Urban Participation & Public Art
A study of Community Projects in Havana, Cuba

Lotta Kvist
Abstract

In this paper it is argued that participation and public art contribute to sustainable community development. This is a study of four Community Projects in Havana made during a two month stay during summer 2009. The study is based on a number of interviews with people involved in the community projects. By using the Cuban culture and participation as a platform for sustainable community development the Community Projects have created a sense of belongingness and identification in each neighbourhood. This in turn has the ability to join the people together in participatory development work. The Community Projects also function as free space since they are one of the few places where Cubans are allowed to make their own initiatives. This has opened up a discussion between the citizens and the authorities which is important for future urban development. The Community Projects also work with public art in a participatory way that has contributed to place identity and public dialogue in Havana.

Key words: sustainable community development, public art, participation, urban, community project, Havana, Cuban culture, public dialogue.

Cover photo: The teacher Lazaro Enrique Velazquez Herrera showing a boy how to play the drums at Rincón de Los Milagros. 2009-08-05. Lotta Kvist
Preface

This thesis was carried out at the Department of Human Geography at Stockholm University and the fieldwork in Havana was financed by Sida’s Minor Field scholarship. I would like to thank my supervisor Thomas Borén for valuable guidance and for believing in my idea all the way from the start. Also I want to thank Johan Silfwerbrand for his support, Alberto Leon for giving me connections in Cuba, the anthropologist Manuel Rivero Glean for sharing his theoretical knowledge about the Community Projects, M. Sc. Olga María Romero Mestras for sending me the book “El desarrollo social y el trabajo comunitario” all the way from Camaguey in Cuba and all people in Havana that has helped me during field work.

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Lotta Kvist
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Introduction

This is a study of four Projectos Comunitarios (Community Projects) in Havana. These types of community projects started in 1988 and were a part of the first step away from plan economy. These centres were one of the first places where people were allowed to make own initiatives since the revolution in 1959. The Community Projects use the Cuban culture as a platform for sustainable community development and they also work with participatory public art project to get in touch with the citizens and start public dialogues. By involving the citizens in Tallers (which is close to what we call workshops) they intend to create unity that can make people work towards physical and social upgrading of the urban environment. By involving people in culture activities they create involvement and networks that will unite people to work for development within the community. Their aim is to fight poverty, inequities and environmental degradation. This way of thinking is called participación popular (citizen participation) where everyone is working for the community and not for one selves.

These centres are sponsored by the Cuban government in the sense that gives the Community Projects permission for their activities and also that it gives them a place to stay. The government doesn’t give them so much money because the force is supposed to come from the people and not from the government. The initiative for every individual Community Project comes from different directions. Sometimes they are initiated by the government and sometimes by private people. The reason why the government is so positive to these centres is that they keep the Cuban culture alive and that this is strengthening the national identity. Permission might not seem like a lot of help but in a society like Cuba permission is not something easy to get since every business down to the smallest shops is run by the government. These Community Projects are a product of idealistic social thought that has been modified through the citizens’ will and these projects are good examples of using participation as a method for urban development.

Community Projects can also be seen as a form of community involvement and citizen participation in urban affairs that seems to fulfil the goals of local urban development in a social sustainable way. They are sparsely covered in the Anglo-Saxon literature.

Aim of study

The aim of this thesis is to describe, analyse and enhance the understanding of community development in urban affairs in general and Community Projects in particular - their form, role in society and the way they work are in focus as is the meaning they have for the citizens. How the Community Projects use public art and culture activities to create engagement and what role this plays in community development is also covered.

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1 Manuel Rivero Glean. August 1, 2009
**Research questions**

How do the Community Projects contribute to sustainable community development? What meaning does the Community Projects have in terms of free space for the Cuban people and for the Cuban society? How are public art and culture activities used as a method for creating involvement and what part does it play in community development?

**Method and discussion of methods**

The study was made during 8 weeks of fieldwork in summer 2009. The trip was sponsored by SIDA´s MFS scholarship.

I went to Havana with an open mind and worked exploratively. The whole study depended on what I came across in accordance with the serendipity concept discussed by Borén. The serendipity concept is about finding one thing when looking for another and that while working in the field you always find new threads to follow.² I travelled to Cuba with the idea in my head that I was looking for art and culture that involved the Cuban citizens. Even though I had studied my subject before my trip I didn’t want to be more specific than that. When research is explorative and the researcher starts a study by following unknown paths it is impossible to decide in advance the specific aim of the study. It would not only be hard to decide the resolution of the research it would also illuminate the discovery of the unforeseen.³

In the early stage of exploratory fieldwork the researcher collects information for the patterns to become visible. This includes testing of ideas and finding out the importance and meaning of different results. The early stage of the research process requires a mind process of confirming and disconfirming ideas by the researcher.⁴ So one of the biggest parts of my work has been the surge of what was creating involvement and engagement for the citizens in Havana. My choice of subject has been a part of a creative process when people that I met have led me towards my goal. A participative observation method requires a long time in field; you need to build up trust to create relations and develop insights.⁵

To get in touch with people in Havana I used the snowball technique where the selection of interviews is based on a process that starts with only a few people. These people in turn refer you to new people and so on. The snowball technique is an effective way to build a reasonable selection in a small size research project. This technique is also effective because the people trust the researcher more when someone else they know has recommended him or her to them. The negative side of this method is that it is a subjective selection.⁶ Except the university and the people I lived with I had one other contact that a friend of mine got to know when she studied in Cuba some years earlier. Through him I met a little group of artists that led to other artists and people that could help me in my project. The people I lived with also

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² Borén, 2005, P 81
³ Denscombe, 2002, P 46
⁴ Patton, 1990, P 178
⁵ Denscombe, 1998, P 178
⁶ Denscombe, 1998, P 24
helped me to get into the Cuban society and way of thinking. I talked to everyone I could and when they gave me their phone number I always called them back if they said they had something interesting to show or tell me. I said that I was looking for art and culture projects that involved the citizens but no one said that I should write about the Community Projects. I think it was because the Community Projects are something too obvious since they are part of Cuban life. They probably thought I knew about it and that I was looking for something more particular. When they said something like; Oh! That is interesting; you should talk to my friend because he is involved in something like this! Often the person they recommended was involved in a Community Project but I did not understand that connection in the beginning since the various Community Projects differ so much in form and style. It was a bit like walking with a blindfold trying to understand the reality by touching it with your hands. In the beginning you are completely lost but after a while you start understanding the whole context. Many times the information I got from people wasn’t relevant for my study but it always gave me some better understanding of Cuban life. If someone said he of she knew an artist I directly tried to meet that person. Even if he or she wasn’t connected to my subject their knowledge about art in Havana could give me a better picture of the Cuban culture and art scene. And in some cases the artist knew someone else that could be helpful for me. After a while I understood what a Community Project was and thought it was a perfect subject for my study. As I wrote before this type of selection is not a representative sample since all the people in my study are connected in one way or another but all together the material gives a comprehensive image of an important part of Cuban urban life from “below” where life is really lived.

I selected four Community Projects;

- Casa Comunitaria el Canal, Taller de Transformación Integral. This is a governmental project but managed by the staff independently.

- Rincón de los Milagros. This is managed by one private person and this is the only project that is not connected with the government.

- Omni-Zona Franca (OZF). It is connected to the government and it is housed in a governmental estate but managed by a collective for artists.

- Casa Comunitaria Marianao, Taller de Transformación Integral. This is a governmental Community Project and this is the only one in my study that has a supervisor that gets a salary from the government.

My selection of Community Projects was more or less dependent on where the people I knew took me. I have used a selection based on chance or convenience which can be questioned as a serious research method. The reason for this is that I didn’t have the time or the resources to do otherwise. The people I lived with took me to the community house in the municipality Marianao where I lived. I passed by Rincón de los Milagros by accident one day and the staff there told me to come by the next day and participate in their music session. I got in contact with OZF because a guy I got to know took me to one of their exhibition at a gallery. When I went to the rap/poetry night that OZF arranged I meet Delysvell Pérez that was working with

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7 Denscombe, 1998, P 24-25
the Community Project in Canal. There are many different kinds of Community Projects in Havana and I feel these four are good representatives since they represent four types of initiative forms. The most common form of Community Project was the Casas Comunitaria, Taller de Transformación Integral like the one in Marianao. I have interviewed people in two other similar Community Projects but I only chose one since they reminded so much of each other. I chose Marianao because it was situated in the same municipality where I lived so I had the strongest connection to this place. The economical status in the four different areas where the Community Projects are situated are more or less the same. My interpretation was that Canal has some more economical and social problems than the others. This assumption is based on that people in other areas told me it was a dangerous neighbourhood but I didn’t notice any difference.

I used a funnel approach by Agar where you start wide and after a while you narrow your focus on what is catching your biggest interest.\textsuperscript{8} According to Borén it is impossible to know in advance what to find when you are doing explorative research since it is about interacting with other people, you can’t know in advance how much you will be able to participate and observe. It is impossible to predict what kind of material you will come across so you need to be flexible in order to change depending on what you find. The theoretical entrances and exits need to be open during field work otherwise the use of going to other countries or places to study new cultures and traditions will be limited.\textsuperscript{9} In the beginning I was talking about art and Cuban society in general with people to get an understanding for how things worked. As time went by the Community Project caught my interest because it is such an important thing in the society in Havana and because it matched with my original idea to study art that included the citizens. This choice I could not have made without studying city life on site in Havana. One other thing that I could not know in advance was how I would be received as a foreign researcher and how open people would be to answer my questions. That turned out to be no problem because everyone thought it was great that I was studying their artscene and was happy to answer all my questions. Before my trip I thought that the Cubans would be scared of speaking critically about the Cuban political system but I felt nothing of that. Nobody said that I should not mention his or her name or skip something they said in my paper. I came to understand that art was seen as a “free subject”, if I would have started asking politicians about political issues I think I would have been received differently. I also believe that one of the reasons that I got such a warm welcome was because I was a foreigner, since the Cubans that I met seemed keen on having international contacts. This might also have affected the results from my interviews but in which way is hard to know.

My study is based on qualitative interviews since it was closer to my aim how people were thinking and reacting in relation to the Community Projects rather than studying frequencies, like how many percent were in favour of Community Projects or how many people thought that the Community Projects contributed to sustainable community development.\textsuperscript{10} Qualitative interviews aim instead to explore other peoples’ perspectives and that was what I

\textsuperscript{8} Agar, 1996, P 184

\textsuperscript{9} Borén, 2005, P 81-82

\textsuperscript{10} Trost, 1997, P 15-16
was interested in. My interview method varied during field work because I could not use the same method in all different kinds of situations. I am speaking Spanish so I did not use an interpreter. I never used a recorder since I felt that would have ruined the friendly interview mood and because it can make people nervous. Parts of the interpretation can also be lost since you miss out on gestures and mimics. Instead I used notes and my memory. In most of my interviews I used a few readymade questions but otherwise I used an unstructured interview form where I let the conversation ran freely. This increases the respondents’ willingness to cooperate and it can increase the chance of interesting and evident information that could otherwise be lost because of the researcher’s preconceptions. Sometimes I told the person it was an interview and I took notes during our conversation. The problem with this method was that the person often got tensed and felt insecure about what to answer. The positive side was that I gave concrete questions and they formulated concrete answers that I wrote down. When I have referred to someone in my paper it is from the formal interviews when the respondents were totally aware that their name would appear in my paper. In most situations I decided not to take notes and just have a normal conversation although I informed them that I was doing a study. My comprehension was that they gave more earnest answers in these more relaxed situations. What they said about other things related to Cuban society also effected the interpretation and it is not only the words that carry the answer; it is also the gestures, the eyes and tone of voice and all of this changes when you put people in a serious interview situation. The problem was then to remember what they said but I never waited more the 24 hours to write it down. These kinds of interviews I have used to get an overall picture so I have not made any references to them. I think that these two kinds of interviews have complemented each other and have given a more genuine picture than if I would have only used one of them. I made 15 formal interviews and around 50 informal interviews. Borén writes that a lot of the information one gain in fieldwork is through the informal interviews you do while spending time in the area. Through them you may gain an understanding of the culture that will help the researcher in the process of handling the material he/she gained during research. “...the most important material one brings home from the field are not the notes, tapes and other ‘evidence’, but an understanding, interpretative capacity or cultural competence, that makes it possible to interpret the material as an insider...”

During my research I was not only an observant I was also a participant. I took drum classes, I participated in their festivals, I socialized with the staff etc. This could be problematic since it could be hard to maintain an independency that is evident for the observation aspect as a researcher. I think this has coloured my interpretation of the Community Projects and I think it might have contributed to a subjectivity since it got a bit personal but I think I could not

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11 Patton, 1990, P 278-279
12 Trost, 1997, P 51
13 Olsson & Sörensen, 2008, P 80
14 Borén, 2005, P 62-64
15 Borén, 2005, P 83
16 Denscombe, 1998, P 182
have done otherwise, I would not have been so close to the core of the Community Projects if I would have been the “cold” observer and people would not have been so open to me as I felt they were. And our knowledge about the social world can never be objective, it’s impossible for a researcher to put him or her outside the world that is studied. Qualitative approach also highlights the importance of coming close to the people being interviewed so that the researcher can get an understanding of their daily life and thoughts. In qualitative research it is important for the researcher and the informant to have an open interaction between them for an inside perspective to be achieved unlike the quantitative studies where a more subjective outside perspective is wanted.

After my field study the work of analyzing the material started at home in Stockholm. I have been comparing what I read about public art before my trip with my results from Havana. I have been looking at similarities and differences and I have tried to analyze why they have occurred. I have also strengthened my knowledge by reading more about my subject and this literature has been more precise since I knew exactly what I was looking for. One book that has been special is the book “El desarrollo social y el trabajo comunitario” (Social development and community work) by Mirtha Yordi Garcia and Maria Teresa Caballero Rivacoba. It was the anthropologist Manuel Rivero Glean that I met in Havana that said that this was a great book for me to read.

**Outline**

In the introduction chapter I am forming the frame of my research with aim of study, research question and method. In the background chapter I tell the history of Community Projects, community development, public art and public art in relation to citizen participation, globally and in Cuba. In the field study chapter I am describing the information that I gained during my research period in Havana. The discussion chapter contains discussion and conclusion regarding Community Projects and public art in Havana. The last reference chapter contains references and a list of pictures.

17 Denscombe, 1998, P 282
18 Patton, 1990, P 46
19 Olsson & Sörensen, 2008, P 14
Urban Participation and Public art

**Sustainable Community Development**

The significance of a Community Project according to Garcia and Caballero is wide and can be described in many different ways. It is a social action coming from the community which is the main target of its own action. Its purpose is not to design new structures and responsibilities for the communities but to organize them pursuant to their existing needs so that they will work in the most sufficient way according to their resources. A Community Projects is a form which isn’t brevetting it from being flexible and adjusted around the area´s individual needs. The main focus of the Community Projects is sustainable community development. A sustainable community development means a development away from poverty, inequities and environmental degradation. This is a concept that is connected to the human rights and forms a new culture, a sustainable culture. A Community Project can be formed in many different ways in Cuba. Neighbours in the communities can form groups or associations that should include the majority in the community. It can also be formed by a private person, an organisation or a state institution. In Cuba the existing political system has a diversity of organizations within the communities and these facilitate the participation and unity of people around common goals. At macro level Community Projects are connected to Cuban national policies because social development in the community must be planned and supported materially according to national development strategies.

The international term community development constituted by the United Nation is describing the populations' joint efforts to improve their economic, social and cultural standards locally and integrate them nationally. In this complicated process there are two essential elements; first the involvement of people themselves in efforts to improve their standard of living and second provision of technical services and other characteristic ways that encourage initiative.

Sustainable community development does not require new structures or new organizations, only the existent adjusted to the required development. What it does require is a participatory project and a close collaboration between national and local governments and the community according to Garcia and Caballero. Its objective is the attainment of living conditions through participation and cooperation of those concerned. It also requires a relationship between the development techniques and social political and economical administration.

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20 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 66-70
21 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 106 & 107
22 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 73
23 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 91
24 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 75 & 76
United Nations is mentioning three kinds of programs for community development;

- An integrative nationwide program that works with coordination of technical services and reforms in the administrative organization which will lead and coordinate the efforts of governmental and nongovernmental organizations to contribute to the development of the community.
- Adaptive national program with a limited number of administrative states reforms but instead focused on technical areas that will encourage the communities to develop self-made help through various provisions.
- Project programs limited geographically and applicable to communities.

In the 1950’s and 1960’s there were attempts to channel technical and scientific knowledge to develop the community actions. In the 50’s Asia and Africa tried to approve the living conditions for the peasants, in 1952 India was the first country to accomplish a National Communal Development Plan; Afghanistan, Pakistan, Thailand, China and Korea followed. In the 1960’s many Latin American countries started programs related to community development: “Cooperation Popular” (peoples cooperation) (Peru), “Propución Popular” (peoples development) (Chile), “Acción Comunal” (municipal action)(Colombia), “Acción Conjunta” (action together) (Guatemala), “Acción Comunitaria” (community action) (Uruguay), “Promoción y Asistencia de Comunidad” (Community development and assistance) (Argentina). These actions acquired such importance that the governments admitted community development as a social technique, useful and affective to achieve certain objectives and social dynamics that incorporate the population as an active element in the overall process of development, to help accelerating economic and social development.

The actions were executed through the so-called culture centres (educational, recreational, culture factors contributing to the welfare of the community), or through other specific projects related to material improvements (road building, housing), organisation of services (educational, recreational and health) and community action (discourses of groups, setting up committees, obtaining technical assistance and staff training).

Back in the 1970’s, the community development in theory and practice was losing significance which coincides with the crisis of developmentalism and the idea of citizen participation intention was very limited in the frames of capitalist systems. Since the late 1980’s no one longer speaks of community development in the planning and implementation of national development. Community development is now tied to local development as a way to raise awareness and motivate people to participate in solving their local problems. To some Latin American countries in the beginning of the twenty first century there has been a rise of power for the democratic governments. In many communities in Venezuela, Bolivia and other countries there has been introduction of education and health programs as two vital

25 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 71
26 Ibid
27 Ibid
28 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 72
sectors to satisfy the basic human needs and that would direct favour the community development.  

**Participation**

To move towards sustainable community development it is evident for the local citizens to empower themselves through citizen participation and take responsibility for their own neighborhoods. In the community development context citizen participation means “the inclusion of a diverse range of stakeholder contributions in an on-going community development process, from identification of problem areas, to the development, implementation and management of strategic planning” (Schafft and Greenwood, 2003, P 29). Citizen participation has long been seen as the most important part in a democratic society. Those working with community development are also one of the strongest spokesmen for citizen participation to reach sustainable goals. Using citizen participation in local development processes can successfully build community capacity to deal with issues and work out problems through self-help processes.

A more cooperative approach like citizen participation will provide benefits like, lobbying power, networking, sharing of skills, providing direction and support to individuals. This together will provide better results than individual efforts. In participatory democracy involved parties work together for achieving common goals. By thoughtfulness and by learning from each other people create solutions greater than through ordinary compromises that are based on individual interests. Collaborating action between local stakeholders will smooth the progress of sustainable local development. Access to public resources and increased citizen participation in decision-making will support change towards a more participatory democracy.

Participation brings together all the energies from the citizens and mobilizes the insights, information, knowledge and experiences which can contribute to solve problems within the community. Citizen participation will also help distributing the resources in an efficient way that is important in low income communities. Citizen participation has the best chance of succeeding when public offices see it as resources. When projects have been based on the

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29 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 72
30 Cuthill, 2002, P 79
31 Browen, 2007, P 66
32 Browen, 2007, P 65
33 Browen, 2007, P 67
34 Cuthill, 2002, P 83
35 Carr, 2001, P 109
36 Cuthill, 2002, P 86
37 Browen, 2007, P 67
local citizens’ needs and expectation they have become more appreciated and successful. When people have been part of the project they will also take more responsibility for it because people are likely to support what they have been a part of creating according to Browen.38

Citizen participation in local development shows that there is dedication among people of the common good and not only of self interest that often is expected. This ethical approach provides a social foundation for working towards sustainable community development. The citizens also need to be able to work together with civil society and public agencies for the common good. Cuthill means that the potential of the individual to take action is often overlooked.39

Knowledge about local level development for a sustainable community is important together with suitable skills for cooperation towards the common good.40 Educating the citizens in empowerment an understanding will develop their rights and responsibilities. Citizens’ responsibility based on their own capacity is seen as evident for local development.41

There is a broad public that doesn’t participate in local development.42 What prevents this is a lack of attachment of the inhabitants to their community. This absence of relationship will also lead to a lack of collective identity. A strong relationship between the citizens and the area is evident for having common goals and working together towards development of the community according to Garcia & Caballero.43 Cuthill means that a lack of support from political systems is also constraining those working in local communities. There must be recognition of the services and benefits that the community work provides and the government needs to support the projects with information, resources and training skills.44 A way to higher the participation rate according to Colvin is to distributed the resources in proportion to the amount of participation for instance to stimulate the involvement. Or the money could be earmarked for participation in different stages of the policy making or for focus groups, technical-assistance committees etc.45

Browen believes that citizen participation is seen as evident for democracy. It can have positive effects on economical and social development. Participation can create new values, attitudes, knowledge and skills among the participants. Citizen participation is complex and has many challenges. For it to work you need to involve all groups in society in strategic planning and decision making. Without full involvement from the community citizens it will

38 Browen, 2007, P 70
39 Cuthill, 2002, P85
40 Cuthill, 2002, P 87
41 Cuthill, 2002, P 80
42 Cuthill, 2002, P 86
43 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 108
44 Cuthill, 2002, P 84
45 Colvin, 2002, P 452
never accomplish sustainable community development according to Browen. Participation is also seen as an effective tool when fighting poverty. UNESCO has proposed a strategy that encouraging participation of the poor in poverty assessments, design and implementation of anti poverty programs. The United Nation Development Program has also pointed out the importance of participation of the stakeholders when fighting poverty. When anti-poverty programs are implemented locally they have a greater chance of succeeding in reaching sustainability, and better use of new knowledge and services.

**Participation in Cuba**

The Cuban local government which functions under the System Poder Popular (OPP) (system of power from the people) is headed by the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) that is officially designed as the organized Marxist – Leninism vanguard of the working class.

In 1960 citizen participation was introduced in an unorganized way but after a big sugar harvest failure in 1970 Cuban politicians understood that the system needed more structure. System Poder Popular (OPP) was formed as a new organ of citizen participation to balance the centralized planning system with the revolution’s social and participative ethics. The National Assembly is the highest level in OPP and it is the only organ that constitutes and legitimates authority. Under it there is provincial OPP and then on the third level there is municipal OPP, in total there are 14 provinces and 169 municipalities. The municipalities are divided into *circunscripciones* were candidates are elected to represent their local area in the municipal council. The election is every 2 and a half year and the vote participation is high, sometimes over 80 % and never under 50 %. The municipal council’s purpose is to work for local needs within national policies and goals.

Citizen participation during the revolution has given the Cuban regime strength until these days. In Cuba citizen participation is a way of life and it takes place in organizations, social clubs and committees. Here the citizens can meet other individuals and groups so they can solve their problems together. There have also been special efforts to strengthen the participation for women. In 1960 Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) was formed to involve women in the revolution for sovereignty, economic development and social justice.

There have been many examples of participative processes; literacy campaigns, vaccination, housing and major works, sugar crops and agricultural demonstrations, political and historical

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46 Browen, 2007, P 76
47 Browen, 2007, P 67
48 Browen, 2007, P 68
49 Greenwood & Lambie, 1999, P 58
50 Greenwood & Lambie, 1999, P 62 - 64
51 Lambie, 1999, P 31
52 Lutjens, 1995, P 102
commemorations and massive support for important decisions of the revolutionary government.

New things have happened that have directly and indirectly influenced the participation; economic crisis, material constraints, the emergence of new social groups, social inequity, dual currency circulation, promotion of tourism as an important part of the economic base, tightening of the blockade from USA to Cuba, etc. From this it derived many decisions taken by the Cuban state that have influenced major changes as far as participation is concerned: reconceptualization of community work, government structures changes and placing an officer in each district with the aim of closer contact with the people. Havana is going through an economic recovery after the crises that came with the end of the Soviet aid in 1990. Through the times ever since the socialist revolution in Cuba in 1959 the politicians have used citizen participation during economic crises.

The process towards decentralization started in 1987 with the creation of *Grupo para Desarrollo Integral de la Capital* (GDIC) (Group for developing the capital), an organization that was supposed to promote new forms of governance that would stimulate the direct participation of the population. *Taller de Transformación Integral* (workshops for the Integral Transformation) that I will call Tallers in this paper started to appear in Havana in 1988 during the so called “correction of mistakes period” initiated by the Third Congress of the Cuban Communist Party. There had been a lot of critique about the Soviet planning methods so the party wanted to motivate social initiatives based upon community participation. The Tallers were one of the successful initiatives by GDIC. In 2003 there were at least 20 Tallers in Havana. Most of them had a staff of professionals in the urban and the social field and they work with sustainable community development through citizen participation in projects related to housing conditions, support for children and adolescents, community relationships and local economies. The majority had programmes to support their senior citizens and to improve the environment. These strategic planning methodologies prove to have contributed to a better investment orientation with more acknowledgements of the local areas. Also in the creation of the strategic plans in Havana civic participation has been used. Tallers have been formed to work out frameworks for the sociocultural transformation of neighbourhoods. According to Steinberg, Havana is a good example of a city that has used citizen participation that has shown good results for the city development and for the citizens of Havana this has meant pride and rise in quality of life.

53 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 88-89
54 Steinberg, 2005, P 73
55 Ramirez, 2005, P 150-151
56 Steinberg, 2005, P 83-89
**Public art**

Public art has a significant role in the urban environment by creating place identity and foster civic pride.\(^{57}\) It is argued that public art has the solution for many physical, environmental and economical problems. Hall and Robertson argue that public art projects have the ability to communicate fundamental values to community development like shared history, identity, needs and aspirations. But not only does it promote senses of community; it also develops networks and interpersonal links and encourages social development and unity. Public art also works against social exclusion by enabling citizens to participate in art projects which develop social networks and also by giving attention to different cultures and traditions and it can be a way to give voice to marginal groups. Many artists use public art for expressing their opinion about the society and it is the public dialog about these expressions in forms of pieces or events that support a vibrant cultural, social and political atmosphere that is fundamental to a meaningful civic discussion according to Hall.\(^{58}\)

One form of art where the discussion is the important part of the art work is discussed by Bourriaud that is the father of the term relational art. He means that it is not the art work in itself that is the important part; it is the discussion that it is creating.\(^{59}\) Relational art is dependent on its environment and audience and the audience is not there as individuals but as a community, if there is no audience there is no art.\(^{60}\) According to Bourriaud one should ask oneself when confronted with an artwork "does this work permit me to enter into dialogue? Could I exist, and how, in the space it defines?"\(^{61}\) Bourriaud has defined relational art within frames of galleries where the relations have happened between restricted “elite” groups. According to Bishop the art presented by Bourriaud fails in discussing political aspects of communication because the relations only happen in this isolated world.\(^{62}\)

Public art has the ability to upgrade depressing urban forms and reduce wear and tear of public space. It can replace a quality that has vanished from a place or that has solemnly been ignored, this is accomplished through events and aspects that work as reminders of local history. Art also attracts companies, investors and visitors to the city which can create work opportunities and stimulate the economy.\(^{63}\) So on the whole public art is generally regarded as having a strong function in city development.

According to Sharp, Pollock and Paddison it is the democratic process through which public art is produced and to what extent it is inclusive that give public art value. And it is the implementation into the urban environment that is critical for inclusion.\(^{64}\) The central part of

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\(^{57}\) Chang, 2008, P 1921

\(^{58}\) Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 7-17

\(^{59}\) Bourriaud, 2002, P 16

\(^{60}\) Bishop, 2004, P 54

\(^{61}\) Bourriaud, 2002, P 109

\(^{62}\) Bishop, 2004, P 67-69

\(^{63}\) Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 11

\(^{64}\) Sharp, Pollock & Paddison, 2005, P 1003-1006
the installation is the idea of participation of the public. Hall argues that co-operation and teamwork increase awareness and respect for others. Participation develops networks between individuals and in the upgrading of their own environment they get a sense of pride and ownership of the community.65

There are also problematic questions related to participation that Kwon brings up when she discusses the problem regarding community based art projects. Kwon talks about problems that come when distinguishing the community and when finding an artist to work with the community people. When targeting a community with the intention to integrate the citizens into the society you might actually marginalize them even more since you tell them that their society has problems. And when you connect them with an artist that is supposed to be able to identify with the community this might make it even worse because the institutions stereotype the artist and the community by just putting them together. Kwon has an example of this where the authorities give an Afro-American artist a mission to work with an art project in a neighbourhood where mostly Afro-Americans live. Her mission was to do an art project related to the Afro-American culture and the reason for giving her the job was not that she was interested in the Afro-American culture only that she was Afro-American.66

Hall further discusses that problems with public art also may arise because there is a lot of people involved in public art projects, people who come with a lot of issues like budgets, multistage competition and selection procedures, health, safety and insurance constrains and much more. The result of this machinery can be unprovocative art that offers neither critical discussion of artistic risk nor challenge; this is an important aspect to come around in the public art process.67

Public art often develops political tendencies especially since it is public and sanctioned by politicians, according to Hamilton.68 Sharp says that through public art local authorities can signal their willingness of change towards a solution of social and environmental problems; the negative side of this is that sometimes the public art works as a commercial cover up that shows a will that really doesn’t exist.69 Hall also argues that this is not good because art should instead encourage contradictory voices and represent the diversity of the people using the space rather than functioning as a cover up for political, social and economical problems in the city.70

65 Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 12
66 Kwon, 2002, P 139-141
67 Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 20
68 Hamilton, Forsyth & De Jongh, 2001, P 286
69 Sharp , Pollock & Paddison, 2005, P 1004
70 Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 19
Kwon also criticizes that the community art can function as a kind of soft social engineering to defuse rather than address community tension and divert rather than attend to the dissatisfaction that many community groups feel.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{71} Kwon, 2002, P 153
A Study of Four Community Projects

This is a qualitative study of four Community Projects in Havana based on interviews with the staffs at the Community Projects and with the participants. The Community Projects are situated in four different municipalities with similar economical statuses and ethnical composition.

**Casa Comunitaria el Canal, Taller de Transformación Integral**

_Casa Comunitaria el Canal, Taller de Transformación Integral_ (Canal Community House, workshops for the Integral Transformation) is a governmental Community Project situated in a colonial building (figure 1) in an area called Canal in the Municipality Cerro in Havana. This is a governmental community project in theory but not in reality as Delysvell Pérez who is working at the community house puts it. They only want the project to achieve a governmental status because then they can run their projects without problems from the police.

![Figure 1. The Community House in Canal.](image)

Canal started in 1996 and Esperanza Cantillo Mestre and her partners have been working since then for sustainable community development in the neighbourhood. This transformative work is rooted in the physical and social diagnosis which is a result of systematic observations, activities and tasks. Canal is working for developing the citizen participation as a tool for

72 Delysvell Pérez (Meple). July 31, 2009
73 Esperanza Cantillo Mestre. August 14, 2009
74 Delysvell Pérez (Meple). July 31, 2009
changing the social and physical conditions in the neighbourhood. Today they get a little support from the government and some from the foreign nongovernmental organisations like Oxfam-Canada, Young Catalan Social Activists, Solidaridad Mariel-Cornellá and Rafael Alberti. Esperanza Mestre that is the director at Canal says that they have Tallers (see page 12) to develop the citizen participation in the Community Project. By involving the citizens in the different activities and festivals they can organise the community to cooperate towards sustainable community development. She says that they are creating a united force within the community that hopefully will solve physical and social problems in the future. She thinks that by involving the residents in other activities Canal can get in touch with them and that it also creates a sense of belonging to the area. Mestre thinks that when the residents feel that they belong to the area they want to help making the area a better place to live. She believes that if everyone contributes with what he or she can they will be able to do a lot of changes. This way of thinking is in line with Hall’s argument that co-operation and teamwork develop networks between individuals that create a sense of belonging to the area and that when the citizens are part of the upgrading processes they strengthen their boundaries to the neighbourhood. Amilean Tresold & Armando Pino that volunteer as music teachers at Canal also think that the activities for the young people keep them away from doing crime. If the kids get other interests like music or art the risks are smaller that they get into trouble.

The Tallers are for everyone and they are for free. They offer drum and guitar lessons for the young people (figure 6-7). Every Friday afternoon they have street activities for the children. The day I was there they played games and did body paint (figures 2-5). It was great to see how the children were pouring in from different directions without any company from parents which showed that they were there because they really wanted to. Pérez organised them all in a circle and the games began. I think this activity every week means a lot to the children in Canal. I saw a lot of children just hanging around in groups in Havana so I believe that it is a good thing that they get activated and at the same time get in touch with grownups in a relaxed and fun way.

75 Information flyer, Taller de Transformación Integral
76 Esperanza Cantillo Mestre. August 14, 2009
77 Hall & Robertson I. P 12
78 Amilean Tresold & Armando Pino. August 13, 2009
79 Delysvell Pérez (Meple). July 31, 2009
Canal also offers classes in art, theatre and sexual education. Now and then they arrange movie nights outside in the streets where they show documentaries, musicals, movies about ecology and cartoons for the children. They can’t afford to have their own equipment so they borrow when they have an opportunity. In the future they want to have more artistic activities and create groups in dance, theatre, singing and sports. Canal also wants to create religious houses and study local history and culture to strengthen the place identity. Most of the inhabitants in Canal are Afro-Cubans so the religious manifestation involves a lot of people in the area. You can see how important this Community Project thinks the art, culture and religion are for the people in the area and that Canal has a strong belief that these things can make a deferens that can lead to a sustainable community development.

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80 Delysvell Pérez (Meple). July 31, 2009
Canal also wants to strengthen the cooperation between the actors in the community to make things more efficient and create connections with international organisations to get more funding. Their economy is a big problem today and their lack of money prevents them from conducting all parts of their projects. Canal wants to study and analyse the problems in the area more closely to come up with better solutions to social and physical problems. And also identify the strengths and the weaknesses in the neighbourhood to work more efficiently. Furthermore Canal wishes to analyse the local economy to create new place for employment and develop the tourism and other projects that could encourage investment in the neighbourhood.81 This way of thinking is also used by Hall and Robertson that believe that art can attract companies, investors and visitors to the area.82 Canal thinks that there is potential in the neighbourhood that can be used in the social progress. They believe that there are a lot of energy and a lot of people that want to get involved and that the strong Afro-American culture also can help to involve the citizens. Their mission is to define a general strategy for sustainable community development; socially, economically, culturally and environmentally. The physical problems in the area that Canal wants to address are the badly attended urban environment and the inadequate housing conditions. The social problems they want to attend to is alcoholism, drugs, crime and unemployment.83 The staff at Canal knows it will be hard and that it will take a long time before they can realise all the featuring plans since they have such a low budget. Especially they want to solve the housing problem in the area but at this point they don’t have the economical resources. One project they were working with when I was there was to get street lightning in an area where it is very dark at night and where people feel insecure. They got money from the government for materials and the electricians are working for free. Mestre thinks that in the future it can be possible for their community to

81 Planeamiento Comunitario El Canal, 1998
82 Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 11
83 Planeamiento Comunitario El Canal, 1998
solve bigger problems if everyone contributes with what he or she can. She says that the physical problems can be solved in the short term but the social problems are something they need to work on in a long-term perspective. Mestre also says that the best way is to start with small projects so they can grow naturally. If someone gets involved he or she bring a friend and so on. If you start too big it is easy that it resolves into nothing in the end.84

The problems related to community based art projects that Kwon brings up is when you target a community by giving it attention by saying that this is a community that needs help.85 This problem doesn’t happen in Canal because no one is pointing at them saying; let’s help this neighbourhood because they have a lot of problems. It is the people in Canal that say; we have problems and we are working on changing our situation. I think this is an important part that the initiative comes from the area and not from above. Because when you help from above it is easy to victimise an area. Because when you help from above it is easy to victimise an area. Now the force comes from Canal and it is the citizens’ responsibility to change their own life situation. Neither there is anyone that has decided that a certain artist should work in a certain way in Canal. According to the anthropologist Manuel Rivero Gleen this is the whole idea with the community project, the force is supposed to come from the people.86
Rincón de los Milagros

*Rincón de los Milagros* (a place for miracles) is a Community Project situated in the municipality Plaza de la Revolución and it is driven with no governmental interference. The project started sixteen years ago by Manuel Semanat. He started to create wooden sculptures in a corner outside his house. In the beginning people thought he was a crazy man but as time went by people got interested and wanted to be a part of his project. Five and a half year ago he got permission to build a permanent housing for the Community Project Rincón de los Milagros in the same block (figure 8). He didn’t get any money for material so he took leftovers from construction sites to create the shelter for Rincón.

Figure 8. Entrance to Rincón de los Milagros.

Semanat’s vision is to maintain the community and the Afro-American culture. In the centre they teach painting, sketching, wood sculpturing, dancing and drum playing and all in the Afro-American spirit. One of the fundamental things with public art according to Hall and Robertson is that it communicates shared history and identity and that this creates networks that can lead to social development. Since many people in this area are Afro-Americans it is important for them to have a permanent place to share and practice their religion and culture. But Rincón de los Milagros is not only for Afro-American people, anyone can come in and feel welcome. I believe this opens up and take away boundaries between the citizens in the neighbourhood and that this creates a feeling of unity. Most people are from the municipal but also from other parts of the city. Semanat is spreading the information about the centre *Municipio Cultura* (culture department at the municipality) and *Asociación Cubana de Artesanos Artistas* (organization that works as a cooperating centre for community projects), but he thinks that the information mostly is spread mouth to mouth. Semanat believes that the centre is important for the community because it creates an interest for their culture and

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87 Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 10
because people meet each other there and make new friends. He also thinks it is good for the young people to come there because it prevents them from making bad things on the street. \footnote{88 \textit{Manuel Semanat. July 14, 2009}}

The Afro-American culture is strong at Rincón de los Milagros and sculptures of the Afro-Cuban goods made by Semanat are standing everywhere (figures 9-10). When someone passes by to take a pike in the doorway the staff at Rincón always tells them to come in. The door is always open both physically and mentally. This means a lot for people in the area that they have a place where they are welcome and this works against social exclusion and alienation.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figures/9&10.png}
\caption{Figures 9 & 10. Wooden sculptures of Santa Barbra and Elegua by Manuel Semanat.}
\end{figure}
Every Sunday night there was music performance at Rincón that had been going on for a year when I was there (figures 11-13). Everyone was invited to participate as performers or audience. There were professional musicians, amateurs musicians, old people, young people and children and everyone was welcome to participate. In my interviews the last Sunday I was there it came through how important they thought this place was. Rafael Portela that is participating as a singer tells me that he loves these Sunday events. He feels everyone is like brothers at Rincón and that it is wonderful to be a part of such a big family, he thinks Rincón gives force to the whole neighbourhood. Portela also told me their Sunday event had been covered in television the day before and that he thought this gave attention to the whole area. Olando Orrotia that also sings at these events told me that he thinks this project is healthy for the culture in the neighbourhood, everyone is participating and everyone knows about it in the area. Luslivia Medero Rodriguez is a mother to a girl who is participating as a singer and she was there to listen to her daughter and she thought it was nice and relaxing to go there. Rodriguez thought it was a beautiful and healthy thing for the area and that it is a place you want to go to and that the project is growing and that it is getting better and better.

89 Rafael Portela. August 16, 2009
90 Olando Orrotia. August 16, 2009
91 Luslivia Medero Rodriguez. August 16, 2009
Eusenu Eusebio Coledo that is playing the drums at these events thinks this reunites family and friends because at Rincón you can express different emotions like love, faith, hope and solidarity between people. He said that everyone has his problems but when they come to Rincón de los Milagros they can forget, relax and disconnect. Lily Diaz who is a singer said that Rincón is an important place for the neighbourhood and that the people come there to meet their friends and get to know new faces. They can sing and disconnect, it is a healthy environment, she says. Diaz also has the saint Santa Barbara that protects her at Rincón which for her makes it a special place. Fernando Perez Hernandez, that is an improviser, describes Rincón as an open place where you can grow as a person. He says this place inspire the people that are coming, it gives them a feeling of harmony, happiness, love, piece and spirituality. He also says that the people at Rincón respect the people that are coming.
There was also a feast one Saturday when I was there when they had an Afro-American celebration (figures 14-17). *Caldo* (kind of soup made over open fire) was served for everyone and it was for free. First the Rincón Children Drum Class performed and after them a man read poems and in the end there was a traditional Afro-American dance performance. People were sitting around watching, listening and talking. The children were running around and a group of them were playing domino at a table. The feast was clearly an Afro-African tradition and the whole thing ended with that they sacrificed a goat for the gods.
This Community Project revolves around Semanat (figure 18) even though a lot of other people are participating in this. He lives across the street from the Community Project in a big grey “communist” apartment building. Two of the sides of the house have no windows and there Semanat has created two big reliefs to decorate the façade (figures 19 & 22). Outside the house he has built his stone sculptures along the street (figures 20-21) so he really has put his personality on the block. It felt like his art had flooded out of the Community Project out on the street, across the street and up on his own apartment building. This Afro-American touch corresponds to the governmental will to strengthen the Cuban culture identity which has become clear in the neighbourhood through Semanat’s art. Semanat doesn’t have a plan for sustainable community development in the area but he clearly has a vision that his project will make a difference for the people. Public art is important for the urban environment because it creates identity and civic pride that can be a solution for many urban problems. Semanat’s public art communicates values like history and identity to the community that are fundamental for a sustainable community development. Semanat’s art communicates the Afro-American tradition to the neighbourhood and makes people proud of their area and their background. And if they are not Afro-American they also feel at home but it is because they know they are always welcome at Rincón. Since his artworks has such a strong connection to the area the residents helps protect it, if someone from outside would come and try to destroy it they would definitely interfere. I never saw any damage on his art pieces. To have something in the neighbourhood to be proud of and that is worth protecting also strengthens the sense of belonging and identification to the area. Like Canal Rincón also comes around the problem that Kwon talks about when you targeting a community by selecting an artist that is supposed to fit for working with the community. Semanat is an artist living in the area and has by himself decided what he likes to do there. The project has also grown in face with the people’s interest; there would be no Rincón if the people in the area weren’t interested. I believe that the people in the neighbourhood also feel as a part of Rincón because they have contributed to its existence. I think that Rincón is an important place for the neighbourhood and that it gives a feeling of identity and belongingness which is fundamental if you want people to be engaged in its maintenance and development of the community.

95 Chang, 2008, P 1921. Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 7-10
96 Kwon, 2002, P 139-141
Figures 19-22. Work of Semanat across the street from Rincón de los Milagros.
Omni-Zona Franca

Omni - Zona Franca (OZF) is a Community Project located in the community Alamar in the municipality Guanabacoa (figures 23-24). The people behind OZF see themselves as an organisation that can do anything as long as it is creative. You can also describe OZF as an independent community project that works like an artistic collective. It is a horizontal organisation without hierarchy. The only thing that is governmental is that their centre that is called Gallery Fayad Jamis is housing in the Cultural House in Alamar. OZF works as a traditional community project with Tallers (see page 12) but in the same time the people behind it work as a cooperative organisation for professional artists that help each other to perform their projects.

OZF works with all kinds of art and a lot with projects that involve people around both in Tallers and in their performance. They have classes in painting and music; they arrange music and poetry festivals, events, exhibitions etc.

OZF gets its inspiration from the streets; cries, music and voices that surround it and “that means to make use of the most arbitrary and seemingly inspired signs that contaminate our

97 OMNI Presentation(eng)
98 Luis Eligio. July 21, 2009
99 Ibid
civic existence, and transform them without altering their original nature.” 100 “OZF defines itself in the terms such as situationism, aesthetics-practice and conduct-art”. 101

OZF wants to be located in Alamar because the artistic collective thinks that new artistic rhythms and forms are welcome there. The group feels that Alamar needs to be inventive and new thinking because the area lacks a previous history that validates its existence and that the art therefore started with a lot of freshness and youth.

The social action groups have flourished in Alamar and there have been ecological art, graffiti, rock and hip hop. Poets like Ángel Escobar and Mario Benedetti lived and wrote parts of their work in Alamar and they have influenced a whole new generation of young poets. There have also been other artists like Belkis Ayón that has lived and created in this area. It was many Latin American exiles in the 1970s and 1980s with radical socialist ideas that moved to Alamar. Today there live around one hundred thousand inhabitants in the area. The area has poor structures but OZF thinks that it is an incredible place to create in because of its spirituality and creativity. 102

OZF is two different organisations that have merged together. First there was the artistic group Omni that started with making wooden sculptures. Then there was Zona Franca (that means free zone) that was started by the poet Juan Carlos who started as curator at the Galería Fayad Jamis where OMNI was located. Together with Omni they created a union between the fine arts and poetry that would flow in Galería Fayad Jamis. The idea was to work for the community and with time they started with painting, photography, installations and performances. They used discourses in their performances that others thought were in the marginal and expressed themselves through them. 103

The performance is for OZF an attitude that leads to creative and artistic manifestations and through these manifestations the people involved combine all the creative possibilities. In the performances they use speech, poetry, writing in a visual appearance, dance, drama, music, song etc, all artistic expressions that goes on in the urban environment but also in theatres and galleries. The performance is like life and through the performance they adopted a civic intervention in public space. 104

One of the first artistic actions came from defending the independence of Gallery Fayad Jamis and its relations to the Culture House where it is located. The artists did not want to be subordinated to the Culture House in Alamar, they wanted to do as they liked. The problem was that the space they were occupying is a part of the municipality and that is something they can’t get away from. But there are positive aspects because in the Culture House people and the culture authorities meet. So by staying in the Culture House they have direct contact

100 OMNI Presentation(eng)
101 Ibid
102 Empujar los límites, entrevista a Omni – Zona Franca, Con Censo desde Cuba, Yoani Sánchez
103 Ibid
104 Ibid
with the authorities and the people. According to Hamilton it’s possible that public art can be politically affected when it is sanctioned by politicians. However I didn’t get the feeling from OMZ that they would listen to any authorities. I felt more the contrary that pressure made them kick around even more.

Gallery Fayad Jamis is a place for meeting and tolerance where you can use any expression for spirituality. At the same place they unite different movements like Catholics, Buddhists, Jehovah’s witnesses and Rosicrucians. This place of freedom is for everyone. OZF thinks that the best thing with Gallery Fayad Jamis is that it is a neutral space, its object is not capitalism or socialism, only spiritualism. It is not over or under anyone, nor for or against, only for poetry, freedom and spirituality. The artists work for the community interest, united traditions, united purposes, love and hope.

OZF is working a lot with political actions. One of the first actions OZF made was in 1997 when the whole city and especially Alamar was full of garbage. It had piled up week after week without anyone picking it up. There were flies and rats were people were passing by. To opening up the eyes on the authorities they buried themselves in the trash. People gathered up when they saw an arm or a leg sticking out of the rubbish so the police and other authorities came quickly but without a garbage truck to actually solve the problem. They ended up in custody for six hours but were thereafter released. The police did not understand their actions in the beginning so they were always put in custody. Although it never ended in serious consequences and they always got released in the end. OZF thinks it has been worth the trouble because the people involved have pushed the border for what is being permitted. They think that opening up a dialog between the authorities and the people will make the Cuban society more accepting and that their actions will lead to more free space. This is in agreement to Hall and Robertson who means that the most important thing public art should do is to create a meaningful civic discussion.

OZF feels that the problems in Cuba are widely discussed abroad but rarely inside the country. Cuban media have always been willing to pleas the authorities instead of discussing the real problems regarding the Cuban society. OZF thinks it is the Cuban system that is to blame and that the censure and war attitude is one of its foundations. Neither do the Cuban intellectuals talk about the real problems in the country so OZF feels they need to. I went to their exhibition they had in a galleria (figures 25-26). It was supposed to demonstrate a Cuban house. They showed boiling pots which were given by the government to the people for free so in every Cuban home you can find this kind of pot. The message was; it is boiling but no one is saying anything. They had also made an altar with food and a television on top.

105 Empujar los límites, entrevista a Omni – Zona Franca, Con Censo desde Cuba, Yoani Sánchez
106 Hamilton, Forsyth & De Iongh, 2001, P 286
107 Empujar los límites, entrevista a Omni – Zona Franca, Con Censo desde Cuba, Yoani Sánchez
108 Ibid
109 Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 17
The television for Cubans is a window to what they can’t have, it becomes such a contrast to their lives so it becomes like an unreachable god, which is why it was placed on top of the altar. The food was there because in Cuba there is always a constant search for food on the white and the black market so it is a central part of the citizens lives. Their art is critical to the Cuban society but they say they are not afraid of putting out their opinion anymore because nowadays it is freer and if it is art you can pretty much say as much as you want. Earlier they made a performance where they put out chairs at the bus stops as a protest that there was no place to sit, some weeks later the government made permanent sitting places. So the government actually took it as constructive criticism.111

Recently OZF did an action where they walked backwards from Capitolio to Coopelia in Havana. It was a proposal for an alternative event to share life experience, organized by the group Gigantéría (gigantic). 15 people walked in a single line on the street 23 on the yellow line that separates the two lanes and in the way some people joined them. Close to Havana Libre a policeman stopped them and when they explained to him that it was an artistic action he said; “Ah! I see! Then I will inform all the ones that are calling me and saying it is a contra revolutionary march”. And he let them continue.112

The hip-hop plays a big part in OZF because the people involved connect it with their poetry. Hip-hop came to Cuba first in English where it was a copy from abroad but then it melted together with the traditional Cuban music and the Cuban way of thinking. The hip-hop has started a civil discussion, social criticism, questioning of politics that has affected the cultural authorities and it has opened the way for Cuban rap and forced the institutions to accept the alternative. In the last rap festival that was organized by Grupo Uno (group one), for example, the police did not see the rappers as artists, more like criminals. The police was constantly asking for identity card and harassed them in general. Réne, which is part of the team that is promoting the festival, talked to the police and explained. After this the mood was more relaxed and it could continue with less problems. OZF says that many thinks of them as a

111 Luis Eligio. July 21, 2009

112 Empujar los límites, entrevista a Omni – Zona Franca, Con Censo desde Cuba, Yoani Sánches
resistance group, they think it is a component in their art but not the fundamental, the fundamental is opening up spaces of understanding.\footnote{Empujar los límites, entrevista a Omni – Zona Franca, Con Censo desde Cuba, Yoani Sánches}

I went to a rap/poetry night one Friday night that was arranged by OZF (figures 27-30). First they had performance where they sang their poetry in rap form with text that was about life and general but their text also contained a lot of social criticism. After the performance they had a Piñata (it is a box made of papier maché that you hit and when it breaks all the candy falls out). There were people in all ages; children, teenagers, adults and elders. The rap/poetry night was arranged in a courtyard outside the gallery. It was open for everyone but before the whole thing started they closed the doors so it can have been called controlled public space. A lot of the festivals that OZF arrange are like this, everyone is invited but most people coming have some sort of invitation. This can have something to do with security or their permissions; they probably don’t want any trouble but I got the feeling that they wanted everybody to feel welcome.

Figures 27 & 28. Pap/Poetry night.
Galería Fayad Jamis is a place where members of OZF and people from outside meditate daily and now OZF will also do it in public and in the rest of Cuba. Everyone of them has their method to meditate. It is a place for a spiritual dialog, Cuba is wide and diverse and that reflects in the spirituality. They want this kind of space to grow so wherever they go they plant the same love. Recently they had a spiritually mass that was dedicated to poetry. The group wants to connect the spirituality and the poetry in a traditional Cuban mass with different medias. Every year they make a procession to El Rincón (a church) to pray for the health of poetry and they are dedicating the force to the people. For them the poetry is the foundation of their creation, it is their way in life, they are poets. OZF has been arranging the poetry festival “Poesia sin fin” (Poetry without an end) the last nine years during the whole month of December (figure 30). In 2007 it was called “Poesia sin fin: La Sagrada Familia” (poetry without an end: the holy Cuban family) because during this whole time they finally ended up at the fundamental centre of the society: La Familia, La Gran Familia Cubana (the family, the great Cuban family) that they want to nurture and enlighten with their poetry.114

114 Empujar los límites, entrevista a Omni – Zona Franca, Con Censo desde Cuba, Yoani Sánches, and Luis Eligio. July 21, 2009
One of the main things OZF does is creating a discussion about the society with the people and the authorities. OZF is a big organisation with a lot of people involved and the members of OZF are also tied to the authorities since they are housing in the Culture House in Alamar. Hall and Robertson argue that there is a risk being tied to the authorities and that there are risks of being a big organisation since it can lead to unprovocative art with no valuable discussion.\textsuperscript{115} OZF isn’t that of complicated machinery because the participants have no salaries or something of that sort. They stay in their house for free, anyone who likes to participate can and they arrange festivals to raise money. This kind of horizontal organisation with no hierarchy is less bureaucratic which leads to a more freely creativity. They also seem to be aware of the tie to the authorities and are actively fighting against it. That they would be a political tool seems hardly likely. The community art isn’t function as soft social engineering instead of addressing the social problem since OZF’s main purpose is bringing up social problems. OZF wants to open up the dialogue with the public and the authorities because its members think it will make a big difference in the Cuban society. The members of OZF have seen that when they have explained their work for the authorities the authorities have gotten less hostile. Working avant garde these days in the western world doesn’t seem that impressive but in a country like Cuba OZF has really been pushing the limits.

\textsuperscript{115} Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 20
Casa Comunitaria Marianao, Taller de Transformación Integral

Casa Comunitaria Marianao, Taller de Transformación Integral (Community House in Marianao, workshops for the Integral Transformation) is located in the municipality Marianao and was initiated by Poder Popular in 1988. It is the first community project in the municipality and the fourth one in the country. This is a governmental organisation run with money from Poder Popular. This type of Community Projects you can find all over Havana and Cuba. They remind of culture centres that are much more bureaucratic than the other Community Projects in my study. The director gets paid but the rest works as volunteers. Poder Popular is marketing the centres but the information is spread mostly in the municipal through a billboard and from mouth to mouth. The organization also gets help with the marketing by Lindres Informacónes and CDR, Comité de Defencia de la Revolución (the comity to defend the revolution).

Lilia Solís Valdés who is the director at this community house told me that they teach the children local history and how to take care of the local environment because it creates a sense of belonging and pride of the neighbourhood and she thinks that this pride will lead to that the children will take care of the area now and in the future. This is one of the fundamental pillars to care for the environment as a lead of also thinking of featuring development of the community. For retired people they have handicraft classes. They make fairs where they sell what they make during class and for the money they buy more material (figures 32-24). Valdés says that the centre is full during day and night.¹¹⁶

Nancy Talarez has worked as a teacher in flower art for retired people for one year at the community centre. Normally she is a teacher at an art school but she teaches one class every week at the centre for free. All the teachers work for free because it is one of the meanings of the project; you are working for the community, not for yourself. Talarez says that she is doing it for the community and for the old retired. She says that the centre makes magic with the community and that a lot of old people just sit in the house doing nothing but at the centre they feel that they are doing something useful.¹¹⁷ This way of thinking is in agreement with Hall and Robertson that say public art should work against exclusion by involving the citizens in the art projects which create social networks.¹¹⁸

Nieve de las Casas Busques has participated in flower art classes for two years. She is retired so she likes to come to the centre to meet people and being creative. She says that the centre is important and that the people come here to be social and help each other.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Lilia Solís Valdés. July 15, 2009
¹¹⁷ Nancy Pérez Talarez. July 15, 2009
¹¹⁸ Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 15
¹¹⁹ Nieve de las Casas Busques. July 15, 2009
The community house in Marianao works a lot with inclusion. The Community Project in Marianao wants their citizens to feel as parts of Marianao. The Community Project is working for the old people in Marianao to be a part of the society. Through the Tallers the old people can meet others and contribute by making and selling their handicraft. The children are taught local ecology and history. All this is contributing to the citizens to feel that they belong to Marianao and that they are proud to be a part of this municipality and this is one of the fundamental results public art should have according to Hall and Robertson and Chang.¹²⁰

Discussion

According to Garcia and Caballero the Community Projects constitute an organization form based on the idea of citizen participation as a way to work towards sustainable community development. Sustainable community development means a development away from poverty, inequity and environmental degradation.\(^{121}\) The Community Projects use Cuban culture as a platform for sustainable community development. By involving the citizens in culture projects the Community Projects create networks that lead to cooperation in the area which also leads to a sense of belonging. All of the Community Projects in Havana work with citizen participation as a tool for improving the social and physical conditions.

The Community Projects are connected to the UN’s programmes for community development\(^ {122}\) in a way that they are connected to a nationwide program with the aim of coordinating governmental and nongovernmental organisations’ work towards sustainable community development. The Community Projects also work with projects that are limited geographically and applicable to communities.

The Community Projects in my study had been initiated in different ways. The most common form was initiated by state institutions like the Community Project in Mariana that was started by the communist party Poder Popular. This type of Community Projects is initiated and managed by people working for the government although the staffs are working voluntarily. This kind of Community Project exists in more or less every municipality in Havana in form of Culture Centres. They can also be bound to state museums where they also are working with Tallers. Omni Zona-Franca and Canal are housing in a state community houses but they were initiated by private people. Rincón de los Milagros was started by a private person Semanat and managed by him in independence. During my research it has been hard to get a precise grip of the concept Community Project because it is so fluent. What they have in common are that anyone is welcome to participate, they are working for a common good, they create involvement through culture, their housing is for free and most people involved are working voluntarily.

The Community Projects work against social exclusion in a way that everyone is welcome there and they actively try to make people participate in the projects. Information about the projects is mostly spread mouth to mouth but also by billboard and some network organisations. Internet is illegal in Cuba for civil citizens although some people are using it anyway if they can afford it. The only Community Project that was using Internet actively was OZF but that was more for its international connections. My interpretation was that most people involved in the Community Projects had been involved by a friend or an acquaintance. At Rincón, where I spent most time, they often told people that were passing by to come in. The involvement wasn’t so organized which corresponds to many Cubans´ mentality to take the day as it comes. It is generally regarded that it is hard to involve people in community development.\(^ {123}\) As I understood this it was easy to engage citizens in social activities but it

\(^{121}\) Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 66-70

\(^{122}\) Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 73

\(^{123}\) Cuthill & Caballero, 2002, P 86
could be hard when you wanted the people to participate in more organized forms. The reason why it was easy to engage people in activities is probably a result of Cubans working less in general because of lacking work opportunities. It also reflects a social mentality that doesn’t exist in for instance Sweden where it is hard to engage people in public social activities. Why it is harder to make people participate in more organized activities in the Community Projects is probably just because it needs more efforts and planning. Garcia and Caballero believe that it is a lack of attachment to the neighbourhoods that prevents involvements from the citizens. This could be seen as a negative loop since it is involvement in the home area that also creates attachment and feelings of identity. In the case of Havana this means that they have created a positive loop that by succeeding in involving the citizens they create attachment which in turn creates an increase of participation.

Rincon is an Afro-American centre but there are also non Afro-Americans participating which led to a better understanding between the different ethnic groups. Although the inequities are smaller in Cuba than in other Latin American countries the racism is a problem so a better understanding between the “black” and the “white” population is an important positive effect in the urban environment. This also corresponds to one of the sustainable community development main pillars to work against inequities. The Community Project in Marianao works especially with including old people in its organisation to make them feel like an important part in the society and children and the young are taught local history and ecology to strengthen the sense of belonging and also an awareness of the importance to care about their local environment. The Community Projects´ work with children and teenagers is important. Since many grownups have a lot of problems to deal with only to survive the children and the teenagers are often left a drift in Havana. So it is a good thing for them to get in contact with grownups that have an ability to support them. These Community Projects also get them involved in art and music that according to the people at the Community Projects keep them away from the “street”. This can be seen as a social safety net that helps children that doesn’t have support in their home environment.

The force to initiate and manage the Community Projects is supposed to come from the people instead from above and this is what makes these centres work so well since it is the democratic process that gives the projects´ value. This is also in accordance to Browen that means that when a project have been based on what the people want they have become more appreciated and successful. Because the people in the neighbourhoods have been part of creating the Community Projects the people also feel more like a part of the Community Projects and the people often know what they want and what the area needs. It would have been harder for someone from an authority to know what would engage the citizens. Another thing is that the Community Projects start small and grow with interest according to

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124 Kvist, 2007, P 25-26
125 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 108
126 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 66-70
127 Amilean Tresold & Armando Pino. August 13, 2009
128 Browen, 2007, P 70
Esperanza Castillo Mestre. You can’t create engagement, engagement needs to create itself. You can’t start with a big project and hope for the people to show up. These Community Projects start in a small scale and when the people start to show up they grow naturally. Since the initiative comes from the citizens they don’t become victims instead they feel powerful. They would probably not have been feeling so powerful if the initiative had come from some authority. Now it is they who have taken the initiatives which have given them the confidence to do more things that can lead to a positive development within the neighbourhood. The Community Project in Marianao was initiated by the communist party Poder Popular and the responsible person for the project had a salary but it is still people in the neighbourhood that is making it run and develop. It is one of the important aspects of the Community Projects that it is an organic model that forms after the citizens’ needs and capacities. There are no exact rules how it should work and what it should accomplish. There can be a negative side of this unstructured model, the Community Projects might have a bigger capacity to work for sustainable community development if they were more organized but that is hard to know. And maybe this organic model work from the real existing capacities, if they would work out a more organized structure it might be easy to overestimate the capacities in the model and things would ran out in the sand.

The Community Projects have an ability to communicate fundamental values like shared history and identity that Hall and Robertson argues for being one of the effects from public art. The art of Semanat strongly communicate the Afro-American culture through his sculptures outside Rincón. Both Canal and the Community House in Marianao study and teach local history, Rincón teaches Afro-American Culture and OZF tries to enlighten all different kinds of cultures and religions. Canal and Marianao also teach in local ecology to make people care about their own environment. The ecological issue is of high priority and a main pillar on the Community Project agenda to achieve sustainable community development. Canal is also working for approving the collection of garbage and OZF has clearly been working for this in a more radical way when they did their performance where they buried themselves in the garbage to force the authorities to see the garbage problem. This engagement shows that the Community Projects think of the sustainable community development in the future and that they want an ongoing positive development for future generations.

Since the Community Projects are working to approve the living situation in general it could have a positive effect on the economy in a long-term perspective. Canal is especially working to create working opportunities but I never found out exactly in what way. One thing that Canal was working on was to get street lighting to an area which is a concrete example of approving the physical conditions. They were also planning to start a project to approve the housing condition but when I was there they hadn’t been able to raise money for the project yet. Canal was also analysing the strengths and the weaknesses in the neighbourhood to see

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129 Esperanza Castillo Mestre. August 14, 2009
130 Esperanza Castillo Mestre. August 14, 2009
131 Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 7-17
132 Garcia & Caballero, 2009, P 66-70
the potential in the area instead of just looking on the negative factors. The problem for all of the Community Projects is that they have such a restricted budget. Even if they can make things happen through will and cooperation they can’t perform in great extent without money. This is strengthening Cuthill’s argument that lack of support is preventing those working with local community development.  

Everyone I have interviewed formally and informally say that the Community Projects have a positive impact on their neighbourhood. At these centres they meet, socialise, disconnect and relax. New networks are formed and the people have a place to which they belong in the area. They also learn new things and get new perspectives on life through the interaction that can contribute to an ability of solving things better than in an individual way according to Carr. Cuthill also believes that the Community Projects mobilize the citizens which create empowerment so that with joined forces they have a chance of doing positive things for the area.

The Community Projects do not only join people together they also make it legal for them to make own initiatives to approve the urban environment. Cuba has a long history of governmental control but the creation of Tallers was the first step towards individualisation. This was the first place after the revolution that private initiatives were allowed and even encouraged. This free space has meant a lot for the Cubans and for the Cuban society. The government is not giving much (if nothing) in financial help to do these projects but what they have given is free space. It is quite remarkable that the government has given space for the people to do what the people want in such a controlled country. These centres allow people to breathe and they give them the opportunity to take own initiatives. There is a lot of frustration among people in Havana over not being able to change their life situation. Even if the Cubans study to get a good education and work hard they will not make much money. The medical care in Cuba is for free and people have enough food to live and that is a great positive difference to many other Latin American countries. The problem is that it is so hard to get a standard of living that is over your basic needs. At the Community Projects they are free of initiating project that will benefit themselves and the community. Often someone from the authorities like the police come and ask them if they have a permission for the action and when they say it is a Community Project they get left alone so it is working kind of like an exception warrant.

At the Community Projects the citizens also have more freedom to express their opinion than in the rest of the Cuban society. OZF works a lot with social criticism in many different ways. Their poetry nights had a lot of rap that was questioning the Cuban authorities, their exhibition at the gallery was criticising the regime and the Cuban society and they made marches and many other events with criticising ingredients. The reason why they didn’t end

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133 Cuthill, 2002, P 84
134 Carr, 2001, P 109
135 Cuthill, 2002, P 79
136 Ramirez, 2005, P 150-151
up in jail was that they were a part of Community Projects and that the projects were art projects and not defined as political actions. OZF has discovered that the more it explains its actions for the authorities the more accepting the authorities are. In one of its performances where the members put out chairs at bus stops where there were no places to stay, it made the authorities actually listened to what it had to say and corrected the mistake by arranging places to sit.

OZF’s art events could be described as relational art where the discussion coming from the art work is the main aim and where the art is dependent on its audience for its existence according to Bourriaud. The interesting and important part of OZF is the discussion its members are creating which in turn creates public dialogues that support a vibrant, social and political atmosphere that is a positive effect coming from public art according to Hall and Robertson. At their artistic performances in public they interact with the public and they relate to each other. Also the authorities get in contact with both the audience and the artists. OZF makes people and the authorities to see problems like environmental degradation, weakness in social service or other problems in the urban environment. When people gather up around these performances they start talking with each other about what is happening, what it means etc. They make people raise questions about how things should really be. Many times people have gotten used to certain circumstances or they feel that they have no rights to make any demands on sitting authorities. OZF makes the government understand that it is not ok to ignore collection of garbage from the streets or not arranging public sitting places etc. It is dialogues that go in all directions where the artists, the people and the authorities make each other see new things. OZF has created an understanding between themselves and the authorities that they themselves have been surprised by. This relation is an important effect since there normally is a bad communication between the people and the authorities and where there are feelings of suspicion and fear towards each other from both sides. The other Community Projects in this study are also a form of relational art since a big part of their work is about dialogue. Their activities are about engaging the citizens through activities and dialogue. The festivals at Rincón communicate the Afro-American culture and make people in the area to meet and socialize, Canal has facial painting on the street, public movie nights on the streets etc and Marianao gathers people through its courses. The Community Projects use the interaction between people to create the united force for sustainable community development. Bishop says that one of the critiques against Bourriaud is that the art he is involved in doesn’t interact with the realities and that the relations they create only exist within “microtopias” and therefore do not discuss real political aspects. The discussions that OZF creates are to the full a part of real life and do bring up topics that involve the common women and men unlike the art Bourriaud defines that fails in creating dialogues outside the border of galleries.

It is the way public art is implemented in the urban environment that is decisive for inclusion which is an important factor for sustainable community development and for giving public art

137 Bourriaud, 2002, P 16
138 Hall & Robertson, 2001, P 7-17
139 Bishop, 2004, P 67-69
The artists who are connected to the Community Projects have not been placed there by someone that thinks they would do a good job there which can lead to marginalisation according to Kwon. Semanat started Rincón by himself and he has integrated himself as an artist in the Community Project. People have appreciated his work so he started to put his art pieces out on the street. It was no politician that said he should decorate his facade; it was him with the backup from the community. Since it is appreciated by the people in the community they also protect it from vandalism which could otherwise be a problem. And because of having something in their neighbourhood to feel proud of and protect they also get a feeling of belonging to the area. The work of Semanat is inspired by the Afro-American culture which matches the government´s will to strengthen the national identity through Cuban culture according to Manuel Rivero Glean. Semanat´s work makes the Afro-American proud over their culture and others interested in it and it gives an identity to the neighbourhood which is one of the effects of public art according to Chang. OZF´s art also comes from the people since anyone that wants can join OZF and be called an artist. The only thing you need is a willingness to be creative. When the members of OZF are out doing their performance and meet people that want to join they are welcome to, this group reclaims public place for the citizens and makes it theirs. In the projects where OZF is performing the artists use the public space as material and they are also including all citizens that are willing to participate. All the Community Projects are working with people’s creativity to join them together; they make them play, sing, paint, knit and more. This creativity is not hold within the walls of the Community Project; it pours out on the street where it becomes public. They do performances in public, facial painting for children on the street, they have movie nights and festivals on the streets, the elders sell their knitting work on the street, they make events, they put their pieces on the street etc.

One issue that can be problematic in relation to the Community Projects and public art that Kwon addresses is that they can be used as a soft social engendering, defusing rather than addressing social problems. The Cuban government is often accused of creating work opportunities that don’t really exist to lower the unemployment rate. The Community Projects can be a way for the authorities to keep people occupied and more satisfied. The Community Projects might also be used to give a wrong feeling of power to influence that really doesn’t exist for the Cuban population and work as a tool to cool things down and keep the citizens satisfied. This is probably true at some point since the Tallers came when there was a lot of criticism going on in Cuba towards plan economy. It was most likely actively decided by the government to loosen up a little bit so the pot wouldn’t boil over. It can be like this but that doesn’t prevent the Community Projects from also work in positive ways where people are freer to make own initiatives and be creative. There is some steering of the Community

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140 Sharp, Pollock & Paddison, 2005, P 1003-1006
141 Kwon, 2002, P 153
142 Manuel Rivero Glean. August 1, 2009
143 Chang, 2008, P 1921
144 Kwon, 2002, P 153
145 Ramirez, 2005, P 150-151
Projects by the authorities but not a lot. The Community Project in Marianao is managed more or less by Poder Popular so its members were governmentally governed but the other Community Projects felt free to make their own agenda. Canal, OZF and Rincón strongly pointed out that they were working independently. OZF had even done an artistic action to liberate them from the culture house in Alamar because they wanted to be free and independent. According to Canal they just wanted to be a governmental Community Project because this made them freer to do as they liked. If they had been their own organisation they would have been forced to apply for permission for every action they would do in public. So there are two sides of the coin of being connected to the Cuban government that might result in the Community Projects being free and controlled at the same time.

The Community Projects do arrange spectacles to cheer people up but that doesn’t mean they are hiding the problems. The activities at the Community Projects make people relax and forget their problems for the moment and this gives them energy to do something about their situation because without positive energy nobody has any force to do anything. The Community Projects are joining people through culture and make them stronger as a group, as a collective. One of the most important results from these projects is that they create place identity and minimise exclusion which is essential if you want people to maintain and develop their own communities. The projects are also strengthening the public dialogues through public art and Tallers that are enforcing the civil citizens’ power to influence the decisions made by the authorities. These projects also show a willingness to work for unselfish reasons and instead of the common good that Cuthill is pointing out. The Community Projects have come to play an important part in the sustainable community development in Havana and these projects show that citizen participation has a significant role in this development process.

146 Cuthill, 2002, P 85
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