

Los Angeles Daily News

Festivals every day

Los Angeles' civic spirit needs City Hall's help to set it free

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It was blazing hot. It was wall-to-wall crowds. The lines were tortuously long. But despite that, Fiesta Broadway on Sunday was a smash hit. Whether the draw was the entertainment, which included some big names in Spanish music, the food or the free stuff from sponsors, as many as half a million people made their way to downtown Los Angeles for the annual pre-Cinco de Mayo celebration.

So who says there's no sense of community in Los Angeles? And who says the government must sink hundreds of millions into public works projects to get people to go downtown? Several hundred thousand people congregating for any reason and with no major incident in Los Angeles proves those tired myths wrong.

This is exactly what could be happening -- though on a much smaller scale -- across this city every day if the neighborhoods were truly empowered as the promise of neighborhood councils envisioned.

On the East Coast, most towns have commons or a town square where the public life of a community congregates to shop, to eat, to rant, to meet. With encouragement by the city government, there's no reason Los Angeles neighborhoods couldn't have these types of community centers. People clearly crave this type of civic inclusion, which engenders empowerment and thus pride in the community.

The city power structure, however, has resisted the idea of neighborhood empowerment, trying to force all the diverse neighborhoods to look to downtown for guidance. That attitude doesn't serve the long-term health of the city.

With a little help from City Hall, there could be a festival every day in the neighborhoods of Los Angeles.