

INTRODUCTION

Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term **purposeful sampling**. (Patton, 1990, p. 169)

In this Brief, we describe the model we devised to encompass both single project sites and the story of CURRENT:LA as a whole – a model we've called the **City as Gallery**.

Given the evaluative challenges posed by the complexity of the initiative – from artworks, artists, and programs to geography, politics, and aspirations – we elected to purposefully sample **high-priority, information-rich cases** for our investigation. While not leaving out any site, we nonetheless committed our measurement resources *proportionately* based on several characteristics, putting more emphasis on projects that:

- seemed most intentional in addressing established outcome goals for the project;
- exemplified intended processes and aspirations for "social impact public art"; and
- were most accessible for robust data collection activities.

THE STORY OF CURRENT:LA

How do we tell the story of CURRENT:LA WATER in a way that pays tribute to the initiative's complexity while remaining manageable and intelligible? Complexity – several degrees away from merely *complicated* – implies levels of *emergence*, *unpredictability*, and *adaptivity* not seen in something that simply has many moving parts. How, then, to identify and draw out the themes and threads that lead to understanding of what happened, what worked and why, and what's next?

In our view, neither condensing the CURRENT experience into one composite narrative nor crafting a detailed account of each individual project is particularly compelling. Or, in the case of the latter, even possible. Instead, the framework we've devised incorporates purposeful sampling of high-information cases while not neglecting moments, events, and artworks that offered fewer opportunities for observation and research.

FRAMING THE CITY AS GALLERY

CURRENT:LA WATER was the City presenting itself as a gallery, with 15 wildly different settings and artworks – structures and sculptures and stages and fountains and gardens – spread over an area that extended 58 miles north to south. CURRENT was also the hundreds of hours of programming attended by thousands of Angelenos, from artist talks and performances to films and foraging lectures. And it was also the neighborhoods and communities that visitors discovered and explored along the way, connected by the web of freeways, streets, paths, sidewalks, and bridges that got them there.

Our City as Gallery housed three categories of "exhibit spaces"
Portfolio Sites, Portrait Sites, and Postcard Sites.

Rather than sorting CURRENT's 15 exhibit spaces based on things such as the artist's reputation, the type or scale of the artwork, or the location or neighborhood, our criteria for each category evolved during the production period based on what actually happened *in the field*. One of the most important factors was simply whether we could collect enough data to be able to say anything useful or interesting about our evaluation

questions. Another was what *types* of data could be collected and what *instruments* could be deployed. Paper surveys need places for people to write on. Gate counts need gates that people pass through to get to an event. Vox pops need some variety of a "visitor response area" (Adams and Stein, 2004) suitable for a brief conversation. Relatedly, the number of public programs scheduled at a site influenced visitor flows and created more or less potential for fruitful interactions and meaningful responses – i.e., the range and mix of data *sources*.

Here, we've listed the sorting criteria we developed for each of the categories. Our **City as Gallery** blueprint appears in Figure 1, with sites colored appropriately.

Portfolio Sites

- Substantial **visitor flows** and/or numerous **public practice** components
- Multiple opportunities to collect **different types of data**
- Several **entry points** for deep(er) engagement
- Strong potential for **neighborhood/community participation**

Portrait Sites

- **Short run** or periodic **events-only**
- **Limited public practice** components
- **Constraints on data collection** (setting, activity, schedule)
- In some cases, a geographical **outlier** or **difficult to access**
- **CURRENT** may be the beginning of a longer **exploratory process**

Postcard Sites

- Smaller **fixed** or **sculptural**
- **One or two public programs**, such as an artist talk or informal gathering
- **Performance-based artworks** with no structural elements
- **Small parks** embedded in well-defined neighborhoods

The categories do not say *anything* about quality, about success, about merit or significance. Complexity demands structure, hooks for ideas and conditions for inclusion or exclusion. Our inquiry has been guided by the questions and hoped-for outcomes established during the development process – at the same time remaining responsive to unexpected discoveries and surprising encounters.

While each individual site, artwork, and visitor experience certainly contributed to the story of CURRENT, there is also the need for an overarching project narrative that incorporates patterns and themes seen *across* the data corpus. We want to document as much as possible the *whole* of what happened, who came and how many, what they thought and felt, and if and how priority goals were achieved. The City as Gallery allows not only us but also CURRENT's many stakeholder groups to consider what unfolded in a single exhibit space, as well as in the initiative as a whole.

REFERENCES

Patton, M. Q. (1990), *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. Sage Publications, Newbury Park, CA.

Figure 1. CURRENT:LA WATER
The City as Gallery

