Collaborative Art Projects and Digital Campaigns for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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ABSTRACT

The Aravani Art Project is a trans-women and cis-women-led art collective dedicated to transforming public spaces into platforms for visibility, inclusion, and dialogue for the transgender and LGBTQIA+ communities. This paper explores how community-based public art initiatives can serve as powerful tools for social change, empowerment, and healing among marginalized gender identities. By facilitating collaborative mural projects, workshops, and street art interventions, the collective challenges dominant narratives around gender and advocates for reclaiming public spaces as safe, expressive, and inclusive environments. The study critically examines the intersectional approach adopted by the Aravani Art Project, which integrates cis-women from marginalized backgrounds to widen the scope of social justice through creative engagement. Additionally, the project creates alternative livelihood opportunities for trans individuals by professionalizing their artistic contributions. Through an ethnographic lens, this paper reflects on the impact of visual storytelling, shared authorship, and community dialogue in reshaping perceptions and fostering dignity, agency, and cultural memory. The findings reinforce the potential of art as both a social practice and a medium for grassroots advocacy in advancing gender equity and collective well-being.

Keywords: Transgender visibility, community art, gender inclusivity, public space, intersectional feminism, social practice art, LGBTQIA+ empowerment

1. Introduction

Public art is a vehicle for social change, for the community's participation and for cultural dialog, providing cheap avenues which bring underprivileged people back into the spotlight from dominant social narratives. Public art allows the very challenging work of social stigmatization in India, where trans and gender nonconforming societies across India suffer from systemic exclusion, to be articulated. The trans-women and cis-women-led Aravani Art Project – created in 2016 – is at the heart of this effort, creating urban landscapes that are inclusive, expressive, socially vibrant. Through huge murals, participatory workshops, media and online storytelling, the group engages squarely in "the public square" in struggle for transgender people's dignity, visibility, and power. Over the years, the Aravani Art Project has expanded into a lively artistic and social practice model that fuses creative collaboration with grassroots activism. Through its annual community murals, school-based programs and international exhibitions and online propaganda efforts, the project points to the growing power of art to respond to the urgent problems faced by marginalized communities. By making the transgender participants the owners of the works rather than the objects of representation, the project disrupts traditional art-making hierarchies; it also introduces paths for sharing authorship and equipping skills for a new life that can be used as its own. Such long-term engagement with digital platforms extends the collective into global digital circles. In terms of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Aravani Art Project is an example of how collaborative art in accordance to international frameworks dedicated to reduce inequalities, to enhance gender equality, and ensure inclusive cities that bring about progress such as Aravani Art Project. Their work strongly aligns with SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by raising a more visible and fairer public space; it also promotes more people who are equally important at the time. Now the collective is further building artistic interventions and digital identity, representing a compelling case study to us of how artistic practice can operate as a tool of advocacy, healing, and sustainable social change. This paper explores how collaborative art projects and digital campaigns create

opportunities for enhanced community involvement, public awareness and creative advocacy to effect SDGs through the case study of the Aravani Art Project, in particular. The research shows how art is a powerful means to reach SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), by enabling inclusive public spaces and giving legitimacy to marginalized gender identities.

2. Background and Context

2.1 Public Art as Social Practice

Public art, particularly if it is in the service of social practice, makes it a useful instrument for community participation, community expressing and social reform. Social-practice models have made art into a dynamic enterprise rather than its commodity. The Aravani Art Project demonstrates this methodology by situating public walls as sites of collective activity where transgender and cis-women artists work, collaborating to piece together stories of identity, dignity and visibility. The collective works over years through annual mural projects, as well as through workshops and community events, turning public space into places where artistic production is integrated into social empowerment. Their yearly stories are the latest in a series documenting the cumulative influence of participation in artistic expression that influences how people view an issue, how we create income opportunities and social inclusion opportunities for marginalized gender positions. As a social practice, the work of the Aravani Art Project speaks to the way art has the capacity to act as a social intervention into life. The co-creation of works by the murals democratizes 'authoritativeness' while also creating safe spaces that allow conversation and expression (between artists and the citizens with which they meet). The expanding national and international presence of the project through continuous digital documentation in videos, photo essays and archives of the projects, as well as digital projects more generally, enhances its ability to create an ever-lasting social story behind the walls painted on the walls. With a mix of partners, municipal bodies, NGOs, educational institutions, and cultural festivals, the collective shows what public art can do to help achieve broader aims of gender equity, reduction in inequalities and inclusive cities, through its work in support of SDGs.

2.2 Transgender Communities in India

Transgender persons in India, among other identities, include hijras, kinnars, gender nonconforming and other variants with their own specific histories and culture. India's transgender people have often retained separate social structures and cultural customs from the colonization attempts and being marginalized for generations. Transgender people in India were recognized as a third gender in 2014, and the Supreme Court in judgment confirmed their constitutional rights to dignity, identity and non-discrimination thereby broadening the constitutional definition of gender diversity within the state. Yet statutes like the 2019 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act have come under fire for being poorly enforced, the bureaucratic obstacles to self-identification, and weak protections in fields such as marriage, inheritance, and social protection have left many transgender people without the legal instruments to exercise social equality. This includes both legal milestones and still-existing social stigma and socio-economic exclusion, which are deeply ingrained among many transgender individuals in India. Social rejection by families and communities results in exceptionally high rates of school dropouts, inadequate access to education and obstacles to formal employment; one report states that literacy for transgender persons is still well under the national average; large numbers of them also face hostility to and economic marginalisation in the workplace. These experiences of discrimination in healthcare settings, denial of gender-affirming care, and consistent verbal and physical abuse compound their vulnerability to lead to worse mental health and social isolation. Economic exclusion often forces them to rely on informal jobs or survival economies which might include begging or sex work on the part of the other not out of preference but by systemic barriers which occur in the institutions of the capitalist world.

Inspired through documentary research and community visits with transgender people, artist and community practitioner Poornima Sukumar launched the Aravani Art Project in 2016 in Bengaluru, India. At first, a series of wall paintings evolved into a collective practice based on the idea that public art can change not only physical spaces but social ties as well. The project was begun in response to chronic invisibility, social exclusion and

economic marginalisation experienced by transgender and gender-diverse people in Indian cities. Instead of working about transgender lives, Aravani positions transgender people as public culture's co-creators, imbuing them with leadership, artistic agency and shared authorship in the creative process. The name "Aravani," which comes from Tamil lexicons that reference transgender identities and cultural traditions, serves as a conscious effort to ground the practice in regional specificity and to pay tribute to indigenous gender identities that have often been erased by colonial and post-colonial social norms. Central to the Aravani Art Project philosophy is a praxis in which aesthetics and social justice are connected. Its goals include increasing the visibility and dignity of transgender communities through the beautification of public spaces; providing alternative livelihood opportunities by professionalizing artistic skills and commissioning participants as muralists, workshop facilitators, and design collaborators; and building dialogue between communities that dismantles prejudicial ideas and invites broader civic participation. Every project cycle starts with listening and co-design, to support the participation of local residents, schools, and community leaders, in order to generate long-term investment and shared commitment to the visual and social significance of the mural. And beyond static wall paintings, the collective values process over product, and the notion of shared labour, learning from one another, and the public building trust is paramount. This orientation has given Aravani, over the years, the ability to grow geographically, forge partnerships with institutions, and record its expanding practice in videos, digital archives, and annual presentations, in keeping with Aravani as a living, relational, engaging, social practice.

3.2 Collaborative Mural Projects

Year	Location	Project Title / Site	Key Themes	Primary SDG Linkages
2016	Bengaluru	Transgender Visibility Wall	Identity, visibility, reclaiming public space	SDG 5: Gender Equality; SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities; SDG 11: Sustainable Cities
2017–2018	Bengaluru	School & Community Murals	Inclusivity education, youth engagement, empathy building	SDG 4: Quality Education; SDG 5; SDG 16: Peace & Strong Institutions
2018	Delhi	Delhi Metro Mural Project	Mobility, visibility in transit spaces, public outreach	SDG 5; SDG 10; SDG 11
2019	Jaipur	Heritage Wall Murals	Cultural motifs + trans identity, intersectional representation	SDG 5; SDG 10; SDG 11
2019–2021	Mumbai	Community Street Murals	Resilience, collective storytelling, urban diversity	SDG 5; SDG 10; SDG 11
2020	Chennai	Rainbow Chennai Mural Series	Celebrating gender diversity, solidarity	SDG 5; SDG 10; SDG 11
2020–2021	Kolkata	Kolkata Colour Walls	Local identities, queer visibility, public narratives	SDG 5; SDG 10
2021–2022	Pune	University & Market Area Murals	Community life, empowerment, shared authorship	SDG 4; SDG 5; SDG 10

2022	Colombo (Sri Lanka)	Trans Identity Visual Project	South-Asian queer identity, cross-border solidarity	SDG 10; SDG 17: Partnerships
2023	Kathmandu (Nepal)	Inclusive Art Initiative	Regional collaboration, cultural interconnectedness	SDG 10; SDG 17
2024	Venice	Diaspore – Venice Biennale Intervention	Global visibility, representation on international platforms	SDG 5; SDG 10; SDG 17

3.3 Intersectionality in Practice: Inclusion of Marginalized Cis-Women

Part of the Aravani Art Project philosophy is a focus on intersectional social justice, which not only attends to transgender activism, but works within greater schemes of empowerment with which all marginalised bodies may engage. At the collaborative mural and workshop levels this collective purposefully brings cis-women with socio-economic disadvantage or marginalisation into the fold, as co-creators with transgender artists. On the one hand, this involvement is not merely tokenistic or symbolic; it is a strategic push toward solidarity amongst experiences of gendered oppression, appreciating that structural inequalities and gender identity are enmeshed in gender-based hierarchies that also are intersectional and class-based, as well as economic precarity-based. Drawing transgender persons and marginalised cis-women into creative spaces where they can work together, the Aravani Art Project expands the realm of shared representation, opening up possibilities for all participants to have a hand in skill-building, public authorship and economic agency that might otherwise only be restricted by such systemic barriers. And practice this intersectional model through mixed-group mural planning sessions, collaboration workshops, and community dialogue events where participants all get together and shape the visual narrative of each other. But these processes center the notion of mutual listening and respectful exchange as well, allowing transgender and marginalised cis-women artists to shape the themes of the artwork from their own experiences and points of view. Instead of reducing marginalised cis-women to mere assistants or background partners, the collective works to deliberately create shared leadership roles, shared design responsibilities and opportunities to be seen. It provides multiple modes of empowerment: solidarity across forms of marginalisation, transfer of skills and economic participation through collective work, and discursive opposition to a single narrative of gender struggle through the convergence of experiences of exclusion in the same public spaces. In doing so, Aravani's interlocking practice does more than individualize agency more firmly, it provides a collective basis upon which for a sustained engagement with social equity, dignity and inclusive public culture can be based.

3.4 Livelihood and Professionalization

One of the Aravani Art Project's key dimensions is its dedication to turning creative engagement into economic empowerment for transgender and gender-diverse people. More than just generating visibility and public dialogue, the collective helps the art participants develop artistic skills that they can use to monetise and sustain as part of a livelihood strategy. Many of the collective's participants engage in paid mural commissions, workshop facilitation, freelance design projects, and collaborations with cultural organisations, NGOs, schools, and municipal partners. Through hands-on training in mural painting, design planning, project management, and community engagement, the Aravani Art Project provides participants with marketable skills that go far beyond the walls they paint. Inherent to this is a critique of the economic marginalisation of transgender people in India so that they could take a less economically precarious route than informal survival economies, giving rise to opportunities for formal artistic engagement. Professionalisation in the group is not only about skill but is incorporated in a supportive environment that focuses on fair compensation, the creation of a collective portfolio, and means for external visibility. Participants frequently qualify as artists and co-facilitators for public art commissions, and the group's increasing exposure from its contributions to high-profile cultural venues and

international showcases extends its professional credibility. With regular collaborative projects, artists create a collection of works and a range of sources for artist-related contacts, providing means for them to take additional commissions on their own or with allied art projects. This approach is both economically empowering and socially dignifying, breaking narratives that position transgender people as relegated to marginal occupations. For the Aravani Art Project, artistic development is linked to structured opportunities for paid work and higher professional recognition, thereby embodying a model of community art practice, which recognises sustainable livelihood as well as creative effort.

4. Art, Digital Media, and the SDGs

4.1 Expanding Impact Through Digital Campaigns

With ever-increasing digital integration, the public art space has transcended just the walls and spaces where murals are hung. At the same time, the Aravani Art Project has used digital media like social networks, video-sharing sites, and web-based project archives to translate murals beyond the confines and borders and into a global conversation on gender, identity, and social inclusion. Digital storytelling acts as its own parallel mode of visibility, allowing not just to keep a record of its work for the year but for the community to be able to read it (through visual stories of personal stories and creative processes) and to be part of a community dialogue. Short video documentaries; time-lapse murals; artist interviews; behind-the-scenes footage tell audiences how public art grows from idea to community-driven creation in a way that few other mediums can provide. Digital artefacts like these enlarge the project's reach beyond individual city centres. They allow viewers from India and abroad that are supporters, collaborators, or interested in art to watch and participate in its work. Through the careful curation of content across mediums like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, the Aravani Art Project places its annual activities in the broader context of wider social currents which focus on gender justice and marginalised inclusion. Digital campaigns in conjunction with International Transgender Day of Visibility, Pride Month, and public art festivals elevate messages of dignity and equity to other digital communities and provide solidarity in various social scenarios. This digital approach contributes to the project's alignment with the important Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly with respect to SDG 5, which addresses Gender Equality, SDG 10, Reduced Inequalities, and SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, by releasing stories of support, through promotion of stories that affirm and mobilize networks of support and broader literacy of various audiences on the intersectionality of gender diversity experiences. In this, Aravani shows how current art practice can apply digital media as not a marginal record but as a fundamental part of advocacy, community building, and sustained impact.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

The practice of the Aravani Art Project addresses SDG 5 directly as it is centred in the public creative expression of transgender persons, one of the most marginalised gender categories in India. Using large-scale murals, participatory workshops and community dialogues, their collective is actively rejecting patriarchal and binary conceptions of gender. Its work is grounded in the process of co-creation by transgender artists and cis-women from disadvantaged communities, a model of gender collaboration based on equity, not hierarchy. Such inclusive mechanism not only makes visible transgender persons but also makes them recognised as cultural makers and contributors to society. Also, through providing paid artistic work, as well as professional training and leadership positions, the project increases the economic empowerment of gender-diverse persons, reinforcing the broader goals of equality, agency, and dignity enshrined in SDG 5.

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

The Aravani Art Project directly fits into SDG 10, which seeks to eliminate inequality within and among communities. Trans people navigate systemic barriers in work, education, and public life and the collective's interventions directly target social exclusion. With marginalised cis-women and trans artists inhabiting these creative spaces, the project makes intersectionality an operating principle to disrupt social cycles of isolation. Its collaborative mural-making model redistributes opportunities by offering paid commissions, training, and community-level recognition to people who are not usually given access to institutional artistic platforms. Furthermore, their use of digital campaigns, storytelling projects, and public gatherings amplifies the voices of

the marginalised on a much broader scale, building social acceptance and challenging social stigma. Taken together, these interventions help to dismantle inequality by establishing inclusive spaces that affirm the diverse identities and lived experiences of individuals.

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

The repeated re-configuration of public spaces in the project is directly related to SDG 11 to support cities within the sustainable framework it embodies: inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. With lively murals painted in markets, classrooms, metro stations and residential neighbourhoods, the Aravani Art Project reimagines public spaces as sites of conversation and collective ownership. Such interventions enrich the cultural and aesthetic dimension of cities, while working to enrich with inclusion through the representation of stories about transgender identities and collective identity. This is how collaborative public art engages local community residents, students and NGOs and city governments, enhancing social relations and community development, and promoting civic engagement. Through the reclamation of public walls as a space for the possibility of visibility and membership, the project builds urban spaces that are not only rich with the physical, but also social and emotionally secure for all gender-related experiences.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Sustained partnerships form the foundation of the operational model for the Aravani Art Project, thereby directly contributing to SDG 17. The group partners with municipal bodies, schools, universities, nongovernmental organisations, international organisations, cultural foundations and grassroots community organisations who collaborate to support the undertaking of the large-scale mural projects and public programmes. Such partnerships allow sharing resources, mutual understanding and support and scale up, and the impact of, the projects. Digital partnerships, such as social media partnerships, internet campaigns and video-supported storytelling contribute to the project's global visibility to groups that are preoccupied with gender justice, art activism and inclusive development. Engagements at the international level, such as cross-border art projects and global art festivals, fit the collective in wider world networks of works that are aimed at social equality and inclusion. With these multi-dimensional collaborations, the Aravani Art Project showcases how creative collaborations can act as vehicles for cross-sector collaboration and collective advancement towards the SDGs.

5. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design that draws from ethnographic observation, digital content analysis, and a secondary literature review, seeking to investigate the collaborative public art practices of the Aravani Art Project and their relationship to the SDGs. Since the collective's work is based in lived experience, community participation, and creative intervention, a qualitative approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of how artistic processes are connected to gender equality, inclusivity, and social change. Based on the online archives of the collective, video narratives, interviews, social media materials, and the project descriptions, the research allows for the understanding of themes, the creative process, and the community interactions that guided mural projects. They were analysed thematically to identify patterns that were common in these digital and documentary materials in terms of visibility, intersectionality, livelihood opportunities, and public engagement. It is evident that the methodological approach also draws upon elements of visual ethnography as murals, photographs, and video are considered by visual language as cultural texts expressing the collective's politics of representation and identity. Through a review of the visual language, iconography, and spatial arrangement of such selected mural works, the study examines how creative choices inform public conversation around the visibility of transgender individuals and the inclusiveness of the city. Through the lens of a socio-cultural narrative, this research employs contextual analysis to locate the practices of the Aravani Art Project in broader socio-cultural and policy frameworks dealing with marginalised gender identities in India. Interviews, public statements, and digital campaigns were melded into thematic coding for systematic analysis on the specific SDGs that project activities were mapped to including SDG 5, SDG 10, SDG 11, and SDG 17.

These methodological strategies together bring with them a comprehensive insight on how the Aravani Art Project mobilises art, community collaboration, and digital media as tools for social advocacy and sustainable development.

6. Analysis: Art as Dialogue, Healing, and Advocacy

6.1 Visual Storytelling and Representation

Visual storytelling is the main vehicle of advocacy that the Aravani Art Project uses, and it uses its murals as places for transgender peoples' narratives, histories, and aspirations to be made public. The collective reclaims public walls as spaces where gender-diverse individuals can represent themselves on their own terms through vibrant colours, portraiture, symbolic motifs, and contextual storytelling. These murals typically share themes of resilience, community, maternal bonds, cultural identity, and self-affirmation among others. The act of visually occupying urban spaces moves these stories into everyday social engagement for the public, disrupting normative presumptions and challenging embedded social stigma. So visual representation is a political act itself – an assertion of existence and belonging within places that have too often excluded or invisibilised transgender bodies. The project's visibility of these stories increases the cultural memory and social identity of transgender communities and reaffirms their standing in the broader social conversation.

6.2 Shared Authorship

Another feature of the Aravani Art Project is that it is an art with a shared authorship process. And, instead of organizing art-making as a process orchestrated by the top individual, the team foregrounds making collectively with the help of transgender artists, cis-women from marginalised backgrounds, locals, students, and volunteers. This strategy redistributes creative power and encourages active participation along the identity spectrum. Meeting at planning sessions, sketch-development meetings and with a series of shared executions from which sketches are derived and murals produced collaborate with others. Shared authorship allows participants to develop confidence, skill and ownership of the work shared by all, enabling them to see its ownership. As much as the painting should work on the people at a given year, everyone's contribution to this type of public art is equally theirs, this is a shared ownership. A similar approach fits into the collective's bigger philosophy of communal creative practice where art serves as a mediated process rather than an isolated expression rather than an all-or-nothing event. Co-creation itself is as important as producing the mural, encouraging empathy, trust and solidarity among differing groups.

6.3 Public Dialogue and Social Change

The collective's murals are catalysts to public conversation for conversation's sake, even frequently eliciting conversation about gender identity, discrimination, safety, and social justice. These installations, strategically located in markets, at underground stations, on the walls of schools, and in streets in the community, are woven into the mundane and may draw in viewers with little prior understanding of transgender stories to draw attention to. The presence of passersby themselves prompts interaction - be it from fascination, or acknowledgement, resulting in a reflective exchange. These workshops, community meetings, and mural inaugurations encourage residents to share personal stories, prejudices, and joint duties. In this way, the project offers a method for community education in public places, creating greater understanding and compassion. Through visual exposure, repeated use, and participation in the project on multiple levels the image and attitude change is achieved both with immediate impact on public attitudes, while not making overnight change at that. The Aravani Art Project facilitates the slow yet significant evolution of societal attitudes for long-term change.

6.4 Healing Through Collective Art-Making

For many transgender people, the collaborative mural creation is an intensely transformative process for many who do not only participate in artworks but also recover a sense of themselves as part of a collective. Art contributes, for some, as an unspoken form of expression that people can use to help process trauma, assert agency and create healthy emotions. The collective creative space (non-judgmental, supportive, and based on mutual respect) allows transgender individuals to live a world of acceptance and affirmation through each other as a community. Murals may act as vehicles of both personal and collective pain, self-discovery, or communal

dreams, allowing therapy through stories and imagery. The act of painting is physicalised to play with colour, scale, movement and space and so it can be therapeutic as well. Support from cis-women collaborators, who often go through marginalised experiences, heightens the healing aspects of the project with emotional solidarity across gender identities. Such collective creative healing resonates with community art therapy practices at large, where artistic healing can create shared processes for psychological restoration, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging.

6.5 Digital Amplification and Youth Engagement

Digital media is key in growing the reach of the work of the Aravani Art Project, especially for young audiences, who are very active online users. Using social media posts, behind-the-scenes footage, short documentaries, livestreams, and time-lapse mural recordings, the collective has turned every project into a digital story that can be accessed nationally or internationally. These online artefacts are a tool of visibility that help bring transgender identity to the public and communicate the story of the project's emphasis on equality across miles and across continents. Youth participation is especially important when younger generations do follow updates to this project, engage with content, attend workshops or participate in campaigns, and engage with materials. So, we have new digital campaigns around Pride, Transgender Day of Visibility, public art festivals and beyond to drum up conversation, in ways both digital and physical that ignite dialogue about identity, rights, and inclusivity. In that way, by embedding the artistic process into digital ecosystems, the Aravani Art Project uses technology as a means to social education, as a means of promoting advocacy and an instrument of community mobilisation, it is closely aligned with SDG 10 and SDG 17.

7. Critical Reflections

7.1 Challenges

The Aravani Art Project is also not without structural and social challenges. One ongoing challenge is the precarious livelihood environment facing transgender and marginalized cis-women collaborators, who are often subjected to discrimination that prevents them from advancing economically on a sustainable path. And although the project generates visibility and short-term employment via mural commissions and workshops, the lack of sustained institutional buy-in in the form of both state sponsors and private foundations limits the scale and continuity of their initiatives. And another problem is navigating public spaces, where bureaucratic clearances, local resistance, and social prejudice may stand in the way of mural creation and community participation. Moreover, in the absence of simultaneous mental health and social welfare resources, the emotional labor demanded of transgender community members, who share personal stories as part of the art-making process can feel heavy indeed.

7.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethical practice is fundamental to the project's philosophy, but dilemmas inevitably arise. A key concern is ensuring that representation does not become extraction that the lived experiences of transgender participants are not aestheticized without adequate agency, compensation, and follow-up engagement. Additionally, the visibility generated through public murals or digital media can unintentionally expose participants to discrimination or online harassment, making informed consent and privacy safeguards essential. The collaborative model also requires constant attention to power-sharing, ensuring that artists, facilitators, and community members contribute equally to conceptual decisions. Ethical sustainability further involves acknowledging local neighborhood stakeholders, mitigating cultural misunderstandings, and maintaining transparency with funding bodies.

8. Comparative Framework: Learning from Global Movements

Around the world, many community-based public art interventions from Brazil's Afro-Brazilian mural collectives and South Africa's post-apartheid community mural programs to LGBTQ+ public art initiatives in the U.S. and Europe mirror the Aravani Art Project's ethos of visibility, empowerment, and community building. Similar to these international efforts, Aravani prioritizes collaboration, reclaiming public space, and transforming marginalized identities into celebrated cultural narratives. However, the project's specific strength

stems from its intersectional approach in an Indian socio-cultural environment, where transgender communities (namely, hijra, thirunangai, and kinnar) face unique historical stigmas and exclusion. Like global movements, the project applies participatory art for healing and political activism, yet it is distinct in the ways it incorporates Indian wall-art traditions, local languages, and site-specific stories. The project contributes to a rising worldwide conversation on the dual role of public art as a mirror and an act of social change.

9. Implications for Policy, Education, and Urban Development

9.1 Policy Recommendations

Policies that institutionalize community-led public art as part of urban renewal programs must amplify the impact of initiatives like the Aravani Art Project. Government bodies could establish dedicated grants and "safe commissions" for transgender and marginalized women artists. Additionally, policies must ensure anti-discrimination protections in public art employment, integrate trans-inclusive cultural programming into local municipal plans, and facilitate partnerships between community organizations, arts councils, and social welfare departments.

9.2 Educational Integration

There are opportunities for art education organizations to implement Aravani Art Project's methods in the curriculum through modules on participatory art, gender-sensitive pedagogy, and community collaboration. Hands-on opportunities in the form of workshops, internships and field visits will further expose students to the practice of social art in a "real-world" way, helping them construct inclusive structures for their work. And when they are documented, they serve as case studies for critical discussions of art as activism, intersectional representation, and public engagement.

9.3 Sustainable Urban Development

Public murals created through collaborative processes serve as tools for placemaking, turning neglected or marginalized urban zones into culturally meaningful spaces. City planners can integrate community mural programs into broader strategies for sustainable, human-centered urban development. When transgender communities participate in designing these spaces, it ensures that urban environments reflect diverse identities and contribute to safer and more inclusive cities. Long-term sustainability requires cross-sector collaborations involving NGOs, local residents, artists, and municipal authorities.

10. Conclusion

With Aravani Art Project, we've shown how public art can become an instrument of visibility, dignity, and social cohesion among trans and marginalized cis women in India. Focusing on collective mural-making, storytelling, and digital amplification, the project frames art not merely as aesthetic production but as dialogue, healing, resistance, and advocacy. Its inclusive approach – grounded in shared authorship and intersectional collaboration – reimagines public space as a site for marginalized identities to claim presence and agency. Challenges about policy support, ethical considerations, and sustainable livelihoods also remain, but the initiative provides a powerful model for socially engaged art in emerging economies. This project serves as both inspiration and blueprint for other cities and cultural institutions aspiring to a more equitable and inclusive future, linking artistic practice with community empowerment, social justice, and inclusive development.

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