to Jamaica Plain, Union Square and South End (*Villa Victoria*). This article also reflects on how particular urban public spaces, where ephemeral cultural events, cultural gatherings and artistic outreach sessions take place, can give rise to a wide range of civic participation activities.

The third issue presented here is based on the assumption that cultural and artistic community organizations and events provide a strong venue for social integration and can offer an alternative approach to community-building and to the re-conceptualization of the contemporary urban citizen. Focusing on these neighborhoods, emphasis will be devoted to how distinct artistic and cultural initiatives grow when specific aspects of the public space are exploited by certain arts-related community-building efforts.

## **2. BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL PRACTICES: Jamaica Plain, Union Square, and South End/ *Villa Victoria***

By focusing on community-building initiatives using the arts and culture, and considering strategies of “civic engagement” (Short, 2001) in the “urban public space,” we propose an understanding of the cultural and artistic processes that have been influencing these communities’ social development. In so doing, it is our intention to offer a more comprehensive

understanding of the dialectics of place and community-building that arise as a result of the organization of cultural and artistic events.

By creating social networks at the community level, implementing artistic and cultural practices work as privilege strategies, adopted not only to build an identity of place, but also to reclaim creative uses of the urban space, developing a cultural allocation of urban sites (Bianchini, 1991 and 1993; Landry and Anglo-German Foundation for the Study of Industrial Society, 1996; Landry, 2000; Harcup, 2000; Florida, 2005).

Through social use, public spaces are then transformed into “cultural landscapes” (Alanen and Melnick, 2000; Sabate et al., 2004) as they become associated with a specific social and/or cultural activities, events or communities (or group of communities), and consequently play a symbolic role (Meinig, 1979) in the bigger context of the organization of urban space.

As advocated in this paper, urban space becomes an essential variable that influences the process of building social capital networks and of defining the processes of social integration. In this context, arts and culture are essential tools in fostering community civic participation and social relationships between ethnic groups. Furthermore, civic participation may have in community social movements a parallel approach to the creation of urban spaces that cultivate the tendency to be integrated and cohesive (Castells, 1983 and 1997; Harvey, 2001 and 2006).

## **2.1. CONNECTED COMMUNITIES**

“Connected Communities” are communities where inter-ethnic, inter-generational and inter-neighborhood relationships are sustained amid various community members. In a “Connected Community” there is a great emphasis on strategies that promote sociability at the community level. In Jamaica Plain, artistic activities are seen as potential resources to encourage various inclusive social practices, as they create places of voluntary reciprocity between people interested in civic activities. One community organizer said about the organization’s building: “We fixed it up with just donated labor, volunteer work from people who wanted to build the project, people from the community who wanted to help, who donated their time, like plumbers and electricians” (C. Carvalho, semi-structured interview, December 12, 2004).

Therefore, the urban public space emphasizes its collective function, working as a site of community interrelation. Urban sites are simultaneously physical intermediaries, through which community social capital (Putnam et al., 2003; Putnam, 2004; Briggs, 2004; Hutchinson, 2004; Light, 2004; Rohe, 2004; Vidal, 2004) is built, and also mediators of strategies for the social integration.

### **Space as a Source for Ethnic and Generational Intersection**

Through Spontaneous Celebrations’ work, these communities have been able to build their own places of social connection through artistic and cultural events and activities, especially as preparing for these events brings people together. One of the community organizers explained it this way: “(...) what also makes our events and festivals different is that we have the preparations before and that is how we involve all the community, including people from different generations” (C. Carvalho, semi-structured interview, December 16, 2004).

In addition, cultural and artistic events and projects provide a perfect opportunity to work on community social issues, like youth street violence. A youth program coordinator spoke to us about how the youth community at Spontaneous Celebrations created their own cultural program: “Their goal was to create a project of change in the community and what they ended up deciding was to actually create a program for themselves to keep youth off the streets (...) and talk about preventing violence” (C. Carvalho, semi-structured interview, October 11, 2005).

Preventing youth violence in Jamaica Plain is one of the main goals of Spontaneous' work. Therefore, the organization has created opportunities for social interaction among young people, bringing them inside the organization through youth leadership programs (with direct implications on local community-change efforts), or integrating them into the open-air celebrations, where youth become engaged through the organization of their own set of events within the year-round community celebrations. These two main strategies are the springboards for developing more cohesive cultural dynamics and encouraging more inclusive community socialization among children, youth and adults. In fact, according to Shin (Shin, 2004), one of the great impacts of creating urban spaces of community celebration, where festivals and neighborhood gatherings take place, is to cultivate ethnic acceptance and more multicultural sense of belonging.

Spontaneous Celebrations uses environmental awareness strategies to build social networks. One example is the effort to promote awareness about other cultures' natural landscapes. Each year, during the Tropical Fiesta event, Spontaneous Celebrations' community center is decorated using natural *leit motives* from Latino countries in an effort to recreate these countries' natural environments. Collaborative work centered around painting, the construction of collage, drawing, crafts and producing plays and typical dances from particular Latino countries, are some of the activities that bring different people from the community together into a joint effort of cooperation.

### **Enabling Social Awareness in Public Spaces**

Integration in urban settings occurs as members of the community come to identify themselves with the urban spaces that they inhabit, not only by appropriating them through individual (Altman and Low, 1992), social, cultural, artistic and economic uses, but also by relating to them through exploring the social and political issues that confront these urban public places. By calling attention to relevant local issues, using artistic practices as an agent of mediation, community members are enabling social awareness.

Therefore, in this neighborhood, cultural and artistic events occurring in open air public spaces can creatively draw attention to *global* social issues and to *local* social conflicts. Social protests, rallies and parades are the means used to develop awareness and contribute to social change. For example, the 2005 Wake Up the Earth Festival amplified a sense of community social awareness by creating a space for the organization of parades and rallies where people both protested against the use of pesticides and against the war in Iraq.

### **Public Space Appropriation**

People in these communities create loose space, creating activities not intended in the design or program of these spaces. To do so they appropriate sites, meaning that “ (...) they use the physical features of their surroundings when they think they are helpful and overcome or ignore them when they are constraining” (Franck and Stevens, 2007). The urban public spaces we've discussed thus become both a venue for social connection through the arts and for community physical and social appropriation, by using cultural traditions, artistic activities and social issues as tools. These neighborhoods are surrounded by different open air leisure places, like parks, gardens and lakes, representing a great resource for developing events and activities that use the cultural and ethnic diversity of the area as a resource to promote events that implicate collaborative organizing and civic engagement.

The cyclic festivity Wake Up the Earth takes place in the streets of Jamaica Plain and all along the South West Corridor Park. People from different ages are given access to places in

which they can socialize and find cultural and artistic expression. The neighborhood park becomes the venue for gatherings, musical performances, dance traditions, community theatre, youth artistic activities, local vendor's tables, social parades and children's activities.

### **Civic Relations in Public Space**

Using urban places in an unconventional way has created spaces for face-to-face interaction during the preparation and realization of artistic events. Community actors, like neighbors, local businesses and artists are encouraged to intervene as active participants in the production and preparation of the events. In the Wake Up the Earth Festival, youth are responsible for many tasks. As one community organizer says "This festival represents a platform to learn about the world of business and performance production. There's a kid who is going help to set up the electronics and hire the groups for the pop stage (...). It really is a great exercise for a lot of people to learn about how the world works by setting up an event." (C. Carvalho, semi-structured video interview, 17 February, 2005).

Through cross-collaborative work, networks of interconnection start to develop between community members, encouraging more personal and less formal relationships. Specific up to date themes, like the issue of using pesticides in public parks, are brought up as festival themes in order "(...) to mobilize and unite thousands of JP residents in the cause to have a pesticide free community" (C. Carvalho, community meeting, May 2, 2005).

The effort to build civic networks is based on two different types of strategies that show a holistic approach to the concept of community. The first strategy is related to the urgent need to create spaces of socialization, not only for the youth, but also between people of different ages. According to one community organizer who has been working with Spontaneous, "Wake Up the Earth Festival is basically an expression about what this community is all about, which is bringing people together to share musical and artistic experiences (...) Festival for me is really the preparation for it because many people in the community come together to work on the Festival (...) for several months" (Carvalho, C., semi-structured interview, 17 February, 2005).

The second strategy focuses on perceiving the value of the place's ethnic diversity: it concentrates all organizing efforts on building culturally-based local knowledge, by developing strategies for collaborative, inter-ethnic and inter-generational work. This type of knowledge requires an understanding of the traditions and social behaviors of the different cultures that inhabit the same neighborhood and the encouragement to use of public arena as a place of dynamic community interchange. As a festival coordinator in Spontaneous states "(...) many events at Spontaneous are organized by community members. Part of their mission is to build a sense of community that crosses borders of age, race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation" (C. Carvalho, community meeting, May 2, 2005).

## **2.2. CLUSTERED COMMUNITIES**

"Clustered Communities" create localized and specific community-building initiatives that result from different formats of association between distinct community agents. Aggregates of associated actors emerge throughout the neighborhood, developing networks of civic dynamics, grounded in the site's cultural resources, as follows artistic activity, urban heritage, culinary diversity, businesses' ethnic mishmash and others.

### **A project situated in the intersection of the Arts and the Economy**

Union Square's historical heritage may be seen in context of three characteristics that distinguish the Square from other Boston commercial areas: Firstly, the ethnic immigrant

communities are highly diverse, presenting rich opportunities for cultural sharing. Secondly, Union Square is the most densely populated community in New England including also long-term residents, students, artists and young professionals. And finally, the Square buildings have been designed to accommodate various needs, particularly related to the rezoning to accommodate the burgeoning artistic community.

The idea behind the Arts Union initiative is to implement a rezoning process where artists and the arts become main agents in the creation of an Arts District in Union Square. According to one of the representatives of Arts Union, the rezoning process of the area is necessary in order to "(...) designate Union Square as an Arts District and have a public art, temporary event tied into the kick-off of the city as Arts District. This event will be a kick-off for the City to create a zoning process where arts can get a permit." (C. Carvalho, semi-structured interview, March 18, 2005)

### **Public Space Appropriation**

The Union Square area is located in the city of Somerville which has become a very attractive place for artists to live. As one of the local policy makers elucidates: "Somerville, for ages, was a very reasonable place to live in. And for seven to eight years it's really gotten more expensive ... there are a lot of younger people here but also because it was cheaper to live here before, brought in a lot of artists. So, the arts community is very strong here." (C. Carvalho, semi-structured interview, October 4, 2005) Additionally, community-building efforts throughout the urban space in the Union Square area are profoundly affected by the diffuse localization of the different resources, as well as by their variety. Networks of "civic-minded artistic efforts" (C. Carvalho, semi-structured interview, December 16, 2004) emerge around the urban space, giving origin to spatially delimited efforts of community building through artistic and cultural practices.

Within the "Arts Union" project, public installations are prepared in the businesses windows, used simultaneously as outdoor panels for publicity and as street gallery space for the artists to exhibit their work. Also, this project has permitted different strategies of cultural and artistic allocation of the Union Square plaza by the different ethnic communities, mostly Brazilians and Indians.

The Union Square area has the tendency to be overlooked as a site for vibrant socio-cultural intervention. It is therefore important to emphasize the significance of artistic events that have taken place within the "Arts Union" project context. These efforts have been able to enlighten community members about the different cultural traditions and the different approaches to community building in this area. Brazilians and Africans tend to use the Plaza as a performance space and for cultural and social interaction with the public. The audience interacts with the artists before and during the performance, so that the space for social and cultural interchange is enlarged and acquires multiple formats, namely conversation, interchange of dance and singing skills and collaborative learning of the artistic experience. Thus, in the Union Square Plaza, the use of this public space for performances creates a valuable opportunity to cultivate multicultural awareness and the exchange of artistic learning experiences.

The successful, varied use of the physical spaces themselves—street-facing business windows, the sidewalks and the plaza—prove the potential of these kind of spaces to build local knowledge. Scattered efforts show that various urban spaces are starting to be used as assets for creating collaborative relationships between different social and cultural agents. The boundaries between these different communities can be attenuated through the overlap of strategies of socialization and culturalization of urban places.

## **Civic Relations and Public Space Appropriation**

Another idea behind the Arts Union project is to reach out to different arts-related partners, in order to create a civic network of involved citizens and organizations. The need to provide outreach to different ethnic immigrant communities, allowing them to experience the potential of Union Square, creates networks of collaboration between local performers, immigrant artists and community-based groups and also supports the local community. As stated by one of the Arts Union local organizer: "In the outreach that we did for participation in the Arts Union event, we got this Latino best player, we got this guy who is Brazilian and works at an insurance company, we got this woman who works in a New Asia restaurant who brought a Chinese group of dancers! So we (...) had to coordinate a lot of people in the community" (C. Carvalho, semi-structured interview, 4 October, 2005). The outdoor performances are designed to reproduce the traditions from the diverse immigrant populations within Union Square. Therefore, as shown by the above statement, strategies to create social capital are based on cultural outreach efforts within the surrounding community.

Arts Union partnerships are based on the articulation of artistic and economic resources, highlighting the increased revenues that may result from using the arts as a tool to spark economic developments. Furthermore, through public installations, visual artists are recognized as intimately connected with the urban public space. On the other hand, the "Street Furniture project," in which public artists are hired to design and make items such as benches and trash cans, further reinforces the valuable connection between Union Square streetscapes and local artists, contributing significantly to the creation of a new image for the Square.

Union Square is also characterized by the multi-faceted character of its local resources and by the fact that they are spread through out the Union Square area. Therefore, clustered cultural appropriation efforts emerge, focusing on taking advantage of a specific resource or group of resources at a time. As an example, the cultural rehabilitation of the urban space associated with the previously mentioned "Street Furniture Project" brings together two types of local resources: the artistic knowledge of local artists and the historical heritage of the urban space. Through the outreach to locally based artists who work on the public art field, "Arts Union" could identify different types of people, some of whom have a high-tech approach to the urban spaces, others who are more socially and environmentally engaged.

### **2.3. COMMUNITIES OF ENCLAVE**

*Villa Victoria* represents an example of a "Community of Enclave". This type of story space is strictly confined to a particular urban setting and to an ethnic community with a history of resistance and space-appropriation. In these areas, arts and culture have been ensuring the very survival of the community, emphasizing the uniqueness of its way of life, traditions and space allocation.

The vitality of a community of enclave also depends on being able to support cultural revitalization and to readapt while the space itself is changing ethnically. This ability to constantly readjust is very well identified in the comments of one of the Puerto Rican community leaders: "You have changes in the festival and cultural activities in *Villa Victoria*, the community is changing, leadership is changing, the residence is changing and the community becomes more multicultural, they [the Puerto Ricans from the *Villa*] start to accept people from other cultures." (C. Carvalho, semi-structured interview, February 10, 2006)

*Villa Victoria* is a perfect example of how an ethnic community reclaimed their own residential space in the South End. The *Villa* represents a mainly Puerto Rican group of immigrants who struggled for a physical and symbolic place in the South End. Since 1968, this



community has been trying to build a neighborhood that promotes a Latino culture in general, but works as an Americanized amalgamation based on Puerto Rican cultural traditions.

### **Space as a Source for Ethnic and Generational Intersection**

In order to help prevent the problem of youth street violence, places of social interaction are closely connected with the open air leisure places. These sites work simultaneously as places to develop cultural dynamics and as places of community socialization. “[In Festival *Betances*] we have a procession and a parade with artists and kids, community and staff, children and adults, music and dance (...) We start at the Plaza and we go around the streets of *Villa Victoria*,” said one of the Festival organizers. (C. Carvalho, informal conversation, June 30, 2005). The appropriation of urban public spaces through artistic and cultural activities creates possibilities for cross-cultural and intergenerational connection. Arts and culture reconfigure the common uses of urban space, offering spaces of socialization between different ethnicities and generations.

### **Public Space Appropriation**

The history of building a community through an effort of cultural resilience has definitely contributed to the development of a specific “cultural landscape” (Alanen and Melnick, 2000; Aponte-Parés, 2000) within the South End urban area. The growth of this landscape has occurred in three different ways. First, through the appropriation of a physical space, building a neighborhood of readapted *casitas*, characterized by brightly colored houses, ample *verandas* and vegetable gardens. Secondly, socially, through providing to the residents a group of social services that range from school and pre-school programs, to after school and technological programs; and finally, culturally, by offering community arts programs and the maintenance of a cultural center and a gallery, open to the community with events on a regular basis.

Place as a variable had an influence on the origins of the *Villa* as a community, allowing for the creation of a sense of place for Puerto Rican and Latino cultures. This connection between the individual and his environs (Rasmussen, 1962; Relph, 1976; Zarro, 1988) presupposes an interdependency with the broader culture and with place as a spatial and temporal phenomenon. In the *Villa*, what started as an attempt to create a space for social integration is now being influenced by a process of establishing door-to-door dividers between groups of white upwardly middle class and Latinos.

In addition, by struggling for an urban space in which to live and flourish, this Puerto Rican community was also reviving and recreating their culture and their social networks in an American urban setting. The development of an environment for the creation of a Latino culture within a confined urban area produces to some extent a feeling of an “enclave,” both culturally and the ethnically. The relationship with the surrounding neighborhood of the South End is tense: the *Villa* residents are stereotyped. As one activist and policymaker stated: “(...) there’s an isolation because the bigger community— including universities, colleges, businesses, residences—don’t know anything about it. (...) The South End community knows it’s there, but doesn’t feel it’s welcome. So they walk around it and not through it. And what they know of it reinforces stereotypes. They say they’re poor, uneducated, loud, dirty, they’re criminal.” (C. Carvalho, semi-structured interview, February 10, 2006)

In a space where low and high income communities coexist, establishing symbolic and physical boundaries is a direct consequence of the lack of communication, as the barriers of language, religion and other traditional cultural practices are still shaping neighborhood social behaviors.

### **Civic Relations in Public Space**

This community promotes strong ties among civically-involved individuals, where individual self-help relations (Williams, 2005) are developed between the inhabitants. Community residents collaborate with the community agency *Inquilinos Boricuas en Action* to organize community events like *Festival Betances* or other neighborhood events, such as domino tournaments, weddings or artistic opportunities for the youth (like “Critical Breakdown” or “Youth Truth”). According to an IBA’s staff person, “(...) the community participation is pretty much committees from residents working hand in hand with IBA (...). The Festival *Betances* is planned months in advance, and we pretty much we make a call to the board and to the residents to try to form committees. So there’s people working on every different task.” (C. Carvalho, semi-structured interview, June 30, 2005).

These dynamics are normally a result of a partnership between IBA and *Villa* residents. They are the result of several months of collaborative work and involve many community meetings thereby enforcing ties between people in the area. By strengthening these social relations, a civic network is created, based on a culture of pride and resilience. Typical Puerto Rican activities are organized, through which the community promotes its cultural identity within the South End neighborhood and the great Boston area.

### **Cultural Appropriation of Public Space**

In *Villa Victoria*, a delimited cultural and ethnic landscape has been reinvented through strategies of cultural resistance and through the reproduction and emphasis on divides, based on cultural, social and economic differences. By developing typical Puerto Rican landmarks, with a distinctive cultural identity in the city, this community has reinvented a new cultural identity. The annual *Festival Bétances*, the *Jorge Hernandez Cultural Center* and the community Gallery of *La Casa de La Cultura* (Center for Latino Arts) all showcase ancient traditions, rituals, music and dances and have played an essential role in the survival of the Puerto Rican culture in a predominantly gentrified Boston neighborhood.

By building delimited spaces of action and promoting a culture based on pride, the *Villa* develops better connections with other communities. Self-sufficiency in terms of social relations, cultural interconnections and social services fosters the creation of negative stereotypes in relation to the *Villa*. These two variables: space delimitation and social self-sufficiency contribute to the creation of a confined and resilient civic network.

Places can also be revitalized and re-appropriated by stories of community resistance and resilience, as is the case with *Villa Victoria*. By reproducing periodic and seasonally-based annual events in a particular urban space, communities tend to appropriate that space far beyond the duration of the specific event. They endeavor to re-claim the place by physically marking it, using cultural or artistic icons, or by enabling artistic or social interventions, outside the regular or artistic event that the community most identifies with.

Consequently, the relationship and mutual influence between urban public spaces and communities becomes more complex as it is established in different levels, transforming these spaces into community-supported places where different community stories can be regenerated. Urban public spaces, now transformed into places for celebration of cultural, artistic and ethnic diversity, represent symbolic places.

The table below, by considering the interlocking nature between urban space, community, arts and culture, summarizes how civic engagement and urban space revivification are expressed in the three neighborhoods in innovative ways.

Table 1. Types of Urban Space Appropriation and Different Approaches to Civic Engagement and Revivification of Urban Space

	<b>Jamaica Plain</b>	<b>Union Square</b>	<b>Villa Victoria</b>
<b>Civic Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- informal day to day community relationships</li> <li>- individual self-help relations</li> <li>- outreach to family aggregates and their integration in cultural and artistic activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- outreach to local ethnic-businesses and artists as main agents of cultural and economic development</li> <li>- effort to integrate immigrant populations in the organization of artistic events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- neighbor to neighbor relationships based on Puerto Rican cultural traditions</li> <li>- cultural tradition of neighborhood festival mobilizes the community</li> </ul>
<b>Revivification of urban space</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- environmental awareness as a tool to mobilize community to urban spaces</li> <li>- direct relation between immigrant cultural traditions and urban green spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- direct relation between Public Art and urban space</li> <li>- presentation of artistic events in various urban sites – squares, bridges, storefronts, streets</li> <li>- artistic zoning of urban space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- physical, social and cultural urban revivification based on Puerto Rican cultural heritage</li> <li>- integration of a Puerto Rican life style in an American urban context</li> </ul>

### 3. FINAL REMARKS

The contemporary urban condition is expressed in key aspects of the everyday lives of neighborhoods. It has affected social relationships in the urban space, undermining cross-cultural interconnections and aggravating immigrants' social integration in urban territories. As a response to this social crisis of the contemporary city, strategies of resilience were here emphasized as urban strategies of "civic governance" and cultural civic empowerment endeavors at the community level. These responses recreate local knowledge-based communities, incorporating artistic expression and cultural traditions as a tool for affirmative action.

Spontaneous Celebrations' context of action in Jamaica Plain is part of what we understand as a "Connected Community." These are based on the promotion of inter-ethnic and face-to-face connections, through developing social spaces of artistic inclusion. The existence of a variety of open air urban spaces and their use as sites for promoting cultural and artistic civic events encourages development of a stronger connection between the communities and the sites. Consequently, efforts to promote environmental and social awareness are undertaken, as well as endeavors to envision urban spaces as places of socialization between different groups: regardless of ethnic heritage, level of income and identified social communities. When appropriated by artistic events, urban spaces develop multicultural, multi-social and intergenerational capacities, repositioning social networks within the community and promoting a cultural refunctionalization of urban spaces.

A "Clustered Community," such as Union Square, is based on spaces where there is significant ethnic juxtaposition. The ethnic diversity of the area, the existence of socially diverse communities, the adaptable functionality of the buildings and the localization of the Square as a

site of intersection contribute to the proliferation of community aggregates. These sub-networks of collaboration depend on social connections between different cultural resources (whether ethnic, artistic or historic), and on the diffuse spatial localization of the resources. Given the desegregated identity of this area, civic networks can increasingly be supported by a variety of citizen groups working together as partners. A new identity of place starts to develop, focusing on the artistic and cultural facilities of the area as a tool to foster community development.

*Villa Victoria* is an example of a “Community of Enclave,” as its dynamics are based on physical space appropriation, and a re-established cultural identity. By historically defining a delimited urban space as the context for development of a very specific cultural tradition (in this case Puerto Rican), issues of social and cultural segregation arise. The urban space inadvertently discourages inter-ethnic relationships from developing while encouraging the development of Puerto Rican cultural pride. Physical space allotment itself enabled the survival of the community-building initiative *Villa Victoria*. As the development of this community is based on an extensive history of grassroots collaborative work and individual self-help relations, arts and culture represent a means to create social awareness and build a specific cultural landscape.

We tried to present how these different urban public spaces in three distinct Boston area neighborhoods present different types of “culturally knowledgeable communities. Some connections were highlighted between the variables of urban space, civic engagement and cultural resources. The sites where each community is located and the type of outreach in which its members participate significantly influenced each community’s profile.

By looking at examples of “Culturally Knowledgeable Communities,” we considered not only the physical characteristics of the urban spaces and how they offer—or fail to offer—conditions for establishing relationships with outside social and cultural environments, but also where these places are located in relation to their urban surroundings. This reflects on their urban functions in regards to traffic, economic, ethnic, industrial, artistic and socially-engaged uses.

The processes of reconstruction and deconstruction of urban social space, influenced by social processes such as de-industrialization, the post-Fordist condition or the various demonstrations of gentrification, give rise to a contemporary urban condition. Artistic activities and cultural expressions operate as a detonator, generating responses to the new urban order. Some of these responses manifest as continued social struggle.

In this paper, we proposed some responses that can help understand the potential behind arts and culture to impact contemporary urban settings, transforming them in more socially integrated sites.

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