# Gathering Places as Cultural Passages:
# Engaging with Public and Community Arts

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University of Oregon
Master's in Arts Management

**Research Capstone**

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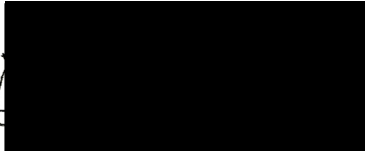
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*Arts and Administration*

*University of Oregon*

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Mil Gracias.

# CURRICULUM VITAE

## YASMIN A. ACOSTA-MYERS

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## PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVE

Become a proficient arts administrator and knowledgeable educator by bringing the following skills, and experience. Wide-ranging experience working in arts centers, and educational settings in fostering community spirit, and civic duty; through art, technological endeavors, and creating cultural opportunities that provide an environment for learning, and incite social change for all involved. Interface well with others, caring, hardworking with admirable interpersonal communication, and always eager to keep learning.

## EDUCATION

Master's of Science in Arts & Administration

June 2011 University of Oregon, Eugene OR.

Bachelor's of Science: Major: Art K-12 Broad-field & Elementary Ed. K-8
December 2005 University of Western Montana, Dillon MT.

## HONORS

University of Western Montana's Dean's List, 10 semesters.

Mary Baker Emerick Scholarship Recipient, 1999-2002.

Graduated Cum Laude

Licensed Initial I Teacher Secondary Art Educator in the State of Oregon.

## SKILLS

Versed in software programs: Adobe Creative Suite: In-Design, Photoshop, Illustrator, and Dream weaver, and Flash. Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Outlook.

Versed in many open source programs: Word press, Blogger, Facebook, Flickr, Prezi, Wikis.

Bilingual: Spanish and English speaking, reading and writing skills.

Admirable Interpersonal & Intercultural skills.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Graduate Research Fellowship, Wired Humanities Projects, Digital Resources & Knowledge Environments. University of Oregon, Winter 2009– Spring 2011.

Virtual Oaxaca: Digital Scholars, University of Oregon. Collaborate work for the creation of "Virtual Oaxaca" a map base three dimensional space in Second life (later Open Sim) through photographs and drawings. Spring 2010–present.

Art Builds Communities Project: Project Co-Manager, Community and Communications Liaison. Portland and Hood River, OR. September 2010-May 2011.

LAX: Latino Artist Exchange: Planning Committee and Volunteer. Portland, OR. September-February 19th.

Oregon Latino Agenda for Action Inaugural Summit: Brown Paper Presenter on Arts and Culture. Salem, OR. October 17, 2010.

Intern Arts Administrator and Presenter at Columbia Center for the Arts. Art @ the Center:
Summer Teacher Arts Institute. Hood River OR, Summer 2010.

Assistant Administrator, Cultural & Language Liaison. NEH Summer Institute Mesoamerican Cultures & their Histories: Spotlight on Oaxaca, University of Oregon, Oaxaca Mexico, July 3rd – August 6th 2010.

Moderator, and Presenter for Engaging Identities and Communities Panel. Crossing Borders: Inaugural Graduate Student Research Forum. Eugene OR, April 30, 2010.

Vice Representative of Emerging Leaders in the Arts Network (ELAN), University of Oregon, Summer 2009 – Spring 2010.

Intern at Miracle Theatre Group, Portland OR, Summer 2009.

Art Assistant, Oregon Young Scholars Program (Interdisciplinary project), University of Oregon, Summer 2009.

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Art & Human Values Course, University of Oregon, Fall Term 2009.

Art Educator at Hood River Valley High School, Hood River OR. Taught general Art Education, 9th through 12th grades, 2006-2008.

Assistant Freshman Volleyball coach, Hood River Valley High School, Fall 2007.

Summer Migrant Program Art Educator, Hood River OR, August 2006, 6th-8th grades.

Artist in Residence at Pine Grove Elementary, Hood River OR. Kindergarten through 5th grade. May 1st-5th, 2006.

Migrant Education Coordinator & Tutor, Beaver Head County School District, Dillon MT.
Tutored, translated, developed lessons for school district, and coordinated Hispanic Festival.
Pre-K - 8th grade, and some High school. February 2001 – June 2005

Summer Migrant Program Teacher, Kindergarten –3rd grade.  Summers 2001 – 2005.

## VOLUNTERING EXPERIENCE

2nd Annual Art Education Congress, Portland OR, Winter 2010. Note taker, participated in round table discussions, and posted to Art Education Forum.

"Burst your Bubble"=Architecture and Allied Arts and Alliance of Graduate students for Diversity Social event. Helped organized social event to meet people across disciplines, from different backgrounds, age groups, abilities, ethnicities, and cultures. Spring 2010.

Pilot tester-UfoliO Installation, University of Oregon, Arts Administration Department. Eugene, OR, Spring 2009. Evaluated Word-press: Multiple user publishing platform for functionality and issues, published blogs, created personal learning environment, research widgets and plug-ins.

Center for Intercultural Dialogue: UNESCO conference: Ethics, Religion, and the Environment. Co-coordinator for the communications committee. University of Oregon. Winter-Spring Terms 2009.

Office of Multicultural Academic Support: Reach for Success program volunteer, University of Oregon, Winter Term 2009.

Second Annual Benefit Concert for Mele Ohana of Oregon/ Hawaiian Cultural Arts Workshops, Ticket-taker and handing out programs, University of Oregon, Fall Terms 2009.

Inspiration Circle: Girls Group Facilitator, Hood River Valley High School, 2007-2008.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Oregon Arts Commission Summit: The Art of Adaptation. October 7, 2010

3rd Annual Northwest Conference on Teaching for Social Justice: Rethinking our Classrooms, Organizing for Better Schools. Portland OR. October 2, 2010.

Artist2artist: Professional Development Event. Columbia Center for the Arts. Hood River, OR. April 10, 2010.

Americans for the Arts Annual Convention: Arts in Sustainable Communities. Seattle WA, June 18–19th, 2009.

Racial Formations in the 21st Century Panel discussions. Presented by the University of Oregon Law School. April 17, 2009.

Architecture and Allied Arts Career Symposium. Produced by the University of Oregon PODS. April 23, 2009.

HOPES Conference: Thinking Small: eco-design arts conference. Production of the ecological design center. April 2–5th, 2009.

Cascadia-region Cultural Planning and Development Symposium. November 7, 2009

Oregon Art Education Association Conference.  Portland OR, Fall 2007.

SIOP Model: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol. Attended workshops in teacher
preparation, instructional indicators, building background knowledge, and interactions, in order to make content comprehensible to English Language Learners. Helena, MT, Summer 2005.

Montana State Conference for Migrant Education. Helena MT, Summers 2002-2005.

## COMMUNITY ARTS PARTICIPATION

Columbia Center for the Arts Exhibits & Performances, Hood River, Oregon.
   “Authentic Hybrids” Visual Art Exhibit. October, 2008.
   “Insight” Visual Art Exhibit. January, 2008.
   “Mrs. Bob Cratchit’s Wild Christmas Binge” Play Performance. November, 2007.
   “Social Justice” Visual Arts Exhibit. May, 2007.

University of Montana Western Performances, Dillon, Montana.
   “Musical Comedy Murders of the 1940’s.” February, 2005.
   “Men are from Milwaukee and Women are from Phoenix.” November, 2004.

Please Contact me for References.

## ABSTRACT

*Gathering Places as Cultural Passages: Engaging with Public and Community Arts*

*Gathering Places as Cultural Passages* explores place and social interactions in relation to art. This research capstone delves into theoretical ways of seeing and addressing how different communities evoke the historical memories of a place. An extensive literature review explores how gathering spaces can become sustainable cultural and social assets in engaging communities.

The study additionally presents unique arts projects that engage community members in the learning and creation process, with the purpose of helping communities become aware of their own cultures and to be socially engaged. I define gathering places as public spaces, historical places, or cultural landmarks in communities, which serve as cultural passages in guiding the formation and creation of a sense of place and belonging. Gathering spaces provide opportunities to create an environment for expression and learning, which can represent the cultures of a community.

### Research Question(s):

How does public art and community art engage society to create gathering places? To address key concepts of the research, sub-questions arise: What is community civic engagement and how does it fit into participatory democracy? How do gathering spaces engage communities and aid in the formation of culture?

### Key Words:

*Space, Place, Gathering places, Civic engagement, Participatory democracy, Placemaking, Cultural Landscapes, Identity, Cultural heritage, Public art, and Community arts.*

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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore key strategies that involve and attract community members to be empowered and enact change in their communities, as well as to examine how gathering spaces can become sustainable cultural and social assets in engaging communities.

My research is informed by my own cross-cultural perceptions of place. My perspective has been and always will be multi-culturally influenced by the Mexican and Anglo Cultures. Growing up in an urban setting on the border of Baja California and influenced of living in Montana created a profound sensitivity to the natural environment; both cultural experiences are key foundations of my appreciation of cultural and historical places. Having worked as an arts educator, I have witnessed how gathering places within school systems and communities foster an environment that evokes the cultures of the community, promote multicultural inclusiveness, and also brings forth participation of (all) its members. An environment that has a *sense of place*, one that enhances, educates, empowers, and serves the interests and needs of community members, where hopes and dreams can be represented visually, dramatically, and musically is an effective space.

## CAPSTONE COURSES THAT SUPPORTED STUDY

The capstone courses that supported my study include: Community Arts Partnerships, Community Cultural Development, and Cultural Identity and Heritage. These courses were chosen based on content that I believed contributed to my study of *gathering places as cultural passages*. The content examined in these courses is presented as a literature review that delved into community, civic engagement, culture, identity, heritage, and participatory democracy.

## APPROACH TO RESEARCH

The expectation is that the concepts give insight to the purpose of giving voice to participatory democracy, the engagement necessary to create a place of cultural significance, and community identity. This research capstone delves into theoretical ways of seeing based on critical social theory,[1] that with examination will contribute a holistic approach to the development of a *sense of place* and G*athering Places* as *Cultural Passages*.

In exploring the concepts of 'gathering places' I also conducted a literature review in cultural geography, environment, placemaking, culture, cultural development, community, the arts, and education, in order to explore how a *sense of place* is created. I examine the question how public art and community arts are engaged in order to create gathering places. I also include research sub-questions: What is community civic engagement and how does it fit into participatory democracy? How do gathering spaces engage communities and aid in the formation of culture? In concurrence with the visual components of the capstone a professional blog has been created to house the materials (please see Appendix I [2]). Furthermore, programs that offer participatory arts projects are used as models of engagement.

I understand that engagement with the arts requires participation, and methods such as those in participatory action research produce a plethora of participant perspectives. Therefore, project based and art based research strategies, such as participatory action research will be described in the models of engagement section.

## ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

The concepts explored in my study are organized into three sections. This organizational framework is intended to foster an examination of how sense of place relates to the study of gathering places. First, in Section I, Sense of Place, I explore literature relevant to environment, space and place, culture, and placemaking; this section presents the holistic framework of the research.

Second, in Section II, Civic Engagement and Participatory Democracy, I focus on exploring the question: What is community civic engagement and how does it fit into participatory democracy? Third, in Section III, Models of Engagement, I review programs that serve as unique illustrations of how gathering spaces engage communities and aid in the formation of culture. These programs include: the *Animating Democracy Program,* the *Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, the Pomegranate Center,* the *Integral Vision of the Arts Program*, the *Wired Humanities Projects,* and the *Arts Builds Communities Grants Program.* Suitably, the report will conclude Section IV, Implications, which discusses the implications this study will have on my future endeavors as an artist, educator, and researcher.

## INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

"Just as we can learn to see more in design by recognizing similarities and differences, so we can better understand the dynamics of art in human life by seeing both similarities and differences in art and life among various periods and peoples."

———McFee & Degge, *Art, Culture and Environment:*

*A Catalyst for Teaching,* 1977.

Gathering places created as public art and those that exhibit community arts are found all over the world; they may be the plazas in urban settings or open spaces in school environments, for example. Gathering places can engage us in activities that promote a sense of place and encourage a cultural transformation. These places ignite interactions between people; these interactions are inherently necessary for collective community works such as public art and community arts. These works are produced through multiple partnerships of organizations, artists, arts administrators, public planning, city development, and the general public. These multiple perspectives help create gathering places that evoke the cultures of a community and create an environment for expression and learning.

All too many public places that already exist, although they are meant for civic purposes, have been created by key place-makers who have seldom involved the multicultural historical perspectives of a community. Likewise, the way our cities have been planned does not allow for easy access for social interaction. As the authors state in *Transform Space into Place* (2006), "In the United States the organization of the westward expansion led to the development of the way that our cities are planed, established in 1785 through the national land ordinance of the continental congress, and the roman grid is what we live within today. The issue is that the grid does not have the function for us to meet each other, for us to interact, it has only allowed for a passage of transportation" (The City Repair Project, 2011). Consequently, without the places that are

community driven and that connect us on a personal level to broadly embraced social and cultural past we are moving from point to point, instead of moving towards social encounters.

Moreover public spaces that evoke cultures are necessary for community engagement and for the formation of a community's identity. Francis Tibblad argued that "'places matter most:' 'We seem to be losing the ability to stand back and look at what we are producing as a whole…We need to stop worrying quite so much about individual buildings and other physical artefacts and think instead about places in their entirety'" (as cited in Carmona et al, 2003, p. 6). Furthermore, we tend to observe instead of experience and participate in the future look and feel of our communities. As articulated by Wortham-Galvin (2008) in *Mythologies of Placemaking,* a sense of place in America has been caught between "traditionalism and post-modernism more than about the actual experience of a place", which can be both real and imagined because "mythmaking and place are intertwined with identity" deriving from origins, leaders, and the constructed cultural landscapes (p. 1, 2).

In the context of *Gathering Places as Cultural Passages* the "actual experience of culture" is an occurrence of social interactions, engagement with the arts, and the feel (evoking emotion and conjuring memories) a place produces, rather than relying on characteristics to define its essence. For the purpose of this research, culture is defined as "a pattern of behaviors, ideas, and values shared by a group" (McFee & Degge, 1977, p. 272). Hayden (1995) in *The Power of Place* states, "the authors of books on architecture, photography, culture, geography, poetry and travel rely on "sense of place" as an aesthetic concept but often settle for "the personality of a location" as a way of defining it" (p. 15). With this in mind, an alternative is grounding "a *sense of place*" as an actual experience of cultures.

Notably, in an ever-growing diverse nation there needs to be awareness of the vision and the power of a collective imagination and one that includes diversity within our communities. We also need an awareness of why, how, and for what purposes we are creating our built environments, and we must create a set of cultural and art strategies. Hayden emphasizes the link to history through our environments:

> There needs to be, and there can be, a more coherent way of conceptualizing and planning the work each group is able to contribute to the presence of the past in the city. Cultural landscape's history can strengthen the links between previously disparate areas of practice that draw on public memory. And conscious effort to draw out public memory suggests new processes for developing projects (1995, p. 45).

In the same way, cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan reminds us that "prose recalls the past, makes us more aware of the present, and gives us a heightened anticipation for the future" (as cited in Gould, 1995, p. 598). Under the latter circumstances built environments such as gathering places are guides to cultural passages that exhibit the cultural identities, the memories of a space, and journeys that capture the art and multiple identities within those communities. In fact, authors, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) in *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* position the idea of place (with ethnographic scholars like Fabian 1990; Marcus 1989; and Thorton 1988), as "the apparent boundedness and coherence of 'a culture' as something made rather than found; the 'wholeness' of the holistically understood object appears more as a narrative device than as an objectively present empirical truth" (p. 2). By these means, gathering places such as public squares and historical landmarks, can in truth be cultural passages for the reason that they are concurrently either being created, preserved, or experienced.

Given these themes and concepts presented by the literature, we are offered insights to view *places as art*. In particular author Mike Lipske (1985), in *Places as Art* asserts:

The term '*places as art*' challenges us to look at our environment and at art in a new way. Usually we think of art as an object, something that hangs in a gallery or as an event that takes place on a stage. Yet places can be works of art, too. They can satisfy our desire for beauty, stir our deepest feelings, link us to our history (p. 8).

He also remarks, "places as art," allows for vision and attentiveness to what composes our surroundings and also makes possible for the arts to come together to create our environment. In this sense, gathering places are works of art created with resources, spaces, and people engaged in the community's development. If such spaces were going to emerge, it would need to have diverse groups collaborating to create a sense of unity. A desirable goal is to have a variety of spaces in a community, each with a unique character that serves various constituencies and helps them feel included in and represented by the community.

## SECTION I: SENSE OF PLACE

"Landscape [can be] seen as a cultural image in which it's represented through a variety of materials–symbolic imagery of cultural representations."

——Cosgrove, D. E., & Daniels, S.

*The Iconography of landscape, 1988.*

In this section I examine literature on environment, space and place, culture, and placemaking, which explores how a sense of place relates to the study of gathering places. In addition, the themes of art, social interactions, memory, identity, visceral feelings, and power are explored in this section. For instance, Jane Jacobs defines the role of places as the "containers of human activity and places for social interaction" (as cited in Carmona et al, 2003, p. 7). For this reason, the purpose of creating a sense of place is to focus on the relationships between the elements of built and un-built space, the character, diversity, access, control, community, and the environments (Carmon et al, 2003). And so, in this way the purpose to develop a space is to give voice to a place of environmental, cultural, and historical significance.

Additionally, as explained earlier, an important yet often unseen concept of developing a space is seeing place as art. Place as art dates back to the term "genius loci", which refers to the "spirit of place and is an ancient concept that most closely suggest the meaning of, and means of creative places as art" and particularly "genius loci" for "places as art" can say not only what we are but what we hope to become" (Lipske, 1985, p. 16). As a result, a community's history, principles, and perspectives are made visible by the gathering spaces people choose to engage in, and they present possibilities of human interactions.

**Environment**

In exploring the literature on the significance of the environment for cultural considerations, I began to connect landscape, art, and social interactions. Given these points, "It is only a short step to consider the relations between symbol, metaphor, and synthesia–that strange experience when one sense 'informs' another" (as cited in Gould, 1995, p. 598). Similarly, *The Iconography of Landscape*, by Cosgrove, & Daniels (1988) shines a light on "landscape as a cultural image" in which it's "represented through a variety of materials" – "symbolic imagery of cultural representations" (p. 1). Hence, the mixture of landscape, art, and social interactions in gathering places can be portrayed in the studies of iconography.

To explain, Kaufman (2004) in *Towards a Geography of Art,* examines the geography of art as "the effect of the environment, cultural and natural, on what humans have created" (p. 1). He also brings forth perspectives from philosophers such as Polybius, who "attributed the character of people to geographical climate and location" (p. 5). Tuan explains, "an individual's sense of place is both a biological response to the surrounding physical environment, and a cultural creation" (as cited in Hayden, 1995, p. 16). In the same way, what we see and how we interact is also examined in West, Igoe, and Brockington (2006) *Parks and Peoples: The Social Impact of Protected Areas.* West, Igoe, and Brockington examine relationships between peoples and their surroundings, with the "social, material and symbolic effect of protected areas have on people's lives" (p. 252). These relationships not only with physical surroundings, but also relationships with people are an overarching theme in the entire literature examine for this essay. Indeed "an awareness of the impact of design on our lives comes with understanding what art is communicating about qualities, values, and beliefs" (McFee & Degge, 1977, p. 293).

## Space & Place

Here I continue to connect the environment and art to gathering places. I do this by exploring the writings of cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, which focus on exploring the nature of experience within a place. Tuan argues that "'space is expressed as freedom, openness, ability to move and something to be marked off and defend. Whereas 'space' is undifferentiated, 'place' is as a definite object that provides feelings of security and stability, to which a felt value is attached and that is a source of confidence, due to one feeling at home or at ease in a place, or that it is familiar and can be taken for granted" (as cited in Patricios p. 253).

According to Tuan (1975) in *Place: An Experiential Perspective*, the interdependency of culture with the physical environment is the key approach to awareness and the "nature of experience." Tuan believes that we desire to know the world objectively not by passive means, but by "actively exploring" and critical thinking about what is being seen. In this way we suitably "create patterns of reality to human purposes"(1975, p. 152). In essence, cultural perspectives coincide with ways of seeing and employing what is seen through particular social actions, social order and power can be represented if the city is seen as text (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988). Environments that contain "text," the visual voice to the environment's story, can help us critical reflect on our personal cultural patterns.

## Culture & Placemaking

The literature relating to culture and placemaking offers additional cultural perspectives on identity, visceral feelings, community, and power, which are essential ingredients for examining the immersive experience of gathering places. As stated previously, culture is defined as "a pattern of behaviors, ideas, and values shared by a group" (McFee & Degge, 1977, p. 272). The arts—specifically, public art, and community arts are a great window into this type of examination. They

are a "means of communicating, teaching, and transmitting these cultural ideas and values, [and] thus maintain the behavior, ideas, and values" (McFee & Degge, 1977, p. 272). For example, Kleim (2004) in *Dispatches - Multi-Sourcing,* defines creating a space as the influence of Multi-sourcing, where learning takes place from all kinds of images and ideas, in which the energy of a place, enforces people's identity in the place. Kleim's observation that space is "a venue for inspiration" that "sparks creative opportunity, enforces the interpretation of a cultural phenomena in which a sense of place is an "Awash of Mystery" that echoes the energy of the space and its influences" (p. 70, 72).

At the same time, "the kind of public art that can truly contribute to a sense of place needs to start with a new kind of relationship to the people whose history is being represented" (Hayden, 1995, p. 76). Furthermore, "every human-made object that we can see, touch, or smell communicates; it tells us something about its use, its function, and its social meaning," calling our attention to the need to investigate social interaction in places that are occupied. It is also worth noting the suggestion that "people both create and react to the culture that maintains and sustains their way of life" (McFee & Degge, 1977, p. 276, 280).  For instance, Tuan (1975) claims that "place is a center of meaning constructed by experience," what's more "at a high theoretical level, places are points in a spatial system. At the opposite extreme, they are strong visceral feelings" (p. 152).

In the same way, Carmona (2003) in *Public Places–Urban Spaces***,** confirms the need to make places for people to invoke feelings, knowledge, and power. The purpose rests in invoking knowledge that is based on social and cultural heritage, between space, and society, with "an overall concern with the quality of the public realm [being] both physical and socio-cultural" (p. 1). Accordingly, Hayden (1988) illustrates in *Placemaking, Preservation and Urban History*, the goal for a

"'theory of place' by establishing a new agenda for historical preservation, public art, and urban design" (p. 45) in Los Angeles, California. She emphasizes that it is about the people, the voices of ethnic minorities and women whom are also the past, present and future. These vital members of the community have been overlooked or misrepresented. As a result, public spaces do not allow them an expression of voice, do not represent their experience or knowledge, and will not reflect their feelings. Hayden inherently intends that this injustice be rectified.

Likewise, Fleming & Tscharner (1987) argue in *Place Makers* in favor of "an ethic for the built environment," addressing the need for symbols and imagery that "activate our curiosity about where we are, inspire some reverie about our future there," and "restore a vision of public value" (p. 25). Members of communities that do not experience an activation of their curiosity or stir some reverie about a future in a given place are not taken into account the "mental linkage" in the very definition of "public value" and might not treat the built environment as though they are participants in its preservation.

The essay on *"Ethnography at the End of an Era" in Culture, Power, Place* (Gupta, A. & Ferguson, J., 1997) emphasizes "The sense of culture as a space of order and agreed-on meanings, meanwhile, undergoes a transformation of its own in the process," sometimes through "ironic political processes through which cultural forms are imposed, invented, reworked, and transformed" (p. 5). I would agree that the public might embrace some impositions, but others will not resonate for all community members, who do not necessarily understand or buy into the "agreed-on meanings." We must be conscientious to such disconnects.

In addition, Kaplan (1985) argues, "location and local perspectives should be involved in devising "policies and regulation [that] bend enough to allow the developer to formulate the type of space best suited to a particular site" (p. 13). While local perspectives are necessary for the creation

of site-specific gathering places, at the same time global perspectives are increasingly suggested in the placemaking literature, especially relevant for grasping essential component of the concept *Gathering Places as Cultural Passages.*

For instance, Hector Fernando Burga (2009) argues in *Decentering Urban Theory* that "innovative ideas in urban planning, and thought provoking conversations, will lead urban developers, planners and architects to envisioning, as he states, "a solution to the global economic crisis" [3] (p. 93). According to Burga, the solutions to the global economic crisis can be found in cities such as São Paulo, Mumbai, Kinshasa, Johannesburg, Beirut, and Mexico City (p. 94) whose urban development focuses on the concerns of social and material necessities. This international lesson can have clear bearing for inner city U.S.A., where impoverished and immigrant populations are not always seamlessly integrated into the larger community and feel disaffected.

He names this approach "design interventions," an approach that in his view can be implemented in urban communities in the United States with potential success. Burga supports his argument with examples of the multiple perspectives given by "urban theorists, practicing architects, development experts, and social activists" (p. 94). Some of these perspectives present urban development as a locus for "auto-construction" by "emerging urbanities" and a "neocentering" where he proposed "urban citizenship as a basis for legal rights" (p. 95) at the conference on *Peripheries: Decentering Urban Theory.*

He notes that although these cities have global economic issues they are administering "innovating interventions" (p. 95). Interventions are seen as urban development practices that are placed in the hands of creative community members in order to create, and preserve more relevant and inclusive gathering places.

## SECTION II: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

"Art is the inevitable consequence of growth and is the manifestation of the principles of its origin."

——Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit*, 1984

In this section, I continue to explore the connections between power and social interactions by means of examining the concepts of Civic Engagement and Participatory Democracy within the context of the arts. I do this by examining content and literature from the following courses, Community Arts Partnership, Community Cultural Development, and Cultural Heritage and Identity. My aim is to grasp complexities such as community as a place, cultural transformation, cultural democracy, education, and cultural identity and heritage, in order to reflect on one's own place within a global community.

I embrace the concept that, "In America, or in any country, greatness in art" will "come by the art spirit entering into the very life of the people, not as a thing apart, but as the greatest essential of life to each one" (Henri p. 188). When art is holistic in this way, it will facilitate the creation of socially responsible and culturally reflective art in gathering places.

Civic engagement, multicultural education, cultural development, and participatory democracy were laudable goals raised during the Civil Rights era in the second half of the twentieth century. My vision for gathering places as cultural passages would insist upon the arts as well as multicultural education as essential component of the "journey of personal and community transformation" (Nieto, 2010, p. 26). In the same way, participatory democracy is needed for creating a more inclusive and representative *sense of place* and also requires that we be cognizant of power relations. With this in mind, Paul Kivel (2000), in *The Culture of Power,* urges us to become aware of the culture of power around us. In particular, we must seek out "information about who has power and privilege, and who is vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion" (p. 3), in order to

reverse such social injustices. He also states, "Every person has the right to complete respect, equitable access, and full participation" (p. 6) in a truly representative and participatory democracy. If we define civic engagement as "individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern" (Stern & Seifert, 2009), engagement in the arts offers access to a participatory democracy in education and placemaking.

## Community as a Place

In my view, the concept of community as a place expands the idea of "*places as art*." When community as a place allows a group of individuals to engage with one another in the midst of cultural diversity, they have the potential to create a more equitable civic engagement and a more legitimate participatory democracy. To broaden this with a consideration of what art adds to the mix, some the studies of environment, place and space, and culture ask us to interpret the deeper meaning of the artistic elements. For example, one author points to the symbolic nature of art in what "Panofsky called the 'intrinsic meaning' of a work of art 'by ascertaining those underlying principles [that] reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion – unconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one work" (Cosgrove & Daniels, p. 2). Hence, a place that serves the interests and needs of wider array of community members can also represent a community's more authentic cultures, and therefore a more sustainable environment.

In the same way, a sense of place and community assist in engaging with our communities and maintain an awareness of collective experiences. This concept of creating spaces for communities is discussed in *INROADS: The Intersection of Art & Civic Dialogue*. According to Assaf, Korza, and Schaffer-Bacon (2002), "More than just physical environment, the arts and humanities can offer psychological, experiential and intellectual space conductive to reflection and discussion"

(p. 6). As a result, community is represented through group dynamics from the past, present, and future possibilities that evoke the shared cultures.

Furthermore, group dynamics build communities, as discussed by Ewell and Altman (2003) in *Community organizing: Building community through the arts*. They state, "'Group power' emphasize[s] a valid and important process in creating a sense of group identity" (p.1). The culture and identity of a community can be seen not only in the presence of individuals within a place, but also in the common interest that brings members (of the community) together. They might also share an underlying and quietly agreed-upon sense of meaning in the environment that surrounds them. Ray Oldenburg (2001) in *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories about the "Great Good Places" at the Heart of Our Communities* labeled gathering places as "Third Places". He states, "The best attitude toward the third place is that it merely be an expected part of life" (p. 37). In addition, gathering places are the safe environments, for communication and expression. As a result, community and gathering spaces are the places we can call home. Or, they might be what psychologist David Seamon calls "homes away from home" (as cited in Oldenburg, p. 39). In this way the arts in gathering places are visual representations of individual and community interests expressed outside of the household.

In other words, a sense of community and a sense of place can be essential elements in the construction of a balanced environment, and a natural way of life. Similar to the experience of a sense of community, "art provides an image of feeling: it gives objectified form and visibility to feeling so that what is powerful but inchoate can lead a semipublic life" (Tuan, 1975, p. 161). For this reason, the environments that shape us are the places that allow for a personal experience where one feels connected and where the art reflects both a sense of self-identity and a shared identity with a larger community.

The continuous experiences and engagement with our environment (specifically with gathering places) become the connectors that help create community culture and that link us to the world that surrounds us. As Tuan (1975) asserts, "Experience takes time. Sense of place is rarely acquired in passing. To know a place well requires long residence and deep involvement," therefore, "to know a place is to know the past" (p. 164), which develops a connection to a sense of place. Drawing from this approach, we might say that cultural passages involve revisiting those recognizable and comfortable spaces where we have a connection, where we have witnessed or participated in activities over time that we associate with our very being as well as something larger than our selves.

## Activating Public Space

Activating public space is a further method of engagement. It builds connections between people, making positive change in communities, and breaking down walls of ethnic, economic, and social class through the arts. *Creative Organizations: Putting Culture to Work in Community Development,* by Tom Borrup (2003) was written to report the "role of arts and culture in the community development initiative of "Active Public Space," part of the Ford Foundation Asset Building and Community Development Program" (p. 1). According to this study, the role of arts and culture organizations is to "support community involvement and participation, increase the potential for people to understand themselves and change how they see the world and bolster community pride and identity" (p. 5). By activating public space through the arts a safe space is created for participatory citizenship, which leads to a means of transforming our environments.

Overall, the initiative of 'Active Public Space' originated from the need to achieve broader and more inclusive social and civic awareness in the work of community and cultural development. Researchers were looking for ways to assess the impacts of organizations (in community and

cultural development work) have on their communities. The concept of activating public space came to life with the intention that "Just as healthy ecosystems benefit from diversity, the coexistence of a variety of organizational approaches can be advantageous in building healthy communities" (Borrup, p. 1).

In Borrup's report, the organizations that brought diversity to civic and cultural work were selected as exemplary illustrations, they included: Miami's Black Archives History and Research Foundation, Minneapolis/St. Paul's Youth Farm and Market Project, Boston's Asian Community Development Corporation, and East Oakland's Tumi's and Eastside Arts Alliance. These organizations brought forth constructive community building work through the following principles:

> Exploring Outside of the Box—brought unique assets and approaches to their efforts to improve their communities.

> Differences That People Make—Patterns of thinking, behavior and strengths vary greatly among individuals as they get imprinted on organizations and institutions. These patterns are neither right nor wrong as long as they are an appropriate fit for their community's strengths, visions and challenges.

> Using the Creative Process To Realize a Vision—They focus more attention on their involvement in the dynamics of the world they're hoping to change. They approach their goals with no preconceived notion of how their work should be organized.

> Evidence of Their Impact Mounts—A flurry of recent studies has arrived at similar conclusions: that small, community-based cultural organizations have far greater impact than their size would suggest. And, that this impact is felt in areas not typically associated with the arts (Borrup, p. 1-4).

Consequently, researchers "recommend increasing activities that honor the community's own experiences and that offer more opportunities for participation in creating, and practicing artistic and cultural work" (Borrup, p. 5). These principles and recommendations have shaped my

conceptualization of *gathering places as cultural passages* as the ideal of art as practice for a more socially and multicultural inclusive community where new patterns of culture are activated in public spaces.

## Participatory Democracy

"Participatory democracy insists that the people themselves must decide, and at its heart it generates and requires dialogue—each one speaking with the hope of being heard, each one listening with the possibility of being changed (Souto-Manning, 2010, p.194)."

All of the traditions to convey a sense of place, a sense of community, social, and civic issues are best communicated and encountered through participating in the arts. This type of arts-based communication is labeled as "arts-based civic dialogue," which is "the artistic process and/or the art or humanities presentation [which] provides a key focus or catalyst for public dialogue on the issue" (Assaf, Korza, & Schaeffer-Bacon, 2002 p. 2). Gathering places, or the "Third spaces exist on neutral ground and serve to level their guest to a condition of social equality. Within these places, conversation is the primary activity and the major vehicle for the display and appreciation of human personality and individuality" (Oldenburg, p. 42). The physical surroundings, which may include art pieces, the design of a place, nature, and the people within the space converge to create a visual representation, an opportunity for conversational engagement, and may foster participatory democracy.

When people are given the opportunity to engage in dialogue with enactments of art, performances, and social movements, their overall understanding of the issues improves. In the same way, awareness that community is art engages freedom of expression and participation. Clearly, then the process and experience of art become the connections, which "can bring people to the conversation who might not otherwise participate. It can bring forward the voices of those often silenced or left out of public discourse" (Assaf, Korza, and Schaffer-Bacon, 2002, p. 5).

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Participation in our communities connects us to an individual's expressions as well as group work that evokes the culture of the people.

The concept of participation to engage in building our communities and our culture is described as "participatory citizenship", which engage[s] community members in the issues of the community, by participating in community development opportunities" (Borrup, 2003). In other words, a participatory citizen is practicing a truer democracy. Furthermore, a communities' social and political issues are known to feed an artist's work, too, creating a symbiotic process.

Participatory democracy in the arts, aids in expressing views through visual representations, dramatic interpretations, and poetic writing. Hence, the opportunity to learn about the culture of a community and engage in pathways to culture can be found in creating public art and engaging in community arts. "Art can humanize civic issues, bringing forward the human impact and implications" (Assaf, Korza, and Schaffer-Bacon, 2002, p. 11). As stated previously, the process of civic engagement with the arts creates the opportunities for creative dialogue and enhances participatory democracy.

The connection between participatory democracy and learning is well documented in Paulo Freire's work. He became one of the most influential writers and thinkers on education in the second half of the twentieth century. He connected community cultural development within his method of education. He believed that people learn democracy through their hands, by taking action, "the important thing is to help men (and nations) help themselves, to place them in consciously critical confrontation with their own problems, to make them agents of their own recuperations" (Freire, 2008, p. 12). Freire's concept "Education as the Practice of Freedom" is defined as communicating and intercommunicating through dialogue what is understood of people's language, arts, and culture (Freire, 2008). In a like manner, "art trains attention and

educated sensibility; it prepares one to respond to the character of alien places and situations" (Tuan, p. 162). In the end, participatory democracy in the arts opens opportunities for people to engage in passageways to culture. This engagement gives an artistic dialogue to participation in the gathering places of our communities.

Consequently, according to Buber's philosophy, "In dialogue, we penetrate behind the polite superficialities and defenses in which we habitually armor ourselves. We listen and respond to one another with an authenticity that forges a bond between us" (as cited in Yankelovic, 2001, p. 15). Both education and placemaking rely on participatory democracy and dialogue, and with the arts placed in the middle of the process it creates a visual representation of culture. Therefore, the arts bridge and activate the experience of the participatory democracy, and contribute to a share sense of place.

## Cultural Transformation

Considering the latter, the process of transforming our environments through arts and culture is the work of civic engagement, participatory democracy, and also the work of community cultural development (CCD). What constitutes CCD "emerged in the 1960's to refer to 'activities undertaken by artist-organizers in collaboration with community members, employing social imagination and collective creation in the arts to express identity, concerns, hopes, and fears'" (Goldbard, 2005, p.1).

In essence culture is created in a community by transforming peoples' voices into actions. That is to say, "Culture is what people do with nature. Culture clarifies our role in the world and with the world as transforming rather than adaptive beings. Through culture we can transform our environments" (Freire, 2008, p. 57). The major concepts in the CCD can be found in Paulo Freire's concept of dialogue, in Saul Alinsky's (1971) concept of giving power to the people, and in

recommendation of Don Adams and Arlene Golbard (2001) to take action through active participation. Adams & Goldbard argue further that "cultural action frequently serves as a form of preparation for social change" (p. 21). Therefore, to culturally and socially transform a community is to give voice to the people. This social change is accomplished thorough expanded participation and involving people in making choices about the future of their community.

To step directly into action makes sense when culture is defined as something that we do with our surroundings, which in turn can be considered as a reflection of our culture. Transformative action can include creating, producing, and expressing ourselves artistically within our familiar surroundings. Above all, the characteristics of a mature and pleasing culture are noted as the "collective enterprise, human values, physical artifacts, institutions, social and political beliefs, crafts, performing arts, visual arts, literature, & various forms of communication" (David Olsen, Cherry Creek Theatre [4]). Furthermore, respect must adhere to the need and desire to create culture in order to develop a broad and inclusive cultural understanding.

For the latter reasons, I see culture and community as interconnected, and to separate them is an impossible task. In my view, the arts provide an optimism that we can create a collective sense of place, and as a result a cultural transformation moves us also in the direction toward social change. Alinsky (1971) author of *Rules for radicals: A practical primer for realistic radicals,* believed that change means movement. His personal philosophy "is anchored in optimism. It must be, for optimism brings with it hope, a future with a purpose, and therefore, a will to fight for a better world" (p. 21). Hence, with purpose and voice we create a future filled with passageways to culture through our collective artistic work.

Another equally important thought, is to remember that we are constantly re-organizing the culture within us and around us, listening and taking in, and inserting our views into a

community of sometimes shared and sometimes diverse perspectives. If common interests are not as apparent, community members might perceive that their voices do not belong. But what needs to be understood is that with CCD we are creating in our classrooms as in our shared community spaces a collective learning environment. In other words, Paulo Freire's concept of dialogue, that of "listening with an empathetic ear" and understanding viewpoints in people's language, arts and culture is an important start toward a more equitable, more representative cultural development in our communities.

Therefore, listening and understanding diverse viewpoints is also a necessary form of active participation.  After all, according to Adams and Goldbard (2001) "active participation in cultural life is an essential goal of community cultural development" (p. 17). Through active participation we are changing ourselves as we are changing our communities in extraordinary ways. This model of practice is a method for identifying what makes a place special, and how to become involved in our communities as "cultural workers."

The term "cultural worker" is used for those who participate in community cultural development; it is anyone who engages people in dialogue and active participation in developing a community. This practice also applies to the first step to cultural planning called "cultural inventory," with a mixture of successful characteristics of CCD, which rely on the following; "people are the key, clarity and trust the most important factors, clear on issue being addressed then find the right partner, extra work, communicate-communicate-communicate, be open to change (flexibility), incremental steps, document outcomes, consider needs and expectations, Partner!" (Flood & Vogel, 2009, p. 12). Flood provides additional tips for developing the "cultural inventory" in the "areas of arts, heritage, history, and humanities […] seeking to identify people,

places, organizations or other networks or bodies that are significant, special, and unique to our communities," [5] and ones that open doors for active participation.

This idea of active participation is connected with Alinsky's (1971) concept of "giving the power back to the people," consequently mobilizing individuals to work with the assets within their community. Essentially, Alinsky's aim is to "organize for power" (to create our own power), to create mass organizations, to seize power and give it to the people (p. 10). In the context of gathering places, giving power back to the people is to give them the opportunity to create and engage with visual representations of their community and thereby shape their own culture.

In this way, the concept of power can encompass the ability to "claim public space" for the "members of marginalized communities [which] lack public space for their cultural expressions. Speaking concretely, they seldom have institutions, facilities or amenities equal to those available to more prosperous neighborhoods or communities" (Adams & Goldbard, p. 30). Furthermore, Alinsky's "tenth rule of the ethics of means and ends" is that "you do what you can with what you have and clothe it with moral garments" (p. 36).

Consequently, operating on the terms of working with what was given to us and our gifts, we are able to see things as they really are, which sets a drive to create a better world by becoming creative transmitters of culture. This is a culture that can be more diverse and more inclusive of people previously excluded and alienated.

## Cultural Democracy

The process of civic engagement, community cultural development, participatory democracy, cultural transformation and education are the means towards empowering people to find their voice and achieve the change desired. In the context of CCD, the collective encounters of

these voices aid in understanding influences and add insight to the concept of cultural democracy and cultural heritage.

In the view of Adams and Goldbard (2001), "Cultural democracy is predicated on the idea that diverse cultures should be treated as essentially equal in our multicultural societies." Further, they state, "within this framework, cultural development becomes a process of assisting communities and individuals to learn, express and communicate in multiple directions, not merely from the top–the elite institutions of the dominant culture–down" (p. 55).

Room for broader participation can be given, it can be taken, or some of each ideally with multiple sides yielding or sharing space. Moreover, previously marginalized people can help one another find their voices, believing in each other, and showing respect for the more diverse cultural experience of communities. Alinsky's notes "we learn from experience," (p. 69) therefore, we learn about a community not by studying a community, but by experiencing a community. We must open and create spaces where these more diverse experiences will take place and where we can dialogue about them in a non-threatening way.

By becoming constituents, we are active participants engaged in dialogue and creators of a vision for a more representative and diverse culture. Alinsky believes that "we dialogue and react based on our own experiences" (p. 87). For example "when communities are split over contentious issues, the aim of community cultural development projects is often to create opportunities for dialogue rather than the type of debate that leads to greater polarization" (Adams and Goldbard, p. 29). For this purpose, CCD workers, leaders, and/or community organizers do not define and dictate what is a community for the people. Communities are the places that develop organically from our cultural diversities. The gathering places in themselves are works of art, which reflect our identities and bridge us together.  Subsequently, the constant theme of participation supports the

idea that we cannot have a holistic culture without multiple perspectives. Accordingly, it is understood that taking in another's experience as well as expressing one's own point of view achieves a vision for a better tomorrow and creates a sense of place, a home where we can co-reside in peace and safety.

## Cultural Heritage

At times the art of our communities is visible and recognizable, when it is, it reflects back to us our sense of self, our shared heritage, our cultures. It is an essential component of our identity and the comfort we find in our community. In the context of gathering places as cultural passages we must be cautious not to assume that a "dominant culture" and its visible expressions will speak effectively for all. We must also not overlook the cultural heritage of the members of our diverse community who wish to have a greater presence. Cultural heritage is a concept that is open to change, it "reflect[s] living culture every bit as much as that of the past" (UNESCO, 2008). By supporting cultural heritage of all the members of our community we help promote cultural diversity, encourage active participation, and continuity in recreating it, as well as dedicating to the preservation of our cultural experiences.

## SECTION III: MODELS OF ENGAGEMENT

"Engaging people in dialogue about issues and ideas can be made easier and the quality of dialogue made deeper when people are involved in the art-making process."

———Lynn Stern, *Nuevo California:*

*On the Border of Art and Civic Dialogue, 2003*

The following section highlights organizations that promote through programming long-term growth and change by creating "multicultural learning communities" (Nieto, 2010). By providing proactive engagement opportunities these organizations' create a safe space for civic dialogue, education, cultural heritage, and cross-cultural exchange. Such opportunities challenge us to embrace new ways of seeing and creating. They also engage communities and aid in the formation of culture.

A number of organizations offer opportunities for art projects that help create visual representations of culture through community arts and various types of public art. These opportunities help fulfill the ideals that shape these programs, which in turn motivate community members to participate. These models of engagement are emerging from the following organizations: the *Animating Democracy,* the *Esperanza Peace and Justice Center,* the *Pomegranate Center, the Integral Vision of the Arts program* (AVI), the *Wired Humanities Projects* (WHP), and *Art Builds Communities Grants Program* (ABC).

### Unique Organizations

It is instructive to work with multiple perspectives and approaches to creating gathering places for the reason that these perspectives make visible the various connections that empower community arts. The following social, arts, and educational organizations explore the multiple meanings of community through a complex set of negotiations of social and cultural boundaries, which include dialogue, cultural grounding, the artist's role, and the use of public space.

## Animating Democracy Project

Animating Democracy is "the artistic imagination as a force in civic dialogue," (Bacon, B. S., Yuen, C. L., Korza, P, 1999). Animating Democracy (ADI) is one example of a program that uses arts-based projects to engage dialogue on civic issues. ADI projects work with "intra-group dialogues that seek to help clarify each particular group's own relationship to an issue, and to empower that group's voice before engaging in a broader inter-group dialogue" (Assaf, A., Korza, P., and Schaffer-Bacon, B., 2002, p. 7).

A common practice and belief of ADI is that "engaging people in dialogue about issues and ideas can be made easier and the quality of dialogue made deeper when people are involved in the art-making process" (Stern, 2003, p. 10). Therefore the art of creating *gathering places as cultural passages* can be perceived as the "mix of art and culture" that utilizes participatory engagement and respects diversity. If "the art of placemaking is the mix of art and culture," then "the art of placemaking needs to be understood in a time when that proverbial 'sense of place' is disappearing all around us" (Fleming, 1987, p. 13). ADI's principles of practice and evaluation checklist are attributable to the idea of placemaking in that they encompass a democratic process that adheres to an inclusive *sense of place*. For example the principles of "inclusion," "dialogue," and "deliberation," requires for relevant interest, values, and views of participants as an understood sense of inclusion (Ernest H., Kenneth, H., 2000).

## Esperanza Peace and Justice Center: Arte es Vida Program

The *Esperanza Peace and Justice Center "*believe[s] in creating bridges between people by exchanging ideas and educating and empowering each other" (Assaf & Sánchez, 2003, p. 5). Andrea Assaf, and Graciela Sánchez (2003) writer and executive director of *Arte es Vida* (a program of Esperanza Peace and Justice Center), explore the role of an artist and the "cultural grounding" as

necessary for an individual's empowerment and involvement in democratic civil life.

Cultural grounding in *Arte es Vida: A Case Study: The Esperanza Peace and Justice Center*, is described as "the concept that a strong sense of selfhood and identity, rooted in creative expression and cultural practice, [cultural grounding] is necessary to empower marginalized communities and individuals to participate actively in public dialogue and civic life" (Assaf & Sánchez, 2003, p. 1). In this way, the artists and other individuals involved in the arts must understand that the process is about building a more inclusive community. Assaf further articulates the ideals that shape Esperanza:

> The Esperanza Center takes multiple approaches to activism, including: cultural grounding as a means of empowerment; cultural practice as a mode of community building; advocacy for the arts and culture as a civic issue (of representation, acknowledgement, equity, etc.); use of art in demonstrations and performances of resistance (Assaf, and Sanchez, p. 2).

Hence, through creative expression, and story telling central assumptions about education, the economy, society, cultural values, and governmental policies may be revealed. *Arte es Vida's* goals for building community are bound "together by values of human dignity and shared learning" (p. 48).

**Pomegranate Center**

The Pomegranate Center Organization in Issaquah, Washington, has developed ideals with regard to the use of public space. Multiple opportunities are offered through their programming, which includes: *Build Place, Build Community,* and *Build Leaders.* The organization is internationally recognized for developing neighborhoods and gathering places. Created in 1986 by artist and community organizer Milenko Matanovic, the center addresses community development by creating places with community members, who work together. In the *Build Place* program, the

Pomegrante Center and the community "imagine, plans, and create shared public places designed to encourage social interaction and to build a local sense of identity" (Pomegranate Center, 2011).

For example, the creation of the Pomegranate Center was inspired by the Kuchuma project in 1992, an outdoor chapel, made by local brick and stone from Tecate, México (my hometown). The Kuchuma project is a participatory art-making project, which combines the essential unique qualities of workshop leaders James Hubbell and Milenko Matanovic, twelve U.S. participants and a group of Mexican masons. The location at the base of the mountain (Kuchuma), a sacred place that holds spiritual importance to the local people, is significant and intentional. What the Pomegranate Center people have created encompasses the notion of being within art, experiencing the true creation of collective collaborate work, incorporating the unique qualities of the people involved as well as recognizing the surrounding cultural landscape.

Another example of their programming and ideals are found in their *Build community* with their "collaborate, win-win approach to problem-solving inspires broad community participation" and *Build Leaders* program that trains "community leaders to inspire and engage others to build stronger, healthier, more connected communities" (Pomegranate Center, 2011).

One great example of these two programs is adding a sense of safety to an existing park to the Washington Park Project in Walla Walla, Washington. The Pomegranate Center working together with Walla Walla–based nonprofit Commitment to Community, and community members "add[ed] safety to a misused park – through color, music, and dance". Besides working together to design the new additions to the park, one great outcome of the project includes "Dia del Ninos celebration which will be the first community festival in Washington Park since the state, dance floor and shelters have been added" (Pomegranate Center, 2011). Community organizations with ideals such as those of Pomegranate Center have the power to improve community, to teach

creative invention, to create "safe" spaces to communicate, and to think outside the box. They also create multiple entrée opportunities for participatory democracy.

### Integral Vision of the Arts Program (AVI)

The idea of "Arts Integration" in the public school system has been a key argument for the survival of arts education programs in schools and communities, primarily through artist-in-residence and afterschool programs. Dorinne Dorfman (2008)[6] sheds a light onto the process of establishing a democratic and academic oriented environment in the schools along with possibilities and struggles in her publication, *Arts Integration as a Catalyst for High School Renewal*. She asks if an art integration program set up as a career academy of the arts can be the solution for student empowerment and academic fulfillment for our public school system. Dorfman successfully discusses her experience as project director of Integral Vision of the Arts program (IVA) to establish that art can be a catalyst for inspiring democratic education.

Dorfman points out in her accounts the trends of high school renewal based in career academics, arts integration and democratic education. She provides a comprehensive report on published documentation concerning the background and framework needed for such an endeavor. Dorfman's detailed descriptions of the "common elements" (p. 53) in arts integration and career academies, merged with those of democratic education methods, are informative and necessary, and reflect the complexity of such a project. Democratic education methods such as those of Paulo Freire's were implemented in IVA.

Dorfman asserts that a career academy of the arts is a catalyst for the development of a democratic education. She supports this through an example of the Advisory course, which she help design during the first two years of IVA. The course promoted democratic development, based on "state standards in communication, problem solving, personal development, and civic

responsibility" (p. 54). Dorfman believes that the process of democratic development may encourage students to become responsible for developing their personal learning environment (p. 54). It is also important to note that in the Advisory course the students partnered with teachers with similar interests.

Overall Dorfman's findings are valid for this field of study. The article is informative because it "demonstrat[es] student growth in public speaking, writing, the arts, technology, and organization" (p. 59) as well how IVA had "positive impact school-wide and on the lives of its participant. Dorfman goes a step further by offering suggestions to those interested in developing a democratic learning environment, which further lends credence towards finding "new pathways" in education.

## Personal & Professional Engagement

The latter models of engagement, the *Animating Democracy, the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, the Pomegranate Center,* and the *Integral Vision of the Arts Program*, informed the possibilities of *Gathering Places as Cultural Passages*, and guided me through forming my own *sense of place,* as well as creating an environment for learning and expression during a collective art project. This collective art project became a means to apply theory to practice. The theory that gathering places as cultural passages as guides for the formation and creation of a sense of place and belonging towards the practice of experiencing culture by means a personal and professional journey and addressed issues of public concern through collaboration, dialogue, inclusion, and participation. The issues addressed and elements of civic engagement in it of them-selves created a *sense of place* and the cultures within that space became visually accessible.

The following section presents a discussion of my personal experience of learning through *the Wired Humanities Projects*, as well as the experience of creating a gathering place through the *Art*

*Builds Communities Grants Program*. I describe my process and my cultural experiences in both models and incorporate photographs of historical and cultural places as examples of a cross-cultural *sense of place* from the gathering places of Mexico. Elaboration of my personal and professional engagement through these projects is housed on my professional blog (see Appendix I), which was created as a component of my graduate studies, and my capstone. The WordPress blog has served not only as a professional portfolio, but also as visual representation of my journey into a *sense of place*.

## Wired Humanities Projects

To engage in the very "act of learning" about identity, society, culture, and democracy is empowering to the process of dialogue. One illustration of an organization that has paid attention to experiential learning is the *Wired Humanities Projects* at the University of Oregon. Among some of its many other projects, WHP organizes and runs summer institutes for schoolteachers with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. These institutes involve an immersive, cross-cultural arts learning experience in Oaxaca, México.

Participating teachers spend four weeks in Oaxaca, studying the art and architectural remains of ancient civilizations, indigenous-authored pictorial manuscripts that capture their perspectives on Spanish colonialism, modern-day community arts programs (such as textiles, ceramics, and carved wooden animals) that are integral to the identities of Native communities today, and films that treat indigenous community concerns today, such as environmental risks in work places, inequality for women in the political system, and injustice in the courts and prisons.

Engaging with one of these institutes in the summer of 2010, I was able to travel deeply into Mexico, the country of my origin. In that environment, I found a *sense of place*. The immersive experience in Oaxaca helped me form connections to diverse art experiences that brought forth Mesoamerican traditional art practices, contemporary art, media communities, and educational

learning programs. More than simply observing or guiding the process as an assistant to the Director, I also participated in the process of developing k-12 broad-based curriculum with the selected participants of the NEH Summer Institute. The intention behind curriculum development was to create lessons that would appeal to a variety of learners and bring greater multicultural depth and understanding into U.S. classrooms. Together with a considerable number of the participant teachers I was interested in developing community-building art projects.[7]

Ostensibly participating as an administrative assistant and cultural and language liaison, I found myself immersed in a cross-cultural experience where I could more easily imagine how gathering spaces can become a sustainable asset in engaging a community after the creation of the space, and how gathering spaces can create an artistic representation of the culture in a community. While in these gathering places, I explored Emmison's and Smith's (2000) *Researching the visual: Images, objects, contexts and interactions in social and cultural inquiry*, where the gathering places of our society act as "'lived text' where both actions and sign systems can be read to unpack their cultural significance" (p. 19). All four weeks were spent in spaces that reflected a diverse history with clear influences from indigenous cultures, Spanish colonial culture, and U.S. and European tourists' tastes in food, clothing, and music, to name a few of the more recent, external influences that are reflected in the open spaces of Oaxaca.

### Archeology

Two of the most memorable archaeological sites[8] in the state of Oaxaca, are Monte Albán, and Mitla. We were guided trough these spaces by anthropologist/archeologist Ronald Spores and John Pohl. Monte Albán is known as a tourist destination, it was once a ceremonial and civic center and was one of the longest, continuously occupied communities in Mesoamerica, having been occupied by Zapotecs and Mixtecs, two of the major cultural groups of the region.

In the midst of the ruins of Mitla, which was still a living community when the Spaniards invaded and had been thriving for perhaps six hundred years, a Christian church was constructed. The name for Mitla (Nahuatl) is Place of the Dead, and in Zapotec it is Lyobaa, Place of Rest. These names suggest a reverence for ancestors. Little is known about how people lived in the tiny rooms found in the site. But the traditional plazas are surrounded by other structures that are similar to those of Monte Albán. This place, though not used today by the people of Mitla still has an energy that is alive in its intricate fretwork and geometric designs. "Mitla is unique in that the ruins preserve a series of paintings that are stylistically and thematically related to the Mixtec codices, pictographic manuscripts that document heroic sagas and over twenty-five generations of ancient Oaxacan ruling families" (Pohl, n.d.). The remembrance of the past still lingers.

In these ruined cities many centuries old and dating from prior to contact with Europeans, I was fascinated to see the natural beauty of the settings (atop a mountain with spectacular views to the valleys below, on the one hand, or nestled in the fertile valley, on another). I could also feel the deep historicity and the sacred meaning that such sites seem to hold especially for Mexican visitors.

The way the buildings were once stuccoed, decorated with three dimensional sculptures, and organized around patios lead me to imagine how the built environment could take on a patterned layout, and a visual aspect that would have made the original people who once occupied these spaces feel at home, comfortable, connected with these expressions of culture. The more similar sites we visited, the more I could begin to assimilate the ancient *sense of place* and understand how the colonial communities that group up around them have worked them into their new worldview.

Community Arts

In our study of community arts in indigenous towns today, San Miguel Tilcajete and Arrazola stand out as examples of the way people have not only changed social engagement in their communities, they have also consciously taken steps that have changed their economy. This resulted after many families started collaboratively creating small wooden figures called alebrijes. As Chibnik (2003) notes, in *Crafting tradition: The making and marketing of Oaxacan wood carvings*:

> Carving villages share many long-standing features of social organization with other communities in the Central Valleys. Craft production has flourished in the region in the past several decades because of encouragement from the state, increased tourism, and a thriving international market for ethnic arts (p.62-63).

Although the invention of *alebrijes* came from an individual, not only one entire town but two have embraced this artistic production creating in both Arrazola and Tilcajete a community tradition that is practiced on a family level. One example is found in the couple known internationally as *Jacobo and Maria de los Angeles* [9] (included photograph—See Appendix II). They and members of their family not only encompass the tradition of carving the animal-shaped figurines, but they also paint some of their *alebrijes* with natural dyes. Some of the ingredients include limes, pomegranate, and sap from the copal trees. Ingredients come from the local environment, integrating the art with the *sense of place*, creating new traditions that connect it intrinsically with the community.

This model provides us with an awareness that we need to assert an ethic of placemaking. According to Fleeming (1987) we need to "seek to create conditions in which culture and art are not separate. The objective is to construct procedures that can nourish and sustain a place" (p. 28). These indigenous communities previously made other crafts, traditions that have been abandoned in favor of the more lucrative production of *alebrijes*. Nevertheless a whole new tradition has

developed around this art form, one that is created by and embraced by these two communities. This is reminiscent of the findings of a survey conducted by West et al (2006) and outlined in their book, *Parks and Peoples: The Social Impact of Protected Areas* found connections of "subsequent losses of social and cultural ways of being in people living around protected areas," (p. 257) and on the other hand "protected areas were also found to create new ways of social interaction, which meet the social needs of a community" (p. 259). For example, "women broadened their social networks and participation in handicraft productions aimed at tourist markets which in turn has given them economic power of their space and place" (p. 261).

The interesting twist regarding this study is that of globalization within the preservation of the natural state of the environment, protected areas as built environment need to take into account the beliefs and practices of local populations (p. 265). Therefore, in order to fully create places within the environments of the cultural present, past, and future, the full perspectives of the community need to be brought forth through active participation in the development of a place.

### Oaxaca City

One last example provided by my involvement in the summer institute organized by WHP that allows for reflection on *Gathering Places and Cultural Passages* comes from the time I spent exploring the streets and gathering places of Oaxaca City. The institute coincided with the Guelaguetza,[10] a dance festival that takes place every July.  Part of the festival is held in a designated space (built for the festival), but it also spills out into the free and open spaces of the city, where indigenous communities come and parade in their costumes and dance through the streets.  A number of free concerts and dance demonstrations are also provided over the course of the month, and a large craft faire is assembled in the streets to take advantage of the increased tourism. On many occasions I was given to observe and reflect upon the ways people of many different

ethnicities and social classes either came out to participate in these activities or came to watch, shaping and occupying the spaces.

One example was observing the ins and outs of the Catholic churches. Santo Domingo (with a cultural center and museum adjacent) tended to be a focal point, not just during Sunday masses, weddings, or the free concerts, but in between, as well. During the day, the Triqui people, most marginalized of all the indigenous ethnicities, criss-cross the patios of the former monasteries, selling trinkets, candies, and cigarettes, and still dressing in their colorfully embroidered garments centuries old. Nahuas come from the state of Guerrero to sell their *amate*[11] (fig-bark paper) paintings, getting a better price here than they would get at home, displaying their colorful paintings all over the sidewalks in front of the church to catch our attention. Even the designs of the paintings are influenced by the artistic traditions of the communities that produce them (piñata parties, cockfights, weddings, and so on) but also the colors and the themes that the purchaser might find engaging. Maker, seller, and buyer collaborate in their production, keeping an artistic tradition alive even as it evolves, similar to the case of the *alebrijes*.

The "centro historico" (central, historical district) of Oaxaca has many pedestrian streets surrounded by carefully restored colonial buildings painted in striking colors. The streets are paved with stones laid carefully in intricate patterns. Watching one of these streets being created right in front of the building where I was residing, in Oaxaca as in other parts of Mexico even the laying of the cobblestones represents an art form. In Oaxaca, people of all ages, classes, and ethnicities observe the buildings around them, walk on the specially designed streets and sidewalks, dance in the little squares, some proudly wear their artistic clothing – the whole of this creates a powerful sense of identity and community that might be taken for granted or might be intangible for some, but as a visitor, and a Mexican-American in search for a *sense of place*, it really struck me.

Through this journey, I encountered experiences that made visible this society's hierarchy and discrimination, such as who hold power and who doesn't. But through the numerous spaces open to almost anyone, I became aware how people from many walks of life contribute to the culture of Oaxaca. Even the disaffected youth have found an outlet for their creative energies – painting graffiti and street art on the walls of the city. I had never seen more of this form of expression in any other city I had visited. A censorship team regularly paints over some of these art forms, especially when they are perceived to be defacing UN World Heritage (colonial buildings, such as Santo Domingo Cultural Center), but there are many walls that are left for long periods with their stenciled or hand-painted slogans and designs. Some also get memorialized in prints and sold to tourist, others in still photographs posted to blogs on the Internet, an arena for preserving diverse expressions, and cultural heritage. [12]

**Art Builds Community Grants Program**

Moving attention back to the United States, we find that the Oregon Arts Commission's *Arts Build Communities* (ABC) grants program provides:

> Support to strengthen communities through the arts. ABC-funded projects are specific to the critical issues and opportunities facing each community and the ways in which local organizers seek to connect local arts resources with these issues and opportunities. This program supports organizations and communities isolated by geography and communities, both urban and rural, with a history of social, cultural, or economic barriers (OAC, ABC Report, 2001).

In 2011, the Arts Builds Communities Grant Program provided funding to implement in Hood River, Oregon, a bilingual arts "Journey's" workbook workshops series in two Hood River

district schools (Hood River Valley High School and Hood River Middle School). The workshops were conducted in partnership Teatro Milagro (bilingual theatre in Portland), Columbia Gorge Center for the Arts, and Columbia Gorge Arts in Education to implement a project in Hood River. With guidance from the participating organizations, the students who participated in the workshops created a temporary public art installation.

These "Journey's" workshops are designed to engage students in self-discovery and a celebration of individuality, as well as focusing on anti-bullying and self-esteem building activities. State Superintendent of Education Susan Castillo has recommended the curriculum workbook (which I helped create in association with the project and my internship with Miracle Theatre during the summer of 2009) in her statewide teacher newsletter.

Hood River High School students from school clubs MEChA, GSA, Challenge Day Club, Asian Club, and Inspiration Circle created a temporary public art piece utilizing the process of community arts engagement. The art piece shows the club member's individuality as well as the club's voice and mission. This concept was accomplished by giving each club its own ("canvas"-working space), and integrating individual poems (self-identity/discovery) in the canvas.

The idea was that the labyrinth' section(s) would show the cooperative approach to the project and demonstrate (visually) the cohesion and collective work of the students (organized in clubs). In the same way, the idea of the installation at the Columbia Center for the Arts Studio was to have people walk the labyrinth, contemplate the questions posed to students and posed by students, as well as see (and read) the students' accounts of their individual journeys (included photograph—See Appendix II).

This recalls the book *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories about the "Great Good Places" at the Heart of Our Communities,* where Ray Oldenburg (2001) states, "People walk labyrinths for many

reasons," "they are all searching, as I am for peace of mind and beauty, for self-knowledge and understanding" (p. 21). Hence, the implementation of the project's activities was divided into four days, each day representing the "Journey's" workbook themes, which included "Self," "Family," "Community," and "Outside."

One important activity, which was started on the third day and continued to the fourth day, was the writing of words on precut pieces of black contact paper. The words and questions represented thoughts about individuality, diversity, and self-discovery. The precut pieces of black contact paper represented the "stones" of the labyrinth. During the showing of the art piece, one audience member commented that he had not seen the labyrinth on the floor. It was not until he was within it, and chose to look down that he realized he was within the art piece.

## IMPLICATIONS: BRIDGE & CONCLUSION

"Culture is never fixed or passive, nor is it manifested in the same way in each person."

——Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 2010.

In light of the consideration that my research is a personal journey to connect with and develop insight into a *sense of place*, cultural heritage, cross-cultural perceptions, and educational endeavors, it is important to state that the study of place and the experience of a *sense of place* are complex concepts. Research on the topic from an arts administration prospective was motivated by a desire to further explore the complex interactions that bring communities together.

The extensive literature review is augmented by some elaboration on my professional and personal engagement. One of the conclusions I am drawing is that *gathering places as cultural passages,* facilitated by civic engagement, can empower individuals during and after the creation process. Robert Henri (1984), states, "The artist, who is not materialistic, sees more than the incident. He puts in his work, whether consciously or not, a record of sensibilities that bridges time and space, bringing us together" (p. 219). Hence, communities that evoke multiple perspectives through their gathering places, are those that have a more inclusive and democratic artistic process.

Gathering places provide a forum for civic dialogue, a space for cultural transformation, an environment for learning, and a process of developing ideas about identity, society, culture, and democracy. Important themes in the animation of democracy, education, and placemaking, reflect long-term visions toward a holistic movement for social change and immersive learning experiences. Accordingly, Graciela Sánchez (2003) argues that we "develop the communities creative skills", and "recover skills of storytelling and conversation, [which] are essential to mutual understanding and alliance building" (p. 28). Engaging with public and community arts evoke the remembrance of the past in order to connect with our present and foresee our future. Placemaking,

civic engagement, participatory democracy, cultural democracy, heritage, such as those encountered in the IVA classrooms in Dorfman's article are, as Fleeming (1987) states;

Liberating concept[s], because [they are] egalitarian in [their] view[s] that every place has a story to tell, an experience to share. The phrase "sense of place" can also "conjure up the specter of blasted hopes; just add the words 'loss of' to 'sense of place' and there is a ravished matriarch. For 'loss of place' implies the bitter sweetness of memory (p. 14).

Viewing places as art and being cognizant of listening to the story, the hopes, and the memories it has to share, we can then experience a *sense of place*. With this in mind, Sonia Nieto (2010) considers the experience of learning from socio-cultural and sociopolitical perspectives; one of her principles speaks to the process of empowering cross-cultural values. Nieto also addresses the process of connecting to a sense of identity, and "taking action" in learning. She states, - "Learning is actively constructed; learning emerges from and builds on experience; learning is influenced by cultural differences; learning is influenced by the context in which it occurs; and learning is socially mediated and develops within a culture and community" (p. 35). Used responsibly, the placemaking process utilizes principles based on socio-cultural perspectives, and with the "idea is to profile the history, the character, the design constraints and opportunities, behavioral data about how people use the site, and the artist traditions in the area" (Fleming, 1987, p. 23).

Sociopolitical perspectives, such as the U.S. cultural inventory "creates a great resource for the community, and through the process engages the community in one of the main elements of community cultural development, that of "taking action, building and improving their shared culture" (Community Cultural Development Glossary [13]).

Cultural transformations towards social change within our learning environments in and outside of school are "In practice, people speaking a cultural vocabulary—describing the social values that animate their community, explaining how they mark and honor milestones in the lives of individuals and in their joint histories, telling true stories of lived realities—can often reach a point of mutual comprehension seldom achieved through debates over hard' issues" (Adams & Goldbard, 2001, p. 21). We must embrace cross-cultural and multiple perspectives to provide opportunities for engagement, which are necessary to create an environment for expression and learning, and a place of cultural significance and community identity, which represent the cultures of a community.

> *"Mirare hacia el mundo como arte de*
> *nuestra humanidad del pasado,*
> *presente, y visiones del futuro—I*
> *will look onto the world as art of our*
> *humanity, from the past, present,*
> *and visions of the future."*
> ——Yasmin Arlette, 2011

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## APPENDIX I

ENDNOTES

1 Research theories were explored in Research Methods course with O'Leary, Zina. (2010). *The Essential Guide on Doing Your Research Project.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

2 Professional Blog: e-Portfolio. Created during graduate studies:

http://aaa.uoregon.edu/yasminarlette

3 Unpublished critical analysis of Burga's (2009) article, *Decentering Urban Theory.* Researched during Academic Writing for Graduate students course, related to my research.

4 David Olsen, Cherry Creek Theatre, quote, from Community Cultural Development course.

5 "Cultural Inventory", notes are from Cultural Community Development course. Also found in (2001–2002) *Arts Build Communities Technical Assistance Report.* Oregon Arts Commission.

6 Unpublished critical analysis of Dorfman's (2008) article, *Arts Integration as Catalyst for High School Renewal.* Researched during Academic Writing for Graduate students course.

7 Curricular Units of Wired Humanities Projects, NEH Summer Institute for Teachers: Mesoamerican Cultures and their Histories found in

http://whp.uoregon.edu/?page_id=1081

8 Professional Blog: e-Portfolio. Created during graduate studies: Archeological sites

http://aaablogs.uoregon.edu/yasminarlette/tag/archeology/

9 Professional Blog: e-Portfolio. Created during graduate studies: Alebrijes

http://aaablogs.uoregon.edu/yasminarlette/2010/12/10/alebrijes-en-san-miguel-tilcajete/

10 Professional Blog: e-Portfolio. Created during graduate studies: Guelaguetza

http://aaablogs.uoregon.edu/yasminarlette/2010/08/13/desfile-parade-de-la-guelaguetza/

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[11]  Amate Painting created during my work with Wired Humanities Projects as a Graduate

Research Fellow. The interactive manuscript is found at the following address:

http://whp.uoregon.edu/amatepainting/

[12]  Professional Blog: e-Portfolio. Created during graduate studies: Oaxaca City photographs.

http://aaablogs.uoregon.edu/yasminarlette/2010/08/01/experiencing-cultural-heritage-in-

oaxaca-city/

[13]  'Community Cultural Development Glossary', notes are from Cultural Community

Development course.

# APPENDIX II

*Wired Humanities Projects: Community arts: alebrijes*

*Natural dyes*

*conejo/rabbit alebrije*
*Some symbols mean happyness*



*Art Builds Communities Project: Club's Individual pieces & Labyrinth*



Images: Yasmin Acosta-Myers, Photographs of experience in Oaxaca, 2010.
Art Builds Communities Project, 2011.