



DESIGNING PERFORMING ARTS' CENTRES AS COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE: ARCHITECTURAL STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT IN UDI, ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Performing arts facilities are increasingly expected to serve functions beyond the presentation of scheduled performances. Their spatial organisation can influence social interaction, cultural participation and the extent to which a cultural building becomes part of everyday community life. This study examines the role of architecture in promoting community engagement through performing arts and identifies design strategies relevant to a multi-functional performing arts centre in Udi, Enugu State, Nigeria. The study adopts a qualitative systematic literature review guided by PRISMA principles. Relevant literature was identified through multiple academic databases and screened using predefined eligibility criteria. The selected studies were thematically analysed to examine relationships among architectural design, public space, flexibility, accessibility, cultural participation and community engagement. The review shows that community engagement is strengthened when performing arts facilities combine socially active public spaces, flexible and multi-functional environments, physical and visual accessibility, and strong connections between performance spaces and everyday public life. The findings further indicate that cultural buildings are more likely to function as community hubs when they accommodate informal activities alongside formal performances.

Keywords: Community Engagement; Performing Arts Centre's; Cultural Infrastructure; Architectural Design; Public Space.

Introduction

Performing arts have always been more than just entertainment, they've played a vital part in social and cultural life. Live cultural practice, including theatre, music, dance, storytelling and others, offers more than just entertainment; it is a space for collective expression, shared experience and the negotiation of cultural identity. Recent research on cultural participation also suggests that engagement with the arts can foster social connection and wellbeing, although the benefits and patterns of participation vary across social groups and geographical contexts. (Lerouge and Prieto-Rodriguez, 2026). Architecturally, this demonstrates the significance of the environments in which cultural activities are performed. This means that the spaces within which cultural activities are located are not neutral containers, since the spatial organization can influence who enters, how people move and interact, what activity they encounter and how integrated a cultural facility is into everyday community life.

The connection between architectural and community engagement is especially relevant in the design of contemporary performing arts facilities. Auditoriums, which are designed for such use, may be used efficiently for scheduled events but are idle much of the day. Cultural facilities that include accessible public spaces, informal gathering spaces and activities beyond ticketed performances, in contrast, can support a broader and more sustained pattern of use. Thus, such buildings can be places that communities visit on occasion, rather than spaces that are part of their everyday social and cultural life. Contemporary approaches to cultural infrastructure increasingly challenge this model by recognising the potential of cultural buildings to accommodate a wider range of activities including rehearsals, exhibitions,

workshops, education, festivals, informal gatherings and community events. This represents a shift from the performing arts center being seen as a performance venue only to becoming a community infrastructure.

Architecture can support this transition by creating spatial conditions that invite interaction and participation. Public plazas, courtyards, foyers, terraces, outdoor performance spaces and other socially active environments can provide opportunities for people to gather even when there is no formal performance occurring. Likewise, flexible and multi-purpose spaces can be accessed by different groups for a range of cultural, educational and social activities. Accessibility and welcoming thresholds can reduce physical and psychological barriers to participation, and visual and spatial connections between public areas and cultural production can increase the accessibility of artistic activities. The architectural problem therefore is not only to provide the necessary rooms and facilities, but to create relationships between spaces which allow people to approach, enter, meet, observe, interact and participate at different levels.

Research on cultural production and urban placemaking is moving toward a conception of cultural institutions, creative activity and public space as interdependent rather than separate systems (Ryberg-Webster et al., 2024; Bertacchini and Pazzola, 2022). This change provides an architectural exploration of how the spatial organization of a performing arts center can encourage a community to use the building as part of its social and cultural life, not just to attend performances. The challenge is most acute in communities with a lively cultural scene but a lack of purpose-built infrastructure. The performing arts, festivals, music, dance and other cultural practices are identified as key components of community life in Nigeria, where Udi is a part of (Onyia, 2026). Onyia (2026), also demonstrated the need to connect cultural practices with practical spatial strategies rather than treating architecture and cultural participation as separate concerns.

Udi Local Government Area in Enugu State, Nigeria, provides a relevant context in which to examine this relationship between architecture, cultural participation and community engagement. The existing scholarship provides useful but fragmented insights into this problem of lack of dedicated multi-functional arts and performance center that can accommodate traditional and contemporary activities within a single integrated facility. The same was the case with Udi Local Government. The architectural problem that results is not just the lack of an auditorium. The problem is the lack of a spatial framework to accommodate rehearsals, exhibitions, workshops, informal gathering, formal performances and other forms of cultural participation.

The literature on public space focuses on accessibility, permeability, comfort and the social opportunities that spatial design offers. The literature on cultural and creative places emphasises the potential of artistic activity to contribute to placemaking and community life. Research on performing arts buildings, however, is often concerned with the technical and functional requirements of the building, e.g. quality of performance, acoustics, audience accommodation, and production facilities. The gap is currently working on uniting these strands into an architectural framework that accounts for how performing arts centers can be deliberately designed as spaces of community engagement. Therefore, this study is to explore the ability of architecture to influence the community engagement through performing arts and to discover the spatial design strategies for a multi-functional performing arts center in Udi, Enugu State. The study makes two principal contributions. First, it synthesises insights from literature on architectural design, public space, cultural infrastructure and community engagement to highlight common spatial conditions that can foster participation in performing arts environments. Secondly, it converts these conditions into context-sensitive architectural strategies for a multifunctional performing arts center in Udi and possibly other semi-urban communities with similar cultural and infrastructural conditions. In this way, the study

supports the argument that the Performing Arts Center should be considered not only as a venue for scheduled performances but also as a hybrid cultural and community environment where architecture creates the physical conditions for repeated interaction, participation and cultural exchange.

The central argument of this article is that an architecture that is seen as an active social framework and not a specialised container for performances makes a performing arts center more effective in supporting community engagement. This implies design strategies that combine open public space, flexibility, accessibility and spatial integration. This reasoning is consistent with the findings of the thesis which identified cultural continuity, spatial flexibility, accessibility and community integration as the main themes connecting architecture and engagement.

Literature Review

Architecture as a framework for social interaction

Architectural environments are not socially neutral, and to be effective, spatial arrangements must respond to the patterns of interaction, participation and socio-cultural expectations of users (Irouke et al., 2026). It shapes community life by building on the way architecture organises proximity, movement, visibility and opportunities for encounter. People do not interact in a spatial vacuum. The conditions in which interaction is possible are determined by circulation patterns, thresholds, seating, sightlines, entrances and the relationship between indoor and outdoor areas. This is why scholarship on public space has increasingly moved beyond the simple provision of open areas to questions concerning the connection, experience, maintenance and social meaningfulness of spaces (Carmona, 2021).

In this view, community engagement should not be reduced to participation in consultations or formal decision-making. In cultural architecture engagement also refers to repeated social presence, informal interaction, artistic participation and relationship formation around shared activities. The arts can contribute to these processes in which cultural venues provide opportunities for audiences, practitioners and residents to occupy shared spaces in different ways. For example, research on urban cultural production has demonstrated how cultural activity can foster placekeeping and civic engagement when linked to local communities, rather than functioning merely as a tool for prestige-driven development (Bertacchini and Pazzola, 2022; Ryberg-Webster et al., 2024).

This perspective has immediate consequences for architecture of the performing arts. The architectural triumph of such a facility cannot be measured exclusively in terms of the quality of its stage or auditorium. A building may be technically excellent for formal performance, but socially inaccessible or estranged from the daily life of its context. Another choice is a multi-purpose building that can be used on a daily basis and that can provide access to culture. The thesis review reached a similar conclusion: built environments are social frameworks structuring movement, gathering and interaction, rather than simply physical structures accommodating activity.

Performing arts centres as community infrastructure

The concept of cultural infrastructure is useful in that it expands the role of a performing arts center beyond its main program. A facility that is community-oriented can serve as a space for rehearsals, workshops, exhibitions, festivals, education and informal social use as well as formal performances. This diversity is particularly critical in a situation where a single facility

may be expected to serve users of different ages, interests and levels of engagement in the arts. The ability to host multiple uses can therefore affect whether a cultural building is active throughout the day and year or remains reliant on a limited program of events. The thesis findings also identified multi-functionality as a key requirement for performing arts facilities seeking to operate as community hubs.

Another increasingly important theme in recent scholarship is the link between cultural participation and place. The effectiveness of built environments is also influenced by how much users' experiences and community needs are recognised in planning and design processes (Irouke, Agwu, & Okoyeh, 2026). Studies on creative industries and cultural production have highlighted the relevance of accessible places to create belonging and collective cultural activity. For example, Haarman's recent work on creative industries and placemaking in Accra, highlights ways in which creative activity can be embedded within wider practices of building belonging and negotiating access to public space (Michael, 2024). The urban and institutional context is different from Udi but the underlying lesson is relevant: cultural participation is partly dependent on the availability of places where people can encounter one another, develop networks and move between formal and informal forms of creative activity.

In semi-urban contexts, the community role of a performing arts center may be even more pronounced given the often-limited availability of specialised cultural infrastructure. A multi-functional facility can at least partially combine functions that would otherwise take place in scattered or temporary venues. But the concentration of activities in one building does not necessarily mean engagement. The architecture must remain open to the surrounding community and not create hard boundaries between performers, audiences and everyday users. The case studies conducted for the thesis supported this point. The examples that were more community-oriented and accessible to the public were associated with higher levels of engagement, whereas rigid spatial organization limited adaptability and everyday use.

Public space as the social interface of the cultural building

The significance of public space to the argument of this article is that it acts as a mediator between the specialised functions of a performing arts center and the wider community. Plazas, courtyards, foyers, terraces and outdoor performance areas can support planned activities, but they can also host the unscripted encounters that make a cultural facility feel socially accessible. Such spaces have a particular importance when they are considered as places in themselves, and not as residual spaces around the main building.

Carmona (2021) argues that the success of public space is not only about how it looks, but also about access, use, management and the ability to cater for different users. This has implications for cultural buildings. A generous plaza that is hard to enter, poorly connected or seldom activated may contribute little to engagement. By contrast, a small but well related court or foyer can become an important social setting if it can provide for sitting, waiting, meeting, informal performance or other everyday activities. The thesis findings also identified plazas, courtyards, foyers and outdoor performance areas as important settings for both planned and spontaneous interaction.

Recent scholarship on arts, heritage and urban contexts also supports the need for understanding cultural activity in relation to public life. Intersections between the arts, placemaking and civic engagement are identified by Ryberg-Webster et al. (2024), while Matarese and Bombonato (2025) describe the continuing community role of the Sydney Opera House as a heritage site and performing arts center. The examples are vastly different in size and resources from the proposed Udi facility, but they illustrate a larger principle: that the cultural value of a great performing arts building is enhanced when the physical and social

presence of the institution extends beyond the event itself.

For Udi, this principle suggests that the public realm should be part of the architectural program, not a secondary landscape treatment. The approach, entrance sequence and exterior gathering spaces of the building could become sites for festivals, informal performances, meetings and everyday interaction. This type of approach is particularly relevant when considering the context of the thesis, because the research identified cultural activities that have historically taken place in communal and adaptable settings. Therefore, a contemporary facility should not substitute participatory cultural practices with a solely formalised building type. Instead, it should provide a spatial framework that can support both organised performance and the more informal rhythms of community life.

Flexibility, accessibility and spatial integration

Flexibility is another critical dimension of community-oriented cultural architecture. A space designed around a single mode of performance may operate effectively for that purpose but remain unsuitable for workshops, exhibitions, training or community events. Flexible spatial organisation allows activities to change over time and can make a facility more responsive to variations in programme and participation. The thesis review repeatedly identified adaptability as an important strategy, including the use of multi-purpose halls, movable seating and layouts capable of accommodating different forms of activity.

Accessibility takes this argument further by asking who can really use the facility. Physical access is important but social accessibility is equally important. It is possible, technically, for a building to comply with access requirements yet still send the message that some users do not belong. This can be mitigated by welcoming entrances, understandable circulation, visible activities and a mixture of free or low-threshold spaces. Thus, inclusive design must be considered as a social as well as a physical condition. In particular, the thesis findings identified physical accessibility and social openness as being necessary to widen participation. Spatial integration links these problems. When public spaces, circulation routes and performance functions are deliberately related, the boundary between everyday activity and formal cultural production is less rigid. Visitors to the building might come across exhibitions, see rehearsals through visual links or simply remain in public areas before and after events. This does not mean we reveal all functions or compromise backstage requirements. Instead, it points to architecture's capacity to generate graduated transitions between public and specialised spaces. The thesis identified the integration of public and performance spaces as a key strategy to encourage interaction and participation. To summarise, these principles imply that community engagement is best understood as an architectural outcome that is driven by several mutually reinforcing conditions. Open public space can provide the opportunity for gathering, flexibility can accommodate a range of activities and groups, accessibility can improve participation, and spatial integration can link specialised performance functions with everyday community life. The challenge is to combine such conditions into a single architectural framework, rather than use them as independent design components.

Research methodology

The article uses a qualitative systematic literature review to explore the link between architectural design and community engagement in performing arts environments. The review was based on the broader systematic literature review undertaken for the parent thesis which used PRISMA principles to enhance transparency for the identification, screening and selection of relevant studies. The current article, therefore, focuses that wider review on the fourth research objective and synthesises evidence relevant to architecture, public space,

cultural participation, accessibility, flexibility and community engagement.

The parent review searched a range of academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar. Search terms combined concepts around performing arts, cultural architecture, community engagement, public participation and spatial design. Studies were screened against pre-specified inclusion and exclusion criteria. The wider process identified 140 records, 110 studies remained after removing duplicates and initial screening, 70 full texts were evaluated for eligibility, and 30 studies were kept for final synthesis.

The literature was thematically interpreted for the present article, not as a summary of individual publications. This was necessary as the aim was not to list the previous studies but to identify the spatial relationships that are repeated and translate them into architectural implications. The analysis thus concentrated on four recurrent dimensions: public space and social interaction; flexibility and multi-functionality; accessibility and inclusion; and integration between public and performance spaces. These dimensions were consistently identified in the findings of the parent thesis and form the analytical structure for the article.

This analysis should be considered in light of the limitations of a literature-based study. It does not claim to directly measure attitudes or behaviour of Udi residents, nor does it provide the design recommendations as empirically tested within the proposed facility. Instead, the study synthesises existing evidence and develops context-sensitive implications for Udi. This distinction is important because the parent thesis itself was delimited mainly to architectural planning and design and did not undertake extensive ethnographic or sociological investigation.

Table I. Analytical framework for the literature synthesis

S/N	Analytical dimension	Principal concern	Architectural variables examined
1	Public space and interaction	How spatial settings support gathering and encounter	Plazas, courtyards, foyers, outdoor performance areas, seating and circulation
2	Flexibility and multi-functionality	How facilities accommodate diverse activities	Adaptable halls, movable seating, convertible layouts and shared-use spaces
3	Accessibility and inclusion	How design broadens participation	Physical access, legibility, welcoming thresholds and inclusive public areas
4	Spatial integration	How performance functions connect with everyday public life	Visual links, indoor-outdoor continuity, public circulation and graduated thresholds

Source: Developed by the authors from the literature synthesis (2026)

Results

The systematic review showed a consistent relationship between architectural design and community engagement in cultural and performing arts environments. The literature review

identified five major architectural strategies: providing socially active public spaces; spatial flexibility and multi-functionality; integrating public and performance spaces; accessibility and inclusive design; and contextual and cultural responsiveness. These strategies are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they collaborate to investigate how a performing arts center can serve as a dedicated cultural venue, as well as a common resource for the community.

The results are in line with the broader findings of the parent thesis that cultural continuity, accessibility, flexibility and inclusion of community-oriented spaces are key consideration in designing a multi-functional performing arts center for Udi.

Socially active public spaces

The first big finding concerns the role of public space in creating community interaction. As mentioned in the literature, the social engagement of cultural buildings increases if they offer spaces for activities other than formal performances. Informal encounters, community gatherings and cultural events can be enabled by plazas, courtyards, foyers, terraces and outdoor performance spaces, extending the social life of the building beyond the auditorium (Hajzeri et al., 2026; Duxbury et al., 2026).

The findings are suggestive of the important mediating role that public spaces play between the wider community and formal cultural activities. While a ticketed performance requires a conscious commitment, publicly available spaces provide opportunities for lower-threshold forms of participation. Visitors can congregate, observe activities, join an informal event, or simply utilise the setting as a gathering spot. Ongoing meetings can help to familiarise people with the cultural institution and encourage broader participation.

The thesis findings also identified plazas, courtyards, foyers and outdoor performance spaces as key settings for both spontaneous and organised social interaction. Therefore, the public realm which surrounds and permeates the building should be considered as an active component of the cultural program, not as residual space.

Spatial flexibility and multi-functionality

The second major finding is that spatial flexibility expands the potential user base for the performing arts facility. The studies reviewed for this research consistently demonstrate that cultural spaces that are able to accommodate different activities are more capable of responding to changing patterns of use and diverse community needs (Sepe, 2026; Zami et al., 2026).

A multi-functional performing arts center needs spaces for rehearsals, workshops, exhibitions, meetings, training and community events, as well as formal performances. This flexibility reduces dependency on a single program and can help maintain activity throughout the day and the year. This is especially true in places where cultural infrastructure is limited, and one facility may be expected to serve a wide range of artistic and social functions.

However, the results also suggest that flexibility doesn't mean making every space the same. Some specialised performance areas may need fixed technical and acoustic conditions while other spaces may have changing layouts and uses. The parent thesis also identified the need for specialised performance facilities together with flexible spaces for rehearsals, workshops, exhibitions and community activities.

Integration of public and performance spaces

Thirdly, a significant finding is the importance of the spatial relationships between public spaces and spaces of cultural production. The literature reviewed suggests that engagement may be fostered where visitors are able to encounter cultural activity outside of the formal

auditorium. This does not mean free access to technical or backstage areas, necessarily. It is rather about finding the right visual and spatial relationships between public life and artistic activity.

Linked foyers, exhibition areas, visible rehearsal rooms and active circulation zones can open up aspects of cultural production more to visitors. They can also be used for informal meetings between performers, artists, audiences and other users of these spaces. Similarly, Gigante (2024) points to the relationship between cultural institutions, public engagement and cultural citizenship and recent research on cultural infrastructure stresses the importance of connecting cultural activity to wider community life (Duxbury et al., 2026). The results of the thesis also pointed to the integration of public and performance spaces as an important strategy to reduce the separation of everyday community life and cultural activity. It means that the circulation spaces should not be seen only as the access between enclosed functions. Well-designed foyers, galleries, corridors and external walkways can be social spaces in their own right.

Accessibility and inclusive Design

The fourth major strategy that impacted community engagement was accessibility. Literature suggests that participation is affected by the extent to which potential users can physically access cultural spaces, navigate them and use them in comfort. Barriers to access may therefore prevent participation even if programs are otherwise available.

Results show that accessibility needs to go beyond technical compliance. Barrier-free movement, accessible entrances and appropriate circulation are important, but social accessibility is also significant. Users are to have knowledge of the purpose of the building, are aware of the entrances, and feel that some portion of the facility is available for their use. Likewise, studies on cultural infrastructure in disadvantaged communities show that people's access to cultural resources is conditioned by the conditions in which people can engage with and make use of such facilities (Wang, 2026).

The thesis findings support this wider appreciation of accessibility, in that physical access and social openness are identified as complementary requirements for community participation. What this means is that an architecturally accessible building can fail to engage the community if its organization, image or program is communicating exclusivity.

Contextual and cultural responsiveness

The fifth finding relates to the importance of adapting architectural strategies to local cultural and social conditions. The literature suggests that community engagement is influenced by place-specific patterns of social interaction, cultural practice and participation. Thus, the transfer of strategies developed in metropolitan cultural districts to semi-urban communities is not an automatic process.

Contextual responsiveness is especially relevant to Udi as the proposed performing arts center is meant to respond to existing cultural traditions and forms of communal performance. The thesis hints at the role of indigenous performance practices and cultural activities in the formation of the design response.

The results therefore suggest that the cultural identity should influence the program and spatial organization of the building and not be limited to decorative references. Local patterns of gathering, performance and celebration can inform the relationship between indoor and outdoor spaces, the nature of public areas and the range of activities accommodated within the facility.

Table II. Summary of findings

S/N	Architectural strategy	Main spatial characteristics	Community engagement outcome
1	Socially active public space	Plazas, courtyards, foyers and outdoor performance areas	Supports informal interaction and low-threshold participation
2	Flexibility and multi-functionality	Adaptable rooms and spaces supporting multiple activities	Broadens the range of users and extends activity
3	Public-performance integration	Visual and spatial connections between public and cultural activities	Encourages interaction and reduces institutional separation
4	Accessibility and inclusion	Barrier-free, legible and socially welcoming environments	Expands participation among diverse users
5	Contextual and cultural responsiveness	Design informed by local cultural practices and patterns of use	Strengthens relevance, belonging and cultural continuity

Source: Authors' synthesis from the reviewed literature and thesis findings (2026)

Discussion

From performance venue to community infrastructure

The results support a more extensive conceptualisation of the performing arts center as community infrastructure, rather than just a venue for scheduled performances. Conventional performing arts facilities are often designed to meet the technical needs of the auditorium, stage and audience. Although these functions remain important, the findings suggest that a facility which engages with the surrounding community should be evaluated in terms of its capacity to support daily social and cultural life.

This demands a shift in architectural priorities. The question is no longer one of how well a building accommodates performance. It also concerns how to keep the building useful when there is not a performance happening. Public gatherings, workshops, rehearsals, exhibitions and informal activities can sustain the occupation beyond the program events. In this sense the center becomes a place that communities can use repeatedly rather than occasionally.

Recent research also recognises cultural infrastructure as an important aspect of social connection, cultural resilience and community development (Duxbury et al., 2026; Iversen, 2026). The parent thesis arrives at a similar conclusion, positioning the proposed facility as a multi-functional cultural environment, which can support performance, learning, interaction and cultural continuity.

Udi's implication is that the auditorium is to be considered as a major part of the building, but not the only source of architectural activity.

Public space as a gateway to cultural participation

The findings have several implications, one of which is the role of public space as a gateway to participation. Cultural engagement doesn't always begin with formal attendance at a performance. People may first encounter an institution at an outdoor event, an exhibition, a rehearsal or an informal gathering.

Architecture can facilitate this gradual process by offering a succession of spaces with different levels of public access. A visitor may enter from an external plaza, first into a courtyard then into a foyer or exhibition area before formal performance spaces. The spatial progression allows for varying degrees of involvement and lessens the psychological barrier between the community and the institution.

This interpretation is consistent with existing research on placemaking, which connects socially successful public places with sociability, accessibility, flexibility and active community use (Hajzeri et al., 2026; Sepe, 2026). For the Udi context, outdoor and semi-outdoor spaces can therefore serve as important components of the cultural programme rather than as secondary landscape features.

Flexibility as a response to changing community needs

The findings also show that flexibility needs to be understood as a response to changes in patterns of use. There is no single way in which communities interact with cultural buildings. A facility may have formal performances one time, rehearsals another, and educational or social activities at another time.

This spatial flexibility means that the architecture can accommodate this diversity without having to provide separate dedicated facilities for every possible activity. This flexibility must be weighed against functional requirements. For example, performance halls require specific acoustic, technical and environmental conditions that might limit their adaptability. Other spaces such as studios, workshops and community rooms can provide more freedom of use.

The strategy for the architecture should be one of flexibility, but a flexibility in a strategic sense, not a universal one. This hierarchy is particularly important in Udi, where the proposed centre is expected to serve multiple community functions while maintaining its identity as a performing arts facility.

Accessibility as a condition of belonging

The discussion further elaborates the findings about accessibility. A cultural facility will only become a shared community resource if people feel that they have the right to enter and use it. Therefore, physical accessibility is a necessary but not sufficient condition.

The way thresholds, entrances, circulation and public areas are designed all have an impact on how welcoming a building feels. A confusingly accessed or heavily managed institution may switch off first time users inadvertently. Instead, clear entrances, visible public activity and legible circulation can reduce uncertainty and encourage exploration.

This supports the thesis finding that both accessibility and social openness should be taken into account in the design of community-oriented cultural spaces. In practice inclusive design for the proposed center needs to consider mobility, age, familiarity with cultural institutions and the different reasons people may visit the facility.

Integrating cultural production and everyday life

Maintaining the link between public and performance spaces is especially important for ongoing engagement. If cultural production is completely separated from the public realm, visitors only experience the building at the moment of formal performance. The findings suggest that well-designed visual and spatial connections can offer additional opportunities for

participation.

For example, exhibitions can activate the circulation areas; visible rehearsal spaces can show aspects of the artistic production and outdoor performances can attract people who may not otherwise enter the building. These strategies allow for the integration of cultural activity into the daily life of the center.

The objective is not to eliminate the distinction between professional and informal cultural activities. Instead, architecture can provide a range of thresholds between them. The proposed centre can therefore support formal performances while making selected forms of cultural activity visible and accessible to the wider community.

Implications for architectural design in Udi

Taken together, the findings suggest five major design implications for a multi-functional performing arts centre in Udi:

1. The site should function as a social extension of the building, with outdoor spaces capable of accommodating gathering and cultural activity.
2. Public spaces should be integrated into the programme, rather than treated as leftover circulation or landscape areas.
3. The building should contain a hierarchy of specialised and adaptable spaces to accommodate different forms of cultural activity.
4. Spatial connections should encourage interaction between public users and cultural activities while maintaining necessary operational boundaries.
5. Design decisions should respond to local cultural practices and patterns of communal life, strengthening the relevance of the centre to its intended users.

The principal argument emerging from this discussion is that architecture can act as a catalyst for engagement when it creates opportunities rather than merely containing activities. The most relevant architectural question is therefore not only what spaces are required, but how those spaces relate to one another and how people can move between different levels of participation.

Practical Implications

The findings are of practical significance to architects, cultural institutions, planners and policy makers involved in the development of performing arts facilities.

Implications for architectural design

Architects should consider community engagement to be a first-order design input, not a byproduct produced by the construction of a cultural building. That means decisions ranging from site planning to interior circulation should be informed by engagement.

First, performing arts centers must incorporate substantial public space. Courtyards, plazas and outdoor performance areas should be individually usable and directly related to the surrounding community.

Secondly, there should be a suitable balance between specialised and flexible spaces provided in facilities. Main auditoriums may require fixed technical conditions, but studios, community rooms and exhibition areas should allow for different forms of use.

Third, circulation spaces should be designed as social spaces. Foyers and galleries can be used for gathering, informal interaction and cultural display. This can improve the social value of the building, but not necessarily greatly increase its overall program.

Implications for the proposed centre in Udi

For Udi, the findings suggest that the proposed multi-functional performing arts centre should incorporate the following design priorities:

1. Accessible public thresholds that make the facility approachable to the wider community.
2. Flexible indoor and outdoor spaces capable of supporting traditional and contemporary cultural activities.
3. Community-oriented circulation and gathering areas that encourage informal interaction.
4. A balance between specialised performance facilities and adaptable community spaces.
5. Integration of local cultural practices into spatial programming and design decisions.
6. Clear relationships between public, semi-public and controlled areas to support both openness and operational efficiency.

These implications are in line with the design criteria developed in the thesis, which focused on flexibility, accessibility, community interaction, user comfort and the use of culturally responsive design strategies.

Implications for cultural policy and planning

The findings have implications beyond the individual building too. Cultural infrastructure should be included in wider community-development and planning strategies. The investment in performing arts facilities must not be based solely on economic or prestige value but also on the function of cultural spaces for promoting participation, interaction and local identity.

This means that local authorities and policy makers should not measure the success of a cultural facility by attendance at major performances alone. Other indicators may include diversity of users, frequency of community activities, availability of public spaces and opportunities for local cultural groups to use the facility.

In semi-urban settings such as Udi, a multi-purpose model may be more advantageous than a highly specialised single-purpose theatre. By supporting artistic production, education, exhibitions and community activities within one integrated facility, such a centre can potentially provide broader social benefits.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations exist in this study. The research is primarily based on a systematic literature review and design findings from the parent thesis. This approach, while offering a broad basis for identifying recurring architectural strategies, does not directly quantify the behaviour, preferences or perceptions of an existing performing arts center in Udi.

Second, the literature reviewed encompasses studies from different geographical, cultural, and urban settings. The findings of international cultural facilities must therefore be applied with caution to a semi-urban Nigerian context. The design strategies identified in this study need to be customised to local conditions rather than being universal solutions.

Third, community engagement is affected by factors other than architecture. Management, programming, affordability, transport, governance, and cultural policy can all affect whether people use a cultural facility. This article focuses on architectural strategies and does not suggest that design alone can guarantee lasting engagement.

These limitations deserve empirical investigation in future studies. To determine what local people are looking for, interviews could be held with artists, community leaders, residents and potential users. Participatory design workshops could also be used to identify spatial qualities that residents associate with cultural participation and belongingness.

Post-occupancy evaluation could be used to further study similar performing arts and cultural centers in Nigeria and other African contexts. Such research would shed light on how architectural features impact actual patterns of use. Future longitudinal studies could also examine whether engagement changes after a multi-functional cultural facility is completed. Future research should also consider the interaction of architecture and operational factors. Success of the proposed center is likely to depend not only on spatial design but on programming, governance, maintenance and access over time. An assessment of these elements together would give a more complete picture of how the performing arts infrastructure can support community development.

Conclusion

This study examined architectural approaches through which a multi-functional performing arts center can stimulate community engagement in Udi, Enugu State, Nigeria. The findings identified five interconnected strategies: provision of socially active public spaces, spatial flexibility and multi-functionality, integration between public and performance spaces, accessibility and inclusive design, and contextual and cultural responsiveness.

The findings show that a performing arts center can enhance community engagement when it is more than just a venue for program performances. Public gathering spaces can encourage informal interaction; flexible rooms can accommodate various activities; spatial connectivity may improve the visibility of cultural production; inclusive environments can expand participation; and contextual responsiveness can enhance cultural relevance and a sense of belonging.

The main contribution of the study is therefore the identification of an integrated architectural approach to cultural engagement. One design feature is unlikely to bring about community participation. It is supported rather by a network of spatial relationships that permits the people to approach, enter, gather, observe and participate at different levels.

The findings indicate that the proposed multi-functional performing arts center should be seen as a hybrid cultural and community environment for Udi. Its design must combine the technical requirements of performance with public spaces that are accessible, community facilities that are adaptable and spatial relationships that connect cultural activity to everyday life.

The suggested approach might also be applicable to other semi-urban communities with limited cultural infrastructure. But its application should still be sensitive to local social, cultural and spatial conditions. Architecture on its own can't create community engagement, but it can create the physical conditions in which engagement becomes more possible.

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