

Innovative Cultural Uses of Urban Space

SHARED SPACE



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look for:

- adaptive reuse
- construction zones and vacant lots
- public outdoor space: short- and long-term
- publicly owned facilities
- religious spaces
- shared space

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

RISE WILSON is committed to lifting up the value of creativity in our every day lives. She is the founder of The Laundromat Project, which mounts topical and timely art programming in local laundromats as a way of amplifying the creative power available in neighborhoods like Bed-Stuy, Harlem, and the South Bronx. She was recently appointed as the inaugural Director of Philanthropy for the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation (RRF) in order to help shape the foundation's grant-making priorities and to fulfill its belief that art can change the world. Before joining RRF last fall, Risë served as the Program Director for Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC), a ten year initiative created to strengthen the support structure for artists as a workforce. There, her work centered on the development of equitable, community-driven cultural spaces.

As an artist, Risë works in the genre of printmaking and social sculpture. As an arts manager, her work has spanned strategic planning, fundraising, community outreach, and art education. She has also taught at Parsons, the New School for Design, helping product design students apply their creative talents to the public sphere. Recognized as one of the "World's Best Emerging Social Entrepreneurs" by Echoing Green in 2004, Risë is a 2012 participant in Coro Leadership NY and a 2008 Douglas Redd Fellow in art and community development. She holds a BA from Columbia University and an MA from NYU.



INTRODUCTION

In a city that is driven by real estate, the prospect of sharing the costs of space seems logical and to make good business sense, especially for independent artists and organizations with small annual budgets. As private individuals, we may solve our space needs by answering an ad in Craigslist; but for institutions and creative entrepreneurs, a space share is not so simple. It entails tying up your brand, your reputation, and your operating model with that of outside institutions. And from the perspective of the building owner, it requires a belief in the value of the creative economy, which is directly tied to the capacity of creative professionals to pay their rent.

How, then, is a successful space share created? What does it take to develop cultural facilities that address the needs of the creative workforce (artists, designers, arts organizations, and other creative entities) while also generating meaningful benefits for the communities in which the buildings are located?

This essay is an overview of the factors to consider in creating or occupying a shared art space. Using New York- and Philadelphia-based arts organizations and nonprofit developers as case studies, the following pages explore what is required for making a multitenant cultural facility a success, whether for an occupant or a developer.¹

1 The nuts and bolts of financing a facility are outside the scope of this essay. For more information about the particular financial products and strategies that nonprofit developers have used to generate cultural facilities, see *Artist Space Development: Financing*, by Christopher Walker (Urban Institute, 2007), http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/1001175_asd_financing.pdf. You can also search the National Art Space Database via www.LINCnet.net to explore what kinds of cultural facilities have been created across the country and the various approaches their respective developers took in producing the space.

Benefits and Costs of Sharing Space

For a neighborhood, an art space delivers many benefits. Areas that were once desolate or subjected to disinvestment are often transformed as the addition of an art space generates more foot traffic, better lighting, and improved streetscapes surrounding the building in which it is housed, changes that can bring about a reduction in blight and crime. The development process undergone by art spaces can lead to the preservation of historic buildings; the reuse of derelict properties; and local job creation, which can continue through the activities of the creative entities these facilities support, whether they be professional artist studios, non-profit arts organizations, or for-profit creative enterprises such as design and architecture firms. Cultural facilities and the ecosystem of relationships and real estate patterns they engender are important assets in the process of what has been popularly termed “creative placemaking.”² This phenomenon can lead to increased property values as it catalyzes further development of non-art spaces and generates a complement of activity that attracts a diverse set of relationships with a local geography—from business owner to business patron, from cultural consumer to inspired/invited neighbor—which in turn can span generations, genders, and categories of economic class. This web of relationships and activity can lead to population growth, as well as demographic diversity, especially within low-income communities.³ A multitenant artist facility, in other words, an art space inhabited by multiple occupants, increases the odds of these benefits for the surrounding community.

For individual artists, arts organizations, and other creative entities, a shared space has distinct benefits. This kind of cultural facility (the most familiar example might be a building of artist

studios or an art center that houses several non-profit arts organizations) can create opportunities for program/mission synergies, collaboration and knowledge sharing, cross-pollination of businesses, and cost savings through resource sharing. Further, the affordability of these buildings offers stable locations from which artists and small art businesses can operate, which in turn allows them to give greater attention to their craft.

However, space shares are not without their challenges; inhabiting or developing a multitenant facility entails many considerations:

- *The building is an ecosystem that can be sustained only if its tenants and owner(s) are all in sound fiscal health.*
- *It is important to assess whether there is a strong cultural fit among the community of tenants sharing the space or to establish such a fit.⁴*
- *In this field, the essential elements of planning and predevelopment are underresourced and underpracticed.*

Ingredients for Success

What, then, are the conditions for ensuring that multitenant facilities can indeed serve as solutions for artists and arts organizations needing space while also having a substantive, positive impact on the neighborhoods in which these spaces are located?

² A heavily circulated phrase of late, the term creative placemaking has been applied to various examples of cultural activity. The working definition used by the National Endowment for the Arts is shaped by the work of Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, who in their 2010 white paper on the subject write, “In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities” (Creative Placemaking, white paper, Mayors’ Institute on City Design, 2010).

³ Although demographic diversity can bring an increased tax base and re-investment to the community, it is also an aspect that contributes to the displacing effects of gentrification. This is not an argument for the (re)ghettoization of low-income communities, but a caution that discussions of and approaches to creative placemaking must not lose sight of issues of equity, especially in regard to race and class.

⁴ The author recently received a survey from a group of activists interested in securing space for cultural workers and movement builders. The brief questionnaire not only solicited space needs from potential cohabitants but also shared the fundamental spirit of the project (so that folks could self-select whether this was the right fit for them). In addition, it invited people to share as much information as they were comfortable with about their backgrounds and values so that thought could be given at the outset to the culture of the space itself and what it might mean to bring that particular set of bodies together.

Due Diligence and Rigorous Space Planning

For many individual artists and nonprofit arts organizations, affordable rent is the principle driver in selecting a space. Others may be fueled in their search by the technical demands of their craft. These are reasonable priorities, but there are further considerations that need to be contemplated by potential tenants or those who are debating developing a space independently. Such considerations multiply when the building project will entail space to be shared among several individuals or organizations. An assessment of the following key questions, undertaken early on, can help tenants and developers alike avoid costly mistakes.

What are our space needs according to both our mission *and* our revenue model?

What kinds of amenities do we need to offer our constituents and our staff? What square footage is necessary to accommodate these amenities? What is the ideal location, taking into account our mission, access to public transit, and availability of parking and given our institutional partners and individual supporters? How would our revenue model be affected by our new physical space? Would the new space increase our capacity to generate income or would it be a draining expense?

Is this the right time in my organization's life cycle to pursue a capital project?

Do we have sufficient infrastructure—staff, board, systems, and policies—to pursue a project as complex and long term as creating a facility? Does our base of support have the economic capacity to realize this project with us right now? Would we be supported by sufficient political will or do we need to identify important factors in our local context that would help us make our case?

What is the right scale or scope for our facility project? Should we pursue (or offer) a long-term lease or a lease-to-own agreement? Should we acquire and develop a space? If we

purchase space, do our needs require ground-up construction or is adaptive reuse an option?



Asian Arts Initiative (AAI)
Philadelphia, PA

An example of right timing that was externally driven, rather than originating in an organization itself, can be seen in the displacement of the Asian Arts Initiative (AAI) by the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia. AAI, a community-based arts center in Philadelphia that engages artists and everyday people in creating art that explores the diverse experiences of Asian Americans, was able to make a case for developing its new multitenant building, and for doing so with significant public investment, in light of the injustice incurred when not only the group but also many other arts organizations and nonprofits were evicted when their building was taken over through eminent domain.

Of course, the idea is not to seek out misfortune but, rather, to point out that the impetus for a new facility could be planned or it could be crisis driven, and in either case the success of a facility project will rely on having the fiscal and organizational capacity to respond to external conditions quickly and nimbly.

A string of other micro-topics emerge from answering each of the preceding questions, provoking queries ranging from “What would it take

to right-size my board?” to “How well do our current fiscal systems and reports support a process of strategic decision making?”

Now imagine having to negotiate your answer to each question with twenty other entities, or only two, for that matter. For prospective occupants in a multitenant building still in development, this process can become an important litmus test of whether they are sharing space with a complementary set of partners. Alternately, developers who have successfully navigated these questions, in anticipation of providing space for multiple entities, have a deep, honest understanding of both their purpose and the underlying business model that facilitates this mission. Further, they understand the operating models of their constituents and partners.



Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC)

Greenpoint, Brooklyn, NY

A nonprofit developer, Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC) in the Greenpoint neighborhood of Brooklyn, is well versed in the criteria for developing successful spaces according to the model it has created. GMDC’s mission is to turn inactive industrial spaces into manufacturing centers in urban communities. This clarity is evidenced in how GMDC has been able to evaluate whether one of its facilities would be viable in an environment other than Greenpoint, where its

work originated. The organization understands that the success of its design centers is contingent on a local market for its tenants’ goods, which in this case are custom limited-edition products. This in turn requires an area with enough private wealth to sustain that market and with a steady supply of creative entrepreneurs to produce the goods. For GMDC that has translated into cities with healthy private sectors and large universities offering art and design degrees. GMDC has facilities throughout Brooklyn and in parts of Long Island City, Queens, and soon will have a site in Philadelphia.

Does that mean that creative manufacturers are not viable in rural locations? Not at all. But it does perhaps mean that centers developed and operated by GMDC in such geographies might have difficulty under the organization’s current model. This isn’t a flaw or limitation in its approach but rather testament to the complex decision making that comes with developing real estate. Further, GMDC understands that its value proposition—below-market rents and leases at longer terms than those of the market standard of month-to-month or year-to-year agreements—is of value only if there is sufficient demand for studio space for small creative businesses.

GMDC is quite literally in the business of space development. But what about arts practitioners? What does due diligence look like for small creative businesses that are considering developing shared spaces themselves? When the Asian Arts Initiative began to chart out the possibility of pursuing a permanent home, its board and staff used a quadrant diagram to describe the costs and benefits of renting versus owning and of operating independently versus creating a shared space in which it would be the anchor tenant. This was part of a much larger and longer process in which the executive director was charged with researching any and all resources that could be supportive to the organization should it decide to pursue purchasing a building. These resources ranged from local community development corporations,

to local for-profit developers, to programs like Tides Shared Spaces and other national models.

Assessing Core Values and Core Competencies

GMDC has a strong command of its core purpose and its operating model. Its model is to adapt once fallow industrial buildings for use as long-term studio spaces for independent designers and small creative enterprises. The group functions as a benevolent landlord that makes real estate development choices for the benefit of its tenants. One obvious benefit is the delivery of infrastructure that allows tenants to tailor space to their unique needs, so that tenants can place outlets and lights where they need them or, if one tenant needs a T1 line and another requires only a cell phone for his or her business, both can manage the unique build-out and operations costs of their businesses without one tenant passing them on to the other.

However, the impact of New York City’s modern rezoning codes have put pressure on GMDC’s capacity to develop space at an affordable price. For example, many areas in North Brooklyn that had been zoned for manufacturing were given an MX designation, under which essentially any kind of development is allowed. According to Brian Coleman, the executive director of GMDC, this shift in zoning policy has led to a wave of displacement as many local businesses, which don’t historically own their buildings because rents for manufacturing have been typically low, have become vulnerable to speculation. The change in zoning meant that for-profit developers were free to create buildings that would generate much higher returns than those of plants and factories, a boost for developers’ private wealth that comes at the expense of local manufacturing companies and the higher-wage jobs they create for local residents. As GMDC has negotiated the pressures of this new, seemingly less regulated real estate market, it has seen its acquisition costs triple.

GMDC’s intention of maintaining rents at 10–15 percent below market even as costs skyrocket

reflects the organization’s commitment to investing in the creative economy—but this commitment has limits. While GMDC understands the value of supportive services for small businesses, it also knows that its core competencies and the focus of its mission is space development. When it comes to supplementary services for tenants, such as professional development workshops or training in fiscal management, GMDC would rather make referrals to entities that regard such training as being at the center of their mission. GMDC in turn focuses on the benefits that its buildings can create; among these benefits are local job and income creation (according to a survey conducted in 2010, 91 percent of GMDC’s tenants live in New York City, with 48 percent residing in Brooklyn) and a pathway to the middle class (across sectors ranging from woodworking to fine art, the average annual salary in a GMDC-tenant business is close to forty-two thousand dollars).



Urban Bush Women (UBW) and Alliance of Resident Theatres New York (A.R.T./NewYork)
Fort Greene, Brooklyn, NY

Urban Bush Women (UBW), a touring dance company, arguably could have chosen to focus on its administrative needs when selecting a space for its operations, but since community engagement is a core value of the group, UBW

ultimately shaped its space strategy to be able to engage the public in programs beyond the stage.

UBW didn't begin with this approach. As with many nonprofits, its space story was catch as catch can—colocating in more established dance studios, moving to different boroughs as budget and circumstances dictated. And when the scale of its operations exceeded an informal space share, UBW located to the Alliance of Resident Theatres New York (A.R.T./New York) building in Fort Greene, in Brooklyn. Although affordability was the initial impetus, UBW soon realized that by using the space solely for offices and administration it was missing the opportunity to put its core values into practice. Values like the importance of cocreating stories and the notion that “place” matters were infused into its performances and the way it engaged communities across the country and around the globe. But UBW realized it had not demonstrated who it is as a neighbor in its own home community. As a result, the group created *Being Bushified*, a monthly series of public programs that demonstrate the connection between dance and wellness, education, innovative thinking, and forming communities. By holding the series' workshops, lectures, and films in one of the building's common spaces, UBW has created opportunities for Fort Greene residents and visitors to connect not only with the dance company but also with each other and with the A.R.T./New York building itself; its common spaces are available for use by both tenants and the general public.

Attention to Community and Accountability

Functioning as a good neighbor is at the core of UBW's mission and is consistent with its approach to teaching and sharing dance as a system of movements to build a larger social movement. Being a good neighbor is also good practice for any organization whose name is not on the build-

ing from which it operates. It is in the nature of sharing space that the names of the independent artists and organizations housed in a common facility are not likely to appear on the building's marquee. There is a degree of invisibility inherent in these kinds of locations, which requires that creative businesses with missions or operating models that are dependent on street-level marketing be proactive in engaging with a broad public. Community programs and creating a footprint far beyond the building itself are essential to long-term success. For UBW this has included not only hosting programs in the common areas of the A.R.T./New York building and spaces immediately surrounding the building but also partnering with other organizations in Fort Greene and elsewhere in Central Brooklyn to bring the dance troupe's constituency to other local spaces. Whether it's offering dance classes at Kuumbe or exploring partnerships with Weeksville Heritage Center and the Bedford-Stuyvesant YMCA, UBW recognizes that community engagement has to be more proactive than just waiting for people to arrive at its doorstep. Furthermore, it is more than just artistic programming. Jana LaSorte, UBW's former executive director, became a founding member of the Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance (www.dbartsalliance.org), which led to meeting with then congressional candidate Assemblyman Hakeem Jeffries to talk about working in a shared arts space.

LaSorte also recognized that a building has at least two communities—the external residents of the surrounding neighborhood and the internal collection of tenants. In her tenure as executive director she has taken an active interest in the operations of the A.R.T./New York building and approaching the building's management and administrative staff as key partners. UBW has also benefited from the organic relationships that form from sharing space. Collaborations between the dance company and the Modern-Day Griot Theatre Company, the ActNow Foundation, and the Civilians are all the product of organic conversations that emerged as tenants crossed paths in the hallway.

Sharing space fosters a level of trust that is rooted in familiarity. One of the many benefits of occupying a multitenant facility is that professional and personal networks can form simply from tenants' sharing the same address. But bringing people together does not guarantee cooperation. There is an art to facilitating a collegial, collaborative environment. Both developers and tenants can benefit from application processes that do more than check the financial capacity of a tenant to lease space; there should also be some ground rules to provide prospective tenants with a glimpse into the kind of environment they would be entering and to which they would be contributing. Before the Asian Arts Initiative opened its doors to other

organizations, its leadership gave careful thought to who would be ideal tenants. The group's goal was to provide space for artists and organizations whose mission and focus aligned with its own values, with a preference for tenants who would use art to deeply engage with their surrounding neighborhood of Chinatown North (or with neighborhoods in general). Further maintaining its justice-driven principles, AAI sought to provide affordable space not only to tenants that would engage with the facility's surrounding geography, but also to those that reflected the demographics of that neighborhood, largely a community of color with residents from various ethnic backgrounds including but not limited to Asian American.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The matrix of decisions entailed in pursuing a space project are myriad and complex, whether you plan to function as the developer or as a tenant. For all their benefits, and even with an appropriate level of due diligence, multitenant facilities raise critical concerns. For example, how can tenants achieve clear, street-level visibility in a shared space? How do tenants avoid being subsumed by the brand and storefront visibility of the parent organization/developer? Similarly, how do tenants remedy the absence of autonomy or of full ownership of their work product that can come with using someone else's facility? Itinerant organizations and touring companies (like Urban Bush Women), which are always working in someone else's space, build audiences for those presenters but don't always receive a list of attendees so they can sustain those relationships. This reduces the potential size of their mailing lists, which then affects the number of prospective donors, which then affects long-term sustainability.

And while the various concerns of whether to pursue a space share have to precede, or at least parallel, any consideration of cost, the reality is that while investing in space planning and predevelopment can reduce costly mistakes, most small creative businesses are not operating from the luxury of pause. To be intentional, to make decisions driven by more than today's price tag, requires an existing level of stability that few small creative businesses (be they for profit or nonprofit, institutions or one-person operations) enjoy. Ultimately, the ability of artists, arts organizations, and creative entrepreneurs to maximize the benefits of sharing space (benefits for both their neighbors and the wider area surrounding their operations) rests on a larger policy and funding environment that understands the value of and makes meaningful investment in cultural work.

RESOURCES

Why Create Multi-tenant Nonprofit Centers

<http://www.tides.org/fileadmin/user/ncn/Tides-NCN-Why-Create-MTNCs.pdf>

Measuring Collaboration: The Benefits and Impacts of Nonprofit Centers

http://www.denvergov.org/Portals/691/documents/Measuring_Collaboration_Exec_Summary_tides_1.pdf

An Investment Worth Making: A Report on Developing Shared Spaces for Denver's Nonprofit Community

<http://www.denvergov.org/Portals/691/documents/Investment%20Worth%20Making%20Full%20Report%205.10.pdf>

Set in Stone: Building America's New Generation of Arts Facilities, 1994–2008

<http://culturalpolicy.uchicago.edu/setinstone/lookleap/>

<http://culturalpolicy.uchicago.edu/setinstone/pdf/setinstone.pdf>

Are You Ready for a Cultural Facility Project?

http://artsconsulting.com/pdf_arts_insights/insights_april_2012.pdf

Example of a tenant application that reflects organizational values

<http://www.goggleworks.org/resources/StudioApplication.pdf>



Asian Arts Initiative, a former Warner Brothers screening house, offers individual artist studios and organizational and program space, including room for workshops and meetings, gallery and exhibition areas, and a black-box style theater. photo: Asian Arts Initiative

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