Place-Making a Child-Friendly Urban Environment Through Artworks

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Abstract. More recently, concern on children’s well-being, health, mobility and upbringing has been increasingly being discussed. The child of today is the city-maker of tomorrow. Rapid urbanization impacts children the most as they have less access to the natural environment in the city. Moreover, in most developing nations including Malaysia, children opinions are not taken into consideration in the development of urban public spaces such as parks, playfields, streets and plazas. Living in an urban environment is not primarily about people relationship but rather the relationship between people, places and spaces. Realizing this, as the Malaysian urban population rapidly increases, the government and local councils have started to rethink and redesign urban spaces to sustain the basic needs and welfare of its citizen. Since neighborhood streets, public spaces, alleys and loose-fit spaces are essential spaces for children’s exploration and play, place-making is one of the favorite projects that many have chosen to use to create an urban environment that is child-friendly. According to Project for Public Spaces (2011), place-making is an integrative approach to better plan, design and manage the urban environment. It focuses on the cooperation and contribution of local communities to promote their safety and well-being. This paper attends towards children’s artworks impact to create a child-friendly environment in an urban environment. From a review of 50 articles in journals of various discipline which includes Environmental Psychology, Art Education, Urban Sociology, Children Cognitive Functioning and Children Geographies, it is understood that children’s participation in place-making an urban environment are influenced to three attributes: (1) artworks as a mode of place-making for a positive emotional sense-of belonging, (2) active participatory of children in creating artworks could cultivate community bond and social skills, and (3) public sphere are spaces for children to exhibit their sense-of-attachment. The review construes that place-making through art can contribute to create a child-friendly environment that is inclusive, healthy, nurturing and sustainable.

1. Introduction

The city-maker of tomorrow is in the living child of today [1]. As Malaysia’s urban population grows beyond 71%, it is essential for the people and government to ensure that their living environment and urban spaces are designed and able to sustain the basic needs and well-being of children. In many developing countries including Malaysia, as a result of rapid urbanization, children have limited access
to their own natural environment [2]. In addition, adults disregard children’s voices as they design the cities public space such as playgrounds, parks, streets and alleys [3]. Adults have a profound idea of what children want and need as they believe that since they were once children. However, children of today are different from before. Children should be given the opportunity to participate in meaningful activities that shape their environment. It is their right [4]. Their views should be taken into consideration in design and planning of their urban environment that will subsequently help the growth and development [5] as well as their psychological well-being [6].

Living with one another in an urban environment is about negotiating between people which includes adults and children, material places and spaces [7]. Giving children the recognition of their capacity to be genuine participants in the planning, development and execution process should be the level of relationships between adults and children [8]. This action illustrates the importance of creating a good environment for the children [9] Accordingly, the Child-Friendly Environment program developed by UNICEF urge communities, all stakeholders and governments to act and value children’s right to play [10].

Essentially, a child-friendly environment aims to assure that children are given the right to have a voice about their environment [3] Further research by Horelli [11] established a theoretical framework that describe a more meaningful model of environmental child-friendliness. This framework can be a guide to drafting the municipal and regional plan with regards to children rights.

UNICEF article 31 avows that children has the right to play, leisure and participate in artistic and locale cultural activities. With this child-friendly environment initiative, play is principally very important to children [12], which is both a right and need [13]. Through discovery, as a child’s right to play [14] children will develop the mental processes as a way of learning. Play stimulate and advocates children the opportunity to be creative [15]. Play affords physical contact of the environment and social interaction [16]. Through play, children learn more of their urban environment and harness their gross and fine motor skills as well as their abilities through exploring, discovering, doing, succeeding and failing [17]. Therefore, is art considered part of play? Through participatory, can art-making be engaging and responsive towards establishing a child-friendly urban environment?

2. Method
A computerized search through various online databases from SAGE, Scopus, JSTOR and Science Direct were meticulously done on eight disciplines. These disciplines include Environmental Psychology, Environmental and Behavior, Children Geographies, Early Childhood Education. A through search using the following keywords as a guide to the search; Play, art and play, child independent mobility, space, child-friendly environment and public art.

Theoretical paper, reviews, empirical article and chapter in books were also drawn. The literature chosen illustrated the breadth of knowledge about the studies on child and the child-friendly environment. An emphasis of the literature research was carried out on studies and issues pertaining child-friendly environment. A greater importance was placed on literatures concerning research of children’s art and play in the built environment. Studies on children’s learning experience, social development and physical activity were aspects that was taken into consideration in this review. This review hoped to include the challenges and potentialities of creating a child-friendly urban environment through art-making
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        |

The above Table 1. indicates a plethora of literatures pertaining child-independent mobility and public art. The body of knowledge leads to the benefits of play and is further elaborated to play in its place and space. It elaborates the importance of space and meanings towards children. These elements create an engaging environment that is child-friendly. However, there is scarce literature of active play in art although its relationship is parallel towards the attributes of creating a child-friendly environment.

3.1 Space

Important areas for children exploration and play in an urban environment includes neighbourhood alleys, streets, public spaces and loose-fit spaces [18]. These everyday landscapes allow children to expend their minds, exhaust their energy and relate to their buddies whilst developing their social, cognitive and physical skills and well-being development [19][20]. Being with their buddies in their everyday environment [21] secures their perception of safety [22]. These relationships between buddies, space and environment afford children to develop their capability as social agents and being independent [23].

Designed and designated public space for children that includes parks, playground and school are the only places where children are welcomed and are free. In other places, children are restricted and unwelcomed [24]. It is important that these outdoor spaces have the possibility to afford physical interaction and exploration through congregating when children exercise control of their environment. Loose-fit spaces, public urban spaces and urban neighborhoods afford freedom of play and discovery.

3.2 Child Independent Mobility

Of late, children’s play has been always dictated and design by adults. This designed play activities deprives children of being self-reliant, and obtain the necessary skills for them to explore and understand their environment [25]. Children should be given the ability to nurture their personal identity and explore on their own. Together with others, they will build a sense of community [26] without supervision of adults [27]. Limiting their independence deprives the opportunity to improvise their social life, develop community-based friendships, acquire necessary social skills and street literacy [28] and most importantly their freedom of play [29]. Thus, as a consequence, children are excluded from the common ground for people and adults alike to carry out cultural, social and meaningful activities [30].

Playgrounds as designed play areas can be safe and responsive for children. However, it physically limits the potential for imaginative and free play. However, it can provide a platform for art. Therefore, to expand the definition of play-space, can non-designated spaces for children such as street, parks, playgrounds, squares and other loose-fit spaces be included?

3.3 Play Through Art

Art as well as play is profoundly important to a child’s development and education [31]. Art is an avenue for children to be creative and express the emotion, cultures and as a medium of socializing [32]. Henceforth, art is a medium for communicating as well as play. Art is a pervasive force that assist children in shaping their attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours [33] Children participating in art-making has shown positive social results in schools [34] and the community [35]. Visual art helps illustrate to the audience issues that are currently relevant [36]. Arts is considered part of being child-
friendly as it is as natural as play [37]. Conjoining play and art within the context of everyday activities suggest an acknowledgement of new ideas of making public art as being functional. It is then both aesthetically pleasing as well as being functional [31].

3.4 Artworks
Artwork that have artistic value and of a creative expression outside of museum walls is considered as public art [32]. The works include sculpture, mural, bass imprint situated in designated children play-space as well as other public space can stimulate the public. These reactions can be of issues, space and behavior [38][39][40]. Public art and sculptures therefore, have become a representation of identity to communities [41][42]. Place-specific that collaborate-and-create public artworks [32] 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 identify those who do not make art professionally such as children. This is an opportune for artist to act as facilitators cooperating between artist and non-artist to create an on-going performance expressions. The beauty of such continuous collaborative engagement will allow these artworks to grow as long as the community takes care of it [36][43].

4. Conclusions
This review paper affirms that art is essentially play. It is creative process that is fun for children. Continuous participatory in art-making by children in their urban environment can potentially enhance children skills, foster community ties and embed a sense of attachment as well as being educational. Therefore, great emphasis should be given to create a child-friendly urban environment through children artworks. The result of this collaboration will definitely help towards children’s growth and the creation of an urban environment that is child-friendly

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