

ARTSCAPES: COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF CITY BEAUTIFICATION
THROUGH MURALS IN DENTON, TEXAS

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

December 2017

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Robertson, Lindsey Morgan. *Artscapes: Community Perceptions of City Beautification through Murals in Denton, Texas*. Master of Science (Applied Anthropology), December 2017, 58 pp., 11 figures, references, 21 titles.

Keep Denton Beautiful (KDB) is inspired by Keep America Beautiful's model of community engagement to create a clean, beautiful, and vibrant city. The community mural initiative, Artscapes, aims to enliven public spaces, abate graffiti, and inspire community members to keep Denton, Texas, clean and beautiful. The goals of this research project are to understand the impact of Artscapes initiative, community perceptions of public art, and find ways KDB can better align future mural projects with the needs and desires of community members. By talking to artists that have worked with KDB, members of the mural art committee, and community members from the neighborhoods that have existing murals, this research provides input from these three populations to continue creating public art for the Denton community. I discuss the context of my work through Lefebvre's concept of "Right to the City," Rafael Schacter's opposition between sanctioned and non-sanctioned murals, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic and social capital, and David Harvey's work on neoliberalism and the entrepreneurial city.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my grandma, Carolyn Jean Greer, who passed away in August 2016. I would like to thank my parents for being incredibly supportive through my long school journey. You have always been there for me and always tell me to follow my dreams and do what makes me happy. I would like to thank my chair, Mariela Nuñez-Janes for being so patient with me after I completely changed the focus of my research. Thank you for brainstorming with me and helping me develop this project. I am grateful for the support you have given me throughout graduate school, profe. I would also like to thank my other two committee members, Andrew Nelson and Amy Kraehe, for always pushing me to think critically about different aspects of my project. I will forever be grateful to the support my cohort (plus a couple of adopted cohort members) has given me throughout our graduate school experience. I feel incredibly lucky to have been in this specific cohort with all of you. It has been a pleasure developing our projects together and bouncing ideas off of each other while drinking “one” beer at Oak Street. We may have been a small group, but I have no doubt that you all will follow the words of Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” I would like to thank my site sponsor, Lauren, for giving me the opportunity to do this research with Keep Denton Beautiful and being so supportive throughout my project. I would also like to thank the mural committee for listening to my input and allowing me to sit on the committee throughout the last year. I would like to thank all of my participants for contributing to this project and letting me tell your stories. Lastly, I would like to thank the artists that painted these murals. Without you, this project would not exist and Denton would be a less beautiful place.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Murals have increasingly become a way to utilize and enliven urban spaces while showcasing the talent of artists and bringing art to the public. In 2015, Keep Denton Beautiful started redoing faded murals through their Artscapes initiative in Denton, Texas. As of May 2017, Keep Denton Beautiful completed three mural projects and are in the process of trying to complete a fourth. The three sites were painted by three separate artists hand selected by the mural art committee. This research project investigates community perceptions of the Keep Denton Beautiful murals, the importance of public art, and ways Keep Denton Beautiful can align future mural projects with the needs and desires of community members.

Client Description

Keep Denton Beautiful (KDB) is an environmental organization in Denton, Texas. As an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful and KDB is inspired by their model of community engagement to create a “clean, beautiful, and vibrant city” (“Keep Denton Beautiful” 2017). In 2015, KDB launched an initiative called ‘Artscapes’ through a Special Interest Committee with the hope of beautifying Denton, Texas through public art in places they identify as graffiti-prone and high traffic areas. Artscapes was inspired by Keep America Beautiful affiliates who had success with beautifying graffiti-prone areas. Notably, Keep Albuquerque Beautiful created over 30 public murals throughout Albuquerque, New Mexico. KDB’s goals for their mural initiative include enlivening public spaces, abating graffiti, and inspiring community action to keep Denton clean and beautiful (“Keep Denton Beautiful” 2017).

According to KDB's archives, Keep Denton Beautiful started as the "Blue Ribbon Citizen's Task Force" through the Denton City Council to make recommendations regarding beautification of major city entrances and other city beautification efforts. They eventually created the Beautification Advisory Commission out of this task force. In 1992 the name was changed to the Keep Denton Beautiful Board. In 1996, The Keep Denton Beautiful Board changed the name to Keep Denton Beautiful, Inc. and became a 501(C)(3) with 23 board members. KDB had community members serving on the board as well as council-appointed members. In 2000, the board voted to become a stand-alone 501(C)(3) and dissolve the advisory board, or city appointed members, in the organization while remaining closely affiliated with the City of Denton (KDB archives). KDB operates as a hybrid organization, meaning KDB employees are still paid by the City of Denton Solid Waste Department but all projects are paid for through fundraising. Despite their non-profit status KDB still relies on city government funding for their employees and office space.

Project Purpose

This research sought the perspectives of artists who have worked with KDB, members of the mural art committee, and community members from the neighborhoods that have existing KDB murals, to understand the impact of public art for the Denton community, and facilitate the improvement of the Artscapes initiative. The research questions for this project included 1.) How have the KDB murals impacted the Denton community? 2.) How can KDB improve the *Artscapes* initiative, and 3.) Why is public art important?

Site Locations

The field sites for this research included the locations of the three completed murals completed for KDB: Bell Avenue and Prairie Street (SCRAP Building), Bonnie Brae and Scripture, and Bell Avenue and Sherman Drive (Figure 1). Additionally, potential location sites for new murals that have been discussed during the mural committee meetings were also included.

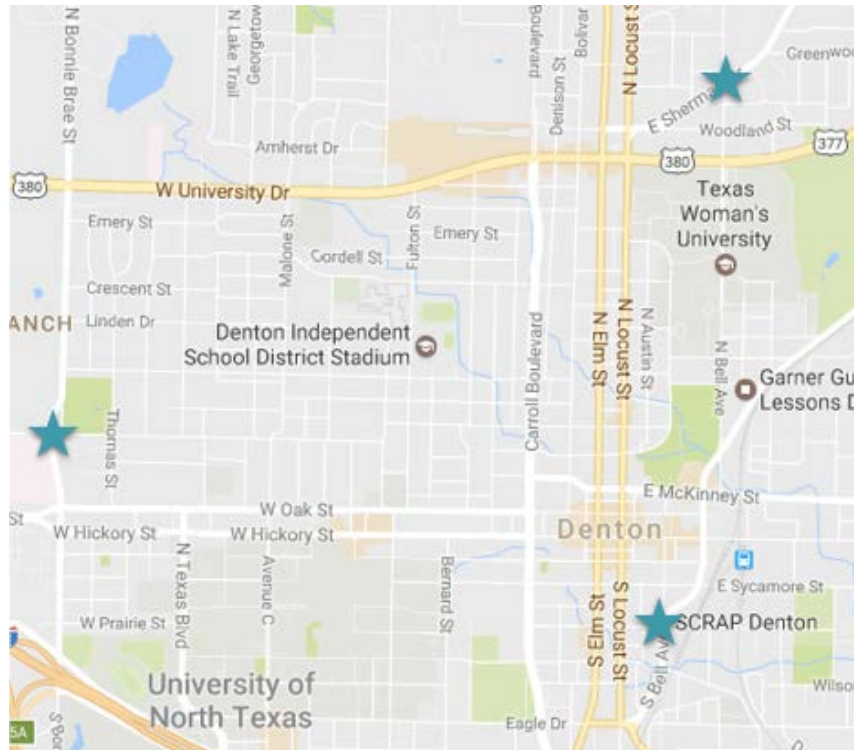


Figure 1: Mural Locations in Denton, Texas

Projected Timeline

I started this project after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in July of 2016. I attended the first mural committee meeting in August of 2016 and began recruitment. My projected timeline showed that I would complete data collection by the end of October and finish my client report and presentation by January of 2017. Due to difficulties in recruitment, I extended the timeline and amended the IRB to include recruitment through the

KDB Facebook page. The amended IRB was not approved until April of 2017 and the call for recruitment was posted on the KDB Facebook page at the beginning of May in 2017. I finished data collection at the end of May and made my recommendations to the client in mid-June.

Deliverables

The deliverables that were presented to the client at the conclusion of this research included a client report with detailed site descriptions, methods, emergent themes from the results, and recommendations for future murals. Additionally, the client was given a presentation with quotes from participants about the importance of public art. The client was updated with information about the research throughout the project particularly during mural committee meetings.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Methods

This research project utilizes ethnographic research methods to understand how the existing murals from KDB's Artscapes initiative have affected the community and how they can improve in the future. Qualitative research methods included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and site visits to achieve triangulation in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with community members living or working near the three current murals, artists of the existing murals, and the mural art committee members. An initial interview guide was created for interviewing the mural art committee members and then adjusted based on information gathered after talking to committee members. Interview guides were then created for artists and community members, adjusting questions to target each population. Over the course of eight months, I participated in seven mural committee meetings, attended one public art committee meeting and one neighborhood association meeting, interviewed 17 participants, and spent a total of 19 hours doing observation at mural locations and meetings. I interviewed each of the three artists that completed murals through KDB, three participating mural art committee members, and 11 community members from three different neighborhoods. Data collected were then analyzed using the qualitative analysis software, Dedoose.

Recruitment

The three populations recruited for this study include mural art committee members,

artists that have worked for KDB, and community members from the three mural location neighborhoods. Committee members were recruited by attending mural committee meetings. At the beginning of the meeting, committee members were given the opportunity to give their personal information in order to be contacted for an interview. A total of three committee members were interviewed. All of the committee members were female. Mural artists were recruited through the site sponsor or through emailing. Contact information was found partially through the KDB web page and through the site sponsor. In the event that an artist did not respond to email, Facebook messenger was used. Three artists were interviewed, all of whom were male. Through random sampling, community members, including people who lived or commuted near the existing murals, were recruited by knocking on doors in the neighborhoods within a one mile radius of the current murals. Recruitment in the neighborhoods took place from November to March. When community members were not home, fliers with my contact information and project description were distributed. Recruitment also took place through the KDB Facebook page and snowball sampling. Community members from three different neighborhoods were recruited, totaling in 11 interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven community members from the Sherman and Bell neighborhood, two community member interviews from the Bonnie Brae neighborhood, and two community member interviews from the SCRAP neighborhood. Including the interviews with the local artists (3) and the Mural Arts Committee (3), a total of 17 interviews were conducted over the course of this project. Written consent was obtained from each participant before conducting interviews.

Interview Process

All interviews were recorded using a cell phone with the voice memo application or Tape-A-Call application, and transcribed using Google transcribe. Initial semi-structured interviews were conducted with three mural art committee members to understand the selection process of the local artists and the stages of completing a mural in the community. These interviews were recorded and transcribed taking approximately 30 minutes to an hour. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the local artists who completed the three existing murals, all of which were male. These interviews helped to understand the artists' perspective of the KDB Artscapes initiative before conducting interviews with community members. These interviews were recorded and transcribed taking approximately 20 minutes to an hour. Semi-structured interviews with the 11 community members near the existing murals were completed over the course of five months. These interviews were recorded and transcribed taking approximately 15 minutes to an hour.

In the Bonnie Brae neighborhood, the two participants were female. The first participant was recruited by knocking on doors in the neighborhood. The second participant was recruited through my recruitment post on the KDB Facebook page. Recruitment took place on the weekends (Saturdays and Sundays) during the daytime, typically in the mornings and afternoons. This was done in order to have a better chance of people being home from work. I did not recruit during the evenings for safety purposes since I was by myself. No one responded to the fliers left on doors that were not answered in this neighborhood.

In the SCRAP neighborhood, the two participants were female. Each of these participants had some relation to SCRAP and were recruited through snowball sampling.

Snowball sampling was used as a recruitment strategy for the SCRAP neighborhood due to issues with recruitment in this neighborhood. No one in this neighborhood opened their door or responded to a flier.

In the Sherman and Bell neighborhood, of the seven participants, three were female and four were male. One interview took place by knocking on doors, three interviews took place over the phone in response to the flier placed on doors outside people's home. The Tape-A-Call application was used to record these phone interviews. Three interviews took place through Facebook recruitment and snowball sampling. This neighborhood was the most active in their responsiveness to the flier.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was conducted at the Mural Art Committee meetings with field notes taken on the process of selecting artists. Meetings occurred on the third Wednesday of the month and a total of seven meetings were attended over the course of nine months, since two meetings were cancelled. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour with four to seven committee members at each meeting. I strictly observed at the initial meeting I went to, but participated in several meetings after becoming familiar with the structure of the meetings. My participation consisted of offering suggestions based on my findings. Observations of peoples' interactions with existing murals took place at the three mural sites. I observed a couple of people taking photos in front of the SCRAP mural, however I was not able to interview these individuals. Less interaction took place in front of the Bonnie Brae mural and the Sherman and Bell mural. This was perhaps due to their location being in residential areas and further away

from the downtown area with less accessible sidewalks or due to the fact that these murals are on retaining walls as opposed to the side of a building. Field notes were taken at each of the mural locations. Over the course of several weeks, approximately 12 hours was spent doing site observation at the mural locations. Observations also took place on the KDB Facebook page to look at coverage of the current murals and responses to posts about the murals. In addition to site observation and social media observation, I attended one public art committee meeting and one Southeast Denton Neighborhood Association (SEDNA) meeting as an observing party with the site sponsor. Field notes were taken at each of these meetings. In total, I had approximately 19 hours of observations.

Data Analysis

An in-depth analysis using the qualitative software, Dedoose, revealed key themes that were used to come up with recommendations for the client. Analysis was done through open and closed coding. Codes were then grouped into different themes that became prevalent throughout the research including right to the city, social and symbolic capital, neoliberalism, community, the importance of public art, and localism.

By including interviews from three different populations, 1) the local artists 2) the mural art committee members and 3) community members, the analysis showed differences and commonalities about the goals of the Artscapes initiative and public art. In-depth analysis was conducted for field notes taken during site visits and participant observation at the mural art committee meetings. Field notes were also analyzed using Dedoose. Findings were used to

propose recommendations for the client and provide insight on community members needs and desires for new murals.

Limitations

The limitations for this project include challenges during recruitment and overall participation among community members. In the initial project design, 3 artists, 3 committee members, and 6-8 community members from each neighborhood, totaling 18-24 community interviews were projected. The total number of interviews proposed between all populations was between 24-30. Due to challenges during recruitment, only 11 community interviews were completed resulting in a total of 17 interviews. I attempted to overcome the small number of interviews from some neighborhoods by recruiting through the KDB Facebook page. I specifically asked for people who lived or commuted near the Bonnie Brae & Scripture and the SCRAP mural neighborhoods, but ended up having more people respond about the mural on Sherman and Bell. However, I was still able to talk to individuals from each of the three neighborhoods, and additionally talk about the two murals (SCRAP and Bonnie Brae) that lacked participation with community members from the Sherman and Bell neighborhood. In addition to observing KDB murals, I also conducted observation of other publicly viewable murals in Denton in which I observed many people interacting and taking pictures at non-KDB mural sites.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXT OF WORK AND LITERATURE

The creation of public art enables members of a community to be involved in creating beautiful spaces, whether it is as the result of individual artists or community driven efforts. From 1935 to 1943, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) established a federally funded program in the United States called the Federal Art Project (FAP) to provide work for artists during uncertain economic times. Many public murals came out of the FAP, in addition to the creation of community art centers. Over the course of the FAP program, over 225,000 works of art were created for the public. According to the WPA Murals website, “They stand as a reminder of a time in our country’s history when dreams were not allowed to be destroyed by economic disaster” (wpamurals.com). Public art has been an important part of United States history for the last century. According to the KDB website,

Nationally, public mural art has shown to be effective for beautifying sites that are chronically prone to graffiti. Keep America Beautiful affiliates – like KDB – have had great success with this approach around the country, creating more beautiful public spaces and instilling community pride in the process. This strategy is the foundation of the Artscapes Mural Initiative. (“Keep Denton Beautiful” 2017)

The scholarship on public art, cultural capital, and neoliberalism helps to disentangle the assumptions that drive strategies such as the Artscapes mural initiative. I discuss the context of my work through Lefebvre’s concept “Right to the City”, as it relates to the opposition of public versus private murals. Building on the work of Schacter (2016), I further situate the Artscapes initiative as related to the opposition between sanctioned versus non-sanctioned murals and the theme of graffiti prevention. I then discuss the work of Pierre Bourdieu with the concept of symbolic and social capital, which I extend to a critical understanding of the accessibility of the

mural committee. And lastly, I use the work of David Harvey on neoliberalism and the entrepreneurial city in relation to how public art plays a role in marketing a city as a destination place in a city versus city competition.

Context

Public vs. Private Murals

There are several differences between the approval process of a private mural in contrast to a public mural. Private murals only require the approval of the property owner, whereas public murals are highly regulated and must go through several committees to be approved. After being approved by the KDB Mural Art Committee, the KDB Board of Directors must approve the proposed public mural, then the Public Art Committee (a committee appointed through the Parks and Recreation Department) makes recommendations to the city council on whether or not they should approve the site location, making it a very lengthy process for public murals to become a reality. Since not everyone can paint a mural on a public space, calling murals “public murals” seem to be misleading. So in these instances of “public art” versus “private art”, private art seems more accessible to the public under these circumstances.

Additionally, at several public locations, TxDOT must be consulted in the process of closing lanes of traffic in order for the artist to work at the site if there is no sidewalk at the location, as was the case for two of the mural locations (Bonnie Brae and Scripture; Sherman and Bell). In regards to this thesis, I discuss “private” in the context of a mural that has been approved by a property owner as opposed to a “public” mural that needs to be approved by the City, despite both being visually accessible to the public.

One of these murals resides closer to the downtown area and is considered a “private” mural, while the other two murals reside in residential neighborhoods and are considered “public” murals. The two murals that are in “public” spaces (Bonnie Brae and Scripture; Bell Avenue and Sherman Drive) are both in residential neighborhoods on retaining walls that separate the street from the yard of the residential house. The one “private” mural (SCRAP building) is near the Denton downtown area. The SCRAP mural is “private” only because it was approved through the owner of the SCRAP building as opposed to the various steps of approval for a “public” space.

The first mural through the Artscapes initiative (Figure 2) done by Mick Burson, is on the side of the SCRAP building, a nonprofit organization that serves as a creative reuse store and donation center. SCRAP is located on Bell



Figure 2: SCRAP Building Mural on Bell Avenue and Prairie Street by artist Mick Burson (kdb.org)

Avenue and Prairie Street, catty-cornered from the Morrison’s Corn Kit Factory, an iconic factory in Denton. This mural was the launch project for the Artscapes initiative. Before the mural committee formed, this mural was completed and used as a launch project for the two future mural locations and created a template for how to approach the next two mural projects.

While this mural is fairly close to downtown, it is removed from high-traffic businesses located near the square. Bell is a very busy street for car traffic but seems to have very little foot or bike traffic during the day. This mural is more accessible visibly to people driving North

on Bell Avenue as they pass the SCRAP building. Although this mural is “private”, it is on the outside of the SCRAP store available for public view. As Jane Jacobs (1961:273) notes in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, “a city sidewalk by itself is nothing. It is an abstraction. It means something only in conjunction with the buildings and other uses that border it, or border other sidewalks very near it”. This area, while relatively close to the busy downtown area, is almost deserted even though there is a sidewalk, because there are no major businesses surrounding the SCRAP building. According to the Denton Plan 2030, one of the goals is to support “more compact and interconnected land use pattern; placing housing, jobs and shopping in closer proximity, and providing greater opportunity for mixed-use and development designed for walkability” (2015). The future planning of Denton shows the goals to make Denton a more walkable city and perhaps create more areas that are conducive to the appreciation of public art since many of the KDB murals are only appreciated in passing. The first mural was painted on a blank wall on the side of the SCRAP building in which the manager of SCRAP feared that the large white wall was asking to be graffitied. This launch project led to the next two mural sites, which were chosen by KDB due to the faded nature of existing murals already on those sites.

The second mural (Figure 3) is in a public space at Bell



Figure 3: Sherman & Bell Avenue by artist Travis Sykes (kdb.org)

Avenue and Sherman Drive and is on two retaining walls that extend from Bell Avenue to Sherman Drive in front of a residential home. The Sherman and Bell mural was the second mural completed, and originally the site of a previous KDB



Figure 4: Bonnie Brae & Scripture Mural by artist Shay McAnally (kdb.org)

sponsored mural. The previous mural had fallen into disrepair and started to attract graffiti once it began to look like graffiti itself. This mural is closer to the Texas Women’s University campus in a residential neighborhood near the Bell Avenue Historic Conservation District. This particular intersection is a very high traffic area with cars. There is no sidewalk below one side of the mural but it is easily visible from the sidewalks across the street where there is high foot traffic.

The third mural (Figure 4) is on Bonnie Brae and Scripture across from the Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital. This is a high car traffic area on the edge of a residential neighborhood near the University of North Texas. There is a sidewalk on either side of the street that allows



Figure 5: Bonnie Brae & Scripture Mural before 2016 (Keep Denton Beautiful Archives)

for mural visibility while walking, but there seems to be more car and bike traffic than pedestrian. The Bonnie Brae and Scripture mural previously had a faded green mural devoted to Denton (Figure 5) that had been on this retaining wall for several years.

Right to the City

While the KDB murals are deemed as 'public', the right to actually paint the murals is controlled by governmental processes. Mark Purcell (2002) notes in *Excavating Lefebvre: The right to the city and its urban politics of the inhabitant*, "the right to the city stresses the need to restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state towards the inhabitants" (101-102). The lengthy mural approval process seems opposed to Lefebvre's concept of "Right to the City" in the fact that community members or artists must depend on the city to grant them the right to paint these public spaces even though they live in and contribute to the city. It would be much easier for artists to ask a business or property owner to let them paint a 'private' mural on the side of their building instead of getting in trouble for illegally painting something in a public space without going through the proper channels, which is required for a 'public' mural. But even then, the artist must get approval from someone before they can paint unless they want to be labeled a deviant or potentially encounter legal trouble. Keep Denton Beautiful is one of the few organizations with the ability to go through the regulatory process of gaining permission for the creation of a public mural. Another organization with this authority is the Public Art Committee through the Parks and Recreation Department.

Controlling Public Spaces through Graffiti Prevention

While the mission of the Artscapes initiative to beautify their community through public art is directly related to their goal to ‘abate graffiti’; and ‘inspire community action to keep our city clean and beautiful’, the outcome seems to be more about controlling public spaces through City approved murals. The Keep Denton Beautiful website, notes that “public mural art has shown to be effective for beautifying sites that are chronically prone to graffiti” and that other affiliates have had success with this approach to create “more beautiful public spaces and instilling pride in the process” (“Keep Denton Beautiful” 2017). KDB references three articles on their website that discuss the effectiveness of murals for deterring graffiti: “Graffiti Prevention: Creating a Community Mural” (from Keep America Beautiful), “Charting the Multiple Meanings of Blight – Executive Summary” (from Keep America Beautiful), and “The Mural as Graffiti Deterrence” (from the Environment and Behavior Journal). These articles are used in reference to KDB’s strategy to deter graffiti with their mural initiative. According to these referenced articles, graffiti is likened to ‘blight’ as well as something that needs to be prevented. However, graffiti has become more of a style of art than an act of defiance in today’s public art scene with reference to graffiti-style murals as sanctioned art (Bartlett 2015).

In *Ornament and Order: Graffiti, Street Art and the Parergon*, Rafael Schacter (2016) refers to graffiti, in any sense, as forms of cultural production “created within a complex tradition of visual dexterity and physical skill, containing a quite defined notion of aesthetic value and beauty at their core (even if a natural subjective notion of beauty of course)” (21). The notion that tagging (usually a quickly done signature) is a complex skill with aesthetic value is quite the opposite of how the City and organizations such as KDB view tagging—as a quick

vandalistic act and against their mission to abate graffiti. Schacter (2016) discusses two forms of illegal ornament: consensual and agonistic. Agonistic ornament is typically defined as graffiti practices or aesthetic practices occurring illegally in the streets using techniques such as tagging, throw-ups¹, or etching², while consensual ornament is defined as ‘street-art’ practices or aesthetic practices occurring illegally in the streets using techniques such as wheat-pasting³, muralism, and freehand drawing (47-48). These categories serve to show the differentiation in types of illegal work in which one is more commonly accepted than the other; Consensual ornament is more widely accepted than agonistic ornament in the sense that consensual ornament is more readily viewed as “art” while agonistic ornament is ‘graffiti’ by City entities that work with the removal of graffiti. For the now scrapped Southeast Denton mural location, the hopes of the committee members were that if the mural were done in a ‘street-art style’, then any tagging or graffiti in this location will feel like consensual ornamentation as opposed to agonistic ornamentation if the mural looks like it was done without permission from the City. Although the graffiti style is widely popular and in use in a number of public and private art projects, it is not considered traditional graffiti when the artist seeks permission to do so. When the artist obtains permission, the project becomes sanctioned graffiti. For example, the graffiti park in Austin, Texas, is privately owned (“Hope Campaign” 2016). Here the artists must gain

¹ “‘Throw-up’ or ‘throwie’ is a widely referenced graffiti term, most commonly used to describe tag-like drawings of bubble letters designed for quick execution, and usually consisting of artist’s name and only two colors” (Randall).

² “Etching is a form of graffiti where an object is used to scratch graffiti into metal, plastic, and most commonly, glass” (Graffiti Guide).

³ “Wheat pasting refers to an adhesive made from equal parts flour and water; also the name for a type of street art that relies on it. To put up a wheat paste, an artist covers an area with the paste, then unfurls a poster, drawing, painting, or photo made off site. After smoothing out the paper’s wrinkles and bubbles, another smear of wheat paste goes on top” (Allen 2013).

access to be able to graffiti in this area, which seems counter-productive for the initial point of the graffiti process, which is to create what Schacter calls “independent public art”, a decriminalizing umbrella term for anonymous art in the public sphere (2016:22-23).

Furthermore, when discussing the removal of graffiti in Denton, what KDB is mostly referring to is various forms of tagging. The murals done within KDB, as well as the murals around town, are done with permission from either the City for public spaces, or property owners for private spaces, making them legally sanctioned murals.

In the past, KDB murals have been effective in deterring graffiti and tagging on these sites until, ironically, a mural becomes so faded that it begins to look like graffiti itself (Figure 6). In an interview with mural artist Mick Burson, he noted that he knew the taggers in town and that they typically stayed away from his murals out of respect for his artwork.

Graffiti is often referred to as a visual element of hip-hop culture and it contributes to place-making as graffiti artists make their mark on the landscape (Jaffe and Koning 2016: 96). Typically the type of ‘graffiti’ KDB is trying to abate within its mission for the mural project is illegal tagging. The most prominent example of independent public art is tagging. Schacter notes that in tagging “we can see how this [often] described scribbled mess, this supposed territorial pissing, is in fact a



Figure 6: Sherman and Bell Avenue Mural Before 2016
Photo (Keep Denton Beautiful Archives)

double ornamental practice” in which ornamental practices are produced to decorate, adorn, and/or embellish their surfaces (2016: 22-23). Tagging allows the artist to leave his or her mark as well as create a sense of place on the landscape.

The process of tagging is likened to calligraphy by Schacter, as it is “understood as one of the archetypal forms of ornament, so too tagging must be seen in the same way, as an accessory and an embellishment to a secondary structure, as an adjunctive and decorative aesthetic” (2016:26). However, the intricate nature and aesthetic appeal of tagging that

Schacter describes is not necessarily a view shared by everyone, especially the City of Denton and Keep Denton Beautiful. Walking through Denton, you can see various tags



Figure 7: Underpass at Robertson and Bell

on buildings, signs, bridges, and sidewalks. Within a couple days, these tags will have been painted over, often with whatever paint the city has available, creating out-of-place rectangles of various shades of whites and grays. This is particularly evident in the Southeast Denton underpass at Robertson and Bell (Figure 7). Southeast Denton is the neighborhood location where many former Quakertown residents were displaced in the 1920’s after “Denton club woman had campaigned actively to beautify their city” and make Quakertown the location for a city park (Glaze 1991:2). Glaze (1991) notes that the while the “creation of a city park fulfilled a valid civic need, it camouflaged the deeper desire of administrators at the college and business

leaders to minimize contact between the black community and the all-white women’s campus” now known as Texas Women’s University (2). When mural committee members at KDB search for potential sites for new murals, they typically find places that are constantly being tagged and then painted over by the City. However, even after the City has painted over tags, new ones show up creating an endless battle between the taggers and the City, in which taggers attempt to claim a “right to the city, take urban spaces as their own and appropriate what is properly theirs” (Purcell 2014).

With the growing number of murals in Denton, Texas, most artists do not need to illegally create street art when they can just ask business or property owners to paint their walls. Several business owners commission local artists to paint murals on their walls legally to continually grow and market Denton as a creative city. Denton seems to like the idea of ‘graffiti-style’ street-art, as long as the artist asks permission first, as seen in the instance of covering up illegal graffiti with sanctioned graffiti in a previously proposed Southeast Denton mural site on East Sycamore Street. (Figure 8) However, there are plenty of instances where tagging and other forms of graffiti stay up. Schacter (2016) quotes the Madrid artist Eltono, “my work, I

think it’s really about order; it’s not disturbing its space, it’s following the lines, it’s order, even it’s a new order [...] I think actually sometimes my work stays up because it’s in place, it’s working with the architecture



Figure 8: Proposed mural location at E. Sycamore Street

around it, not against it” (73). In Denton, this is evident with a mural on Fry street in a nook area between two buildings that has a street-art style mural. This location, while not a KDB mural, is evident as a place where graffiti stays up because it complements the style of the mural.



Figure 9: Mural in nook on Fry Street

(Figure 9) Graffiti that blends in with its surroundings typically stay up longer than ones that are out of place such as small tags on the side of telephone poles or dumpsters versus tags that are on plain white walls.

Social and Symbolic Capital

Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of social and symbolic capital play an important role in the appreciation and accessibility of public art. In the *Logic of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu discusses many different types of capital: social capital, cultural capital, economic capital, and symbolic capital (1990). Different types of capital explain the unquestioned authority of the mural committee to decide what counts as public art and what are appropriate sites for future murals.

Symbolic capital references reputations and only exists in the eyes of others, which is relevant to who has the ability to enjoy the murals without being seen as someone who is loitering in front of a residential home. Bourdieu notes that symbolic capital “procures all that is referred to under the term *nesba*, that is, the network of affines and relationships that is held through the set of commitments and debts of honour, rights, and duties, accumulated over the

successive generations, and which can be mobilized in extraordinary circumstances” (1990:119).

Bourdieu also discusses the idea of social capital, which makes up your social network and who you know as well as links that can be converted into some kind of value. This is evident in the creation of the mural art committee in which members were hand-selected for this committee. Additionally, who knows about and has the ability to serve on the mural committee is evident of social capital since the committee ends up primarily comprised of people who have close affiliations with the City of Denton as well as local business owners who have the ability to attend meetings. Bourdieu (1986) notes,

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity- owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.

These institutionalized relationships and credentials are apparent in the sense that KDB as an organization is assumed to have the ability to create a public mural with their association with the City, as they are one of the few organizations in town with the ability to complete a public mural because of their affiliation with the City of Denton. This association with the city can provide the disguise of a democratic committee rather than authoritative control because city officials are elected figures. Thus, authority is unquestioned or unchallenged because of this association and is further unquestioned by the lack of information on how to join the committee. Social capital provided an interpretive lens to help understand authority as it is related to the selection of committee members.

Neoliberalism: The Entrepreneurial City

In the neoliberal city, the predatory nature of economic capital creates a city versus city competition in which cities are more likely to market themselves as a destination place and compete with other cities in order to survive. This type of marketing could be geared towards wanting corporations to come to the city to build capital, more residents to move to that city, or just as a tourist destination spot. Public art is a primary example of this competition in which cities are able to market themselves as a destination place through creative avenues such as murals. By crafting a market that is considered creative, cities are able to regulate public art while creating a sense of pride within a community that relates to buzzwords like 'local' and 'unique'. Harvey argues that "urban governments have been forced into innovation and investment to make their cities more attractive as consumers and cultural centers" (Harvey, 1990: 256). Cities are forced into competition within the entrepreneurial city through changes in spatial practice within the city. Negative impacts of policies that forced city governments to move away from redistributive roles, exploitation of capital by taking advantage of the working class, attracting business to the City by giving them incentives such as tax breaks or non-unionized labor, and producing spectacular landscapes through things like amusement parks, giant stadiums, or an overhaul of malls that adds to the prestige of the city. This inevitably leads to a city versus city competition in which cities must compete with each other in order to survive and City governments must do whatever they can to keep the capital or investment in their City.

Denton, Texas is a primary example marketing itself as a place to live and visit through local community markets, festivals such as Oaktopia, Day of the Dead, Jazz Fest, 35 Denton, as well as local businesses hosting events on any given night of the week. Harvey notes that at the centerpiece of entrepreneurialism is the public-private partnership. This notion, “in which a traditional local boosterism is integrated with the use of local governmental powers to try and attract external sources of funding, new direct investments, or new employment sources” (Harvey 1989:7). Recently, the city of Denton’s website (Figure 10) changed to look less like a government website and more like a tourist destination site. The front page emphasizes Denton as “Vibrant, Eclectic, Local”, marketing on the idea that Denton is a diverse place that cares about supporting local businesses and its community. Also on their website, the city boasts of

“Clean Air, Shade, and Beauty,” emphasizing the partnership between Keep Denton Beautiful and the City of Denton. However,



Figure 10: City of Denton Website (www.cityofdenton.com)

According to the Denton Record Chronicle, Denton was named as having the worst air quality in the state of Texas further showing that cities must do whatever they can to keep investment in their city (“Denton Record Chronicle” 2016). This example of boasting about ‘clean air’, further shows the interconnectedness or public/private partnership between the City of Denton and

Keep Denton Beautiful and the controlling of public images of the city. The “Vibrant, Eclectic, Local” and “Clean Air, Shade, and Beauty” pages were taken down from the City of Denton website after being up for roughly a week or two in March of 2017. It is unclear if they plan to frequently cycle the homepages, or if they had complaints about the content of these two pages.

Denton has frequently been compared to Austin, Texas in a way that Austin has the slogan “Keep Austin Weird” and Denton has #dentoning. The hash tag #dentoning that Denton residents tag on social media to let people know of things they are doing in Denton creates this sense of identity tied to the city in a similar way that Austin does with Keep Austin Weird. Many shops sell items that are Denton-centric, such as the DIME (Denton Independent Makers Exchange) Store as well as the new Discover Denton shop that opened through the Denton Convention and Visitors Bureau, capitalizing on the commodification of their city through Denton postcards, books, mugs, posters, or anything that they can put the image of the courthouse on.

Harvey argues that in order to improve the competitive position of the city, it has to “appear as an innovative, exciting, creative, and safe place to live or to visit, to play and consume in” (Harvey 1989:9). This creative city is further influenced by a university with a highly acclaimed college of music and college of visual arts and design. The influx of young arts people allows the city to market itself as this creative city with many of their events and festivals focused on the arts.

However, Denton markets itself as a creative city with a focus primarily on the downtown area and seems to exclude certain areas. While there was a mural on the underpass

at Eagle and Dallas Drive for roughly ten years, the Southeast Denton underpass (Figure 7) has effectively been ignored and periodically partially painted over with whatever paint is available when graffiti appears. The mural on Dallas Drive was a revitalization effort neglected by the city and outsourced to a private organization, while the removal of the graffiti on the Southeast Denton entrance through large rectangles of random paint is always done through the city. The entrance on Dallas Drive is seen as the downtown entrance, while the Southeast Denton entrance leads to a lower-income neighborhood.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The literature discussed in the last chapter helped me to think about the themes that emerged from the data and guide my recommendations for the client report. The major concepts that came from the review of the literature—right to the city, neoliberalism, and capital—all tie into the themes that emerged during the analysis of the data: the importance of public art, localism, and community. In this chapter, I discuss how these tie into each other and influenced my recommendations for KDB. Within these themes, I show the need for more community involvement to incorporate the voices of community members, the need to support local artists, the importance of continuing the mural project, and the need to research and reach out to the neighborhood organizations for future mural projects. The themes addressed show the ways that KDB murals have impacted the Denton community and why public art is important. Additionally, the themes discussed in the literature show how KDB can improve the Artscapes initiative by furthering the themes of community, importance of public art, and localism. The concept of right to the city relates to the importance of public art as it illustrates the need for public art to be accessible and inclusive of murals considered to be sanctioned and non-sanctioned. The concept of neoliberalism illuminates the marketing of the city as a commodity to be consumed which, as the result of Denton’s marketing strategy, capitalizes on the importance of localism and how Denton residents buy in to the local boosterism through city versus city competition. Alternatively, local pride adds to the city versus city competition as cities commodify community pride by showcasing the city as a place to invest capital. The

concept of capital illustrate who is considered to participate in these sort of community led projects.

Community

Community members take pride in the public art that is showcased throughout Denton. The murals foster community building by inviting participation through visual impact and interpretation of the murals and through the uniqueness imparted to the city by the Artscapes initiative. Many community members noted in the interviews that they have seen an increase in public art in the last couple years. One committee member said “I think that mural art is starting to take off it seems like. The City in itself is starting to see that that's a really wonderful way to beautify and bring the community in to do things.” Despite many community members not being aware of the mural committee and their ability to be a part of it, committee members noted that “Keep Denton Beautiful is a community non-profit so...we really want peoples ideas and input so it really is, it's open to the community.” Moving forward with their mural initiative, Keep Denton Beautiful is trying to engage the community more in the mural selection process. Keep Denton Beautiful was attempting to incorporate the neighborhood voices where the two murals (now scrapped) were planned. However, there is some tension between the idea that the initiative is open to the community and the actual practices in place for the initiative.

While sitting in on one of the mural committee meetings (November 2016), the committee proposed a “street-art style” theme for a future mural site in Southeast Denton. Committee members designated the future mural site as a ‘sensitive site’ in which they needed to take greater care with community input and style for this particular location, most likely

because of the historic significance of Southeast Denton. In March of 2017, Keep Denton Beautiful brought designs to the Southeast Denton Neighborhood Association (SEDNA) meeting to ask for their feedback on the designs before they moved forward with the mural. Southeast Denton residents argued that these murals had nothing to do with their neighborhood and that if a mural was going to go up that it should have historical significance or be reflective of the community. In their opinion, the designs could be put up anywhere and believed that if a mural was going to be completed in their neighborhood, it should represent the distinct historical struggle of Southeast Denton residents. They wondered who had selected the theme for the design and expressed the interest to be more involved with the selection process. In fact, they expressed interest in having the underpass entrance to Southeast Denton on Bell and Robertson be the site for the new mural, instead of the initial proposed site. Since this interaction, KDB has decided to scrap this project as one of the mural locations and continue working with SEDNA for a future mural. From the SEDNA meeting, it seems like community members are interested in having a more community based mural project. In "The Neighborhood Strikes Back", Sieber, Cordeiro, and Ferro discuss community murals as being produced "through the initiative of local community artists rather than through state, commercial, or corporate direction, even if sometimes these wider agencies offer support; and, they have the grassroots participation of local people in defining themes, and often in the actual artistic production. They are fundamentally collective, not individual, works of art" (2012:265-66). The process of creating an appropriate design and finding an artist or artists that could execute a mural on the Robertson and Bell underpass sounds more aligned with the

“community mural” definition than a public or private mural produced by an artist, for the community.

When I started to attend the committee meetings, these projects had been completed in a little under a year and they were in the process of finding new mural location sites for the committee. A number of sites were proposed over the course of several meetings, but the two sites primarily considered were on Old North in Northeast Denton and on East Sycamore Street in Southeast Denton as “quick and easy projects”. Both of these locations were smaller pedestrian foot bridges that had existing graffiti on these sites. The committee created an open-call for artists to submit designs for these proposed sites. However, the open-call was met with backlash due to issues I will discuss further in the next section. The committee is no longer moving forward with these murals because of funding issues, lack of community interest in the mural design or site, and the lack of progress over the course of the year.

The committee decided to take the funding that was raised for the two proposed sites and combine the funds for the underpass on Dallas Drive and Eagle, where there is an already faded mural that has fallen into disrepair. The Dallas Drive and Eagle underpass is the main focus of the committee at the time of writing. One other site that has been proposed as something to consider in the future is the underpass at Robertson and Bell, which is considered one of the entrances to Southeast Denton. This location was considered more seriously after the initial Southeast Denton mural design and location was rejected by community members at the Southeast Denton neighborhood association meeting. The community members expressed more interest in having the entrance to their neighborhood have a mural with more community involvement for the design and artist selection process.

The current mural project (as of July 2017) on the underpass at Dallas Drive and Eagle Drive has been a subject of conversation since I began this project in June of 2016. Working with Union Pacific (UP) to find out if KDB can redo the mural and if the city can clean up the graffiti on the train trestle has been a long process that has finally been approved. Initially, the mural art committee wanted to do two quick projects that cost less on two pedestrian foot bridges, however, these projects were ultimately taking longer than expected and the backlash from the open call and lack of input from the community before the designs went through created many complications in completing these murals. The funding that was allocated for the two



Figure 11: Dallas Drive Underpass current mural (Google Maps)

proposed sites were then redirected to the funding for the Dallas Drive underpass (Figure 11). This project's initial estimated cost was \$10,000 and has since been raised to \$17,500. This site location, as I have previously mentioned, is considered more of an entrance to downtown, so KDB's investment in this site is much greater than other sites. Initial conversations about this site among mural art committee members about a potential theme showed the desire of KDB to have the least controversial themes possible. One committee member brought up the Latina/o population in that area and wondered if there should be 'bienvenidos' on the mural to represent the community in that neighborhood. Another committee member noted that they

did not want to upset anyone and if they had 'welcome' in Spanish then they would need to have multiple languages on there. Community murals traditionally reflect the community within the vicinity of the mural. While this mural is not a "community mural" in the sense that it is a group effort in the painting process, KDB notes on their website that "Artsclapes is a community beautification initiative, created to inspire civic pride..." ("Keep Denton Beautiful" 2017). One community member notes that murals should have relevance to the community or neighborhood and wonders what the relevance of some of the murals are. He notes, "I think though it needs to be something that comes from a community or like has relevance to a community sometimes otherwise it's just there for the sake of being there. Right? Like I think there needs to be intentionality and thought into it as opposed to like let's go get art and put it there."

In a post about the Artsclapes murals on the Keep Denton Beautiful Facebook page, a woman commented that she loved most of the murals, but hated the one on Bonnie Brae and Scripture. She wanted to know how she could become part of the committee to have a say in the selection process. While KDB was responding to the positive feedback comments, no one addressed this woman's comment. While it may seem like the mural arts committee is open to community members, perhaps it is much more selective about who can actually join this committee. This is evident in the fact that it is very difficult to find information about the committee unless you know what you are looking for. The website is difficult to navigate if you are trying to find anything about the mural art committee or the public murals that KDB has completed. In order to find the committee information you must go through 5 different pages before it says that the Special Project Committee focus for 2016 is Mural Projects. This still does

not give a lot of information about what the committee entails, and you must fill out an application to learn more about this. Additionally, the committee meetings are not well advertised and at a very inconvenient time for people who work during the day, according to my participants. Social capital contributed to how the committee members came to be on the committee and who can attend these meetings since they are at a time when most people are working during the week. The bulk of the committee is made up of government workers and small business owners that perhaps are able to leave during the day to attend a Wednesday meeting at 2:00 PM. Additionally, the mural committee has not been particularly diverse in the last 7 meetings I have attended. Typically the committee is made up of white females, and one white male. Although the designs for the Southeast Denton mural site location were brought to the neighborhood association meeting, the site potentially could have been completed if there were more community voices or diverse committee members involved in the mural committee meetings. Many participants noted that they would love to attend a mural committee meeting and participate in the community through something like that, but the time was too restrictive.

Despite the lack of accessibility given to the public to participate in the committee or mural selection process, many community members I spoke to thought the Artscapes initiative was a great way to raise the value of the community and the city and gave them a sense of community pride. The Sherman and Bell neighborhood had the highest number of participants in this study, compared to the other two field sites. Many of these participants noted that the Travis Sykes mural was their favorite because it reminded them of the natural world and it was refreshing to see nature incorporated in an area that would otherwise be just a concrete wall.

Each of the artists expressed that the murals were their way to contribute and give back to their community.

Travis Sykes noted that the inspiration from his mural came from being outside all of the time while growing up and said it was something that anyone can relate to:

I know what I had growing up and we had like yard of the month and you know everybody took pride in their little feeders and stuff, and like I said I was an outdoors kid all the time. The second I'd get home from school I'd be gone until 6 hours later...So that was just a reflection of my childhood more than anything and I wanted to give that back to everybody, because I think everybody can appreciate that kind of stuff. Because you see it every day and it's just...everybody's got some sort of tie to the natural world more than anything.

The SCRAP neighborhood had low level of participation compared to the Sherman and Bell mural, but one of the SCRAP employees noted that there are always people taking pictures in front of this mural. The artist noted that he has had positive feedback on this mural but he said that he typically keeps his work pretty light hearted and open to interpretation. Mick Burson discussed that his murals were a way to give art back to the community and let people who might not have interaction with art otherwise be able to interact with his murals. He notes:

If I'm going to do (art) for months and months at a time, it starts to feel like a selfish endeavor. Like, who am I to think that I have so much to say that I can just lock myself in a space and create this work constantly and this should be my contribution to the world? But when you contribute to that and show the work, it's still like this incestual pool of people who create work and people who view work and it doesn't actually reach farther than that to like the general public who normally wouldn't be able to interact with art. So with murals, it feels pretty pure. I don't really feel ownership over it at all, like it's not mine. I show up and I do paint, I do that and I really enjoy it but it's not mine and it's open to interpretation to the public and it can be whatever they want it to be for each individual person.

The Bonnie Brae and Scripture neighborhood had less participation, but many participants that did not necessarily live in that neighborhood were familiar with that mural as

well. Community members talked about the vibrancy of this mural and were happy to see it updated from the outdated looking University of North Texas themed one. Shay McAnally noted that he has had positive feedback in regards to his mural. The only times he heard anything negative about it was during the painting process in which a lane of traffic had to be closed in order to complete the mural, causing an already high-traffic area to become more congested. In this instance, the negative feedback is more in reference to the inconvenience of being stuck in traffic than the actual art itself. He notes that his mural was inspired by the rattlesnake mural on the side of the restaurant formally known as Sweetwater, which he believes was iconic to Denton. He noted:

My style has always been kind of integration of urban meets rural themes because I grew up on a cattle ranch---half between a cattle ranch and also in the city during the school year. I kind of had like two different worlds, so with the process for the Bonnie Brae mural I think I kind of tried to integrate the idea. I do a lot of stoic birds that are representative of all sorts of different aspects of human emotion and tradition but the snake for me was honestly the easiest thing to tie that wall together immediately and so I ran with that and kind of brought a bit of the west Texas themes to Denton. Denton's kind of interesting because it's still...you go anywhere around Denton like out in the country and there's still cactus and, you know, mesquite trees. There's still a bit of a feeling of like the wild west and then that meets the square or the universities. And you have such a great music scene. It's kind of like two worlds that are kind of melding together, you know?

Of the three mural artists, Shay is the only one that created a mural that brings in themes of Denton and has more intentionality.

Many participants identified Denton as a creative city, with a thriving arts community. They feel a sense of community pride through Denton public art and think that it separates Denton from any other city in the United States. The community members thought the *ArtsCAPES* initiative was a good way to beautify the city and hoped to see more in the future. One community member noted:

Well I think it's a difference of overall feel of Denton. It's going back to that town pride kind of thing, is embracing what Denton is and what it has been which is an artist community I think for awhile. I mean it's the reason my in-laws came to Denton to go to art school. So I mean there's been art and music as part of the fabric of Denton for a really long time and I think through the murals it's really embracing that.

However, participants recommended making the committee meetings at a more convenient time for a larger level of community engagement. Many participants expressed interest in being involved with something like the *Artscapes* initiative, but work during the day and would not be able to attend meetings. To continue to build community through the *Artscapes* initiative, involving community members in the site selection process would add a level of community engagement in addition to increasing the awareness of the *Artscapes* initiative. While many participants were already aware of Keep Denton Beautiful and some of the programs offered through the organization, many were not necessarily aware that the mural in their neighborhood was commissioned through KDB or that there were multiple murals done through this initiative.

Importance of Public Art

The murals have affected the community by creating a city that prides itself on supporting the arts. However, supporting public art needs to be recognized by KDB as giving the public the opportunity to bid for these sites. Being transparent about the mural project with the community is important and funding projects that support local artists ties into Lefebvre's concept of right to the city. With it being difficult to paint a public space without the permission from the city, the transparency and open call for the public is important to allow for any local artist to have the opportunity to bid for the site instead of hand-selecting an artist. This process

of hand selection continues to be the preferred procedure for the large scale project on Dallas Drive and Eagle. The roles that social and symbolic capital play are evident in the neighborhoods that currently have murals and get to enjoy them. These ideas also illuminate who has the ability to sit on the committee or know about the committee. As discussed earlier, symbolic capital references reputations and only exists in the eyes of others. I argue that symbolic capital is relevant to who has the ability to enjoy these murals without being seen as someone who is loitering. These murals are mostly enjoyed in fleeting moments instead of extended periods of time. The other three murals may not allow the user to leisurely spend time at these locations as a “flaneur” type figure, appreciating public art. A flaneur can be defined as “a figure who walks throughout the city, wandering through its streets, observing its population and enjoying the sights, sounds and smells” (Jaffe and Koning 2016:44). However, the ability of the flaneur to “move through the crowd anonymously, and his role as an observer rather than an object of surveillance, are dependent on his social privilege” (Jaffe and Koning 2016:44). With the two public murals in the residential neighborhoods, spending time by the murals may seem like loitering and make residents feel uncomfortable that people are outside of their home for extended periods of time. Jaffe and Koning (2016) note, “the ability to move freely and at one’s own pace often intersects with gendered and ethno-racial hierarchies...” which could be the case in some of these neighborhoods or mural locations (46). Ultimately these murals are to be appreciated in passing, however, invoking the concept of the flaneur and leisurely appreciating art can be problematic in these particular spaces which raises the question of who these murals are for and who has the symbolic capital to be able to enjoy them.

Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of capital (1986), social capital is evident in those who know about and serve on the mural committee. While all of these murals, especially the public ones, go through a process to become a reality, residents in the nearby areas may not be aware of the murals going up in their neighborhood. If they are aware of the mural, they might not have had a say in the selection process. According to mural committee members, they believe anyone can serve on the committee and participate in the decision making process for these murals. However, after talking with a few of the committee members, it seemed like they were hand selected by the program director of Keep Denton Beautiful to be on the committee. This raises questions of whether anyone can actually join the committee or if it is representative of the Denton community. In February of 2017, Keep Denton Beautiful held an 'open call' for artists to paint two new mural sites. In the past, artists were hand selected by committee members but changed their process after they were given feedback from artists who wished it was more open to the public so they could have the opportunity to bid for the sites. As a result, KDB created the open call, in which artists were asked to pay \$15 for each submission. This resulted in a Denton artist posting on the Keep Denton Beautiful Facebook page, insisting that they were exploiting young artists. He notes in a portion of this post that,

It is unethical to expect artists to create specific free submissions in order that they might WIN work. To require an entry fee, in addition, is an insult. Your contest pits artists against other artists and wastes their time creating art for which you will not pay. Be considerate of your community's artists. View their portfolios to commission them. Pay the industry standard for square footage. Realize you are paying for art duration and the number of views (like you would pay for an internet banner ad). You are not paying for the time it took to 'do it'. Stop thinking you are doing the artist a favor. Respect the talent.

After responding to the artist and inviting him to serve on the committee (which was unclear as to whether or not anyone could serve on the committee until this point), the post was hidden by KDB staff on their Facebook page.

However, the positive support for the Artscapes initiative serves to show the importance of working to incorporate public art into the city. One of the mural art committee members at KDB noted,

The mural art project has been probably one of the most popular projects we've probably ever done. Everyone likes trees and we give out a lot of trees but we've been doing that since 1999 and so people love that. But this has really been kind of a really unifying thing for the community. A lot of people like colorful art and they like to be able to observe it without having to go to museum and pay for it, go to a gallery and pay for it so now it's just sort of like every mans art

Many participants discussed the value of supporting local artists and giving back to the community. Participants often referenced the talent that comes out of Denton, especially with two major universities: The University of North Texas and Texas Women's University. The community members interviewed believed that Denton should support the local artists that come out of the universities and thought that public art kept Denton from feeling monotonous and made the city more aesthetically pleasing. Participants would reference murals as keeping Denton more unique, especially with the Razor Ranch expansion, a newer development with multiple chain restaurants and stores. They thought the murals were a good conversation piece and helped to eliminate boring concrete spaces with vibrant art. All participants identified public art as being very important in the Denton community. They believed it set Denton apart and provided space for the city to celebrate the arts. This was primarily tied to supporting public art locally and is evident in discussions about the importance of celebrating the diverse,

creative, and artistic community in Denton. When asked how important public art was, one community member noted:

I would say very important. I mean just in terms of my mental well-being, to see art as I'm going through my daily motions, it like kind of restores my faith in humanity, *laughs* I know that sounds really ridiculous but you know I'm going around and I'm like "There are amazing things going on in my community. There are talented people here and they are sharing their gift with me. This is really cool." So I think it's really important. I do. I think that it's important to live in an environment that is pleasing on multiple fronts and aesthetics is part of that.

Many participants identify Denton as a 'creative city', with a thriving arts community. They feel a sense of community through things like public art and thinks that it separates the city from being just 'Anywhere, USA'. A community member notes, "I think if we have all of these open, blank spaces, why not make them interesting? I think it helps make our community vibrant, helps make walking and biking a little more enjoyable, and it celebrates the arts in our community. Anywhere. Everywhere. Throw 'em up." Recently, the city of Denton's website has began marketing on the idea that Denton is unique and the pride that Denton residents take in their city. An employee of the Denton Convention and Visitors Bureau and mural committee members notes, "obviously Keep Denton Beautiful is an initiative that's important to us simply because...our task is to market the city as a destination and so having a beautiful city is vital to being successful in that endeavor, and not only successful in the marketing side but in the delivery side when somebody does get here, do they find what we say they'll find? Which is this creative artistic expressive community with unique character." The beautification of the city through murals is vital to the marketing of Denton as a creative and artsy city.

Localism

While not everyone stressed the importance of local artists, many participants believed supporting the arts in Denton meant supporting local artists. Having local artists paint murals expands the cultural capital in the community, in which supporting local artists can be tied to the pride that the community members feel for their community and the way they appreciate the city. Participants discussed the murals as synonymous with supporting local artists and creating community pride among Denton residents. One participant noted:

I think, nothing against artists from other places, but local artists have a pride for our town and know our town and that's what we...I don't know what they want from it but I imagine that it would be you know to show the diversity of Denton and to be, since it's going to be a part of Denton for a long time to really have the, someone local should. I know you know what I'm trying to say, it's hard for me to get it across so just hold on one second. To show the diversity of our city and to really like give our...it's town pride. It's town pride.

As noted on the KDB Website, “for nearly three decades, we have partnered with Denton neighborhoods, businesses, community groups, and families to achieve our vision of a clean, beautiful, vibrant city.” As a community based organization, I think it is important to consider local artists first when completing a new mural. However, one community member said in reference to the kinds of murals she would like to see more of, “Maybe something Denton-y, I don't want like the courthouse....I love the courthouse and don't get me wrong...But I don't want it to be contrived. You know what I mean? I would like to see a little creativity”. So despite the importance of public art stressed by the community and the idea of localism, community members do not necessarily want a mural with a subject matter that is over done, like more paintings of the courthouse on the square.

One of the points brought up in a mural art committee meeting was whether the open call to artists should be extended to Dallas-Fort Worth or even state-wide, or if it should be kept local, meaning Denton County artists only. In 2012, Olympic legacy murals in London were met with outrage due to the fact that it replaced local artists work with international work, in what local artists called “gentrified graffiti”. Artists who had worked in this area for several years were upset and believed it went against the “spirit of street art” and “takes away the authenticity”, especially since they did not include any local artists on these commissioned projects (Wainwright 2013). All of the previous mural artists for Keep Denton Beautiful have lived and worked in Denton. Even within the private mural sphere, there are always a few local artists names that repeatedly come up. One of the reasons for this might be, as one of the artists noted, is that taggers know those artists and respect their artwork. There are obviously exceptions to this, but typically the response is not of whether there is an issue with people graffitiing over the murals. More likely, tagging is going to happen where there is no artwork.

CHAPTER 5

DELIVERABLES

The deliverables that I presented to my client at the conclusion of this research included a client report detailed with my site descriptions, methods, emergent themes from the results and recommendations for future murals. Additionally, I presented the client with quotes from participants on the importance of public art and argued that the future muralists should be local to the Denton area, pulling quotes from my participants to support this. The following four recommendations were given in the client report and presented to the KDB Board of Directors. They are based on the resulting themes from the analysis of the data: community, the importance of public art, and localism. Each of these themes ties in with one another and show the importance of the Artscapes initiative in the Denton community.

First, committee meetings should be held at a more convenient time than 2:00 PM on a Wednesday. Community members recommended making the committee meetings at a more convenient time for a larger level of community engagement. Overall, the community members thought the Artscapes initiative was a good way to beautify the city and hoped to see more in the future. Many participants noted that they thought joining something like the mural art committee would be a good way to get involved with their community, especially with something like public art. However, many participants noted that the committee meetings were at inconvenient times during the work week. I recommend either moving the committee meetings to the evenings or weekends so more people have the opportunity to serve on special committees. However, if moving the time of the committee meeting is not an option, I recommend at least making the committee meeting information (such as meeting minutes)

more accessible on the KDB website so it is easier to learn how community members can get involved and what the mural committee meeting entails.

Second, I recommend holding an open call for mural sites instead of mural artists. This way, in the event that community members cannot join or attend mural committee meetings, they have a say on where they would like to see a future mural in Denton. I believe this would allow community members to be more involved with where they want murals in their community and could avoid situations like the potential mural site for the Southeast Denton neighborhood where the community did not want a mural at the location selected by the committee and offered a site they actually did want to have a mural completed.

Third, the mural art committee should give preference to local Denton or regional artists over artists across the nation. The murals can support the community by creating a city that prides itself on supporting the arts. Many participants discussed the value of supporting local artists and giving back to the community. References to the talent that comes out of the two universities in Denton: University of North Texas and Texas Women's University. The community members interviewed believed that Denton should support the local artists that come out of the universities and thought that it kept Denton feeling less monotonous and more aesthetically pleasing. They thought the murals were a good conversation piece and helped to eliminate boring concrete spaces with vibrant art. Opening the call nation-wide would be met with backlash since many participants discussed the importance of local artists. I think the community would be much more willing to donate or support a project that is going to be given to a local artist or an artist with ties to Denton. Community members want to know that they are supporting their community and might be more willing to help fund the mural if they know

that their money will be supporting a Denton artist. All of the participants believed that public art was extremely important to the Denton community and this is evident in the quotes pulled for the committee in the PowerPoint presentation.

Lastly, I recommend looking at demographic and historical neighborhood information before going forward with a mural project to better understand the community members in each area. By looking at demographic characteristics of the neighborhood, the history, and talking with active neighborhood organizations, the mural committee could better understand the communities wants and desires for public art in their neighborhood. Southeast Denton residents argued that these murals had nothing to do with their neighborhood and that if a mural was going to go up that it should have historical significance or be reflective of the community. In their opinion, the designs could be put up anywhere. More importantly they believed that if a mural was going to be completed in their neighborhood, it should represent the historical struggle of Southeast Denton residents. By learning information about a neighborhood and working with neighborhood organizations, the process and results could be more inclusive of community members.

Overall the recommendations aim to bridge some of the gaps and tensions between the goals of the Artscapes project, the expectations of community members, artists and committee members, and the publics that may be unintentionally excluded as Artscapes is made a reality in Denton. The inclusion of transparency for community members could help with backlash received from the public after the failed open call for the two scrapped mural locations. By working with community members and researching neighborhood areas, as discussed in my recommendations, the Artscapes initiative could create a less exclusive process. This can also

be achieved by my recommendation to have committee meetings at more convenient times to allow for a more diverse committee or being more transparent on the website about the mural committee. Opening the call for mural locations would also allow for more community input and transparency from KDB and help to disassemble boundaries unintentionally created by this initiative.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

When I began this project, I was concerned that it was not going to be applied or theoretical enough. Throughout the course of this project, I began to see different questions emerge from my research and wish I had been able to explore things further. My initial project design had to be amended due to the lack of participants in two of the three neighborhoods. My initial plan was to go door-to-door and recruit participants that way. However, I realized quickly that people do not necessarily want to open their door to strangers; And if they did open their door, they did not necessarily want to talk about public art. The process of amending my IRB application to allow me to solicit interviews on the Keep Denton Beautiful Facebook page took a little longer than I anticipated. However, I was able to get a few more interviews from this post which made it a little easier for recruitment.

I think it would have been interesting to talk to more local artists, specifically about public art instead of focusing just on the Keep Denton Beautiful murals. This could have been beneficial to understand the greater public art scene in Denton and could help guide KDB in their future projects. However, I believe that the information I presented to KDB was still valuable and helped guide my recommendations for their future projects.

My initial interest in this project came from my background as an artist. I spent all of high school in advanced placement art classes and initially came to the University of North Texas as a communication design major in the College of Visual Arts and Design. While I do not have experience as a public artist, I share a love for having art that is accessible in my community. I eventually changed my major to anthropology and graduated from Texas State

University before coming back to the University of North Texas and joining the applied anthropology graduate program. I wanted to integrate my love for the arts into my project and spent a lot of time figuring out how I could focus on art and anthropology for my thesis project. I believe having a background as an artist gives me a unique perspective within this project and has helped guide my project in a direction that is beneficial for the client and the community. As I developed this project, I wish I had the opportunity to speak to more artists about their murals around Denton, since there are so many but do to IRB limitations and time restrictions, this was not possible at the time. Throughout the course of this research, I have come to realize the importance of community input and being connected to a community. When I started the program, I was worried that because I was interested in working locally that I was not really doing anthropology. Additionally, I felt that my project was also not valid because I was researching art, an underrepresented topic in anthropology from a community standpoint. I sometimes felt that my research was not as impactful as some of my peers or wondered if it would really make a difference. A lot of times, when I would talk about my research I would get questions about what I planned to do with this research in terms of a job. Having already dealt with many people thinking that it was a waste of time to get a degree with anthropology, a lot of people will see the value of anthropology with a project that has a lot of impact such as working as a medical anthropologist or as an environmental anthropologist. However, when you tell people you are researching the impact of public art, many times you are met with “Oh, that’s nice. What do you want to do with that?” because, unless we discuss further the impact of public art and community engagement through visual representation, they see art as irrelevant. Throughout this project and my time in graduate school, I have come to learn that

practicing anthropology locally can be a vital part of the community. I think being immersed in your local community gives anthropologists insight since they are already members of that community. My fears of not being a “real” anthropologist because I was not working in a culture different than my own, have been eased after my time spent working as an applied anthropologist in my community.

Additionally, I felt fear of legitimacy researching a topic on the subject of public art. The scholarship within anthropology tends to focus on critiques of art or artists without focusing much on the content. This work on the public discourse about public art, specifically murals, is not unique within anthropology but it is small. I think this fear goes back to not feeling like a real anthropologist and seeing that most of the literature was coming out of sociology or art education. Even then, though, these pieces were primarily focused on utilizing murals as part of a community-led project. Though the Artscapes initiative is not necessarily community-led in terms of multiple members of the community coming together to create a mural, it is community-led in the sense that all of the members that sit on the mural art committee are part of the community. I did not find any anthropological pieces that focused on the type of research I was doing. Breaking new ground in this sense, while exciting, added an additional layer of stress and self-doubt.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDES

Single Participant Interview Questions for Community Members

- 1.) Can you tell me about the mural in your neighborhood?
- 2.) How important is public art to you?
 - a. How important is having a local artist paint the mural?
- 3.) Are you familiar with other murals besides the one in your neighborhood?
- 4.) How long have you lived in this neighborhood? In Denton?
- 5.) Have you noticed graffiti in your neighborhood?
 - a. If yes, where is the graffiti? How do you feel/what do you think about the graffiti?
 - b. If no, was there graffiti before the mural went up?
 - c. In your opinion how have murals deterred graffiti (if at all) in your neighborhood
- 6.) Do you have a favorite mural in Denton? Why?
- 7.) What kinds of murals would you like to see more of?
 - a. Or where would you like to see a mural?
- 8.) How do the murals reflect the Denton community? (if at all)
- 9.) Were you familiar with Keep Denton Beautiful?
 - a. With their mural art initiative?
 - b. Did you know there was a committee you could serve on?
- 10.) Do you have any affiliation with the art community in Denton? (e.g. you are an artist, you donate to or support the arts, you have a background in art/art history/design, etc.)
- 11.) What affect do you think murals have on Denton/your neighborhood?
- 12.) Would you have liked a say in the mural that went up in your neighborhood or more information about it (if you did not)?

Single Participant Interview Questions for Mural Artists

- 1) How long have you been creating art? Murals?
- 2) Can you walk me through the process of creating the mural at (insert Denton location)?
- 3) How long did it take/how did you decide on a design?
 - a. Was the design influenced by the site location?
 - b. Did you get a say in the location?
- 4) What are some of your major influences artistically?
 - a. Did they influence the mural you created?
- 5) What were the responses to your mural?
 - a. How was your mural received?
- 6) Was your mural site previously a high-prone graffiti area?
- 7) How did you find out about Keep Denton Beautiful's mural initiative?
- 8) How long have you lived in Denton? (Or how long did you live in Denton?)
- 9) What was the process like to become a mural artist?

Single Participant Interview Questions for Mural Committee Members:

- 1) How did you get involved with the Mural Committee?
- 2) How are the artists selected?
- 3) What is the process like of finding a site for a mural? (In reference to the Scrap building, did they approach you about a mural or was it the other way around?)
- 4) How much does it typically cost to fund a mural?
- 5) What do you look for artists when discussing a new mural?
- 6) How do you select the design of the murals? How do the designs of the murals reflect the neighborhood or community?
 - a. are they representative of the Denton community?
 - b. Of Keep Denton Beautiful?
- 7) How are high prone graffiti areas identified? Are the areas chosen for the mural so far high-prone graffiti areas?
- 8) Have previous KDB murals been graffitied over ever?

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT FLYER



PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

(Must be 18 years or older)

I'd love to talk to about the mural in your neighborhood!

I am a graduate student at the University of North Texas conducting a study with Keep Denton Beautiful that seeks the following:

- * Understand the impact of existing murals in the Denton community.
- * Increase awareness of Keep Denton Beautiful's Artscapes initiative
- * Discover ways to better align future mural projects with the needs and desires of Denton community members.

If you would like to learn more about this project and participate in an interview please contact me:

Lindsey Robertson

(xxx) xxx-xxxx

Lindsey.Robertson@unt.edu

Thank you!

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