Function Follows Form: How Mixed-Used Spaces in Museums Build Community

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ABSTRACT   This article examines three elements largely overlooked by the museum profession when thinking about community building—space, space mix, and unexpected use of space. It suggests that if museum planners were to pay overt attention to these, they could greatly enhance the community-building role museums increasingly play. When considering museums and communities, writers in the museum field have focused on broadening audiences, public programs, collections and exhibitions. Physical spaces have been regarded as necessary armature but not as catalysts themselves.

    There are many subtle, interrelated and essentially unexamined ingredients that allow museums to play an enhanced role in the building of community and our collective civic life. The article describes the characteristics of the Livable Cities Movement and New Urbanism and suggests ways in which museums could encourage these characteristics—and thereby consciously use their interior and exterior spaces to build community.

"Civic life is what goes on in the public realm. Civic life refers to our relations with our fellow human beings—in short, our roles as citizens" (Kunstler 1996: 3).

INTRODUCTION

There are many subtle, interrelated and essentially unexamined ingredients that allow museums to play an enhanced role in the building of community and our collective civic life. Museum professionals generally acknowledge that the traditional mission of museums involves housing and caring for the tangible story of the past, materially illuminating contemporary issues, and creating a physical public consideration of the future. Increasingly, museum leaders are also asserting that museums can become safe places

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for unsafe ideas, meeting grounds for diverse peoples, and neutral forums for discussing issues of our day. Of course, museums vary in their stated purpose, and not all museums' leadership believes community building to be central to their work. Regardless, this paper will consider some ways that museums can enhance their role in building community. Underlying the discussion that follows is the notion that all museums are an important part of civic life; that whatever their overt mission may be, museums have become an important agent in the creation of a more cohesive society.

Interestingly, it is the economic and social theorists (and pragmatic practitioners—property developers and civic leaders) who are asserting (often in stronger terms than museums use themselves) that the not-for-profit sector plays an unparalleled role in community building. For instance, Peter Drucker, the management pundit, writes:

> Only the institutions of the social sector, that is the non-government, nonbusiness, nonprofit organization, can create what we now need, communities for citizens and especially for the highly educated knowledge workers who, increasingly dominate developed societies. One reason for this is that only nonprofit organizations can provide the enormous diversity of communities we need.... The nonprofit organizations also are the only ones that can satisfy the second need of the city, the need for effective citizenship for its members.... Only the nonprofit social sector institution can provide opportunities to be a volunteer and thus can enable individuals to have both: a sphere in which they are in control and a sphere in which they make a difference.... What the dawning twenty-first century needs above all is equally explosive growth of the nonprofit social sector organizations in building communities in the newly dominant social environment, the city (Drucker 1998: 6).

Considering museums and community, writers within our profession have focused on broadening audiences, public programs, collections and exhibitions. Physical spaces have been regarded as necessary armature but not as catalysts themselves. And the element which authors outside our profession refer to as "informal public life"—which arises spontaneously within these spaces—has been largely ignored in museum writings.

Redressing this oversight, this paper concentrates on three elements largely overlooked by our field—space, space mix, and unexpected use—and attempts to show that if museum planners were to pay overt attention to these, they could greatly enhance the community-building role our institutions increasingly play.

Museums are behind the times in considering these concepts. The proposition that space and space mix are important ingredients in humanizing an urban setting has been explored since the 1960s. A search of <*www.Google.com*> using a common space-planning buzzword "mixed use space" was completed in 0.73 seconds and revealed 628,000 Web pages. Even refining the Google search by adding the word "museum" resulted in a list of 57,400 pages.

Like many of the sites retrieved by Google.com, museums and community building ideas benefit from the planning theories of Jane Jacobs (1961). Jacobs is

cited by many as the founder of city planning ideas and practices now known as the Livable Cities Movement and as New Urbanism (Katz 1994; Fulton 1996). Proponents hold that to build a functional sense of community and civility, planners should fashion spaces (streets) that foster a sense of place, are ecologically sensitive, put reliance on foot rather than auto traffic, are utilized over many hours each day and offer a mix of activities which appeal to many. They maintain that the juxtaposition of spaces that forms mixed-use environments must be present if community building is to succeed.

Jacobs describes another necessary component—the *ad hoc*, seemingly unprogrammed social activity that then arises within public space.

> Formal types of local city organizations are frequently assumed by planners and even by some social workers to grow in direct, commonsense fashion out of announcements of meetings, the presence of meeting rooms, and the existence of problems of obvious public concern. Perhaps they grow so in suburbs and towns. They do not grow so in cities. Formal public organizations in cities require an informal public life underlying them, mediating between them and the privacy of the people of the city (Jacobs 1961: 57).

AN EXAMPLE OF PUBLIC MIXED-USE SPACE

I first began to encounter the subtle interrelationship of space, its use and emergent civility in the shopping strip in Barcroft, my multi-ethnic, multi-economic neighborhood close to Washington, D.C. The shopping center used to be failing but is now very active—day and night *(Photo, page 66)*. Its metamorphosis has been fascinating and instructive to watch. A shop will open with a sign that announces a needed and straightforward function. Thus we have, for example, signs for a laundromat, a dry cleaner, and separate Asian, Latino, and Halal food markets.

Upon closer observation and through experience, one sees that the laundromat has pool tables, a child's play area, and a barbershop. It had a money order and check-cashing booth but that moved to its own shop next door and combined with the utility bill-paying function that used to operate out of the Asian food market. The Asian owners speak Spanish, sell both Asian and Latino food and beer, and liquor. Not to be outdone, the Latino food market sells lottery tickets, phone cards, and is the French pastry outlet. The Halal food store rents videotapes and sells clothes. The hours of use are nearly around the clock.

I have watched these entrepreneurs expand their businesses without regard to their announced and original niche function. Their motivation has been to follow the money. Without plan or foreknowledge, they are reinventing the general store, combining the outdoor market of their native countries with a more rural American corner store of former years. (And if you look closely at supermarkets, chain bookstores and pharmacies, they are following the same trend.)

Arising out of these multifunction spaces has come an interesting array of more subtle mutual supports within the community. There is tolerance for the presence of

mostly male hangers-on who stand around (varying from sober to intoxicated) and who watch out for, and comment benignly on, the ensuing foot traffic. The other day, I saw the community police hanging out with the hip-hop Latino teenagers in the parking lot, the babies in the laundromat playing with each other and learning English, the community bulletin board offering babysitting services at the pizza parlor, and the Asian food store proprietors refusing to sell alcohol to an already drunk adult, sending him home to his family.

Barcroft is safe, friendly, and welcoming most of the time. It is not always entirely tranquil. It is above all an active useful mixed-use space, which has the effect of building civil community.

JANE JACOBS AND THE COMPONENTS OF A LIVABLE CITY

Jacobs wrote in response to the postwar central-city revitalization efforts (after the middle class had fled to the suburbs) and there were predictions of the impending death of most downtowns. Planners in the 1960s were offering models of city reinvigoration that focused on tearing down inner cities and rebuilding them along theoretical precepts that Jacobs found sterile and alarming. She believed plans like these would destroy the essential social order to be found within old neighborhoods. Jacobs wrote,

> This ubiquitous principle is the need of cities for a most intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially. The components of this diversity can differ enormously, but they must supplement each other in certain concrete ways (Jacobs 1961: 14).

Jacobs, and others, prescribed a list of attributes needed for making streets vibrant and the people using them civil and safe. The *space* components should allow:

- The mingling of buildings that vary in age and condition; including a good proportion of old ones so that they vary in the economic yield they must produce.

- Priority for pedestrians rather than cars.

- Wide and pleasant sidewalks.

- Short streets and frequent opportunities to turn corners.

- A clear demarcation between what is public space and what is private space. Public space and private space cannot ooze into each other.

- Sufficiently dense concentrations of people, including those who are there because of residence.

- A disparate mix of useful services.

- A mix of services that together is used over as many hours as possible, especially at night.

- Opportunities for loitering and the encouragement of people watching (e.g., benches, small parks, etc.).

- Windows overlooking the street to encourage unofficial surveillance.

If the space has these attributes then *users* will:

- Represent as broad a social and age mix as possible.

- Feel personally safe and secure among all those strangers.

- Exhibit a range of acceptable, though not uniform, behaviors and intercede with those who violate the norms.

- Have varied motivations for using the street, ranging from intentional and targeted shopping, passing though on the way to somewhere else, and going to and from their homes.

- Walk, thereby encouraging unplanned interaction.

- Allow children's use of the space in ways that are unplanned and seemingly unsupervised.

- Share responsibility for the safety of all users, including children.

- Set up unspoken standards for cleanliness and repair accepted by all.

- Use the street on a regular basis and thus develop a cadre of "regulars."

- Tolerate and even encourage hangers-on.

The creation of such a space would then encourage an *overlay of social activities,* which would include:

- Formal and informal (voluntary) surveillance: *"there must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street"* (Jacobs 1961: 32).

- Intercession when danger threatens.

- Casual social interchange, which does not invade privacy or cultural norms for acknowledging strangers and acquaintances rather than friends.

- Loitering developed to a social art that promotes interactivity.

- *Ad hoc* additional services (i.e., leaving a note with a grocer, using the telephone of the pharmacist, picking up supplies for neighbors, etc.).

- The establishment of occasional formulized rituals (i.e. parade, celebrations) and informal ones (i.e., neighborhood cleanup, cook-outs).

If all of this is present, the result will be *"The trust of a city street . . . formed over time from many, many little public sidewalk contacts. . . . Most of it is ostensibly utterly trivial but the sum is not trivial at all"* (Jacobs 1961: 56).

In *The Great Good Place*, Oldenburg (1989) writes about the importance of overt neighborhood gathering places (i.e., bars, cafés, etc), and describes a few additional ingredients for making such places successful. Gathering places should be:

- On neutral ground, not seen to be owned by any clique or faction.

- Seen as a social leveler, in which social status is not the currency of interchange.

- Conducive to conversation.

- Physically plain or modest in its internal space to reduce self-consciousness.

- Welcoming or even playful in mood.

HOW MUSEUMS CAME TO HAVE MIXED-USE SPACE

Without necessarily intending to, museums have become, increasingly, a mixed-use environment. Starting in the 1960s, United States museums found that financial viability required new revenue sources to augment their traditional financial base from endowment revenue and private donations.

The need for additional income led to two seemingly unrelated developments. The first was a new emphasis on financial business models, which included expanding sources of earned income. The second was increased budgetary reliance on government allocations and competitive grants from foundation and government sources.

Museums adopted commercial management models, appointed more business-trained leadership to their boards and staffs, explored revenue opportunities (not just shops and cafeterias) from as broad a menu as possible, professionalized and expanded their fundraising apparatus, explored corporate sponsorship and imposed or increased entrance fees. Within the profession, there was much discussion that museums were subverting their core mission. Nevertheless economic imperatives caused United States museums to become more professionally managed and more money conscious.

As museums increasingly turned to government and private foundations for economic survival, they discovered that most foundations and granting agencies focused on social needs. Aligning with the guidelines set out by these funders, museums increased their service to under-served communities and elevated education programs for schools and the general public to a higher priority. This, too, caused much internal discussion about the core functions of museums (Newsome and Silver 1978), and some

suggested that social and educational agendas, while worthy, were not central to museum activity.

These two financial streams—business revenue (money in), and social and educational service (money out)—led to a broader mix of programming and, as a consequence, an altered set of space requirements. As a result, the ratio of permanent gallery space to other spaces often decreased. Food service and shops were created, revamped or enlarged. After-hours fee-based activities were superimposed on spaces formerly used exclusively as galleries. Classrooms and auditoria grew in number and often in size.

During the same period, cities were changing their shape. There was flight from the central cities to suburbia, an increased reliance on cars, and the beginnings of urban sprawl. As one response, city rehabilitation advocates and commercial developers, interested in tourist dollars and the rejuvenation of neglected cities, included museums, historic houses, performing arts centers and other educational attractions in their city-planning mix. Like the Barcroft shopkeepers, the revitalizers were following the money. Studies of tourist spending, often urged by arts organizations, showed that cultural attractions enhance income for local hotels, retail and food service . Government-sponsored cultural revitalization came in two forms: cultural centers such as New York's Lincoln Center, with a surround of related amenities; or a mix of functions within a larger building, like the Centre Pompidou (Beaubourg) in Paris, where galleries, a public library, restaurants and a museum occupy the same building.

Mayors of U.S. cities budgeted for the construction of museums in the heart of their decaying core cities (Detroit, MI; Richmond, VA; and Baltimore, MD for example). These local mayors persisted despite federal policy makers' attempts to reduce funding for the arts and cultural programming. On the international scene, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao comes to mind as a similar example of a museum initiated by local government to leverage community revitalization.

Guided by the social planning insights of people like Jacobs, government initiatives often included dollars allocated exclusively to cultural amenities. Percent for art programs were part of government-funded revitalization schemes. Similarly, vest-pocket parks and green-space setbacks were included in the planning guidelines. This encouraged museums to include such outside spaces, if they were part of larger redevelopment plans.

More recently, the New York City Partnership and Chamber of Commerce Business Partnership considered redevelopment for Lower Manhattan:

> The plan that emerges should enable Lower Manhattan to become a world class, high tech community—a twenty-four hour, mixed use neighborhood. It should be full of high-performance buildings, nodes of housing and retail stores, commercial space for industries such as biotech, enterprise software and international business. Lower Manhattan should be made more attractive than ever, with cultural amenities and, of course, a memorial to those who lost their lives on September 11. This region of New York should become the envy of its global competitors (2001: 15).

EXAMPLES OF OUTDOOR MIXED USE SPACES

The physical placement of museums within their immediate neighborhoods can make them more or less "owned" by the surrounding community. For years, the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston shut its entrance on the more populous neighborhood side (which also had a trolley stop), and opened itself instead to the parking lot—making it clear that those driving from outside the neighborhood were more welcome than those who lived nearby or came by public transport. Now the MFA has reopened the neighborhood door, and there is, I am told, a decidedly positive attitude change in the community about the museum.

But in museums that are not yet naturally "owned" by residents, neighbors sometimes create unexpected activity that can be encouraged or enhanced. The outer courtyard of the Centre Pompidou is always filled with buskers who enhance the activity in the whole surrounding. The new National Museum of Australia's campus includes contoured outdoor performance amphitheatres, used for planned and spontaneous activities external to the museum building *(Photo, page 67)*.

The director of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Arnold Lehman, tells this story. Many dark winter evenings as he was walking to the subway, he noticed that the forecourt leading to the building's entrance was bright with floodlights placed there for security reasons. Capitalizing on the lighting, that space had become a nightly spontaneous community-gathering place for recreation and performance, with different groups using the lighted space for different needs. His current capital campaign to renovate the front of the building recognizes, encourages and augments that function. He hopes that the formalization of the space will not end the activity.

THE INSIDE AS OUTSIDE

Thinking about museums' internal spaces as neighborhoods within themselves opens up additional possibilities for planning. Reading Jacobs' list of required city attributes makes clear that today's museums already include many of the aspects of an effective village: strolling opportunities, frequent corners to turn, demarcations between public and private space, comfortable opportunities for hanging out, and a mix of services provided over an ever-lengthening number of hours and for broader segments of the populace. Museums' internal spaces are like streetscapes and as such are an important part of the public realm.

> The public realm is the connective tissue of our everyday world. . . . The public realm exists mainly outdoors because most buildings belong to private individuals or corporations. Exceptions to this are public institutions such as libraries, museums, zoos, and town halls, which are closed some hours of the day, and airports and train stations, which may be open around the clock. The true public realm then . . . is that portion of our everyday world which belongs to everybody and to which everybody ought to have equal access most of the time (Kunstler 1996).

Accepting their responsibility for being part of the public amenities, many museums are now planning new facilities with spaces explicitly for use by other constituents. Nancy Matthews, curator of education at the Kenosha Public Museum reflected on this trend:

> The concept of the new Kenosha Public Museum (Kenosha, WI) being a community center with flexible spaces that could be used for a variety of meetings, functions, receptions, parties, etc. by outside groups definitely has steered the design of many spaces. . . . Many community groups are already asking about using the space. We will have rentals but we will also have regular outside groups who will use the museum as meeting space as long as their group is within the scope of our mission (Matthews pers. comm.).

THE ARRIVALS HALL AS AN INSIDE STREET

Perhaps more interestingly, one might consider the uses of traditionally non-programmed museum spaces. The entrance hall of museums is the one location where the most concentrated and differentiated activity happens with hours often longer and more varied than the museum itself. Like malls and even new office buildings, these indoor spaces are often multi-storied, lead directly to many different venues (including the shop and the café), and often benefit from natural light. These spaces encourage strolling and resting regardless of the outside climate *(Photo, page 67).*

Entryways can have an overlay of programs both intentional and unexpected. Those with icons in their atria—like the dinosaur at the Field Museum in Chicago or the elephant at Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History— become meeting-place destinations. This is true of I. M. Pei's addition to the Louvre in Paris, which is beautiful, free, handicapped accessible, and a gateway to shops, archaeological excavations, and cafés, as well as to the museum itself.

Some museums have begun to program these spaces intentionally. Jay Heuman of the Joslyn Art Museum wrote (in an e-mail on museum-l to a query I put to the readership) that, in addition to its regular functions and rentals:

> The museum uses the atrium for . . . a monthly concert . . . our Holiday Fair, when our atrium is transformed into a "sidewalk sale" for Christmas shopping . . . Family Fun Days, in conjunction with many exhibitions, events that use up much of our atrium space. . . [And] . . . every day we have "Exploration Station" on the bridge in our atrium—intended to be used by parents with their children as a hands-on educational activity (Heuman pers. comm.).

The new Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History in Detroit was designed with an outsized central social space to deal with the large crowds it drew annually for Martin Luther King Day and other important holidays. The museum discovered that the space was a highly desirable after-hours function space contributing a

great deal of revenue to the museum. But on the occasion of the death of Coleman Young, the long time mayor of Detroit, the city fathers felt that the museum atrium was the appropriate location to host his public lying-in-state. The museum remained open around the clock for a week with people lined up around the block during all hours of the day and night. That unexpected function underscored the museum's status as an institution of contemporary importance, central to the community.

The public's decision to enter the museum building can be based on reasons as diverse as the offerings within it. Not everyone is going to museums to view the exhibitions. It makes sense that the more varied the internal spaces, the more diverse the audience. Fast food restaurants bring in lunchtime workers from nearby businesses. Port Discovery in Baltimore has a free public library embedded within it and Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village has a charter school, just to name a few examples.

Not surprisingly, it is in the museums, without entrance fees where one sees the most street-like mix of people. The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History has day-care centers, galleries, libraries, hands-on children's areas, multiple food venues, and different shops located on different levels. Parents drop off their preschool children, workers meet for lunch, and some come to use the shop or the resource centers. Some of these users change their minds unexpectedly and sample what they have passed; others don't. In each case the mix of activities allows visitors to partake of gallery offerings if they choose and feel welcome even if they don't.

Recently on a Sunday, I witnessed hundreds of people streaming out of The Museo National de Bellas Artes in Santiago, Chile, on its free day. I discovered they were mostly Peruvian immigrants on their day off. They are working in low paying, unskilled and domestic jobs and are not experienced at visiting art museums. They come every Sunday from all over the city to the square in downtown Santiago to see each other and get news from home. During good weather, they promenade down the avenue, eating food they buy from vendors, and taking in the art museum, which is on their route to the playground where their children work off excess energy. How lucky for the museum, I thought, to be in the path of this ritual promenade. The director, however, was not altogether happy with this uninitiated audience. Other art museums, like the Denver Art Museum, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and the Walker Art Center, which are overtly interested in building community, might have been thrilled.

PEOPLE WATCHING

Walking is certainly the transport mode within museums and increasingly museums have focused on building strolling perimeters that include seats and other amenities to aid visitors in people-watching and to encourage conversation between strangers and within families—another ingredient in the creation of the civil street. While once considered extraneous, social interaction within museums is now understood to be

part of the experience. Research into museum visitor behavior has pointed out that, on average, visitors spend fully half their time doing something other than attending to the exhibitions, and about one third of their time interacting with other people (Falk et al. 1985). This finding initially made some museum administrators feel that they were failing in their work since they felt the public should be focusing attention to exhibition content. But Jacobs points out that people-watching aids in the safety, comfort, and familiarity for all. Further, Falk et al. posit that learning is enhanced through social interaction. These observations suggest that perhaps museums should allow for even more people-watching by designing spaces, especially within the galleries, that encourage social interaction. Te Papa, the National Museum of New Zealand, has added a coffee bar within its exhibition thoroughfare to very good effect.

Among other things, people watching can teach the uninitiated visitor about museum behavior. Jacobs indicates streets must have an overlay of acceptable behavior (albeit not excessively restrictive) in order to remain safe. Foucault has pointed out that museum behavior is not intuitive and museum novices fear to go to museums because they worry that they may not behave correctly (Foucault 1970). In situations where passive observation can happen easily, this worry might diminish. The creation of mixed-use space and easy access to it creates an audience of regulars that probably has a broader profile than when museum use is exclusive to traditional museum patrons and so brings with it a secondary benefit of behavior that is acceptable but of a broader range *(Photos, page 68).*

CASUAL SURVEILLANCE

Jacobs is much concerned with casual surveillance as a way to keep shared social spaces safe and behavior within acceptable bounds. Sometimes, the museum visitor aids in that role. In the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, it is common for visitors to remind teenage strangers of appropriate behavior when they are inappropriately rowdy. Similarly, it is usually the visitors who make sure that the handicapped or elderly are moved to the front in order to see better.

Museums' visitor-services staffs also serve in the capacity Jacobs would describe as ". . . *public sidewalk characters (who) are steadily stationed in public places*" (Jacobs 1961: 68). These "regulars" permit a reduction in the number of uniformed guards. And visitor friendly "hangers-out" create an ambiance different from the tension inherent in having uniformed security staff present. So having customer-focused front-of-house personnel creates an ambiance more akin to the civil street.

Visitor services personnel are not the only regulars in the museum; repeat visitors are, as well. In a new facility, staff will notice that the museum is much easier to operate after the first year of operation. They assume it is because they know how to run the building better, and so they do. But they also need to take into account the growing number of visitors who have been there before, and that these regulars have begun to

regulate the flow of traffic. When a stranger needs information, someone who looks like they know what they are doing, becomes a reliable guide, and the number of staff-mediated questions goes down. In effect, the repeat visitors are helping to change the museum into a functioning neighborhood by providing the casual social interchange that civil streets engender.

UNANTICIPATED USE

In another Brooklyn Museum of Art story, Arnold Lehman says that having opened the museum in the evenings, one night a week, the Hasidic Jewish community has declared the museum as a permissible dating venue. At the Cranbrook Institute of Science, the evening hours of the observatory encourage visitation by young adolescents by providing a safe location for unescorted entertainment. And the Arts and Industries Building of the Smithsonian has singles socials organized by Smithsonian Associates, the institution-wide membership organization.

Parents of home-schoolers gravitate toward educational public spaces so that their solitary children can find increased social interaction. Further, these parents need examples of the material they teach but lack in their homes. Without informing the museum, and without programs specifically established for their use, some home-schooled youngsters and their parents regularly come to the museums during the afternoons when attendance normally is low. They make friends with each other, use space organized for drop-in visitors and socialize weekly in the café (Kirsten Ellenbogen pers. comm.). Museums, especially science museums, observing this unexpected new audience, have begun catering overtly to their needs.

The examples used above illustrate the serendipitous uses that occur when a confluence of space, program and social interaction arises. The Hassidim decided to use the museum as a dating program; the home-schoolers came unbidden; the Peruvians were unexpected on a Sunday in Chile. This paper suggests that museums should stay attuned to and then encourage such broader social uses of their spaces as important opportunities to enhance community building within our museums.

In the late 1970s, The Children's Museum in Boston desired to become the home base for an annual Native Powwow. To be a successful host, the museum needed a round, flat dancing space, booths on the perimeter to allow vendors to sell native goods (not controlled by the museum shop) and an area to serve food for dancers and spectators within the exhibition space. The museum agreed, even though, at the time, there was no obvious dance floor, eating was not permitted within the museum, nor was anything allowed to be sold outside the shop's control. Now the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian is building a large museum on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. and having listened to the community and to their museum colleagues, they will create a mix of these spaces and attendant programs as a matter of course.

CHILDREN IN MUSEUMS

Jacobs, and others, speak eloquently about the need for children to have safe but seemingly unstructured and unsupervised space in which to grow up successfully. *"Children cannot acquire social skills unless they circulate in a real community among a variety of honorably occupied adults, not necessarily their parents, and are subject to the teachings and restrains of all such adults"* suggests Kunstler (1996: 22). During any of the annual meetings of the Association of Youth Museums, leaders talk about the entirely too regimented life of children today and the hope that children's museums would aid in bringing back the go-out-and-play exploration opportunity of our past. Taking that responsibility seriously, some children's museums are creating outdoor and indoor unprogrammed discovery spaces, inviting children's exploration with supervising adults seated unobtrusively nearby.

For a long time, most adult museums have found themselves filled with mothers and toddlers during the morning of the workweek and with strollers during the weekend. Where once museum staff felt this to be an inappropriate audience, there are now toddler play spaces in museums such as the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History and The Field Museum. Responding to this unexpected use, the museums now encourage families to sit and let their children unwind and run around.

Parents sometimes drop their unsupervised kids off, and children, especially those of working parents, can be found trying to use museums unattended. Most museums still reject this practice quite adamantly (Childmus list-serve March 2001). Yet others amend their policy to assist in this social need. As a youngster, Michael Spock, the famed former director of The Children's Museum in Boston, used to hang around the Museum of Modern Art in New York so much (he lived in the neighborhood), the museum invented the category of child member for him and then offered it to others. There are many stories of museums discovering the same groups of neighborhood children hanging out in the building and setting about to build programs to serve them, the Brooklyn Children's Museum's Kids Crew being a shining example. And funders, having noticed this need, have become very interested in museums expanding their work with the after-school latchkey crowd thereby formalizing this existent serendipity.

Overnights, programs where youngsters sleep in the museum—often in galleries—would have been unthinkable thirty years ago; though the idea was immortalized as fantasy for youngsters of that era in the beloved children's book, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (Konigsburg 1972). Now museums routinely host groups to learn, play and sleep in the museum.

In all these cases—after school, overnights, babies in strollers, home-schoolers, over-programmed or unsupervised youngsters—spaces are being built or adapted within museums to cater to the unexpected use that members of the community have brought to museums. Overtly or not, museums are accepting their role in the rearing of all our children.

OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

These examples demonstrate that museums are already doing a lot to use space in ways that encourage community building. Yet, by and large, museum leadership has not capitalized upon the interplay between space planning, programming, and the emergence of unplanned social activities. The cost of building and maintaining space discourages planning seemingly unprogrammed areas that do not demonstrate immediate financial returns. Without demonstrated overt usefulness, these spaces inevitably get cut in a value-engineering exercise. Therefore the justification for creating such spaces needs to be given priority when creating an architectural program plan. Yet in this one finds an unexpected ally: the architect who is interested in and fighting for the creation of signature spaces. These are typically based on aesthetics rather than functionality, and are often included in the final design (sometimes over the objection of program planners). We should be alert to opportunities to make such grand statements work in ways that help.

While many museums may voice support for community needs, rarely are programs of community building included in the general operating budgets (with the exception of something vaguely termed outreach, whose function is often ill defined, however well-intentioned). Some successful programs have been covert "guerilla" activities (staff initiatives tolerated by museum leadership without formal acknowledgment), often the result of short-term funding from social-service agencies. When the funding is gone, the programs shrink or cease.

Museums often use the terms meeting ground and forum without having thought through the attendant prerequisites or consequences. And some staffs maintain that programs like outreach or ethnically-specific special events will, by themselves, encourage broader user mix—and then wonder why that is not sustained. The evidence presented here suggests that program offerings alone are not enough.

Some may not want our museums to become informal social hubs like the complex older streets described by Jacobs, or the "third places" like cafés, coffee shops, community centers, beauty parlors, and general stores described by Oldenburg. Yet both of these writers have demonstrated that it is these third places, the informal meeting places where citizens can gather (in addition to the other two paramount places used by individuals—work and home), that help create community.

Taking informal meeting places seriously, museums should consider "gathering" as an activity to be enhanced. The availability of museum public spaces could be offered not only to outside community organizations but also to the individual piano and dance teacher and to hobby clubs meeting informally. More free seating and access to resource centers could be provided outside the admissions barrier. We could set up more systems for latchkey kids, places for elders to play checkers or dominos, and could even set up group lunches among strangers in our midst. In doing so, and depending on our definition of social responsibility, we should not be surprised if we are confronted with and forced to accommodate the undesirables who also use the airports and train stations of our cities.

Jacobs insists that one must provide for ranges of economic choices and consequently a range of rental income within the complex of each street. It may be interesting for museums to consider the mix of price points rather than trying only to maximize income per square foot. Such thinking could lead to, for example, children's museums to house consignment shops of used children's merchandise in addition to selling new things.

Museums could participate in activities like voter registration and blood drives, as some shopping malls and libraries already do, and directly acknowledge their role in social service. And even more critically, museums could enhance their quick responsiveness to contemporary issues so that, for example, the immense spontaneous public mourning of Princess Diana's death would have been naturally accommodated within museums rather than relegated to unrelated outdoor monuments. It is interesting to note that following the September 11, 2001 terrorist bombings in the United States, many museums responded with free admission and special programs for parents to work with their children about the tragedy.

Robert Putman (1995, 2000) writes about the collapse and revival of American community, suggesting that as people join organized groups less and less frequently, they have less community affiliation as a consequence. He also alludes to the power of casual, but nonetheless satisfying, affiliation between strangers—in cafés, bookstores, museums, or online. *"Like pennies dropped in a cookie jar, each of these encounters is a tiny investment in social capital"* (Putnam 2000: 93). Safe interaction among strangers is seen by Putnam as a necessary prerequisite toward building a more harmonious society.

Museums could facilitate interactions between strangers. Talk-back boards and visitor comment books are exhibition strategies that already allow strangers to talk to each other. These could be made more central, more customary and could elevate the stranger as co-leader. In that regard, docents could share leadership of group tours by allowing knowledgeable strangers to interject. Informal areas for public debate could be encouraged more often.

There are many examples worldwide of museums facilitating safe interaction between strangers. The ubiquitous pre-school spaces, first piloted by The Children's Museum (Boston) in the 1970s, were overtly designed to encourage the exchange of parenting information between strangers while watching their children at play. Different community clubs meet on the same night every week at the Cranbrook Institute of Science; the museum sets-up coffee and cookies in a neutral space after the meeting, which allows all the members of the disparate groups to meet each other and socialize. The Walker Art Center set up chess tables within one of their exhibitions and community members came inside to play chess and meet each other. Putnam points out that it is not the organization per se that builds community but the interaction and ensuing occasional civic conversations that build social capital.

Museums' most useful community enhancement might be the elimination of admission charges. Before the 1960s many museums were free. In the 1980s, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts dropped admission charges and increased the space

devoted to its café and fee-based programs. In so doing it built community trust. Director Evan Mauer has demonstrated that an institution of fine arts with an aura of exclusivity can become, at the same time, a treasure widely used by the surrounding neighborhood. By contrast, when the government museums in England instituted admission fees, the demographics of users narrowed and their numbers declined dramatically. Many British museums, having suffered the consequences of instituting charges, have just announced their abolition. If museums are to become institutions that intentionally facilitate community development, then we should consider eliminating our entrance fees and recapturing the lost income from alternate sources.

Oldenburg has postulated that for civility to be enhanced, humans need three kinds of spaces—our homes (intimate private space), our work space (set aside for our vocations with our work mates), and, perhaps no less essentially—informal public space where strangers can mingle on a regular basis. Among public places, institutions like museums that store our collective memories and allow for the broadening of our collective experience are especially precious. The work of Jacobs, Oldenburg, and other planners has great value to the museum profession if our institutions are to be effective public forums and catalysts in the creation of a truly civil society. In Putnam's words, *"To build bridging social capital requires that we transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves. This is why team sports provide good venues for social-capital creation. Equally important and less exploited in this connection are the arts and cultural activities"* (Putnam 2000: 411).

NOTE

Te Marae *(see cover)*, a breathtaking public space at the heart of Te Papa, welcomes everyone. Used for ceremonies, events, and performances that celebrate the Maori culture, Te Marae is also a powerful symbol for Te Papa as a forum for the nation. It is a *Marae* (a place) where all people have a right to stand through a shared *whakapapa* (genealogy) along with the *mana* (spiritual power) of the treasured collections held within Te Papa Tongarewa.

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