

Creating Child-Friendly Environment Through Artworks In Cities

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ABSTRACT

Almost a decade ago, UNICEF coined the concept of child friendly environment to advise governments to make decisions in the best interest of children and to value their rights to play. As Malaysia's urban population reaches 71%, it is important for the government to ensure that the cities and their urban spaces are designed to sustain the basic needs and welfare of children. It means that the views and rights of children are taken into consideration in planning and design cities for children growth and development. Practically, in most developing nations including Malaysia, children voices are ignored by adults in the development of city public spaces such as streets, squares, parks and playfields. This paper addresses the roles of children's artworks to create a child friendly environment in cities. From a review of more than 50 journal articles in disciplines of Children Geographies, Environmental Psychology, Childhood Cognitive Functioning, Art Education and Urban Sociology it is found that children participation on artwork in public urban spaces contributed to three attributes: (1) public spaces are inclusive space for young children to display their sense of attachment, (2) artwork is a mode of children's place-making leading to positive emotional connection to a locale, and (3) a continuous participatory in artwork by children in public space could foster social skill and community ties. The review concludes that art can contribute to the creation of an inclusive child friendly environment that is nurturing, healthy and sustainable.

1. INTRODUCTION

Child of today is the city-maker of tomorrow (Chawla and Malone, 2003). As Malaysia's urban population reaches 71%, it is crucial for the government to ensure that the cities and their urban spaces are designed to sustain the basic needs and welfare of

children. Impact of rapid urbanization, children have less access to the natural environment especially of their own (Malone, 2002; Rivkin, 2000). Furthermore, in most developing nations including Malaysia, children voices are ignored by adults in the development of city public spaces such as streets, squares, parks and playfields (Riggio, 2002). In the context of urban planning and design, children's rights extend to both their access to urban resources that affect their rights in the city and to give them ample opportunity for meaningful participation in urban development (van Vliet and Lia Karsten, 2015). This means that the views and rights of children are taken into consideration in planning and design of cities and their environment which will in turn help foster children's growth and development (Fjurtoft and Sagei, 2000) and psychological well-being (Kaplan, 1987).

Living in the city is about negotiating relationship with other people as it is about living in material places and spaces; there is a continual interactivity between the relationships, places and spaces for children and adults alike (Christensen and O'Brian, 2003). However, this relationship is not just about adults' role as facilitators and their capacity to act on behalf of the child. It is about recognizing the capacity for children to be authentic participants in planning, development and implementation process (UNICEF, 1997). This indicates an effort to describe the importance of environment to children as well as to create good environments for children (Clark, 2004). As a result, UNICEF developed a Child-Friendly Environment program of action that encourage governments, communities and all stakeholders to make decisions in the best interest of children and to value their rights to play (Horelli, 1998; Malone, 2006).

Fundamentally, a child friendly environment started with the aim to guarantee the right of all children to influence

decisions about their environment (Riggio, 2002). Horelli (2007) expanded the research and introduced a theoretical framework to define a more meaningful criteria for environmental child-friendliness. This framework can be analytically used to negotiate the content of a municipal or regional plan.

Within the child-friendly environment initiative by UNICEF, Article 31 states that a child has a right to leisure, play and participate in cultural and artistic activities. Play is essentially important childhood activity (Piaget, 2007), which is both a need and right of children (Nor Fadzila and Ismail, 2012). Play is significantly a child's right (Almon, 2003) and through explorations, it will develop their human processes as well as help them to learn indirectly. Play promotes opportunity to experiment with creative thoughts and enhance problem-solving skills (Malone and Tranter, 2003). Play indicates the relationship of physical contact of the elements in the environment and the social interaction amongst peers (Kellert, 2002; Olds, 1989). Through play, children learn more of their environment and equip their main skills and abilities through doing, exploring, discovering, failing and succeeding (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2014; Moore and Young, 1978; Medrich and Benson, 1976; Benjamin, 1974; Opie, 1969). The question that arises is art part of play. And, how can environments through participatory artworks become more responsive, engaging to create cities that child-friendly?

2. METHOD

Literature was selected from eight disciplines including Children Geographies, Environmental and Behavior, Environmental Psychology, Childhood Cognitive Functioning, Art Education and Urban Sociology, Early Childhood Education. Computerized searches were conducted using online databases from Science Direct, SAGE, Scopus and JSTOR. Combinations of the following keywords were used to guide the search: child-friendly environment, play, child independent mobility, space, art and play and public art.

Papers drawn included theoretical, review and empirical articles. Some of the literatures are also derived from chapter in books. Literature was chosen to illustrate the breadth of knowledge about the studies on child-friendly environments. A greater emphasis was placed on literature that address the relationship of children environments through art and play and its impact on children's learning experience, physical activity and social development. The aspects taken into consideration in this review includes the potentialities and challenges of creating a child-friendly environment through artworks.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Domains and Frequency of Child-Friendly Environment Attributes

Domains	Frequency
Child-Friendly Environment	11
Play	14
Space	10
Child Independent Mobility	25
Art and Play	9
Public Art	21

Table 1. indicates that the domain of child independent mobility and public art shows a profusion of literature towards that body of knowledge, which leads to the idea of play and its benefits. Play is further elaborated to define its place in a space that is given meanings and importance. These attributes create an environment that is both engaging and child-friendly. However, there is dearth literature on art and play although it obviously indicates the positive relationship towards the attributes of creating a child-friendly environment.

3.1 SPACE

Neighborhood streets, alleys, public spaces and loose-fit spaces are important sites for children's play and exploration (Witten et al., 2015). The everyday settings of these spaces will allow children to expend their energy, relate to peers and learn a range of social, physical and cognitive skills fundamental to healthy development (Day and Wager, 2010; Freeman and Tranter, 2011). These children engage with their local environment in the company of their peers (Chawla, 1992). This secures them of their perception of safety (Castonguay and Juntras, 2010). Relationships between peers provide space for children to develop their capability as social agents and independence (Sutton-Smith, 1990; Hartrup and Laursen, 1989; Sluckin, 1981).

In public spaces other than residential, school and playground environments, children appear to be invisible and unwelcome (Percy-Smith and Matthews, 2001). Children's innate need to exercise control over the environment for physical interaction and exploration through gathering and outdoor play in neighborhoods, public spaces or loose-fit-spaces are crucial affording freedom of movement and free discovery (Haider, 2006; Karlsten and van Vliet, 2006; Kytta, 2004; Percy and Malone, 2001).

3.2 CHILD INDEPENDENT MOBILITY

Children's play is usually organized and managed by adults. This deprives them of being self-reliant, obtain necessary skills and for them to understand their spatial environment (Haider, 2006). They should have freedom to nurture their personal identity, explore their own environment and build a sense of community (Prezza

and Pacilli, 2007) without constant adult supervision (Wyver, 2010). Limited independent mobility not only deprive children of their ability to improvise their social life (Lasch, 1995), learn social skills and street literacy (Cahill, 2000), develop neighborhood-based friendships (Veitch, 2010) and their freedom to play (Prezza, 2005; Wen, 2009). Therefore, as a consequence when children are excluded and their independent mobility is limited, the public space as a common ground for people to carry out social, cultural and functional activities will become destabilized (Haider, 2006). Playgrounds as play-space can be responsive to children's needs and be an integral part of the urban environment. Although physically it limits the potential for free and imaginative play craved by children, it can however provide a welcome environment for art. Hence, to broaden the definition of play-space, can streets, squares, parks, playfields and loose-fit space be included?

3.3 PLAY THROUGH ART

Art and play are fundamentally valuable to a child's education and development (Ryan, 1990). Art has become an avenue for children to express their cultures, emotion and as a medium of socializing (Boughton and Mason, 1999). Henceforth, art can be a medium for play. Art is a powerful, pervasive force that helps shape attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviors (Chalmer, 1996). Arts participation has shown positive social outcomes towards children, including overall engagement in school (Deasy, 2002) and increase in community and pro-social activities (Catterall, 2009). Visual art addresses the audience about the issues that are directly relevant to their lives (Russell, 2004). Arts are child-friendly and engaging because they are as natural as play (Henderson, C. Miki; Lasley, Elizabeth 2014). Combining art and play within the context of everyday life, suggest an acknowledgement of new ideas about public art as being art plus function. It is both practical as well as aesthetically function (Ryan, 1990).

3.4 ARTWORKS

Public art is the artwork of artistic and creative expression that is outside of museum walls (Lacy, 1995). It includes sculptures and murals which is situated in children's play-space such as loose-fit spaces, streets, roundabout, square, plaza and park that stimulate public reactions about space, behavior and issue (Hein, 1996; Bach, 2001; Sharp, 2005; Chang, 2008). Two-dimensional and three-dimensional public art has become a representation of the identity of the community (Beunders, 2007; Pinder 2011). Postmodernist public artworks might be considered place-specific that collaborate-and-create (Lacy, 1995). The collaborate-and-create orientation can be divided into two groups: "listen-and-lead" and "confer-and-defer." Listen-and-lead is when artist are given inputs from communities whereas confer-and-defer on the other hand encompasses artworks designed directly by non-artists. This term can be used to indicate those who do not make

art vocationally such as children. Here, the artist plays as facilitators and the cooperation between artist and non-artist will create perpetual performance pieces that are an ongoing process. This artwork will grow as long as the public takes care of it (Russell, 2004).

4. CONCLUSION

This review evidently affirms that art is part of play for children. Art is a process and that continuous participatory artworks by children by children in public space can potentially foster communities, enhance social skills create a sense of attachment and be educational. Therefore, there should be a concern to relate children artworks with child-friendly environments. The result to this relationship will help towards children's growth and the creation of cities that are child-friendly.

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