Participation as a Supportive Framework for Cultural Inclusion and Environmental Justice

Participación como Marco de Apoyo para la Inclusión Cultural y la Justicia Ambiental

Participação como Marco de Apoio à Inclusão Cultural e à Justiça Ambiental

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In 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child lay the groundwork for children´s access to education, to play, to express themselves, and to have their views heard. This article explores participation as a supportive framework for democracy, environmental justice, and cultural inclusion. It presents methods that have fostered cultural inclusion and connection to nature, by analyzing three projects in Boulder, Colorado and Salinas, California. Participatory methods included nicho boxes, photovoice, and garden art. These cases demonstrate how children's rights to participation, through nature and the arts, help create just sustainabilities through the creation of culturally relevant practices that bridge social and environmental justice.

Keywords: Participation, Social justice, Rights of the child, Arts, Nature.

En 1989, la Convención de las Naciones Unidas sobre los Derechos del Niño establece una base para que los niños tengan acceso a la educación, a jugar, a expresarse y tener sus opiniones oír. Este artículo explora la participación como un marco de apoyo para la democracia, la justicia ambiental y la inclusión cultural. Presenta métodos que han fomentado la inclusión cultural y la conexión con la naturaleza, analizando tres proyectos en Boulder, Colorado y Salinas, California. Los métodos participativos incluyeron cajas nicho, *photovoice*, y arte del jardín. Estos casos demuestran cómo los derechos de los niños a la participación, a través de la naturaleza y las artes, ayudan a crear sostenibilidad justicia, a través de la creación de prácticas culturalmente relevantes que contribuyen a la justicia social y ambiental.

Descriptores: Participación, Justicia social, Derechos del niño, Artes, Naturaleza.

Em 1989, a Convenção das Nações Unidas sobre os Direitos da Criança proporcionou uma base para que as crianças tivessem acesso à educação, para jogar, para se expressar e para que as suas opiniões fossem ouvidas. Este artigo explora a participação como um quadro de apoio para a democracia, a justiça ambiental e inclusão cultural. São apresentados métodos que promoveram a inclusão cultural e a conexão com a natureza, analisando três projetos em Boulder, Colorado e Salinas, Califórnia. Os métodos participativos incluídos nicho, *photovoice* e jardinagem. Estes casos mostram como os direitos das crianças à participação, através da natureza e das artes, ajuda a criar sustentabilidade através da criação de práticas culturalmente relevantes que contribuem para uma justiça social e ambiental.

Palavras-chave: Participação, Justiça social, Direito da criança, Artes, Natureza.

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Introduction

Young people face great uncertainties –in their rights to democracy, to climate justice, to inclusive and public spaces in cities. These uncertainties re-assert and re-invent themselves in new contexts and across time. A recent anthology reflects on children's historic and contemporary experiences of physical spaces, the power relations that occur in these spaces, and the myriad ways child advocates foster children's integration into city spaces and decision-making (Burke & Jones, 2014). In this volume, Lester (2014) suggests that "the act of playing involves the creation of disturbance and disorder… and in so doing generates an air of excitement" (p. 200) a sense of power. Formal planning efforts can often dismiss the value of these processes, and in so doing can fail to promote the varied forms of power inherent to citizen participation. This tension is manifest in the ways adults describe and value participatory practices, often giving greater weight to those processes that are most "adult" and most integrated into formalized institutions, such as public meetings or city council sessions. However, many processes that allow children to think about their city, through artistic forms of expression, can also be seen as a means of disrupting and expanding our thinking, by seeing the world through children's eyes.

Children's rights scholar Louise Chawla (2015) has described early participatory efforts as "like a dandelion head ... our goal was to blow the seeds all over the world, to let them be picked up where they will" (p. 435). In some cases, these seeds may land in an institutional framework, to be integrated into formalized processes for participation. In others, these seeds may emerge through the cracks of a broken sidewalk, happy to see the light of day, to be seen and heard. If we are to embrace the metaphor of a dandelion's head for participatory processes, we must also explore the diverse ways participation occurs in practice. We must explore and reflect on *how* participation occurs. In this article, I explore participation as a supportive framework for democracy, environmental justice, and cultural inclusion. To do this, I will present artistic methods that have fostered a sense of inclusion, connection, and belonging from work conducted in Boulder, Colorado and Salinas, California in the United States. Participation in each location, while differing in scope and practice, still represents the much needed distribution of dandelion seeds, to be picked up where they may.

1. Theoretical frameworks for participation

1.1. Supportive international frameworks

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 was the first international framework for children's rights. Its fifty-four articles lay a broad foundation that includes children's rights to care and protection, to education and health services, to develop one's talents and abilities, and to play (United Nations, 1989). Article 12 specifically states that children have the right to give an opinion about matters that affect them, and that children have a right to have adults listen to these opinions including through formalized government processes. Article 13 gives children the right to express themselves, through writing, speaking, and art, and Article 31 states that children have the right "to engage in play and recreational activities ... and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (United Nations, 1989, p. 14). Percy-Smith and Thomas (2010) suggest that *how* these rights are met is an essential question for participatory practice. They suggest that we should consider "how children's participation can contribute, not

only to improving the situation of children, but also to a more healthy, just and democratic world for all" (p. 366).

Many cities worldwide have institutionalized these principles into municipal policies and practices (e.g., Child in the City EU, 2016). While there are many projects that engage children in the design of public spaces (e.g., BBSR, 2012; Kapanen & Svinhufvud, 2011; Million & Heinrich, 2014), few cities have institutionalized participation as a regular practice. Quebec, Canada is one municipality that not only encourages participation, but has a non-profit entity designed to provide accreditation for such participation (Blanchet-Cohen & Torres, 2016). While the United States is the only U.N. member nation to not ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), individual cities with progressive leadership within the U.S. also acknowledge the importance of children's role in participatory practice (e.g., Derr et al., 2013; Grillos, 2014; New York City Council, 2016).

In the city of Boulder, children's rights to participate are formalized through *Growing Up Boulder*, a partnership between the city of Boulder, Boulder Valley School District, and University of Colorado, whose mission is to empower Boulder's young people with opportunities for inclusion, influence, and deliberation on local issues that affect their lives (Derr et al., 2013). Since 2009, this municipal-level framework has provided opportunities to explore and deepen participatory practice and to create a culture of learning and experimentation (Derr & Rigolon, 2016). While many *Growing Up Boulder* projects have been focused on planning and design, others have engaged children and youth in creative expression about their city. The partnership draws on the rights-based focus of the CRC while also building on UNESCO'S *Growing Up in Cities* work initiated by Kevin Lynch (1977), and revived in the 1990s by Louise Chawla (Chawla, 2001). An important ethical underpinning of Growing Up in Cities' work is to engage children and youth from marginalized populations. In the case of Boulder, this includes children who are low-income, recent immigrants, and primarily Latino youth (Derr et al., 2013).

1.2. Varying perspectives and approaches

While the principles of the CRC provide an institutional framework for participation, scholars and practitioners have evaluated a range of participatory practices in diverse social and cultural settings that include, but are not limited to, institutionalized participation (e.g., Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Participation can contribute to families and community, local organizations and activities, and community concerns and visions. It can also present a range of methods for engaging with community issues, from advocacy, decision-making, and influencing development processes (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Important to Percy-Smith and Thomas' (2010) edited volume is that while many "Western" nations have emphasized the role of young people in decision making within the public sector of cities, there also are many other ways to interpret and value participatory processes. They state that "a wider interpretation may provide for more meaningful forms of participation to evolve" including relating to others, making decisions, and taking action in ways that "characterize the practice of everyday life" (p. 357). They further suggest that while participation is often valued by its measurable results, an essential component to participation is learning and making a difference. They emphasize that it is the quality of relationships that is significant and through these relationships, the learning of social processes, values, and a view of children as positive agents of change.

A decade prior, Hart (1997) described ways that children could specifically participate in environmental action and learning. Application of participatory principles for environmental education or advocacy has been much less common in the U.S. In certain projects, such as park or civic area planning, I and my colleagues have approached participation as an opportunity to creatively explore nature as a part of the city. In so doing, participation as a learning process extends not only to social processes and values, but also to those of the natural world (e.g., Derr & Rigolon, 2016; Derr & Tarantini, 2016). This weaving of environmental exploration with design activities has been employed by others for the design of naturalized schoolgrounds (Ito et al., 2010; Moore & Wong, 1997; Wake, 2007), but less so for the design of nature in the city. However, as our world becomes more urban and dense, green spaces in cities become a much more important focal point for participatory design (Derr & Tarantini, 2016).

Expansion of participatory practice to include the rights of future generations to a sustainable future enlarges children's perceptions and enables them to make natural connections between their own rights to participate and others' rights to environmentally just and sustainable futures (Davis, 2014). It is important to note that international frameworks place very little regard on the natural environment as a part of children's rights. Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child articulates educational goals, including one that identifies development of respect for the natural world (Derr, Chawla, & Van Vliet, in press). Similarly, Article 13 articulates children's rights to informal play. But neither articulate the right to informally play *in nature* (Derr & Rigolon, 2016). Yet when children engage in thinking about their cities, or their own resilience, nature emerges as a central theme of importance (Derr & Tarantini, 2016, Derr et al., 2017; Derr, Corona, & Gülgönen, in review; Hordyk, Dulude, & Shem, 2015).

1.3. Participation as a form of environmental justice

My own interest in participatory processes was influenced by international sustainable development frameworks of the 1990s, such as Agenda 21, which set a framework for sustainability that included social, economic, and ecological well-being with democratic principles of participation (United Nations, 1992). For a time, I worked with the Capacity 21 arm of the United Nations Development Programme, which sought to support capacity building from local to national levels of government in order to implement the principles of Agenda 21. And I was simultaneously interested in engaging children in community-based learning as a form of environmental education. When *Rescue Mission, Planet Earth* was published in 1994, I was inspired by the authentic concerns and questions young people had for the planet, and the powerful ways they employed art to convey these messages. In this book, young people from 21 countries collaborated in producing their own interpretation of Agenda 21 principles from the 1992 Earth Summit. Over time, these interests found a home in the emerging discipline of environmental justice, which, as a field, brings together ideas from social justice and the civil rights movement with the disproportionate environmental impacts felt by marginalized and underrepresented communities, and the children within them.

Around this same time, anthropologist Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) wrote about "the distribution of sadness." Specifically focused on the Mexican-American experience in the Southwest United States, he predicted conditions well into the 21st Century of "great sadness because of the effects of miseducation, poverty, physical and mental illness, crime, drugs, and over participation in wars." He wrote that all of these effects would be disseminated to varying

degrees, "despite clusters of exchange and the great investment in social relations, children, and a sense of place and space" (p. 182). Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) ties this trend to shifting demographics, with large numbers of children vulnerable to the effects of poverty and social exclusion. These claims are evidenced not only in much of the Southwest United States today, but many other cities as well.

Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) suggested that "the single most important predictor of the population's mental, physical, economic, social, and cultural well-being is the acquisition of a high-quality educational experience" (p. 186), and emphasized that such education does not deny language and culture, but instead draws on these as strengths and resources for instruction. He further wrote that the quality of education is strongly tied to the "emotive and intellectual support" (p. 152) teachers and communities provide to students. These ideas of cultural inclusion as a form of justice are represented in curriculum for multicultural education, social justice, citizenship education, and social action (Banks, 2016; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Like Fuad-Luke (2009), I see design processes as not only the creation of end-products —places or objects for people— but also a form of democracy itself, in which the act of engagement is an educative and transformative process.

Children's rights to participate, with nature, in the arts, and through voicing and being heard, run parallel to rights for what Ageyman (2013) calls "just sustainabilities". Acknowledging the "relative, culturally and place-bound nature" of sustainability, Ageyman's concept of just sustainabilities integrates social well-being and equity, the needs and rights of both present and future generations, and the importance of living within ecosystem limits. It is in this realm, of thinking very broadly about just sustainabilities, that children's participation can, and I think, should, sit. This is in part informed by scholars and activists in the fields described herein, but also from children themselves. Over many years, and in varied geographic settings, trends emerge —that children and youth consistently seek inclusive spaces where they feel welcome, with opportunities to express themselves, and to experience and sometimes care for nature (e.g., Derr & Tarantini, 2016; Freeman & Tranter, 2011; Gülgönen & Corona, 2015; Malone, 2013). Conversely, they see a lack of care —through littered and polluted spaces, homelessness, or lack of climate action as a "hostile" environment (Gülgönen & Corona, 2015) that denies children of their rights to just futures (Derr, Corona & Gülgönen, in review; Our Children's Trust, 2016; Strife, 2008).

2. Methods of engagement

2.1. Community contexts

While Boulder, Colorado, is a relatively affluent city in the United States, Latino children and youth still tend to live in poverty, struggle with educational attainment and with feelings of social exclusion (Derr et al., 2013, 2017). An estimated 23% of people live below the federal poverty line in Boulder. These statistics stand in sharp contrast to the majority of residents in this small city, who are mostly white and well-educated (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In contrast, Salinas, California is a predominantly low-income community, with 75% of residents identifying as Latino and only approximately 25% attaining a college degree (U.S Census Bureau, 2015). It is estimated that 13.5% of residents are undocumented residents who are unable to access health or food services (Hill & Johnson,

2011). An estimated 20.5% of Salinas residents live below the federal poverty line (U.S Census Bureau, 2015); however undocumented residents, not included in census estimates, would bring this figure much higher. Salinas also has one of the highest rates of youth homicides in California. In 2016, at least 19 of 31 homicides were of males under the age of 25. Homicides are attributed to gang activity and domestic violence, among other activity (The Californian, 2016).

As discussed earlier, Boulder has an institutional framework for children's decision-making. The city of Salinas, like most of the United States, does not. Lack of an institutional framework does not equate with lack of interest in young people's participation. Many city leaders recognize the importance of participation, especially for long term community health. I worked with *Growing Up Boulder* as a faculty coordinator from 2012-2016. I have just recently begun to work with Salinas, in the fall of 2016.

2.2. Projects and methodology

In this article, I present three projects that illustrate the important linkages between children's participation, nature, and arts and culture: a civic area planning project in Boulder (Derr et al., 2013, Derr & Tarantini, 2016), a photovoice project that emerged from the Civic Area project (Derr et al., 2013), and a preventative mental health project in Salinas, California. Each of these projects has different objectives, processes, and outcomes, but each was designed to give voice to children, as valued members of their communities, with art as an integrated part of the process.

2.2.1. Civic area project

The Civic Area project began with a visioning process in 2012 and continued in 2014 with a park design process. More than 225 children and youth, ages 4-16, participated in the project. Methods varied across the visioning and design phases. The visioning phase included site visits, drawing and photography, family interviews, dialogue with city leaders, photovoice and photogrid, and City as Play. The design phase included many of the same methods as well as *nicho box* making, visual preference surveys, model making, and design scenario critiques. These methods are described in detail elsewhere (Derr & Tarantini, 2016).

Of these methods, the *nicho box* was designed as a means to develop culturally relevant means of self-expression. In a prior project, *Growing Up Boulder* had partnered with an elementary school to explore neighborhood design. In a project debrief, teachers expressed that they wished we could have provided more culturally resonant housing examples. In reflecting on this as preparation for the park design process, we decided to adapt a folk art tradition common to the Southwest United States of *nichos* and *retablos*, in which artists use mixed media to express ideas and beliefs of personal and spiritual significance. In our adaptation, children were provided with shoe boxes, spray painted in bright colors, which they then decorated with photographs, figurines, and words, to express what was important to them and what they liked about their community. Children designed their own boxes and displayed them at a school heritage night.

2.2.2. Photovoice

The photovoice project emerged during the Civic Area visioning process. One of the youth leaders, who provided recreation services to youth in Boulder's public housing sites, felt that young people would not want to design and envision a public space that they might never use when they were concerned with issues such as food and housing scarcity or deportation of family members. However, she said that youth were very interested in photography (Derr et al., 2013), so we developed a project based on the photovoice method (Wang & Burris, 1997). Young people worked with a professional photographer over 10 weeks to take pictures and use words to communicate about their lived experiences. To facilitate "voice" about their photographs and lives, youth were given a choice of prompts that they could use, or they could write their own statements. Prompts included "From ____ to ____, I come from ____," "If I could change one thing about the world, it would be ____," or "I wish ____." Photographs and words were mounted on foam boards and were hung at a recreation center with high community visitation, and traveled to other venues in the city and university (Derr et al., 2013). Two years after project completion, the photographs were again exhibited and presented at a county wide immigration summit, to understand and deepen discussions about the immigrant experience in Boulder County.

2.2.3. Preventative mental health

In Salinas, where there is no institutionalized structure for young people's participation, the county's mental health department has sought partners who can provide preventative health services, through the arts and gardening. They partner with non-profit organizations who can directly provide these services to children. One example is the Urban Arts Collaborative, which connects children with nature and art as a way for children to experience the social and physical traumas of violence within their community. They embrace the idea that "nature is art and art is healing," and integrate these concepts for any youth who wishes to participate in community healing (Adami, 2015). The collaborative is an after-school program, and is important in providing preventative services that are culturally relevant. The arts particularly resonate with the Latino community as a way to express themselves, and the county mental health department partners with a wide range of community arts partners who engage children in mural making, community arts activities such as for *Día de los Muertos*, and photovoice (Derr, 2016).

3. Participation outcomes

While each of these projects differed in their goals and outcomes, they all present ideas about participation as a process, and participation as a product. In all cases nature is a setting for safety and exploration; it provided a means to understand issues and to develop ideas. As well, art is a means for developing expressions of young people's experiences, their daily lives, their desires to participate in the daily life of their city.

3.1. Civic area project

In an assessment of young people's views on participation and "feeling heard" by city government as a result of Civic Area participation, students showed a 126 to 780% increase in feeling heard, believing that their ideas mattered, and that they were contributing to their community (Derr & Tarantini, 2016). Exactly how or why students

felt these gains varied, but students expressed the importance of having opportunities to share ideas with their peers and with city leaders, opportunities to express themselves, and opportunities to make their city a better place, for people and for nature (Derr & Tarantini, 2016).

Artistic modes of expression, such as the City as Play method, three-dimensional models, and *nicho boxes* provided multiple means for students to feel heard. One teacher reflected on the value of the *nicho boxes* this way: "Every student was really eager to collect items that reflected their culture… They enjoyed sharing their boxes with others and displaying them at Heritage Night" (as quoted in Derr & Yilmaz, 2015, p. 11). Another teacher involved in the Civic Area process said that both teachers and students appreciated being a part of a design process in which they had a role, where their ideas were valued. This teacher felt that they received "intrinsic reward for being bold and creative" (Derr & Yilmaz, 2015, p. 11). In the assessment, young people were also asked if they had opportunities to experience other cultures. Only the students who created *nicho* boxes showed positive gains from the project in this measure. One eight-year-old stated, "My favorite activity was the *nicho boxes* because I got to express myself" (Derr & Tarantini, 2016, p. 15).

This project also brought forth the varied ways that children and youth think about and value nature. Preschoolers, aged 4 and 5, spoke in a variety of ways about wanting to protect, celebrate, and enhance the shelter for ducks that live along the creek. Secondary students expressed concern that redevelopment of the park would affect wildlife, who use the area as a movement corridor and as habitat. All ages of students also wanted to enhance nature as a place for their own play and exploration. Their ideas ranged from treehouses in which people could read and listen to the birds, underwater viewing areas, and covered study spaces where students could work outside, protected but within nature (Derr & Tarantini, 2016).

3.2. Photovoice

Outcomes from the photovoice project included the exhibition itself, as well as how youth experienced the process. The project was sometimes a struggle for the photographer and facilitators. Many youths did not see themselves as artists, had never used a camera, and were a bit reticent about sharing anything about their personal lives. Because of this, youth first chose to visit the Civic Area, a nearby public space, to take pictures and play with photography as an art form, primarily by photography nature and each other. The photographer saw a shift among the youth when she brought in other photographs for the youth to critique. Through this process, they learned that they had valuable perspectives and began to see themselves as artists. They became more experimental with their photography, and developed a sense of accomplishment. Toward the end of the 10 weeks, when youth took cameras home for photographs, many participants still felt they had "nothing of interest" to share from their home lives, and they resisted putting words to the images. However, through the process of exploring photography as an art form, beginning with pictures of nature in the civic area, and then taking pictures of home, youth moved from issues that were "safe" to those that cut across serious social justice issues in their homes and neighborhoods.

One participant took a picture of her sister wrapped in a Libyan flag and wrote "From riding horses to hiking mountains, visiting Africa and smelling spices, I come from Libya." Another took pictures of her open refrigerator and food cooking on her stove and wrote

"We need to make sure our refrigerator is always full, so we can feel normal." Another took a picture of his friend, Jesus, and wrote, "If I could change one thing about the world, it would be the way that people in the U.S. treat immigrants – they should be nicer and more accepting of us. They kick us out, tell us mean stuff, and all we are trying to do is have a better life here."

The main exhibition was at a recreation center that hosted approximately 1,500 visitors per day. At the opening, many visitors were recreation users, as well as the family and guests of the youth. Many visitors stated that they had no idea how some of Boulder's youth lived, and some called the recreation department after the exhibit to express their interest and pleasure in learning more through this venue. While many of the photographs caught visitors' attention, it was often the words that conveyed the most. Youth exhibited a sense of pride in their own accomplishments as well as at truly being seen and heard.

3.3. Preventative mental health

In the city of Salinas, many children experience violence, trauma, and anxiety over their own health and well-being as well as their physical safety and large scale uncertainties – they experience the distribution of sadness that Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) described. The county's health response has been to encourage children and youth engagement activities, as a preventative health measure. This flips the goals that have typically come from participatory planning –which often is a top down approach, and instead puts the needs of children first. The approach is simply to connect children with nature and with art– as a way for children to heal from the traumas they experience. "What I have seen, stated Urban Arts Collaborative program coordinator, is that children need a safe space to come together, to process what they are seeing, and to heal" (Derr, 2016). Through the establishment of community gardens, and food-based arts, children explore nature and connect with each other. According to preventative health staff at the Monterey County Health Department, this is important because children have no access to open space otherwise, so it needs to be provided directly through services (Derr, 2016). It is also paving the way for a transformation of additional public health services that focus on prevention and early intervention, through the funding of activities within the community. To accomplish this, community input is also essential: "We want these things to help us. To heal from violence and the trauma that is going on. To help people by building community and communication with other mental health services" (Derr & Rigolon, 2016, p. 159). Preventative Health emphasized that unmet needs lead to high levels of stress and anxiety that are otherwise going unmet. Yet currently there are few projects that engage the community to effectively support an understanding of the root causes of poverty and violence. I am currently working with the county to explore additional ways to engage young people, so that they not only heal, but also might find ways to address the issues they face within their community. Other researchers have worked with young people using photovoice as a tool to understand environmental health in Salinas (Madrigal et al., 2014). While there currently is no institutionalized role for young people's participation within Salinas, a strong foundation of engaging and valuing youth ideas could lay the groundwork for processes that also allow young people to influence decisions in their city.

4. Reflections on participation as a form of social and environmental justice

We know that nature provides protective factors, we know it helps to heal (Chawla, 2014, 2015). We also have limited evidence that the processes involved in participatory practice also facilitate the development of social capital. So participation in itself is a form of voicing and influencing, but also healing. Planning and architecture fields have emphasized the need for children to influence long term structures of the city. Even in well-resourced communities, such as Boulder, this is still a challenge, yet an important goal to be met. Yet if we think about participation as itself being along a spectrum, from low to highly resourced communities, and from varying cultures and goals of practice, we can also open doors for scales of change, the first steps being to connect and to heal, and then future steps being to also really influence long term change. I cannot yet speak to what children and youth of Salinas will say, what their hopes and vision for their community will be, but it is clear that participation in the arts, as a form of civic expression and action, has potential for powerful transformation.

In this article, I focus on projects that celebrate culture and arts as a means to achieve social justice. These artistic methods allow self-expression as a primary means of engaging with ideas of self *first*, before thinking about larger community issues. Methods that draw on the arts, such as photovoice, provide a safe and comfortable means of discussing critical or challenging issues, such as food insecurity, deportation or violence. The photovoice and preventative mental health projects may not have influenced a long term plan, yet they were significant for those who participated. Young people felt seen and heard in communities where their ideas, and lives, are sometimes invisible.

What is the role of nature in this work? Nature was a source of inspiration for art, a place of refuge, and a place where people could feel free from the world. In projects where many of the problems that emerge are social, nature is often proposed by children as a solution. This has been true in other work focused on resilience (Derr et al., 2017, Derr et al., in review) and for increasing housing density (Derr & Kovács, 2015). We tend to think that nature is important for young children, but teens also have said they would like more opportunities to be in, or experience nature, whether it be a view of the mountains from their school, or a study spot along the creek (Derr & Tarantini, 2016). In the photovoice project, nature was a safe photography space early on. For the Civic Area and preventative health projects, nature was a more deliberate "canvas" for exploration.

Only with longitudinal studies will we truly know the lasting impacts, and relative differences, projects might have for children. Yet we do know that when children express themselves, and adults bear witness to this, whether through formalized processes or art exhibitions, there is an impact. We cannot underemphasize the importance to young people of feeling welcome in spaces, the importance of having a sense of belonging in their communities. Many children and youth feel excluded from society. Projects that allow young people to share and celebrate some expression of themselves in a public venue may in fact be of primary importance. This may be especially true for those who experience the *distribution of sadness*, for children whose education practices are not high quality, and where culture is not an integrated part of their learning or community experiences. In this way we can bring children's rights to participation, through nature and the arts, in line with Ageyman's (2013) *just sustainabilities*, by creating culturally relevant, place-

bound practices that integrate social well-being and equity with the needs and values young people hold for nature.

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