

Nature and Childhood: From Research and Activism to Policies for Global Change



Bringing Together Ideas for a Salzburg Statement

Oscar Tollast

Following three and a half days of discussion, participants of the Salzburg Global Seminar session, *Nature and Childhood: From Research and Activism to Policies for Global Change*, came together to present their ideas for a new Salzburg Statement.

Before this, 27 representatives from different regions, sectors, and disciplines had split up into four working groups to develop specific policy ideas and recommendations to form the backbone of the Statement.

The first group to present on Friday afternoon focused on principles and processes for identifying and working with key audiences and change-makers.

The group recognized the different types of audiences which existed, such as global leaders, national figures, sector representatives, families, and children.

In light of this, participants devised two process steps which could be aimed at any of these levels. The first process step is to adopt an interest and influence matrix and target policymakers with the highest potential for either. The second process step involves thinking about the hierarchy

of sectoral influence and coming up with the correct language for the problem that would meet the needs of different hierarchy levels.

For example, if the overarching statement is, “To enhance engagement of all with outdoor space to connect with nature,” a justification is required for each audience.

Participants created template “in order to” statements for several audiences, such as “in order to improve mental health.” Further to this, a “how” statement is required as to how change will be effected.

This group went through the policy cycle to highlight areas of influence, identifying that the cycle often starts with advocacy to set the agenda. The problem is then defined before a solution is put forward. An implementation scale follows afterward.

One participant suggested the Salzburg Statement could act as an advocacy statement, but consensus was required for it to have a strong influence. Another participant, meanwhile, reminded the group that trillions of dollars would be spent on infrastructure in the near future. If stakeholders could get into the discussion and help decide the share of money spent on children and nature, that

could represent the biggest opportunity for short-term influence.

The second group to present discussed the value of forming or working with existing partnerships, alliances and collaborations for impact.

Participants began this exercise by identifying seven existing barriers to children being outside in nature. This included concerns about safety and security of children; diminishing outdoor spaces; highly structured free time; social norms; technology; academic pressure; and a knowledge gap.

For each issue, participants identified partners and sectors which could help remove these barriers and act as “partnerships for impact.”

The group acknowledged clusters of partners which could help tackle more than one issue. This list includes educators, planners, storytellers, policymakers, gatekeepers, the economy, platforms, leaders, and corporations.

The next step would involve assessing the clusters further, drawing lines between them, and seeing what potential outcomes could emerge.

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Cath Prisk – There’s So Much More to Learn Outdoors

Project Dirt global partnerships director emphasizes importance of play and access to nature

Carly Sikina

As a lover of nature and an advocate for children’s fundamental right to play, Cath Prisk understands the importance of re-evaluating the existing legislation affecting this field. Not only is Prisk global partnerships director for Project Dirt, but she has also undertaken many different initiatives to get children learning and exploring the outdoors through play.

An instrumental figure in the movement, Prisk works in partnership with Dirt is Good to head the global campaign Outdoor Classroom Day – originally known as Empty Classroom Day – which was formed by environmental educator Anna Portch. In addition to this endeavor, Prisk is the founder and director of Outdoor People, a Hackney-based shop, consultancy, research organization and NGO that strives to get children, families, and communities outdoors.

Prisk attended the Salzburg Global Seminar session, *Nature and Childhood: From Research and Activism to Policies for Global Change*, part of the Parks for the Planet Forum, which took place at Schloss Leopoldskron. Prisk shared her insights during a panel discussion on “Smart Action for Nature-Based Solutions” where she emphasized the importance of play and outdoor learning.

Throughout the panel, she stressed the urgent need for policy change, indicating 56% of children around the world are only getting one hour or less of outdoor play per day. “Teachers must realize that literacy can be taught outdoors” she explains, “You take schools outdoors and they are still schools. Children are still children whether they are indoors or outdoors and outdoors, there’s so much more to learn.”

Prisk believes children learn huge amounts through playing. “They are learning positional language, they are learning forces, they might be learning a bit of science, certainly awe and wonder - the base foundation of all religious teaching - they are learning all sorts of practical things like that.” Furthermore, she believes that when outdoors, children can learn “21st-century skills” such as teamwork, leadership, resilience, and stoicism.

She recognizes there is an urgent need to address this issue. “We’ve got to a point now where our children recognize dialect



more than they recognize blackbirds.” She continues, “What children learn when they are learning outdoors, they learn more immediately and they learn more holistically.”

Although many school agendas do not prioritize outdoor play, Prisk believes this can be altered by initiatives like Outdoor Classroom Day and policy change. “How do we make play, how do we make it happen?” she asks, “We have to get the most important thinkers in the planet to be saying ‘This is the way it is.’”

“What if every head teacher [who cut play and outdoor time] expected to have emails from all the parents in the school complaining about this in the same way if [children] went to school and [were told] ‘We are stopping lunch?’”

In Prisk’s view, the best way for children to move is not simply providing them a sports class to take part in: they have to play as well. She says, “The head teachers think that it’s their responsibility to send children home unharmed and clean instead of excited, filthy, dirty, creative and screaming about all of the things that they’ve learned that day.”

When reflecting on potential policy changes surrounding children and nature in urban contexts, Prisk highlights the core planning policy implemented by the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands. “Rotterdam has a foundational policy that says that every child at the age of seven should be able to walk to school, to the park and to the shop by themselves, and that shapes the planning decisions... Having that as a foundational policy, that they hold

everything up against, just changes the way people think about planning.”

Drawing on the city of Rotterdam’s child-friendly approach to city planning, Prisk put forward three key policy recommendations. Her suggestions include:

- Every school is required to have a policy for their outdoor spaces that incorporates children’s right to play as well as a responsibility to make those spaces great places to learn.
- Every community plan has to listen to the needs and voices of young people and families.
- At the city-wide level, policymakers should be thinking about children as citizens.

Reflecting on her time in Salzburg and new insights she may have learned, Prisk said the experience had reaffirmed her belief that further cross-sectoral work was required. She also highlighted the need to take action at a city-level. She said, “National policy can frame support for city level action, but actual change happens in real communities... There’s a power of a campaign to provide a tipping point, but actual change happens in people’s hearts and minds on the ground, and it’s a holistic change.”

“Conservation organizations have a big role to play, but part of that role is changing themselves - you know, letting kids pick flowers and jump all over the bushes because if they can only look at the flowers, or look at the bushes, they are never going to want to conserve them.” ■



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Participants working in Schloss Leopoldskron's Venetian Room spent their time looking at tackling the disparities in access to nature and capacity to scale or implement.

When presenting their findings to the rest of the group, they revealed they started with the problem: urban childhood has moved indoors.

They began by identifying causes in their own communities, followed by secondary causes, and consequences. Participants considered what was needed to flesh out how disparities are happening and how to communicate them. Together, they agreed on five fleshed-out policy suggestions, building on recommendations that featured in the *Salzburg Statement on The Child in the City - Health, Parks and Play*.

All children must have access to an outdoor natural/play space within a safe 10-minute walk.

Cities collect and use disaggregated data on outdoor public play space usage.

All schools must have an outdoor space for play and learning.

All safeguarding policies must include the right to play.

City planning/design is co-created with local children.

These suggestions could lead to increased access, convincing data, equity, rights-based language, and capacity and process which is inclusive of children.

The final group to present ideas worked on developing strategies for embedding nature in everyday spaces that children use and to activate a broader cadre of

leaders. Instead of coming up with several strategies, however, they devised just one which one of the group members defined as “completely outside the box.”

This group identified what they wanted to see in an ideal society, such as the feeling of being valuable, heard, and celebrated.

There are obstacles to this happening, however, which the group said needed to be eliminated.

This could be achieved by creating a structure within governments around the world which provides a platform for children's voices to be heard.

An “Interministry for Children and Childhood” would prevent children's interests from being siloed. A body or a network of people would exist with the responsibility to listen. Listeners become conduits between children and the “Minister for Children and Childhood.”

One participant suggested that while every policymaker might not care for children, each of them did have a childhood. It lives within them.

As part of this approach, stories would need to be collected and taken to multiple sectors as part of a cross-sector approach. Progress can be achieved by bringing resources from all sectors together to address the need. For this to be effective, however, this has to be a statutory process.

Ideas and recommendations put forward by participants have been recorded and will be used to draft a Salzburg Statement that will be published later this year. Keep up to date with the progress of the Statement by visiting salzburgglobal.org/go/608

Using Storytelling To Enact Change

A decade ago, Sean Southey realized if he wanted to change the world, he'd have to give everyday people the belief to take care of their own lives and the knowledge to do it well.

As chief executive officer of PCI Media Impact, Southey sets out to empower communities worldwide to inspire positive social, health and environmental change through storytelling and communications.

The most important aspect when producing stories is knowing your audience, according to Southey. Without knowing who they are, or what they care about, you can't reach them effectively.

Southey is also a “huge believer” in the power of positive messaging – love, not loss. When telling a story, he advocates communicating what can work and what already works and to resist solely focusing on the challenges.

Content, however, is only powerful if people truly engage with it. It is important for organizations to have effective distribution strategies and to know where their audience resides.

The messages which stem from the content should be given a “surround sound” experience. People might need to hear things from different sources before they are prepared to trust what they are hearing and become further engaged.

This links to another piece of advice: work with trusted voices. The spokesperson behind the message has to believe in what they are saying.

If successful, media content will help drive discussion, and it is these conversations which will drive behavior change.

Southey highlights the power of radio call-ins and TV talk shows which enable audience members to feel they are part of the conversation, even if they are not in the room. It's one example of where old technology can still carry influence.

In a nutshell, stories work. Southey believes stories can drive more people than facts and data. It is easier for someone to relate to a story than a set of statistics.

As author Janet Litherland said, “Stories have power. They delight, enchant, touch, teach, recall, inspire, motivate, challenge. They help us to understand. They imprint a picture on our minds. Consequently, stories often pack more punch than sermons. Want to make a point or raise an issue? Tell a story.” ■

#FacesofLeadership

“I think it’s all about trying to make a difference... We come from different areas, different backgrounds, different communities. First, it’s the love of it - the conservation part – but also, we love people. But, I think the most important one is the challenges that you know, my specific community is faced with, and that is... the level of poverty, the level of unemployment and people do not have the information and people do not know that they can actually access these areas. So, [my] greatest inspiration is the fact that people do not have much and I [want] to try and create platforms for them and opportunities... so that they can develop themselves, especially within the space of conservation and tourism. So, we are inspired by... the suffering of the people in poverty and unemployment and then we use the conservation as a platform to try and address all of those challenges... We want to set ourselves as examples and role models for those that do not have much and say to them, ‘Look, we are trying to help you.’”

Sabelo Lindani, *Head of Green Futures College, Grootbos Foundation, South Africa*



HOT TOPIC: “What are your hopes for the Salzburg Statement which will come from this session?”

“I want to reach the people who have the power or the money or the influence to shape the way the cities of today and tomorrow will develop. Will they be nature-friendly? Will they enhance the lives of all children and people of all generations, or are we condemned to more concrete jungle with green spaces reserved for the rich?”

Clare Shine

Vice President and Chief Program Officer, Salzburg Global Seminar

“I hope that the *Salzburg Statement* evinces a very strong commitment to equity and to the overall health and wellbeing of vulnerable and marginalized populations.”

Alexander Plum

Director of development and innovation for the Global Health Initiative, Henry Ford Health System

“I’m hoping that the *Salzburg Statement* will focus on the child and the benefits of exposing the child to nature for the purpose of the child’s health and the child’s education outcomes.”

Margaret Otieno

Activities coordinator, Wildlife Clubs of Kenya

“My hope is that the work we do here, as manifest in the statement, can be used to shift policy dialogue and help people think about that intersection between a healthy child and a healthy planet.”

Sean Southey

Chair of the Commission on Education and Communication, IUCN

“I hope that we produce a statement which brings all of these important issues and insights to the attention of people of influence and policy-makers. I hope that we produce a statement that is a powerful advocacy tool for people lobbying for change and working towards a better world. Most of all I hope we produce a statement which captions the imagination.”

Dominic Regester

Program Director, Salzburg Global Seminar

Have an opinion on our HOT TOPIC? Let us know what you would like to include in the Statement.

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with the hashtag #SGSparks

Salzburg Snapshots

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