CultureCase

Participatory art projects can be catalysts for developing community

This research was conducted by **Seana S. Lowe** at the **University of Colorado, USA**

Summary

Calculating the value of community arts projects is a tricky task. In an attempt to better understand the impact such projects can have on participants, this paper looked in detail at two initiatives that took place in Denver in the USA – the first was the creation of a permanent mural, and the second a multigenerational play. Using participant observation, the research found that the process of doing community arts projects creates distinct settings for social interaction, allowing participants to discover connections with each other and develop friendships and social bonds.

Arts projects can foster feelings of interconnection

For both projects, artists employed inclusive decision-making processes to allow all participants (spanning ethnicities, age ranges and genders) to contribute to the formation of ideas. It was discovered that both projects provided opportunities for participants to build a greater sense of collective identity and solidarity. Through the process of creating the work participants supported each other, communicated common concerns and worked to better define and celebrate the identities of the neighbourhoods to which they belong.

Community arts projects can lead to changes in self-perception and the perception of others

Ultimately, the study suggests that community art provides a framework for social interaction by bringing individuals together, providing a shared goal and setting a common mood for the process of designing a community symbol. However, the research also highlights that it is difficult to calculate how long the heightened sense of community that comes from such projects can be retained, and questions whether the installation of permanent art pieces would foster the same sorts of social interaction. Future research could be expanded and strengthened by looking at multiple locations over a longer period of time.

This summary is by **Alexandra Talbott, King's College London**

Keywords

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