NOTES FROM WORKSHOP #15: Making the ArtsCommons Come Alive: How? For Whom? 

DECEMBER 10, 2014

From the Workshop Announcement

Participants in the previous workshop – 'Arts Commons: Sharing Resources, Linking Disciplines, to Create Art in Public Places' – brainstormed a wide range of responses to the question of what could happen in and on the Rose Kennedy Greenway’s Dewey Square Park when resources are shared and disciplines linked to create art in public places – an “arts commons,” in other words.

Next steps via the Lab: beginning to close in on what’s feasible, what’s desirable, what’s implementable – challenges, opportunities, first steps – with, again, Dewey Park as a potential site. As we’ve moved on, much of the task we articulated for the November Lab still holds for this one:

Given this site, what would a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary – maybe even “rapid-fire” – collaboration look like? What kinds of outcomes might be expected? Where’s the public in all this? What principles that can be adapted to other situations/ environments/practices?...How do we make this happen?

1. Workshop’s action items
   - Context and Goal Setting
   - Program
   - Timeline
   - Core Ideas
   - Cost
   - Infra requirements

2. Review of brainstorming from November 12 Workshop

Group 1:
- Favorite idea: some kind of monument or interactive – permanent or semi-permanent – installation.
- Sonic playground walk, or a big public chalkboard on one side of the building, something that people can interact with in an impromptu manner 24/7.
  - Then have mini residencies around the space.
- Focus on having the public installation be something into which local Boston people can insert their lives, faces, and voices. Not just a passing tourist experience, but something reflective of the city. Have access points to draw people in and make it media- and technology-rich.
Group 2:
- "Boston Commons Too"
  - Lots of ideas, inspired by the notion of the Gum Wall in Seattle: How can we make a public art installation that people can interact with?
  - Large wall structures for each Boston neighborhood.
    - Tall and movable that people can interact with.
    - They would be set up all over like a forest that you can move through.
    - Since they are portable, they can go into the neighborhoods and the neighborhoods can curate their own pieces.
    - Also, because they are movable, they can be anything: backdrops or stages or individual art installations.
- "Saturday Morning Springboards."
  - You can go to the area and learn a craft (or teach one) and it can advertised creatively all week.
- Put a screen up over the mural, have projections and images,
- Great place for all the people who come in from South Station.

Group 3:
- Couple of ideas around food trucks: lunch is a very good time with huge crowds, so have performers on top of food trucks. People are in line, so you have a captured audience. If we could connect the trucks, have large scale or individual performances.
- Make large-scale tapestries: then people could take them into the park and have their lunch there.
- Snowman army: make your own snowman
- Camp night: on the weekends, when basically vacant, have a camp night – reimagine the space with movies, food, etc.
- Seed bombing: Greenway is equipped to nurture that. Seed bomb a plant or area. People can go back and be reminded of that. Learn to become green people.

3. About the site: Dewey Square
- Review of some of the events – the Occupy movement and more recent demonstrations – that have occurred in Dewey Square.
- What would engagement, via the Arts Commons, look like? How do you engage the public?
- Could some of these installations be about social issues? Climate Change? Inequities of Wealth? Resiliency?
- 100,000 people moving through the Square each weekday
- Note: little activity at night or weekend, even some weekdays
- Physical dimensions/considerations:
  - Plaza: 35,000sf
  - Lawn: 10,000sf
  - No noise ordinances
Available infrastructure includes power, water, lights, trash pickup, tents

4. Arts Commons: core concepts
• Mobility, to/from neighborhoods: opportunities that emerge from various corners of the city coming together, inter-community sharing of resources (cf. cross-disciplinary sharing of resources among the artists)
  • Physical structure:
    o Modular, reusable, flexible (in terms of size, shape), moveable
  • Structurally sound
  • Re-usable
  • Support performances as well as installations
    o Movable panels
    o Identified as “scaffold,” (became the “go-to” label!), “armature,” “template,” “skeleton,”
    o Opportunity for (1) branding of the Arts Commons and (2) further branding of potential sponsor/funder
    o Possibly engage No. Bennett Street school in connection with creating the “scaffold”
    o Pop-up shop tactics offered as model for use/re-use of “scaffold”
    o Sebastian Mariscal to summarize and share his ideas re the “scaffold”
  • Programmatic structure:
    o Curated, with original “commoners” serving in that collective role
    o Flexible: works/artists as interactive, able to respond to viewers’ inputs
    o How is this put together and by whom? What are the limits of this structure?
    o Project leader/leaders for each round of performances/installations
    o Food vendors as part of the framework
    o “Theme”: Necessary? Desirable?

5. Summary: action Items fulfilled for Workshop 15, and next steps
• Context: Dewey Square
• Goal: Prospectus/brief to take to potential funders/sponsors
• Program: 5 project teams
• Timeline: 5 days = 5 project teams | June - September
• Core Idea: “the Skeleton” provides the physical heart of the Arts Commons
• Cost = $20,000 (est. out-of-pocket) funding required
• Infrastructure requirements: primarily thru the Greenway Conservancy
• Detail the physical structure and flesh out the programmatic structure