

# Research on the Mechanism of Children Friendly Participation through the Art Involvement in Public Space

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**Abstract:** Art breaks through disciplinary constraints with its own agency and inclusivity, continuously responding to the needs of individuals and society. Particularly, art intervention brings multidimensional values and meanings to the exploration of public spaces and educational practices. This research, from an interdisciplinary perspective, aims to explore and construct child-friendly participation mechanisms in public spaces. Starting from the level of strategies and practical methods, it is based on existing urban public spaces and service facilities. It proposes an "art intervention"-led mechanism optimization method, advocating for the creation of inclusive and equitable child-friendly public spaces through projects led by art intervention combined with aesthetic education practices. Simultaneously, it analyzes and elaborates on feasibility through practical cases, discussing its application prospects in future sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Art Intervention; Public Space; Inclusivity; Equity; Interactive Experience; Multidimensionality

## 1. Introduction

Children are an important part of society and play a core role in sustainable development. Therefore, meeting their diverse needs for space according to their daily lives and characteristics, and establishing friendly and open spaces, not only benefits the natural development and growth of children but also embodies the concept of people-oriented place creation in human-environment relationships. Especially, at the 2019 China Urban Planning Annual Conference, it was proposed to 'promote the development of child-friendly concepts, create child-friendly urban spaces, formulate child-friendly public policies, provide child-friendly service facilities, shape child-friendly social atmosphere, and explore child-friendly participation mechanisms' [1]. Subsequently, the comprehensive exploration and construction of a child-friendly city in China is no longer solely the responsibility of a single discipline. The interactive research among multiple disciplines will open up a new situation for the formation of a child-friendly city, contributing to the formation of a relatively complete ecosystem that is macroscopic and multidimensional. In recent years, the discipline of art has sparked its own advantages, no longer confined to art itself. Whether it is the practice of rural revitalization or the exploration of urban organic renewal, art ultimately breaks through disciplinary constraints with its unique agency and inclusivity, continuously responding to the needs of individuals and society through art projects intervening in localities [2]. From the culture, landscape, ecology, and economy and other aspects of integration and symbiosis, truly realize the practicality of art, for the exploration of public spaces and educational practices to bring more value and significance.

Therefore, this research, from an interdisciplinary perspective, aims to explore and construct child-friendly participation mechanisms in public spaces. Starting from the level of strategies and practical methods, it is based on existing urban public spaces and service facilities. It proposes an "art intervention"-led mechanism optimization method, advocating for the creation of inclusive and equitable child-friendly public spaces through projects led by art intervention combined with aesthetic education practices. Simultaneously, it analyzes and elaborates on feasibility through practical cases, discussing its application prospects in future sustainable development.

## 2. Art Intervention in Public Spaces and Aesthetic Education Practices

In exploring the social aspect of art, we can easily discover that art intervention is a process that combines the concepts of the public, institutions, and participation<sup>[3]</sup>. Education is a creative practice activity. Moral education, intellectual education, physical education, and aesthetic education all need to shape personality and construct educational values through practice. The educational value constructed in practice is more effective and conforms to laws<sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, when it comes to 'aesthetic education' involving art, it is not a fixed or rigid theoretical creed, but fully integrates human life experiences and personality traits<sup>[5]</sup>. Aesthetic education not only influences people's emotions, psychology, and morals but also stimulates their imagination. Imagination is a major pathway to cultivate creativity, which plays a decisive role in the development and progress of science and society. Comprehensive aesthetic education is crucial for both children and adults. It not only stimulates innovative spirit but also continuously and effectively promotes the improvement of civic moral quality. It has social value and significance beyond education.

If we consider public spaces as venues that provide a place for residents' daily lives and social interactions, art intervention serves as a medium and becomes one of the main approaches for aesthetic education practices. Previously, public spaces such as art galleries, communities, and schools usually served functions such as exhibitions, interactive exchanges, and education. However, under the leadership of art intervention, aesthetic education practices and public spaces form a new connection by inviting public participation. This connection allows users of these public spaces to transcend specific audience groups within a particular location. They are no longer restricted by age, identity, or occupation; they are not just art enthusiasts, but also community activists, students, and teachers. By gathering a more diverse social group, it balances education and public resources, embodies inclusivity and equity, and truly contributes to the formation of a child-friendly social atmosphere and participation mechanism. These impacts are the positive effects and significance brought about by the dominant mode of art intervention.

### 2.1 The importance of art intervention for children

'The experience of art is education' is the core of Dewey's philosophy of aesthetic education for children. Dewey believed that art has a subtle and transformative function in education, and he proposed the idea that 'the essence of art is education, and education can also become art'. He insisted on a child-centered approach of 'learning by doing', allowing children to naturally accumulate aesthetic experiences in their lives and learning. This approach not only compensates for the shortcomings of traditional education but also aligns more with the physical and mental development characteristics of children<sup>[6]</sup>. The aesthetic education activities at the Dewey Experimental School also fully embody the above-mentioned views. Not only do they integrate art with various disciplines, but they also make full use of external resources by combining museums, sports arenas, art centers, and other public spaces, guiding children to comprehensively understand the beauty in their surrounding society and environment. Through practical operation and participation, children experience the real social scenes and meanings<sup>[7]</sup>.

It can be seen that the combination of aesthetic education practice and social space under art intervention is an inevitable result of educational exploration. The environmental adaptation and perception under art intervention not only break the restrictions of traditional education on resources and venues for children but also bring a more friendly, inclusive, and diverse interactive experience for children's social participation. This makes aesthetic education practice have a more positive and effective significance.

### 2.2 Advantages of Art Intervention

As aesthetic education practices develop and art participation mechanisms improve, art intervention is increasingly appearing in the public eye and public spaces. At the same time, art intervention for children's projects is also becoming more comprehensive and diverse. While involving more public participation, its advantages are mainly reflected in the following five points.

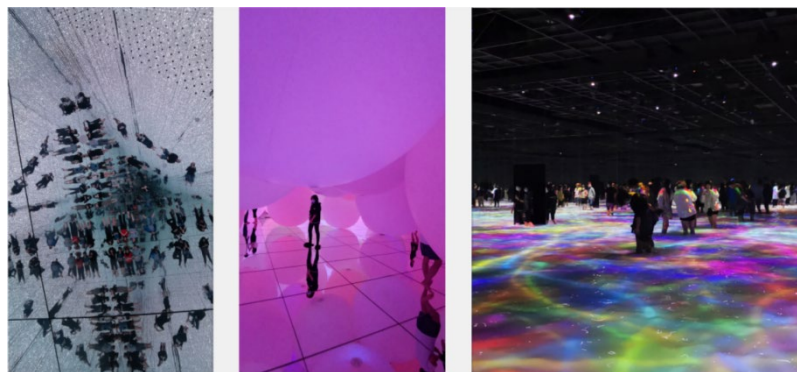
1) The enhancement of children's creative thinking ability under art intervention. Stein proposed in his book "Stimulating Creativity" that creative thinking ability can be stimulated and cultivated through appropriate education. Children's art education is mainly implemented through activities such as drawing, music, performance, handicrafts, and literary works appreciation. Forward-looking art education and activities have a broader development space to cultivate children's creativity and enhance it<sup>[8]</sup>.

2) The enhancement of children's aesthetic ability under art intervention. Professor Nelson Goodman, an American philosopher, believes that the process of aesthetic understanding is very complex. In addition to linguistic thinking, it also requires visual, auditory, and artistic thinking, as well as the participation of imagination, sensation, perception, and emotion. Therefore, the improvement of aesthetic ability is not only the task of aesthetics but also the task of education<sup>[9]</sup>. Aesthetic education practices under art intervention combine art exhibitions, music performances, outdoor activities, handicrafts, etc., which can provide children with a diverse range of experiences that open up their visual, auditory, and perceptual abilities. Through the natural participation of body and mind, children's aesthetic ability is naturally enhanced.

3) Enhanced inclusivity under art intervention. Inclusivity is one of the important characteristics of art. In the process of artistic development, the emergence of each specific art form further interprets inclusivity<sup>[10]</sup>. The inclusivity of art is not only reflected in accommodating material differences such as materials and media but also in accommodating differences in thoughts, ideas, and actions. Therefore, activities led or participated in by art are more inclusive. They can accommodate children with different geographical, age, hobby, and developmental differences, as well as their characteristics, allowing them to naturally and peacefully be themselves without being constrained or treated harshly because of their differences. Furthermore, the inclusivity of art can become the center of cohesion, allowing people who are originally strangers to engage in natural communication and peaceful coexistence in the same space.

4) Equity of resources under art intervention. The resources here include both educational and environmental resources. When art touches upon public spaces and domains, it acquires a social attribute and becomes part of public resources, reflecting its equity in the process of urban resource allocation. According to Lefebvre's theory, in the process of producing unjust urban spaces, the ultimate results of all daily activities will continuously lead to a redistribution biased towards the rich. That is, spatial fairness is the result of all human behaviors<sup>[11]</sup>. Therefore, it can be concluded that under art intervention, human daily behaviors will result in a directional redistribution of public resources, and the results of this redistribution will fully reflect equity. This allows children participating in it to enjoy education and environmental resources mobilized by art projects in a fair, open, and just manner.

5) The rich and multidimensional interactive experiences under art intervention. The ways of art intervention in public spaces are diverse, and artworks themselves have various presentation methods due to differences in materials, media, and artistic languages (Figure 1). Whether it's painting, installation, photography, performance art, or new media art combined with technology, they can bring different sensory experiences to viewers. In particular, new media interactive installations are no longer limited to visual, auditory, and tactile senses. They can bring artistic thinking and technological shock to participants. For example, sitting down and letting a robot sketch a portrait for you (Figure 2). The interactivity is also part of the artwork. Unlike the past one-way communication of information, interactivity emphasizes bidirectional information feedback, and the emotional value of the audience in the participation process is also one of the important indicators to evaluate the artwork<sup>[12]</sup>. Therefore, the interactive experience under art participation will be multidimensional, combining the participation of senses, perceptions, and emotions.



*\*Fig. 1 was taken by the author*

*Figure 1: TeamLab Planets Tokyo DMM: The Infinite Crystal Universe, Free Floating, Infinity*



\* Fig. 2 was taken by the author

Figure 2: An art installation of Patrick Therese: Human Traits

In summary, compared to general public gatherings or public participation, public spaces with art participation are more creative, inclusive, equitable, and multidimensional, and can help enhance aesthetic ability. It addresses issues such as professional limitations, age limitations, identity limitations, and regional limitations in general public participation experiences. Art intervention transforms public spaces into truly open and inclusive resources that are completely fair.

### 3. Art Intervention Mechanism Optimization

#### 3.1 Elements of Mechanism Optimization under Art Intervention

If public facilities in cities serve as ‘hardware’ to ensure residents' basic living needs, then various mechanisms in cities function like ‘software’ to regulate the structural relationships between elements and ensure the normal operation of society. In this context, ‘mechanism optimization’ can not only bring tangible changes to cities but also maximize its effectiveness and agency without additional investment in urban infrastructure construction, better coordinating the relationships between various parts of the city. It is in this sense that the mechanism optimization method led by art intervention is proposed. This clear purpose—benefiting the formation of mechanism optimization for child-friendly participation—is mainly achieved through the construction and implementation of art projects. Compared with general art projects, art intervention projects aimed at mechanism optimization should have the following elements ( Table 1):

Table 1: The elements of art intervention project for the purpose of mechanism optimization

Project Characteristics	Expression Mode	Function
Clarity	Establish clear and specific goals, starting with child-friendliness as a guideline for project planning, construction, preparation, and implementation.	Promote the construction of child-friendly participation mechanisms, guide individuals and groups to shape a child-friendly participation consciousness, and contribute to the formation of a child-friendly participation atmosphere in the overall society.
Guidance	Have the responsibility to guide the public in creating a child-friendly participation atmosphere and influencing the public to shape a child-friendly participation consciousness.	
Targeting	Focus on the factors influencing the formation of child-friendly mechanisms, and refer to beneficial factors for project planning and implementation.	
Openness	Open to participants based solely on child-friendliness, removing restrictions such as age, venue, region, category, etc.	
Fairness		
Inclusivity	The project attributes are non-singular, with diverse performances, multidimensional experiences, and diverse practical methods, providing flexible and rich artistic forms.	
*Table 1 is compiled by the author based on literature review.		

### 3.2 Case Analysis

The research conducted a series of investigations and data collection, attempting to verify the feasibility and effectiveness of this method through further analysis of cases. Based on the stability and continuity of the samples, the study selected the iSTART Children's Art Project at the Luhu·A4 Art Museum as a sample. The iSTART Children's Art Project was initiated by the A4 Education Center in 2014 and has been held for six sessions to date (with one session suspended in 2016 due to the construction of a new art museum), with Sun Li, the curator of the A4 Art Museum, serving as the artistic director and Li Jie, a resident curator, serving as the curator. After organizing the information about this project, the study obtained the following overview (Table 2).

Table 2: The profile of iSTART Children's Art Festival

Project Name	Time	Project Theme	Project Composition	Artistic Form	Venue Expansion	Public Participation Groups
iSTART Children's Art Festival	2014	Activating Children's Perception	Theme Exhibition,	Integrated Space	Art Museum, Community,	Children, Families,
	2015	New Adaptations of Fairy Tales	Parallel Exhibition,	Construction (Architecture),	School, Public Space, Internet,	Artists, Designers,
	2017	A World Without Distinctions of Age; Another World	Education Forum, Children's	Painting, Animation, Performance,	etc.	Architects, Teachers, Researchers,
	2018	Childhood Sanatorium; 'Little Bang'	Workshop, Children's Art	Photography, Live		Scholars, Community Workers,
	2019	Childhood Secrets; Goodbye School, Hello School	Exhibition, Building Games,	Installation, Game, etc.		Universities and Art Education Institutions, etc.
	2020	'do it(in school)' / Custom Action Theme; Action School	Physical Theatre, Lectures,			
	2021	1001 Game School	Urban Projects, Special Projects			
	2022	The Museum of Nonexistence				
	2023	The Infinite Game Family				

\*Table 2 is organized by the author according to <https://www.a4am.cn/>

For example, the 5th iSTART Children's Art Festival: In 2019, A4 Art Museum launched 2 theme exhibitions ('Childhood Secrets" and "Goodbye School, Hello School'), 3 educational forums (International Education Forum, Local Forum, Youth Forum), 8 sub-exhibition venues (A4 Children's Art Museum, A4 International Artist Residency Base, Chengdu Tianfu Fifth Elementary School, Chengdu Tianfu Seventh Elementary School, Chengdu Hongxing Kindergarten, Golden Apple Longwan Peninsula Kindergarten, Luhu Community Center, Aiyouxu Community Center), and 12 special projects including small curator programs, drama, architecture, animation screenings, photography, etc. It involved 45 individuals/groups of artists from domestic and foreign sources, 70 small curators, 100 art institutions, and over 4,000 pieces of artwork by young artists (Figure 3).



\* Fig. 3 from A4 Art Museum Official Website

Figure 3: Special projects of the 5th iSTART Children's Art Festival

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the case analysis and comparison, it is evident that the art project, which is committed to promoting child-friendly participation, possesses the elements outlined in Table 1 that optimize mechanisms for child-friendly participation. This confirms the feasibility and certain application prospects of the mechanism optimization method led by artistic intervention. Furthermore, this approach has the following advantages.

(1) Breaking the occupational barriers of the public participation group. While gathering participants around children and families, it breaks the singularity of the project led by curators or teachers in general art projects, making the professional categories of the teaching faculty more diversified. This inadvertently enhances children's learning interest in various disciplines and promotes their exploration and development across multiple disciplines.

(2) Breaking the spatial barriers of arts education practices in public spaces. Although previous children's projects and arts education practices have extended from classrooms and schools to public spaces such as art museums and communities, this project consciously links these public spaces through the setting of exhibition spaces and activity venues. It transforms these singular public places into spaces with changed attributes due to the intervention and leadership of art, capable of generating sustained and efficient linkage effects in a short period. It guides children to comprehensively understand the surrounding social environment and to experience real social scenes and meanings through actual participation.

(3) Breaking the value barriers of traditional educational models. Compared to traditional educational models and general arts education practices, this art intervention and leadership model not only fills the gap in traditional education in terms of diversity and multidimensional experiences but also breaks the perceptual boundaries of children. It guides children to consciously enhance their self-worth, establish direct connections between children and the social environment, urban spaces, and art education, and maximizes the inclusiveness, practicality, and fairness of art. This approach brings visible and tangible benefits and values to society.

(4) Breaking the resource barriers imposed by regional divisions. We must acknowledge that both public and educational resources have long been locked in urban area planning, albeit without explicit regional restrictions. However, due to considerations such as distance, transportation, and convenience, most urban residents tend to prioritize areas that are closer, less time-consuming, and more accessible. This principle of using resources nearby needs to be established through targeted, high-quality, high-impact, and strongly appealing project planning. As shown in the case, arts projects led by art intervention can establish new links while breaking regional barriers, making urban public and educational resources more open and increasing overall usage rates among residents. Its proactive nature will enhance interaction and connection between residents and the city.

The research explores the optimization of child-friendly participation mechanisms through the use of arts intervention and leadership, based on the practice of arts education in public spaces and the advantages brought by practical cases. This method can break various barriers, stimulate public participation groups to exert influence, and consciously create a child-friendly participation atmosphere. It allows arts intervention to establish new links between children and urban spaces, guiding and strengthening the exploration of arts education practices, thereby promoting the overall and comprehensive creation of inclusive and fair child-friendly public spaces in cities.

According to the UNCHS Agenda for Human Settlements, which emphasizes that "children are important players in sustainable development, and the well-being and quality of life of children are the ultimate goals of urban sustainable development," interdisciplinary interaction and collaboration will generate new meanings and discoveries in urban development, educational practices, and more in the future.

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