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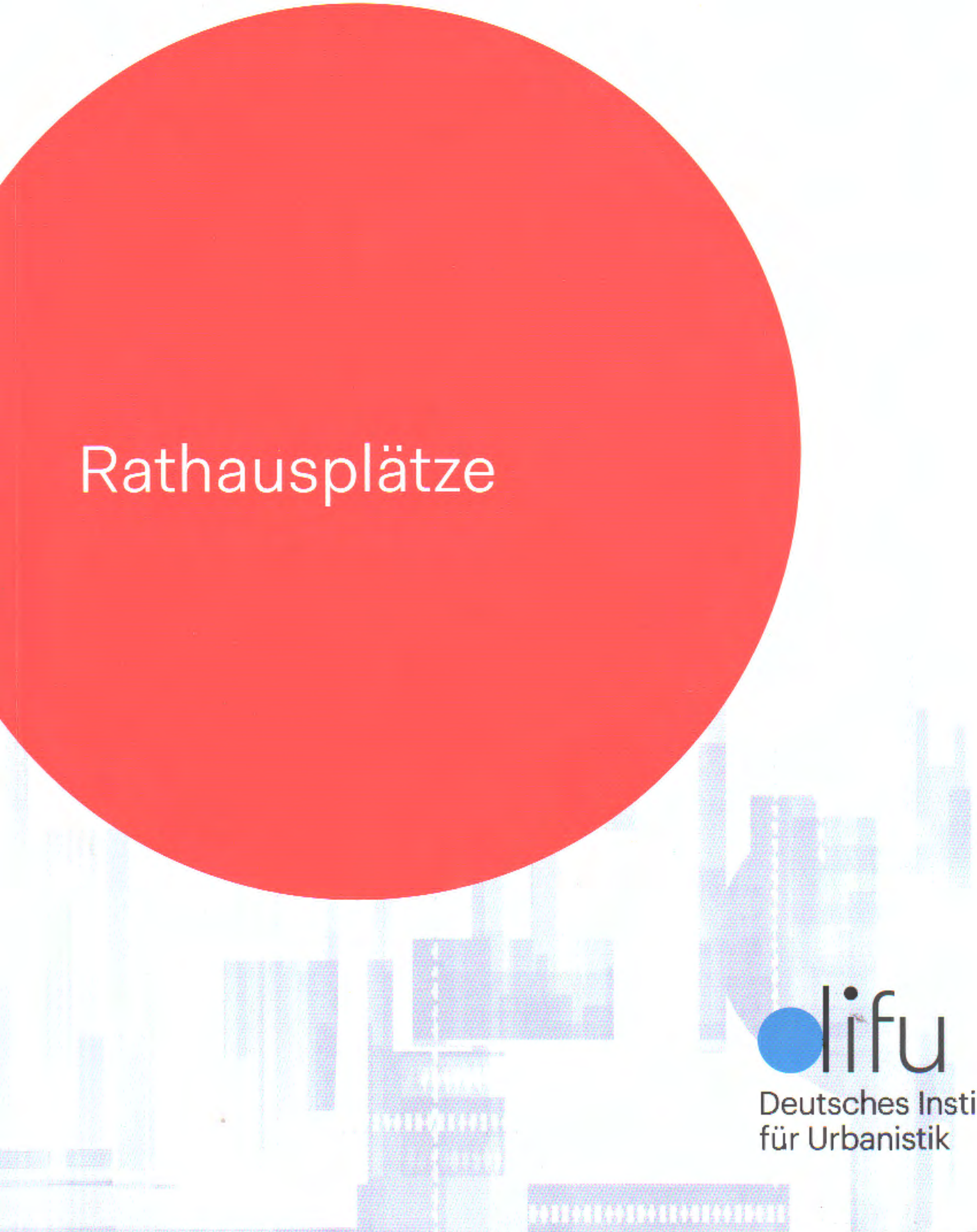

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Rathausplätze als Arenen urbaner Selbstverständigung

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Kathryn Holliday / Colleen Casey

Urban Sprawl, Social Media and the Town Hall Square as a Symbol for Civic Culture in Postwar Dallas-Fort Worth

The sprawling, polynucleated form of Dallas-Fort Worth presents challenges to traditional notions of civic public space. While it is anchored by two major cities, the metropolitan area is composed of over 200 incorporated cities and towns, each with its own separate local government and town hall. This fragmented pattern of growth is typical of late 20th century urban sprawl in the U.S. and it raises fundamental questions about the role of the town hall and public square in shaping civic culture.

We seek to uncover correlations between the design of town halls and squares in the context of urban sprawl and the capacity of civic government to engage in meaningful practices of authentic public participation. The research is interdisciplinary, bringing together faculty and students from architecture and public policy to investigate evolving relationships between the physical space of a central town square and new models for civic engagement that depend on social media. As local governments continue to adopt a number of decentralized approaches to reach diverse individuals and communities, how does this affect the centralization of town hall squares as a spatial focus for civic life and activity?

1. Introduction

Histories of architecture and urban form in America make clear connections between democracy and the idealistic design of town squares and civic institutions. From the utopian squares of Oglethorpe's Savannah and Penn's Philadelphia to the controversial brutalism of Boston City Hall, historians have studied and critiqued the connections between urban form and the ways that it facilitates and symbolizes democratic ideals and processes.[1] As Mary Ryan has suggested in her discussion of "civic materialism", examining the form and geography of city halls and town squares allows historians to investigate "how civil society relates to the state" and the development of a symbolic language of local democracy.[2] In the context of American democracy, the typology of the central square located at the heart of a town and faced by civic institutions developed early, in the eighteenth century, as the first post-colonial cities and states began to form. The grid forms of the township and range plans of Ohio and the gridded courthouse squares of Texas extended the democratic morphology of American town planning across the country through the nineteenth century. These town squares were envisioned as symbols of civic order as well as egalitarian meeting grounds between elected officials and the citizenry, places for the voice of the people to be heard whether in celebration of civic pride or in protest of governmental error.[3]

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[1] Thomas D. Wilson, The Oglethorpe Plan: Enlightenment Design in Savannah and Beyond, Charlottesville 2012; David Monteyne, Boston City Hall and a History of Reception, in: Journal of Architectural Education 65:1, 2011, pp. 45-62. A capsule history of Philadelphia's plan is provided by John Gallery, The Planning of Center City Philadelphia: From William Penn to the Present, Philadelphia 2007 with a discussion of its origins in Elizabeth Milroy, The Grid and the River: Philadelphia's Green Places, 1682-1876, University Park 2016.

Given the dramatic changes in urban scale as well as the mechanisms of democratic civic governance across the past 240 years in the U.S., the meaning and use of town squares continues to evolve. Chattopadhyay and White provide additional depth in their examination of city halls and town squares as a global phenomenon across varied urban forms and political cultures.[4] Their focus, however, remains on the town square as the heart of a dominant, mononuclear urban form that shaped our image of cities well into the 20th century. This essay proposes looking at the question of spatial democracy in the context of fragmented 21st century urban sprawl by incorporating cross-disciplinary methodologies that link urban history with public administration and public policy, methodologies that study the mechanisms and outcomes of the governmental process as well as the physical spaces that represent it. Accepting the challenge voiced by Upton to "think more insightfully about the way architectural symbols of community work", we collaborate as a cross-disciplinary team to seek a broader understanding of the ways that civic spaces function in an era when city governments depend increasingly on decentralized public participation strategies that depend heavily on disembodied digital communication through websites and social media.[5] Given this separation of the town square from processes of local democratic engagement, we ask how public spaces associated with city halls do – and do not – support local governments in creating a culture of public participation in democracy. Our research suggests that today civic space is more important as a symbol for the idea of civic culture rather than a space that allows it to develop.

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[2] Mary P. Ryan, "A Laudable Pride in the Whole of Us": City Halls and Civic Materialism, in: American Historical Review 105:4, 2000, pp. 1131-1170, quote: p. 1133.

[3] The classic study of the development of American town and city form is John Reps, The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States, New York 1965.

[4] Swatti Chattopadhyay/Jeremy White (eds.), City Halls and Civic Materialism: Towards a Global History of Urban Public Space, London 2014.

[5] Dell Upton, Architecture in the United States, New York 1998, p. 59.

Our cross-disciplinary approach is particularly important in the case of Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW), the metropolitan area that we examine. As a Sunbelt City of the American south and southwest, Dallas-Fort Worth is fragmented and polynucleated without a dominant center. While a precise definition of "Sunbelt" remains a subject of discussion, in general, it refers to cities like Dallas, Fort Worth, Atlanta, Nashville, Jacksonville, and Phoenix, cities that grew exponentially in the post World War II decades of the 1950s and 1960s, far outstripping the pace of growth in more established American cities in the Northeast and Midwest. "Sunbelt" does not refer to a consistency of climate, though that is a popular misconception, but to the rise of cities fueled by Cold War defense contracts and information technology accompanied by civic administrative structures that promoted aggressive urban development policies and an alignment between civic and business elites.[6] In Dallas and Fort Worth, growth was anchored in part in the postwar decades by Lackland Air Force Base, the headquarters of military contractors Lockheed Martin Aircraft and Bell Helicopter, Texas Instruments, developer of the miniaturized transistor that rocketed the American space program to the moon, and Microwave Communications, or MCI, the insurgent long-distance telephone company that brought down the Bell telephone monopoly.

In both cities, Dallas and Fort Worth, those new industries located on the periphery, outside recognized urban boundaries, pulling development and population primarily to the north and west. Federal policies promoting high-speed interstate highway construction fueled land speculation and white flight and fear of desegregation policies in public schools amplified the outward, suburban growth. State policies that favor decentralized authority and favor home rule allowed the creation of dozens of small, new incorporated towns and cities that transformed the open prairie and farmland surrounding Dallas and Fort

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[6] Debate about the definition of Sunbelt has existed since the term was invented in the 1960s. See for example, Robert B. Fairbanks/Kathleen Underwood (eds.), Essays on Sunbelt Cities and Recent Urban America, College Station 1990, pp. 3-7 and Rachel M. Guberman, Is There a Sunbelt After All? And Should We Care? in: Journal of Urban History 41:6, 2015, pp. 1166-1174 as well as the discussion in Elizabeth Shermer, Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics, Philadelphia 2013, pp. 1-14. Lassiter's synopsis emphasizes that the Sunbelt depends on "high-tech innovation, business deregulation, flexible labor markets, and low-density sprawl" accompanied by high rates of racial and economic segregation: Matthew D. Lassiter, The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South, Princeton 2006, p. 10.

Worth into a quilt of segregated suburban and exurban communities ranked amongst the most racially and economically segregated in the U.S.[7]

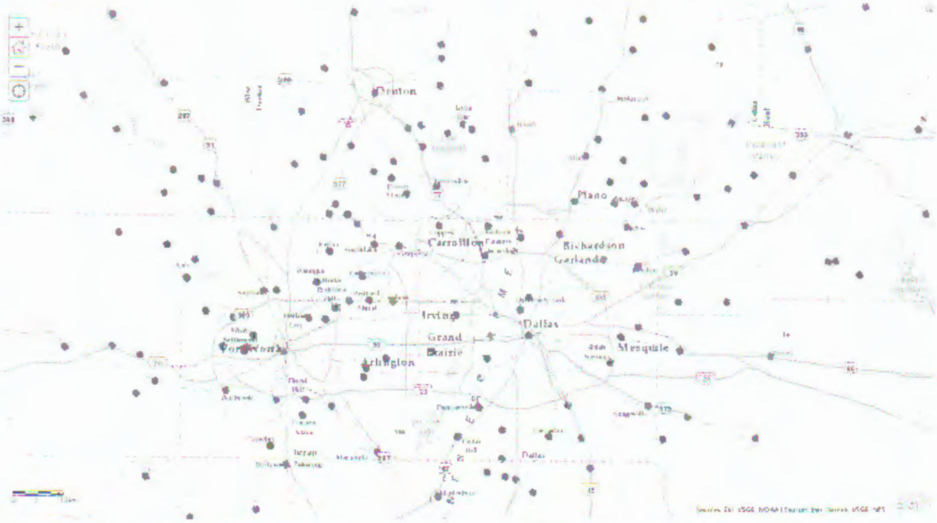
Denton
Plano
Carrollton
Richardson
Garland
Irving
Dallas
Grand Prairie
Fort Worth
Arlington
Mesquite

Fig. 1: *The Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area is composed of over 200 cities in a web of fragmented urban sprawl. The dots indicate the locations of the city halls for these separately incorporated areas.*

Today, the "Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Statistical Area" (MSA, as defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget) is named for its two largest cities, each of which are the 9th and 15th largest cities in the United States when measured individually, and is composed of over 200 separately incorporated cities and towns, ranging in size from the smallest, Corral City, with 27 citizens, to the largest, Dallas, with a population of about 1.2 million. The pairing of Dallas with Fort Worth 30 miles to its west as complementary urban magnets in a decentralized landscape further sets the region apart from other sprawling Sunbelt cities like Atlanta and Phoenix that are also polynucleated, but with a clear single consolidated center. In Dallas-Fort Worth, the tug-of-war between the two major urban centers magnifies the decentralized nature of civic form and space. The ragged edges and often quick transitions from city to city create a mosaic of civic spaces, with each individual city having its own mayor, city council, police force, fire department and city hall. While the basic structures of civic governance remain similar, though not identical, across municipalities, the citizenry is tremendously diverse, presenting challenges to traditional notions of public participation in a civic democracy. The accompanying variety of city halls and town squares – from the imposing grandeur of Dallas City Hall's inverted ziggurat and open plaza to the informal playground of tiny Euless's civic campus – amplifies the region's diversity and challenges expected associations of democracy, architecture, urban space, and civic identity.

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[7] There is a limited historiography on Dallas and an even smaller investigation of Fort Worth. Robert B. Fairbanks, For the City as a Whole: Planning, Politics, and the Public Interests in Dallas, Texas, 1900-1965, Columbus 1998; Patricia E. Hill, Dallas: Making of a Modern City, Austin 1996, and Harvey J. Graff, The Dallas Myth: The Making and Unmaking of an American City, Minneapolis 2010, provide a variety of approaches to the city's 20th century history. On Fort Worth, Ty Cashion, The New Frontier: A Contemporary History of Fort Worth and Tarrant County, San Antonio 2006, addresses the postwar decades. David McComb, The City in Texas: A History, Austin 2015, places urban development in north Texas in context with the rest of the state. Recent studies indicated the DFW region is amongst the most segregated in the United States: Timmy Huynh/Lauren Kent, In Greater Dallas Area, Segregation by Income and Race, Pew Research Center Fact Tank, June 29, 2015: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/29/in-greater-dallas-area-segregation-by-income-and-race/ [28.03.2019].

2. Case Studies

The central case studies examined here are Dallas and Fort Worth, which compete as focal points in the larger region. They are also the county seats of Dallas and Tarrant County, respectively, a critical factor in the development of each city plan and in civic conceptions of public space. As county seats, each city hosts the administrative apparatus of state government, namely the state court system, embodied in a county courthouse. By roughly the 1880s, every county seat across the state had erected a county courthouse directly at its center, surrounded by a county courthouse square and street grid. This organizing space, of a courthouse surrounded by open plaza as a focal point in a gridiron plan, became a universally recognized symbolic apparatus for Texas government and civic space that resonates into the present. This is a distinctive spatial practice of Texas state government that is not ubiquitous across all 50 U.S. states.[8] As a result, in the majority of Texas county seats, city halls were at least initially an afterthought, built later than the state-mandated courthouses and generally off the square with much more modest architectural ambitions.

Both Dallas and Fort Worth built a monumental courthouse by the 1880s though interestingly, they are amongst a small number of cities that failed to provide a substantial public space surrounding the building. Dallas's courthouse occupied its entire block and in Fort Worth a small perimeter of grass was the only nod the public space. Other county seats in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area, including Denton, Waxahachie, and Cleburne, provided generous courthouse squares that continue to thrive as active public spaces into the present. Even as the courthouse functioned as a visual focal point, the space left for civic culture in Dallas and Fort Worth remained undeveloped. City hall – and a town square – were virtually nonexistent.

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[8] Robert E. Veselka, The Courthouse Square in Texas, Austin 2000, thoroughly discusses the history and typology of the courthouse square system.

The idea of civic space – as opposed to county or state space – took longer to develop in Texas and has a much more diverse range of expressions. It was not until the early 20th century that a separate culture of civic space began to appear. Dallas built its first purpose-built city hall in 1889 and Fort Worth followed suit in 1893. Both set their city halls at the opposite end of the urban core from the county courthouse, staking out a physical separation between county and city governance that continued as the buildings were replaced multiple times during the twentieth century. Still, neither city provided public space or a town square to accompany any of these city halls.

In the 1960s, both cities embarked on campaigns to modernize their city image and civic administration processes. Building new city hall buildings was a cornerstone of each campaign. Both cities sought to reinvent their downtowns in an era of urban renewal, but the narratives surrounding that reinvention are strikingly different. Fort Worth's campaign to reinvent its downtown conforms more generally to the trends discussed by William Lebovich in his chronology in *America's City Halls*.[9] Concerned by a shrinking urban economy that struggled as the new suburbs siphoned business away from downtown, civic boosters hired urban planner Victor Gruen to propose a radical new vision for the urban core. The Gruen plan proposed a pedestrian-only urban core of modernist superblocks and civic plazas surrounded by parking garages accessed from the interregional highways.[10]

While the specifics of the Gruen plan went unbuilt, its influence led to the construction of a series of urban renewal superblock projects, including a new city hall complex designed by New York-based architect Edward Durrell Stone in 1967. The city demolished dozens of blocks to make way for this new civic complex but made no provision for open space to accompany the heroic minimalism of Stone's brutalist design. The concrete frame extends to the edge of the city block; a sliver of left over land between city hall and the adjacent telephone building, created by a shift in the street grid, provides a sidewalk, parking and space for trees. Built at the height of the era of public protests and demonstrations in American cities, it is an inwardly focused and unwelcoming civic center with little apparent interest in creating a gathering space for community building and civic engagement. Instead, Stone incorporated an indoor town square, an enclosed and air-conditioned atrium with a fountain and public sculpture where citizens' activity could be tightly controlled and regulated. Complaints about the new building centered only issues related to its cost and perceptions of its efficiency, with one city councilor calling the fountain an unnecessary "hippie wading pool" and another criticizing the new interior color scheme as "throwupsville".[11]

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[9] William L. Lebovich, America's City Halls, Washington, D.C. 1988, p. 37: "[...] witness the major, dramatic city halls and municipal government centers built in the 1960s and 1970s. For some cities these buildings were intended to symbolize the rebirth of the downtown [...] the birth of a new city [...] or a new image for a city."

[10] Gruen Associates, A Greater Fort Worth Tomorrow, 1956. Discussed in M. Jeffrey Hardwick, Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream, Philadelphia 2004.

At the same time, Dallas embarked on an even more ambitious campaign of city building. As the site of the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Dallas earned a worldwide reputation as a "city of hate" that it struggled to change. Mayor Eric Jonsson led a series of civic workshops with committees populated by the city's financial and professional elites that led to the publication of "Goals for Dallas" in 1966, a road map to rehabilitating the city's public image and civic culture. It cannot be overstated how dramatically the Kennedy assassination reshaped the city's culture in ways not experienced by other Sunbelt cities. While there are elements from the "Charlotte Way" and "Forward Atlanta", for example, that align with the general pro-business, pro-development tenor of Goals for Dallas, Dallas's forced entry onto the global international stage in 1963 dramatically impacted the city's self-image in distinctive ways. Architecture, culture, and city planning were key tools identified by civic leaders for rebuilding the city's global image in the eyes of the world and a campaign to create a radically new civic center began as a result.[12]

After a long selection process and a series of stops and starts due to controversies over funding, Dallas City Hall opened in 1978, designed by an emerging architectural star, New York-based Chinese American architect I. M. Pei with local landscape architect Richard Myrick. For the first time in the city's history it included a massive civic plaza. It is divided into two halves – one an open concrete plaza; the other a shady grove of live oak trees. A low concrete wall separates the two halves with a grade change at a sharp angle that mirrors the dramatic trapezoidal wedge of the city hall building, effectively dividing the space into two completely separate outdoor rooms. Across the plaza from city hall are the public library and a federal courthouse.

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[11] Little has been written about Fort Worth's city hall. Information about its design and construction comes from articles in the city's newspaper, the "Star-Telegram" as well as the Edward Durrell Stone Papers at the University of Arkansas. Responses to the building are quoted in: Color, Space in City Hall Questioned, in: Star-Telegram, October 8, 1971. The local newspaper was more generally supportive of the campaign for a new city hall. See, for example, John Ohendaski, Here are 5 of 18 City Halls Scattered All Over Fort Worth, in: Star-Telegram 1966, clipping, Fort Worth Public Library Vertical Files.

[12] The Goals for Dallas initiative, Dallas 1966, led to a series of reports, the last of which was issued in 1979. For discussion of Charlotte and Atlanta's civic progressivism from the same time period see Lassiter, pp. 109-114 and 123-131. There are many sources on the assassination of President Kennedy; for its impact in Dallas see Graff; Sean P. Cunningham, Cowboy Conservatism: Texas and the Rise of the Modern Right, Lexington 2010, pp. 54-60, and Edward Miller, Nut Country: Right-Wing Dallas and the Birth of the Southern Strategy, Chicago 2016.

As the first town square in the history of the city, Dallas City Hall plaza has more symbolic than practical purpose. It was designed primarily as an exercise in city image rather than as a space that would fulfill a particular need for social and democratic space. In a city without a tradition of civic space, Pei's and Myrick's design provided no clues as to its intended use and, in fact, the concrete walls and bollards and grid of trees inhibited its use as a park or gathering space, an intentional nod to civic security. The lack of amenities, including public restrooms or restaurants, and the lack of a clear democratic program made the plaza an instant wasteland in the center of the city, more important as a symbol for the potential of public interaction than a cradle that supports it. While Pei discussed the brutalist form of the city hall as symbolizing the forward-looking spirit of Dallas to break with tradition, cartoons in the local editorial page crystallized the local sense that the inverted wedge of the new city hall was a confusing puzzle.[13] Thus the idea of the town square in Dallas and Fort Worth's anchor cities is problematic at best. The invention of a civic plaza in Dallas was sparked by a campaign to manipulate outward appearances rather than an existing culture of public democratic life in a town square – the absence of a town square in Fort Worth is in this context unsurprising.

The example provided by the anchor cities of the region, of a contradiction between the symbolism and use of the town square, suggests questions to explore in the smaller suburban and exurban cities surrounding them. The vast majority of the 200 cities in Dallas-Fort Worth have constructed new civic centers since 1950, pursuing similar goals as their larger neighbors. Civic imagery, interurban competition, and brand building underlie the creation of new town squares. The examples provided by Richardson (incorporated 1925) and Southlake (incorporated 1956) provide two model strategies that these communities have employed to create a clear distinction between their local civic culture and that of much larger Dallas and Fort Worth. None of these exurban centers would thrive without the automobile and their town squares reflect that reality.

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[13] A series of political cartoons in the "Dallas Times Herald" lampoons the building and plaza. They are collected in the Dallas Municipal Archives, housed in the basement of city hall.

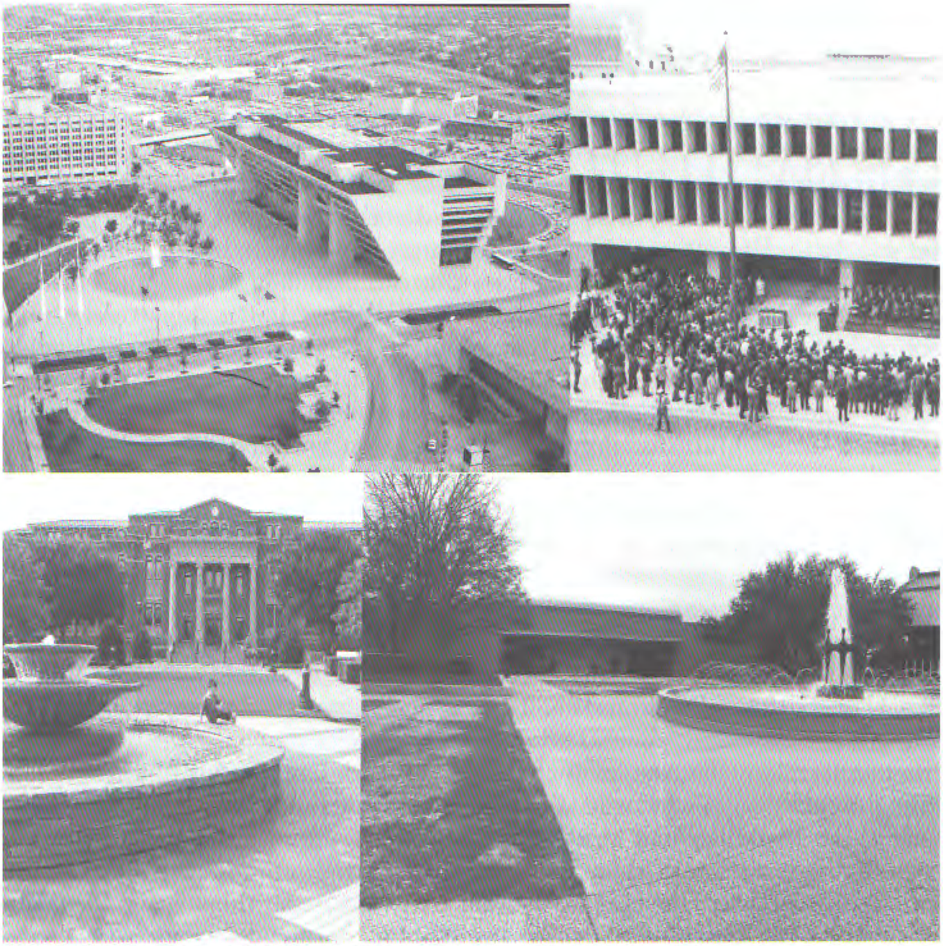

Fig: 2: *Clockwise from top left: Dallas City Hall's forbidding plaza (Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress); Fort Worth's city hall on its opening day, with city officials gathered on the sidewalk in absence of a town square (Star-Telegram Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections); Richardson's campus-like town square with fountain, library, and city hall (photograph by Kathryn Holliday); Southlake's town square with fountain and neo-traditional city hall, completed in 1999 (photograph by Kathryn Holliday).*

Richardson is typical of the cities of the region that began as a small, independent farming communities. It is located to the north of Dallas and first coalesced in the late 19th century, officially incorporating in 1925. It followed typical development patterns for farming communities in the west, with a small market square at its center surrounded by civic institutions like the post office, hardware, and dry goods stores.[14] After World War II, Richardson transformed almost overnight into an automobile suburb for Dallas, accessed by a new state highway that provided quick access to the new tech corridor anchored by Texas Instruments. From a population of 1,300 in 1950, Richardson exploded to nearly 60,000 by 1975. Its new civic center opened in 1978 to serve this entirely new population of suburbanites and – unlike its counterparts in Dallas or Fort Worth – it included a town square intended both to reinvent its original market square for the 20th century and to welcome newcomers, building a sense of belonging in a community created from thin air.[15] The Richardson town square is surrounded by civic institutions: the city hall, library, fire department, and police department and, perhaps most importantly, it was located directly adjacent to the new highway with a huge parking lot for quick access. The "town square" was deeply symbolic here, just as it was in Dallas, but its shaded lawn and easy accessibility for families grew from an entirely different sense of "small city personal attention."[16] This modest, campus-like green surrounded by institutional buildings is a recurring typology in the region, with other examples built from the 1960s to the 1980s at Plano, Irving, Euless, Grand Prairie, Hurst, Carrollton, and Benbrook. They are today typically empty and unused spaces that never completely fulfilled their intended civic functions.

A second model for the town square in Dallas-Fort Worth is provided by the city of Southlake, which provides an excellent example of late 20th century neoliberal conflations of civic and commercial space.[17] Southlake incorporated as a city in the 1950s based purely on land speculation – there had been no farming community as in the case of Richardson. Instead, it grew out of speculation over the subdivision of a large farm into residential home sites near the proposed site of the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. Southlake thus lacked even Richardson's sense of identity as a "real" if tiny community. At the extreme edge of suburban development in the early 1990s, Southlake used the tools of new urbanist planning to design and build a core town square in 1999 that has been enormously successful in attracting people as the anchor for a major shopping center cobranded with its neo-classical city hall and library. Designed by neo-traditional architect David Schwarz, it is filled with people and with traditional elements of the 19th century courthouse square like a gazebo, fountain, and a grassy lawn. Financed through a combination of public tax breaks and tax increment financing that funnels public money back into private development, it has spawned imitators across the DFW area. From tiny Melissa, to larger automobile communities like Frisco, Allen, North Richland Hills, and Rowlett, cities have adopted the privately financed neotraditional town square as an anchor for new economic development that combines civic rebranding with commercial space and a nostalgia for traditional 19th century town forms. As one Sunnyvale city council member put it when describing their plans for a new town square, "residents wanted to see a town center [...]. It's a concept more than anything."[18] This "concept" has little to do with long-held associations of democracy with the town hall square and much more to do with the provision of regulated commercial space as an anchor for civic investment.

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[14] For the classic narrative, see John W. Reps, The Forgotten Frontier Urban Planning in the American West Before 1890, Columbia 1981.

[15] Richardson's growth is discussed in the local news in Jim Stephenson, Bedroom Burg or Balanced Suburb? 'Remarkable Richardson' at Crossroads, in: Dallas Morning News, March 26, 1967.

[16] T. Noland, How to Design a City Hall for a Small Municipality, in: American City & County 84, 1969, p. 93.

[17] We use neoliberal here to connote the rise of Jason R. Hackworth, The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism, New York 2006.

3. Public Participation from the Inside

The limited examples presented here suggest that in their varied forms, town squares in Dallas Fort Worth provide civic imagery more than they provide a space for active civic engagement or activity. At the same time, from inside city halls and municipal buildings, there is a renewed interest in public participation processes because recent research has identified a "legitimation crisis" in our current political processes. This legitimation crisis, defined as the decline in the confidence in institutions of government, is evidenced by increasing distrust between citizens and their local governments or sources of political authority. As Pew Research Center reported in 2015, only 19% of Americans say that they can trust the government always or most of the time. In many cases, the typical participant in a public meeting or public hearing has little or no expectation of influencing policy. Instead, they participate for their personal benefits or for their sense of civic obligation.[19] Wealthier and higher-educated citizens tend to participate more; citizens who participate are often a self-selected group of the general population and often do not represent the larger public; and young people and members of non-white racial and ethnic groups participate at lower rates.[20] Traditional processes typically aim to provide one-way communication or just gather data on public input or opinion. Municipalities that adhere or subscribe only to traditional public participation processes have been criticized for the lack of design features that promote democracy building in both the substance of the participation elements and the ability to reach a diverse group of citizens.[21]

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[18] Cindy Rollins quoted in Cherie Bell, Town center park developing – Amphitheater, pond, trails are on horizon for area, in: Dallas Morning News, October 3, 2002.

[19] Krystyna A. Stave, Using system dynamics to improve public participation in environmental decisions, in: Systems Dynamics Review 18:2, 2002, pp. 139-167.

[20] Laurence Bherer/Sandra Breux, The diversity of public participation tools: Complementing or competing with one another? in: Canadian Journal of Political Science 45:2, 2012, pp. 379-403. However, the public affairs literature suggests that local level participation

In response to these criticisms, advocates of democracy have proposed the authentic model of participation. Authentic public participation prioritizes the ability of all citizens to have an equal opportunity to influence outcomes, and involves creating an inclusionary, participatory, and collaborative opportunity for participation.[22] It provides the opportunity for communication between agencies making decisions and the diverse public, as well as for expanding the public's knowledge and education about issues that impact the entire community. While the increasing digitization of civic participation processes through city websites and social media has offered the potential for greater engagement, the success of these "digital democracy" practices remains untested.[23]

The move towards the ideal of authentic public participation requires administrators to design public participation processes that include a wide range of tools that reaches the many groups of citizens within the larger municipality, and it requires the inclusion of passive and active participation tools.[24] Thus, a significant, observable difference between traditional and authentic public participation is the diversity of tools used to promote public participation. Passive participation tools are described as those tools that are used for the one-way "pushing" of information to the public. Active participation tools are designed to fully engage citizens in two-way dialogue and information exchange.[25]

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processes fall short and there is a need towards strategies that better match the diverse needs of the citizenry: John M. Bryson [u.a.], Designing Public Participation Processes, in: Public Administration Review 73:1, 2013, pp. 23-34.

[21] David R. Godschalk/Samuel Brody/Raymond Burby, Public participation in natural hazard mitigation policy formation: Challenges for comprehensive planning, in: Journal of Environmental Planning and Management 46:5, 2003, pp. 733-754.

[22] Cheryl S. King/Kathryn M. Feltey/Bridget O'Neill Susel, The question of participation: Toward authentic public participation in public administration, in: Public Administration Review 58:4, 1998, pp. 317-326; Marcus B. Lane, Public participation in planning: An intellectual history, in: Australian Geographer 36:3, 2005, pp. 283-299.

[23] Jacqueline Lambiase, Searching for City Hall, Digital Democracy, and Public-making Rhetoric: U.S. Municipal Websites and Citizen Engagement, in: Journal of Public Interest Communications 2:1, 2018, pp. 85-106.

[24] David A. Julian [u.a], Citizen Participation: Lessons from a local United Way planning process, in: Journal of the American Planning Association 63:3, 1997, pp. 345-355.

[25] Stave, pp. 139-167.

To connect changing ideas about the role of civic space and its connection to democratic processes associated with authentic public participation, we gathered and evaluated information from city officials in Dallas, Fort Worth, Denton, and North Richland Hills. This evaluation asked larger questions about the culture of public participation, including the number of different participation tools used to engage citizens and how important real, physical, public civic space is for engaging with citizens.

Overall, our findings suggest that public participation in the cities of Dallas Fort Worth is characterized by an emphasis on decentralized activities spread across wide geographic reaches and dispersed through a wide range of outlets, from traditional print to city websites to social media. There was no single model for public participation. Administrators in Denton, Dallas, and Fort Worth, for example, defined public participation as a process to get residents more involved and engaged in local government. Administrators in these case studies valued the importance of two-way communication and saw it as an important part of the process. By contrast, administrators in North Richland Hills defined public participation as public activities, emphasizing public meetings, one-way communication strategies, and special events.

We also asked municipalities where they typically engage in public participation activities, including both virtual and physical spaces. The primary physical locations for meetings cited were city hall and other city facilities such as the police or fire buildings, the main library, churches, and community centers. Dallas and North Richland Hills emphasized that neighborhood parks are utilized, particularly when tied to a special event or activity. The City of Denton also emphasized the use of its courthouse square for community outreach events.

Each municipality utilizes a wide array of public participation tools including postal mailings, public meetings, public hearings, website, twitter, Facebook, mobile apps, text alerts and email communications. The City of Dallas Public Information Officer (PIO) explained:

"We have a very high level of access to city council meetings [...] a strong city website [and] a very strong community news site that my team manages. Dallascitynews.net is a very high quality and informative site that has received rave reviews [...] we utilize a mobile app called 311 to allow citizens to submit complaints. We also have our own cable channel and we utilize traditional media, Facebook and twitter. We basically use everything we can get our hands on" (interview communication, September 17, 2015).

Fort Worth also uses the diversity of public participation tools listed above. And as their PIO explained, all have equal priority because they are needed for different audience members and people engage now in very different and selective ways. Similar responses were provided by PIOs in North Richland Hills and Denton.

Taken together, these practices indicate that contemporary understandings of authentic public participation depend on the dispersement of civic activities across geographic space and into the realm of social media and virtual space to reach all citizens where they are. This is particularly true when we consider sites of extreme sprawl and fragmentation. While a centralized city hall and town square remain the site for traditional public meetings, they are not prioritized by local governments as a means of actively building democratic culture. This potentially creates a tension, or at least an amendment, to long-standing notions of civic space in the United States which have increasingly transformed into purely symbolic images removed from the need to directly nurture or support democratic processes.

4. Conclusion

Our first survey of the civic spaces and public participation practices of sprawling Dallas-Fort Worth suggests challenges to traditional historical assumptions about the ways that town squares are used and valued in civic life. No city surveyed specifically mentioned its town square as an important tool in engaging its citizens in city life. And yet, the cities of the Dallas Fort Worth region continue to build new town squares as anchors to their communities at a rapid rate. As we continue this project and gather data about more of the 200 cities in the DFW region, we will continue to ask a broad set of questions that informs the seeming disconnect between the dispersed, virtual world of civic participation in the age of social media and the more traditional physical world of the town square.

As the recent history of Dallas and Fort Worth and other Sunbelt cities suggests, town squares are crucial for civic branding and economic competition, but less important for civic and democratic culture. Private investment in public town squares aligns with the region's tendency toward neotraditional, conservative politics and attempts to recreate the imagery of traditional American towns as they existed in the 19th and early 20th centuries and as they were originally framed in the "legacy cities" of the northeast and west coasts that are the focus of the majority of scholarly attention. The spatial and cultural dynamics at play in the dispersed and competing town halls of Dallas-Fort Worth align with Strom's challenge to urban historians to refocus attention on the geographically fragmented postwar cities of the Sunbelt, which remain little studied. As the few case studies discussed here suggest, suburban centers in Dallas-Fort Worth exert powerful influence over local civic identity that saps the power of centralized civic squares and imagery, challenging traditional conceptions of the urban-suburban divide. Better understanding the mechanisms that drive these separate geographies and dimensions of civic culture is fundamentally important for a more nuanced and differentiated urban history that incorporates a greater degree of localized data while "highlighting opportunities to effect change in this region."[26] These questions asked here provide a framework for examining the power of the suburban town square in the context of urban sprawl, recognizing that even as the form remains a persistent image of the city, its purpose continues to evolve.

Abbildungsnachweis

Abb. 1: Website "Building Democracy: The City Halls of Dallas-Fort Worth" at: https://arcg.is/1Pau9e [28.03.2019].
Abb. 2: Clockwise from top left: Dallas City Hall's forbidding plaza (Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress); Fort Worth's city hall (Star-Telegram Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections); Richardson's campus-like town square with fountain, library, and city hall (photograph by Kathryn Holliday); Southlake's town square with fountain and neo-traditional city hall (photograph by Kathryn Holliday).

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[26] Elizabeth Strom, How Place Matters: A view from the Sunbelt in: Urban Affairs Review 53:1, 2017, pp. 197-209, p. 207 quoted and Kathryn Holliday, Place and the city biography: Between the local and the universal in the Sun Belt in: Journal of Urban History 40:4, 2014, pp. 792-798.