



Demographic dynamics and art engagement: urban development in Lubbock and El Paso, Texas

Dinámicas demográficas y participación artística: desarrollo urbano en Lubbock y El Paso, Texas

ASMA MEHAN Texas Tech University, Estados Unidos
asma.mehan@ttu.eduSADAF ALIKHANI Texas Tech University, Estados Unidos
sadafe.alikhani@ttu.edu

ABSTRACT Cities serve as dynamic arenas where citizens negotiate needs and co-create solutions to enhance urban life. To address the complexities of contemporary urban living, planning must respond to social justice, economic vitality, and cultural inclusion. This study explores how demographic factors—age, ethnicity, and economics—influence art engagement in two culturally distinct Texan cities: Lubbock and El Paso. Using qualitative comparative analysis and data from a graduate seminar at Texas Tech University, we examine student-led art projects reflecting community experiences. These creative works reveal how art fosters communication, cultural belonging, and social cohesion. Findings underscore that integrating art into urban planning—through public installations, murals, and participatory design—can revitalize underutilized spaces and address diverse community needs. The study argues for art as a tool of creative placemaking, especially in demographically varied cities, emphasizing that culturally responsive engagement strategies can cultivate inclusive, vibrant urban environments.

RESUMEN Las ciudades son espacios dinámicos donde los ciudadanos negocian sus necesidades y co-crean soluciones para mejorar la vida urbana. Para abordar las complejidades del entorno urbano contemporáneo, la planificación debe responder a la justicia social, la vitalidad económica y la inclusión cultural. Este estudio explora cómo los factores demográficos—edad, etnicidad y situación económica—influyen en la participación artística en dos ciudades culturalmente distintas de Texas: Lubbock y El Paso. A través de un análisis cualitativo comparativo y datos del curso ARCH 5384 de posgrado en la Universidad Técnica de Texas, examinamos proyectos artísticos realizados por estudiantes que reflejan experiencias comunitarias. Estas obras creativas muestran cómo el arte fomenta la comunicación, el sentido de pertenencia cultural y la cohesión social. Los hallazgos subrayan que integrar el arte en la planificación urbana—mediante instalaciones públicas, murales y diseño participativo—puede revitalizar espacios infrautilizados y responder a las diversas necesidades comunitarias. El estudio defiende el arte como herramienta de creación de lugar creativo en ciudades con diversidad demográfica, destacando que estrategias de participación culturalmente pertinentes pueden fomentar entornos urbanos inclusivos y vibrantes.

Recibido: 31/08/2024
Revisado: 06/03/2025
Aceptado: 19/03/2025
Publicado: 29/07/2025

KEYWORDS urban planning, social needs, art engagement, demographic factors, urban development

PALABRAS CLAVE planificación urbana, necesidades sociales, participación artística, factores demográficos, desarrollo urbano



Cómo citar este artículo/How to cite this article: Mehan, A. & Alikhani, S. (2025). Demographic Dynamics and Art Engagement: Urban Development in Lubbock and El Paso, Texas. *Estoa. Revista de la Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo de la Universidad de Cuenca*, 14(28), 163-177. <https://doi.org/10.18537/estv014.n028.a12>

1. Introduction

A city serves as the focal point where members of society get together to satisfy their needs and work towards finding solutions to address them. To meet societal expectations and improve quality of life, urban planning techniques must consider social equality, economic growth, environmental sustainability, and cultural vibrancy (Yao, 2023). Urban sociology offers a range of methods for studying the social needs and pressures within a metropolis. One of these strategies involves exploring the interrelationship between human needs (Papachristou and Rosas Casals, 2016; Williams, 2016), and a suitable method is studying social interaction with art. There are a multitude of fascinating ways to approach the relationship between art and community. Initiatives in the arts and humanities promote connections among individuals, communities, spaces, and the environment (Nurse-Bray, 2020). Art as a Medium of Communication: It's common knowledge that art is a strong means of communicating thoughts, feelings, and opinions about society. The fundamental qualities of art are in line with the ideas of free speech, enabling people to express ideas that may be divisive or uncomfortable (Mehan et al., 2023; Kearns, 2020). Art activities contribute to positive cultural change by engaging the public in dialogue with contemporary ideas and art practices. Public engagement opportunities can benefit social cohesion as well as urban development (Goldberg-Miller, 2022). Engaging creatively with art can meet a range of requirements for urban dwellers (Fraaije, 2023). Many individuals and diverse demographics influence communities, making it crucial to consider the demographic aspects of these societies when discussing social engagement and communication. Demographic variables will often be important influences on engagement with different art forms (Ateca-Amestoy and Prieto-Rodriguez, 2023).

This research focuses on two radical cities in Texas, USA: Lubbock and El Paso. Due to their geographical location, we can observe the demographical variety as well as the influence of demography in art. In Lubbock and El Paso, there are significantly different demographic geographies, and as such, it's important to explore how demographic variables, such as age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, might influence our patterns of engagement with a certain art form (Mostafavi et al., 2025). Therefore, our particular interest aims to address the question: How do we find the specific needs of these groups in the context of a radical city? How can urban planners use art to meet these needs? How does art engagement vary among different age groups and ethnicities? What are the ways that age, ethnicity, and economic status influence the public's participation in the arts in Lubbock and El Paso? Additionally, this study considers how local artists, local cultural policymakers, and the geographical location in relation to demography can shape the arts of Lubbock and El Paso. Public participation in the arts in Lubbock and El Paso is shaped by factors such as age, ethnicity, and economic status (Mehan, 2024a; 2024b). Age plays a significant role, with younger audiences in these cities gravitating

toward contemporary and digital art forms, while older adults engage more with traditional performing arts. Programs aimed at senior populations, such as painting classes, have been shown to improve mental well-being and social engagement (Greer et al., 2012). Ethnicity also influences arts participation, particularly in El Paso, which has a majority Hispanic population. Cultural events reflecting Latin American heritage, such as folkloric dance and mariachi performances, draw significant local interest (Villa et al., 2019). Economic status affects participation, as lower-income individuals may have fewer opportunities to access paid art events. Initiatives like free public murals and community arts programs help bridge this gap, making art more accessible to underserved populations.

2. Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the intersection of art engagement, urban development, and demographic factors in Lubbock and El Paso, Texas. The research integrates qualitative comparative analysis, case study methods, and participatory research through student-led projects in urban community design. A two-pronged methodological framework guides this study. First, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) is utilized to identify patterns of art engagement among different demographic groups in Lubbock and El Paso. QCA is particularly useful for analyzing complex social phenomena where multiple variables interact, allowing us to discern the relationship between art participation and factors such as age, ethnicity, and economic status (Mehan et al., 2022a; 2022b). Data sources include interviews with local artists, policymakers, and community organizers, as well as observations of public art initiatives and participatory urban interventions.

Second, the research employs a case study approach focusing on two cities—Lubbock and El Paso—selected due to their distinct socio-political landscapes and demographic diversity. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how urban planning incorporates art to address social needs and foster community cohesion (Mehan and Stuckemeyer, 2023a; 2023b). Artworks analyzed include public murals, digital art installations, and performances that serve as mediums for social expression. By examining these works, we assess how they reflect and respond to the cultural and economic conditions of their respective communities. A significant component of this study draws from ARCH 5384, a course on inclusive urban community design at Texas Tech University. Sixteen master's and PhD students engaged in research-driven design projects exploring the role of art in urban spaces. Students conducted fieldwork in Lubbock and El Paso, collecting qualitative data through mapping and visual observation. Their final projects—ranging from urban placemaking proposals to interactive installations—provide firsthand insights into the role of art in shaping

community identity and urban resilience. This multi-layered methodology ensures a robust examination of the intersection between demographic factors and art engagement. The study highlights how urban planning can leverage artistic interventions to enhance social inclusion and cultural sustainability (Alikhani and Mehan, 2024).

3. Literature Review

3.1. Urban planning and its influences on social needs

Urban planning plays a vital role in aligning the built environment with societal needs. When responsive to population demands, it improves quality of life and mitigates social inequities (Yao, 2023). Maslow's hierarchy of needs, when applied to design, enables planners to craft inclusive environments that support human potential (Donovan, 2010). Tools like Urban Strategy help manage spatial complexity and diverse stakeholder goals through real-time urban impact data (Mehan and Tafrata, 2022; Borst, 2010). Harmonious development prioritizes integration of economic, environmental, social, and cultural factors, especially for vulnerable populations such as the elderly and disabled (Paraschiv and Rauf, 2022). In contrast, unplanned urbanization often results in skewed land-use patterns and unequal infrastructure, underscoring the value of strategic planning.

Lubbock and El Paso are framed as “radical cities,” inspired by McGuirk's concept of urban resistance through grassroots action and alternative planning (Mehan and Mehan, 2022; McGuirk, 2014; Bonu, 2021; Schrom-Feiertag et al., 2020; Sánchez-Hernández and Glückler, 2019). El Paso's identity is shaped by borderland activism and immigrant rights advocacy (Ordeman, 2023), while Lubbock—home to Texas Tech University—features countercultural movements within a conservative landscape (Felici et al., 2019). Both cities exemplify participatory planning, cooperative practices, and community-led innovation (Mehan, 2023a; 2023b; 2023c).

Urban sociology provides tools such as ethnography, community mapping, and impact assessments to include marginalized voices in planning (Williams, 2016). Network analysis further reveals the complex interrelations of urban needs (Papachristou and Rosas Casals, 2016). Key strategies include social mix policies to diversify neighborhoods, despite concerns about gentrification (Musterd, 2022), and participatory policymaking, though identifying minority needs remains challenging (Cho, 2021). Diversity is better achieved when density is supported by residential variation, amenities, and income balance. For example, food business density correlates with greater social mixing (Fan et al., 2023). Finally, multicultural needs assessments emphasize the importance of culturally competent urban policies. Marginalized groups—including African Americans, Latinx, LGBTQ+ communities, and veterans—seek inclusive services and representation in urban governance (Bryant et al., 2023). These insights support a planning model that is inclusive, participatory, and adaptive to demographic diversity.

3.2. Art Engagement in Urban Planning addresses the primary citizen's needs

Creative engagement with art addresses essential urban needs, including fostering belonging, cultural identity, and social cohesion, while enhancing residents' participation in city governance. Public art offers meaningful urban experiences that reinforce identity, wellbeing, and a city's overall “lovability” (Yazdi and Jürgens, 2024). Art-centered citizen engagement—such as participatory theatre or interaction design—enables collaboration between the public and innovation professionals in shaping smart cities (Fraaije, 2023; Fraaije et al., 2023; Mostafavi and Mehan, 2023). These practices foster dialogue and reorient attention toward the social futures of technology (Fraaije et al., 2023).

Placemaking through public art encourages residents to critically engage with their environment, helping to heal historical divisions and build cultural awareness (Nursey-Bray, 2020). Arts and culture, when integrated into urban planning, strengthen community development and cohesion (Goldberg-Miller, 2022). Fraaije (2023) advocates for a governance model of responsible innovation that is inclusive, reflexive, and responsive to citizens' perspectives—ensuring outcomes that truly reflect social needs. Public art also serves as a platform for social expression in multicultural settings, giving voice to marginalized groups and contributing to urban social structures (Nursey-Bray, 2020). Demographic

classification—based on age, gender, ethnicity, location, and socio-economic status—shapes how communities engage with public art. These demographic factors play a crucial role in participation patterns and in defining cultural narratives within urban spaces (Varis Husar et al., 2023). By integrating demographic insights into public art strategies, urban planners can foster equitable engagement, increase community ownership, and enrich the cultural fabric of cities.

3.2.1. Age, ethnicity, and economic status

Age, ethnicity, race, and economic status are all factors that drive public participation in the arts, which is positively correlated with arts engagement (Bone et al., 2021; Churchill, 2007). For instance, the process of aging has a negative impact on the performing arts because participation decreases with age. Additionally, mobility and health status significantly influence involvement across all age groups (Check and Walton, 2014). Social background and education programs are also significant factors in active arts participation, with out-of-school art education having a significant effect (Vanherwegen and Lievens, 2014). Ethnicity also plays a role in mediating the effect of education on arts attendance, with more pronounced effects for those with activities of culturally incongruent roots. As such, engagement with contemporary and interactive art forms directly corresponds to the community's cultural roots (Gil-Quintana et al., 2020; Hart and Henn, 2017). Studies have shown that younger adults, individuals with higher levels of education, those with stronger social support, and women tend to engage in more artistic activities than any other demographic group of people (Bone et al., 2021, 2024). This is also true for individuals in lower socioeconomic positions. Simultaneously, studies have indicated that individuals with poorer earnings, little social support, and less effective coping mechanisms are more inclined to utilise artistic hobbies as a means of regulating their emotions (Fancourt et al., 2020). According to research on cultural participation, demographic variables play an important role in how communities participate in the arts. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital suggests that socioeconomic status can limit and determine access to and participation in cultural activities (Aslany, 2020; Zamani and Mehan, 2019). Jenkins's participatory culture frameworks can also be helpful in explaining differential engagement with the arts among different demographic groups. For example, evidence suggests that younger populations tend to engage with contemporary and interactive art forms, as these correspond to the trend (Gil-Quintana et al., 2020; Hart and Henn, 2017).

3.2.2. Age

The impact of age on artistic participation is uneven and varies between studies. On the one hand, while quantitative studies have found only a minor impact of age and cohort on arts participation in crowds

(Díaz León et al., 2021), which underlines the creative interaction with target participants, other studies have emphasised a decreasing engagement within the arts with age, starting around 55 years of age and continuing despite expected increases in leisure time as well as growing income in the older population (Stern, 2011). Certain studies, on the other hand, point to the positive effects of group-based arts interventions on physical, mental, and social health among older people, which highlights the necessity of including older people in arts practices for the promotion of positive health among aging populations (Churchill, 2007). Along a similar line of thought, creative groups involving older populations also demonstrate the valuable contribution older people can make to society (McAvinchey, 2013).

3.2.3. Socioeconomic Status

Each age group observes the predictable impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on art participation. Children's arts and cultural activities exhibit socioeconomic gradients, with social disadvantage increasing the likelihood of not participating in out-of-school arts and cultural activities (Wei and Broome, 2022). This shows the importance of school-provided arts programs for universal access to opportunities (Mak and Fancourt, 2021). The participation of adults in arts and cultural activities are key to social integration, and there is a social gradient in such participation found in several studies, which might also be considered as a factor contributing to health inequalities (Mak et al., 2020). The viewer's socioeconomic status also influences their perception of the visual arts. For high SES participants, preference for high fame artists is significant in response to images of artworks. no artist information is significant.

3.2.4. Ethnicity

The role of a person's ethnicity in arts engagement is a crucial area of study. There is an abundance of literature suggesting that different ethnicities have different patterns of arts engagement. For example, a particular study observed that black and Asian people showed greater experiential creative processes compared with whites (Mak et al., 2020). Similarly, research has linked ethnicity to barriers to arts engagement, showing that whites face fewer barriers across all domains (Thomson and Jaque, 2023). The relationship between ethnicity and specific childhood adversities, such as the greater likelihood of trauma for black individuals and emotional abuse for some ethnicities, can impact creative self-efficacy and personal identity (Fancourt et al., 2020). Recognising these ethnic differences is vital, especially in designing arts policies and interventions aimed at addressing these diverse populations.

3.3. The art engagement in urban context

Radical cities are shaped by transformative urban paradigms, political shifts, and movements that redefine space. In the 1980s, progressive U.S. cities began investing in socially accountable housing and office developments, marking a shift toward environmentally conscious urban planning (Rosdil, 1991). This era also saw postmodern cities like Los Angeles become shaped by fragmented spatial forms and global economic forces (Beauregard, 2006). The Radical's City project highlights how such cities act as testing grounds for cohesion and polarization, offering models for experimentation and reform (Bakshi, 2016). As such, radical cities in North America embody ongoing activism, social responsibility, and global change, making them critical for understanding urban transformation.

Demographic factors—age, ethnicity, and economic status—profoundly influence arts engagement. Older adults often face mobility and health limitations that restrict participation (Tahar et al., 2023; van Hoof and Marston, 2021). Socioeconomic status and educational attainment are strong predictors of engagement across various art forms (Bone et al., 2021). Arts participation disparities also affect children, with those from privileged households participating more, although school programs help mitigate this gap (Mak and Fancourt, 2021). Geographic deprivation further limits access, regardless of individual demographics (Mak et al., 2021). Moreover, political engagement through art deepens our understanding of how socio-political dynamics shape cultural expression. Urban artists play key roles in reflecting and responding to the political contexts of their cities (Tappert et al., 2024; Kaddar et al., 2022). These findings underscore the importance of addressing demographic inequities in arts access, particularly in radical urban spaces, and highlight the need for targeted interventions to foster inclusive cultural participation.

4. Comparative case studies

El Paso and Lubbock in Texas, USA, with their complex social, political, and historical dynamics firmly rooted in their unique cultural and geographical landscape, are prime examples of radical cities. Lubbock and El Paso are considered radical cities due to their histories of activism, sociopolitical resistance, and countercultural movements. El Paso's radicalism is shaped by its border location, making it a center for immigration activism, labor movements, and racial justice struggles. The city has a strong history of Chicano activism and transnational student protests, particularly involving Chicano movements. During health crises like the Spanish flu, Latinx communities faced disproportionate government policies, reinforcing patterns of marginalization and resistance (Ordeman, 2023). Lubbock, despite being in a conservative region, fosters countercultural movements, particularly through Texas Tech University. The city has seen student activism, environmental movements, and

an evolving arts scene that challenges traditional norms. Additionally, urban planning discussions have sought to create more inclusive infrastructure (Felici et al., 2019). Both cities exemplify radicalism through activism, cultural defiance, and policy challenges, making them pivotal spaces for political and social transformation in Texas.

Lubbock and El Paso have very lively art scenes, full of different kinds of art reflecting different cultures, blending cultures, and creating an innovative approach to different kinds of art. Collectively, these three criteria significantly influence art engagement, which in turn has a profound impact on addressing societal needs for a better living environment.

4.1. El Paso, Texas, USA

The rich history of complex cultural demographics in El Paso is reflected in the art and arts activity within the city. The bi-national metro area of El Paso, which includes Ciudad Juárez in Mexico and Las Cruces in the US, has experienced an outmigration of its non-Hispanic population as well as a Latin influx to the US that has swelled the share of the US Hispanic and migration population (Peach and Williams, 1994). The census shows that 81% of the El Paso population is Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2023).

Beyond this, the city's population includes whites (49.4 percent non-Hispanic), blacks or African Americans (3.6 percent), Asians (1.6 percent), and others (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2023), which further contributes to the city's artistic consumer culture that celebrates the arts. El Paso census data reflects a vibrant younger scene: 25.4 percent are aged 18 and under (US Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2023).

This implies that El Paso is not just a border-plex city but also brimming with the potential for young people to shape it. The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) plays a significant role in shaping the city's artistic and cultural environment. UTEP provides platforms for young artists and researchers, encouraging cross-border collaborations and artistic innovation. The university has contributed to the cultural and demographic structure of El Paso by fostering academic initiatives that integrate art into the urban landscape. By incorporating its programs and student projects into public spaces, UTEP has reinforced the city's identity as a radical urban hub. UTEP provides platforms for young artists and researchers, encouraging cross-border collaborations and artistic innovation. The university has contributed to the cultural and demographic structure of El Paso by fostering academic initiatives that integrate art into the urban landscape. By incorporating its programs and student projects into public spaces, UTEP has reinforced the city's identity as a radical urban hub.

This promise is most vividly evident when observing the local cultural scene, where young innovation and educational creativity are on vivid and playful display.

Considering that many of the elements of the culture of the arts of Mexico and other Latino artistic traditions were also integral to this cultural region, it seems apparent that the Spanish cultural influence is evident in the art of El Paso. Local civic galleries and regional festivals display artwork that strengthens multicultural stories and histories.

In various ways, art enhances community life in El Paso. El Paso's arts are lively in their exhibition of cultural identity, historical narrative, and social criticism, made even more alive by the city's location on the US-Mexico border (Mehan, 2021). Mural art challenges border zones by affirming the lived experience of border communities. One of these projects is a bronze memorial of 12 figures known as the 'Memorial de los XII Viajeros del Suroeste', which commemorates multiculturalism's contributions to the American Southwest and commercializes tourism through historical and cultural references (Chowdhury, 2023).

Another example is the use of art in response to the 2019 white nationalist attack in El Paso, where the use of art and the social media hashtags #ElPasoStrong and #ElPasoFirme helped counter the perpetrator's hate and fear by invoking an image of unity and agency. Additionally, the use of public art can promote and strengthen the community's identity, including its self-narrative history. The controversy surrounding the Juan de Oate statue, which was part of downtown El Paso's revitalization, and its distortion of history demonstrate how public art can reflect and reveal general historical attitudes. Historians point to the statue's Hispanic framing of history and the erasure of Mexican and Chicano history in the region, despite its billing as a tourist attraction. This sculpture not only aestheticizes the urban space, but it also creates a space for dialogue and reflection on border social-political issues. Artists have appropriated public space in Ciudad Juárez and created critical art that elicits community engagement while also offering hope or an identity to those subjected to violence and social strains (Sánchez-Hernández and Glückler, 2019).

More importantly, the El Paso Museum of Art (EPMA) and other cultural entities continue to reflect and foster heterogeneous reality exhibitions by local and international artists, as well as through the development of various projects aimed at promoting an integrated culture, engagement, and community participation.

EPMA is a museum that makes its home in West Texas and serves as an academic and cultural outlet for West Texas, New Mexico, and Northern Mexico. The museum reflects the demographics of the region: it accommodates a binational population, with over 80 percent identifying as Mexican, Hispanic, or Mexican American; it also honours members of diverse cultures through its exhibitions, acquisitions, educational programming, and staff representation. A 2017 Texas Commission on the Arts grant examiner's assessment commended the museum for its bilingual exhibition catalogues. Considered among the finest in the world, the museum's collection of artworks includes Mexican retablos, works from all periods of Spanish Colonial, European, American, and Mexican art, and its mission is to serve as a model for cultural institutions straddling the US/Mexico border. The museum tends to replace a temporary exhibition with one featuring more contemporary work but pay attention to its robust program of free events, including several hands-on workshops for kids and teens. The renewed focus on artmaking in specific neighbourhoods or regions lead a neighbourhood to become more fully invested in its culture as well as its social issues and crises of the present day. Historically, El Paso has served as a gateway to commerce, culture, and ideas—as 'the pass' part of the name implies—and, in this capacity, the mission of EPMA is to be a model for border cultural institutions (Bonu, 2021).

When discussing these two regions (El Paso and Lubbock), it is critical to examine the communities and urban elements that influence these cities' demographics. For example, the prominent border-plex feature of El Paso is an important point to examine because, with this information, we can assume the social demands of a specific group of people. These numbers and normative representations documented in a census and interpreted in local arts curricula represent the ways that the city embraces and promotes its heterogeneous identity, where residents and visitors alike can find a diverse spectrum of artistic genres, inspired by its mixed cultural heritage. To provide concrete examples, we have picked a few final designs from students participating in ARCH 5384, The Community Design and Development (CDD) course at the Huckabee College of Architecture, Texas Tech University, during the spring semester of 2024. To illustrate the tangible and measurable nature of art engagement among young age groups who express their social needs and emotions through visual art. In this context, we offer two studies from two separate students working on relevant topics in El Paso and Lubbock.

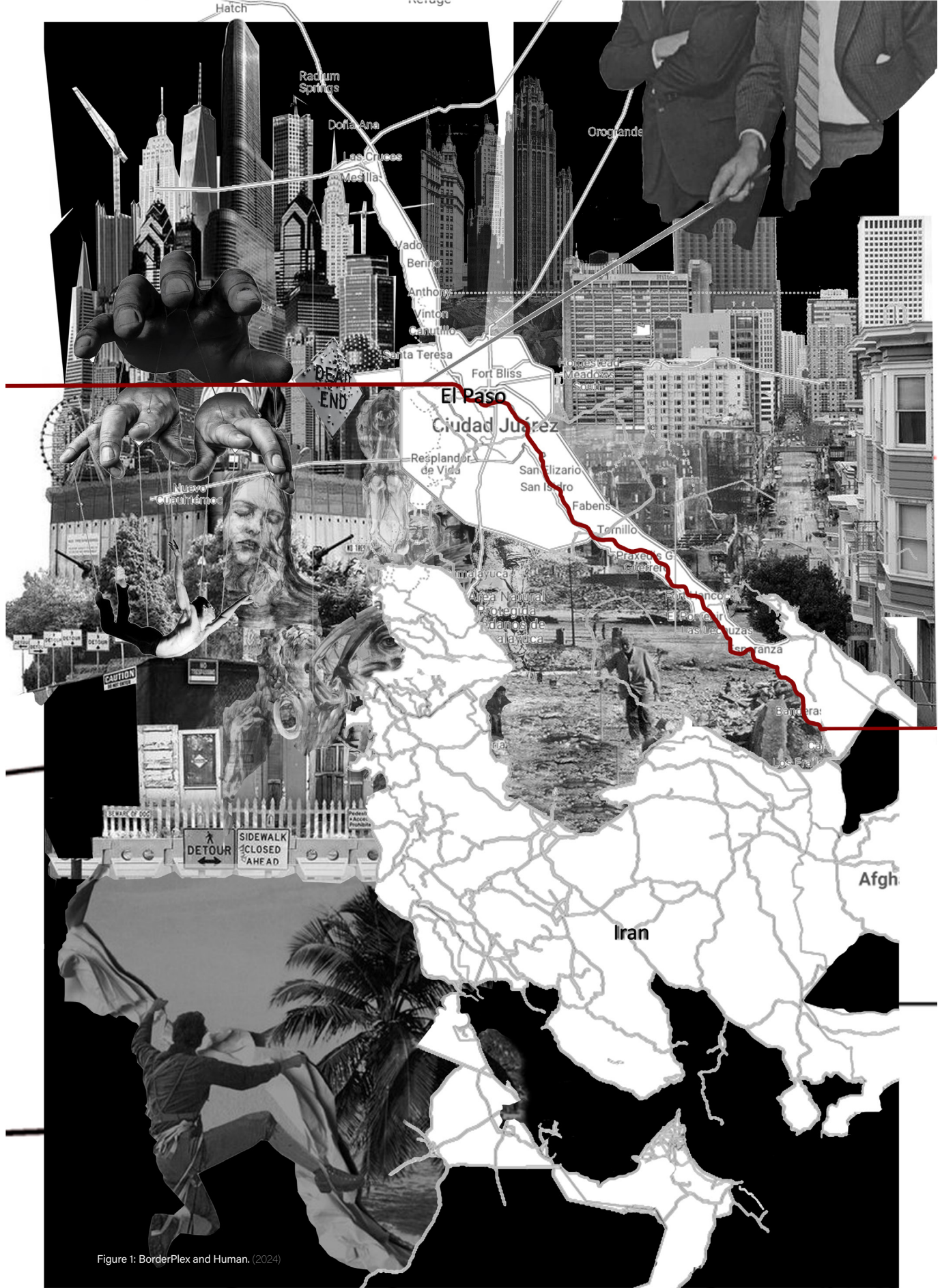


Figure 1: BorderPlex and Human. (2024)

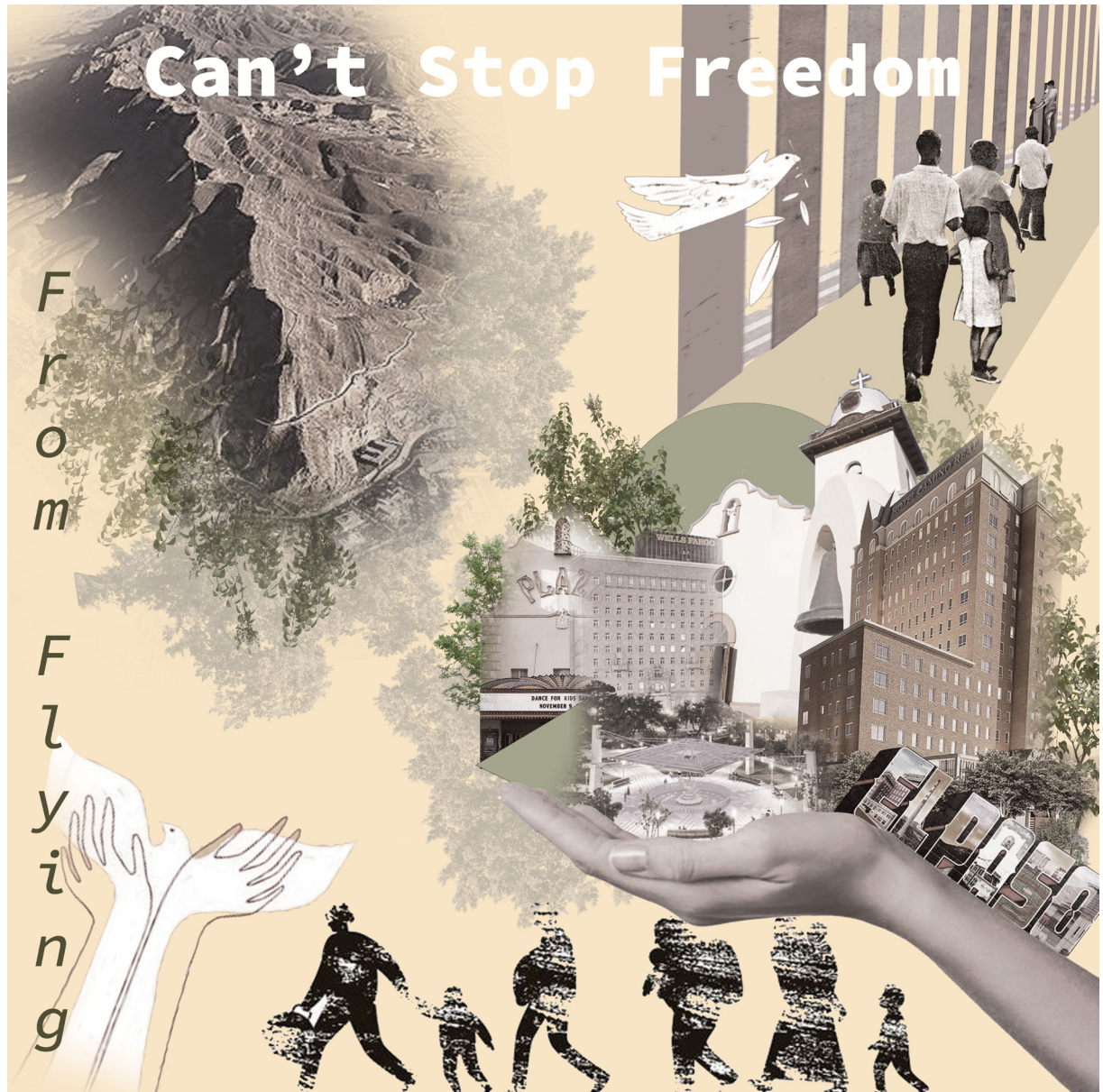


Figure 2: El Paso Collage, Reyes, J. (2024)



Figure 3: Lubbock First Friday Art Trails (FFAT), August 2024. (2024).

Figure 1 of the Border Plex and Human project depicts how a single line on a map can create diverse experiences around the world, as well as how politics, rules, and regulations that influence these borders can impact humans' lives even though they are only a few miles apart. All these lines are abstract representations of a single landscape. This line, drawn by individuals in positions of power, divides a single landscape. In this project, the designer expresses her experience through visual art to depict the current reality in the border city of El Paso. This project aims to demonstrate that city residents, despite being aware of the significance of border rules, perceive borders in their area as important and physically visible, leading them to feel discriminated against. Consequently, any form of border within the city triggers their emotions.

Figure 2 focuses on community facilities, services, and neighbourhood planning. Despite their geographical differences, El Paso and Lubbock, both in Texas, have similarities in urban design, development, and community service integration. The designer of this visual artistic work wishes to demonstrate that El Paso, sometimes known as the "Sunset City", is noted for its vibrant sunsets and breath-taking views. El Paso, known for its history and culture, is located on the US-Mexico border. Spanish colonialism, Native American tribes, and Mexican traditions shape El Paso's culture, which people celebrate through cuisine, music, art, and festivals. It has historically served as a bridge between nations, encouraging cultural diversity and fostering a strong sense of identity among its residents. El Paso's history and culture, from its frontier roots to its current role as a vibrant urban centre, continue to shape its character and enrich its people.

4.2. Lubbock, Texas, USA

Art in Lubbock, Texas, reflects both historical depth and contemporary vibrancy, influenced significantly by the city's youthful population driven by Texas Tech University. Census data shows a culturally diverse population: 36,6% Hispanic or Latino, 8,0% Black or African American, 2,8% Asian, and 67,5% white (Lubbock, Texas Population, 2024). Additionally, 21,1% of residents speak a language other than English at home, reinforcing Lubbock's potential as a multilingual, multicultural arts hub (Lubbock, Texas Population, 2024). This diversity is reflected in the city's cultural infrastructure, especially downtown—home to the Charles Adams Gallery, CASP, LHUCA, Buddy Holly Hall, and the First Friday Art Trail (FFAT) (Dowdle, 2020). FFAT plays a major role in community engagement and economic stimulation, drawing visitors who support local artists, food vendors, and businesses. Cities with active downtown arts sectors are more attractive to both residents and investors (Dowdle, 2020) (Figure 3).

FFAT's significance was recently highlighted when the city cut its funding ahead of its 20th anniversary. This decision, influenced by misinformation about LGBTQ+ programming, triggered a strong public response. The August 2024 event saw record turnout and donations from citizens determined to sustain the tradition. Their involvement reaffirmed FFAT's cultural value and the community's commitment to artistic expression. These demographic insights, census data, and civic actions reveal how Lubbock's cultural scene reflects its heterogeneous identity. Art initiatives not only express diverse social values but also foster unity, dialogue, and resilience.



Figure 4: CultArt. Note: Cultural art is a significant aspect of various cultures and societies. Authors and Hanson, J. (2024)

The importance of demographics in determining who engages in the arts is crucial, and urban planners can incorporate these factors into their planning to ensure meaningful art experiences for as many residents in Lubbock and El Paso as possible. By strategically focussing on the needs and desires of various age groups, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses, planners can work to develop urban areas that enhance the quality of life for all residents. This effort helps to foster a culturally rich and socially cohesive community where art reflects, illuminates, and unites diverse groups of people. By integrating art, community-driven policies, and inclusive urban planning, cities can foster better well-being, stronger communities, and more vibrant public spaces (Dash and Thilagam, 2023). We provide additional final designs created by ARCH 5384 master students to illustrate how visual art can help the younger generation express their social demands and emotions in Lubbock.

Figures 4 and 5 from the ARCH 5384 Community Design and Development course directly engage with themes of art, demography, and place-based identity. Figure 4, titled "Public Art Engagement" explores how age, ethnicity, and economic status influence participation in public art in Lubbock and El Paso. The work visualizes disparities across demographic groups, highlighting how Lubbock's active downtown art scene and El Paso's strong Hispanic cultural presence shape different forms of engagement. The visualization underscores the importance of considering demographic variables to foster inclusive public art participation and urban cultural life.

Figure 5 illustrates the historical context of Lubbock County—established in 1876 and formally unified in 1909—and its evolution into the "Hub City" of the Texas Panhandle. Despite its reputation as "The Friendliest City in America," Lubbock, like many cities, grapples with social and political inequities.

Together, Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate how geographic, economic, and cultural differences shape neighborhood development strategies in Lubbock and El Paso. Lubbock's youth-driven population and industries in agriculture and technology contrast with El Paso's binational identity, borderland commerce, and compact urban form. While different in context, both cities face shared urban challenges such as housing affordability, healthcare access, and community revitalization. Ultimately, these student works show how art can serve as a vehicle for expressing social needs and engaging with urban realities. Through visual storytelling, students translate census data and lived experience into compelling reflections on community identity and cultural diversity.

5. Conclusions and further discussions

This research highlights the significant role of art in urban planning as a tool for social cohesion, cultural representation, and inclusive urban development. By analyzing art engagement in Lubbock and El Paso, this study demonstrates how demographic factors—age, ethnicity, and economic status—shape public participation in the arts and influence broader urban planning strategies.

The findings reveal that younger populations are drawn to contemporary and interactive art forms, while older demographics engage more with traditional artistic expressions. This variation underscores the importance of public art policies that cater to intergenerational audiences. Ethnicity plays a pivotal role, as seen in El Paso's predominantly Hispanic community, where cultural heritage informs artistic practices and public engagement. In contrast, Lubbock's art scene, shaped by Texas Tech University, reflects a mix of contemporary experimental art and community-driven initiatives. Economic status remains a significant determinant of art accessibility, with lower-income groups often facing barriers to participation in institutionalized art spaces. However, community-driven art interventions—such as public murals, participatory installations, and free cultural festivals—emerge as effective strategies to bridge this gap and promote inclusivity.

The comparative case study of Lubbock and El Paso highlights how urban planning strategies must be tailored to local socio-cultural contexts. In El Paso, borderland identity and immigration narratives significantly shape artistic production, reinforcing a sense of belonging and activism. Meanwhile, in Lubbock, the presence of a university-driven creative sector fosters innovation in public art, despite recent political challenges and funding cuts to cultural initiatives. These dynamics emphasize the need for proactive policies that sustain and enhance public art engagement as a means of fostering urban resilience.

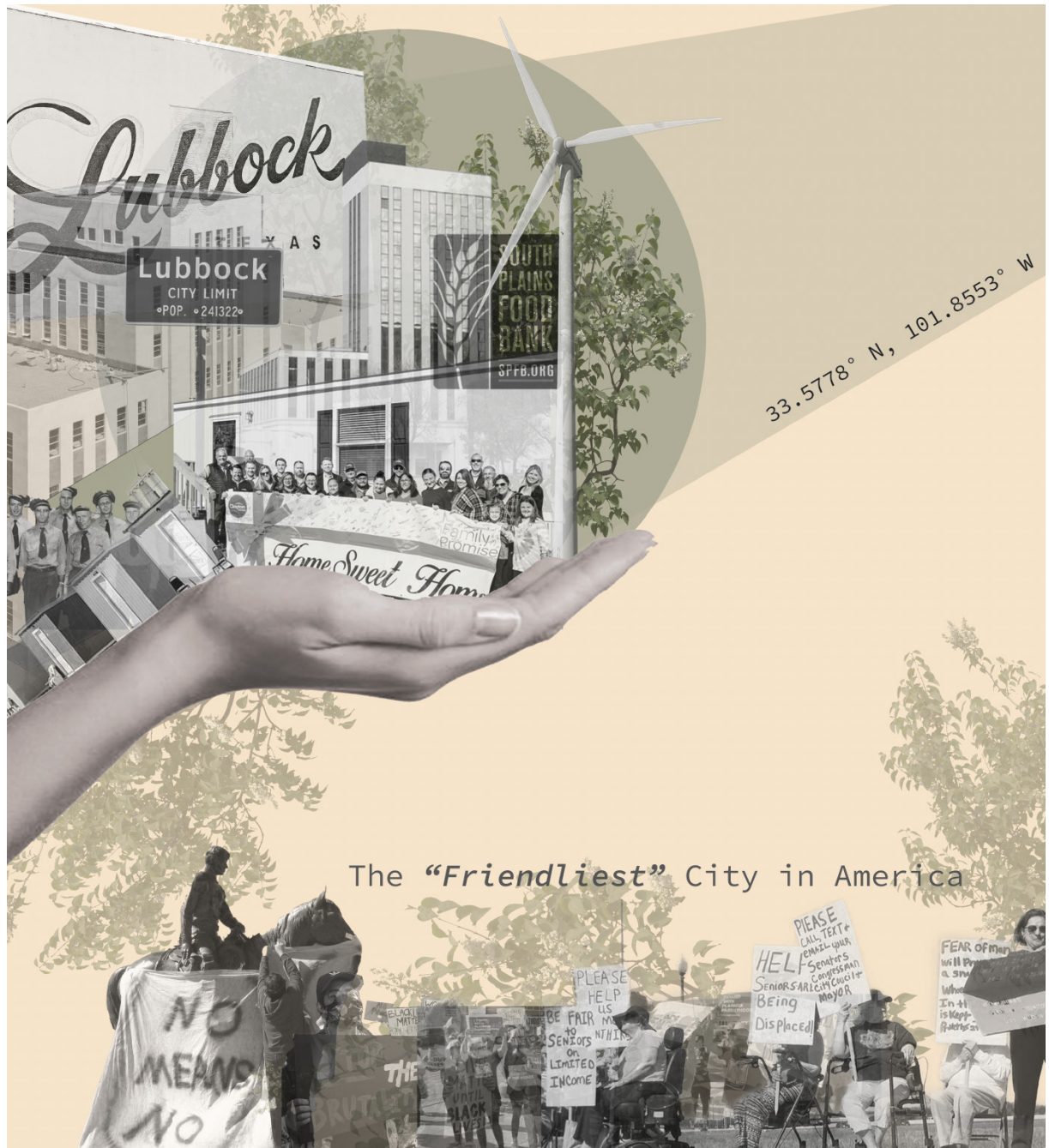


Figure 5: Lubbock Collage. Herbein, J. (2024)

Embedding art in city design is not merely an aesthetic endeavor; it is a strategic approach to addressing social and spatial inequalities. By leveraging art as a platform for dialogue, activism, and representation, urban planners can create spaces that reflect and support the diverse needs of city residents. The findings of this study advocate for a more inclusive, participatory urban planning approach, where art serves as a catalyst for cultural sustainability and community empowerment. Future research should further explore the role of urban governance in supporting grassroots artistic initiatives, as well as investigate how digital and technological interventions can enhance art accessibility in diverse urban environments. Expanding this study to other radical cities would provide a broader comparative framework for understanding the evolving role of art in urban development. Ultimately, this research affirms that art-infused urban planning can foster equitable, dynamic, and culturally rich cities that prioritize the well-being of all residents.

6. Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the students of the Community Design and Development Resources graduate seminar, Spring 2024, at the Huckabee College of Architecture, Texas Tech University. Special appreciation goes to Jacqueline Reyes, Jaclynn Herbein, Sadaf Alikhani, and Jylian Hanson, whose work has been selected and discussed in this paper.

Conflict of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

© **Copyright:** Asma Mehan and Sadaf Alikhani, 2025.

© **Edition copyright:** *Estoa*, 2025.

7. Bibliographic references

- Alikhani, S., Mehan, A. (2024). From Ostads to Architects: Evolution of Iranian Architectural Practices in Residential Buildings. In: Cheshmehzangi, A., Roaf, S. (eds.) *Persian Vernacular Architecture. Urban Sustainability*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-1116-4_2
- Aslany, M. (2020). *Contested Capital: Rural Middle Classes in India: Rural Middle Classes in India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ateca-Amestoy, V., & Prieto-Rodríguez, J. (2023). Whether Live or Online, Participation is Unequal: Exploring Inequality in the Cultural Participation Patterns in the United States. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 68(11), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642231177655>
- Bakshi, A. (2016). The radicals' city: Urban environment, polarisation, cohesion. *Journal of Urban Design*, 21(3), 386–387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2016.1167532>
- Goldberg-Miller, S. (2022). Engagement in the city: How arts and culture impact development in urban areas. *Local Development & Society*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/26883597.2022.2045089>
- Beauregard, R. A. (2006). The radical break in late twentieth-century urbanization. *Area*, 38(2), 218–220.
- Bone, J. K., Bu, F., Fluharty, M. E., Paul, E., Sonke, J. K., & Fancourt, D. (2021). Who engages in the arts in the United States? A comparison of several types of engagement using data from The General Social Survey. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), 1349. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11263-0>
- Bone, J. K., Wan Mak, H., Sonke, J. K., Fluharty, M. E., Lee, J. B., Kolenic, A. J., Radunovich, H., Cohen, R., & Fancourt, D. (2024). Who Engaged in Home-Based Arts Activities During the COVID-19 Pandemic? A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Data From 4,731 Adults in the United States. *Health Promotion Practice*, 25(2), 244–253. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248399221119806>
- Bonu, G. (2021). A space of one's own: Queering the map, challenging the borders: the production of safe spaces in Italian urban areas. *Intersectional Perspectives: Identity, Culture, and Society*, 0(1), 37. <https://doi.org/10.18573/ipics.36>
- Borst, J. (2010). Urban Strategy: Interactive spatial planning for sustainable cities. *Next Generation Infrastructure Systems for Eco-Cities*, 1–5. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/5679227/>
- Bryant, L., Nandan, M., Cade, S., & Anderson, B. (2023). Recovery Journey of Diverse Populations Using Design Thinking Method: Recommendations for Practitioners and Policymakers. *Journal of Social, Behavioral, and Health Sciences*, 17(1), 50–66. <https://doi.org/10.5590/JSBHS.2023.171.05>
- Check, E., & Walton, S. (2014). Documenting Our Neighborhood: Paintings/Stories from the Eastside. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 18(3), 167–170. <https://doi.org/10.20429/jheoe.2014.180311>
- Cho, H. (2021). The politics of recognition and planning practices in diverse neighbourhoods: Korean Chinese in Garibong-dong, Seoul. *Urban Studies*, 58(14), 2863–2879. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098020970450>
- Churchill, N. (2007). Commentary 1: The Golden Age of the Arts? *Cultural Trends*, 16(4), 357–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548960701692712>
- Chowdhury, K. (2023). Visualizing Borders: M.I.A.'s "Borders" and Mural Art in Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. In K. Chowdhury, *Border Rules* (pp. 179–224). *Springer Nature Switzerland*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26216-6_6
- Dash, S. P., & Thilagam, N. L. (2023). "Creative placemaking": A conceptual model fostering social cohesion in community spaces within residential environments. *Creativity Studies*, 16(2), 541–564. <https://doi.org/10.3846/cs.2023.16497>
- Díaz León, B., Martínez Fernández, I., & Palma Martos, L. A. (2021). Temporal restriction and interest for the elderly on cultural participation. The case of spanish performing arts 2019. *Scientific Annals of Economics and Business*, 68 (Special Issue), 35–52. <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=999899>
- Donovan, J. (2010). An introduction to socially responsible planning and urban design. *Environment Design Guide*, 1–10. JSTOR – Stable Link
- Dowdle, K. (2020). *Lubbock's Art District: The Heart of Downtown - Lubbock EDA*. <https://lubbockeda.org/lubbocks-art-district-the-heart-of-downtown/>
- Fan, Z., Su, T., Sun, M., Noyman, A., Zhang, F., Pentland, A. 'Sandy', & Moro, E. (2023). Diversity beyond density: Experienced social mixing of urban streets. *PNAS Nexus*, 2(4), 077.
- Fancourt, D., Garnett, C., & Müllensiefen, D. (2020). The relationship between demographics, behavioral and experiential engagement factors, and the use of artistic creative activities to regulate emotions. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2020-02229-001>

- Fraaije, A. (2023). *Can (sm) art save the city? Lessons from action research on art-based citizen engagement towards responsible innovation in 'smart city' Amsterdam* [PhD-Thesis - Research and graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam]. <https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/can-smart-save-the-city-lessons-from-action-research-on-art-based>
- Fraaije, A., van der Meij, M. G., Vermeeren, A. P., Kupper, F., & Broerse, J. E. (2023). Creating room for citizen perspectives in 'smart city' Amsterdam through interactive theatre. *Research for All*, 7(1). <https://research.tudelft.nl/en/publications/creating-room-for-citizen-perspectives-in-smart-city-amsterdam-th>
- Gil-Quintana, J., Malvasi, V., Castillo-Abdul, B., & Romero-Rodríguez, L. M. (2020). Learning leaders: Teachers or youtubers? Participatory culture and STEM competencies in Italian secondary school students. *Sustainability*, 12(18), 7466. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187466>
- Greer, N., Fleuriot, K. J., & Cantu, A. G. (2012). Acrylic Rx: A program evaluation of a professionally taught painting class among older Americans. *Arts & Health*, 4(3), 262–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2012.696072>
- Hart, J., & Henn, M. (2017). Neoliberalism and the unfolding patterns of young people's political engagement and political participation in contemporary Britain. *Societies*, 7(4), 33. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc7040033>
- Kaddar, M., Kirchberg, V., Barak, N., Seidl, M., Wedler, P., & De Shalit, A. (2022). Artistic City-zenship: How artists perceive and practice political agency in their cities. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 44(4–5), 471–489. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.20201792312>
- Kearns, P. (2020). Freedom of Artistic Expression in International Law. *Art Antiquity & L.*, 25, 99. Institute of Art and Law – Freedom of Artistic Expression in International Law
- Mak, H. W., Coulter, R., & Fancourt, D. (2020). Patterns of social inequality in arts and cultural participation: Findings from a nationally representative sample of adults living in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. *Public Health Panorama: Journal of the WHO Regional Office for Europe= Panorama Obshchestvennogo Zdravookhraneniia*, 6(1), 55. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/331566>
- Mak, H. W., Coulter, R., & Fancourt, D. (2021). Associations between neighbourhood deprivation and engagement in arts, culture and heritage: Evidence from two nationally representative samples. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), 1685. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11740-6>
- Mak, H. W., & Fancourt, D. (2021). Do socio-demographic factors predict children's engagement in arts and culture? Comparisons of in-school and out-of-school participation in the Taking Part Survey. *PloS One*, 16(2), e0246936. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0246936>
- McAvinchey, C. (2013). Coming of age: Arts practice with older people in private and domestic spaces. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 18(4), 359–373. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2013.836920>
- Mehan, A. (2024a). *The Affective Agency of Public Space: Social Inclusion and Community Cohesion*, 22. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111035642>
- Mehan, A. (2024b). Decolonizing Architectural Pedagogy: Radical Cities Over Time and Through Space. In: Cole, D.R., Rafe, M.M., Yang-Heim, G. Y. A. (eds.) *Educational Research and the Question(s) of Time*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-3418-4_21
- Mehan, A., Odour, N., Mostafavi, S. (2023). Socio-Spatial Micro-Networks: Building Community Resilience in Kenya. In: Cheshmehzangi, A., Sedrez, M., Zhao, H., Li, T., Heath, T., & Dawodu, A. (eds.) *Resilience vs Pandemics. Urban Sustainability*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-7996-7_9
- Mehan, A. (2023a). Re-narrating radical cities over time and through space: Imagining urban activism through critical pedagogical practices. *Architecture*, 3(1), 92–103. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1097156ar>
- Mehan, A. (2023b). Re-theorizing the collective action to address the climate change challenges: Towards resilient and inclusive agenda. *Canadian Journal of Regional Science*, 46(1), 8–15. <https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture3010006>
- Mehan, A. (2023c). Visualizing Change in Radical Cities and Power of Imagery in Urban Transformation. *Img Journal*, 4(8), 182–201. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2724-2463/16093>
- Mehan, A. & Stuckemeyer, J. (2023a). Collaborative Pedagogical Practices in the Era of Radical Urban Transitions. *Dimensions. Journal of Architectural Knowledge*, 3(5), 125–142. <https://doi.org/10.14361/dak-2023-0508>
- Mehan, A., & Stuckemeyer, J. (2023b). "Urbanismo en la era de las transiciones radicales: hacia paisajes urbanos postindustriales" in *Transición energética y construcción social del territorio ante el reto del cambio climático y el nuevo marco geopolítico*. Aranzadi. 145–174. <https://www.marcialpons.es/libros/transicion-energetica-y-construccion-social-del-territorio-ante-el-reto-del-cambio-climatico-y-el-nuevo-marco-geopolitico/9788411639545/?utm>
- Mehan, A., Lima, C., Ng'eno, F., & Nawratek, K. (2022a). Questioning Hegemony Within White Academia. *field*, 8(1). <https://www.field-journal.org/article/id/90/>
- Mehan, A., Nawratek, K., & Tahar, F. (2022b). Beyond community inclusivity through spatial interventions. *Writingplace*, 6, 136–147. <https://doi.org/10.7480/writingplace.6>
- Mehan, A. (2021) EUKN webinar Port cities and mega-trends: glocal approaches to sustainable transitions. The Port City Futures (PCF) Blog, Leiden. Delft. *Erasmus (LDE) Initiative*. Port City Futures
- Mehan, A., & Tafrata, B. (2022) Embedding justice in resilient climate change action. In: Brears R (ed). *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of urban and regional futures*. Palgrave McMillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51812-7_350-1
- Mehan, A., & Mehan, M. (2022) Conceptualizing the urban commons. In: Brears R (ed) *The Palgrave encyclopedia of urban and regional futures*, Palgrave McMillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51812-7_349-1
- Mostafavi, S., Bagheri, B., Scott, C., Montejano Hernandez, E., Howell, C. & Mehan, A. (2025). Integrated Computational Design to Augmented Production of Timber-Dowel Structures: A multi-criteria system for informed variation and community co-production. In Dagmar Reinhardt, Christiane M. Herr, Anastasia Globa, Jielin Chen, Taro Narahara & Nicolas Rogeau. *Architectural Informatics* (Proceedings of the 30th CAADRIA Conference, Tokyo, Japan: The Association for Computer-Aided Architectural Design Research in Asia) (CAADRIA), 397–406.
- Mostafavi, S., & Mehan, A. (2023). De-coding visual cliches and verbal biases: Hybrid intelligence and data justice. *Diffusions in architecture: Artificial intelligence and image generators*, 150–159. Wiley Online Library

- Musterd, S. (2022). Segregation, neighbourhood effects and social mix policies. In *Handbook on Urban Social Policies* (pp. 204–218). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/book/9781788116152/book-part-9781788116152-22.xml>
- Nursey-Bray, M. (2020). The ART of Engagement Placemaking for Nature and People in Cities. In D. Hes & C. Hernandez-Santin (Eds.), *Placemaking Fundamentals for the Built Environment* (pp. 305–326). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9624-4_14
- Ordeman, W. (2023). Histories of Radical Interactionality: Rivers, Disease, Borders, and Laundry. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 53(2), 217–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2022.2129756>
- Papachristou, I. A., & Rosas Casals, M. (2016). *Unveiling the complex connectivity of human needs in urban places. Towards a better understanding of the social dimension of sustainability*. <https://upcommons.upc.edu/handle/2117/82858>
- Paraschiv, R., & Rauf, K. (2022). Integrated and coherent urban planning based on regional development strategies. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 1026(1), 012037. <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1755-1315/1026/1/012037/meta>
- Peach, J., & Williams, J. (1994). Demographic Changes in the El Paso-Juárez-Las Cruces. *Estudios Fronterizos*, 34, 117–137.
- Rosdil, D. L. (1991). The Context of Radical Populism in US Cities: A Comparative Analysis. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 13(1), 77–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9906.1991.tb00241.x>
- Sánchez-Hernández, J. L., & Glückler, J. (2019). Alternative economic practices in Spanish cities: From grassroots movements to urban policies? An institutional perspective. *European Planning Studies*, 27(12), 2450–2469. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1644295>
- Stern, M. J. (2011). Age and arts participation: A case against demographic destiny. *National Endowment for the Arts Washington, DC*. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/129586724.pdf>
- Tahar, F., Mehan, A., & Nawratek, K. (2023). Spatial reflections on Muslims' segregation in Britain. *Religions*, 14(3), 349. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030349>
- Tappert, S., Mehan, A., Tuominen, P., & Varga, Z. (2024). Citizen Participation, Digital Agency, and Urban Development. *Urban Planning* 9. <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.7810>
- Thomson, P., & Jaque, S. V. (2023). Ethnicity, creative identity, creative process, and adversity in college and community samples. *Journal of Creativity*, 33(1), 100044. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jyoc.2023.100044>
- Van Hoof, J., & Marston, H. R. (2021). Age-friendly cities and communities: State of the art and future perspectives. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(4), 1644. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18041644>
- Vanherwegen, D., & Lievens, J. (2014). The Mechanisms Influencing Active Arts Participation: An Analysis of the Visual Arts, Music, and the Performing Arts. *Sociological Inquiry*, 84(3), 435–471. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12043>
- Varış Husar, S.; Mehan, A.; Erkan, R.; Gall, T., Allkja, L., Husar, M., & Hendawy, M. (2023). What's next? Some priorities for young planning scholars to tackle tomorrow's complex challenges. *Eur Plann Stud* 31(11):2368–2384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2023.2218417>
- Villa, E. Q., Hug, S., Thiry, H., Knight, D. S., Hall, E. F., & Tirres, A. (2019). Broadening participation of Hispanics in computing: The Cahsi Includes Alliance. 2019 CoNECD-The Collaborative Network for Engineering and Computing Diversity. <https://peer.asee.org/broadening-participation-of-hispanics-in-computing-the-cahsi-includes-alliance>
- Wei, Y., & Broome, J. L. (2022). Same Standards, Different Classes: A Comparative Case Study of Two Art Classes Within Communities of Contrasting Socioeconomic Status. *Studies in Art Education*, 63(1), 55–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2021.2007689>
- Williams, C. (2016). Social Work Research and the City. In C. Williams (Ed.), *Social Work and the City* (pp. 97–120). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51623-7_4
- Yao, L. (2023). Urban Planning Strategies Based on Green and Low-Carbon: A Case Study in Guangzhou City, China. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 14, 177–183. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/14/20230968>
- Yazdi, N., & Jürgens, A.-S. (2024). Negar Yazdi: City Art and Urban Planning. *W/k-Zwischen Wissenschaft & Kunst*. <https://between-science-and-art.com/negar-yazdi-city-art-and-urban-planning/>
- Zamani, F., & Mehan, A. (2019). The abstract space and the alienation of political public space in the Middle East. *Archnet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research* 13, 483–497. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ARCH-03-2019-0054>