

Arts organizing as urban commoning: A case study of community-based artistic practice, participation, and governance

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ABSTRACT

This article explores dynamics and outcomes of community-based arts organizing in the urban context of Vancouver, Canada. Through a case study of a community-based Vancouver arts collective, it explores the social, spatial, and material resources, as well as the practices, strategies and repertoires that are used by this collective to enact community-based arts initiatives. Ethnographic methodology, including interviews, focus groups, and participant observation methods, were used to explore the practices, strategies, and experiences of the collective. Various theories of commoning, including the works of Ostrom, Fournier, and Federici, are employed to dissect how the ‘commoning’ of social, cultural, spatial, and economic resources is enacted by the collective, becoming a potent strategy to enable collective artistic practice. The ethnography reveals that this habitus of commoning, as it is enacted through community-based arts practice, enables powerful forms of grassroots community governance and self-determination.

1. Introduction

I arrive at the neighbourhood house on a Saturday afternoon in January and pass into the main community gathering space - a room filled with tables in a long U-shaped formation at the center and a small kitchen at the back. Today, the tables are covered in buckets of miscellaneous craft supplies, pencils, and tools. The walls temporarily serve as a gallery for the event, hung with photos of art installations that have taken place throughout the neighbourhood, quotes from appreciated artists and community organizers, and guidelines and inspirations for the day's activities. I've been invited to participate in this community arts workshop by Arthur (all names of groups, individuals, and identifying places are pseudonymized). Arthur is a member and organizer of the Elso and 108th collective and an active member of many of the other arts- and community-oriented initiatives in his community. He spots me entering, and immediately starts introducing me to other participants who — just like me as a participant observer and researcher — are here with their own diverse motivations, curiosities, areas of knowledge, and interests for participating. I meet a retired architect, an organizer of a local woodcraft collective, an urbanist with a long white beard, a retired teacher, a painter who works as a barista at a coffee shop across the street, and many others. As the room fills and folks settle into their spots around the table, Arthur calls attention to the wall of quotes, photos, and guidelines, and begins to discuss the afternoon's purpose, activities, and guiding philosophy. We are gathered for a charets workshop: a community gathering and collective design session where we will collaboratively imagine and make initial plans for arts installations, events, and interventions to take place in public spaces throughout the neighbourhood. I partner with a retired architect and a performance artist, both of whom have worked on initiatives with the collective in the past. The architect discusses her ideas for a group art piece: an archway-like installment for the entrance to a nearby public plaza, referencing the importance of creating collective symbols and demarcations of space for community gathering places. The performance

artist probes the architect about her ideas on these traditions and meanings and discusses how we might meld this project with his ongoing initiatives to facilitate participatory performance art in the plaza. The workshop goes on with such collaborative imaginings and plannings for another hour, until the neighbourhood house gathering space is needed for another community group. We wrap up the workshop, gather the materials and sketches into buckets and folders, and leave the room, gathering on the sidewalk outside to talk, and finally going our separate ways.

I open with this vignette as it presents many components of community-based artistic practice that I seek to explore in this article. It encapsulates the role and use of spatial and other material resources in enabling collective, community-engaged artistic practice. It shows the practices, strategies, and repertoires of participation and collaboration that facilitate collective engagement with and contribution to this collective practice. The vignette also encapsulates the dynamics of membership and participation in the collective's artistic initiatives; the ideologies and constructions of community-engaged art that are created and reproduced through their activities and practices. In my exploration of the collective's work, I am interested in this nexus of resources, repertoires, collaborations, and ideologies of art that inform and enable the collective's community-engaged artistic practice. Through this exploration, I argue that these practices, as they are enacted by the collective and collaborating community members, constitute a potent form of localized community-led governance, specifically enacted through various collective artistic acts.

In the vignette, as participants collectively plan for artistic installations in their neighbourhood, they enact a form of collective decision-making about how space and resources in their community are to be mobilized, distributed, used, and adapted. Throughout this article, I come to understand this collective decision-making as a form of community governance, enacted by the collective's members and collaborators through collective artistic practice and through the tangible and aesthetic alterations to space that they produce. To dissect the dynamics and impacts of this community governance, I engage with the concept of "commoning". Commoning, as it has been conceptualized by Ostrom, Fournier, Federici, and others, describes the form of community-led collaboration and governance that determines and guides how these resources are mobilized, as is the purpose and consequence of the event described in the vignette (Ostrom 1990; Fournier 2013; Federici, 2019). In the context of community-engaged artistic practice, commoning is particularly present in the process of making resources collectively available and accessible. As such, this form of commoning functions to actively contradict and resist the privatization, exclusivity, and barriers to accessing artistic resources, and to facilitate collective determination of the use of resources for artistic activity and intervention (Ostrom 1990). Commoning also describes the collection of repertoires and practices through which collective creation and community governance occur. In the vignette, this can be seen in the use of the neighbourhood house, the use of the charets collaboration model, or the gathering in small groups to bring together diverse artistic backgrounds and ideas. These practices and repertoires themselves constitute important resources in the community arts commons, as actions such as the gathering of people in the neighbourhood house becomes a resource in and of itself that facilitates community governance through artistic practice (Fournier 2013). To understand this dynamic, I draw upon Fournier's essential contribution to commoning theory: that commoning exists in both the social organization *of* the commons and the social organization *for* the commons. In Fournier's conceptualization, the social organization *of* the commons refers to the governance of commons resources, as it is conceptualized by Ostrom, such as the use of space, funds, and materials to enact the event in the vignette above. In contrast, the social organization *for* the commons refers to the activities, repertoires, collaborations, connections, etc. through which this collective

governance happens. In the vignette, this can be seen in the existing and developing relationships between community members, the act of bringing together diverse artistic skills, or the use of the charets model itself to develop and institute artistic planning.

By investigating the collective's community-engaged artistic practice, and its role in their local community, this study contributes to an understanding of the social organization and social construction of artistic practice as a form of community-engaged governance. It does so by analyzing the mobilization of resources, systems of collaboration, and guiding conceptualizations and construction of art that are most relevant in the specific context and practice of community-oriented, grassroots arts. In tandem, it contributes to sociological understanding of the commons and social practices of commoning, by dissecting how community-based arts practice enacts the social organization of the commons. This contributes to a growing area of literature examining the relationship between community-engaged artistic practice and civic engagement and grassroots governance (see Eynaud et al.'s examination of artistic collaboration within the context of civil society organizations [2018]; Zilberstein's examination of grassroots community organizations as forms of resistance to displacement [2019]). Such research has found participatory arts practice to have strong potential for fostering civic engagement, civic identity, community agency and resiliency, community governance, and to provide community groups with tools and collective power to resist urban processes of gentrification, displacement, top-down development, and privatization. This study contributes to this growing body of literature by lending support to studies that find community-oriented artistic activity to be a potent tool in community engagement, the assertion of community agency, and bottom-up governance. Further, it expands upon this research by dissecting the dynamics of resource use and interpersonal and inter-organizational networks and strategies that are mobilized to foster practices of commoning through and for the community-based arts. Ultimately, this study adds to a growing and diversifying body of literature on the functions, impacts, and potential of community-based arts, and on the role and potentials of artistic practice in fostering civic engagement and community governance.

2. Case Study and Methodology

These areas of inquiry are explored through a case study with a local art collective, whose members generously shared their time, skills, insights, and expertise, and welcomed me as a guest to their activities, events, and spaces for the purposes of this study. The 108th and Elso collective is a group of multidisciplinary artists, community organizers, and individuals with other vocations and ways of describing themselves, who collaborate to create place-based community-engaged arts initiatives in their local area. These initiatives range from workshops, such as the one described in the vignette, to open mics, installations, performance interventions, and beyond. They work in collaboration with other artists, community groups, and organizations to bring these initiatives to life, to the street, and to the community they are part of. Their work occurs in a variety of spaces throughout their neighbourhood, which is diversely used for gatherings, events, work sessions, installations, and interventions. These spaces, which are essential to both the production and sharing of their work, include, the collective's "art house" which serves as a residency and creation space; public spaces, such as parks, plazas, sidewalks, community gardens, etc.; and semi-public community spaces such as neighbourhood houses, fieldhouses, and community centers. Of these spaces, the local plaza is a place of particular relevance. A blocked-off section of road that connects the neighbourhood's main commercial street to a residential area, neighbored by two cafés and populated by picnic tables, benches, and planters, this space is heavily used by the collective and wider community for gathering, intervention, and engagement. Reflecting the importance and abundance with

which it was discussed and used by participants in interviews, focus groups, and observed activities, this space is abundantly discussed and considered in this study.

This case study methodology included focus groups, collective mapping activities, observation, and participant observation. Ethics approval for behavioural research with participants was obtained with the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board in 2022 (ID: H22-03122). These were done to investigate the resources, spaces, places, relationships, networks, practices, and strategies employed by members of the arts collective in their collective and community-based artistic practices and initiatives. Participants were gathered by contacting organizers and directors of several local, small-scale arts groups or societies. I invited organizers and directors to reach out to active members of their groups and communities who might be interested in participating in the study. Potential participant groups were identified through local knowledge of arts organizations, through personal connections and networks, and through online profiles of arts organizations or societies. The group that ended up participating and constituting the case study subject was recruited by contacting a member and organizer of the collective who I had met at an art event and had maintained contact with. This organizer then connected me with other members of the collective and supported in coordinating focus groups and inviting me to opportunities for participant observation as discussed below.

Focus groups were conducted over a two-month data collection period in January and February of 2023. Focus groups took place at the collective's "art house," which serves as a studio and residency space for several members of the collective, as well as a site for community arts gatherings, workshops, performances, and other events. The focus groups were made up of different groupings of members of the collective. The intention of this grouping approach was to have different voices and experiences centered and amplified throughout the data and to provide opportunities for the ideas and perspectives of different members to inform, inspire, contrast, and resonate with each other in different ways. Focus groups were selected as a methodology for data collection for their propensity to enable the creation and development of data and analysis amongst participants, a strength which was observed and beneficial in this investigation of collective artistic practice (Morgan 1997). Focus group questions sought to explore characteristics and trends in participants' individual and collective artistic practices, including the resources that are necessary and most heavily and frequently drawn upon in these practices. Focus groups took place in the shared living spaces of the art house at the invitation of participating collective members and residents. Integrated with these discussion-based focus groups were collective mapping activities, which were employed to elicit and collect visual and spatial data on trends in the use of public and private urban space for collective arts activities. They were also employed as a tool to engage visual thinking and expression, and to trigger responses and conversations related to and expanding upon the research questions. A large paper map of the city and markers were available, placed at the center of the discussion circle throughout the focus groups, and participants were asked to mark locations, events, and other spatial information related to their individual and collective artistic practice and the wider artistic community they were part and aware of. Collective mapping activities have the capacity to capture intersecting embodied, material, spatial, geographic, and economic experiences of social and physical space. As such, this method presented a powerful way to explore participant's interaction with and experiences of the social material and spatial dynamics and resources in their neighbourhood and how they pursue the activities central to their collective artistic practice within this context. Collective mapping methodologies were informed and adapted from the *Iconoclasistas Manual* (2016).

In concert with focus groups and collective mapping activities, data was collected through observation of portions of the art house where the collective works, installs, and holds artistic shows and gatherings, and where some participants reside. This

included observation of the nearby local plaza and other outdoor spaces that are used by the arts collective and collaborators for installations, shows, gatherings, interventions, etc. This also included observation of the shared living spaces, some study/studio spaces, shared outdoor spaces, and the public sidewalk space that extends from the art house property and is used for installations. As I learned about the centrality of community-engagement initiatives and art workshops to the community-based artistic practice of the collective, it became evident that it would be valuable to attend these events and gatherings as a participant. Thus, the final method used for this case study was participant observation of several events including a “design charet” workshop at a local neighbourhood house and an installation opening at a local community center. The process for collecting data from these observation and participant observations sessions were informed by Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw’s guidance for writing ethnographic fieldnotes (1995).

Focus group transcripts, field notes from observation and participant observation, and memos on the data collection process were coded using qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Coding was initially inductive, with attention to resources, spaces, practices, relationships, strategies, etc. employed in the collective’s artistic practice, arts initiatives, and relationships with the wider community and partner institutions. After several rounds of inductive coding, findings were organized into thematic categories of resources, relationships, and organizational practices. Throughout the coding process, once initial inductive coding and thematization had been established, deductive coding and thematic coding was applied. This phase of the coding sought to systematically identify connections between the data and the relevant literature and to systematically investigate the data using relevant theoretical frameworks and concepts. This resulted in strong presence and reliance upon the theoretical frameworks of art as collective action, resource mobilization, and the social organization of the commons (Bečević & Dahlstedt 2022).

This combination of qualitative methods sought to draw upon the voices, expertise, skills, and knowledge of members of the collective. It enabled me to learn both from their own descriptions of their perspectives and experiences, as well as directly from their enactment of commoning and community governance through practice, collaboration, and intervention within their own community.

3. Findings

The practices and strategies employed by the collective show that community-based arts practice constitutes a form of social organizing *of* and *for* the commons. That is to say, it makes resources more collectively available and amenable to community-engaged artistic activity, it enables community governance of these resources, and it fosters a system of community organizing through the arts, a system which constitutes a commons in and of itself. This is present in a wide range of activities, practices, and strategies employed by the collective, ranging from the resources drawn upon for artistic practice, to the philosophies of participatory art that inform and guide the organization and execution of different installations and initiatives. I begin by discussing the collective’s location and use of resources to enable their community-based art practice. I find that the use of publicly-accessible and community-oriented resources is an essential practice in the social organization of and for the commons. I then discuss the dynamics through which the use of such publicly accessible and community-oriented resources, in concert with the collective’s philosophies of art and artistic practice, influence and inform the installations, interventions, workshops, etc. they create. Finally, I discuss the dynamics of participation and membership in the collective and their activities.

Mobilization of community-oriented resources

The collective draws upon a wide range of publicly accessible and community-oriented resources to support their place-based, community-engaged

artistic practice. This web of resources includes those that are specifically designed and facilitated to support community engagement initiatives, as well as those that the collective adopts, co-opts, and reshapes for this purpose. This range of resources includes more tangible resources, such as funding, artistic materials, and spaces for creating and installing art. It also includes less tangible resources, like relationships, collaborations, and partnerships with other artists, arts groups, neighbours, local community organizations, municipal governmental actors, and other actors.

To support the material needs of their artistic activities, the collective relies heavily upon Neighbourhood Small Grants (NSG), a funding stream provided by the locally based charitable organization, The Vancouver Foundation (Neighbourhood Small Grant, 2023). The collective relies upon successive NSG's for diverse community arts projects. For instance, the material costs of the workshop described in the vignette — including many of the artistic materials, food and beverage, etc. — were covered largely by NSG funds. Here, this community-oriented grant stream enables access to materials that are essential in the collective planning of future arts installations. It in turn enables the connectivity and collaboration that happens between community members through this planning process, as well as the final artistic productions themselves. Noting the value, centrality, and agility of NSG funding to their collective arts practice, one participant commented,

You know Neighbourhood Small Grants, NSG? [...] They're wonderful. I've done like 10 or 12. [...] Because they're very grassroots, right? So, you kind of work that way. So, we did like one was a mobile library. We built this kind of like for the plaza. Another one was a poetry reading. Another one was the [...] with music... so we got a grant for buying speakers and kind of better-quality mics. So, that was happening as summer like once a month we would have open mic, you know.

Here, community-oriented grant funding not only supports the collective's core arts activities, but also supports agility and diversity in their initiatives, and supports their grassroots, community-based approach. This allows arts initiatives to be responsive and adaptable to the interests and ideas of the collective, as well as to the wider community of artists and community members that engage with these initiatives. As seen in the quote, the collective predominantly allocates funds to activities and installations that aim for public community engagement. They take a role in governance by distributing these funds in such a way that the community can engage in artistic activities in public space. What is relevant to our understanding of commoning through community-based arts is not only that materials are needed for such activities, but that the use of these resources is effectively governed by the interests and objectives of the community by members of the community themselves. This governance is supported by the structure of the grant stream itself, revealing the impact and necessity of public funds for small-scale, community-directed artistic activities, with funding structures that allow for agile, collective, adaptive decision-making in how funds will be used. These financial material resources are commoned not simply because they are transferred to the hands of the collective, but because the collective mobilizes them for projects and installations that the public can engage with. They in turn become parts of the public, collective, space of the neighbourhood. The usage of these funds for such collective public activities and space is determined through collective decision-making processes, and thus exemplifies commoning in action (Harvey 2012).

We can also see the dynamics of commoning in how the collective organizes their activities in relation and collaboration with other community groups. While grants are received by a particular actor or group, the practices and initiatives of the collective act to distribute these resources through artistic creation and installation. Both the resources purchased by the grant, and the impacts and benefits of engaging with community-oriented arts initiatives, is spread, expanded, and multiplied

through this process of collaboration and community engagement. Describing their use of funds from the Vancouver Foundation for the production of a community arts event, one participant commented:

“We did a great big banner. This big [gestures to animate idea of banner] for the music night. We were, we were involved with the Chestnut Park community garden and we were trying to raise money for that. So, we had - it was like it was like an open mic kind of thing.”

Here, funds are not only used for the creation of an arts initiative, but to spread resources (NSG funding, public space, artistic skills, etc.) and to build collective capacity for other community initiatives. Through this use, the NSG funds become part of a much wider, diverse pool of resources that is commoned amongst community groups and local residents. There is a reciprocal process of commoning: commoning of the collective’s artistic activities, public space, and funding avenues, which together are mobilized to raise funds for the community garden, and commoning of the fieldhouse’s spatial resource for the collective’s artistic practices, which is used by the collective for other installations and initiatives. Thus, commoning is a habitus carried and formed within the collective itself, as well as within the network of community actors it is embedded in.

Mobilizing Interpersonal and interorganizational networks

The creation of art, as potently theorized by Howard Becker, is a fundamentally collective process, embedded in social networks of collaboration and the divisions of labour that are necessary in the production of any product. The production, distribution, and presentation, as well as the social construction and valuation of art within particular socio-cultural contexts, is not practiced in isolation, is not assessed and displayed neutrally or objectively, but happens through social systems of collective action and collective meaning-making (1982). This is the major contribution of Becker and other sociologists of the arts: that art is created and distributed by interlinked and interdependent networks of actors - through the division of their labour, specialization, and expertise. This foundational sociological understanding of the arts is both exemplified and expanded upon in the diverse artistic and community engagement work of the collective. Essentially, the collective draws upon a vast network of interpersonal and interorganizational networks to support their community-engaged arts practices. This includes a diverse array of actors and relationships, including connections and collaborations with other artists, groups, community service organizations, and local businesses, as well as larger non-profit and municipal institutions. These relationships and networks, and how they are mobilized for community-engaged arts initiatives, are instrumental in the collective’s social organization of the arts commons. In the opening vignette, we see relationships between different members of the collective, relationships between the collective and the neighbourhood house who invites them to use and adapt the space for their purposes, and relationships between the collective and other community members who join and contribute. These relationships are the fabric that enable the workshop to come together and to produce ideas and plans for future installations. These relationships and networks, and the practice of drawing upon them to create community-based artwork, are an essential example of organizing *for* the commons. They represent the practice and repertoires of organizing to share artistic ideas, to discuss the philosophy and goals of participatory art, to design installations in public space - to collectively govern community resources for the purposes of community-based art.

We can explore the dynamics and importance of these interpersonal and interorganizational collaborations by further dissecting the public plaza that was being imagined and planned for in the vignette. The plaza is an important resource and community gathering space where the collective collaborates with other

community members and groups to create installations, interventions, performances, and other publicly accessible, community-engaged arts initiatives. As such, it is an important spatial commons, mobilized through collective artistic action for diverse purposes that foster community engagement and collaboration. Describing the actors and processes involved in this use of the plaza for community arts initiatives, one participant describes the stewardship of the plaza as a collaboration between:

3 groups. Little mountain neighbourhood house; our collective. [Marks onto map]. and then Coco [local business directly neighbouring the plaza]. So the city has given [permission]. This [indicating the Neighbourhood House on the collective map] is like sort of like a neighbourhood [organization] as semi-private. This [indicating the storefront of a local business on the collective map] is a private, I guess commercial. So, it's kind of an ideal thing. So, when there's meetings with the guy [city planner who coordinates the stewardship of local plazas] - Erwin is the coordinator. And of course, there's the overarching: there's the city, the big thing is Erwin and the city. [...] Not to be kind of, like, arrogant but they love what we're doing. I think Erwin was... they thought ours was quite unique because it was more participatory.

Here, a variety of organizations, actors, municipal policies and systems, and interpersonal and interorganizational networks and relationships, intersect and collaborate to enable the use of the plaza for place-based arts initiatives. These practices and repertoires of collaboration that are created to collectively steward the plaza become essential in the commoning of the plaza. It is a potent example of what Fournier describes as organizing *for* the commons - creating and fostering the relationships, community connections, and repertoires of collaboration that themselves become part of the commons (2013/4). To Fournier, these repertoires and interactions are part of the material and substance that constitutes the commons, as they are the repertoires and practices that people draw upon to be able to collectively organize the commons (Fournier 2013). The intention here is to think of the commons not only as the resources themselves, but as the nexus of resources, practices, and systems through which these resources are held, governed, nurtured, and used by the collective. As such, the commons includes the interpersonal collaborations, discussions, relationships, and community that are involved in the collective organization of common resources. Ultimately, the commons is a set of tangible resources as well as actions, relationships, strategies, practices, and ways of thinking and collaborating (Fournier 2013/4). In the quote above, the network described includes an array of individuals, groups and organizations that make up the social landscape of their local community, and the landscape of governance that informs public engagement with the arts. Social organization *for* the commons is enacted when this network of relationships and governance is drawn upon to plan and facilitate collective artistic engagement with the public space of the plaza. This is coupled with the social organization *of* the spatial commons of the plaza, which I dissect further in the following subsection.

To dissect this case of organizing *of* and *for* the spatial commons, it is relevant to consider the diverse positionalities, strengths, contributions, and resources, as well as the distinct but somewhat overlapping and compatible values, purposes, mandates, and interests, that are brought by each group to carry out community-engaged arts activities in the public space these groups collectively steward. For example, in the case of the interaction with Erwin, coordinator and representative of the municipal government, the collective draws upon the interacting social and institutional resources of a) permits to use public space, b) policies that enable the collective stewardship of the plaza space, and c) support from a designated government employee, and d) the city's stated and enacted interest in supporting community-based, "participatory" initiatives — those that

engage and involve a diversity of citizens and organizations. This nexus of social and institutional resources allows them to use the plaza for community-engaged arts, and to collaborate and share support with other community actors and organizations. In each partnership that the collective draws upon for the collaborative creation of community-oriented arts initiatives, a similar nexus of bureaucratic or institutional factors, the specialized resources and capacities uniquely held by that actor or group, interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships, and value for participatory community involvement coalesce and are mobilized to support community-oriented art initiatives.

Together, these actors that the collective collaborates and interacts with, and the diverse resources, interests, capacities, etc. they each contribute, inform and influence the community-engaged arts initiatives that take place at the public plaza. At the root of this network of actors and collaborators, is an interest in contributing resources, skills, expertise, and connections in ways that foster publicly accessible, community-oriented arts activities. As one participant reflecting on a previous installation project at the plaza remarked, “It’s really wonderful to bring people together, you know, with an art event and to have a little bit of money from the Vancouver Foundation to make it happen.” Here, with the support of community-oriented funding discussed above, the collective’s community-engagement activities fosters the forms of community organizing which themselves constitute the social structure of commoning. As Fournier emphasizes, the value of the commons is not only its provision and distribution of resources, but its potential to foster the strengthening and construction of community bonds and systems of organizing for the commons (2013/4). These connections and collaborations themselves constitute the commons.

As is so often true, these interpersonal and interorganizational relationships and collaborations represent the social organization both *of* and *for* the commons. The strengths, capacities, and resources that are held by the municipal government actors are mobilized to enable community-based artistic practice. This represents the organization *of* the commons in that it converts resources such as permits, governance of public space, and municipal bureaucratic discretionary roles into resources that are accessible to and supportive of community-based art initiatives. Simultaneously, it represents the organization *for* the commons through the creation of relationships, practices, collective mobilization of values, which themselves become the commons - the repertoire of social organization which constitutes a pillar of the commons.

Spatial resources and practices

The use, design, and governance of the plaza ties into another resource that is essential in the creation and growth of community-engaged arts. Spatial resources that are publicly accessible and community-oriented provide essential opportunities for gatherings, workshops, collaborations, installations, interventions, performances, and other community-engaged artistic initiatives. Public spaces, such as parks, plazas, sidewalks, community gardens, etc., as well as semi-public community spaces such as neighbourhood houses, fieldhouses, and community centers, act as essential resources and tools for the practice of community-engaged arts. The collective draws upon a wide variety of such spatial resources as sites for their artistic initiatives in ways that represent the social organization both *of* and *for* the commons.

Through the actions of the collective (their community-engaged design of the plaza, their use of the space for installations and events that involve community members, etc.) the plaza becomes an important component of the commons. That is, it becomes a resource that is organized, mobilized, and governed by and for the artistic initiatives and interests of the local community. It is particularly relevant

that through the practices of the collective, this municipally owned, governed, and controlled street space is functionally turned into a collectively held and managed community asset. While this space is inherently open to the public, regardless of the actions of the collective, the use of the space for community-engaged arts initiatives actively involve community members in the creation, care, aesthetic design, and stewardship of the space— roles that would otherwise be performed by municipal government. In other words, the artistic practices and initiatives of the collective shift the stewardship, agency, governance, and creation of the plaza space from the regulatory and institutional hands of the municipal government, to those of the local community that participates in these initiatives – either as active creators or as engaged audiences. Here we see a powerful example of the social organization of the commons in that the collective and wider community organize and collaborate to imagine, guide, and govern how this spatial resource is used for community-based artistic activity. As David Harvey articulates, “while public spaces and public goods contribute mightily to the quality of the commons, it takes political action on the part of citizens and the people to appropriate them or to make them [commons]” (2012). In the case of the plaza, space that is initially publicly accessible is converted to a commons through the governance of the collective, through their adoption of stewardship responsibility from the municipal governments into their collective hands.

Simultaneously, as the collective practices this governance and establishes these repertoires of collaborating and negotiating with municipal actors, they enact the organization *for* the commons, which is inseparable from their organization *of* the commons. The practice, systems, and strategies of adopting of responsibility, governance, and agency from the domain of the municipal government into their collective, community-led domain, is an important and potent practice within their habitus of organizing *for* the commons.

This social organization of the spatial commons is also observable in the events described in the vignette. In the community arts workshop facilitated by the collective, where community members gathered to collaboratively imagine and plan for future installations at the neighbourhood’s public spaces we see the community-led organization and governance of this spatial resource of the plaza. As the artistic ideas and objectives of the retired architect and the performance artists come together to inform how this spatial resource will be designed and used, these community members enact the social organization of the urban spatial commons. Furthermore, this is not only an organization of the spatial commons, but of the other resources that support this collaborative community-based governance process. Here, the coalescence of community-oriented funding, use of public space for community-based arts, collaboration with other artists and organizations, and mutual support between these actors enables commoning through collective, community-led governance of this space and resources.

Relationships between resources, repertoires, participation, and artwork

These norms and practices of locating, using, valuing, and commoning community resources and networks are not divorced from, but rather deeply tied and mutually informative with the character, forms, and underlying philosophies of the artistic initiatives and creations themselves. The installations, interventions, performances, etc. produced by the collective are informed and influenced by the resources, spaces, places, materials, and social networks that are drawn upon for their creation. This means that the character and form of the artworks is highly influenced and characterized by the vulnerability and exposure that comes with exhibition in public space and by the adaptation and creation of art to engage public interaction. In other words, the use and governance of the commons for the creation of community-based artistic work informs the form and character of the art itself.

This was revealed frequently as members of the collective discussed the philosophies underlying and informing their participatory artistic initiatives. As one participant emphasized, “we’re very much about guerilla, spontaneous thing, because the way our philosophy is kind of like, it’s temporal.” Reiterating this theme and value of temporality, another participant reflected, “we tried with [the initiatives at the] plaza to, [...] we’ve been talking about even that art is not sacred, we can do temporary installations.” In these resonant reflections, the participants reveal that the temporality of the art both emerges from, and supports, the exposure and vulnerability of the art to the influence of public spaces, public resources, public audiences, and public contribution and adaptation. As such, the mobilization of the commons for artistic purposes informs the art that is created and installed. By centering and relying upon the spatial commons for their collective artistic practice, the art is consequentially rendered more exposed, malleable, and temporal.

This character and form of exposure, malleability, and temporality was also influenced and informed by the diversity of styles, approaches, opinions, and intentions of the combined contributions of many actors from many artistic and non-artistic backgrounds. This results from the practices and processes of community-engaged artistic creation and practice – in the collective’s understanding, value, and philosophy of public involvement in the creation of the art. Embedded in and guiding their practice is a push for public participation in the creation of the art. As one participant emphasized, “we just want people to share and evolve. We don’t want to kind of impose you know, like, you got to do this and if it gets wrecked, you know, it’s bad or something.” Here, the creativity, agency, and involvement of community members is valued and prioritized over any permanence, aesthetic, or form that they seek to achieve in their art. This is exemplary of social organization *for* the commons, in that the priority of the social organization is the construction and bolstering of community ties and collaborations, rather than the use of resources for any particular artistic material production. As Fournier emphasizes, much of the function and impact of commoning is its capacity to be reproductive of community bonds. By prioritizing the involvement of community members in the creation, installation, and experience of art, over the artistic product’s permanence, preservation, and exclusivity – and thus adapting artistic creations and practice to facilitate popular involvement – the collective fosters this reproduction of community and organizes *for* the commons through their artistic practice.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The guiding intention of this study has been to explore the dynamics and impacts of resource mobilization and organizational practices in community-based artistic initiatives through a case study of a place-based, community-oriented, grassroots arts collective. Through this investigation of the 108th and Elso collective’s practices and repertoires of mobilizing community-oriented resources, interpersonal and interorganizational networks, and community participation in the creation of place-based arts, I find that community-based arts initiatives can enact powerful forms of commoning - of community organizing *of* and *for* the commons. These findings expand sociological understanding of modes and practices of commoning, as well as sociological understanding of artistic creation as a set of practices, repertoires, and social construction of art that can be deeply tied to community governance.

Through various community-based arts initiatives, the collective and participating community members enact community-led governance of the various material, spatial, and social resources that exist in their community and are amenable to community-engaged artistic practice. This finding of commoning at the grassroots level lends support to related studies that have examined the potentialities and impacts of participatory art as a tool of commoning and community governance. As such, this research is in dialogue with an expansive body of literature that explores

the role of artistic expression and organizing in claiming and asserting civic and community rights and agency, particularly within urban contexts. It is amenable to recent invigorations and mobilizations of the Right to the City discourse, which argues that the design, creation, development, and governance of urban space and its social functions should align and be informed by the needs, desires, and leadership of urban citizens, rather than dominated by market forces in favour of accumulation (Lefebvre 1968; Harvey 2019; Eynaud et al. 2018). The Right to the City has proliferated as a framework and discourse, informing and bolstering activist and academic practices and strategies, to articulate and enact the collective right of urban citizens to use and recreate urban spaces and urban social worlds in alignment with their needs, desires, and capacities. Or, as David Harvey summarizes, “to claim some kind of shaping power over the processes of urbanization, over the ways in which our cities are made and remade, and to do so in a fundamental and radical way” (2012). This study adds the particular context and strengths of place-based grassroots organizing to the array of practices and repertoires of community engagement and governance through which the Right to the City can be claimed and asserted.

The practices of the collective also showed that the use of community-oriented resources and social networks foster an alternative construction of art as that which is accessible, exposed, and malleable to access, interventions, and contribution of the local community. In their community-engaged artistic practice and initiatives, the collective prioritized accessibility, exposure in public space, and involvement of community members in the creation. Through the organization *of* the commons for artistic creation - that is, the reliance on public and community-oriented resources - the collective proposes a social construction of art as that which is temporal, malleable, and exposed to public access and participation. Through the organization *for* the commons through artistic creation - that is the creation of community bonds and collaborations through artistic initiatives - art is constructed as that which is accessible, exposed, and contributed to by the community. By being involved in the creation of community arts initiatives - be it through workshops, events, performances, etc. - individuals with artistic and non-artistic backgrounds and identifications are involved in the social organization of the arts commons, and thus hold position and influence as members of the arts community. From this position, they are involved in the governance of the commons, of the resources, spaces, networks, etc. that are mobilized in the creation and practice of community-based arts.

Acknowledgements

This research project is indebted to the members of the arts collective and wider community who shared their practice, expertise, individual and collective experiences, creativity, participatory projects, and critical analysis with me. They are the experts of all that is written here, and I am deeply grateful for everything they shared in support of this research. This research project would also not have been possible without the supervision and guidance of Dr. Carrie Yodanis and Dr. Ana Vivaldi. I am incredibly grateful for their support and mentorship throughout this research and learning process.

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