

Planning a Community Cultural Festival:  
The Power of Politics

By

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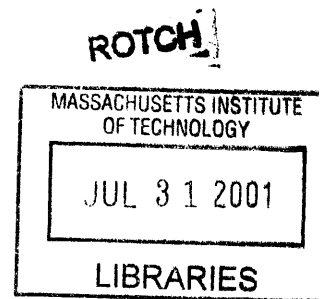
Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
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ABSTRACT

This investigation is catalyzed by my interest in the impact that cultural planning has had on the physical and social formation of cities. Beginning with the hypothesis that urban festivals have lasting impacts on cities, I intend to investigate how cultural planning shapes the social and physical form of a city through the mechanism of festivals. Since these festivals are ephemeral, one might assume that such events would have fleeting impressions on the communities they engage and the spaces they occupy. On the contrary, I will argue that the impacts of festivals are tangible and long lasting. They have significant economic effects, stimulating local and, at times, citywide development. In some cases, festivals spur urban design projects that have permanent consequences for the neighborhoods and cities where the event takes place.

In addition to the economic revitalization that festivals produce, they are vehicles by which community organizations come to participate actively in political decision-making and ultimately help give voice and expression to cultural groups. I will investigate how two entities—city governments and community organizations—plan and produce special events, and I will analyze how their collaborative efforts influence the social and physical impacts that festivals have on cities. Comparing and contrasting the two municipal governments, Los Angeles and Chicago, I argue that cultural programming policies are not the only factors that influence how festivals impact space and communities; a combination of other policies and variables such as the social construction of identity and the shaping of urban space influence the impacts that these urban cultural festivals have on the city. I will use the ideas of the social construction of identity and power of place to understand better the planning and impacts of festivals.

Thesis Supervisor: J. Mark Schuster  
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*Para Mis Padres:*  
*Yolanda y Gustavo Lasso*



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

*Celebration is both culture and politics, or, better perhaps, cultural politics. The phrase implies two converse processes. The first is the politicization of culture, the translation of cultural symbols, beliefs, and values into political discourse and strategy. The second is the rendering of politics—ultimately, a matter of “whose ox is gored”—in cultural terms.<sup>1</sup>*

Frank Manning *The Celebration of Society*

The urban fabric of a place hints at how people use, negotiate, and interact in that space. Similarly, the abundance of the programming of public



Figure 1:  
Fiesta Boricua, 2000

Courtesy of Nereida  
Aviles

activity in cities reveals the necessity of celebrating and expressing culture. The dynamics of contemporary cultural politics underlines the proliferation of festivals that are organized annually in cities.<sup>2</sup> While there are many cultural festivals, not all are considered worth sponsoring by city governments and politicians. To successfully produce a celebratory event, the planning process

for festivals demands collaborative participation by both neighborhood organizations and city governments, because while the city has access to funds, event planners, and direct ties to the police and the fire department, neighborhood organizations have knowledge of local talent, leaders and more importantly, local needs and desires. The broad popularity of the community cultural festivals is evident in the display of posters and other paraphernalia

<sup>1</sup> Manning, Frank. *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives of Contemporary Cultural Performances*. Canada: Bowling Green University Press, (1983:16).

<sup>2</sup> Davila, Arlene M. *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, (1997:127).

connected to the event in municipal offices, corporate quarters, people's homes, and sponsoring agencies.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis is concerned with the planning process for cultural festivals. Beginning with the hypothesis that urban festivals have lasting impacts on cities, it is my intent to investigate how cultural planning shapes the social and physical form of a city through the mechanism of festivals. I will investigate how two entities—city governments and community organizations—plan and produce special events, and I will analyze how their collaborative efforts influence the social and physical impacts that festivals have on cities. Cultural programming policies are not the only factors that influence how festivals impact space and communities; a combination of other policies and variables such as the social construction of identity<sup>4</sup> and the shaping of urban space influence the impacts that these urban cultural festivals have on the city. I will use the ideas of the social construction of identity and power of place to better understand the planning and impacts of festivals.

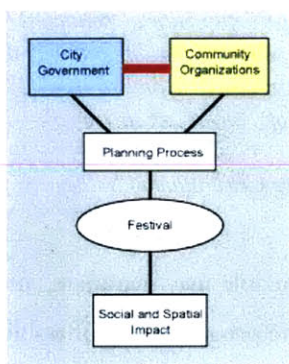


Figure 2:  
Overview of Planning  
Process.

In this thesis I will address the following questions:

- What types of festivals are municipal governments interested in planning and what policies do they employ in programming their city?
- How does cultural planning as played out in the context of citywide and neighborhood level politics influence the impact that ephemeral events have on cities?
- What is the impact that cultural festivals have on the community?

This investigation is catalyzed by my interest in the impact that cultural planning has had on the physical and social formation of cities. As Kevin Lynch has taught us, the urban design of a city is more than the quality of its forms: edges, nodes, paths; it is also a combination of how people use and understand their environment.<sup>5</sup> He eloquently proposes that, “The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and the observer—with great adaptability and in the light of his own purposes—selects, organizes,

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, (1997:128).

<sup>4</sup> Societal factors, such as culture, economic class, gender, sexuality, and community influence how a person constructs their identity.

<sup>5</sup> Lynch, Kevin, *What is this Place?* Cambridge, MIT Press, (1972).

and endows with meaning what he sees.”<sup>6</sup> Individuals will interpret the environment as it pertains to their experience, and urban designers who are manipulators of physical form, are interested in other factors, which produce the environmental image.<sup>7</sup> These factors include issues such as economic development, environment, history, social and political movements, and demographics, and urban designers engage these macro-scale dynamics of cities when designing plans.

Another highly complex issue interwoven into the web of urban design is culture; one cannot design space without taking into consideration the cultural traditions and beliefs of a given community. Cultural planning has become an integral part of urban design because it provides the pigmentation by which space is colored, providing the necessary programming and breathing life into an otherwise bare design. Programming space with ‘hard art’ or ephemeral events makes these places come to life as people fill the streets making use of and enjoying the spaces conceived by urban designers.

Cultural planning takes many shapes and forms. This thesis is concerned with one element of cultural planning: how the planning process of ephemeral events influences the impact that these events have on the social and spatial dynamics of cities. Since ephemeral implies temporary, one might assume that these events would have fleeting impressions on the communities and spaces they occupy; on the contrary, I will argue that the impacts of festivals are tangible and long lasting. They have significant economic effects, stimulating local and, at times, citywide development. In some cases, festivals spur urban design projects that have permanent consequences for the neighborhoods and cities where the event takes place. But in addition to the economic revitalization that festivals produce, they are vehicles by which community organizations come to actively participate in political decision-making and ultimately help give voice and expression to cultural groups.<sup>8</sup> This is why, I am interested in determining how cultural planning, as played out in the context of citywide and neighborhood level

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<sup>6</sup> Lynch, Kevin, *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, MIT Press, (1960: 6).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, (1960:7).

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, Abner. *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements*. Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited (1993:63-67).

politics influences the impact that ephemeral events have on cities, and in ascertaining that policies are only one component in the array of factors that influence the festival's impact. To accomplish this, I will consider these festivals as what Manuel Castells calls urban social movements, which are distinctive in organizational style, display an emphasis on cultural unity, advocate change of some kind, and have a grassroots orientation.

## Methodology

I have decided to compare two cities in order to highlight very different municipal policies regarding festival planning and assess how the diverse approaches influence the impact that festivals have on the city. Having access to the communities that organize and plan these cultural festivals is crucial in conducting field research. As a Chicana, I felt that I could have more accessibility into the Latino community. Additionally, being a participant in one of the community-cultural-festivals, that will be discussed, further shaped my decision to focus on the Latino community.

In attempting to choose two cities with large Latino populations, I decided to select cities of comparable size. The second and third largest cities in the US, Los Angeles and Chicago are useful cities for this study because both have long histories of being a 'port of entry' for new immigrants. Although Los Angeles has a significantly larger Latino population, being the city with the most Mexicans after Mexico City, Chicago also has a large number of Latinos. I chose Los Angeles and Chicago because both have large Latino populations, are diverse, and have important Latino festivals, which garner considerable visibility and support. These cities also have very different municipal policies regarding festival planning.

I conducted field research in both cities, collecting information from interviews, literature, newspaper articles, and my own previous experience from being a festival participant at Dia de los Muertos in East L.A. In Los Angeles, I conducted interviews with Mark Johnstone at the Cultural Affairs Department as well as with Rosie Lee Hooks and Sumi Haru from the Office for Festivals and Gallery Theater. Additionally, I conducted interviews with Tomas Benitez, executive director of Self-Help Graphics, and Consuelo

Flores, former curator of the Día de los Muertos art exhibit. In addition, I spoke to Carmelo Sabatello, an architect who worked on the Mariachi Plaza, and Catherine Rice, project director for Mariachi Festival. In Chicago, I spent a day at city hall interviewing the majority of the Mayor's Special Events department, in particular Cheryl Hughes, director of New Events Production. I also visited Humboldt Park and interviewed Nereida Aviles, Senior Advisor to Alderman Billy Ocasio of the 26<sup>th</sup> ward, who organizes Fiesta Boricua, and briefly met with Alderman Billy Ocasio. Following this, I traveled to Pilsen, where I interviewed Juan Soto, interim executive director of Pilsen Neighborhood Community Council and production coordinator of Fiesta del Sol.

## Latinos: Chicanos and Puerto Ricans

Immigration has played an important role in the history of the population of the United States. Unlike the previous waves of immigration from Europe, in recent decades the largest wave of immigrants has come from Spanish speaking countries such as Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. Similar to older waves of immigrants, the most recent newcomers have been attracted to urban areas where the hope is to find employment and advance up the economic ladder.<sup>9</sup> Immigrants tend to settle based on kinship and friendship networks; thus, it is no surprise that Latinos from Puerto Rico are located predominantly in New York, Mexicans throughout the Southwest, specifically Los Angeles, and Cubans in Miami. However, even other midwestern cities whose significant growth occurred during the European immigration flows of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century have experienced significant growth from this last wave of Latin American immigration<sup>10</sup>.

I focus on Latino immigrant enclaves because the expression of cultural traditions and participation in cultural planning is often a means by which the community can organize itself and participate in the political process. In the case of large multicultural cities like Los Angeles and Chicago,

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<sup>9</sup> Ropka, Gerald William, *The Evolving Residential Pattern of the Mexican, Puerto Rican and Cuban Population in the City of Chicago*. New York: Arno Press, (1980: 2).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, (1980:2)

cultural festivals are a primary cultural outlet for a wide range of ethnic groups. Cultural festivals honor and encourage the preservation of cultural traditions, but they cannot guarantee the preservation of an art form any more than they can ensure cultural survival or multicultural understanding. However, they can be occasions for people to display and participate in culture, learn about heritage and diversity, and affirm what a community cherishes.

The theories of Manning and MacCannell on ‘cultural production,’ argue that these events affect traditional social relations. Manning in discussing cultural production states, “Social entities arise, and often develop an amazing, if ephemeral, solidarity because they share interest deriving from television programs, movies, sports, entertainment and so on.”<sup>11</sup> Correspondingly, Latino immigrant enclaves share many commonalities and interests; thus, focusing on a particular cultural group and type of event allows me to examine the power of politics in planning events and further analyze the social construction of identity and the shaping of urban space, which impact the social and spatial dynamics of these communities.

## Festivals

In order to focus further the scope of my inquiry, I found it necessary to select particular events in order to make concrete comparisons between my two case study cities. There are approximately four types of Latino cultural festivals. The differences of these cultural festivals lie in the organization that produces the event, location of event, targeted community, economic impact, and spatial or urban design impacts.

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<sup>11</sup> Manning, Frank. *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives of Contemporary Cultural Performances*. Canada: Bowling Green University Press, (1983: 6).



Initiator	Location	Ethnicity	Economic Impact	Space/Urban Design Impact
<b>Corporate Sponsor</b>	Located in central business district of the city	Not specific to one Latino ethnic group	Large economic revenue. Profit is usually for corporate sponsor	Closing down of main arterial roads in downtown.
<b>Community Organization</b>	Located in the community	Specific to a Latino ethnic group	Economic revenue provides the muscle to fund other projects initiated by the community org.	Begins to institutionalize the power of place because community associates space with celebration. Sometimes spurs urban design projects.
<b>District Politician</b>	Located in the community	Specific to a Latino ethnic group	Economic revenue provides the muscle to fund other projects initiated by the district office.	Begins to institutionalize the power of place because community associates space with celebration. Sometimes spurs urban design projects.
<b>Church / Neighborhood Association / Local membership-based groups</b>	Usually located in the community, nearby parks, or neighborhood blocks	May be specific to a Latino ethnic group, religious group, or membership-based group	Earns some economic revenue but at a different scale than the former examples	Creates unity, however may not institutionalize space in the same way the former two types do

Figure 3:  
Four types of  
Latino Cultural  
Festivals

Those events initiated by corporate organizations tend to be very large and located in the central business district of the city. These cultural festivals are not specific to one single Latino community, but rather may celebrate multiple Latino cultures. These festivals garner large economic revenue, however, the profit usually flows back to the corporate sponsor. The spatial impact of this type of event entails the closing down of main arterial streets, but otherwise there are few remnants of the festival once the event is over.

At the other side of the spectrum are very small and numerous events such as neighborhood block parties and church festivals. These events are usually located in the community's parks or inside the church's property. Depending on the homogeneity of the community, these events may be specific to one Latino ethnic group but the aim is to celebrate one's group

affiliation, whether it is to a congregation or neighborhood. These events may garner some economic revenue but significantly less than the other three types of cultural festivals. These events create unity by celebrating group affiliation but may not institutionalize space because the festival takes place in a space that already has a designated use, such as a church parking lot or neighborhood park.

A community organization or district politician initiates the second and third types of Latino cultural festivals. These events tend to be located in the community and may be specific to a Latino ethnic group. The economic revenue of these events provides the support to fund other projects produced by the initiating entity or propels the economic development of the community. The festival begins to institutionalize the space where the celebration takes place because the community associates that space with the festival. In some cases the economic revenue gained from the festival provides the community organization or district politician with the ability to spur urban design projects.

Since the Latino populations of Los Angeles and Chicago are very large, the events pertaining to this cultural group are numerous. Choosing two festivals, the flagship event, and another event of somewhat smaller scale, in each city made it possible to perform field research and conduct the necessary interviews to compare and contrast the events. I intentionally chose two of the oldest Latino festivals produced by community organizations both in Los Angeles and Chicago. The festivals *Dia De Los Muertos* and *Fiesta del Sol*, turned out to have had very similar origins, which provided for a very interesting comparison.

The criteria I used to choose the second festivals in each city, were that the event had to be initiated by municipal or district level governments and be located in the community. I also chose two festival that have had tangible urban design implications, however, this is not to say that all district politician initiated festivals spur urban design projects. The reasoning festivals had to be located in the neighborhood of the ethnic enclaves was to allow for a study of how the festivals impact the social and spatial dynamics of the Latino communities. I must stress the importance of ‘neighborhood’ because



both cities produce very large citywide Latino events such as Fiesta Broadway, which takes place in downtown Los Angeles. These conditions led me to pursue investigations of the Mariachi Festival in Los Angeles and the Fiesta Boricua in Chicago.

## Structure of the Thesis

In this study, I first pursue a general investigation of the genre of ephemeral events and their impacts on the social and spatial formation of cities. I provide a general framework for defining and clarifying cultural festivals, allowing me to concentrate on specific events that have similar characteristics to serve as the case studies for this research. Then, I give a brief historical background of the cities, Los Angeles and Chicago, where I conducted field research, in order to frame the existing political dynamics between city government and local communities. I then analyze the government's collaborative efforts with the organizations that produce the urban festivals, focusing on the policy tools and actions that are used to sustain such events. Concurrently, I examine the organization of Los Angeles' Office of Festival and Gallery Theater, as well as, Chicago's Special Events Office, with the aim of portraying how these city departments operate and implement their cultural policies.

In the next chapter I begin by examining the vocabulary of ephemeral events in order to clarify the type of event I will be discussing. This discussion describes the different types of events that color the landscape of cities annually. I end by defining the type of cultural festival that I am interested in analyzing, distinguishing the particularities of these events from those of others. Then, I explore the conceptualization of celebrations and urban spectacles in order to embed this research in a theoretical framework. Looking at the work of Frank Manning<sup>12</sup> and Beverly Stoeltje<sup>13</sup> provides insight into the celebration of contemporary cultural performances.

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<sup>12</sup> Manning, Frank. *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives of Contemporary Cultural Performances*. Canada: Bowling Green University Press, (1983: 6).

<sup>13</sup> Stoeltje, Beverly. Festival. In *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*, 261-71. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Research by Abner Cohen<sup>14</sup> in England, Olivia Cadaval<sup>15</sup> in the United States, and Arlene Davila<sup>16</sup> in Puerto Rico, provide a rich analysis of how cultural festival planning enables ethnic enclaves to claim space, create identity, and ultimately become involved in the political decisions of their community. At this point, I shift to what Dolores Hayden calls the “power of place” and further analyze Cohen, Cadaval, and Davila’s claim that urban cultural festivals ultimately enable ethnic enclaves to claim space, inserting specific identifiable and cultural symbols onto the landscape. The themes of life in public places, negotiating space, and the staging of events are also fleshed out.

Having presented a theoretical framework for ephemeral social events and their contributions to place making, I then discuss a rather different notion, the idea that these cultural festivals are urban social movements, which are vehicles for mobilization.<sup>17</sup> What I ultimately see here, however, is these groups organizing themselves around a particular urban festival, garnering political and economic muscle from the event. Thus by choosing the following theories allowed me to analyze these events through a particular lens that discusses the events as part of a larger urban social movement.

The excitement of the celebration may be temporary, but the social and political effects can be long lasting. The work of Manuel Castells, P. Dunleavy and Stuart Lowe<sup>18</sup> locates cultural planning within the sociological and political theory of urban social movements and grass roots organizing.

The definition of urban social movements, as described by Dunleavy, is that these actions must display collectivity and push towards change of some kind. He draws particular attention to the distinctive organizational style of these groups—their grassroots orientation and unhierarchical mode of organization, their non-involvement in formal political parties, and their

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<sup>14</sup> Cohen, Abner. *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements*. Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited (1993).

<sup>15</sup> Cadaval, Olivia. *Creating a Latino Identity in the Nation’s Capital: The Latino Festival*. New York: Garland Publishing, (1998).

<sup>16</sup> Davila, Arlene M. *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, (1997).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, (1997:128).

<sup>18</sup> Lowe, Stuart. *Urban Social Movements: The City after Castells*. Hong Kong: Macmillan, (1986:3).

emphasis on direct action and protest tactics.<sup>19</sup> The mainstay of urban social movements in this definition is the creation of an identifiable social group organizing itself around a particular urban policy agency or policy issue.

This discussion of social movements and how they coalesce around urban policy issues creates a transition into Chapter 3, which discusses the policies implemented by Los Angeles and Chicago in their Cultural Affairs and Special Events Departments. Before launching into a dialogue of the policies employed by each city, a brief historical discussion of artistic and cultural development frames the analysis of how each city arrived at its current policy position. I then proceed to examine these respective policies, the reasons why the cities have chosen these policies, and the methods by which the policy is enacted. A series of examples are given to show how the policy and organization of these departments works. Finally, I analyze how each city's policy enables the production and proliferation of cultural programming in the city.

In Chapter 4, I present two case studies of the major Latino cultural festivals organized by community-based organizations in each city. This research is embedded in a historical narrative, which provides insights as to the catalyzing events that led to the creation of the festival and later to the transformation of these organizations. I first reconstruct the history of each community and show how the Chicano movement of the late 1960s propelled the creation of these events as vehicles for creating social identity, reclaiming history, and promoting a political platform. The primary sources of information here are interviews, personal narratives, and newspaper coverage.

In his study of Latino ethnic consciousness in Chicago, Felix Padilla contends that Latino identity, "serves as a political mechanism for the coalescing of forces between Chicanos and Puerto Ricans."<sup>20</sup> Olivia Cadaval goes beyond this point in her study about the Latino Festival in Washington DC arguing that 'Latinoism' is a self-ascribed cultural classification that is a

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, (1986:3).

<sup>20</sup> Padilla, Felix M. *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago*. University of Notre Dame Press, (1985: 13)

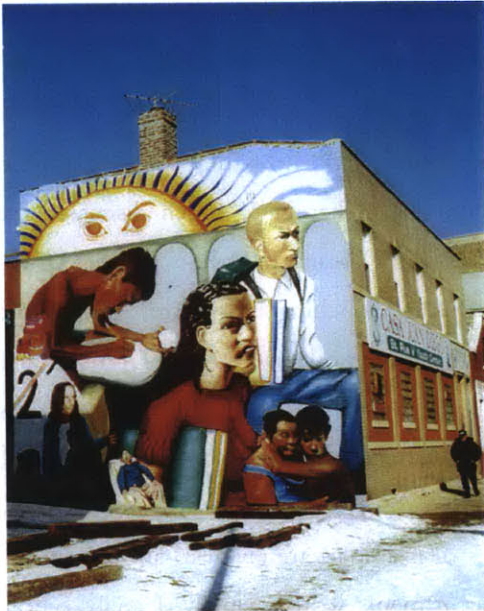


Figure 4: Mural  
Pilsen, Illinois.

Source: author

base for political and cultural action.<sup>21</sup> I expand on these two analyses and explore how the communities of East Los Angeles and Pilsen created political consciousness via identification with various cultural symbols, ultimately helping to create a social construct of identity. I also show how the festivals became vehicles to inject urban space with symbols and designs that exhibit the distinctiveness of the community's cultural identity.

In chapter five, I examine two case studies of younger, smaller Latino festivals, one in the Chicano/Mexican American community of Boyle Heights, Los Angeles and the other in the Puerto Rican community of Humboldt Park, Chicago. Beginning with a brief

historical background, these analyses focus on how the organizational structure of these events differs from those organized by community organizations. In addition to discussing the festival as a vehicle for the propagation of a cultural ideology, this chapter analyzes the political bodies that spurred the onset of these new urban Latino festivals. This chapter looks at how neighborhood-level politicians use their political clout to garner significant support from city government around the organization of such events. I also go beyond the policies and actions taken by district-level politicians to address the economic development and urban design implications that these cultural festivals have on their respective communities.

In the concluding chapter, I pull all the strands together to analyze how Latino cultural festivals impact the social and spatial dynamics of their communities via the proliferation of symbols and icons that are representative of the community's identity. I discuss how acculturation, a process of adapting to the mainstream culture and appropriating new cultural traits, has been a two-fold process for the Latino communities of Los Angeles and Chicago. Finally, I conclude that policies alone do not have

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<sup>21</sup> Cadaval, Olivia, *Creating a Latino Identity in the Nation's Capital: The Latino Festival*. New York: Garland Publishing, (1998:13).

much influence on the impact, because despite two very different policies—incubator and producer—the outcome in Los Angeles and Chicago is still very similar. Finally, I suggest new directions for festival planners and ideas for future research.



## 2 EPHEMERAL EVENTS

Since this thesis is concerned with the planning process of special events, it is valuable to distinguish and understand the different types of events that occur and with which municipal governments are, or might be interested in becoming, involved. Countless numbers of ephemeral events are programmed annually onto the landscape of a city. A festival is a time for celebration marked by special observances: commemorating an event or honoring a deity, person, or thing.<sup>1</sup> Several types of events are called festivals, such as film festivals or book festivals, but these are not the types of events I will discuss. As genre of public art, the festivals that I will highlight, “occur at calendrically regulated intervals and are public in nature, participatory in ethos, complex in structure, and multiple in voice, scene, and purpose,”<sup>2</sup> and are located in the neighborhoods of the communities that I discuss.

Focusing on the influence that the planning process and policies may have on how ephemeral events impact cities, I first explored international events that generate significant economic and urban design development in the cities where these events take place. On a grand scale, events such as World Fairs and the Olympic Games, provide a dynamic landscape for celebration at the international level. Presumably, these events require more time to produce the infrastructure and organize the programming; thus, these celebrations may take multiple years to create. International events also have major economic and impacts on the cities where they take place.

Other special events, which over time have lasting impacts on the spatial dynamics of cities, are parades. Parades are public processions, often involving the promenading of floats, marching bands, cars, and people. Parades tend to have lasting impacts on the parade route. For example, the Pasadena Rose Parade, which has occurred annually on New Years Day since 1897, has impacted the design of the parade route. Lining Colorado Blvd., the main artery of the parade route, are banners, street signs and furniture

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster's, *Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition. (2000:430)



bearing the 'rose' symbol of the parade. The Norton Simon Museum, where the parade begins, displays an emblem of the Rose Parade on its exterior wall, commemorating the start of the procession. Pasadena calls itself—"The City of the Rose Parade"—hoping that society at large will associate the city with this particular ephemeral event. The parade also impacts the landscape of the parade route throughout the year, since a handful of sites are left undeveloped in order to accommodate the bleachers that are set up once a year. With sales from bleacher seats, commercial activity, and tourism, the City of Pasadena uses its popular Rose Parade as a key source of income. Such events have more noticeable impacts on the economic, social, and spatial dynamics of a city, which would be very interesting to measure and analyze. However, I wish to focus on smaller-scale events, often known as neighborhood cultural festivals and analyze how these events that take place in the communities of ethnic enclaves begin to impact the social and spatial dynamics of those areas.

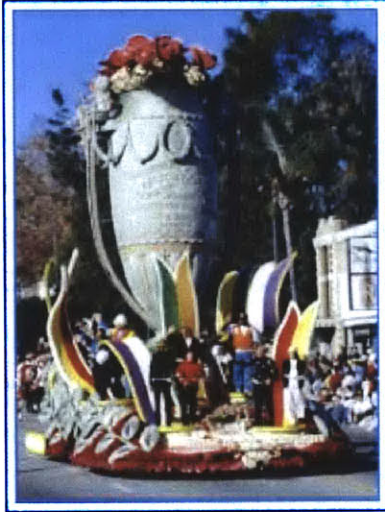


Figure 5:  
Tournament of  
Roses Parade, 2001.

Throughout the United States, festivals are used to celebrate the food, traditions, or folklore of that specific locality.<sup>3</sup> Governments also use festivals to disseminate and affirm the symbolic and political platforms that represent a given national identity.<sup>4</sup> Stoeltje argues that festivals are often “contemporary modern creations,” serving wider commercial, ideological, and political interests.<sup>5</sup> But, most importantly, festivals are also instruments of communicating identities, at a local, regional, or national level, attaining political dimensions and involvement in greater political movements.<sup>6</sup>

An important dimension of festivals relates to participation vs. observation. Festivals that are staged and non-participatory might be more

<sup>2</sup> Stoeltje, Beverly, In *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*. New York: Oxford University of Illinois Press, (1992:261-271).

<sup>3</sup> Humphrey, Theodore, and Lin Humphrey. *We Gather Together: Food and Festival in American Life*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press (1988).

<sup>4</sup> LiPuma, Edward, and Sarah Keene Meltzoff. “Ceremonies of Independence and Public Culture in the Solomon Islands,” *Public Culture* 3(1): 77-91.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, (1992).

<sup>6</sup> Cohen, Abner. *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements*. Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited (1993:80).



properly called 'spectacles'.<sup>7</sup> Frank Manning defines spectacle as, "a large scale extravagant cultural production that is replete with striking visual imagery and dramatic action and that is watched by a mass audience."<sup>8</sup> The festivals on which I focus do not fall under this rubric. Instead, they are communal, both in participation and planning.

Another helpful concept is that of 'ritual'. Rituals are ceremonial in nature and are typically composed of prescribed religious acts or actions.



Figure 6: Altar, *Dia De Los Muertos*, SHG, 2001.

Courtesy of  
Martha Y. Galvez

Festivals that are ritual in nature contain ceremonial actions designed according to religious or social custom. Schuster states, "Rituals tend to have long-established historic roots and, as such, are not normally part of the thinking that goes into creating or consolidating new urban festivals."<sup>9</sup> Yet, the Latino cultural festivals that will be discussed here do have ritualistic elements that were purposefully injected into the celebration when first designed by the organizers. The two older festivals—Dia De Los Muertos and Fiesta del Sol—purposefully reinterpreted indigenous rituals that became principal themes for the celebratory event.

The reason rituals were integrated into the construction of these events is because, more than an annual celebration of heritage and customs, these events were opportunities to reclaim and reinterpret cultural roots. These cultural festivals particularly Dia de los Muertos, which begins the celebration with a processional march to the cemetery where blessings are performed, integrate ritual aspects. The two older festivals—Dia de los Muertos and Fiesta del Sol—integrate indigenous practices and symbols that provide the community with Chicano traditions. Today, symbols of the Aztec sun, Quetzalcoatl—the feathered plumed serpent, sugar skulls, and the Virgin of Guadalupe, also read as Chicano cultural pop-icons. These symbols have indigenous and religious roots, but

<sup>7</sup> Schuster, Mark. In *Planning Practice and Research: Two Urban Festivals: La Merce and First Night*, Vol. 10, No.2, (1995:173).

<sup>8</sup> Manning, Frank. *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives of Contemporary Cultural Performances*. Canada: Bowling Green University Press, (1983).

<sup>9</sup> Schuster, Mark. In *Planning Practice and Research: Two Urban Festivals: La Merce and First Night*, Vol. 10, No.2, (1995:174).

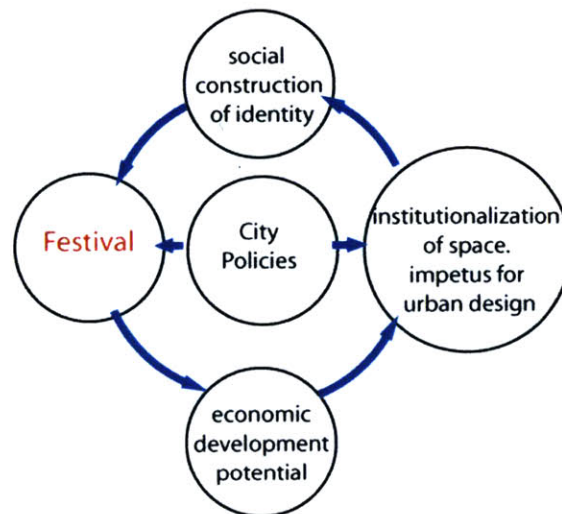
they are now also part of pop-culture, appearing on objects such as magnets, t-shirts, key-chains, candles, tattoos, and many other objects.

## Theory

I now discuss why I use a particular set of theory to analyze the following case studies. I view these four cultural festivals as vehicles to promote the communities' cultural identity, claim space, and ultimately become involved in the political decisions of their community. I was able to look at these festivals through this particular lens by incorporating theory about cultural identity, power of place, and urban social movements. This is by no means the only method to analyze how these festivals begin to impact the social and spatial fabric of those communities nonetheless; my fieldwork and research led me to pursue an analysis of how these festivals are part of larger urban social movements.

A combination of societal factors, such as culture, economic class, gender, sexuality, and community influence how a person constructs their identity. I call this phenomena the *social construction of identity*, and this phenomena plus the changing of urban space are elements in a cyclical unit that produce and are influenced by the continuing creation of social identity, celebration of identity through the festival, economic revenue that is spurred

Figure 7:  
General model of  
proposed theory



by the festival, and the institutionalization of space. The institutionalization of space occurs either because the public associates the space to the festival or because the money generated by the festival spurs urban design projects.

## Cultural Festivals

Public celebrations of culture highlight the shared values and sensitivities of a given social group. A cultural festival provides public entertainment and celebration entailing the dramatic presentation of cultural symbols, which assert recognition. The symbols can be read as depicting social aspects of a community and informing others as to the history, identity, and commonality of a cultural group. MacCannell, challenging orthodox Marxism, argues that cultural productions of modern societies provide insight as to what are the common beliefs and principles of a given social group.<sup>10</sup>

Another aspect of cultural performances is their ability to mobilize political movements. In their research about ‘Carnival’ in Brazil and England, Guillermprieto and Cohen argue that carnival is the essence of anti-structure—a grand expression of order and chaos.<sup>11</sup> Celebrations of cultural affirmation provide a license for temporary revolution, “Although Carnival’s role in this situation is usually seen in terms of symbolic, temporary rebellion, one should also consider the festival’s potential to support, even mobilize, political movements aimed at democratic change—movements of the type that flourish in modernizing societies like Brazil.”<sup>12</sup> This phenomenon can also be witnessed in the West Indian communities in Britain; Cohen states, “Carnival, on the other hand proved over the years to have immense possibilities for cultural expression, and hence indirectly for political mobilization on a massive scale.”<sup>13</sup> Although, the steel band was a Trinidad invention in Britain it acquired a powerful symbolic significance representing something beyond the making of loud rhythms; and like most dominant symbols it developed different and contradictory meanings.

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<sup>10</sup> MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken, (1976).

<sup>11</sup> Guillermprieto, Alma, *Samba*. Cohen, Abner, *Masquerade Politics*.

<sup>12</sup> Manning, Frank. *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives of Contemporary Cultural Performances*. Canada: Bowling Green University Press, (1983: 15).

<sup>13</sup> Cohen, Abner. *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements*. Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited (1993:15).

Equally, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans in the United States have had the opportunity to make a statement via the proliferation of cultural symbols facilitating the mobilization of political movements. These cultural celebrations are vehicles for social recognition and political involvement as community members not only participate in the celebratory play but also become involved in the planning process. This administrative involvement lends the opportunity for citizens to take on leadership roles that they otherwise would not practice, American Latino cultural festivals have been a catalyst to the growth of political influence that community based organizations and local politicians have in Los Angeles and Chicago.

In planning a *cultural festival* the recognition of diverse cultures and greater multicultural understanding are essential components. For *heritage festivals*, the aim is fostering the flourishing talents, history, and traditions such as a harvest, beginning of a season, or other folk traditions of a community.<sup>14</sup> Cultural festivals recognize the multicultural reality of our cities and provide a snapshot of the complex nature of culture and politics within communities, serving as mediums for wider commercial, ideological, and political expressions.<sup>15</sup> Such events can also contribute to the construction and communication of identities at the local, regional, and national levels, attaining political power for the organizing entities and community and enabling a direct route into greater political movements.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Auerbach, Susan. "How to Grow a Multicultural Community Festival: A Handbook for California Organizations," for the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, 1991

<sup>15</sup> Stoeltje, Beverly, In *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*. New York: Oxford University of Illinois Press, (1992:261).

<sup>16</sup> Davila, Arlene, *Sponsored Identities*; Abner Cohen, *Masquerade Politics*; Frank Manning, *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives on Contemporary Cultural Performance*.

# The Structure of Festivals

an abstract model

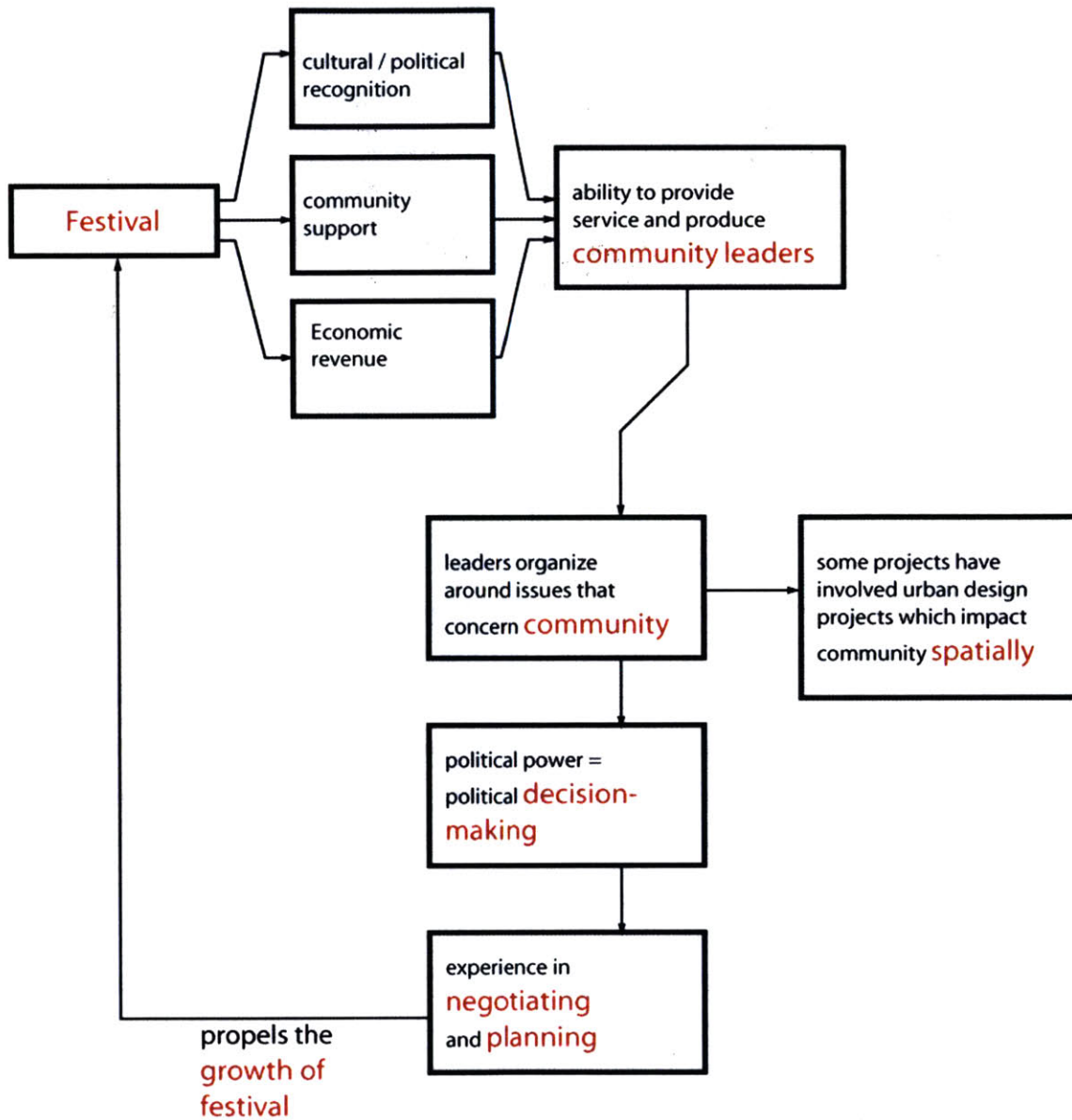


Figure 8:  
Abstract structure of  
cultural festivals.

## Power of Place

In order to analyze Cohen, Cadaval, and Davila's claim that urban cultural festivals provide ethnic enclaves with the ability to claim space, inserting specific identifiable and cultural symbols onto the landscape, I will also draw on Dolores Hayden's concept of the "Power of Place". Hayden claims that 'power of place' nurtures citizen's public memory encompassing shared time in the form of shared territory. She argues that public space can help to nurture an inclusive sense of what it means to be an American. However, in her view this so called 'shared territory' remains unavailable for most working class, ethnic communities and women in history.<sup>17</sup> How we view space has a relationship to how we see ourselves in that space, and this is directly tied to the construction of our social identity; "Identity is intimately tied to memory: both our personal memories (where we have come from and where we have dwelt) and the collective or social memories interconnected with the histories of our families, neighbors, fellow workers, and ethnic communities."<sup>18</sup> This collective identity produces a cultural landscape filled with symbols, patterns, and distinctive design traditions.

The construction of social identity is also influenced by how we use and interact with others in public space. Being in public increases the opportunity for people to relate through a variety of relationships. For the most part, economic wealth, fame, exceptional qualities and achievements do not matter as much as does the personality of the person and his interaction with this setting. Although people express their personality, interests, and affiliation through their body language, clothes, or actions, the public space creates a platform upon which people of all backgrounds can gather. Life in public settings creates a more democratic and egalitarian environment.

Public space is simultaneously a stage and a theater, for in public the spectators may choose to become the actors.<sup>19</sup> Public spaces produce theatrical stages—as the main performance of the evening, public life may

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<sup>17</sup> Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place*. Cambridge: MIT Press, (1995:9)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, (1995:9).

<sup>19</sup> Lennard, Suzanne H. Crowhurst, and Henry L. Lennard, *Public Life in Urban Places*. New York: Gondelier Press, (1984:21).



occur in center stage, where the actors are visible to most of the audience, or it can occur on a side stage where the composition of street furniture, light, and ambience lends itself to a smaller stage only visible to a few.

Diversity, conviviality, and communality are important social functions that are met by being in public thus prompting the creation and programming of public spaces. The soul of a city lies not only in its architectural monuments, which shape physical space, but also by actions, interactions, and everyday life that occurs in these spaces. Human beings depend on contact with other beings to survive; being in the presence of others is both interesting and comforting.<sup>21</sup> To be seen and recognized by others affirms and maintains one's identity as a special person while still belonging to a family or special group. Awareness of other people, through hearing, seeing, and touching, also allows one to feel less alone. The interaction with different people other than kin provides one with the fascinating emotions of attraction and interest in the unfamiliar.

Public spaces minimize the inequities of access and opportunity for use that prevail in most private indoor spaces. Secondly, public spaces promote a wide range of encounters and relationships, whether they are planned or unplanned, of short or long duration, specific or unspecific. Thirdly, public space users encounter other users who are very different from themselves. Their co-presence may spark interest in the other's life and create an opportunity to learn about the other. Some public spaces also diminish the exclusion of the physically or mentally disabled. Celebrations, festivals, and street entertainment provide an increased opportunity for such encounters to occur. People are enriched in their view of others through the recognition of their different appearances, backgrounds and stories.

## **Urban Social Movements**

To better understand both the planning process and the impact of festivals, I now turn to theory about urban social movements. In the *City and the Grassroots*, Manuel Castells states, "Cities like all social reality, are historical

products, not only in their physical materiality but in their cultural meaning, in the role they play in the social organization, and in peoples' lives."<sup>21</sup> He argues that urban social movements have the characteristic of being a self-governing system, locally based and territorially defined, and organized around three major goals: collective consumption, cultural identity, and political self-management.<sup>22</sup> Urban social movements, as described by Dunleavy, are those actions that display a stress on collectivity and the push towards change of some kind. Dunleavy draws particular attention to the distinctive organizational style of these groups—their grassroots orientation and unhierarchical mode of organization, non-involvement in formal political parties, and emphasis on direct action and protest tactics.<sup>23</sup>

The celebratory event serves as a vehicle by which the organizing entities, which work at the grassroots level, can gain economic revenue to support the organization's agenda. Because the festivals discussed in this thesis provide monetary and community support enabling these organizations or the politician's offices to promote an agenda, these cultural festivals are part of larger urban social movements that impact the changing form of cities. One might ask how urban social movements impact the form of a city. Castells provides an example of merchants who see their city as a market, and because they understand the functions of the street fairs it is the intense socializing that takes place in those markets that shape the physical dynamics of that location. Consequently, he argues that the historical definition of urban is not a mental representation of spatial form but rather an assignment of a structural task to the form according to the social dynamics of history. Castells further argues, "Urban meaning and urban functions jointly determine urban form, that is, the symbolic spatial expression of the processes that materialize as a result of them."<sup>24</sup> The definition of urban meaning is a social process as the expression of cultural, economic, religious, political and technological structures. Urban functions relates to the actions

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<sup>20</sup> Lennard, Suzanne H. Crowhurst, and Henry L. Lennard, *Public Life in Urban Places*. New York: Gondelior Press, (1984:5).

<sup>21</sup> Castells, Manuel. *The City and the Grassroots*. University of California, Berkeley, (1983:302).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, (1983: 328).

<sup>23</sup> Lowe, Stuart. *Urban Social Movements: The City after Castells*. Hong Kong: Macmillan, © Stuart Lowe, (1986:3).

<sup>24</sup> Castells, Manuel, *The City and the Grassroots*. University of California, Berkeley, (1983:303).



and activities performed in those spaces, thus in tandem—meaning and function—shape the form of cities.

Urban form as the spatial expression of processes is thus also marked by the temporary nature of cultural celebrations. Castells concludes by saying that economy alone does not determine urban form; rather, he establishes a relationship and hierarchy between historical meaning, urban functions, and spatial forms. Furthermore, he points to Kevin Lynch's argument that urban form is shaped by the uses, flows, perceptions, mental associations, and systems of representations, whose meaning changes with time, cultures, and social groups.<sup>25</sup>

I will use the theories of Hayden's *power of place* and Castells *urban social movements*, to better understand how the planning process for the Latino cultural festivals discussed in this thesis, influences the impact on the physical and social dynamics of its community. I will also discuss the propagation of cultural icons via the festival and how these symbols begin to leave impressions on the space they occupy.

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<sup>25</sup> Lynch, Kevin, *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, MIT Press, (1960: 6).



### 3 CITY GOVERNMENTS & FESTIVAL PLANNING

Why do cities program events? There are several answers to this question. Municipal governments want to gain support from their constituency; celebrating the cultural diversity of the city creates a forum in which various communities can come together; and cultural festivals generate significant economic revenue and can promote good press for city government. Creating cultural events, whether they are festivals, traveling fairs, or parades, contributes to the vitality and growth of any city because the opportunity for multicultural interaction increases, serving to reduce tension and promote harmony in the community.

Festivals give insight to a community's social relations and identity through the ritual practices celebrated at the event.<sup>1</sup> These events provide an opportunity to transform reality, offering alternatives to everyday life. In the words of Olivia Cadaval, "during festival, people enter a utopian realm of freedom and equality in which they can imagine a different order."<sup>2</sup> Thus, festivals enhance multicultural understanding while valuing the contributions of different cultural groups.

One cannot assume that by throwing people together and exposing audiences to a different culture, multicultural understanding will result. But one can begin to provide opportunities for exchanging information and learning about others through celebratory events by making these events accessible to groups of people who otherwise would not participate or interact.

The lively proliferation of cultural festivals programmed annually in Los Angeles and Chicago demonstrates these cities' investment in celebrating their multiculturalism. Because I am particularly interested in Latino immigrant populations, I have chosen to focus on these two cities and their Latino festivals.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Manning, *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives on Contemporary Cultural Performance*, (Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1983:11) .

<sup>2</sup> Olivia Cadaval, *Creating a Latino Identity in the Nation's Capital: The Latino Festival*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998:7).

Los Angeles and Chicago have long histories as a port of entry for Latino immigrants. Latinos achieved a plurality in the City of Los Angeles in the 1970s, and Illinois' Latino population (mainly in Chicago) will nearly double by 2020, becoming the state's largest minority.<sup>3</sup> In the past two decades, throughout the United States Latino metropolises have grown dramatically due to immigration triggering transformations in urban culture and ethnic identity, making these cities prime laboratories for planning and producing cultural events throughout the year.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter I will discuss the different approaches that Los Angeles and Chicago take in programming ephemeral events, specifically cultural festivals. The focus of my research is an examination of the cities' policy regarding cultural festival planning; the efforts made to work collaboratively with Latino communities will be specifically discussed.

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<sup>3</sup> Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. Big City* (London & New York: Verso, 2000) 2.

<sup>4</sup> Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. Big City*.

## Los Angeles



Figure 9:  
City of Los Angeles  
Festival Guide

In 2000, 218 cultural events were programmed throughout Los Angeles. The city is indeed a city of festivals, where the cultural heritage and traditions of its citizens are reflected through music, dance, the visual arts, calligraphy, dress, food, and language. Yet, while encouraging these festivals, the City of Los Angeles has adopted a “incubator” policy under which city government produces few festivals itself, preferring instead to train community organizers to produce events. The Office of Festivals will co-direct the event for several years until the community organizers are adequately trained to guide the planning process of subsequent years. Before discussing this policy however, it is necessary to provide a brief history of how Los Angeles developed its Cultural Affairs Department and the Office for Festivals and Gallery Theater. Then I will examine the policies, the tools used to implement these policies, and various examples of events planned by the Office for Festivals and Gallery Theater.

## History

*Popular images of power in Los Angeles are curiously contradictory. On the one hand is the common belief, almost folk legend, that L.A. is ruled by an omnipotent Downtown establishment, headed by the Times and some big banks, oil companies and department stores. On the other hand is Chandler's lofty avowal, echoed by journalists of the 'there is no "there" there' school, that power in Southern California is fragmented and dispersed, without hegemonic center.<sup>5</sup>*

Los Angeles heritage is a Mexican and Spanish heritage and from the city's early beginnings, *Fiestas* were a favorite pastime for Angelinos. Named after St. Francis of Assisi's first church, St. Mary of Angels—El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles, this small town, inhabited by both indigenous Californians and Spanish conquistadors, grew until by 1880 the population was eleven thousand; by 1888, it was approximately eighty thousand people. As the city continued to grow, feasts were planned to celebrate the fair weather and abundant vegetation of California. On January 1, 1889, Pasadena held its first Tournament of Roses; the principal event was

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<sup>5</sup> Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, (London: Vintage Books, 1992) 104.

a parade of vehicles gracefully decorated with beautiful floral decorations. The event was so successful that it became an annual event, attracting visitors from far and near; after one hundred and twelve years, the Tournament of Roses Parade is still an annual event in Pasadena.

By 1893, Los Angeles was suffering from the nationwide depression. Business was dormant, not having yet recovered from the real estate collapse and railway craze of the late 1880's. Still, during the early months of 1894 in the midst of business depression and financial distrust, a meeting of the Merchants Association was called. The merchants wanted to attract visitors from near and far in order to stimulate business activity and once again rekindle the love affair with Los Angeles. Max Meyberg, a member of the association's executive committee, suggested a festival. *La Fiesta de Los Angeles* was not planned to commemorate or celebrate any particular event, battle, or anniversary, but rather as a tool to attract tourists and promote the natural, physical, and the industrious possibilities of Los Angeles. The official program of the 1894 La Fiesta de Los Angeles read:

"The primary object is to make a gala time for their own and outside townspeople. As the feverish speculative era has given place to solid prosperity and happiness, the need is felt for more social intermingling and diversion among a people who come here, not solely for making money and seeking health, but to live an easier life in a more poetic climate."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the festival became a tool to promote Los Angeles as a prosperous, healthy, and beautiful city. The merchants hoped that the festival would catalyze economic growth and interest in real estate by highlighting the fabulous climate of Southern California, "Lummis organized the first Los Angeles Fiesta as a public distraction. The next year, with the class war temporarily abated, he orchestrated the Fiesta around a comprehensive 'mission' theme, influenced by *Ramona*. Its electric regional impact can only be compared to the nation frisson of the contemporary Columbian Exposition in Chicago; as the latter inaugurated the neo-Classical revival, the former launched an equally frenzied local 'Mission revival'."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Merchants of Los Angeles, *Official La Fiesta Brochure*, (Los Angeles, 1894).

<sup>7</sup> Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, 26.

In 1932 the Olympics came to Los Angeles. Not only was it a pivotal moment in the history of Los Angeles but also for the United States since it was only the second time that an American city had been chosen to host the Olympics games. It would take fifty-two years before the ‘City of Angels’ would serve as the stage for another Olympic games.

The 1984 Olympics gave birth to the Olympic Arts Festival, which later transformed into the LA Festival. The 1984 Olympic Arts Festival and subsequent events gave testament as to the depth of talent and cultural production in the City. Los Angeles had grown up artistically.

Most of the work that made Los Angeles a cultural center began during the past 45 years. The first of the publicly supported permanent arts institutions—the Music Center Complex and the Los Angeles County Art Museum (LACMA), are just a little over 35 years old. Mayor Tom Bradley originally proposed the Arts and Cultural Facilities Services Trust Fund more commonly known as the Los Angeles Endowment for the Arts. Councilman Joel Wachs then translated this proposal into a group of ordinances, which were enacted by City Council in 1988. These ordinances created the funding structure for the policies and activities of the Los Angeles Cultural Masterplan.<sup>8</sup> The masterplan primarily guides the Cultural Affairs Department, which is the administrative unit in charge of implementing the Plan. The goal of the Cultural Affairs Department is to promote the artistic expression of culturally diverse groups, creating opportunities for exposure of diverse art, shifting the Euro-centric, “high-art” emphasis to one that embraces non-western and folk art. To accomplish the production of cultural arts, the city began to produce multicultural events that celebrated diverse cultural traditions, and sponsored multiple artists.

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<sup>8</sup> McNeill, Morris Inc. *City of Los Angeles Cultural Masterplan* (Draft), 1990.

## Policy

In an effort to clarify the Cultural Affairs Department's multiple responsibilities, which were spread between public art, arts education, and festival planning, the *Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater* was created to specifically direct the programming of ephemeral events. The Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater plans fewer events today than it did ten years ago, yet surprisingly the number of cultural events throughout greater Los Angeles area has grown considerably.

The Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater is an entity in charge of programming the city with cultural events throughout the year. They also program a season of theatrical events that are sponsored by the City of Los Angeles and take place at the Gallery Theater. The Gallery Theater is located at the Los Angeles Theater Center, which also serves as the Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater's headquarters.

The Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater is intimately involved in collaboratively planning a cultural festival for a couple of years until the community has built a strong organizational process around the production of the event. The policy implemented by the City of Los Angeles operates much like an incubator; incubating a particular event until this event can be self-sufficient. The policy requires a representative from the community and someone from the city office to be co-directors of each event at the outset. The representative from the Office of Festivals works more as a mentor to various community leaders, teaching them the process of planning cultural events rather than actually planning the event. This individual will organize meetings on how to manage and reap economic and sociological benefits from the event. Additionally, as committees are formed to coordinate advertising, fundraising, talent, logistics, and site planning, the Office of Festivals provides training and support to those committees. The city government hopes to foster a sense of harmony by getting people to interact with one another and a sense of self-empowerment by having the community organizers take administrative and artistic control of "their" celebration.



## Why this Policy?

Under the auspices of Mayor Tom Bradley, the Cultural Affairs Department had generally applied a ‘hands-on’ policy, but Mayor Richard Riordan known to be more of a ‘businessman’ does not micromanage the cultural programming of the city. Initially, I interpreted Mayor Riordan’s approach as a “hands-off” policy, where the city is supportive of cultural programming but takes a very uninvolved position. Yet, after analyzing the process of how the City of Los Angeles implements their policies, I felt it is more in lines with an ‘incubator’ approach. The aim here is to increase the cultural programming of Los Angeles by promoting public initiative, and shift the city’s resources from creating new festivals to providing supportive staff and training for community organizations planning cultural events.

Today, the city of Los Angeles initiates approximately ten events each year. They are moving away from organizing events that addresses a particular cultural group, to producing events under an umbrella theme such as “world music,” with the intent of bringing together a variety of communities that would otherwise never intersect. The opportunity to bring together talent and communities is a salient goal since Los Angeles—a city, which boasts considerable multicultural diversity—is still very segregated. The problem with Los Angeles, like many other cities, is that even though many cultural groups live in a relatively defined area, cultural enclaves tend to cluster, producing very segregated neighborhoods. Thus, Los Angeles has many cities within a bigger city; and each city has a concentration of at least one cultural group. As a result, Mayor Riordan, along with the Cultural Affairs Department, targets arts programming as a tool to teach multiple communities about the rich cultural diversity that exists in the city.

## Implementation

The aim of the Los Angeles Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater is to promote public initiative in planning events throughout the city. But the resources used by this office are relatively limited, particularly in comparison to Chicago’s Special Events Office. For one, the Los Angeles department has

fewer staff and responsibilities. A basic tool used by this department is the dissemination of a brochure outlining the process by which one can plan, fundraise, and ultimately ‘grow a multicultural community festival.’<sup>9</sup> This handbook serves California organizations interested in using community festivals as celebrations and economic development tools.

Because the Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater is very small in comparison to Chicago’s office, different departments take care of all permitting and site planning requirements, thus community organizations must contact each of the required departments individually, including the LAPD, the LAFD, the Planning Department, and the Department of Transportation. Finally, one other tool is used by the Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater this issuing of grants to community organizations planning events. Through the grant program Los Angeles can help support and ensure the vitality of events throughout the city, however, the creative planning is initiated at the community level.

The Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater incubates many young festivals during the first years. Many of the organizing groups eventually form not-for-profit organizations that continue to plan an annual event in order to foster a sense of cultural pride and continue the tradition. The information and press releases that the Cultural Affairs Department produces are for festivals in their first five years. After that, most festivals continue independently and produce their own artistic program. After successfully weaning the organizations from moral and logistical support, the Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater hopes that these community organizations can continue to endure the stressful, time-consuming process of producing such events.

An example of a community initiating a community festival and asking for support from the City of Los Angeles’ Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater is the *Ang Pagmumulat*. The *Ang Pagmumulat* is the Festival of Philippine Arts and Culture. Initially, Rosie Lee Hooks, director of the Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater co-directed and planned this festival with the

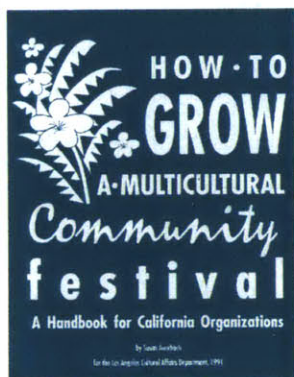


Figure 10:  
City of Los Angeles  
Handbook  
community cultural  
festival planning.

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<sup>9</sup> City of Los Angeles. Cultural Affairs Department. “How to Grow a Multicultural Community Festival: A Handbook for California Organizaitons,” ed. Susan Auberach, Los Angeles, 1991.

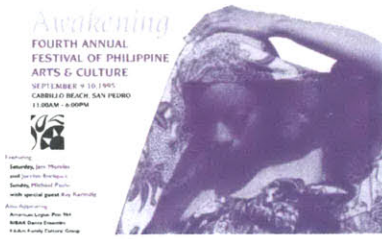


Figure 11:  
Ang Pagmumulat  
Festival Brochure, 1995.

Filipino community of San Pedro and Cabrillo Beach. In her view, this was a successful case because after a couple of years of co-sponsoring the event between the Department of Cultural Affairs, the Filipino Consulate General, and the Filipino community, the community is now able to sustain all planning issues on their

own.<sup>10</sup> The event is now in its tenth year of production. Another collaborative effort between the Patronato Jose Marti, Inc. and the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, is the Cuban Cultural Festival: *Presencia Cubana en Los Angeles*, which celebrates the cultural heritage and Cuban presence in Los Angeles.



Figure 12:  
Presencia Cubana  
Festival Brochure,  
1997.

Usually, the directors and coordinators of these community events do not get paid; more often than not these are part-time obligations taken up by individuals who are passionate about their culture and community. After a year of coordinating meetings, seeking talent, and tackling the logistical process, organizers tend to experience ‘burn-out’. Although there are dynamic leaders, the leadership role must be passed on to younger generations to guarantee the future of the event. Yet, despite the strong commitment that certain community leaders have to planning their event, it is very difficult to ensure that subsequent leaders will fulfill their responsibilities while also bringing innovative momentum to the event. Cultural events are wonderful assets to communities because they reap countless benefits. Nonetheless, the events must constantly provide provocative eye-catching entertainment and activities; otherwise the event runs the risk of dwindling from lack of support due to its predictability.

## Analysis

In assessing the Office for Festivals’ “incubator” policy, it appears that communities have benefited from this process because there are countless cultural events planned annually, most of which are now planned by community organizations. However, it is difficult to maintain stamina when the community-based organization no longer has the safety net of the

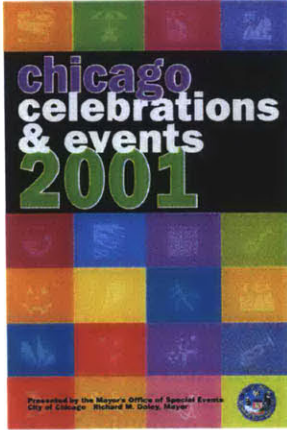
<sup>10</sup> Hooks, Rosie Lee. Personal Interview. 11 January. 2001.

city government. If beckoned, the Cultural Affairs Department can step in and give organizers the proper tools to continue producing the event, however the municipal government still employs an 'incubator' policy wanting the organizers to become autonomous directors of the event. For communities who want to continue having a festival but do not have enough people who are willing to volunteer their time, corporations who specialize in producing cultural community events can be hired. They have access to talent, equipment, sponsorship, capital, and marketing. Additionally, because of their experience, these companies have streamlined the permitting process with the city departments of transportation, special events, sanitation, and safety. Occasionally, large corporations make it their business to produce the event because exposure and economic benefits are so rewarding.

The availability of professional festival planning companies and large sponsors who independently promote events does not assure that a cultural celebration will be well attended and successful. Other factors, such as tradition and pride (in the event) also play a large part in continuing the celebratory event. One could not ensure a highly programmed urban core, unless a Cultural Affairs Department, with total mayoral support, would produce every event in the city.



## Chicago



Unlike Los Angeles, the City of Chicago has adopted a “producer” policy under which the Mayor’s Office of Special Events pours a great amount of effort into continuously programming the city, while also adding new events to the already lengthy list. The Mayor’s Office of Special Events produces over twenty events throughout the city of Chicago every year, and collaborates with neighborhood organizations in planning festivals. This “producer” policy means that this office is directly involved in the planning of multiple festivals often on a micro-management level. In addition, this office assists community-based organizations in the production of summertime festivals designed to celebrate Chicago’s many neighborhoods.

## History

The decade of the 1960s was a perilous time for big city mayors; there were ghetto riots, anti-urban renewal protests, anti-expressway protests, welfare rights and civil rights protests, and a myriad of other special interest groups fighting for their specific cause. Yet, despite the afflictions that wore down other big-city mayors, Richard J. Daley Sr., survived the career-killing decade.<sup>11</sup>

Twenty years later Richard Daley, the younger, took up the reins of Chicago in a radically different political landscape than his father: “The new Daley is a “producer,” action-oriented leader more in the CEO or city manager mold than an old-style boss-politician.”<sup>12</sup> Mayor Richard M. Daley has earned a national reputation for developing innovative community-based programs. The central aim of Daley’s administration has been economic growth, and he has accomplished this by focusing on planning for the city, hoping that this would result in future jobs and business growth.<sup>13</sup> Some insiders label him a “policy nerd” due to his passion for management, and, to be sure, his managerial style extends even to the micro-level of programming

Figure 13: City of Chicago Celebration and Events, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Green, Paul M., Melvin G. Holli, eds. *The Mayors: The Chicago Political Tradition*. Southern Illinois University, (1995:218).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, (1995:228).

the city. Almost every day, Daley sends the Department of Special Events clippings of news articles and pictures with notes stating his interest in programming the city in some new way. He enthusiastically passes on information regarding grand events that he would like Chicago to produce. Mayor Daley has given his unrelenting support to artistic programming of the city, earning Chicago (like Los Angeles) the reputation of being “a city of festivals”.

In 1986, Harold Washington, then mayor of Chicago introduced and implemented the Chicago Cultural Plan. The Chicago Cultural Plan was a comprehensive strategy for nourishing and cultivating the cultural landscape the city. This document was shaped by the recommendations and observations of thousands of Chicago citizens, community-based organizations, and community groups. The plan established a Department of Cultural Affairs, which grew out of a recommendation by Mayor Washington’s 1983 Transition Team Report, and it was out of the Cultural Affairs Department that the Mayor’s Office of Special Events was instituted.

## Policy



Figure 14:  
City of Chicago  
Taste of Chicago,  
brochure 2000.

The Office of Special Events was created in part due to the logistical and political demands that grant making, arts production, and site planning for events require. Another reason for the creation of this Office is due to the Mayor’s need to have a department in charge of organizing international dignitary visits and working closely with the Governor’s office of international affairs, the corporate sector, international service and nonprofit organizations. This office which is involved in programming ephemeral events throughout the city, is organized into several entities; event production, corporate sponsorship, permitting, sports events, neighborhood festivals, public relations, and an office of protocol. These divisions work collaboratively as a team to program the city of Chicago year-round.

The event production staff coordinates and programs the internationally renowned downtown lakefront events and music festivals

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, (1995:230).





Figure 15:  
City of Chicago  
Great Chicago  
Places & Spaces,  
brochure 2000.

including the famous Chicago Blues Festival, the Chicago Gospel Festival, Taste of Chicago, and the Chicago Jazz Festival. The staff also designs new events that are added to the already notable list of festivals, parades, and celebrations. In recent years, the Mayor's Office of Special Events has added the Celtic Fest Chicago, WinterDelights: Chicago's A Cool Place, Great Chicago Places & Spaces, Chicago Puppetropolis, Chicagoween, the Chicago Outdoor Film Festival, Mayor Daley's Holiday Sports Fest, and the Mayor's Cup Youth Soccer Tournament. Furthermore, the Office of Special Events provides grants and technical assistance to neighborhood festivals as well as to major downtown and neighborhood parades. Over time, this department has streamlined the event permit process for community festivals, improved amenities and entertainment at Taste of Chicago, changed parade regulations to relieve traffic congestion, and serviced more neighborhood events through its Jumping Jack program<sup>14</sup>. Additionally, the event production staff is collaborating in the production of a new design for Grant Park, where the Taste of Chicago takes place.

The result of the City's policy and investment of resources is a proliferation of community organizations whose foremost goal is to produce a cultural festival. The policy requires community organizations to be registered as "good standing not-for-profit" agency in order to receive funds for festival planning. This promotes the formation of new community non-profit organizations that coalesce around the design and planning of community festivals. But what is most interesting is that as the festivals evolve, becoming mainstays of the community; the organization's initial reason for existence evolves into a variety of other programmatic efforts that go well beyond the production of a festival.

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<sup>14</sup> Jumping Jack Program: provides *moon-bouncers* to communities so that children can enjoy this activity.

## Why this policy?

The 1986 Cultural Plan for Chicago established goals to celebrate the cultural vitality of the city and create cultural activities accessible to a wide audience. Other goals were to strengthen the ability of the Department of Cultural Affairs, to streamline city cultural programming among various agencies, and to act as an advocate for cultural concerns in such areas as codes, transportation, planning and education. Since the responsibilities of programming the city with public 'hard' art and ephemeral events were quite different and very large to be handled by one office, the Office of Special Events was created. The OSE became a very rich department full of centrally located resources. Another reason for the implementation of a 'producer' policy was the goal of promoting cultural tourism. Without a 'producer' centralized municipal department, the proliferation of cultural programming would be left in the hands of the community rather than the city.

## Implementation

The Special Events office brings together many resources to program Chicago with an array of events throughout the year. This office dedicates a staff member to design and initiate new events. Other efforts are employed in creating a special events packet in order disseminate information to community groups interested in producing neighborhood events, streamlining the permitting process by having an "in-house" committee dedicated to this task, and assisting in designing the site-plan of the event as well as providing grants. Within the OSE, the Neighborhood Festival committee provides grants to community organizations in order to subsidize some of the festival. These grant awards range from \$500 to \$2,000 for new or established festivals. This grant application is very dense, so the Neighborhood Festivals staff provides close supervision of the process. There are four staff members dedicated to disseminating information, organizing community organizations, and providing step-by-step assistance in obtaining all the required permits, insurance, and approvals.



Providing community organizations with grants insures that various goals established by the Neighborhood Festival staff and community organizations are met. The goals outlined by the grant application include; (1) encourage the improvement of all festival management operations—especially the quality of programming while also complying with all city ordinances, (2) increase networking and communication between producers and local agencies when addressing common needs, (3) assisting the development of neighborhood festivals, especially where limited programming exists, (4) promoting integration of the arts into the fabric of the community, (5) form new alliances among all sectors of the community, and 6) ensure artistic integrity, managerial and fiscal accountability. The policy states that applicant organizations must be located in the City of Chicago and registered in good standing as a not-for-profit organization, as well as having had active service to the public for at least one year prior to the date of application.

The Neighborhood Festivals staff works with Chicago's community-based organizations in the production of summertime festivals designed to celebrate Chicago's many neighborhoods. They also provide assistance to local community groups and non-profit agencies involved in promoting their service areas economically, artistically, and culturally. This group of staff also works closely with all city departments to ensure proper staffing and event awareness. Neighborhood festival producers must be registered as a community organization that fosters the development of quality activities in the community, for at least one year prior to applying and being eligible for support and grants from the city.

## **Analysis**

The “producer” policy implemented by the Mayor’s Office of Special Events ensures a consistent programming for the city. Moreover, housing all of the committees involved with special event planning, such as permitting, grants and funding, site-planning teams, neighborhood festivals, advertising, and special protocol, under one roof promotes efficiency and streamlines the

planning process of producing ephemeral events. Additionally, the centralized organization of this department allows neighborhood level organizations to benefit from the knowledge of the resourceful staff. Additionally, the resource of a neighborhood festival staff promotes an open exchange of information to community groups interested in cultural planning. The Neighborhood Festival staff disseminates information, trains community leaders, and helps organizations arrange their permit packages correctly to ensure the approval of all necessary permits. All of these efforts influence the increasing number of year-round celebrations and events produced annually.

Under the leadership of Mayor Daley, the Office of Special Events is constantly creating new events for the citizens of Chicago ensuring a highly programmed city. A testimony to his interest in cultural planning was the addition of the event production committee, which is responsible for coordinating and programming the City of Chicago's internationally renowned downtown lakefront events and music festivals. In addition to special events, the OSE is responsible for promoting cultural tourism and ensuring the lively promotion of Chicago's wonderful treasures—famous restaurants, world-class museums, excellent shopping districts, and countless theaters and entertainment centers.

With a 'producer' policy, the City of Chicago promotes the lively proliferation of events by being more than a patron, but actually stepping in and collaboratively producing cultural festivals with communities. Every year, the number of events that the city initiates and produces continues to grow. During the calendar year of 2001, the City of Chicago will be responsible for producing twenty large events, not including the numerous neighborhood festivals, which are in large part intimate collaborations with the OSE.

## 4 CELEBRATING IDENTITY: THE PRINCIPAL LATINO CULTURAL FESTIVALS

Governments use festivals as vehicles for disseminating and affirming whatever political or ideological materials are deemed valuable and throughout the United States community festivals translate the cultural traditions and rituals of a given group. The stakes are much higher for non-profit organizations, which exert much of their limited resources on planning such events. A festival is an opportunity not only to disseminate the organization's ideological agenda, but also to help organize the community around a given issue. The festival also generates significant revenue, which enables such organizations to exist and consequently fund the array of other social service programming.

The planning of cultural festivals is a process by which a non-profit organization can express the political agendas and cultural rituals of the community while educating the younger generations about their heritage, social, and cultural representation in the society at large. In discussing the cultural politics of Puerto Rican communities, Arlene Davila argues that festivals planned by grass roots organizations distinguish themselves from those organized by city governments because by choosing a cultural theme the former can highlight their self-identification. Many organizers struggle to distinguish their work from religious and municipally organized events because the primary purpose is to represent the community as an autonomous entity whose cultural rituals and pride are at the vanguard of the agenda. Moreover, these organizations highlight their cultural distinctiveness in order to display the constraints and motivations that have led previous generations to organize these events. Arlene Davila writes, "The cultural content of festivals is often a source of legitimating activities that are used to voice wider concerns about social space, quality of life, or the economic development of a given community."<sup>1</sup> These festivals provide the community with one of the few open public spaces for entertainment and self-expression

in neighborhoods where the sense of territorial ownership by gangs, has been the cause of violence and crime.

In this chapter, I focus on festivals organized by two non-profit community organizations; East Los Angeles' Self Help Graphics and



Figure 16: SHG Logo

Figure 17: PNCC,  
from cover of Fiesta  
del Sol brochure,  
2000.

Chicago's Pilsen Neighbors Community Council in order to analyze the planning process involved in major cultural festivals in each of the cities. These festivals, and the ethnic and political issues which shape them, have had a major influence on the social and spatial dynamics of their communities. I will begin by exploring the relationship

that these two community organizations have with their respective municipal special events departments and argue that policies alone, are not what influence the impact of the festival, but instead, social construction of identity and 'power of place' impact the social and spatial dynamics of the community. I address Felix Padilla's idea, that Latino identity serves as a political mechanism<sup>2</sup> and Olivia Cadaval's theory, that Latinoism as a self-ascribed cultural classification is a base for political action.<sup>3</sup> I will expand on these two analyses and explore how the communities of East Los Angeles and Pilsen created consciousness and translated cultural symbols, beliefs, and rituals into political discourse. I will also address how the festival has turned out to be a mechanism for organizing the community around political issues.

Located in East Los Angeles, the art atelier and gallery Self Help Graphics has represented its community on political issues via art production and the provision of a gallery for the Chicano community of Los Angeles. In contrast, the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council in Chicago strategically executes its political platform through a task force that provides social services. These organizations utilize their festivals as opportunities to organize the Latino community around specific themes and also to achieve socio-political recognition from political entities in their respective cities.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, (1997: 130).

<sup>2</sup> Padilla, Felix M. *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.

## Creating an Identity:

Cultural festivals honor and encourage the preservation of cultural traditions infusing spatial dynamics with distinctive symbols and icons. On these occasions people display and participate in culture, learn about heritage and diversity, and affirm what a community cherishes. Cultural festivals, as a manifestation of community and Latino identity, are also vehicles through which different groups of people can challenge, express, perform, and reflect multiple perspectives on social status, immigrant experiences, education, and their community within a celebratory context. Cultural festivals are an outlet to affirm cultural traditions and rituals while also making political statements and disseminating political propaganda. In this way, a political and cultural statement can be made safely.

Latino urban festivals are a means of expressing cultural traditions, reinterpreting indigenous rituals, and inventing new art forms. These events



Figure 18:  
Dia de los  
Muertos,  
1996.  
(Indigenous  
Blessing)

allow a community to grapple with its sense of displacement. While experiences in the country of origin are significant, the status of being an immigrant relegates one to many struggles, specifically learning a new language, political system, and social behaviors. Thus there is a need to express these experiences and struggles, and

festivals enable the expression of identity, allowing immigrant groups to temporarily inject urban spaces with cultural icons, music, and dance. The festival provides a space for altering the existing social order; it is a license to defy, transform, and offer alternatives to every day rules.<sup>4</sup> Likewise a festival can trace the evolving identities of immigrant enclaves; Olivia Cadaval writes, “Festival as a cultural performance provides a multifaceted camera lens that selects, magnifies, and frames elements of an ongoing historical process of

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<sup>3</sup> Cadaval, Olivia, *Creating a Latino Identity in the Nation’s Capital: The Latino Festival*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1998

<sup>4</sup> Cadaval, Olivia, *Creating a Latino Identity in the Nation’s Capital: The Latino Festival*. New York: Garland Publishing, (1998:10).

immigration.”<sup>5</sup> These celebrations begin to guide the collective symbolic ‘expressive forms’ to reflect, interpret, and influence society. An example of this is the proliferation of the United Farm Workers icon and the Virgin of Guadalupe in Chicano festivals. These two symbols, one political and the other religious, were both transformed into cultural icons that represent the community not only during the cultural performance and demonstrations, but in murals, t-shirts, and other paraphernalia displayed by multiple Chicano communities.

## The Festival and Community Organizations

The process of planning a festival not only introduces community organizations to the politics of power, but also helps reconstitute communality through the festival by claiming public space.<sup>6</sup> The negotiation of the use of public space, its transformation, and the lasting effects on the city are phenomena influenced both by the planning process and the actual experience of the event. The actual event is a product of the community organization’s planning efforts and to a peripheral degree negotiation with municipal departments regarding permits, site plans, and safety. To better understand this process it is important to understand both the city departments and community organizations that participate in the development of cultural festivals and to analyze whether these collaborative relationships influence the impact that festivals have, or whether the social construction of identity and the shaping of urban space are the driving factors in impacting social and spatial dynamics.

Self Help Graphics (SHG) and Pilsen Neighbors Community Council (PNCC) form around a distinct issue, setting themselves apart from other institutions within their particular area. Abner Cohen writes, “The organizational functions of group, such as distinctiveness, authority and ideology, can be effected in terms of symbolic forms and performances that

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, (1998:10)

<sup>6</sup> Davila, Arlene M. *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, (1997:130).



are based on primary, moral relationships.<sup>77</sup> The quality of distinctiveness allows the local community and city at large, to recognize and affiliate certain agendas with a particular non-profit organization. Neither SHG nor PNCC are purely communal organizations; they have no stated aims nor is there a rationally or consciously arranged hierarchy. They are, however, a combination of associative and communal because there are elements of both the formality and the fluidity of community relationships. Religious leadership, often offers such groups the opportunity to develop an organizational structure.<sup>8</sup> During the 1960s Civil Rights Movement religious leadership and organizations played a fundamental role among African Americans in the United States. This is also true for the Chicano and Latino experience in the United States.

Religion plays a crucial role in both SHG and PNCC. Religiously affiliated individuals have been at the forefront of the organizations' struggle, because, since the beginning, these organizations have focused their efforts around social justice. Although these religiously affiliated individuals were atypical in their involvement in political activity, it was their passionate and visionary creativity that promoted the growth of both of these organizations, which became political powerhouses in their respective communities. The earliest supporters of the PNCC were Jesuit priests, who initiated various social service programs for the south Chicago community over fifty years



Figure 19:  
Sister Karen Boccacero,  
†.

ago. Today, the organization continues to foster an intimate relationship with the multiple Catholic and denominational churches in the Pilsen area. Similarly, Self Help Graphics in East Los Angeles, received much of its visionary guidance from Sister Karen, a Catholic nun. Until her death, Sister Karen, an atypical, radical Catholic nun, helped organize the festival for many years. She was in large part

responsible for the expansion of this festival throughout the greater Los Angeles area and consequently throughout the United States.

<sup>7</sup> Cohen, Abner. *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements*. Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited (1993:83).

Both of these organizations depend on an annual festival to support the yearlong programming of services. This festival showcases the variety of services and resources that are part of each organization, and the ephemeral event highlights the organization distinctiveness and represents the community within a larger social context. Unless people from the community tap into the resources offered by both of these organizations, most people only recognize the organization for producing the festival. The economic revenue from the festival allows these organizations to grow and provide services to their respective communities, thus propelling an entire community to organize socially and politically around the festival, while benefiting from the social services that it supports year-round.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, (1993:88).



## Self Help Graphics: Dia de los Muertos



Figure 20:  
SHG brochure.

While *Dia de los Muertos* is a day traditionally celebrated by Chicano and Mexican communities, it has taken a particular form in Los Angeles under the tutelage of Self Help Graphics. The festival was a reaction to a complex series of issues facing the Chicano and Mexican American urban communities of the Southwest, specifically Los Angeles. The late 1960s were a time of great turmoil and awakening in the United States. The Vietnam War, the onset of the Civil Rights Movement, and urban riots that resulted from these events catalyzed social unrest as well as social participation in many large metropolitan areas. Los Angeles suffered its first major riot in 1969, and during the following summer various historic occurrences catalyzed the organization of the urban Chicana/o movement <sup>9</sup>and subsequently the Day of the Dead Celebration<sup>10</sup>.

*Dia de los Muertos* developed out of one pivotal event that occurred against this backdrop of civil discord. By the summer of 1970 the Chicano community in Los Angeles had built up a unified front specifically to protest the Vietnam War. Although only 20% of the American men fighting in the Vietnam were ‘people of color,’ 70% of the body bags coming back were of African American or Latino background. This created a sense of frustration and anger that forced many Chicanos to come together and plan a peaceful moratorium march that would take place on August 29, 1970.

At the same time, the morale and pride of Chicanos had reached a peak due to Rueben Salazar. Coverage of the Bay of Pigs and other seminal stories made him one of the most prestigious journalists for the Los Angeles Times, making him as a Chicano hero to many people in the barrio. During the summer of 1970, Rueben Salazar was investigating police brutality in the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department, an assignment, which made him very

<sup>9</sup> Acuna, Rodolfo F. *A Community Under Siege: A Chronicle of Chicanos East of the Los Angeles River 1945-1975*. University of California Press, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> Consuelo Flores. Personal interview, March 25, 2001.

unpopular with the LAPD. Salazar received notice from an informant who offered very tangible and incriminating information about the Sheriff's Department, and this informant scheduled a meeting with Rueben Salazar at the Silver Dollar Café at five o'clock on the same day that the moratorium was to take place—August 29, 1970. While the moratorium was taking place at Laguna Park at the corner of Whittier Blvd and Ditman, in the nearly empty Silver Dollar Café, Rueben happened to be sitting directly in front of the door when police rammed in and shot a 9-inch long, 2-inch wide tear gas projectile, which hit Rueben Salazar directly in the head. He died that day after bleeding to death.<sup>11</sup>

After this incident, the momentum and spirit of the Chicano people suffered a serious setback. They felt that they were disposable—as soldiers, as political figures, and as a community. Not only had they suffered a great deal from the number of Chicano men whose lives were lost in the war, but they also felt that justice was unmet when Deputy Wilson was absolved from shooting the tear gas projectile that killed Rueben Salazar into the Silver Dollar<sup>12</sup>. This was the straw that broke the camel's back for a community of people who hungered for justice and socio-political recognition. Today, in Los Angeles this era is called the onset of the urban Chicano Movement, or *El Movimiento Chicano/o*.

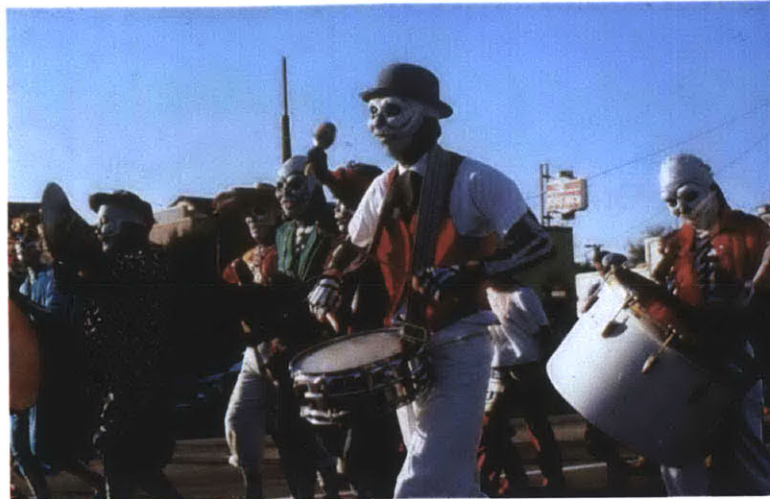
As symbols began to arise, creating icons of *Chicanismo*, many artists looked for a day of celebration to heal the wounds of repression and racism. The group of artists known as ASCO, (Harry Gamboa Jr., Willie Heron, Patsi Valdez, and Gronk) re-introduced many Mexicans and Chicanos to the

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<sup>11</sup> According to records, Rueben Salazar was kept at the Silver Dollar Café for 10 hours without any assistance because of the supposed rioting that broke out. According to law enforcement officers the peaceful march had broken out into a massive riot. A respondent who was there thirty-one years ago said that the police halted the moratorium and as people found out about Rueben Salazar, they broke out into tears, anger, and frustration, hardly a riot as the police claimed. She and several scholars believe that Rueben Salazar was set up because he knew too much. The disturbance that occurred at a local soda-shop gave the police freedom to approach the situation as if it were a riot. Under this pretense, the police shot tear-gas into the Silver Dollar café and blamed it on the supposed riots. However, the events happened in the opposite order—Rueben Salazar was injured from the shot of a tear gas projectile and then the peaceful march broke out into mayhem.

<sup>12</sup> Acuna, Rodolfo F. *A Community Under Siege: A Chronicle of Chicanos East of the Los Angeles River 1945-1975*. University of California Press, 1984

Figure 21:  
Musicians  
Marching to  
cemetery  
Courtesy of SHG.



Celebration of *Día de los Muertos*.<sup>13</sup> This group also helped initiate Self Help Graphics, which began as a non-profit art gallery, in the subsequent years. However, the community felt in between two cultures—they were neither Mexican or American. They could not justify celebrating *Cinco de Mayo* or September 16<sup>th</sup>, since both are Mexican holidays that do not speak to the Chicano experience in the United States. For similar reason, the community could not appropriate July 4<sup>th</sup>. Instead, these artists searched for an indigenous holiday, that would celebrate symbolically the healing process of life and death.

The first organized celebration of *Día de los Muertos* in the United States took place in 1972. This celebration had resonating similarities to the Moratorium March of August 29, 1970. The 1972 procession took place at the cemetery located on Cesar Chavez Ave (previously Brooklyn Ave) and Lorena Street. Consuelo Flores, an artist and scholar of *Día de los Muertos*, said that this was not a Catholic or purely religious celebration, but was, and continues to be, a cultural ritual in which Catholic and indigenous symbols are integral. Consuelo says that *Día de los Muertos* is a “means by which you accept mortality...with the understanding

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<sup>13</sup> The Day of the Dead is an indigenous Mexican holiday celebrated on November 1<sup>st</sup> and still practiced predominantly in the southern states of Mexico. Since the majority of Mexican Americans, Chicanos and immigrants in the 1970s were primarily from northern Mexican states, many people of this community had never encountered this celebration. In fact, many families, including my own, knew of such a celebration but did not practice it since it had been wiped out from the northern cultures during the conquest of Mexico. By 1972, this group of artists, known as ASCO produced *Día de los Muertos*.

## The Origins of *Dia De Los Muertos*

and how it changed the visibility and self identity of Chicanos in Los Angeles

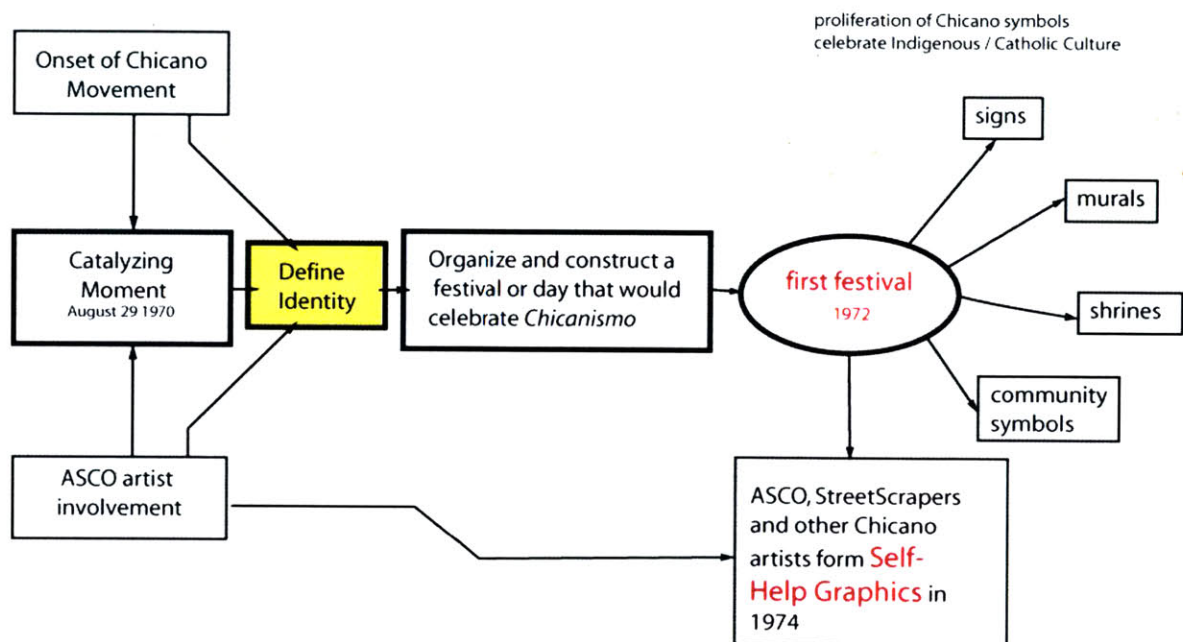


Figure 22: Origins of Dia de los Muertos Celebration in Los Angeles



## The Current *Dia De Los Muertos* Celebration and how its various public components interact

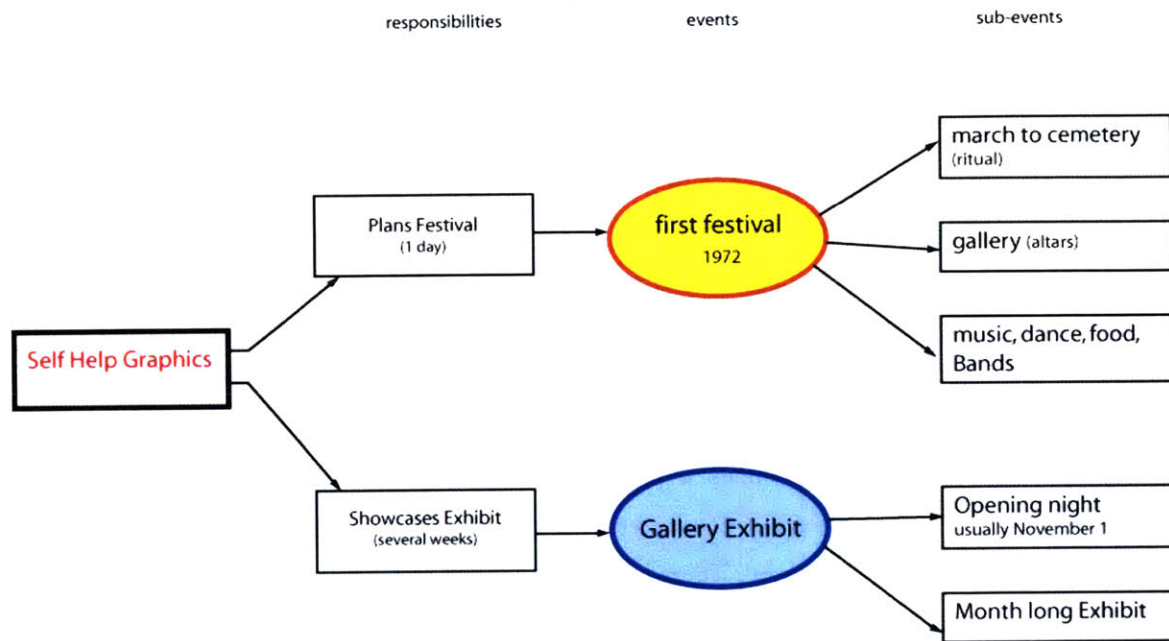


Figure 23: Current *Día de los Muertos* Celebration in Los Angeles



Figure 24: Día de los Muertos, East Los Angeles, 1974  
Courtesy of SHG.



Figure 25: Día de los Muertos, East Los Angeles, 1974  
Courtesy of SHG.

that they (your loved ones) are really never gone.” According to her, during the first year there was much debate whether to have a Catholic or Indigenous priest preside over the celebration, but in the end the organizers decided to have both since it was a reinvention and reclamation of an indigenous and cultural Catholic ritual. One of the aspects of celebrating the dead entails a processional march to the cemetery where people make offerings of flowers, food, gifts, liquor, and pictures and decorate the graveyard. There is also the lighting of firecrackers and the playing of music, making this a very festive and boisterous celebration of death.

The celebration began to grow, becoming a vehicle for social, public, and civic recognition. The artists of ASCO, East LA Streetscapers, and other Chicano artists created art that reflected the rich cultural values and spirit of the local Chicano community, and by the time these artists decided to move into a storefront on Brooklyn Ave (presently Cesar Chavez Ave), the larger community was already familiar with the name, products, and ideology of SHG. This familiarity with SHG was in great part due to the ubiquitous nature of the Chicano symbols and icons spread via murals, art, and other items such as t-shirts. Many more local artists joined forces with the core group, and in 1974 Self Help Graphics hosted the first *Día de los Muertos*. It has continued to do so for the past twenty-seven years.

Figure 26:  
Self Help  
Graphics.  
Children  
participating in  
Dia de los  
Muertos.  
Courtesy of  
SHG.



Many aspects of this celebration have evolved over the years. The primary changes have occurred in organizational structure of the organization affecting how the festival is planned. According to Tomas Benitez, current director of Self Help Graphics, the most drastic changes have occurred in the style of planning the event. Previously, artists in residence would plan the entire event in exchange for the use of gallery space. Their contribution to the planning stemmed from their artistic strengths, and, although they were not professional event planners, the event had deep social and artistic impacts on the Chicano community. Today there no longer any artists in residence who commit their time to planning this event; instead, an administrative staff oversees the planning of this cultural event. Tomas Benitez feels that while the artists had deeper social impacts on the immediate community, the current staff, who are trained in event planning, impact a wider demographic, commercializing *Dia de los Muertos* in a way that teaches people about the history and purpose of this celebration. Ensuring the growth of Self Help Graphics is important because over the past twenty-eight years, SHG has emerged as the leading visual arts institution serving the predominantly Chicano/Mexicano community of Los Angeles. Moreover, garnering financial support and presence via the festival ensures the growth of the organization and provides the muscle SHG needs to continue being nationally and internationally recognized as a rich resource for Chicano art.

## The Original Planning Organization of *Self Help Graphics* and how it balances community responsibility with business practices

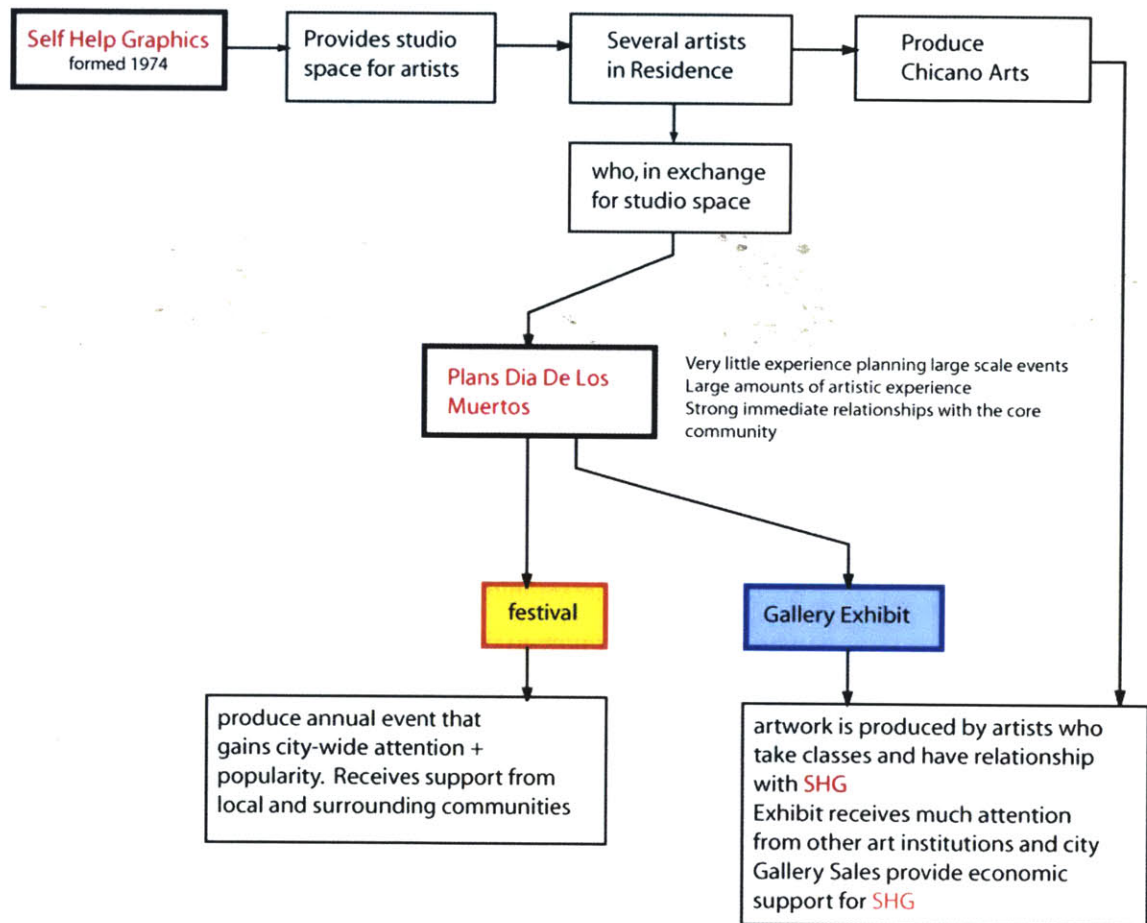


Figure 27: Original Planning Organization of Self Help Graphics



## The Current Planning Organization of *Self Help Graphics* and how it changed the visibility and self identity of Chicanos in Los Angeles

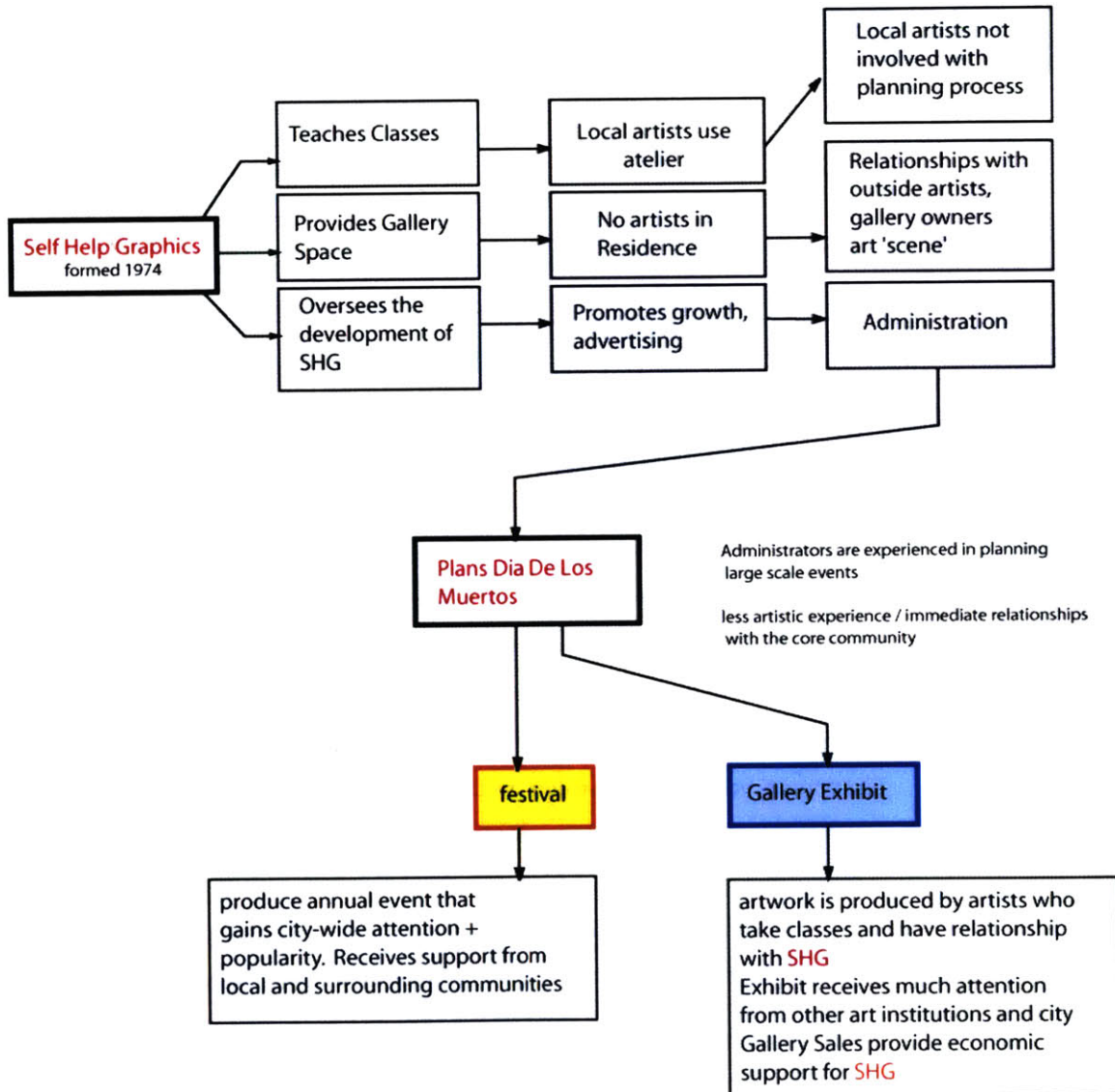


Figure 28: Current Planning Organization of Self Help Graphics

Over the past twenty-eight years Self Help Graphics' Día de los Muertos celebration has experienced several transformations, especially as different visionaries and civic entities have become involved. The first time that Self Help Graphics hosted the Day of the Dead Celebration in 1974, its underlying goal was to achieve social, public, and civic representation of Chicanos. Many people gathered, painted their faces as *calacas*<sup>14</sup>, and made papier-mâché and *papel picado*<sup>15</sup> to prepare their procession to the cemetery. The participatory performance culminated at the cemetery, where a conglomeration of indigenous and Catholic ritual blessings took place. The first year was such a great success that in subsequent years there has been significant desire to formalize the marketing and advertisement process to ensure the steady growth and propagation of this young



Figure 29:  
1977 Día de los  
Muertos, procession  
to cemetery.  
(Courtesy of SHG)

Figure 30:  
1977 Día de los  
Muertos, procession  
to cemetery.  
(Courtesy of SHG)

urban Chicano celebration.

Sometimes the famous procession would travel down the middle of the street, in which case the organizers had to request permits from the Department of Transportation and the Police Department in order to close down the street. In Los Angeles, the closing down of a street requires a permit because it obstructs traffic, however, the holding an event on the sidewalk does not require a permit, so long as the event does not seep on the transited street. Other years, to avoid the bureaucratic process Self Help Graphics would avoid notifying the police and other municipal departments until the last possible moment; in other cases they completely avoided any permitting process by processing along the sidewalks. In Tomas Benitez's view, the police for the most part, were not helpful, and due to a long history

<sup>14</sup> *Calacas*: skeleton figures.

<sup>15</sup> *papel picado*: ornately cut tissue paper.

of animosity between the Chicano community and the police department, Self Help Graphics circumvented any official permitting procedures by containing the event to the gallery's property and minimizing obstruction of traffic by using the sidewalk versus the street.

By the mid-seventies the event had become so large that it was no longer an East Los Angeles event, but rather an Angelino event highlighting the growing presence of a Chicano agenda. Part of the Chicano agenda, was and continues to be bringing about awareness and promoting the rich cultural heritage and contribution of Chicano art, literature, thought, and history to the contemporary American experience.

In 1980, the City of Los Angeles approached Self Help Graphics in hopes of collaboratively producing the Day of the Dead celebration, and for approximately five years Self Help Graphics and LA Photo Center collaboratively planned the annual celebration. Benitez states that during this era, Self Help and the municipal department, which later became the Cultural Affairs Department, had a positive relationship. When the city changed its policy in 1985, giving birth to the Cultural Affairs Department, this co-sponsorship of *Dia de los Muertos*, dissolved. During the period that the Photo Center co-sponsored this event, a theater troupe named *Teatro Grupo Cinergia* became involved in coordinating the events and workshops associated with the daylong celebration. This group was more interested in the theatrical component of the festival, while Self Help Graphics had a visual arts emphasis.

Issues contesting the municipal funding of an event that incorporates Catholic and indigenous iconography provoked strong opposition from a significant constituency of citizens and ultimately led to the obstruction of municipal funds, ultimately, bringing an end to the collaborative relationship between SHG and the City of Los Angeles. The folks from Self Help Graphics upheld their position that this was not a religious event but rather a cultural celebration amalgamating both the indigenous and Catholic undertones of the Mexican version of *Dia de los Muertos*. But Self Help Graphics and the City of Los Angeles ultimately dissolved their collaborative ties and moved forward each to produce its own version of *Dia de los Muertos*.



This split also propelled the initiation of multiple other celebrations of Day of the Dead throughout Los Angeles, spearheaded by different organizations each with different visions and programming. Nonetheless, Self Help Graphics continued to produce the largest, most attended such event every year.

Despite the issues surrounding the dissolving of this collaborative relationship, the City of Los Angeles' Cultural Affairs Department and Self Help Graphics continued to be amicable. Although, they no longer co-sponsor this event, both entities continue to collaborate on other projects. So, the policies that the City of Los Angeles has employed over the years have not exclusively influenced the impact that *Dia de los Muertos* has on the social and spatial dynamics of the community and city at large. The impact that this collaborative relationship did have was the proliferation of other events celebrating the Day of the Dead throughout Los Angeles.



Figure31:  
SHG, Dia de los  
Muertos altar, 2000.  
Courtesy of Magda  
Gomez- Parra

Self Help Graphics and *Dia de los Muertos* have had tremendous impacts on the dynamics of Los Angeles, despite the divisions and political opposition SHG has endured over the years. Today, there is tremendous awareness, not only in the Latino community but in other circles as well, of this urban celebration that was reinvented in East Los Angeles by artists during the early 1970s. Over 5,000 people participate in the Self Help Graphics celebration alone, and there are over two-dozen other celebrations throughout Los Angeles, as well as in California and throughout the entire Southwest. *Dia de los Muertos* has become so popular that many consider it to be the 'Mexican Halloween' indicating the familiarity with an event that is being marketed by a handful of boutiques, galleries, and stores located throughout the City of Los Angeles, not just in Mexican American neighborhoods. It is very difficult to measure the impacts of *Dia de los Muertos* quantitatively, but there are definite qualitative results that are recognizable in the proliferation of icons, altars, and other artistic representations of this celebration in many other settings.

Throughout Latino neighborhoods in Los Angeles there are permutations of altars, symbols, ‘enacted environments’<sup>16</sup>, that represent many of the icons that were created during the Chicano Movement and propagated via organizations like Self Help Graphics. In part due to the festival and in part due to the strong support from a community whose identity was united via the Chicano Movement, Self Help Graphics has reached national and international acclaim. This tradition has become an important legacy for the Chicano community and an important means of visibility for Self Help Graphics. It is a celebration practiced by many and cherished by even more.

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<sup>16</sup> Rojas, James. *The Enacted Environment—The Creation of “Place” by Mexicans and Mexican Americans in East Los Angeles*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991.

## Pilsen Neighbors Community Council: Fiesta del Sol

Pilsen Neighbors Community Council is a grassroots, leadership driven, empowerment organization whose mission is to ensure that residents



of Pilsen are represented in decision making on issues that affect the quality of life for the people of the neighborhood. One of the major issues that Pilsen Neighbors tackles is the empowerment of Latino families, providing information about homeownership, community development, and ultimately the greater political decisions that affect their neighborhood on a daily basis.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 32:  
Pilsen Neighbors  
Community Council,  
Chicago, IL.  
Source: author

The Pilsen Neighbors Community Council in Chicago produces the largest Latino cultural festival in the Midwest region of the United States. During the past fifty years, the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council has helped shape Pilsen through its social service and community development efforts. Today the organization is able to support many of these services via the festival they produce. This community development corporation is responsible for creating Fiesta del Sol a four-day summer festival: which draws over a million people to the streets of this community.

Pilsen's annual gathering takes over Cermak Road on Chicago's south side, stretching from Throop Street to Carpenter Street. The event celebrates more than food, music and art. It is an opportunity to provide social services to Chicago's Latino community. Among the services available are free immunizations for children and diabetes screenings for adults.

Established in 1954, the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council initially served a predominantly Eastern European population, mostly

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<sup>17</sup> Chicago's demographic history is very interesting because the city is made up of ethnic enclaves and most neighborhoods have a cultural identity associated with it. However, thirty years ago Chicago began to experience white flight, as many families of predominantly Anglo background moved out to the suburbs. This phenomenon left Chicago's inner city in a state of blight, nonetheless, in the past 10 years there has been a trend to move back into the inner city, propelling property values to skyrocket. Areas like Pilsen are facing this increase in property





Figure 33:  
Pilsen, 2001.  
Source: author

Czechoslovakian and Polish. However, when Mayor Daley the elder, decided to place the University of Illinois, Chicago (UIC) campus on Blue Island Ave., hundreds of Latino families living near this site were displaced and moved east into the Pilsen neighborhood. To aid the displaced families, Pilsen Neighbors created the 18<sup>th</sup> Street Development Corporation, which

provided information on home ownership, eventually helping many local dwellers to become homeowners in the community. As demographics shifted and new waves of Latino immigrants settled in this community located west of the central business district of Chicago, PNCC framed its efforts more and more towards a young and thriving Latino populace.

In the early 1970s many Mexican American and Latino communities were experiencing the Chicano movement, which advocated the rights and representation of people with Mexican or Latino ancestry. In this regard, Pilsen was not unlike many other communities in California, New Mexico, Arizona, or Texas. By 1971-72 the community organized a massive campaign around the development of a new high school. Pilsen had an existing high school that was in deplorable condition; thus, the neighborhood was in dire need of a new local high school to serve the growing numbers of students. Through much effort, PNCC tapped into the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) to organize countless meetings on the development of a new high school. Due to these efforts, the *Benito Juarez High School* was opened in 1972. This was a paramount achievement, not only for the community of Pilsen, but also for many other Latino communities as it exhibited solidarity with the Chicano Movement. Over 50 meetings were organized by PNCC in collaboration with more than a 1,000 families to petition for the construction and dedication of the Benito Juarez High School. This effort was made possible by Pilsen Neighbors, which used its previous experience in

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value, affecting many of the citizens who rent in this area moreover; this real estate boom is making it very difficult for families to purchase homes.

## The Origins of *Fiesta del Sol*

and how it changed the visibility and self identity of Chicanos in Chicago

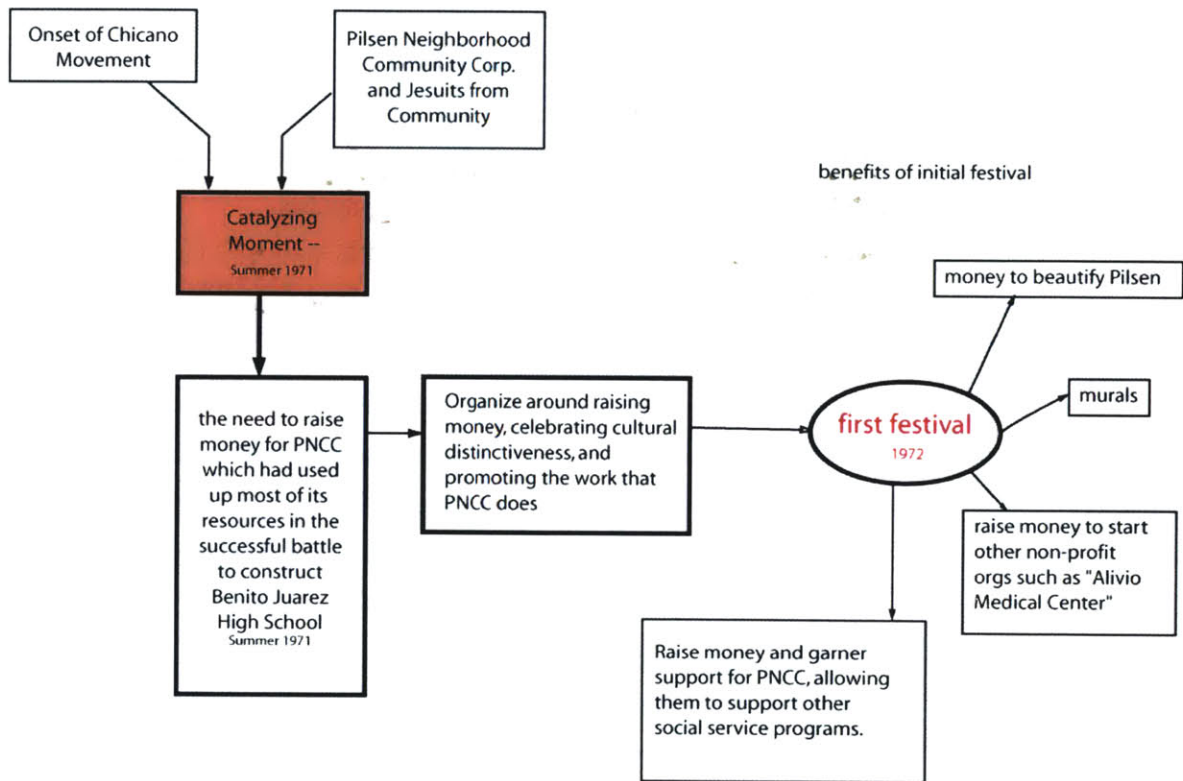


Figure 34: Origins of Fiesta del Sol



community organizing as a catalyst to get the entire community in support of this endeavor.

But the organizational efforts that PNCC contributed to the Benito Juarez high school campaign had diminished the funding base of the organization. During the summer of 1972, a group of leaders from PNCC began to organize a festival as a means of generating income for the organization. They never imagined that this festival would grow steadily over



Figure 35: Blue Island Ave., Pilsen, 2001.  
Source: author

the next three decades. In the summer of 1973, *Fiesta del Sol* took place for the first time in the heart of Pilsen on Blue Island Ave. Originally, the festival consisted of 10-15 booths lined along one block; Ryerson Steel Co. lent PNCC a flatbed truck that served as the stage for entertainment. With the money that was collected during the first festival PNCC was able to expand its efforts and launch more programs. Since its inception in the

early 1970s, the festival has been more than purely entertainment—it has served as the backbone of the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council.

This festival began a tradition, not only for the Mexican American/Chicano community of Chicago, but also for the regional Latino population of the Midwest. *Fiesta del Sol* has become a vehicle by which the organization can showcase and celebrate its work. This festival serves to disseminate the PNCC's ideology and to organize the community around different issues, but moreover the festival is the economic engine that supports many of the social and political efforts of the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council. Today the festival is Pilsen Neighbors' primary source of funds, subsidizing most of the work that is conducted at PNCC. Approximately 80% of PNCC's budget comes from the economic revenue of *Fiesta del Sol*. In 1991, *Fiesta del Sol* grossed between \$75-90,000 for the organization alone; ten years later this 'in-house' revenue has grown significantly. According to Juan Soto, who was executive director until this year, *Fiesta del Sol* now generates approximately \$12,000,000 dollars for the

City of Chicago; this value includes lodging, commercial activity, sponsorship, media, and tourism. The Chicago Tribune informally measured the last figure.

With *Fiesta del Sol* as their major economic engine providing economic autonomy, Pilsen Neighbors is able to provide training for leaders who carry significant weight in the political decisions affecting the neighborhood. Daniel Solis, current alderman for Pilsen, was Pilsen

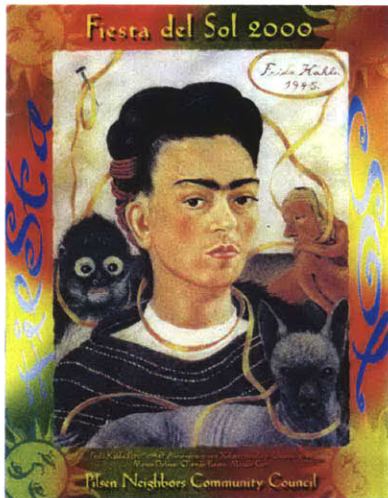


Figure 36:  
Fiesta del Sol,  
brochure, 2000

Neighbors Community Council's executive director until Mayor Daley appointed him as alderman. During his tenure, he contributed by adding the carnival rides component to Fiesta, making the festival more appealing to youth. However, since his appointment as alderman, Daniel Solis has not supported *Fiesta del Sol* wholeheartedly; his office tried to dismantle the Fiesta during 1998 because, according to a source from PNCC, the influence that this festival has was something Alderman Solis' office could not manage, and he did not want it as a possible adversary during his term.

In reaction to the alderman's growing opposition, PNCC launched a media campaign on the tradition and benefits that the Fiesta provides Pilsen. In the end, the community's interest and love for Fiesta prevailed, yet not without negative impact to the community organization. According to Juan Soto, the animosity between Alderman Daniel Solis and PNCC stems from the fact that *Fiesta del Sol* is such an influential event, giving PNCC the muscle it needs to command authority in political situations. PNCC community leaders have actually initiated many of the urban design and beautification projects that would usually be attributed to municipal efforts. Evidently, PNCC's success in mobilizing a community and achieving political recognition as well as influencing urban design creates tense relationships with other organizations and political entities, who are competing for similar recognition and support throughout the area. It seems that PNCC either attracts genuine allies or ardent foes.

## The Current Organization of *Fiesta del Sol* (1972-present) and how it changed the visibility and self identity of Chicanos in Chicago

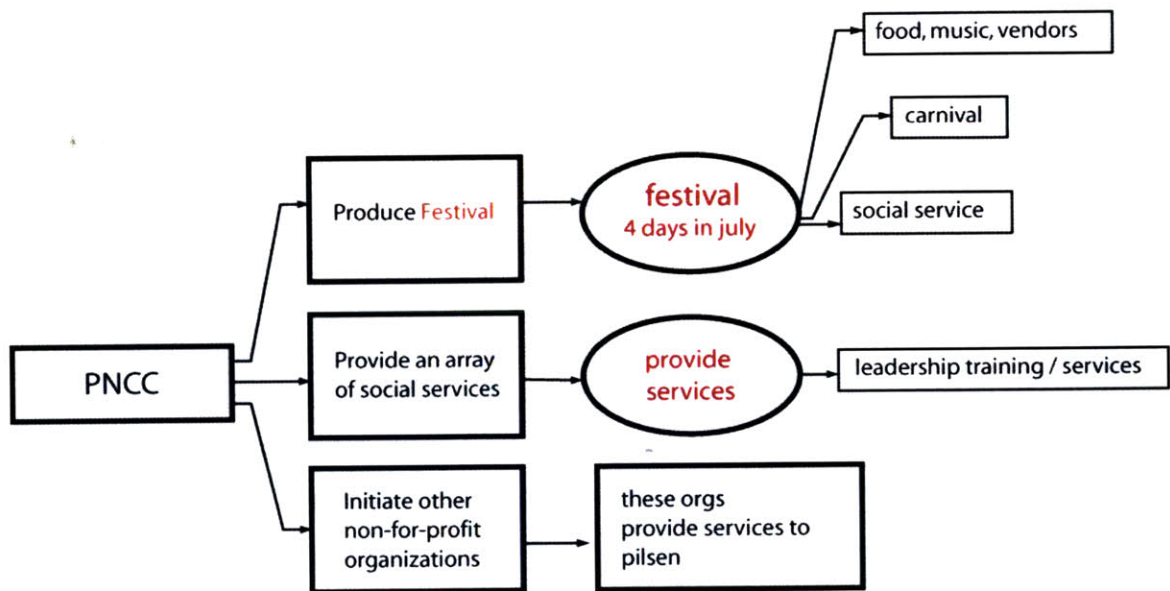


Figure 37: Current Organization of Fiesta del Sol (1972-present)





Figure 38:  
Vaulted sidewalks,  
Pilsen, 2001.  
Source: author

Figure 39:  
Vaulted sidewalks,  
Pilsen, 2001.  
Source: author

Since rallying the efforts to bring a new high school to this community in 1972, PNCC has steadily trained a cadre of leaders who continue to engage in socio-political issues facing the community. Committees formed through PNCC initiated some of the parks and recreational facilities. One of the largest public works projects led by PNCC was the construction of new sidewalks. The new sidewalks were constructed because the existing ‘vaulted’ sidewalks had deteriorated from the harsh winters. When Pilsen was a suburb, the homes were built on a different grade from the central business district of Chicago. Once the city extended its infrastructure to Pilsen, roads and sidewalks had to be raised 10-15 feet to accommodate sewage pipes. Yet, instead of demolishing homes and bringing every plot of land to grade, they constructed what are now known as ‘vaulted sidewalks’. Since these sidewalks were crumbling from constant use and weather damage, PNCC rallied support behind the effort to re-construct the sidewalks. The festival was an opportunity to distribute information regarding this issue and garner support from the community. After PNCC used its political influence to pressure the City of Chicago, this \$26 million public works project was completed.

Another very well known project initiated by PNCC is the beautification of Blue Island Ave., where *Fiesta del Sol* took place until three years ago when it moved to a larger location on Cermak Road. New landscaping, diagonal parking, street lighting, and a plaza were designed as a result of lobbying and fundraising. The diagonal parking, and pronounced curb cuts and addition of speed bumps have slowed down traffic creating a



Figure 40:  
Blue Island Ave.  
Landscaping.  
Source: author



Figure 41:  
Blue Island Ave.  
Landscaping.  
Source: author

pedestrian friendly environment along Blue Island Ave. This beautification project was in part constructed because *Fiesta del Sol* took place on this street. However since this event is the largest regional Latino festival and attracts over a million people over a four-day period, the space along the street and plaza constrained the masses of people from maneuvering freely through the festival. Thus, three years ago, PNCC decided to move the festival to the adjacent artery, Cermak Road, extending *Fiesta del Sol* from Throop to Morgan Streets. Since the move, PNCC has also used its political leverage to kick-start the design and construction of a new soccer field along Cermak Road.<sup>18</sup>

Drawing visitors from all of the mid-west states and the greater Chicago area, *Fiesta del Sol* has become an opportunity for people from all backgrounds to come together and enjoy four days of entertainment, food, culture, and social services. Since Juan Soto, interim director of PNCC, decided to not accept any alcoholic or tobacco companies as sponsors this festival has attracted more families. Although it was not an easy move, given the monetary support that sponsors endorse, Soto was able to attract other sponsors that could grant *Fiesta* the financial support it needed. Today, this family oriented event offers an array of activities such as petting zoos, pony rides, face painting, family Olympics, and a carnival.

<sup>18</sup> This past summer, PNCC offered a program called “Reconstructing America’s Communities,” a collaboration between banks and lenders to help low-income families purchase homes. The goal of the program is that by the year 2005 to educate and assist 13,000 Chicago families in the process of purchasing a house. Another program, which was launched five years ago, is the Business Education Advisory Group (BEAG), a 70-member organization of representatives from the Chicago Area businesses, educational and healthcare institutions, as well as other community based organization. The goal of BEAG is to help the youth of Pilsen achieve improved education and career outcomes. BEAG programs include internships, partnerships, tutorials, and scholarship opportunities as well as a mass of other programs, which aid the Pilsen youth in building a prosperous future.

## Conclusion

The relationships of both of these organizations with their respective city governments' events planning offices have historically been neutral to good. Throughout the span of the past three decades, both SHG and PNCC have collaborated at different levels with the City in promoting and designing the events. While the City of Los Angeles has more recently taken an "incubator" policy, the collaborative relationship in designing the event has shifted and does not exist as it did in the past. SHG will request permits and inform the corresponding departments about the event; however, there is no effort on behalf of Los Angeles' Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater to become co-directors of this event.

In the other case, PNCC has continuously received monetary support from the City of Chicago; nonetheless, this may be changing due to the success of this event. Since PNCC's Fiesta del Sol receives significant support from other sponsors, the City of Chicago's grant and permitting department may not continue to issue Fiesta a grant, because the City judiciously grants monetary support based on the need of the festival. In any case, these grants are usually for a amount, \$500-\$2,000, which wouldn't make much of a difference in a festival that has grown so large. Thus, the municipal policy of planning cultural events has minimal influence on the impacts that these two festivals have in their communities. The moral encouragement from the City of Los Angeles and Chicago, to continue producing these events sustains an amicable relationship enabling the programming of public space, however, the strength of these events comes from a long history of community support.

There are many similarities between these two case studies. Self Help Graphic's *Dia de los Muertos* and Pilsen Neighbors' *Fiesta del Sol* both started in the early 1970's with the onset of the urban Chicano Movement. As Chicanos attempted to create their own political agenda organizations such as Self Help Graphics and Pilsen Neighbors Community Council served to disseminate the political ideology and promote the cultural identity of the Chicano/Mexicano community. Both of these organizations grappled with the new wave of Mexican immigrants during the early years; by the early

1970s, immigration had become important to most Chicano organizations. Pilsen, in particular, targeted its resources towards the growing numbers of immigrants settling in that community. Contrastingly, Self Help Graphics represented the plight of the Mexican American people in the United States through the production of graphic art. Some of the artwork produced during this period is amongst the most famous Chicano art and has become part of popular culture. Indeed, both of these organizations had a pivotal role in the propagation of Chicano art and culture via the programming of an urban cultural festival. Whereas Self Help Graphics reinvented and reintroduced the Chicano community to an Indigenous/Catholic celebration in order to affirm the community's mestizo culture. PNCC initiated a festival to harvest economic support for the social services that were provided by this organization. Yet both have used the festival as a means to continue providing and cross-subsidizing their services and making an impact on the on the spatial and social dynamics of their communities.

Self Help Graphics has become a popular and vital community resource of cultural identity and pride, as well as a center for creative art production. This organization has produced the largest collection of Chicano art prints in history, and traveled more exhibitions to more destinations across the country and around the world than any other Chicano art center. SHG has also become a partner and collaborator with every major Southern California art institution, including MOCA, the Getty Center, the Armand Hammer Museum, the Japanese American National Museum and the Southwest Museum. As a national and international resource of Chicano art, SHG constantly promotes awareness of Latinos to mainstream viewers. The presence of SHG serves as a cultural landmark and over the past twenty-nine years the endeavors of the center have given voice to artists who represent the community.

In the heyday of the Chicano movement, PNCC became an organizing engine for social change. The festival Fiesta del Sol is very important to the community of Pilsen and PNCC because it provides this organization with the muscle it needs to continue providing social service resources to its neighborhood. Moreover, the festival showcases the



successful projects achieved via community organizing and leadership. PNCC trains leaders in becoming advocates for their community in a quest for 'metropolitan equity'. Fiesta del Sol also helps revitalize the neighborhood by bringing commerce to local businesses. Every year, vendors line the street and are able to sell their products at the festival, sustaining the economic operations of Latino owned businesses. Finally, Fiesta del Sol has enabled PNCC to move forward with various urban design projects, such as gathering support to reconstruct the 'vaulted' sidewalks, re-landscape Blue Island Ave., and the design the plaza area adjacent to this avenue.

As community organizations, SHG and PNCC have had lasting impacts on the social and spatial landscapes of Los Angeles and Chicago. Their unrelenting advocacy and promotion of the Chicano/Latino culture have positively marked their cities with tastes of Chicano art, design, and social-service organizations. The festivals produced by each entity have become key elements in their activities. They drive the organizations, sustaining their yearlong programming of classes and workshops, and since the festival is what continues to support the availability of these resources, it is the festival that in some way has lasting social and spatial impacts on the community. The two cultural celebrations create the synergy with which the community and the community's organizations continue to grow and thrive.

## 5 PROVOKING CHANGE: DISTRICT POLITICIANS INITIATE LATINO CULTURAL FESTIVALS

The dynamics and purpose of a community festival change when neighborhood-level politicians initiate and sponsor the planning of those festivals. Neighborhood-level politicians initiate community cultural festivals on their own and collaborate with community development corporations in producing the event because: festivals and neighborhood block parties are seen as a way to advance economic development in a particular neighborhood or community. Festivals provide the ‘celebrant’ an opportunity to take time out of their ordinary routine with the aim of aesthetic, sensual, and social gratification, Manning points out that, “Modern leisure is seen as the reward for work and is thus deemed an appropriate occasion for expending and enjoying income gained from work.”<sup>1</sup> Festivals are opportunities for most participants to transition from producers of ‘products’ to consumers of amusement. Money can purchase the leisure that is not part of the ordinary routine.<sup>2</sup> Providing entertainment, food, beverages, music, art, and crafts, generates significant income and bolsters the local economy.

Whether the city’s policy is to act as an “incubator” or “producer”, the fact that a neighborhood level politician becomes involved in initiating the production of a community festival sets it apart from those organized by community non-profit organizations. The festival becomes a tool to promote the social ideology and value system based on what the represented communities considers worthwhile, stable, and true,<sup>3</sup> but in these particular cases, the festival also hypes the contributions that the politician makes during his or her tenure. The dynamics of the festival change and impact the community differently than those events organized by community-based

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<sup>1</sup> Manning, Frank. *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives of Contemporary Cultural Performances*. Canada: Bowling Green University Press, (1983:5).

<sup>2</sup> Abt, Vicki and James F. Smith. “Playing the Game in Mainstream America: Race Track and Casino Gambling.” In Frank Manning, ed. *The World of Play*. New York: Leisure Press, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Manning, Frank. *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives of Contemporary Cultural Performances*. Canada: Bowling Green University Press, (1983:5).

organizations. Producing a festival is an opportunity for city officials to promote their agenda and display their political authority. In discussing the politics of celebration, Manning proposes that, “When those who control celebration are also those who dominate the social order, there is a tendency to ritualize that dominance in order to sustain and legitimize it.”

The tendency to ‘ritualize dominance’ in order to legitimize social order occurs easily because an appointed city official can tap into the assets of the larger city government. Within city government a pipeline of information services and political connections exists, providing a support system that advances projects initiated by neighborhood-level elected officials. An instant recognition of relative power among community members, businesses, and sponsors invokes a *hierarchical* system by which decisions and projects are executed.

Festivals have the potential to raise thousands of dollars that can be used in local improvements or urban design projects. A newly designed physical intervention is probably the clearest indication that revitalization is taking place. When a politician, a community development corporation, and the city undertake urban design projects, the end product receives considerably higher fanfare than if a non-governmental agency initiated, guided, and accomplished the same result. Accomplishing the implementation of an urban design or beautification project, or even making plans known to the public, allows city government to highlight its continuing efforts at improving the citizens’ urban experience.

Holding office carries significant weight in negotiations, particularly in those dealing with the development and progress of a community. It is very important for merchants and developers to have good working relationships with local politicians to accomplish economic development and urban design projects, because politicians are familiar with and know how to manipulate the sometimes complex policies employed by the city. Frequently, community development corporations become part of the planning process because their primary purpose is to provide economic development ideas, and the opportunity to work alongside local politicians enables CDCs to bolster their plan by tapping into the resources of municipal governments.

Local politicians benefit from this collaborative relationship because they can bolster their own resources with the community-based organization's expertise.

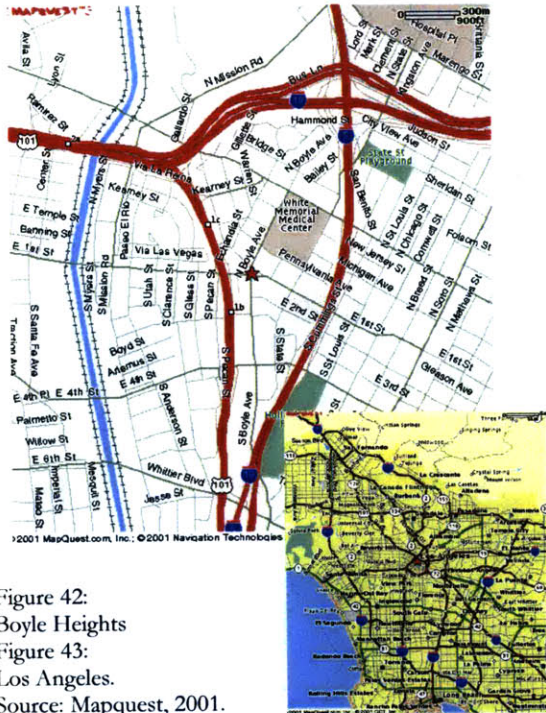


Figure 42:  
Boyle Heights  
Figure 43:  
Los Angeles.  
Source: Mapquest, 2001.

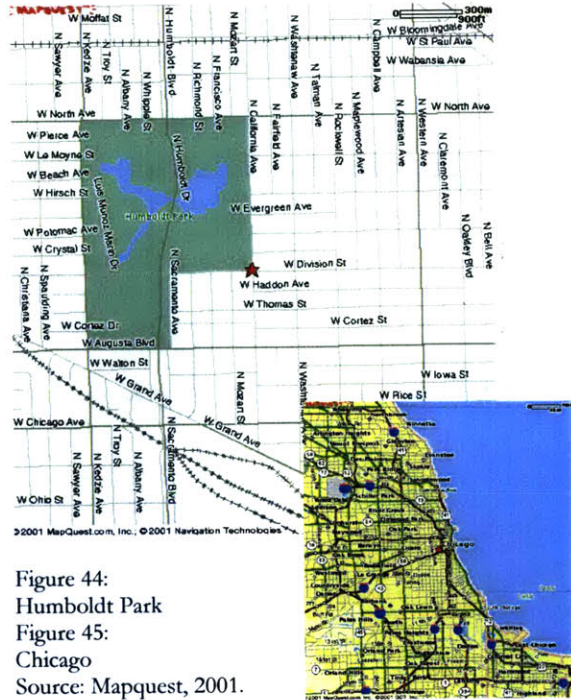


Figure 44:  
Humboldt Park  
Figure 45:  
Chicago  
Source: Mapquest, 2001.

From various interviews, site visits, and newspaper articles, I have collected data on two politician-led Latino festivals, each less than ten years old. These festivals are in the Mexican American/Chicano community of Boyle Heights in Los Angeles, and the Puerto Rican community of Humboldt Park in Chicago. Several distinct components set these festivals apart from those discussed in the previous chapter. The collaborative dynamic between these local government offices and the larger city government is different than the relationship between the community organizations that plan festivals and city government. Firstly, the festival is a product of co-sponsorship by city and district governments. Secondly, because local politicians are part of the centralized city government, presumably they have knowledge of the planning and permitting processes. Thirdly, both of these festivals have been catalysts for urban design projects, which either celebrate the festival or physically frame the space where the event takes place. These festivals are ephemeral events that highlight the

fruits of the local governments labor, and the urban design projects that spurred from the onset of the festival are clear indications of the local governments' investment in their community, an opportunity to ritualize the dominance of having control and to disseminate an ideology of cultural pride and tradition.

## Los Angeles 14<sup>th</sup> District: Mariachi Festival

Figure 46:  
Mural located  
across from  
Mariachi Plaza  
Source: author



The Mariachi Festival of Los Angeles serves various purposes, not only the celebration of the Mexican cultural tradition of Mariachi music. It is a mechanism by which local politicians provoke change in the community while ritualizing their dominance. By working in tandem with the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department local politicians share the administrative and creative support of producing an event. This event is used to highlight the efforts of the district politician to program and promote the cultural character of the community

In 1988, Adolfo Nodal was hired as director of the Cultural Affairs Department of Los Angeles. At the time of his appointment, the department had a very Euro-centric focus and Nodal's goal was to redefine the boundaries of fine art to include Pan-Asian, African, and Latin American art forms. Incorporating indigenous dance, cultural festivals, and non-western



theater, began to reflect more accurately the diverse makeup of the city.<sup>4</sup> One of the first broader ethnic celebrations that Al Nodal programmed was the Mariachi Festival held at the intersection of 1<sup>st</sup> and Boyle Ave. in Boyle Heights, a neighborhood in East Los Angeles. He collaborated with his good friend and former councilman Richard Alatorre in order to design and coordinate this event. This event was a joint effort between the City of Los Angeles' Cultural Affairs Department and the Councilman's office of the 14<sup>th</sup> District.

It is difficult to say who originally came up with the idea of producing this event, but many people claim that the good friends Adolfo Nodal and Richard Alatorre jointly decided to honor the history and cultural tradition of Mariachi music. Since the 1940s, mariachi players had congregated at the triangular intersection of 1<sup>st</sup> and Boyle near a donut shop. People from around the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area came here to hire mariachi musicians on the spot for grand parties, events, and backyard get-togethers. This urban musical hiring location was and continues to be similar to *Plaza Garibaldi* in Mexico City, which serves essentially the same purpose—where brilliant mariachi musicians gather and are hired by citizens for festivals and a myriad of other celebratory events. (Another location in Mexico that mimics this phenomenon is *La Plaza de los Mariachis* in Guadalajara, Mexico; this site is also a popular urban destination for tourists and locals looking for proper mariachi music.)

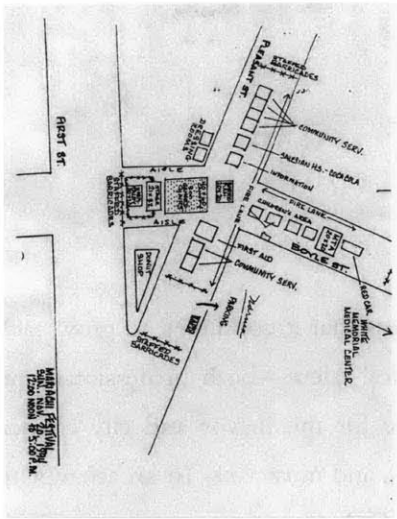


Figure 47:  
 Plan of 1<sup>st</sup> and Boyle  
 Street. Donut shop  
 stood at triangular  
 intersection.  
 Courtesy of  
 City of Los Angeles

Due to cultural traditions that had migrated from Mexico, the specific site became recognizable for the gathering of mariachi musicians and reminiscent of the musicians' plazas in Mexico. Al Nodal and Richard Alatorre felt it important to create a festival that would honor all mariachi musicians in Los Angeles, specifically those who were part of the networking unit of the Donut Shop in East LA. In 1991, the first Mariachi Festival took place during the third week of November, from 10 am – 4pm, when the feast

<sup>4</sup> Today, Los Angeles is among the largest multi-cultural cities in the world; in 1988 over 44% of the population was Latino and today it is near 60%.

day of St. Cecilia, patron saint of musicians, is celebrated. Although, this has never been an official religious celebration, many Mariachi musicians, who are predominantly Catholic, make reference to and offer their talent to St. Cecilia.

Figure 48 :  
Section/Elevation of  
proposed Mariachi Plaza  
Courtesy of City of Los  
Angeles.

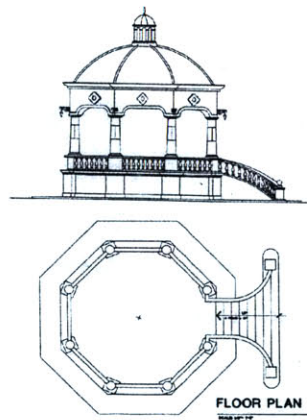


Figure 49 :  
Mariachi Plaza.  
Source: author



The first festival was such a success that it continued to grow each year. The festival was a program of musical talent—both professional and amateur—with a half-hour press interlude for the mayor and city council member to introduce organizers, sponsors, and musicians. In an attempt to garner support from the local community, Catherine Rice, an organizer from the Cultural Affairs Department, invited non-profit organizations, artists, White Memorial Hospital, and the Hollenback Police Department, to couple the musical programming with providing services to the community.

After a couple of years the festival had become such a staple of the community that former director of Cultural Affairs Adolfo Nodal, and the former council member of the 14<sup>th</sup> district Richard Alatorre, and the director of *Mariachi Sol de Mexico* Jose Hernandez, felt it was important to commemorate the mariachi musicians who looked for work at this intersection with some kind of physical intervention. In Mexico, mariachis seek shelter at plazas that were constructed during the colonial period. Contrastingly, mariachis in Los Angeles sought shelter at the now demolished



donut shop. The stark contrast of the spaces used by Mexican vs. American-based mariachi musicians spurred the idea to design a kiosk in a traditional colonial Mexican architectural style to honor the Angelino musicians.

Plans began to purchase the land and design a colonial style kiosk for the mariachi musicians and to commemorate the festival that had taken place every November since 1991. This project was made possible by generous gifts from the Mexican governor of the state of Jalisco, Alberto Cardenas Jimenez; Councilman Richard Alatorre, Council District 14; the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, and its General Manager, Adolfo Nodal; and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of Los Angeles, in partnership with the City of Los Angeles. The governor of Jalisco commissioned an artist, Juan Pablo Salas Renovato, to design and carve the stone blocks that would comprise the kiosk. All stone quarrying, masonry, and hand carving took place in Guadalajara, Mexico. The completed blocks were then shipped to Los Angeles, where the architects and engineers who designed the site plans implemented the development.

Another important contributor to this project was the Metropolitan



Figure 50:  
Mariachi Plaza:  
1<sup>st</sup> Street corridor,  
facing west to  
Downtown Los  
Angeles.

Source: author

Transit Authority. The MTA had a vested interest in this project because their master plan included an extension of the metro line to East Los Angeles. Since 1<sup>st</sup> Street is a major corridor in Los Angeles, Catherine Rice of the Cultural Affairs Department was able to apply for a Transportation Corridor Grant, which provided the financing and permits necessary to re-route

street traffic, creating a triangular site for the production of the kiosk, and a space for what would be the metro stop in East Los Angeles.

When the MTA took over the rights to that site, there was tension as to the design of the kiosk and how it would fit into the plans for the metro station. However, soon the MTA relinquished control of the physical design, giving the city of Los Angeles full reign over the design of the site and kiosk. Architects from the city of Los Angeles moved forward to request elevations, sections, and drafts of the kiosk from the Mexican artist. Once they received

these plans the architects working for the City of Los Angeles realized that the artist had designed too large a kiosk for the site. The governor Alberto Cardenas of the state of Jalisco Jimenez had commissioned the artist Juan Pablo Salas Renovato to design, carve, and construct the kiosk. Besides a generous budget for the *canterra* stone there had been no limitations on the artistic design of the kiosk. Carmelo Sabatello, the architect of the city of Los Angeles who worked on this project, said that the challenge was to marry somehow the artist's almost completed work to the site specificities in Los Angeles.<sup>5</sup>

The design outcome of this endeavor is apparent; the grand kiosk, made out of materials not indigenous to this location, is out of place, dwarfing the surrounding buildings. When this intersection was conceived, the plan was to have the kiosk link with the prospective MTA metro stop at this location. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority plans indicated that there would be a very modern building to serve as the metro station, coupled with the Renaissance-influenced building with columns and a cupola. However, the commissioning of the kiosk continued despite the failure to extend the metro line through East Los Angeles.

At this point, the Los Angeles architects flew to Guadalajara, Mexico to meet with Juan Pablo Salas Renovato. The Angelino architects inquired about the artist's design, his ideas, and methodology for carving the *canterra stone*. Since most of this colossal kiosk had already been carved, the only possibility was to find a way to combine the structural and zoning stipulations of the designated site to the existing designs and carved kiosk. The Los Angeles architects recommended that Salas convert the bulbous dome into an ellipse, cutting it down at least 10 feet, which brought the height of the structure from 50 to 40 feet. The next recommendation was to decrease the width of the cupola from approximately 49 to 40 feet wide. This allowed the massive kiosk to fit proportionally into the site; yet even today, the structure appears to be out of context with the surrounding buildings.

From a distance the kiosk strikes a dissonant note with its surrounding landscape, lacking the programmed uses offered by the

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<sup>5</sup> Carmello Sabatello, personal interview. March. 30. 2001.



Figure 51: Mariachi Plaza, steps facing east, 2001.

Source: author

storefronts of this location. The kiosk's grand steps face east, opening to what would have been the exit of the metro stop. Yet today they seem to be idle being primarily used by pigeons that gather around the cupola. A community organization, NOSOTROS, has a contract to program the site but it has done a poor job of doing so, much to the dissatisfaction of the Cultural Affairs Department. Mariachi men rarely use the kiosk for shelter or as their prominent one-stop employment site; rather, they stand across the street outside a supermarket, if they even go to that area anymore.

If the MTA 'Red Line' had been extended to East Los Angeles, this urban design project would have served more functions. Unfortunately this never occurred, disappointing many potential customers for public transportation, who were eagerly looking forward to being more connected to the current metro-rail infrastructure. Today, there are still committees working on establishing this connection; however, there is little possibility of any plans coming to fruition as organizers' energy has dissipated.

On November 22, 1998 the kiosk that stands in East Los Angeles was finally dedicated to the musicians and people of this community. The entire development was accomplished via private underwriting and a commitment from general manager Adolfo Nodal and council member Richard Alatorre; without their support this development would not have been accomplished in ten months, a time frame that is unheard of in city-wide projects.

In this case, the policies regarding festival planning manifest themselves differently than in the festival organized by Self Help Graphics, which also takes place in the area known as East Los Angeles. A reason for the rapid growth of the Mariachi Festival and quick implementation of urban design projects could be that the local politician understands and has familiarity with the bureaucratic processes. However, having knowledge of these policies alone does not influence the growth and impact that this festival has had on this community. Rather, the strong partnerships and collaborative relationships are what drive the growth of this festival. By having several contributing collaborators, projects like the Mariachi Plaza, which has injected the space where the festival takes place with an urban

design intervention, can be executed under a very short time frame. This festival is an example of how local politicians promote their own dominance by providing a celebration that also promote cultural pride and heritage of the community.



# The Origins of The Mariachi Festival

how it began and it's role in the development of Mariachi Plaza

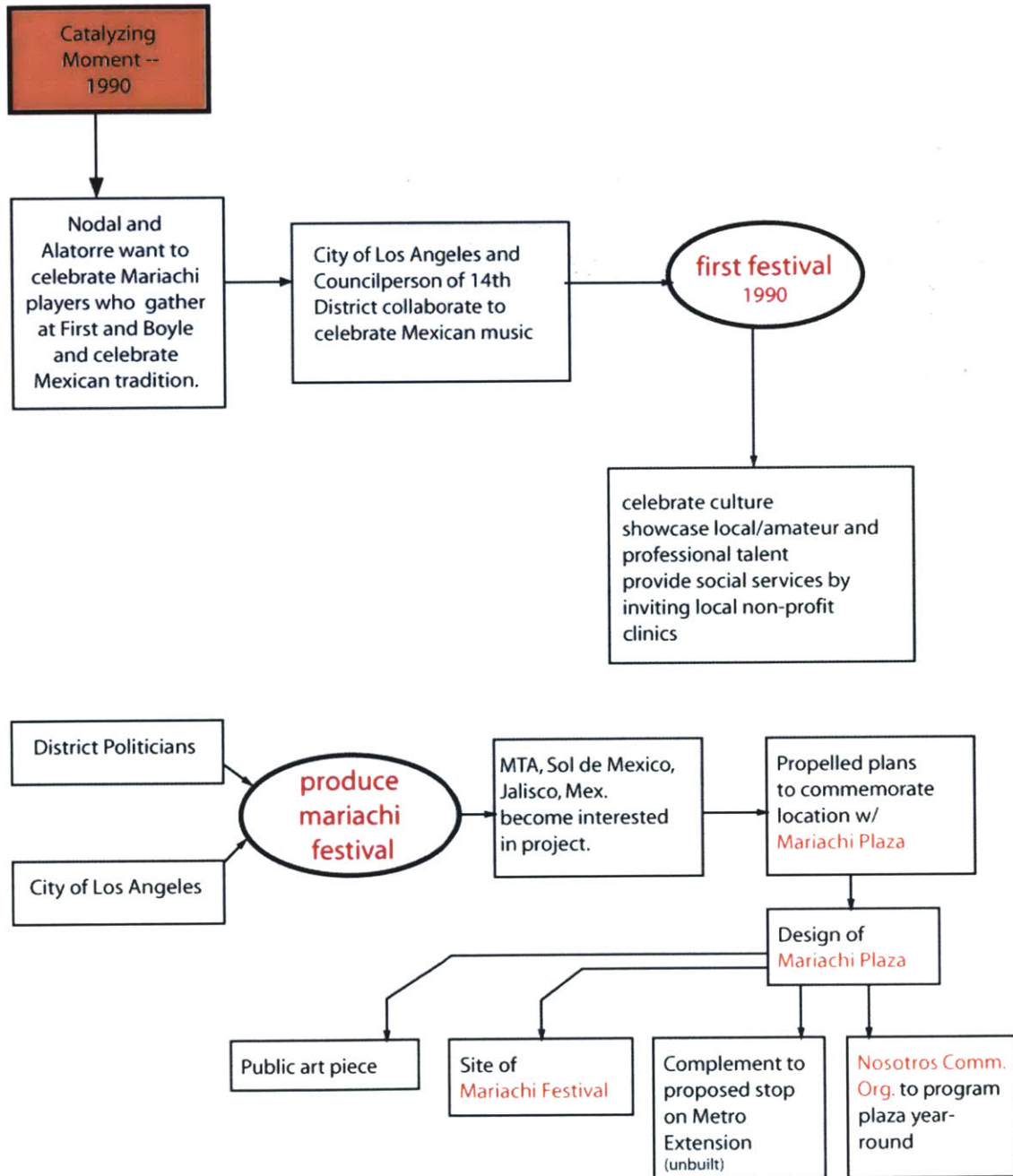


Figure 52: Origins of the Mariachi Festival

## Chicago's 26<sup>th</sup> Ward: Fiesta Boricua

Figure 53:  
Fiesta Boricua, 2000

Courtesy of Nercida  
Aviles



*Fiesta Boricua* is another event through which local politicians ritualize their dominance. Gaining support from the City of Chicago's Office of Special Events and joining forces with a community development corporation, the local politicians garner the administrative and creative support for producing this event. This event also highlights the efforts of a district politician to program and promote the cultural distinctiveness of his community while also using the event as an economic development tool.

The popular Puerto Rican festival of Chicago, *Fiesta Boricua*, will celebrate its eighth year in production in September 2001. It is a high-profile community event that features top tropical talent, Caribbean cuisine, and local artisans and vendors. Initiated by several community leaders and the offices of Alderman Billy Ocasio and Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez, *Fiesta Boricua* have successfully achieved what it set out to do, which was to make the streets of the Humboldt Park area safer.

One of the biggest challenges facing this community is the perception of violence, which deters many non-Humboldt residents from visiting local businesses and contributing to the economy. Yet, since the onset of this festival, Nercida Aviles who works for Alderman Billy Ocasio, says that the local economy has flourished, Nereida Aviles showed me an



Figure 54:  
Paseo Boricua,  
Puerto Rican,  
Flag-shaped  
arches along  
W.Division.

Source:  
Nilda Flores-  
Gonzalez



article that ran in the Chicago Sun-Times on January 26, 2001. The article entitled, “On W. Division, Puerto Ricans’ hopes are rising,” talked about the growing affluence and business opportunities in this neighborhood. Furthermore, it highlighted the local *La Bruquena* restaurant located on West Division for the fame of its great Puerto Rican food and increasing upscale non-Latino clientele.

“La Division,” as many locals call W. Division street, is the location of economic, political, and cultural expression for the Puerto Rican community of Humboldt Park. Over the past thirty years this space has developed as a recognizable ethnic enclave. Mayor Richard Daley’s initiative to attract affluent communities back into the city core prompted a wave of redevelopment in the late 1990s. Soon, areas such as Humboldt Park began to become gentrified. The City of Chicago started to pour development efforts into this community, something the municipal government had not done in many years. The threat of gentrification propelled Puerto Rican leaders to preserve the community’s space by celebrating the cultural traditions via a festival.

All of this information is relevant to the Fiesta Boricua because eight years ago, before its inception, this neighborhood was down and out of luck. As a first step, the Alderman, the Congressman, and the Division Street Business Development Association (DSDA) worked together to organize an

event that would create a safe space for community members to come and enjoy a day of cultural celebration, artisanship, food, and ultimately support local business. The event has served as an economic development tool to spur interest in the revitalization of the Humboldt Park area. Moreover, in the past seven years, the face of the community has been drastically altered by an urban design project that celebrates the culture of the Puerto Rican community, and it too can trace its roots to the festival.

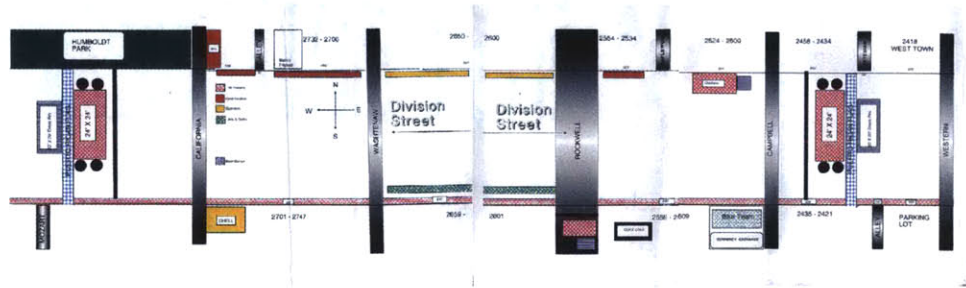


Figure 55:  
Festival Site  
Plan.

Courtesy of:  
Nereida Aviles

Initially, the community event consisted of a block lined with vendors and one stage for entertainment. Today, the festival has been moved from its original location to West Division Street spanning eight blocks from California St. to Western St. At the corners of California and Western Streets, two twenty-ton iron Puerto Rican Flags serve as bookends to the strip known as Paseo Boricua. This strip is the ‘main street’ of the neighborhood. During Alderman Billy Ocasio’s term, the design and implementation of this urban beautification project was started and completed. The gigantic iron Puerto Rican flags are a testimony to the community’s love and pride of their culture. Moreover, these iron flags serve as a gateway into the community becoming a reminder of the current economic and political development that has occurred. Due to the flag’s prominence, many people refer to the festival as, *Fiesta Boricua: De Bandera A Bandera*, meaning ‘Puerto Rican Festival: From Flag to Flag’. Furthermore, the beautification of this community is a collaborative effort between Alderman Billy Ocasio’s office, Division Street Business Development Association, and other community organizations, indicating the initiative to convert this inner-city strip into a clean and safer community space.





Another component is that the food and art sold at this event are a potpourri of local and international supplies. Food, particularly fruit and other indigenous flora and fauna not found in the contiguous United States is brought from Puerto Rico. This is an opportunity for the local community to indulge in products that can normally only be found in their country of origin. Of course, the trade goes both ways—food and talent that are indigenous to Puerto Rico are displayed and enjoyed during this one-day event. But also, this serves as an opportunity to establish an import/export business between Humboldt Park and the Puerto Rican merchants. The growing Puerto Rican community of Humboldt Park has propelled the establishment of businesses specialized in marketing products from Puerto Rico and Latin America. In the past ten to fifteen years, businesses such as supermarkets, restaurants, and bookstores are becoming increasingly specialized, stocking their shelves with products from Puerto Rico.

The businesses located on Division Street use the festival as a vehicle to promote their services and products. The Humboldt community event planners have streamlined the process by assisting with all logistics manners. Each vendor leases a space for \$500 dollars, which includes a tent, electricity, and running water. Since the city of Chicago requires extensive permitting for food vendors, Nereida Aviles requires the vendors to give her all the

necessary information in order to request all the permits at one time. Alderman Billy Ocasio, Congressman Luis Guitierrez, the Pedro Albizu Campos Museum, the Division Street Business Development Association, and the City of Chicago are co-sponsors of this event, so there is extensive collaboration between the committee of Neighborhood Festivals of the Mayor's Special Events Office and the event planning committee



Figure 57:  
Fiesta Boricua  
flyer

in Humboldt Park. Each year they are able to secure larger and more affluent sponsors who support this endeavor. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual *Fiesta Boricua*, some of the sponsors included: Miller Brewing Co., Univision, Sears, La X Tropical Radio Station, American Trans Air, American Airlines, Coca Cola, Goya Foods, and the City of Chicago.

# The Origins of Fiesta Boricua

how it began and influenced the development of Paseo Boricua

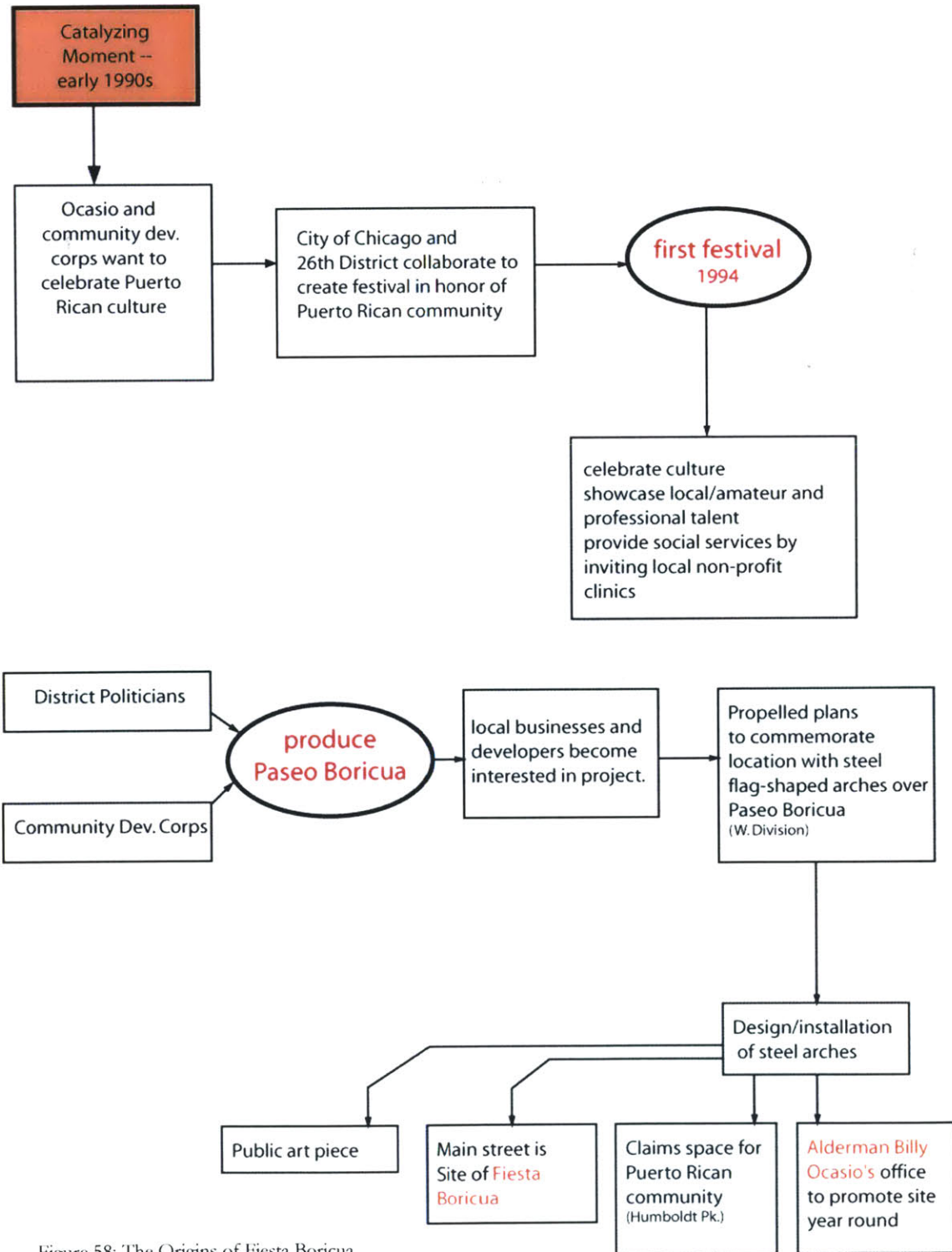


Figure 58: The Origins of Fiesta Boricua

Most of the money is employed in securing talent, equipment rental, advertisement, and hiring an event planning company to guide the community festival committee with their marketing. The airlines that sponsor the event help by flying the entertainers from their respective cities to Chicago and back. The City of Chicago sponsors the event by giving the community festival committee a grant and access to their event supplies, such as stages, porta-potties, barricades, site plan designs. The Neighborhood Committee from the Mayor's Office of Special Events also provides neighborhood festivals with technical assistance and expertise for planning an event, upon request from the community.

Over the years, the neighborhood event coordinators have learned about the permitting process. Currently there are six community leaders planning next year's *Fiesta Boricua*, but a constant challenge is finding and training new leaders who will take on this massive project. Unfortunately, this is very difficult since volunteers do most of the planning of the festival.

*Fiesta Boricua* has become an economic development tool for the community of Humboldt Park. Yet having an appointed official spearhead the production of the festival enables him/her to ritualize their dominance and claim that under their leadership, the community's economic situation has ameliorated. The festival highlights the growing prosperity by ephemerally showing the amount of local businesses and talent that participate in this one-day event. The massive crowds that attend *Fiesta Boricua* momentarily stimulate the economy, having lasting effects on the community.



## Conclusion

These two cultural events represent the communities of Boyle Heights in Los Angeles and Humboldt Park in Chicago, at a local and citywide level, celebrating the rich diversity of cultural practices, food, and music. These events are opportunities not only for the local community to share in celebrating its culture, but also a means by which visitors from throughout the region can congregate and contribute to the local economy.

Similar dynamics led to the creation of both the Mariachi Festival in East Los Angeles and Fiesta Boricua in Humboldt Park. The Mariachi Festival, more so than Fiesta Boricua, was designed to celebrate a specific aspect of Mexican culture, mariachi music. The two festivals were started to celebrate the activity in a particular location, whether it be the intersection of Boyle and 1<sup>st</sup> street, where mariachi musicians congregate to look for work or, Paseo Boricua the main street of the Puerto Rican community in Humboldt Park.

The local politicians in these two communities approached the programming of their communities as an opportunity for economic development and as a means of highlighting the progress that has occurred during their tenure. While Chicago's Humboldt Park has experienced significant economic development, the East Los Angeles Mariachi Festival has not necessarily been a catalyst for economic development rather it has been instrumental in implementing an urban design project

These two festivals have definitely influenced the social and spatial dynamics of their communities. The Mariachi Festival has grown to be one of the most popular and well attended events in Los Angeles. Exhibiting some of the most talented and famous mariachi bands in the area, this festival has garnered the support and attention of the entire city, so that this is no longer just an East LA event. Rather it is a Los Angeles celebration of the Mexican culture of Latino LA. This festival has had one of the most resonating urban design impacts on the community. The Mariachi Plaza, constructed as a gift to the people of Boyle Heights, presents a lasting impression of an event that takes place once a year. Moreover, this monument is a gesture to celebrate

the rich cultural tradition of mariachi music and specifically to honor the musicians who use to stand at this intersection to look for work.

Fiesta Boricua is a growing festival, drawing people from throughout the Midwest. In the same way that the Mariachi Festival has become an Angelino event, Fiesta Boricua has become a popular festival throughout Chicago, not just in the Puerto Rican or Latino communities. Creating a safe space and moment for the community to come together has positively impacted the perception of Humboldt Park, generating economic development for this area. The active participation of the Division Street Business Development Association has also contributed to the development of Paseo Boricua—the main strip in Humboldt Park. To celebrate and solidify the revitalization of this strip, an urban beautification project frames the space where the festival takes place. The two-twenty-ton iron Puerto Rican flags frame the main street of this community. This urban design project is testimony to the cultural pride and economic vitality of this community.

Having a neighborhood-level politician spearhead these cultural events definitely influences the impact of the festival. As politicians, they are able to garner endorsements and tap into municipal and statewide initiatives that support such events. This is not to say that community organizations do not have this opportunity; rather, politicians may have more accessibility to information and resources. Holding public office brings with it a support staff that can access many of these opportunities, while community organizations have limited staff and resources. Thus, from these two case studies it seems that festival planning initiated by district political offices can have social, economic, and urban design results in a shorter time frame than, say, those festivals initiated by community organizations. Though, it is important to state, however, that the citywide policy with respect to permitting a community festival does not change because a district-level office is spearheading the event. The process of applying for grants, site-planning assistance, and permits is the same for any organization. The difference lies in the political influence that district politicians have—they are more likely to collaborate with the city mayor in initiating urban design

projects, as was the case in both Los Angeles and Chicago. Thus, the urban design impacts are products of collaboration between the Alderman, Councilperson, and Mayor's efforts and are evidence of the city's influence in programming and designing the city.



## 6 CONCLUSION

This thesis was catalyzed by my interest in cultural planning at the municipal and community level. Cultural planning can entail many things; however, I investigated the planning of special events and specifically their impact on the social and spatial dynamics of cities. Festivals can encourage a sense of community pride and cohesiveness as well as being occasions for community-wide entertainment. These events also have the potential of raising funds for community projects, but besides their significant economic effects, festivals can spur urban design projects, which have more permanent consequences on the neighborhoods and cities where the event takes place. Festivals are also vehicles by which community organizations actively participate in political decision-making and ultimately help give voice and expression to cultural groups.<sup>1</sup>

I have investigated how citywide and neighborhood level policies influence the impact that ephemeral events have on cities and found that policies bear some influence over the planning process of an event, but that other variables, such as cultural identity have significant influence over the festival's impact.

Cultural festivals are vehicles by which social and political agendas are mobilized, and it is important to recognize that the four case studies that I considered are urban social movements as much as they are ephemeral celebrations of culture. The intoxication of celebrations may be temporary, but they can also be effective in claiming the symbolic importance of place.<sup>2</sup> Castells argues that urban social movements have the characteristic of being a self-governing system, locally based and territorially defined, and organized around three major goals: collective consumption, cultural identity, and political self-management.<sup>3</sup> The cultural festivals of the Latino communities that are discussed in this thesis serve as part of a larger social movement. The

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen, Abner. *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements*. Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited (1993:63-67).

<sup>2</sup> Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place*. Cambridge: MIT Press, (1995).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, (1983: 328).



festivals are part of the agenda of community organizations or district level politicians; they target a specific community with distinct qualities, they are territorially defined, and they are intent on pursuing various social and policy-oriented issues.

In the communities of East Los Angeles, Boyle Heights, Pilsen and Humboldt Park, the festivals are part of larger social movements of economic development and the promotion of cultural pride. The Latino community's festivals become a mechanism by which the social movements are promoted, because they garner significant social support from the community and economic revenue from festival participants. The revenue from the festival gives the organizations and politicians the muscle they need to influence decisions about the design of urban space in those communities.

Ever so often, there will be social movements that arise and challenge the meaning of a spatial structure, therefore contesting new functions and forms. These urban social movements are driving factors in the highest level of urban social change—that is 'urban-spatial transformation'.<sup>4</sup> An example of this is the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council's efforts to organize the reconstruction of the vaulted sidewalks that had fallen to terrible conditions. With economic revenue from Fiesta del Sol, PNCC was able to organize around this effort, eventually receiving additional monetary support from the city to reconstruct the vaulted sidewalks.

Another example of urban spatial transformation is the proliferation throughout Los Angeles and parts of the United States of altars celebrating death during the first week of November. Since Self Help Graphics reinvented and introduced the Chicano community to *Día De Los Muertos*, more and more people have acculturated this celebration and exhibit their commemoration of this day by setting up altars at home, in the garden, in the office, even in Lobby 7 at MIT. The festival has influenced how space is transformed to incorporate symbols of *calacas*. Remnants of this celebration can be seen in murals, altars, and galleries.

In discussing Latino communities and their identification of place Dolores Hayden writes, "Ethnic vernacular arts traditions have often

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<sup>4</sup> Castells, Manuel, *The City and the Grassroots*. University of California, Berkeley, (1983:312).

operated in a similar way to instill community pride and signal the presence of a particular community in the city.”<sup>5</sup> These cultural festivals have left imprints of cultural symbols and icons throughout the landscape of Los Angeles and Chicago. Images such as the ‘Aztec’ sun, the Virgin of Guadalupe, *calacas*, indigenous leaders, and other nationalistic symbols are painted onto walls in the form of murals; furthermore, urban design projects such as the Mariachi Plaza or the two 20-ton steel Puerto Rican flags frame the spaces where these festivals take place. The urban-spatial transformation of these communities not only influences social change at the localized level, but also has greater social ramifications, since these symbols and urban design traditions seep into mainstream pop-culture and city at large associates certain symbols or urban landscapes with specific ethnic communities. Thus, the festival has a two-fold impact, influencing the urban-spatial transformation of space and influencing how the city at large associates particular icons and spatial forms with those communities

As Olivia Cadaval discusses in her study of the Latino Festival in the Nation’s capital, “The Festival effectively unified diverse Latin American immigrant groups and provided them an arena for creating a synthetic Latino identity, claiming a space in the national consciousness, and defining a place in the nation’s capital.” Similarly, the cultural festivals of Latinos in Los Angeles and Chicago have contributed to the creation of a Latino/Chicano identity and impacted the social and spatial dynamics of their communities as well as the city.

Cultural festivals have provided opportunities for Latino immigrant enclaves to celebrate their presence and culture in the United States. Although, many of the cultural practices, whether they be music, dance, or food, are indigenous to their country of origin, these customs take on different meanings and shapes in the United States. The cultural modification that takes place is what anthropologists call *acculturation*, which is the process of people adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture. This is also a process of cultures merging, and as a result of prolonged contact cultural

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<sup>5</sup> Hayden, Dolores, *The Power of Place*. Cambridge: MIT Press, (1995:38).

traits are shared and acquired. As immigrant enclaves begin to acculturate so called 'American' values and customs, the dominant society also begins to incorporate and appropriate the customs, values, and aesthetics of these communities

Through examining the planning process for community cultural festivals in these two cities, I found that festival planning policies alone do not influence the social and spatial impact that these festivals have. One would assume that policies bear on the proliferation of events and on the impact that these have on the communities where they take place. But these cases suggest that, policies alone, do not bear much influence because the driving force is a combination of the investment of a group of people interested in celebrating and promoting their cultural diversity, amicable collaborations between the community organizers and city government, and policies relating to provision of funds, festival site planning, safety and hygiene.

A major component in ensuring that a city is programmed with cultural events that celebrate its diversity, is garnering support from the city's constituency. This may be why Los Angeles has adopted an 'incubator' policy, in which the role of city government is to advise community organizations on the practice of planning ephemeral events. Los Angeles officials know that there is interest from community organizations to produce festivals and other events, not only for their economic revenue, which is one reason to have a festival, but also for the celebration of cultural practices.

A second conclusion is that whether the city department employs a 'producer' or 'incubator' approach, this does not result in having a less programmed city. Municipal governments have very different approaches, and the mayor and/or the special events department director, who have established a vision for programming their city, ultimately guide these policies. Despite the very different policy approaches taken by Los Angeles Offices for Festivals and Gallery Theater and Chicago's Mayor's Office of Special Events, both cities appear to be equally programmed. Actually, Los Angeles initiates and single-handedly produces approximately ten events a year and continues to decrease the amount annually, yet during the year 2000

over two hundred cultural events were programmed throughout the city. Chicago's Office of Special Events produces over twenty-municipal initiated events and the mayor's intention is to have the list grow. The Mayor's Office of Special Events in Chicago is very large and compartmentalized into numerous committees with a clear outline of their duties and agenda. Having all of these committees located in one physical location enables the sharing of information, streamlining the planning process of festivals. Furthermore, adopting a 'producer' policy approach ensures the programming of the city year-round to the extent that the city wants to program.

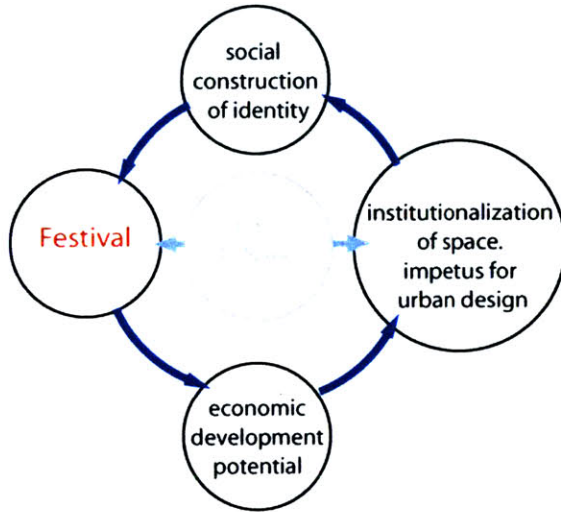
Another conclusion is that older community organizations that produce cultural festivals have successfully continued the tradition of directing their event, not so much due to municipal policies that provide the permitting, the presence of police, and equipment, but more so because the organizations garner much support from community volunteers in organizing and producing the event. The social organizing that takes place around the event is what begins to have an impact on the community, specifically because this is an opportunity for local folks to become involved in political decision-making.

Finally, the younger cultural festivals have also grown successfully, mainly because they are products of very strong partnerships between the local district politicians and the city special events offices. In addition, community development corporations have become involved, both in Los Angeles and Chicago, because these festivals are means by which economic development has been spurred.

Another characteristic of the younger events, *Mariachi Festival* and *Fiesta Boricua* is that the festivals gave attention to these communities and brought together a group of community leaders, politicians, developers, and city departments interested in investing capital and producing urban design projects. In the Chicago community of Humboldt Park, two 20-ton Puerto Rican flags frame the main street where the festival takes place. This main street has experienced significant economic development since the festival started ten years ago. In the Los Angeles community of Boyle Heights a grand kiosk was inserted into the landscape of the community.

# The City as an Incubator of Public Festivals

a general model for urban interaction and how that model is applied to festivals in Los Angeles.



## general model

City policies support events while city planning and participation varies.

## Mariachi Festival, Boyle Heights, CA



## Dia de los Muertos, East Los Angeles, CA

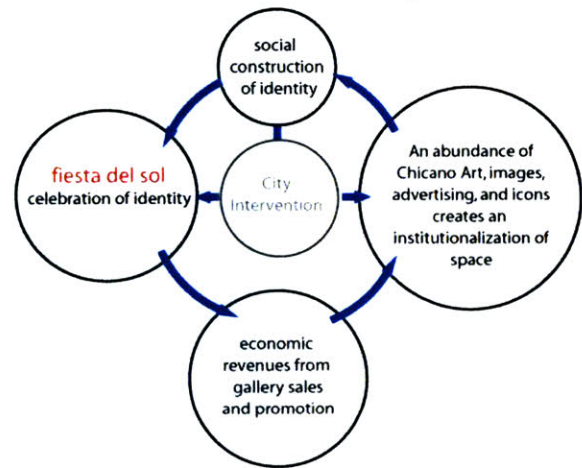
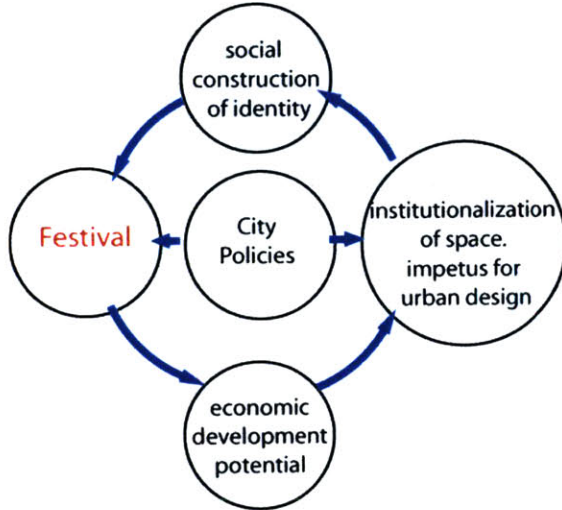


Figure 59: The City as an Incubator of Public Festivals



# The City as a Producer of Public Festivals

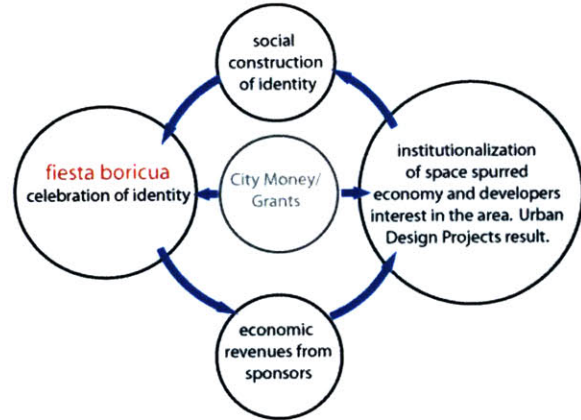
a general model for urban interaction and how that model is applied to festivals in Chicago.



## general model

City policies support and intervene in design and implementation of festivals

## Fiesta Boricua, Chicago



## Fiesta Del Sol, Chicago

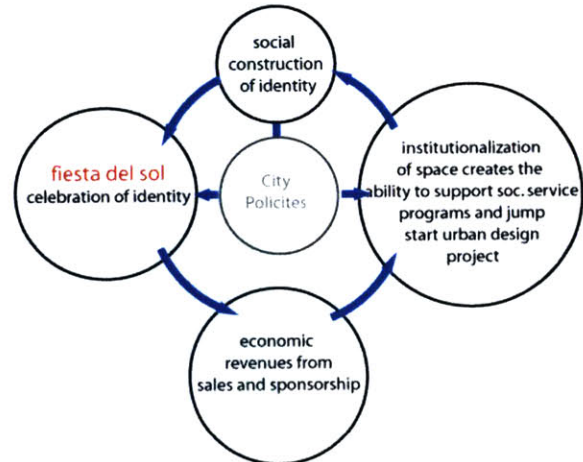


Figure 60: The City as a Producer of Public Festivals

## Directions for Festival Planners

One of the observations I made of festival planning is the need for information, such as statistics on festival goers, demographics of communities, amount of units sold per hour, and other data. It was very difficult to gather quantifiable information, and I am sure that this is because it is very difficult to gather when these events are ephemeral in nature. However, having such information would be of much value to festival planners.

Through my research, I came across useful planning ‘tools’ for festival organizers. One in particular, “How to Grow a Multicultural Festival in Your Community,” was designed by the Cultural Affairs Department of Los Angeles. This booklet is the kind of information that a festival planner, no matter how experienced or inexperienced, could benefit from. The first recommendation in this book is to get to know your community—cultural practices, demographics, and socio-economic information. However, this may be difficult without access to the resources that provide these types of data.

Another planning tool is the booklet, “Building A Festival: A Framework for Organizers,” written by the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism. Similar to the former, this booklet walks one through the process of organizing a festival. It provides the reader with a timeline and checklist of tasks that need to be accomplished in order to produce a festival. This booklet approaches festival planning with an economic development bent, emphasizing that special events are opportunities to raise funds for community projects.

Yet another very useful resource for festival planners is their municipal governments. Although each city employs a different policy approach, the Cultural Affairs or Special Events offices can be great resources for information. Providing a public archive with information regarding the planning process of previous festivals would be a great resource for community festival planners. Items such as press releases, flyers, entertainment, budgets, and timelines could be used as guidelines for future festivals planners. The City of Chicago’s Office of Special Events does a very

good job of archiving information, putting it together in a format that is useful for community organizers and updating it annually so that it includes necessary information of new policies and regulations. Chicago does a phenomenal job of having a very linked department located within City Hall. Their central location expedites the process of permitting since other departments contributing to the festival planning process, such as Parks and Recreation, Fire Department, Police Department, and Department of Transportation are also located in City Hall.

### **Directions for Future Research**

My hope to continue pursuing research in festival planning is stimulated by an interest in quantifying the impacts that ephemeral events have on cities. Having a better understanding of how festivals impact cities economically can aid city officials, community developers, and organizations target their events in a method that can bring about development without negating its purpose to celebrate culture and diversity. If the hope is to garner economic revenue for an urban design project, then involving urban designers in the festival planning process is also very important because they can begin to formulate how to transform the ephemeral into the permanent. Thus, quantifying the economic impacts that events have on communities is necessary to better understand how urban design and/or beautification projects can be materialized.



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## Appendix

## List of Interviews

### Chicago:

Aviles, Nereida. 26<sup>th</sup> Ward: Alderman Billy Ocasio's Office.  
Personal Interview. January 2001.

Davis Fournier, Mary. Near South Planning Board  
Personal Interview. January 2001.

Dolins, Barry. City of Chicago, Mayor's Office of Special Events.  
Personal Interview. January, 2001.

Gray, Thomas E. City of Chicago, Mayor's Office of Special Events.  
Personal Interview. January, 2001.

Hughs, Cheryl. City of Chicago, Mayor's Office of Special Events.  
Personal Interview. January, 2001.

Kennedy, David. City of Chicago, Mayor's Office of Special Events.  
Personal Interview. January, 2001.

Kramer, Jennifer. City of Chicago, Mayor's Office of Special Events.  
Personal Interview. January, 2001.

Salazar, Ron. City of Chicago, Mayor's Office of Special Events.  
Personal Interview. January, 2001.

Soto, Juan. Pilsen Neighbors Community Council.  
Personal Interview. January, 2001.

Thomas, Tim. City of Chicago, Mayor's Office of Special Events.  
Personal Interview. January, 2001.

## **Los Angeles:**

Benitez, Tomas. Self Help Graphics

Personal Interview. January, 2001, March 2001.

Flores, Consuelo. Writers Guild.

Personal Interview. March, 2001.

Haru, Sumi. City of Los Angeles, Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater.

Personal Interview March, 2001.

Hooks, Rosie Lee. City of Los Angeles, Office of Festivals and Gallery Theater.

Personal Interview. January, 2001.

Johnstone, Mark. City of Los Angeles, Cultural Affairs Department.

Personal Interview. August, 2000.

Rice, Catherine. City of Los Angeles, Cultural Affairs Department

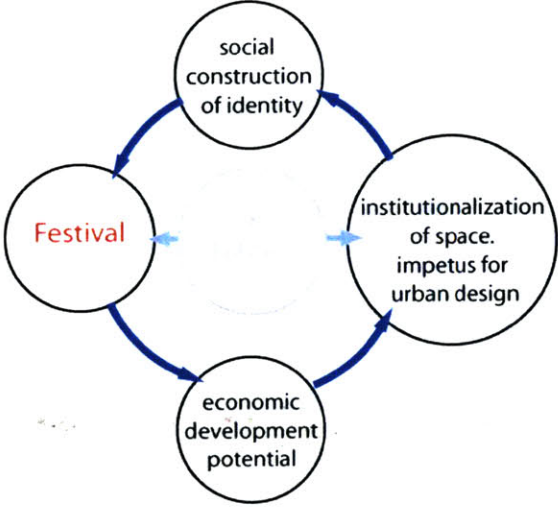
Phone Interview. March, 2001.

Sabatello, Carmello. City of Los Angeles, Architecture Department

Phone Interview. March, 2001.

# The City as an Incubator of Public Festivals

a general model for urban interaction and how that model is applied to festivals in Los Angeles.

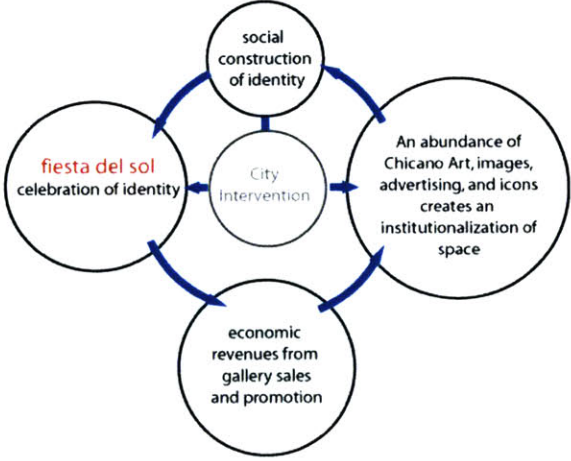


**general model**  
 City policies support events while city planning and participation varies.

## Mariachi Festival, Boyle Heights, CA



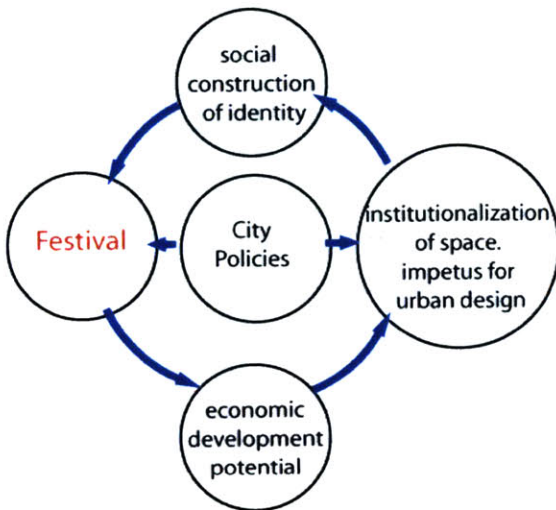
## Dia de los Muertos, East Los Angeles, CA





# The City as a Producer of Public Festivals

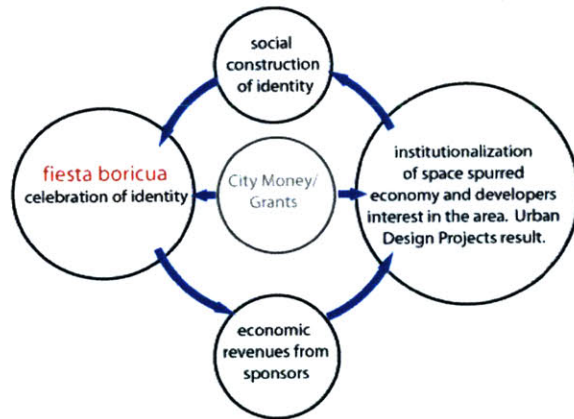
a general model for urban interaction and how that model is applied to festivals in Chicago.



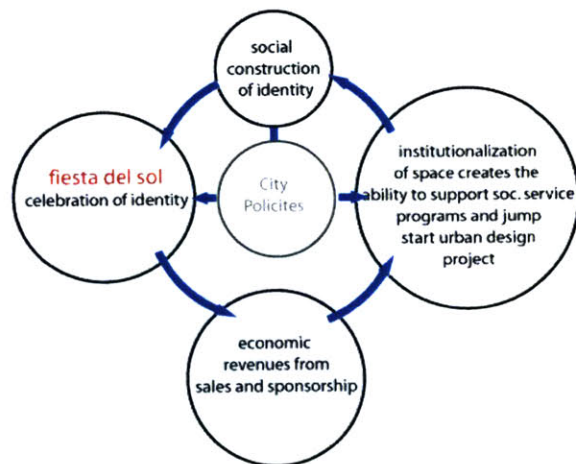
## general model

City policies support and intervene in design and implementation of festivals

## Fiesta Boricua, Chicago

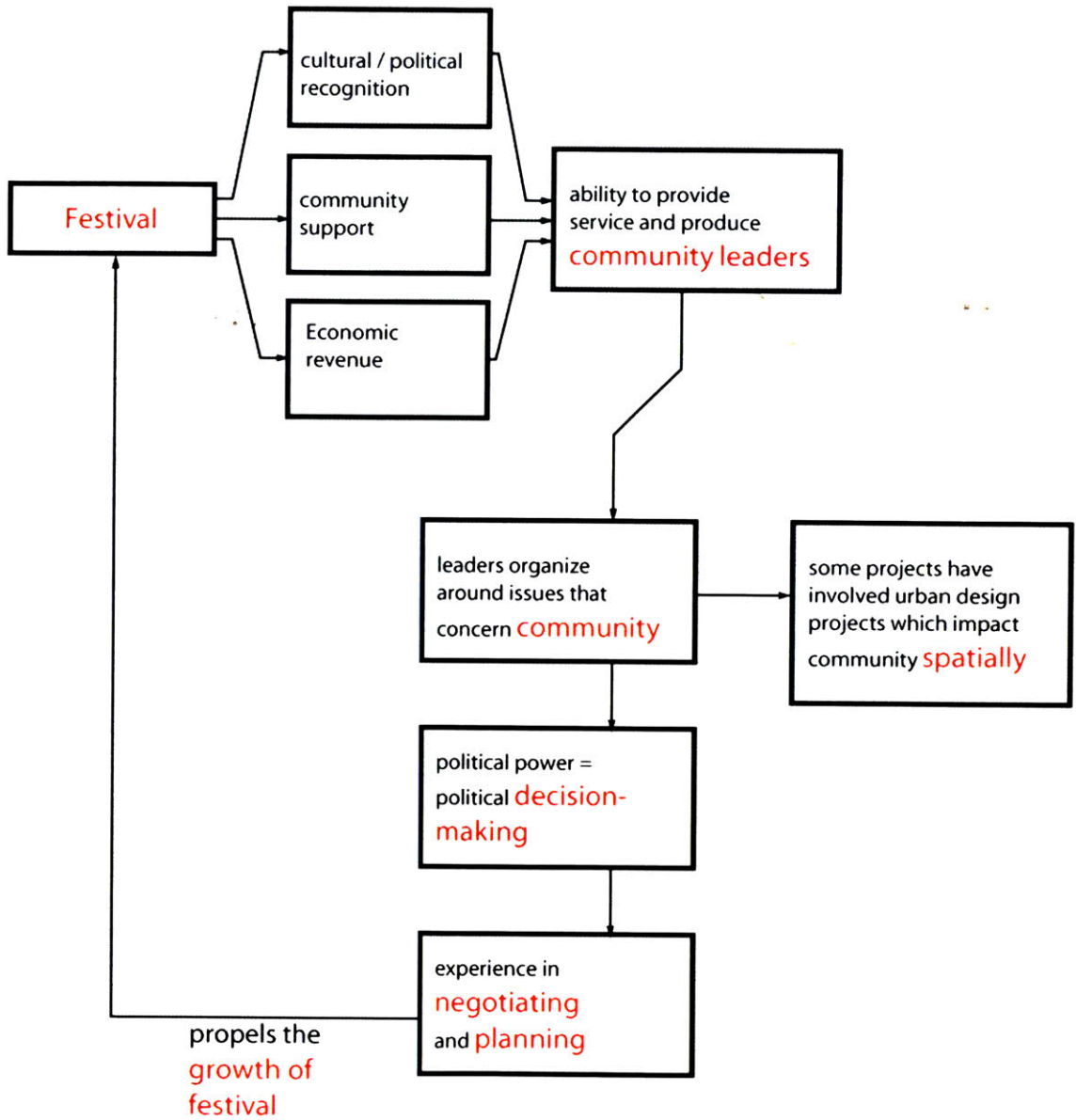


## Fiesta Del Sol, Chicago



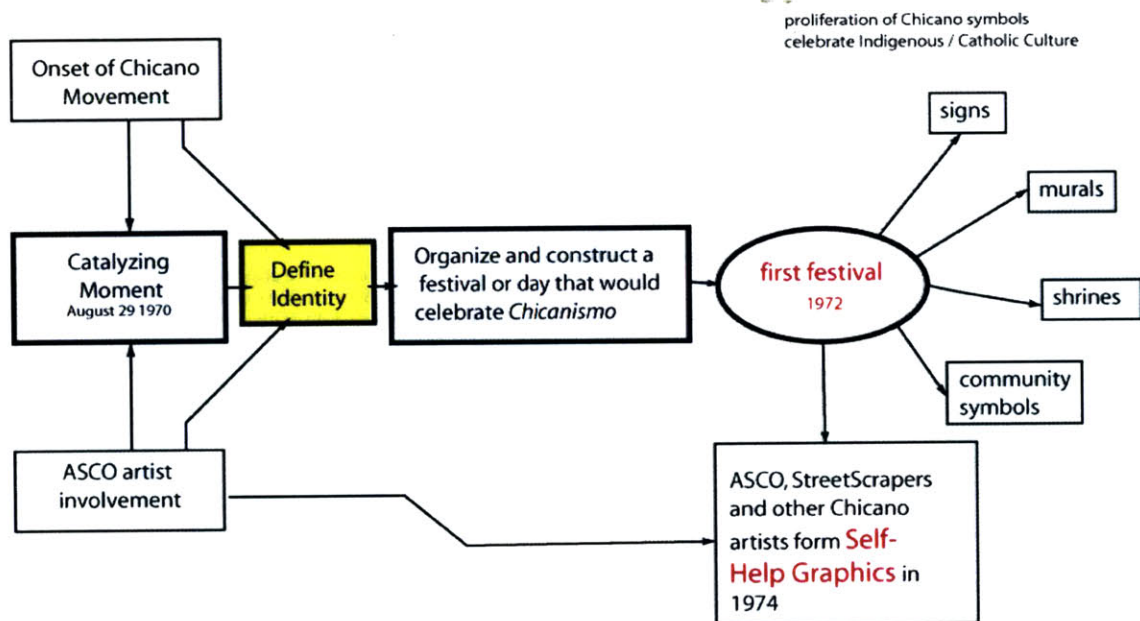
# The Structure of Festivals

an abstract model

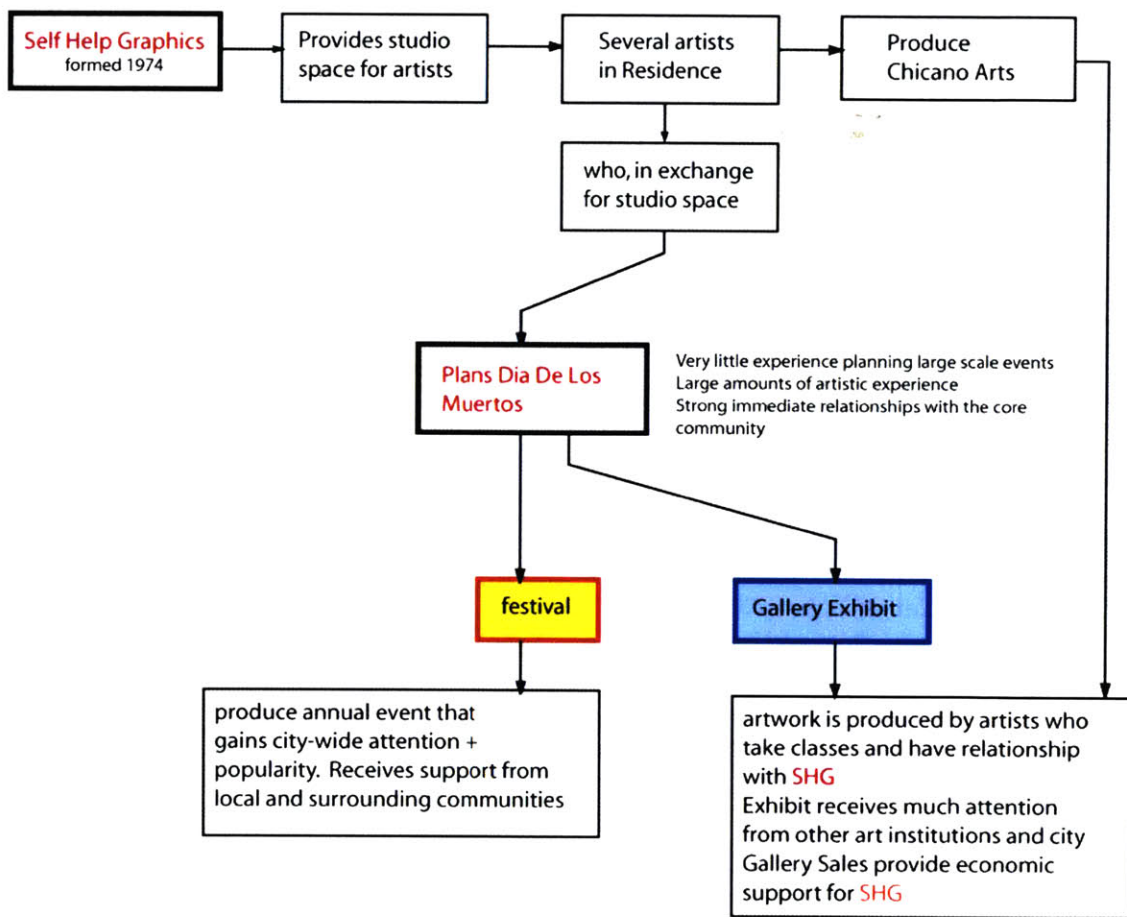


## The Origins of *Dia De Los Muertos*

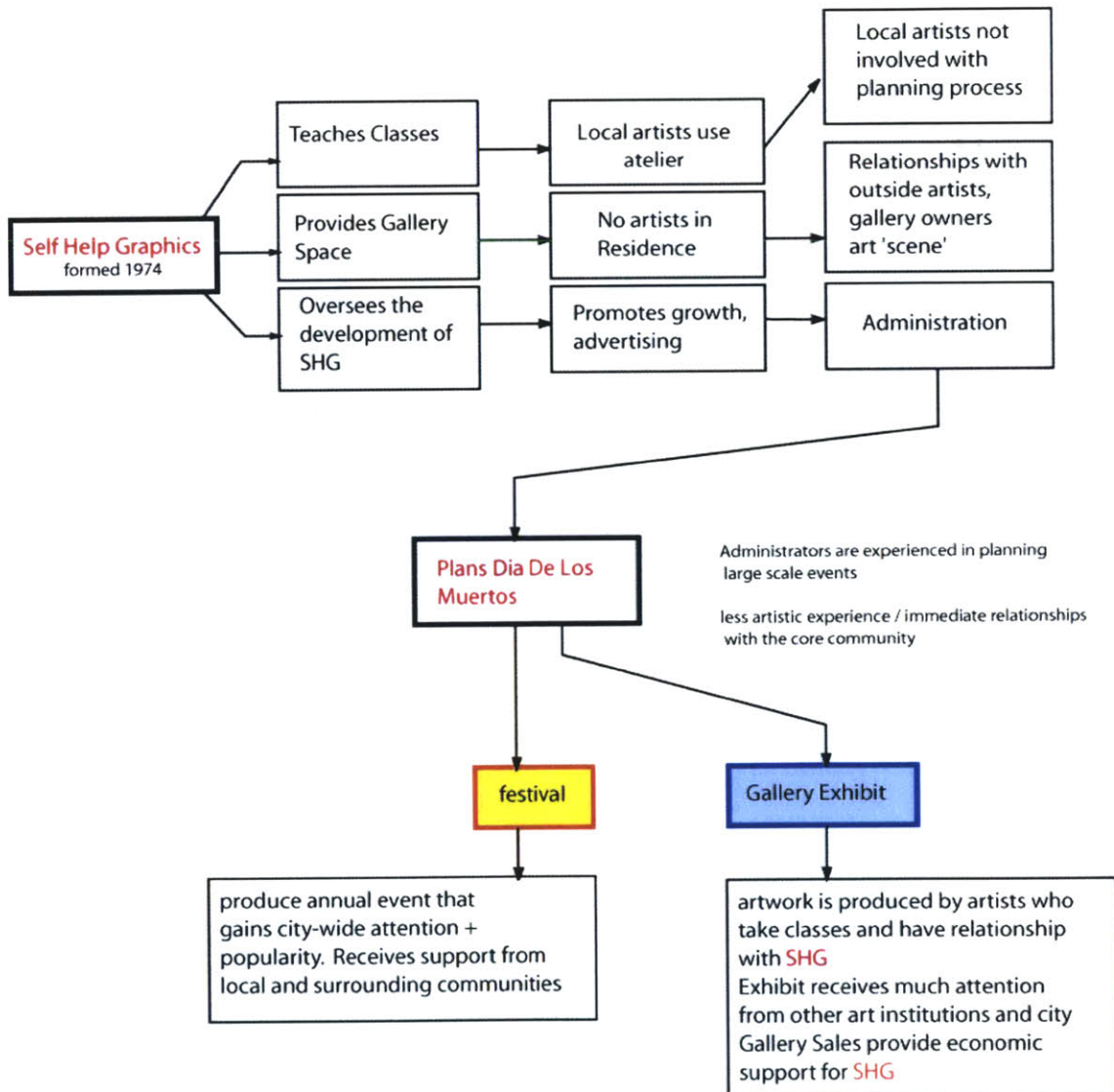
and how it changed the visibility and self identity of Chicanos in Los Angeles



## The Original Planning Organization of *Self Help Graphics* and how it balances community responsibility with business practices

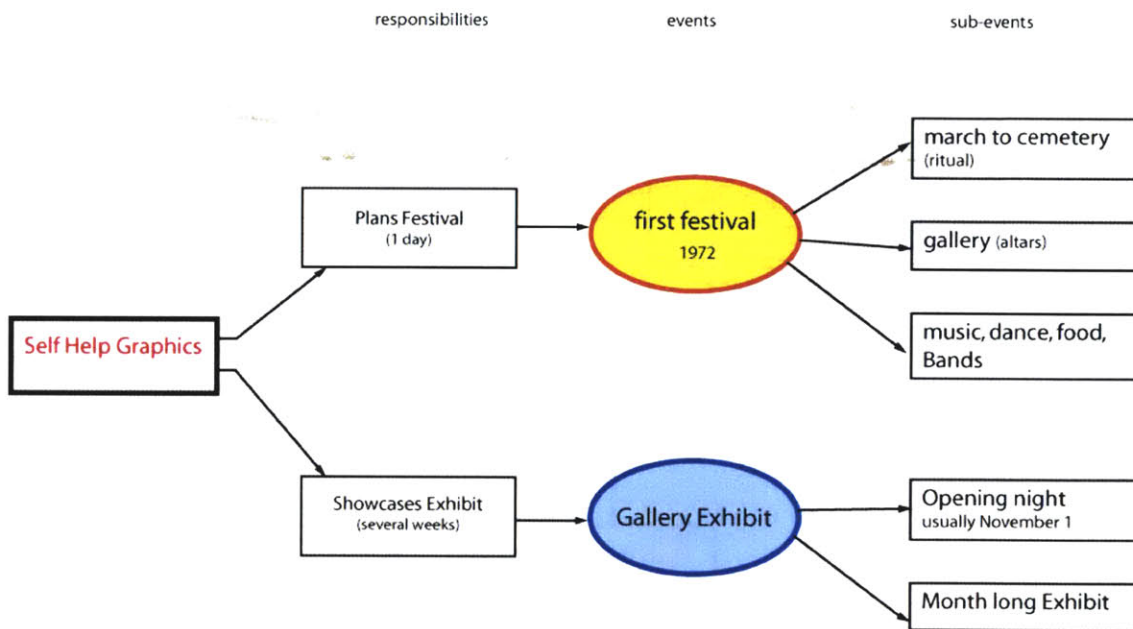


## The Current Planning Organization of *Self Help Graphics* and how it changed the visibility and self identity of Chicanos in Los Angeles



# The Current *Dia De Los Muertos* Celebration

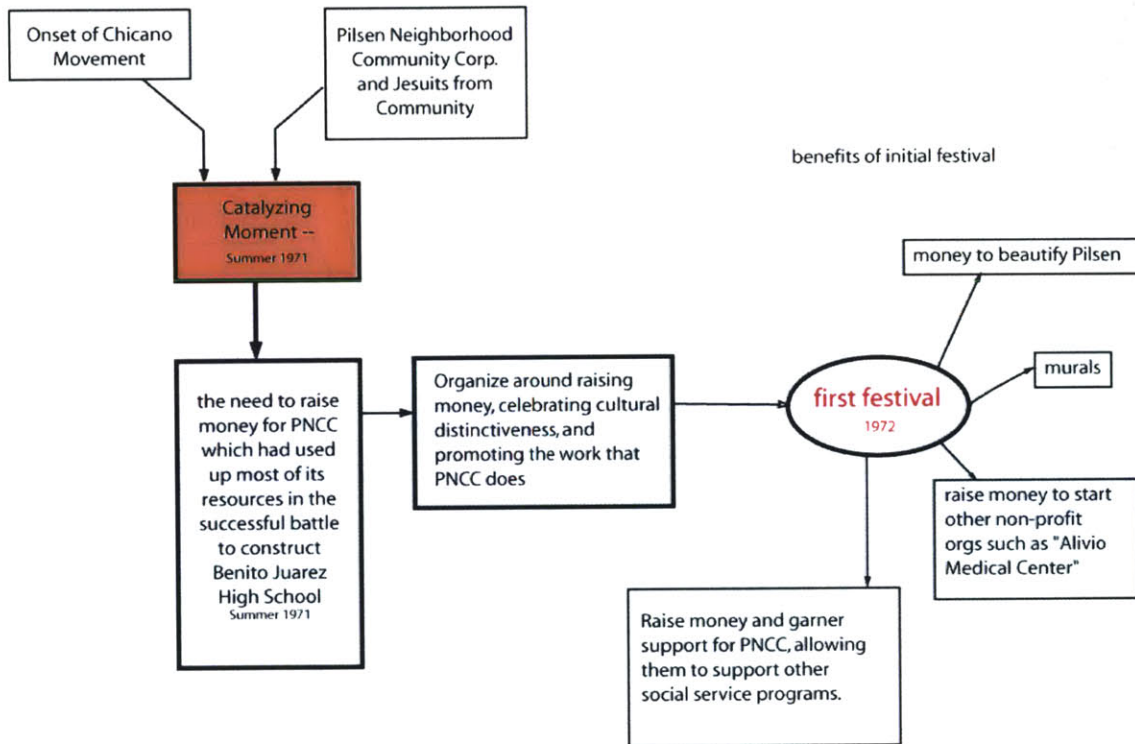
and how its various public components interact



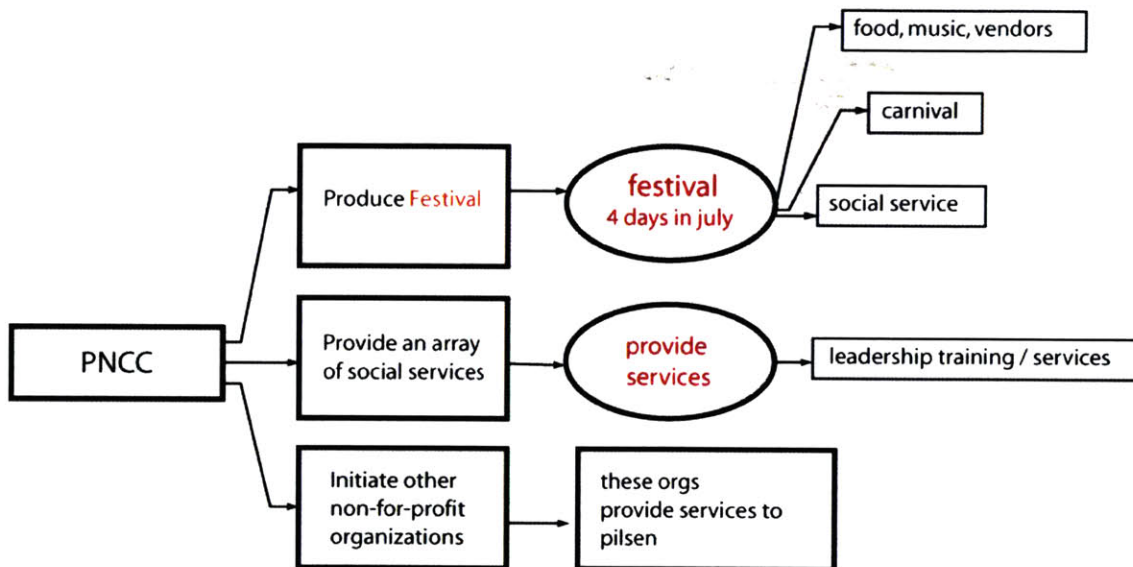


## The Origins of *Fiesta del Sol*

and how it changed the visibility and self identity of Chicanos in Chicago

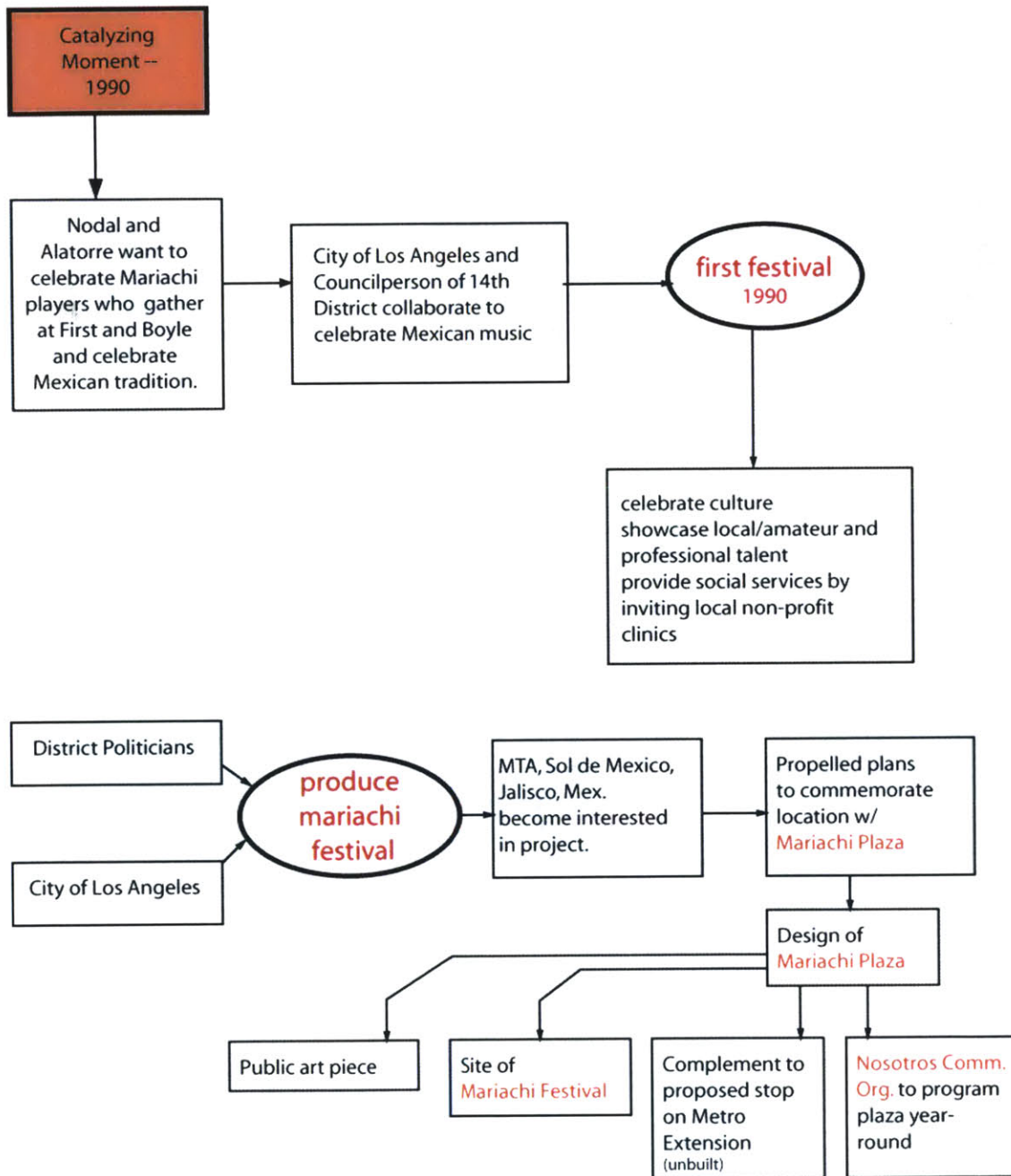


## The Current Organization of *Fiesta del Sol* (1972-present) and how it changed the visibility and self identity of Chicanos in Chicago



# The Origins of The Mariachi Festival

how it began and it's role in the development of Mariachi Plaza



# The Origins of Fiesta Boricua

how it began and influenced the development of Paseo Boricua

