We just want to play

Adolescents talk about their access to public parks

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Healthy Youth - Healthy Regions

Connections between improvements in youth well-being and regional prosperity

Quantitative Research

Qualitative Research

Participatory Action Research

http://explore.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/healthy-youth-healthy-regions
Our Research Partners

15-20 young people
Between ages of 11 and 18
Residents of West Sacramento
Members of the Sactown Heroes
We like to swing too, but the parks don't have things for us to do...
Why is play important to adolescents?

- Teen preference studies
- Developmental tasks
- Developmental affordances
## Teen Preference Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valued Places</th>
<th>Rural communities</th>
<th>Middle-upper income suburbs</th>
<th>Urban / lower income suburbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hester 1988</td>
<td>Hall 1993</td>
<td>Korpela 1991</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guiltner 1998</td>
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<td>Silbereisen 1988</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lynch 1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed Park</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undeveloped Land</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place at School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place at Home</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Natural Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Street Settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for valuing/visiting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be with friends</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>To get away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get away</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>To be with nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be with nature</td>
<td>•</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Table 4. Places Important to Teens: A Comparison Across Nine Studies |

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\(^{1}\) The places which received the largest number of responses in each of the cited studies are indicated. Other places may have been mentioned by some of the respondents in the respective studies. For comparison purposes, similar types of places have been grouped together, although the original study may have used a different category name.

\(^{0}\) The adolescents in this study were not asked specifically why they liked or valued the places. The reasons were derived from written place descriptions provided by the adolescent.
Teen preference studies

- “Play” Activities
  - Team sports (formal and informal)
  - Individual sports/activities (i.e. swimming, skateboarding)
  - “Chilling” – hanging out, talking, shopping, watching others

- Reasons for “play” activity and the place
  - Close to home
  - Free
  - Be with friends, family and others
  - Relaxing
  - Exercise
  - “Something to do”
  - Sense of ownership and belonging
A developmental affordance is perceived, consciously or subconsciously, and may or may not be actualized by the individual or group for the completion of specific tasks relating to the psychological and sociological growth of the individual. (Owens, et al. 2012)
Affordances

James J. Gibson (1979) - the perceived function of environmental features for an individual

Greeno (1994, 338) - “whatever it is about the environment that contributes to the kind of interaction that occurs”

Opportunities in the Environment
- Physical
- Psychological
- Social
- Cultural
## Developmental Affordances (Actualized & not)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGING FREE-TIME EFFECTIVELY</th>
<th>SATISFYING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS</th>
<th>SENSE OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY</th>
<th>SELF-REFLECTION AND INTERNAL GROWTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Places where they can:</td>
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<td>Places where they can:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have “something to do”</td>
<td>• Be with friends</td>
<td>• Have a voice in decisions</td>
<td>• Be alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participate in recreation</td>
<td>• Be with other teens</td>
<td>• Feel like they belong</td>
<td>• Be unsupervised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “chill out” (listen to music, watch tv)</td>
<td>• Be with family</td>
<td>• Work</td>
<td>• Make their own decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Get to easily</td>
<td>• Be with community</td>
<td>• React to or engage in anti-social behaviors</td>
<td>• Be with nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Feel safe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Play can help youth learn to:
MANAGE FREE-TIME EFFECTIVELY

Have “something to do”
Participate in recreation
“chill out” (listen to music, watch tv)
Get to easily
Play can help youth learn to:

DEVELOP SATISFYING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Be with friends
Be with other teens
Be with family
Be with community
Play can help youth learn to:

DEVELOP A SENSE OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Have a voice in decisions
- Feel like they belong
- Work, participate
- Testing anti-social behaviors
Play can help youth learn to:

**DEVELOP SELF-REFLECTION & INTERNAL GROWTH**

- Be alone
- Be unsupervised
- Make their own decisions
- Be with nature
- Feel safe
So what about the SacTown Heroes?

- The Project
- The Products
- The Impact
The Project: Youth-produced media
SP has big jumps
We have fun at the skate park
Leave before it’s dark
Translating Research to Action

Project Exhibit & Idea Exchange

Google Map

Comic Book

http://artofregionalchange.ucdavis.edu/
Translating Research to Action: Comic book
Their Stories: Recreation

Programs
Commercial activities
Outdoor facilities

It’s a good place to hang out with your friends and that way you won’t be bored, like sitting around in your house doing nut’in...
Youth in West Sacramento have many things they do for fun. The recreational interests and activities of youth are varied and they look to many different types of facilities and programs to meet their interests. The youth discussions focused on three main types of recreational pursuits - those that are accommodated by programs and classes, commercial-centered activities and outdoor facilities. In all cases, the youth had both good and bad things to say about how their recreational needs were met and they offered ideas for how the recreational interests of youth can be addressed.

All the youth involved in the Youth Voices for Change effort participate in local programs. Some of these programs, including the Sactown Heroes, have purposes beyond recreation, but recreation is one of their benefits. These activities allow the youth opportunities to get together with friends and have fun. Some of the programs are very specific to an individual’s particular interest such as dancing. These programs allow youth to develop skills while also having a good time. The youth would like to see more opportunities made available to youth in terms of affordability, frequency and location of these specialized programs. The youth also note that the Collings Teen Center provides a valued venue for young persons for all types of indoor recreation throughout the school year. The facility is centrally located, has interesting games and equipment, supportive adult staff and abundant snacks. Unfortunately, the facility is closed in the summer - a time when many youth are looking for fun things to do. The youth would like to see this program available year-round.

During adolescence, many youth find their recreational outlet in commercial settings. Walking around shops, sharing French fries or watching movies are a few of the recreational activities that youth engage in at commercial businesses. Shop owners can either be welcoming of these activities, or they can frown upon or forbid them. The opportunity to safely test these adult behaviors by youth is needed and should be accepted, or even encouraged, by merchants. Stores that are welcoming to youth should be recognized and celebrated by the community, and youth should be encouraged to respect and appreciate the businesses.

Finally, outdoor facilities provide a place for youth to engage in more active recreational pursuits and to be with nature. West Sacramento has many parks that are dispersed throughout the city, but most of these parks have no facilities that are designed for teenagers. The parks contain play areas for small children and benches for parents, but teen-oriented activities are limited to large play fields, basketball courts and one skatepark. Youth, like the rest of the population, have varied interests - not all teens skateboard - and parks need to accommodate different activities. Future park planning efforts could look at making parks more friendly to teens by including oversized play equipment such as swings or water features for cooling off during the summer months.
Influencing community change

Design Decisions
Park Master Plan
Youth Focus Groups
Youth Council