



Centre de recherche et d'expertise
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THE ART HIVE AS A “FRAME OF BELONGING” FOR OLDER ADULTS

UQTR



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NECESSITY OF BELONGING



- Defined as "**personal involvement in a system or environment** so that persons **feel themselves to be an integral part** of that system or environment" (Hagerty et al. (1992, p. 173).
- Belonging is a **fundamental human need** (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

NECESSITY OF BELONGING

- A sense of belonging is a key factor that contributes to the **wellbeing** of older adults (Nolan, 2011).
- Older adults who report a strong sense of belonging believe they have the **necessary coping skills to survive** during times of crisis (Kissane & McLaren, 2006).



FACTORS AFFECTING BELONGING

- While isolation and loneliness affect people of all ages, there is **link between age and loneliness** (Courtin and Knapp, 2017; Toepoel, 2013).
- **Loneliness may increase with age** due to reduced social networks, decreased economic resources and changes in family structures (Courtin & Knapp, 2017).



FACTORS AFFECTING BELONGING

- Life experiences more common in older age (e.g., widowhood) contribute to an **increasing number of older adults living alone** (Kissane & McLaren, 2006).
- Living alone puts individuals at a **disadvantage in terms of social interactions** that can contribute to their sense of belonging (Angus Reid Institute, 2019).



THE ROLE OF LEISURE SPACES IN SUPPORTING BELONGING

- Leisure experiences provide older adults with **feelings of enjoyment, pleasure, and social support**, all of which tend to increase their sense of belonging (Mthembu et al., 2015).



THE ROLE OF LEISURE SPACES IN SUPPORTING BELONGING



- By offering opportunities for **social interaction, friendship, and feelings of self-worth**, leisure spaces have been found to be a **safeguard against social isolation** in older adulthood (Aday et al., 2006).

- While community leisure spaces have an important role to play with regard to supporting older adults' sense of belonging, **it is not clear what helps to support belonging** within these spaces.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Our research focused on **older adults' experiences in three different art hives** located in Montreal. The following research questions guided our study:

1. What are the **meanings and experiences of belonging** for older adults who participate in art hives?
2. In what ways does an art hive **create a space where one feels included** and experiences a sense of belonging?

ART HIVES

- Art Hives are **free and inclusive** community art spaces.
- Designed as **'public home places'** (Belenky et al., 1997), art hives **welcome individuals of different socio-economic backgrounds, ages, cultures and abilities to come and participate in art making together.**



ART HIVES

- Art hives are democratic in nature and **everyone shares the dual role of teacher/student**, all learning from one another in different ways (Timm-Bottos, 2006).



METHODOLOGY

- **Data collection** at each of **the three art hives** consisted of participant observation, arts-based projects, focus groups and individual interviews.
- As part of the arts-based methodology, participants were **invited to make art**, individually or collectively, **that depicted a sense of belonging**.



PARTICIPANTS

- **Nineteen older adults** participated in the study (16 women and 3 men).
- Most participants were **over age 65** and either **retired** from work or not working because of health issues or disability.
- Many participants spoke about **living alone in subsidized housing**.
- Participants were **diverse** in terms of **cultural background** and **languages** spoken.

FINDINGS

We identified **four themes** that capture how art hives become spaces of belonging for older adults:

1. **Needing social spaces.**
2. Being **welcomed** into a **nonjudgmental** space.
3. Coming for **more than just the art.**
4. Creating a **shared space.**

NEEDING SOCIAL SPACES



“Over the winter I felt I really needed [the art hive] actually. I felt really depressed and out of sorts and I thought, I need something to pick me up. And it really did pick me up”.

– Linda

“ ...I tend to isolate myself a little bit. So it was very good for me in that sense because it got me out, it got me socializing, it got me even back into doing some artwork”.

- Sarah

NEEDING SOCIAL SPACES



“I’m really glad to have this place to need to go to – and I mean to need to go to. I really feel like I should be going....I’m alone so I need to get out”. – Veronique

“I’m not working anymore but work also had a sense of belonging for me. Now that work is gone, it’s about going out to see where else I can be part of something”.

- Reggie

BEING WELCOMED

“Here, each time a person comes, we’re all happy to welcome [them]. So, even if you don’t feel good and you come on Thursday, you feel great because it’s like people are waiting for you”.

- Joan

“There is a sense of belonging in this room because we are all here together working. That sense of belonging carries out because people get up, talk, encourage each other. It’s a very nice feeling here”.

- Farah



BEING WELCOMED



“It’s a place where I can walk in and just plug myself in. I probably feel more like I belong there than many other places. A great part of it is a social aspect....no expectations....it’s nice that I don’t feel I’m being judged. No one’s judging anybody, you know”?

- Sarah

COMING FOR MORE THAN JUST THE ART



“I enjoy the collaboration – for me it’s one of the strongest expressions of belonging....I don’t know if I move more toward the people or more toward the activity, I think it’s both”.

Veronique

“I think just being here together, just like a painting has a frame, this [space] is the frame of belonging”.

- Farah

COMING FOR MORE THAN JUST THE ART



“At the art hive, it's loose. You can stop whenever you want. You can start whenever. You don't even have to make art.... There's one elderly woman from the residence who just does puzzles”.

- Rebecca

CREATING A SHARED SPACE



“I feel like the space belongs to everybody and we all have to participate in making it a pleasant place. We need to tidy up or whatever because it is for everybody and we have to make sure the place is respected”.

– Christa

“What I like the most is when people bring their children....I love that. I went to Salvation Army and got some toys. Everybody is using them”.

- Martine

CREATING A SHARED SPACE



... "He stays to clean up and I noticed he just started thanking people for showing up and for participating and he just sort of took on that role without being asked to. He really was one of the ones that you saw change happen the most, where he went from being this shy, tentative person to this involved person."

- Rebecca

KEY INSIGHTS

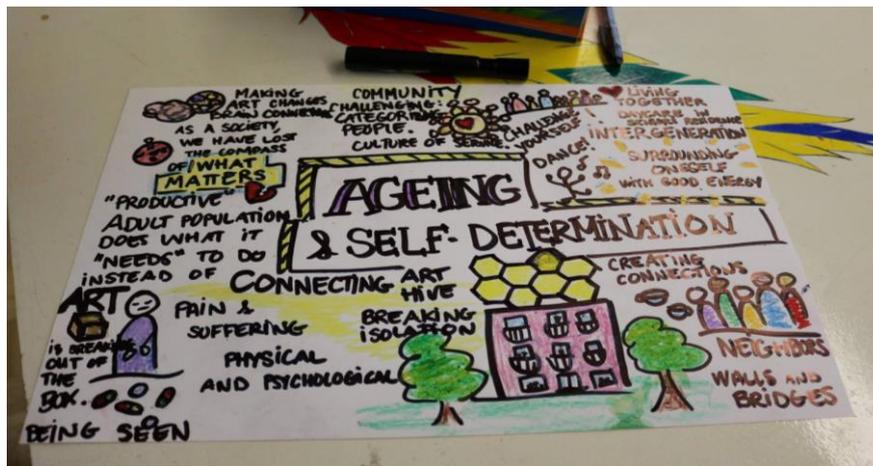
- Constructing social spaces **within the residential buildings** helps to **alleviate barriers** related to transportation and mobility.
- The **cost of participating** is a commonly identified barrier to being in community leisure spaces.
- Art hives become **more accessible to more people** because they are spaces individuals can enter **free of charge**.
- Spaces are more likely to be **welcoming** and contribute to belonging when they are **free from judgment** and are designed to be **flexible** in terms of their use.

IMPLICATIONS

- Some ways to **create welcoming leisure spaces** include:
 - Extending **invitations**.
 - Offering **hospitality**.
 - **Learning about** people who come and **personally greeting** them.
 - **Discovering** people's **interests and abilities** to help **support connections** based on shared interests.

METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHT

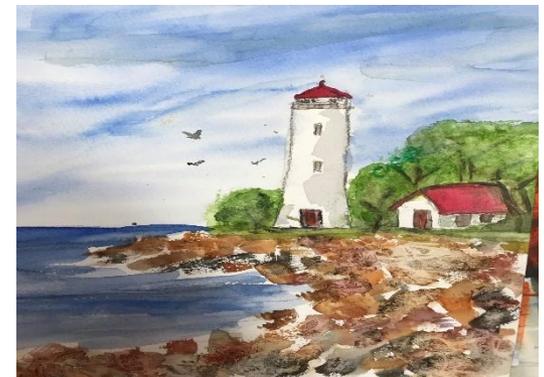
- We learned not underestimate the **value of self-determination** as a key component of the art hive experience.
- Some work on the **same project** over **multiple art hive visits** and often **immerse themselves** in their projects.
- Some who **come** to the art hive **regularly** do so **to socialize** rather than to make art.
- Some prefer the **unstructured nature** of the art hive and do not want to follow a pre-determined agenda.





Contact and conversation
remind us of our common humanity,
particularly when they happen recurrently,
*and when they involve **shared passions and interests.***

(Klinenberg, 2018, p.176).



CONCLUDING REMARKS



- Art hives are prime examples of spaces that **support recurrent contact and conversation** while **igniting shared passions and interests**.
- We cannot afford to overlook the **contribution** such spaces can make to **belonging, particularly for older adults** who may be susceptible to social isolation and loneliness.
- **Understanding** ways older adults **experience belonging** within these spaces can help **guide the creation of more spaces** that can **support belonging**.

We would like to thank:



- The **participants** who generously gave their time to this study
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