AN ACTION-RESEARCH PROJECT ON SOUTH PHILADELPHIA

COHABITATION STRATEGIES

THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA MURAL ARTS PROGRAM’S RESTORED SPACES INITIATIVE
PLAYGROUNDS FOR USEFUL KNOWLEDGE
AN ACTION-RESEARCH PROJECT ON SOUTH PHILADELPHIA
BY COMMUNITY STRATEGIES
WITH THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA MURAL ARTS PROGRAM
RESTORED SPACES INITIATIVE
CURATED BY LUCIA SARKISIAN
PROJECT MANAGER: SHARE-HIGH
CITY OF PHILADELPHIA MURAL ARTS PROGRAM
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PREFACE

Jane Golden

Over the years, the City of Philadelphia's mural arts program has grown beyond its names. From our roots as the Anti-Graffiti Network and then community-based mural making, the scope of our work has expanded enormously. Now, our projects range in size and scale, from the small and intimate to the large and grand—projects that straddle artistic practices from the sculptural to the conceptual.

The thread that binds our projects together is our process. Our art-making process and engages a broad range of “authors,” including artists, community members, and young people. Broader participation and a collaborative process that takes multiple perspectives into account are central to the identity of our program and why I feel the work has been so resilient over the past 30 years. We see ourselves in our work; we see our stories, our histories, our struggles, and our aspirations for change. And in a sense, our work belongs to us all. Our work crosses boundaries, builds social capital, creating opportunities for engagement, and breaking down barriers, both visible and intangible, between the public, private, and civic sectors.

NOTES ON CHANGE

Lucia Ponsarin

Playgrounds for Urban Knowledge from South Philadelphia and the diverse communities and individuals that make it unique. Composed of populations that include long-settled African-American and Italian communities as well as more recent East Asian and Latinx residents, South Philadelphia is a haven of cultural diversity. Historically a center of cultural divides and prejudices among different cultural groups. Today, when racial tensions are systematically exploited to gain political influence in the United States and elsewhere, it is especially important to understand the social composition of each community and to create inclusive urban and artistic projects that address and ease inequity and discrimination.

It is therefore not surprising that Co-habitation Strategies (CoHab), itself comprised of diverse practitioners, chose to focus their project, Playgrounds for Urban Knowledge in this area. Core members Lucia Bahena and Emiliana Gonzalez are based in San Diego, while Gabriela Rendón and Miguel Reina-Aranda are based in Brooklyn, and all are familiar with the process of migration. It seems as if migration has been so much of our experience that it is now a natural phenomenon.

Thse, it is not surprising that South Philadelphia has been chosen as the subject of this complex urban action-research project. Focused on the relationship between a work of social and public art and urban research, this project is meant to provide new tools for future artists and environmental projects in the area produced by the Restored Spaces Exhibiting the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program.

Unveiled and organized in collaboration with Shadi Hoveh, Restored Spaces’ tireless and insistent director, Playgrounds for Urban Knowledge has been demanding, confusing, and frustrating, and also generative, unexpected, and enlightening. As curator for this final project, I have faced one of representation. What exactly is Co-habitation Strategies? How can this collective help generate new models of inclusion and social participation for Restored Spaces? To answer these questions, it is useful to remember CoHab’s origins. Founded in 2008 in response to the financial crisis, this cooperative of socio-political research—determined to describe themselves—works across the disciplines of planning, urban theory, art, and activism and conscientiously frames its work as a Marxist critique of the pressures and exploitative capitalist places of urban centers. CoHab contends that, rather than directing the desires of social practice, it is a necessity to transform cities into commodities for speculation. Their collective’s purpose is to investigate and encourage the concept of the “right to the city” as developed by Henry Lefebvre in 1968, and more recently by David Harvey, who writes, “The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.”

In this statement Harvey poetically draws the limits of our freedoms in terms of defining the city, and challenges us to reclaim our right to create our environment as we see ourselves. By linking the self with the city, Harvey offers a space for everyone to rethink what it might be. CoHab’s approach takes on this challenge, and in so doing, exposes new public art and research potential to transform the city.

her methodology is only loosely based on a model of community organizing or social work, and actually engages through empathy and connection, identification, action, and friendship, rather than by appealing to the promise of "help" for the "family"...the big idea...is about working on this modern history of New York City." Very early on in the project, the themes of the project's spaces for people to gather and be creative, to share ideas and develop new forms of engagement, were developed. This led to the creation of the "art in public spaces" program, which was created through a process of consultation and collaboration. The program is designed to create a new prototype for art in public spaces, to create a new way of engaging with the community and to create a new way of thinking about the role of art in public spaces. In this way, the project's accelerated timeline, has been used to explore and develop new ideas and new ways of thinking about the role of art in public spaces. The project's approach is to develop new ways of thinking about the role of art in public spaces, through a process of consultation and collaboration. This is achieved through the development of a new prototype for art in public spaces, which is designed to create a new way of engaging with the community and to create a new way of thinking about the role of art in public spaces. The project is designed to create a new prototype for art in public spaces, to create a new way of engaging with the community and to create a new way of thinking about the role of art in public spaces. The project is designed to create a new prototype for art in public spaces, to create a new way of engaging with the community and to create a new way of thinking about the role of art in public spaces. The project is designed to create a new prototype for art in public spaces, to create a new way of engaging with the community and to create a new way of thinking about the role of art in public spaces. 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INTRODUCTION

Co-habitation Strategies

Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge is an urban research and artistic intervention project in South Philadelphia that evolved from an invitation by curator Lucía Samorodin to collaborate with project manager Shari Herst and the Restored Spaces Initiative of the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program. Co-habitation Strategies (CoHSta) was asked to create parameters for future artistic and infrastructural interventions by Restored Spaces that can lead to deeper, longer-term investment in the needs and experiences of specific communities. This community-led, process-based approach marks an evolution in the forms of participation and co-productions historically deployed by Mural Arts that allow for a more sustained and resilient interaction by the Restored Spaces Initiative with a rapidly changing city. Therefore, our main goal has been to create an action platform for strategic socio-spatial interventions at the scale of the neighborhood that aim to reveal, produce, share, and politicize local knowledge in response to the commodity and union realities of contemporary urbanization. Playgrounds seeks the medium and long-term restructuring of physical spaces parallel to the promotion of new cultural, social, and economic dynamics, in order to produce more just and sustainable forms of collective inhabiting.

We have looked at the concept of playgrounds in the historical tradition of civic imaginaries, drawing on such examples as Charles Fourier’s 19th-century utopian experiments with playful alternatives to regular work; the Daudet’s utopian desire to undermine the oppressive structures of social order through play; the Situationist’s playful protests against modern bureaucratic alienating forms of urbanization; Constant Nieuwenhuyys’s anti-capitalist urban visions for the Haarlem Extar, or man at play; Henri Lefebvre’s critique of the persistent production of urban everydayness (bereden) in conformity with the unfulfilled social promises of more free time, leisure, and play; Aldo van Eyck’s vision for giving urban spaces to civic imagination in the more than 700 playgrounds that he designed; as well as empirical observations of collective protest and their capacity to interrupt daily life and produce new political subjectivities through playful confrontations in urban spaces.

In line with these imaginaries, we believe that urban play can break the ordinary into moments of shared collectivity, enabling participations to imagine a radically different urban daily life. Urban play is about “games” — repetitive activities where strict rules are set and followed with the end goal of winning. On the contrary, urban play is an act of giving up a material, unrestricted, and dynamic “useful knowledge” which helps to center values of the community, becomes the evolution of the activity itself, as it begins in a pre-socio-spatial context, and is then reappropriated. Section 5, Co-habitation Strategies seeks to enter and support neighborhood communities in their reappropriation of useful knowledge and to support them to become urban players in the production of new neighborhood spaces. Taking and urban analysis, one of our proposals is that by taking advantage of the hundreds of vacant lots and unused spaces in South Philadelphia and strategically developing them, the project can support collective programs that challenge conflict within the neighborhood while staging productive social confrontations.

The concept of “useful knowledge” has allowed us to gather a catalogue of diverse skills, experiences, and insights of various civic organizations and individuals involved with the project. We understand “useful knowledge” as skills of understanding, skills, and experiences that can be placed at the service of social emancipation, justice, and equality in our daily lives. It is mundane, unshared knowledge, which can be culturally specific but can also be translated across social, economic, and ethnic divides. A central component of our project is a catalogue of “useful knowledge” that has been gathered through collaborative play with neighbors and others in workshops, events, and actions.

After months of qualitative and quantitative research on Philadelphia’s many neighborhoods, we decided to pilot a project based on qualitative and artistic research combined with activities and events out of a hub space at 602 Jackson Street in Philadelphia that opened from June to November 2015. Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge focuses on an area of South Philadelphia east of Broad Street, in which we have come to call “the South Seven,” which comprises seven interconnected neighborhoods — Passyunk Square, East Passyunk, Dickinson Square, Greenwich, Passyunk, Lower Moyamensing, and Whitemarsh.

Our investigation has shown that this area possesses many attributes that we believe are important for this project’s development: it includes the area’s large concentration of vacant land; its medium-to-low vulnerability to structured gentrification; the wide ethnic diversity of its inhabitants; and an above-average number of small, effective organizations and enterprises operating in the area, which are an immense reservoir of not-yet-unified useful knowledge. The highly active heterogeneous groups that call South Philadelphia home have become the main co-creators of Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge. They have worked with us to generate transformative links within the community by sharing culturally and organizationally specific useful knowledge within a context that encourages urban play and visionary imagination over profit and competition. To this end, Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge builds on the following available resources and conditions:

1. The universe of useful knowledge that numerous civic associations, residents, and non-profit entities hold and are ready to share.
2. The political, artistic, and logistical assets and expertise that Mural Arts and its Restored Spaces Initiative bring as the project’s partners and co-organizers.
3. The economic and political support of diverse organizations such as The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Department of Parks and Recreation, the city’s Watershed Department and City Council.
4. The cultural support of diverse local and non-local artists and cultural producers.
5. The accessibility of public land currently under the jurisdiction of the newly formed Philadelphia Land Bank Initiative.
6. The urgent need for urban play.
2. INTERVENTION AREA: SITE SELECTION PARAMETERS AND THE SOUTH SEVEN AREA

An area of eastern South Philadelphia that we named the South Sevens due to the fact that it comprises seven neighborhoods, was selected as the focus area for this research-action project. From January to March 2013, we considered fifteen parameters in our site selection, which included: 

(1) community needs, services and conveniences; 
(2) social and cultural assets; and 
(3) government and social services.

We emphasize the importance of understanding the neighborhood context and the role of the community in planning and development related to the neighborhood's future development. We diagnosed current issues and latent threats in the South Seven through personal accounts collected from March to June 2015 that were corroborated during the following research phase, during which we focused awareness on the issues to help develop visions to respond to such conditions and risks.

5. PROJECT DEFINITION: PLAYGROUNDS FOR USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

Merging the scientific and popular knowledge produced over the previous research phases enabled us to define the project and design an action framework for the long-term engagement of the Restored Spaces Initiative in South Philadelphia. The knowledge produced up to this point allowed the following for as particular orders:

1. To identify and define a network of governmental and non-governmental institutions, local associations, grassroots groups, and citizens that can become project partners and build up the ongoing action research.
2. To define potential spaces to be activated as locations for future Restored Spaces projects, to bring and to collectively organize, develop priorities and solutions to generate a sustainable and just neighborhood through the implementation of useful knowledge. We envisioned a neighborhood hub to create a neutral and safe space where community members could feel free to express their issues despite differences in background, race, and citizenship status.
3. To develop tools and procedures crease to foster sustainable and equitable participatory and to engage community members and leaders in the subsequent project steps. These tools and procedures include participatory games, participatory services, and neighborhood committees.
neighboring assemblages, workshops, and a public festival; to define overall engagement framework that mobilizes physical, economic, and social aspects, from the grassroots up and from the politicians in. These can include initiatives, processes to transform social production environments and local knowledge, collective action by local communities, the development of urban and social spaces, and the transformation of alternative community structures to develop new economical, social, and cultural spaces for the community.

G. CREATING AWARENESS AND PRIORITIZING NEEDS: ACTIVATING LAND, ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY, AND MOBILIZING PEOPLE

From May through September 2015, the project for Useful Knowledge occupied a vacant lot at 652 Jackson Street, creating a temporary art hub space where the demands of daily life were interrupted through play to generate new spatial imaginaries and social activities. Working in close collaboration with a variety of neighborhood partners, Cobb creates models of the creation of a temporary community space as a participatory pilot project that activates play and learning as ways of critically thinking about local issues, valorization, and local community organizing. In this way, we can envision new ways to transform community members and leaders to generate shared visions and collectively strategize potential interventions for action, building truly transformative urban interventions.

Working out of a hub space on Jackson Street, we pursued this goal through different activities organized around three major community actions and a number of community meetings and formal gatherings. In an experience, public activities—besides being excellent tools to disseminate organizing conditions—offering local communities—provide opportunities to test the effectiveness of the initial premises and to register feedback. Ultimately, these public activities generate specific conditions to build a network of citizens, shared practitioners, community groups, local artists, and social workers already committed for the neighborhood. Thus, these public actions were organized and envisioned as pilot engagements to test collaboration, understanding, and solidarity among the neighborhood.

Three actions were planned progressively: Action 1: Sharing Knowledge took place on June 25 and gathered together more than a dozen community organizers, residents of local community groups, and artists at the hub on Jackson Street. Philadelphia Theatre of the Oppressed opened the event with an interactive theater workshop, performing stories and images from memos of community research. Participants were invited to interpret what they saw, opening up conversations about neighborhood issues that were then continued in small committees. Although each committee had a different focus, social, cultural, and economic—of the conversations focused on issues related to safety, gentrification, and neighborhood literacy, among other issues.

The useful knowledge disseminated and discussed in Action 1 was transformed into shared visions in Action 2: A Space for Urban Reappropriation, which took place on July 1. While participants were convened during the first meeting to address issues related to South Seven’s space, economy, and literacy, they discussed the committees met during the second meeting to discuss the possibility of working together towards a single, larger event that would bring the various community organizations and diverse cultural groups together in pursuit of a common goal. The use and reappropriation of Millifi Square became a focus, and the committees discussed various ways of addressing neighborhood problems such as litter through the creation of a “Trash Academy.” The project emerged from the Urban Reappropriation meeting was an “art market,” an event to educate public attention on the area’s emergent shadow economies. However, it became clear that there were too little time to work on such an ambitious goal, and during the planning process, the night market evolved into a collaborative festival that could help lay the foundation for more structured strategies for neighborhood interventions.

This final Action was always intended as the largest in ambition and scope. Yet, the strong involvement of community representatives during Action 2 raised the bar to develop a public event in Millifi Square that included the efforts of an extensive network of civic organizations and individuals. Action 3 took place at the Millifi Square Public Festival, a public event with a focus on cultural exchange, cultural activities, and knowledge sharing. The general feeling of the committee’s work led to the idea that, in a area where the fragmentation of social justice has always been obvious, the potential for becoming a theater of true social change, a festival could become the right context for working collectively on a common goal, while testing the possibilities of cooperation and building a common vision for the development of the area. The Millifi Square Public Festival was organized in three programs representing some of the most relevant themes that emerged from the committee meetings. The central part of the festival constituted a program called PublicHouse, a stage on which performances, music, dance, art-making, and storytelling could represent the area’s diversity and become the courthouse of the neighborhood’s development. Another important aspect of the festival became the useful knowledge workshops, where local initiatives could showcase their programs and ideas. The Kids’ Union became the area for youth activities. All these activities came together with a focus on the local production of local foods through the establishment of an extensive public area and an art installation that represented the diversity of the neighborhood through a variety of banners coming together in a communal circle.

This project has involved work with committees focused on different aspects: social, spatial and economic, and formed at the first session and worked over a period of three months, addressing local needs, priorities, and visions. It is important to mention that the project’s activities—actions, community meetings, and informal gatherings—were facilitated by members of Cobaltion Strategies but entirely led by community members and leaders. The neighborhood has utilized creative tools, communication tools, awareness, and engagement. One collaborator: Philadelphia Theatre of the Oppressed, gave life to the first playground of Useful Knowledge through forum theatre, participatory performances, community gatherings, interactive games, and other socially engaged artistic activities. Community stakeholders enjoyed themselves while learning important issues facing their community and proposing localized solutions.

This report provides a detailed account of the different research phases, including aims and outcomes. This discussion is meant to be used by the Researcher’s Project and future artistic collaborations. The Centre for Art and Media in South Philadelphia is working on projects in the area of addressing the needs and aspirations of its inhabitants. Therefore, this report is conceived as a tool for researchers, activists, local officials, and community stakeholders involved in the social, economic, and spatial development of the South Seven.

TOP REPORT: ReSearch for the Creation of neighborhood hub at 652 Jackson Street.
BOTTOM REPORT: Creating social hub at 652 Jackson Street.
1. CITYWIDE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Conducting Strategies' initial introduction to the City of Philadelphia was an unusual one: it took place through visualization and analysis of a series of maps we produced to order both to generate a preliminary understanding of the city's social, economic, and urban challenges and to prepare for a productive first residency. This first residency in November 2015 was a challenge, since its ultimate goal was the selection and investigation of a number of potential locations where we could eventually conduct participatory action research, envision a long-term project, and promote a number of evidence-based interventions for the coming years. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research was key for this endeavor.

This section describes the quantitative and qualitative research and outlines our outcomes. The quantitative research was conducted using census data, geocoded data from different public and private digital libraries, and spatial analysis, while the qualitative research was conducted mainly through interviews, spatial analysis, and participant observation. Additionally, we conducted research through use of secondary source research to learn about current city plans, initiatives, and instruments that the city is promoting for urban and housing development.

To select our areas of interest, we used the district types as defined by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's Philadelphia 2015 Plan. CITYWIDE: Our main district of interest initially was the Lower North District (which includes the Frankford,Northern Liberties, Lawrencetown, and Oxford Circle neighborhoods), the West District (which includes the Overbrook, Cresheim, Haddington, Morris Park, Cobbs Creek, Dunlap, Mill Creek, Belmont, and Manayunk neighborhoods), and the South District (roughly analogous to what is considered South Philadelphia and including neighborhoods such as Grays Ferry, Whitemarsh, East Passyunk, Pennsport, and Point Breeze).

1.1 PHILADELPHIA BY THE NUMBERS

This section is the result of a two-month city-wide quantitative investigation. The analysis of targeted census data and its spatial distribution exposes important challenges facing the city and specific districts. Selected key data sets, taken from the Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access as well as other public and private digital libraries, enabled a thorough analysis of factors correlated with Philadelphia's population, economy, and housing environment. By cross-analyzing a number of data sets, we generated city-wide visualizations that revealed the key areas of interest defined during this preliminary work. These areas include the Lower North, West, and South districts (Chapter 1.2).

PEOPLE

A study of population figures reveals that Philadelphia, unlike most post-industrial American cities, has a growing population, having experienced 2.2% growth from 2010 to 2014. Out of the city's 1,568,246 inhabitants, 23.2% are under 18, and only 12.4% are over 65 years old. Therefore, Philadelphia is a young city that is growing slowly but steadily (US Census Bureau 2015).

Philadelphia contains almost the same percentage of African-American (41.2%) and white inhabitants (40.5%), with the Latinx population comprising the third largest demographic (13.3%). The Latinx population is rapidly growing, with a 45% increase from 2000 to 2010 (US Census Bureau 2000, 2010). Like most North American cities with diverse populations, Philadelphia is remarkably spatially segregated in terms of race and income level.

By mapping the spatial distribution of race and income, the identified three city areas where spatial segregation is particularly stark. The first such area is the Lower North District, where both African-American and Latinx populations are concentrated...
In a circumscribed locality (see figures 1.1.1 and 1.1.2). Compared with the rest of the city, the Lower North's income level is extremely low (see figure 1.1.1). This area has been home to Latino families since they first settled in the city, and is historically seen as a place of struggle with strong organized efforts aimed at creating a sense of community to help fight against systemic problems.

The second area identified is the West District, where larger concentrations of African Americans were identified. This area seems more segregated in terms of race but less in terms of income level, making it more consolidated and stable (see figures 1.1.1 and 1.1.2).

The third area, the South District, is the most interesting for our purposes, as it is home to a remarkable concentration of immigrants, foreign-born residents, and newcomers from diverse parts of the world (see figure 1.1.2). In this neighborhood, segregation is low in terms of race, since whites, African Americans, Latinos, and an increasing number of Asians live side by side. However, spatial segregation in terms of income level can be traced in the district's central area (see figure 1.1.1). The South District, originally populated by Irish and Italian families, has changed over the years with an influx of Latino and Asian families as well as other minority groups. Undocumented Mexicans and refugees from South Asia make up two new key ethnic groups (see figures 1.1.1 and 1.1.2). The remainder of the population is composed of African Americans in the district's western area and whites in its northern area near Center City, although this demographic is further spread across the southern neighborhood (see figure 1.1.1).

According to U.S. Census data, 88.7% of Philadelphia's population over 25 years old has a high school degree or higher, and 37.1% has a bachelor's degree or higher. The spatial distribution of people with at least a bachelor's degree reveals a clear correlation between incomes and education levels in the Lower North, West, and South Districts (see figure 1.1.3).
ECONOMY

This section looks at Philadelphia's industry and employment data in order to gain an understanding of the local economic realities of the city's inhabitants.

Philadelphia is home to four main industries: 39.5% work in educational services, and health care and social assistance; 11.4% in professional, scientific, and management; and administrative and waste management services; 10.4% in retail trade; and 9.3% in arts, entertainment and recreation. The rest of the employed population works in the other nine industries that are identified in the city, including agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting; mining (0.2%); construction (4.0%); manufacturing (6.9%); wholesale trade (3.1%); transportation and warehousing; and utilities (5.3%); information (2.3%); finance and insurance; and real estate and rental and leasing (6.3%); public administration (6.4%); and other services (3.8%) (U.S. Census 2013).

According to the US Census Bureau (2013), over 32.7% of Philadelphia's population works in management, business, science and arts; 24.5% in services; 15.4% in education; 16.5% in production, transportation, and material moving; and 5.8% in fields related to natural resources, construction, and maintenance.

Only 3.5% of the city's entire employed population is self-employed. The great majority of workers, 62.3%, are private wage and salary workers, and 13.7% of employed city residents are government workers. This research also reveals that over 15% percent of the labor force is unemployed (see figure 3.1.2) and that the city's median annual income is extremely low ($57,192) compared to the state ($57,544) and national ($57,844) median incomes (see figure 3.1.2). Additionally, from 2009-2013, an average over 20% of all residents lived below the poverty line (U.S. Census 2013) (see figure 3.1.3).

Poverty is not an isolated variable, and an understanding of poverty requires investigation of
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

Neighborhoods
City of Philadelphia
Parks
Rivers

No data
0% - 5%
5% - 10%
10% - 15%
15% - 20%
20% - 33%
30% -

POPULATION BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

Neighborhoods
City of Philadelphia
Parks
Rivers

No data
0% - 10%
10% - 15%
15% - 20%
20% - 25%
25% - 30%
30% - 40%
40% - 50%
50% - 60%
60% - 70%
70% -

POLICE INCIDENTS PER CENSUS TRACT

Neighborhoods
City of Philadelphia
Parks
Rivers

0 - 50
50 - 100
100 - 200
200 - 400
400 - 600
600 - 900
900 - 1200
1200 -

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

In Philadelphia, owner-occupied housing makes up 33.3% of all occupied housing units. Owner- and renter-occupied housing are spread evenly across the city, see Figures 1.11 and 1.12. Spatial analysis revealed that owner-occupied housing is common even in districts with a high percentage of poverty.

The median housing value is $143,096, and the median gross rent is $853. When analyzing this data against the local median household income ($37,492/year), the median gross rent, and the monthly owner costs ($1,241), the city's unaffordability is exposed (US Census Bureau 2011). This conclusion is based on the standard guideline for housing affordability, which requires housing expenditure not to exceed 30% of the household income.

Looking at the distributions of race, median income, poverty, education-occupation, unemployment, and other key data sets, the South District became an area of particular interest for the project. This area, which faces complex and interrelated issues, has been further investigated through interviews.
in this area, thus affecting low-income renters and long-standing community members who have began to be pushed out by high prices and buyers. Through informal encounters with community members we learned that Mexicans and other Hispanic groups have already been displaced further South.

The large number of vacant lots located in the South District suggests that there is significant opportunity for future development (see Figure 4.1.2). There are already a substantial number of new buildings in the district's northern area that are profiting from proximity to Center City and the surrounding thriving neighborhoods. As the district experiences rapid change, attention must be paid to its existing communities.
1.2 AREAS OF INTEREST: WEST, NORTH AND SOUTH PHILADELPHIA

After considering the city's overall socio-spatial structure, we focused on determining which specific areas could be more interesting as an experimental ground for a long-term cultural research project. We analyzed different areas with a particular focus on districts with inhabitants living partially under the poverty line. After a first analysis, we detected three neighborhood areas that could offer the needed social sustainability for guaranteeing some form of resilience for the project.

The three areas that gained our interest were Norris Square and its surroundings in the Lower North District, the east side of the South District, and a large portion of the West District (see Figures 1.1.1, 1.1.2, and 1.2.1). In contrast with the first two areas, it seemed more arduous to define a focal point in the West District.

DEFINITION OF AN AREA

The definition of these three areas led us to conduct a preliminary analysis based on sociographics and an ethnographic study of local perceptions. On one side we conducted extensive research on demographic, social, economic, and spatial conditions, on the other we achieved a fuller understanding of city dynamics through interviews with local stakeholders, residents, social workers, and other citizens we define as "local experts," people who have a partial understanding of the forces molding their neighborhood, but who have much better perception, at the street level, of each community and even household's local tensions and sensibilities. The superimposition of these two perspectives provided us with a wider angle of observation, at times highlighting the contradictions between an eminently professional understanding of the city and mere subjective perceptions of how things truly work.
In fact, each of the three defined areas is a good potential site for intervention; however, we attempted to prioritize the work and focus it within an area where we think the conditions exist for a sustainable intervention in the project's limited available timeframe.

What became clear during our conversations to define the area of focus was that each of the three observed areas required a completely different intervention strategy. Our priority was to determine the most urgent topics the project could address and each area's latent potential. To address the most urgent topics means to understand in which direction each area is heading from a larger urban framework: what are the underlying forces at play and the municipality's plans, and in what directions is the real estate market development heading, what are the environmental conditions, and other parameters.

Our approach to determining a neighborhood's "latent potential" was more subtle but just as important, as it indicates which topics, concerns, and issues can emerge from the communities with whom we will be working. Often, identifying latent potentials is a sensitive topic, as it leads to a more intimate conversation about what unexpected cultural baggage a community carries, its members' interests and passions, and in the case of immigrants, their background in their native countries, etc.

These qualitative and quantitative forms of urban research led us to determine a specific area of the South District as the project's area of operation. At the moment, the area we selected does not have a specific official denomination, but it is commonly defined as the east side of the South District or the area east of South Broad Street (see Figure 1.2.6).

This part of South Philadelphia is evidently going through transformation, but has not received attention from large developers comparable to that in neighborhoods west of South Broad Street such as Point Breeze.

We believe such conditions allow us to anticipate the risk of eviction that the changing urban dynamics towards gentrification usually lead to. The project focused on determining different socio-spatial strategies for this area that allow the development of greater social, economic, and environmental justice and sustainability; while doing this, however, we must make sure to deliberate ways to engage with the neighborhood inhabitants and to determine arrangements towards the prevention of any form of eviction.

During our fieldwork in this specific area of South Philadelphia, we learned a number of active organizations working mostly with immigrants. What stands out, as we have observed in many other areas where we have operated, is that these organizations hardly communicate with each other. This lack of collaboration is a weakness that represented an interesting challenge to the project, as well as preventing the community from resuscitating into a consistent and strong united front to leverage their political clout.

Another important aspect was addressed over the course of our work is the area's relative shortage of local economies. In terms of local economy, we investigated the informal economies of this area, and what knowledge the local residents possess that could allow the creation of new economic activities and small neighborhood collectives.

As stated earlier, the area lacks quality public spaces that can function as social gathering places where social differences emerge and create dialogue. We see this visibility as an important spatial factor that reinforces the strong ethnic segregation characteristic of this area. Without public space, it simply is difficult to encounter, to meet, or even to acknowledge the existence of other groups of people within the neighborhood.
1.3 PUBLIC CITY PLANS, INITIATIVES, AND INSTRUMENTS FOSTERING URBAN RESTRUCTURING

Housing development, urban rehabilitation, and overconcentration and community development have long been central to the history of Philadelphia. Since private investment is uneconomic in many contexts, city and community organizations, local experts, community stakeholders, and citizens have been crucial in urban development. In August 2013, the Philadelphia Planning Commission (PPC) released a comprehensive plan for urban development in the city, focusing on areas of importance and creating a blueprint for physical development in the city, using a number of public policies and instruments. The plan provides recommendations at both the city and district levels. This plan is the Citywide Vision, which forecasts an additional 100,000 residents and 40,000 jobs in the city by 2035. The citywide plan has three key themes in terms of the city’s economic, social, and environmental development: Thrive, Connect, and Renew. Thrive addresses different topics and goals. Thrive looks toward neighborhoods, economic development, and land management. Community addresses transportation and utilities. Renew focuses on open space, environmental resources, historic preservation, and the public realm. See more information about the goals, visit http://philadelphia.org.

According to the PPC (2011), this plan defines broad, far-reaching goals for the future, building on the city’s strengths as a strong metropolitan center with its diverse neighborhoods and industrial legacy. The plan’s objectives and strategies will contribute to a stronger economy, a healthier population, and a smaller environmental footprint in the years to come. It is also important to mention that this plan builds on the environmental goals set in Greenworks and Philadelphia 2035 (tease below Green City Plans). A number of plans have been developed at the district level. In the coming years, the PPC plans to complete 18 strategic district plans, which will incorporate the city’s new zoning code and assist in zoning map revisions.

PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANS

There are a significant number of plans that the city has formulated and implemented over the years with the assistance of City Council members, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, community development corporations, community-based organizations, local experts, community stakeholders, and citizens. The following outlines some current key plans:

PHILADELPHIA 2035

This is a comprehensive plan developed by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PPC). It is intended as a blueprint for physical development in the city, using a number of public policies and instruments. The plan provides recommendations at both the city and district levels. The first plan is the Citywide Vision, which forecasts an additional 100,000 residents and 40,000 jobs in the city by 2035. The plan has three key themes: Thrive, Connect, and Renew. Thrive addresses different topics and goals. Thrive looks toward neighborhoods, economic development, and land management. Community addresses transportation and utilities. Renew focuses on open space, environmental resources, historic preservation, and the public realm. See more information about the goals, visit http://philadelphia.org.

DISTRICT PLANS

Philadelphia2035’s district plans aim to provide recommendations on future land use, development opportunities, urban design scenarios, and zoning changes. These plans appear to be developed according to local needs, priorities, and visions.

SOUTH DISTRICT PLAN

This plan officially began in September 2013, one month before we started our investigation. The planning team organized into public meetings where residents were invited to participate and were encouraged to get involved in shaping the district’s development. The plan’s development process initially seemed like an opportunity for the project, but then we realized that the planning process was quite accelerated. We were present at the two public meetings. Additionally, as we became more and more interested in working in this district, we interviewed Nicole O’Dowd, the South District Planning Team’s project manager. In the planning phases of those meetings, the eastern area of the South District was barely addressed. ColSta asked O’Dowd if the area’s minority groups had participated in the public meetings or if they were interested in having an individual voice in the plan. The project manager responded that the state’s local groups were invited but didn’t attend, and were contacted afterwards but without much success. She acknowledged that it was difficult to get minority groups involved.

The PPC’s analysis and recommendations were published in April 2013, and soon after. In June 2013, the South District plan was approved. The plan’s focus areas addressed for investment and improvements are among South Broad Street stakeholders’ concerns.
Street, Port Breeze Avenue, and the municipal complex located in East Passyunk.

For more information about this district plan, visit http://philadelphia.gov/department/municipal-planning/

Covina studied the plan’s analysis and recommendations according to the different themes: Thrive, Connect, and Renew. Each theme addresses a number of aspects. Outlined below are only those that directly relate to this project’s aim and the issues and threats identified during the research process of our investigation in eastern South Philadelphia.

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NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

The plan addresses the 29 commercial corridors and centers located in the South District. It states that public-private cooperation is needed in commercial corridors with high vacancy rates and proposes the organization and creation of business associations and business improvement districts (BIDs) and designation of corridor managers. The plan recommends commercial zoning to support growth of existing commercial cores in neighborhoods and commercially oriented corridors along the edges of the district. Additionally, the plan proposes corridor management programs and façade and streetscape improvements along pedestrian corridors, including South 35th Street and Port Breeze Avenue, which are identified as some of the area’s main business corridors (see Figure 3.2). The plan describes three financial assistance programs for commercial corridors: the Streetscape Improvement Program, Taxvoicer, and the Merchant’s Fund.

South 35th Street is an important place for Cambodian immigrants. Business owners and residents have come together around the cause of generating their food and culture through the creation of an official Cambodian Town. Improving current business and increasing foot traffic would help the community set up a business improvement district. However, fieldwork revealed that some friction is latent between different community groups.

**

PUBLIC REALM

The plan addresses the three main diagonal avenues: South 35th Street, Passyunk, and Moyamensing—-that cut across the major grid of the district, creating dynamic spaces and providing room for commercial corridors. The recommendations include the creation and enhancement of pedestrian spaces to support business and encourage pedestrian use and increase pedestrian safety at high-traffic areas, the reevaluation of streetscape to demarcate commercial corridors, and beautification and safety improvements of major transportation infrastructure. Specific areas are addressed outside of the perimeter of the project’s area of interest, such as South 35th Street, Washington Avenue, and Moyamensing Avenue between Washington Avenue and Greenwich Street.

OPEN SPACE

The recommendations for recreation centers and parks include improving green space, activating spaces currently in use, and within our project’s area of interest, Millin Square and West Park, have been prioritized for investment. A new park has been prioritized because of its need for repair, and the second for greening to fill in service gaps for green space access. Many other parks are addressed on the periphery of the project’s area, where they provide a better connection from the district to the city center and to the four miles of waterfront and trails along the Schuylkill River and Delaware River.

The improvement and greening of Millin Square and Washington Park are necessary. However, these sites cannot fully satisfy the needs of the different community groups that live around these green spaces. The presence and creation of community gardens in critical for the district’s wellbeing and to promote interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

The plan examines the changes regarding water management due to the district’s low sea level elevation, the area’s lack of trees, and preservation of community gardens. According to the plan, the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) has been working to mitigate stormwater and flooding issues by the installation of green stormwater infrastructure (GSI). This has been done in partnership with Philadelphia Parks and Recreation (PPR), the Philadelphia Streets Department, the School District of Philadelphia, and local interest groups. The plan states that over 40 GSI projects have been implemented in the South District. More information about these projects, and those in the design process, can be found on the Green Stormwater Infrastructure Project Map, www.phillywater.com/gsi

The recommendations for the building of green stormwater infrastructure at public facilities, the expansion of stormwater management to reduce runoff and flooding, and the establishment of wetland parks, the planting of street trees to increase tree cover, improve air quality, and the preservation of established community gardens on public and privately owned land through ownership transfer to the city through the Neighborhood Parks Trust of the Department of Parks and Recreation. The plan builds upon the goals set in the Philadelphia Greenworks and Green Plan, which will be outlined below.
One of Green 2015’s primary aims is finding opportunity sites for new city park space in areas where people lack green space within a half-mile of their homes. The area with the highest population density and lowest access to green space is South Philadelphia.

The City of Philadelphia Water Department plans to implement incentives for a green stormwater infrastructure system that would address the combined sewer overflows (Philly Parks and Recreation 2010). As highlighted in the Green 2015 Report (2010), this provides the opportunity to align the Green 2015 goal of equal access to parks with a site’s environmental performance when identifying future sites for city park space. There are no urban areas within Philadelphia that lack green space within a half-mile of their homes. The area with the highest population density and lowest access to green space is South Philadelphia.

As mentioned above, the Department of Public Health is creating new green space opportunities from city agencies and members of the public who wish to convert vacant parcels under their jurisdiction into productive uses for the city. In order to achieve these goals, the city has identified several key sites for implementation in South Philadelphia:

1. Tenleytown Community Center
2. Happy Hollow
3. Fort Dupont Recreation Center
4. Kite Park
5. South Philadelphia High School
6. South Street School
7. Rex Technical High School
8. Broad Street and Snyder Avenue
9. 3131 South Columbus Boulevard

As of February 2010, these plans have been developed by the city’s departments of public works and parks, and supported by private and public financial institutions. Further research is required to learn more about the planning process, partners, and funding. However, this brief overview of existing planning efforts highlights the importance of these preliminary areas of interest in this initial investigation. In the future, the city may choose to further refine and expand these initial plans to include other community-based plans that may be developed in the future.
According to the Vacant Lot Program, there are approximately 48,000 vacant lots in the city, over 74% of which are privately owned. This initiative, which is part of the Community Life Improvement Program, is in charge of identifying and maintaining vacant lots. It is the responsibility of the owner to secure and maintain their vacant property. Unfortunately, not all vacant lot owners take care of their property. Property owner neglect, combined with careless parking and illegal dumping of bulk trash, is common in some areas, including South Philadelphia. Vacant properties in unsanitary condition lower property values and add to the perception of blight in neighborhoods. Thus, when owners improperly maintain lots, the program cleans them and bills all costs to the owner. If the cost is not paid, a lien is placed against the property. According to the program, the Community Life Improvement Program's crew cleaned 11,700 lots in fiscal year 2013. However, questions about the Vacant Lot Program's effectiveness in South Philadelphia emerged in this preliminary research phase, since litter is clearly a significant health and environmental problem in the area (see Figure 2.3)).

For more information visit: http://www.phila.gov/qualitylife/vacantlotprogram/index.aspx

LAND BANK

The city has worked hard to keep properties up to code and to make vacant lots and properties safe. However, properties exposed to structural abandonment, code violations, or significant tax arrears have gradually been acquired by different public entities: the city, the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, and the Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation. In recent decades, city-owned land has often been transferred to responsible landlords, sometimes neighbors, to put such properties in use, but many times this is done without any city involvement or community plan.

In order to return vacant and tax-delinquent property to productive use with a defined purpose, the Philadelphia Land Bank has been conceived with the following powers:

- Acquire tax-delinquent properties through tax foreclosures.
- Clear the titles to those properties so that new owners are not burdened by tax liens.
- Consolidate properties owned by multiple public agencies into single ownership in order to spend property transfers to new, private owners.
- Acquire the ownership of a vacant lot from the city or other public entity, and sell it to the public.

The Land Bank is concerned by how to develop a Strategic Plan that will...
guide the acquisition, maintenance, and disposition of property. The recently published 2012 Strategic Plan sets up the ground rules of the Land Bank by following these initiatives (Philadelphia Land Bank 2014):
- Identifying market conditions across the city.
- Providing an inventory of vacant land and tax-delinquent properties that the Land Bank could take.
- Establishing goals to guide Land Bank activity.
- Identifying priority acquisition areas.
- Defining annual targets against which to measure progress.

According to the Land Bank (2015), there are roughly 8,000 city-owned vacant properties and an additional 24,000 privately-owned properties that are both vacant and tax delinquent. Thus, in total, there are about 32,000 potential Land Bank properties. In our view, the Land Bank represents a double-edged sword when facilitating the acquisition of land, as it provides tax incentives and other subsidies to attract private investment and its benefits won’t be directed towards low-income and vulnerable populations and future generations. Nearly before the publication of the Strategic Plan, we visited John Carpenter, the executive director of that initiative, and expressed our concerns and initial vision and ideas for the South District. The City Council had recently passed its ordinance, and consolidation of land was underway. He explained the initiative was eager to transfer or lease public land to responsible landlords who would use land for the benefit of the community, especially in low-income urban areas such as the eastern part of the South District. He answered some of our questions at the meeting, and others were clarified when the plan was officially published. We identified potential opportunities for our project within the goals of this plan.

**GOAL 1: RETURN INDIVIDUAL VACANT LOTS AND BUILDINGS ACROSS THE CITY TO PRODUCTIVE USE.** The strategic plan states that, from the 32,000 potential Land Bank properties, about 25,000 are individual lots. This condition is representative of the eastern South District. The plan promotes individual development opportunities for these lots, the transfer of vacant lots to adjacent homeowners for use as a side yard or parking space, as well as the preservation of existing gardens that have community support and a track record of maintenance.

The Land Bank will reconcile property ownership where gardens are using land in the hands of multiple proprietors and will work with lenders to determine the best entity for preservation. This is an incredible opportunity for community groups to save and expand at-risk community gardens and other spaces in east South Philadelphia.

**GOAL 2: PROMOTE EQUITABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.** The strategic plan aims to support the City Council’s 2,460 Affordable Housing Units Initiative, especially in areas undergoing change. The eastern part of South Philadelphia is considered a priority area for expansion of affordable housing and promotion of equitable development, but mostly in the northern area above Washington Avenue.

Public land is concentrated mostly in the blocks above and below Snyder Avenue. These are potential areas for affordable housing development but also for community facilities and green spaces highly coveted by the community.

**GOAL 3: EXTEND PRIVATE INVESTMENT.** The plan aims to help provide land for viable, market-rate investment, especially in developments incorporating affordable housing.

Private investment could revitalized the area and provide housing opportunities to long-term residents only if affordable housing is mandated for developers acquiring Land Bank properties. Otherwise, market-rate development will continue raising prices and displacing low-income residents. Market-rate housing development already exists in this area, what is needed is affordable housing.

\[ \text{Source: } \text{City of Philadelphia} \]
GOAL 4: CONTRIBUTE TO LONG-TERM ECONOMIC VITALITY
The plan supports existing businesses and neighborhood commercial corridors by synthesizing and conserving marketable sites for new commercial development and expanding existing businesses. The plan targets a number of commercial areas in eastern South Philadelphia, South 8th and 9th Streets, Oregon Avenue, and other scattered spots including the southeast and north ends of East Passyunk are considered prime opportunities.

Business owners, community-based organizations, and Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) have the opportunity to partner with this initiative to generate a local plan to create and improve local economies and community development opportunities in eastern South Philadelphia. Business owners in these corridors already seek economic vitality.

GOAL 5: REINFORCE OPEN SPACE AND URBAN AGRICULTURE
The plan aims to maximize opportunities for partnerships in Philadelphia to improve and repurpose vacant land and by identifying, sensitizing, and/or disposing of vacant land where there is demonstrated need for more or improved space.

In eastern South Philadelphia is considered an area of great opportunities for recreation and land disposition of open space based on local conditions and capacity, especially in the southern area between Snyder and Oregon Avenues. This represents a great opportunity to address the community's lack of green and other community spaces.

GOAL 5: SUPPORT CLEAR AND TRANSPARENT LAND BANK OPERATIONS
The plan aims to follow the strategies set forth in Philadelphia2035 and the approved neighborhood plans to reinforce public initiatives and process. Additionally, it seeks to provide ways for public engagement in Land Bank decision-making. For every property considered for disposition, the Land Bank must provide an on-site notice, notify RCOs serving in the property area, and invite public participation.

The South District plan does not have a specific goal for Land Bank properties. This opens an opportunity for different communities and organizations in the area to be part of the decision-making process and define development according to their needs and priorities.

GOAL 7: ACTIVELY MARKET LAND BANK PROPERTIES
The plan involves establishing a ten-step program of success and utilize targeted acquisition of land to enhance the marketability of existing, publicly-owned vacant property, especially in neighborhoods with deterioration and weak markets that do not attract public investment. In such cases, the Land Bank aims to acquire land around existing publicly-owned vacant land to create marketable sites for the development of affordable housing or other uses such as urban agriculture and community gardens.

These conditions exist in eastern South Philadelphia, as publicly-owned vacant lots can be acquired by side by side with community and/or public-owned vacant land.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS AND REGISTERED COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS
The city's 1996's Zoning code was revised from 1997-2012, and the new code was adopted during the current administration. Bringing things up to date with the changes in the past 60 years and planning in areas that experienced declines in population and industries are both difficult tasks. The Philadelphia City Planning Commission and the City Council are working towards aligning community preferences with zoning changes. Thus, resident involvement is highly desired and encouraged. Assistance from Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) and community development corporations (CDCs) are necessary.

We derived the map of the Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) as well as their locations and boundaries across the city. These organizations receive the benefits of creating a sense of mission and belonging. CDCs have a widespread impact on communities and the built environment and in general. They are a great source of research and the way community members are involved.

Since the community development corporations are involved in planning, zoning, and proposing new laws promoting urban and economic development in Philadelphia, we met with Beth McConnell, Policy Director at Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations (PACDC). McConnell, who lives in the South District, discussed the way this city and their numbers are pushing for equitable development in the city as well as the importance of creating promoting the Land Bank in particular (see above). CDCs are actively involved in affordable housing development in many city districts. Unfortunately, the research revealed that there is no CDC actively involved in the eastern side of the South District.

During our fieldwork, we discovered that community organizations in the West and the Lower North Districts were highly organized and funded in comparison with the ones in the South District. We analyzed that many of these initiatives have brought funding promoting the development of initiatives as well as the proliferation of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and community development corporations (CDCs), but also assumed these were local competition between these organizations. We invested in these assumptions further, as well as the way the South District's community-based organizations have attempted their challenges to organizing and bringing change in their community.
2. SITE SELECTION PARAMETERS AND THE SOUTH SEVEN AREA

Collaborative Strategies has developed 15 parameters to aid in the selection process of an area for any future Restored Spaces project. The parameters emerged from Oshinsky’s qualitative and quantitative research in Philadelphia for the development of the Reuse report and from the project Peer Review of Useful Knowledge for the active-research component. The selected urban area of interest was determined by an aggregation of particular factors that emerged from the analysis of Philadelphia’s social, cultural, economic, political, and spatial conditions. These parameters describe the South Seven. This urban area is framed by Washington Avenue to the north, South Broad Street to the west, Oregon Avenue to the south, and South Fram Street to the east. The applied preliminary transcultural-research framework consisted of site fieldwork; structured and open interviews; relational spatial analyses; GIS data distribution; statistical inference; power mapping; economic, historical, and other biographical studies, as well as different forms of archival and action research.

These parameters can be used as a tool to engage with potential intervention sites and offer multiple strategies to understand an urban environment. By no means are these parameters absolute or all-encompassing, but each offers a unique piece to a neighborhood.

Applying these parameters provides a strong foundation to create more relevant and sustainable urban cultural projects and interventions. Some of the key elements that emerge as parameters manifest in physical elements and social conditions borne out of political and economic realities. These include the concentration of civic organizations and minorities, existing entrepreneurial economic activities and street markets, the impending economic and social transformation of an area, city-owned and vacant land, and cultural manifestations including past Mutual Arts Program involvement and tenure security.

1. DIVERGENT SOCIO-SPATIAL BOUNDARIES

Socio-spatial boundaries include physical, economic, and invisible lines that constitute the different social, economic, and political territories in an urban environment. These lines dissolve and merge in various areas to produce diverse imaginations that provide a fertile ground for the Restored Spaces Initiative and the Mutual Arts Program to co-produce a project that captures them. In this context, imaginations are particularly relevant as, for example, housing issues are lived in and experienced by the people occupying the spaces. Hispanic and Asian communities have distinct imaginations that are heightened in areas where boundaries overlap or co-exist. This approach to public space can be resourceful and can allow for more representative citizen engagement and sustained social practices that are initiated by the Restored Spaces Initiative.

Within the South Seven area, the following boundaries overlap:

1. Strong buffers against impending economic and social upheaval of an area
2. Overlapping registered community organizations and area of civic activity
3. Contrasting densities of vacant impact
4. Porous cultural boundaries and multiple ethnic identities
5. Ethnic community plans and areas lacking formalized proposals
6. Divergent city-wide initiatives and community visions

These socio-spatial boundaries exist at multiple scales including the street, city, and region, and they reveal evolving differences and likely conflicts that are particularly important when implementing a new cultural project that can have lasting impact.

2. CONCENTRATED (SMALL) CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

Civic participation can manifest in multiple ways, including collective cultural expression, community gardening, shadow economies, and social justice advocacy groups. These actions greatly contribute to activating spaces outside institutionalized or private programs.

Seeking spaces enlivened with diverse social, cultural, and political activities beyond that of large area-based non-profit organizations allows for the inclusion of alternative causes and visions. For example, in contrast with other areas of Philadelphia, where large and long-standing nonprofits have an entrenched power over non-governmental development resources, the South Seven area is a more flexible and relatively new area that opens the door for development and experimentation with non-institutionalized approaches. Such approaches can work towards addressing the socio-spatial problems that define the area. Some of the various small organizations operating within the South Seven include:

1. Passyunk Square Civic Association (PSCA) works to enhance the quality of life in the neighborhood, preserve the neighborhood’s unique historic character, and to promote a cohesive community of residents, businesses, and institutions.
2. East Passyunk Avenue Business Improvement District.
3. Southwest by Southeast, a project by Mutual Acts celebrating the diversity and resilience of new immigrants from all over the world, focusing on South Philadelphia’s growing Bhutanese and Burmese communities.
4. Growing Home Gardens, a community-led gardening group located in South Philadelphia that teaches to the needs of refugee communities for Southeast Asia.
6. Friends of Passyunk Square Park, a community organization dedicated to creating events, restoring the park, and maintaining the Park’s cultural diversity in the Passyunk Square area.
7. Mushin Buddhist Temple, the Inner Buddhist Temple located in the Passyunk Square area.
8. Pakistani Association of Greater Philadelphia, the foundational association for Pakistani individuals and families throughout Philadelphia.
10. Free Library, Donut Librarian Branch.

3. CONCENTRATED MINORITIES

When an area hosts large concentrated minorities, this signals its membership in a diverse set of economic, cultural, and civic activities. This condition affords the Flexibility and access to shared agency over common resources, rather than pushing forth a single dominating vision for the neighborhood.

These existing networks and organizational structures provide a strong foundation for partnerships on any future Restored Spaces projects with sustained engagement and impact. Diverse groups and membership also create favorable conditions for fostering projects involving and reflecting Philadelphia’s heterogeneity, stepping away from homogeneous cultural representations. Mutual Arts focus on processes that serve a larger movement around equity, fairness, and progress across all of society can be particularly relevant in areas like the South Seven that bear a wealth of cultural and ethnic difference.

4. ORGANIZED ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES, ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The presence of a local economy, one that is used to recycling and new cycles of capital, can benefit a new arts project, as a local economy can reflect the emerging network of self-sustaining entrepreneurship.

A local economy can be harnessed and expanded to reach