

Concentrating creativity: The planning of formal and informal arts districts

Karen Chapple^{a,b,*}, Shannon Jackson^{c,d,1}, Anne J. Martin^{e,2}

^a City and Regional Planning, UC Berkeley, 228 Wurster Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720-1850, USA

^b Institute for Urban and Regional Development, UC Berkeley, USA

^c Theater Dance and Performance Studies, UC Berkeley, 215 Dwinelle Annex, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA

^d Arts Research Center, UC Berkeley, USA

^e Center for the Study of Social Change, UC Berkeley, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 September 2010

Accepted 13 January 2011

Keywords:

Arts districts
Revitalization
Redevelopment
Informal
Flagship

ABSTRACT

In recent years, cities have increasingly invested resources in creating art districts, from formal districts with public investment in a catalytic development, to informal districts that recognize existing clusters of artists and art organizations. Yet, little is understood about the role of planning processes in the emergence of such districts. In this paper we use archival research and in-depth interviews to document the evolution of two districts in the San Francisco Bay Area. We conclude that in practice, formal and informal strategies may intermingle. The major factor leading to the planning and implementation of formal arts districts is strong vision and leadership, often related to an anchor development. But planning also plays a role in informal districts, where a variety of stakeholders hold their own visions for revitalization. Benefits rarely trickle down to artists from formal districts, while informal districts offer little hope of long-term stability for artists. Better formal tools are needed to protect artists as arts districts emerge.

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

In recent years, cities have increasingly invested resources in creating arts districts, typically a “well-recognized, labeled, mixed-use area of a city in which a high concentration of cultural facilities serves as the anchor or attraction” (Stern & Seifert, 2005). At the same time, informal arts districts are emerging – clusters of arts activity resulting from the colocation of culture producers and consumers and often occupying a variety of multi-functional spaces, including community centers, cafes, churches, libraries, parks, and streets (Stern & Seifert, 1998, 2005).

Public investment and policy play a critical role here: formal arts districts depend on supportive zoning regula-

tions and public financing for new facilities, while informal arts districts are often bolstered by city-funded marketing or small-scale public improvements. Arguably, both can serve as urban revitalization strategies boosting city economic activity; certainly, stakeholders use the idea of revitalization to advance implementation (Brooks & Kushner, 2001; Galligan, 2008; Stern & Seifert, 2005, 2010).

Yet, little is understood about how such districts emerge and what roles different planning processes play. What is the role of planning in formal versus informal districts? This study follows two San Francisco Bay Area neighborhoods that have been defined in various ways as arts districts. We use these cases to argue that planners and other stakeholders interested in revitalization may play a pivotal role in planning both kinds of districts. This then troubles the strict division between the terms formal and informal, planned and “organic.”

Below, we have organized our paper by briefly introducing previous studies, describing the history and emergence of the two arts districts, and examining the very different narratives used to interpret their formation and revitaliza-

* Corresponding author at: Department of City and Regional Planning, UC Berkeley, USA. Tel.: +1 510 642 1868; fax: +1 510 643 9576.

E-mail addresses: chapple@berkeley.edu (K. Chapple), shjacks@berkeley.edu (S. Jackson), anne_martin@berkeley.edu (A.J. Martin).

¹ Tel.: +1 510 642 3895; fax: +1 510 643 9956.

² Tel.: +1 510 642 3256; fax: +1 510 643 9576.

tion generally. We then turn to the terminology of “informal/formal” in arts district planning literature. The conclusion looks at the model of arts districts as revitalization tools.

Previous research on arts districts

Though the term “arts district” was originally associated with bohemian neighborhoods like Montmartre in Paris, more recently it conjures up images of SoHo, where independent artists led a process of neighborhood transformation in the 1970s that ultimately gentrified the neighborhood into a group of high-end art galleries surrounded by luxury residential lofts (Vivant, 2010; Zukin, 1982). But the earliest mention of a *designated* arts district actually stems from the mid-1970s, when Los Angeles introduced a new zoning ordinance to establish a “commercial and artcraft district,” essentially a live-work neighborhood (American Council for the Arts, 1979: 149). A growing literature describes the great variety of arts and cultural districts that are emerging.

Typologies of current arts districts include not only the “artist-centric” or “cultural-production focused” districts chronicled by Zukin, but also “major-arts institution-focused” districts or cultural flagship centered districts advocated by cities for economic development purposes (Galligan, 2008; Grodach, 2010). Jackson, Kabwasa-Green, and Herranz (2006) document formal and informal cultural districts, arguing for the expansion of the cultural district concept to include opportunities for amateur engagement, not merely traditional “high-art” venues. Vivant (2010) likewise expands awareness of the heterogeneity of actors and stakeholders in arts districts in her accounts of alternative or *off* cultural scenes in Paris. Planners increasingly seek out such scenes, in effect legitimizing the work of underground artists.

Planned cultural districts result from policy or active public intervention and thus contrast with “natural” cultural districts (Stern & Seifert, 2005). However, Vivant (2010) complicates the natural/planned dichotomy, showing the economic interdependence of “in” and “off” systems in cultural production systems. She also demonstrates (Vivant, 2009) how the new cultural consensus between planners and artists may co-opt the opposition of the latter to urban regeneration schemes.

The distinction between planned and natural echoes the discussion about informality in planning. Planners often describe urban informality as a Third World (and heroic) phenomenon, contrasting with First World formality (Roy, 2005). The discourse about arts districts reflects this dualism. The term “formal” usually invokes a degree of intentionality, often involving a civic plan for redefining the identity of a neighborhood. The term “informal” invokes a degree of organicism and spontaneity; it usually refers to arts districts that have evolved through practices of local actors who have not been organized by a civic plan. In its positive valuation, “informal” is bottom-up and locally-driven. In its negative valuation, “informal” is unorganized and somewhat naïve.

We build upon previous research by examining two cases in parallel, a formal district with an arts anchor (Berkeley), versus a combined informal/formal district in

Oakland. We use these cases to argue that “informal” arts districts may seem “unintentional” from the perspective of civic planning, but they are often the result of intentional coordination amongst local social actors.

Arts districts have been increasingly framed as an economic development strategy, with cities subsidizing cultural flagships, special events, or artists’ housing in the hopes that arts investment will lead to arts-led revitalization and redevelopment (Grodach, 2010; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Similar to how industrial districts add value, arts districts facilitate networking, generate innovation, and confer legitimacy on artists (Piore & Sabel, 1984; Vivant, 2010). However, arts districts typically differ in scale and organization, with more localized activity and a smaller role for the commercial sector.

New research on the emergence and evolution of arts districts emphasizes process, cross-sector participation, and clear goals as important keys to success (Grodach, 2010; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Grodach (2010) emphasizes that for the arts to be a catalyst for redevelopment, the arts district planning process needs to include many local arts organizations and stakeholders in the arts ecosystem. Stern and Seifert’s (2010) most recent research shows that cultural districts benefit artists by creating an environment for learning, while also benefiting their immediate neighborhoods in terms of increased property values and strengthened social networks. Our cases complicate these accounts of economic and social benefit by showing that stakeholders hold different visions of what constitutes successful revitalization – and that who benefits often remains unclear.

Methodology and background

We selected these cases because they illustrate political processes in two different jurisdictions and exemplify both informal and formal approaches. Oakland’s informal district emerged because of the arrival of both performance and visual artists seeking cheap rent, but was subsequently

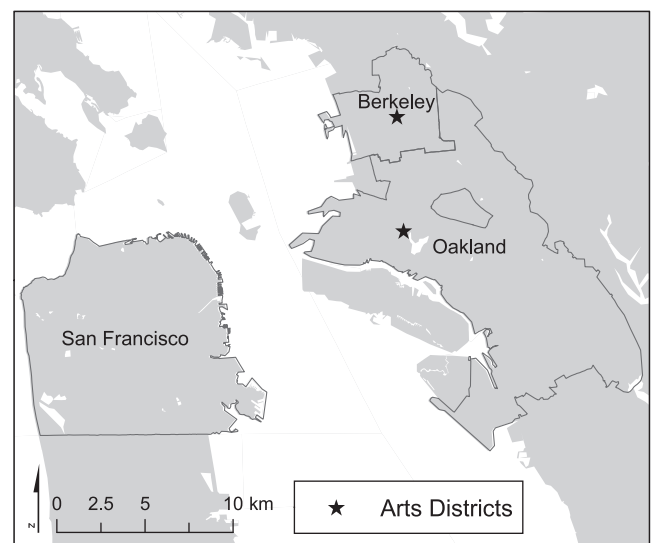


Fig. 1. Location of Arts Districts in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5048445>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5048445>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)