

Nature experience

How **to** Connect with Nature While Living in the City

Francisca Ponta Negra dos Santos

Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences - Piet Zwart Institute

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First supervisor: Thijs Witty-Grabowski

Second supervisor: Ingrid Commandeur

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“I don’t see anything that isn’t nature. Everything is nature.”
(Krenak, 2009, p.9)

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ABSTRACT

Looking back, I understand the urgency of this research. I had just moved from Brazil to the Netherlands, coming from Paraty, a location where I was immersed in the Nature around me, there, it was easy and natural for me to feel connected with Nature. But here, in a different context and environment, it was hard for me to adapt, not only because of the changes in the biome, but also because I moved to a big city like Rotterdam, this was new to me and profoundly affected my health and daily habits.

Because of the lack of Nature, I had to expand the concept of what Nature is, and find ways to connect with it and acknowledge its benefits and importance for ourselves and the planet's health. For that, my background as a Caiçara from a traditional community in Brazil was revisited and analyzed in ways of understanding how the values of community and place are the basis of cultural identity and the feeling of belonging. On this journey, I discovered that the political-economic system in which we live make us displaced people and does not recognize and/or respect the natural systems of our planet as source of everything that exists, including us and the objects we have/use.

Following a practice led-research focused on Nature awareness, I developed, applied and analyzed Nature related educational-artistic-activities around the city of Rotterdam, specific to those who live in cities and/or have little access to Nature. The activities presented were in the form of workshops inspired by Joseph Cornell's book *Sharing Nature*, in which he presents a four-step theme for learning about Nature, and also from my own expertise. The reports of activities, interviews and bibliography served as a basis for the theoretical body of the text. Throughout my research my position as a member of a traditional community, immigrant and artist-educator helped me to form critical thinking, analyze the proposed subject and build the argument in favor of the need to preserve Nature for our health and that of the planet as a whole.

The research has shown that those who have little access to Natural environments or who live in cities, are more demanding of a mindset of appreciation and awe to be able to connect with Nature. In this context, the educator is the facilitator who guides the experience in order to provide the tools and means necessary for this mindset to happen. The results of the educational practices showed that the connection with Nature happens at a subtle level, that is, it is fragile, almost immeasurable and ephemeral. It needs to be nurtured, re-linked, and constantly revised to be active. This can be seen mainly in the comments of those who participate in the workshops, such as telling their past experiences, showing curiosity, overcoming fears and changing perspectives. And sometimes in actions that represent freedom and emancipation.

I believe that the tactics I used to achieve the necessary state of mind to connect with Nature through this research were in most cases successfully achieved.

POSITIONALITY

My position as a member of a traditional community of the Brazilian Rain Forest, that lives in harmony and according to the cycles of Nature, stands for a life to be lived with appreciation for the simple things of everyday life as a form of protesting the oppressor, excluding and exploiting economic system in which we all live in. This position became clearer to me when I moved from my hometown to the city of Rotterdam and felt what the lack of Nature, both physically and mentally, did for my health and in my life. Although living in Europe gave me access to goods of all kinds that I didn't have before, such as electronics, fancy food, accessories and objects, it didn't make me feel fulfilled, happy. Something was missing, and that was my connection to myself and to Nature.

The period when I was happy with my growing power of consumerism was the moment when I got involved in the illusion of capitalism, which sells the idea of happiness as a commodity, in which whoever has the access to buy is considered as happy... and I mean anything! A ticket to a movie, to a trip, to a concert; a new pair of shoes, a sofa, an umbrella; a chocolate bar, an ice cream or a table at the restaurant. But do not forget that capitalism works for those who live on the right side of the globe, in other words, it worked for me because I live in Europe, in the Netherlands, which is a powerful economic center in the world. But it doesn't work for most of the world's population, even though climate change is already affecting everyone, those who suffer the most are the poor, not the rich.

So, I had to change my lifestyle and my relationship with this land, because I was ill and because I lived the flaw, I contributed to this broken system, working, buying and aspiring for more and more, careless; but I do not want to cope with it anymore, at least not like I did in the past. To find ways of connecting with Nature while living in the city I had to expand my concept of Nature. Before, Nature was the catalyst of my existence, permeating my choices, demands, solutions, because its presence was so intense and overwhelming. Here, in the Netherlands, I lost this reference, so I had to broaden my understanding of what Nature is and turn it into something accessible to me, something that would be present with me wherever I went.

In practical terms, I started by going to places where Nature was the main issue, such as community gardens and zero-waste food institutions, like the *Groenten Zonder Grenzen* Rotterdam, which is an initiative that converts leftover food from street markets into free social dinners. In addition to these initiatives, that are part of my private life, as an educator I went to NGOs where I was able to apply activities and talk about my trajectory as an indigenous person, sometimes as a volunteer sometimes as a professional. Institutions such as *De Stad Uit*, *Pier 80* and *Thuis in West* were the places where I was able to address the problem of the lack of Nature in people's lives in a concrete way through education.

This is the practice-led research in which, based on my experiences as an art educator, I analyze the need for connection with Nature when living in the city, such as the need for a community and the influences of Nature in our health and well-being. On top of that, I present the necessary tools to access people, so they recognize Nature as a fundamental entity of our lives.

As a researcher, my aim is to re-frame the meaning of the word Nature, until the borders of a concept where it becomes a mindset in which each person is responsible for it, and is the holder of its existence. As a way of emancipating our relationship with Nature.

The poems in this paper were written by me in my first trimester at MEiA.

INTRODUCTION

In the last couple of years, I have been trying to find a group of words that can express the meaning of the word Nature. On this journey I discovered that its meaning can vary as much between the idea of what is nature, as a concept, specific to each person, as this concept is subject to the context where this word is inserted. It depends on the position of each person in the world itself, as the way you understand Nature is related to the place you occupy and how you act in society as a civilian. This variable is applicable in every different context in which the name Nature is used.

For myself and for the purpose of this thesis, I will be referring to Nature as a mindset, a sort of commitment from oneself to the natural world around us. Nature as what something you can acknowledge as existing, and to be able to link that to your very existence on this planet, as a unity between oneself and the whole. In this unity, absolutely everything that exists is Nature. I believe this definition sets us free. It releases us from the burden of being a citizen doomed to respond to the inputs and obligations of life lived in society. It makes us responsible for one thing, which is to exist. Existence is the principle of life on this planet, things are alive because they exist and vice versa. On the other extreme, there is death, which would be the end, but it is also an essential part of being alive, because nothing really dies, but rather turns into something else, something new, which is not tangible but still existent. The one thing we know for sure is that everything that exists one day will die, will vanish and disappear from our eyes, and so there is no need for attachment or suffering. In other words, human life exists to be contemplated as the existence per se and not to correspond to invisible tasks and struggles.

The cycle of life and death is a, in which things - plants, animals, objects, people, minerals, systems, everything - are driven by their very existence, are transformed, with new appearances, properties and characteristics, but the core remains the same; like water that falls from the sky to fill the river and evaporates with the heat to become clouds and fall back into the river. All that exists comes from the same source, which is Nature, and will come back to it, even that small plastic bag bought at the supermarket 50 years ago.

It is important to briefly explain my background in order to help the reader to understand my endeavor towards preservation in experiencing Nature.

My hometown of Paraty is famous for its biome and cultural life. In 2019 the city became part of UNESCO's World Heritage Site¹ because of its combination of natural and cultural landscapes. The historical buildings and cultural richness, together with one of the best-preserved coastal areas of the Brazilian Atlantic Rain Forest, makes the town one of the five key biodiversity hotspots in the world. In this context, I was born *Caiçara*², which is the name given to the people who live in sustainable communities in coastal regions between southeastern and southern Brazil, where mother earth and the seasons come together in harmony. I am a mixture of indigenous, European and African.

In Brazil I taught art to children and teenagers from disadvantaged backgrounds. In my classes, my aim was mainly to apply the practical and intellectual content I have learned during my Bachelor in Fine arts. There was no need to go deeper into Nature as a subject since we all lived in Paraty, a city in which everyone feels closely in touch with Nature. However, within my personal art practice, the natural world was my main research focus. At that time, I felt the need to talk about the changes taking place in the city's landscape due to urbanization and intense deforestation. I saw the places where I used to play as a child turned into cement blocks in the form of a new condominium or supermarket. The choral song of the frogs in the swamp near my old house was replaced by horns from a large sales shop, while herons no longer appeared on their annual migration.

1. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1308/>

2. <https://www.preservareresistir.org>

For me, to represent the forest and the greenery is a political act advocating for its existence. It is a way of recognizing and preserving the memory of the vegetal life through imagery, as it disappears along with its own experience. The fauna and flora of the Rain Forest are so rich and full of diversity that I am constantly impressed by their grandeur, I am completely in love with the abundance of species and with the beat of life that pulsates everywhere I look. It is the most comfortable biome I have ever experienced, there is an abundance of green, of water, of food and pleasure. If you respect the beings that cohabit the forest and follow the seasonal cycles, you are ready to go your whole life.

On the other hand, within a city, these features are all neglected on a small or larger scale. Nature, as a biome, is concentrated in specific areas, fresh water for diving is rare, food comes mainly from supermarkets and most activities involve monetary transactions. Interactions with other beings are little and scarce, maybe there are pets, or the sight of a bird in the sky, but wildlife is far from everyday life unless you go to a zoo or aquarium, but again, it is not wild anymore. Even spiders, ants, earthworms, those kinds of animals that inhabit any garden, for most city people they are not present. On top of that, the landscape is transformed, adapted and built to meet the needs of the cities without considering living beings, asphalt takes over the ground, buildings take over the view, cars take over the trees and businesses take over Nature. In the end, without the effort of those who care about Nature, art, and the community, cities can be a cold, impersonal, flat and gray place.

Then I moved to the Netherlands, and started to live in a Central European context. At the beginning of my first year in the Netherlands it was difficult for me to recognize Nature in the form I am most familiar with. It is so different from the place where I come from that I had a hard adaptation period until I could really recognize and acknowledge the transitions of the seasons in the trees, in the wind and in the sky. At the end of winter, depression hit me and there was little enthusiasm in me to live this life. I experienced a lack of Nature. I was in a cycle of going from one close space to another, deeming the weather as an enemy that would hurt me if I stayed out longer than I had to. This behavior turned me away from experiencing Nature in this country. Back home, the weather was my friend and companion, I was used to following its suggestions and adapting my activities whenever I could. If it was too sunny, the day was asking for a cleansing and cleaning, but when it was cloudy, running errands in the city was a better and more suitable option. If it was raining, then bureaucracy was a good call. Choices and adaptations in my daily schedule were my day to day, like a symbiosis with the transitions of Nature. However, here I was not familiar with the weather and with the predominance of one type of weather for long periods, I didn't know how to behave, interact and adapt.

Until a cloudy, cold windy day in February when I was cycling against a strong wind current, and I simply got up and froze. I could not move on. The wind stopped me, and I found myself on a kind of tightrope, as if I was flying. I felt the challenge to survive. In this moment I remembered the enormous power of Nature. I decided to go with the flow of the moment, so I turned my bicycle around and let the wind carry me forward with its strength. From this moment on I began to recognize Nature in its tiny details. When I finally surrendered to the forces of Nature, I felt alive again, as if the reason to be alive is to connect myself to this planet.

Looking back, I understand the urgency of this research. As I said before, I had just moved from Brazil to the Netherlands, and I came from Paraty, a location where I was immersed in Nature around me. There, it was easy and natural for me to feel connected with Nature, but here, in this other set up, I could not recognize it in the way I have learned, not only because of the change in the biome, but also because I moved to a big city like Rotterdam. This was new to me and profoundly affected my life, especially my daily habits. The lack of sun, the long hours in closed spaces, the increase in mental activities opting for a decrease in physical activities summed to the little contact with the greenery, left me displaced... I was lost, depressed and defeated.

To overcome this feeling, I had to expand my concept of what Nature is and how I can connect to it in this context. I learned that Nature is much more subtle than I ever imagined. To feel Nature while living in a city like Rotterdam, you must be able to create space in your mind and give yourself time to appreciate your existence on this planet, without any thoughts or claims. Then after a while, you start noticing slight manifestations of Nature around. It is a moment of non-action, where you are able to switch your attention towards little expressions of life that you didn't realize existed before. It is when you realize you are present.

When this state of mind is already conquered, you begin to amplify these boundaries and search for situations where Nature happens every day. It is an understanding of Nature at its core, where all the living manifestations are connected and dependent on each other. It is the realization of the systems of life, within a day, a month, a year, a century, within a seed, a tree, a fruit, a forest. It is the endless circle of life connected to time, which we all are subjected to.

To be present is also to acknowledge the place where you are at. As if it is part of the equation to realize that places are different from each other, that each place has its own characteristics, particularities and ways of dwelling. The places we live transforms us according to its environment and needs, something I have learned from my own experience. On the grounds of that, I tackled the outdoors and initiated a journey throughout my own backyard to make it habitable and then grow some of my own food. I realize that the connection with Nature has an intimate relationship with the land. This understanding made me expand to communities in Rotterdam that share the same interest as me. I then visited places, met people and learned from them how to navigate in this territory, how to get the most out of it and enjoy the climate and its changes. I also shared stories and impressions, and this made me feel connected and part of the city, as if I belong. Therefore, part of my research is also related to aspects of what it means to belong as a social and communicative individual in cities.

The feeling of connection with Nature happens naturally when you are fully exposed to the natural world, when you are experiencing it in its raw form, in the middle of a forest or on a sunny day on a beautiful beach. But it doesn't happen in sites where man has so deeply changed its appearance, up to a moment where you hardly see or interact with any wildlife, which is the case of most cities in the world - Rotterdam is no different. For that, when the ability to get in touch with nature is lost, a reconnection work must be done, a reeducation on how to perceive nature. This is where my research set its route, on raising Nature awareness through education.

One of my cognitions while participating in this master's program is that education has many dimensions, its boundaries are wide, and its modes of occurrence are countless. For me, education happens through interactions and exchanges between , place and method. Particularly in Nature education, which is not a mandatory discipline for the curriculum of a traditional education, its flourishing can be subtle because of its unusual method and its immeasurable evaluation.

The tools for accessing Nature education are other than the technologies established within traditional schools, they depend on uncommon factors. The opening of the group to new experiences and other perspectives is fundamental for them to get involved with the activity and thus leave freedom to speak louder. Every now and then, the group needs to go outside to a place where there is at least a bit of green life around, like a park or a garden. The group also needs to trust the process suggested by the educator and each person must create affection and ownership in the proposed activities. If some of these factors are conquered, then the group manages to get out of their comfort zone and still learn to relax, enjoy and appreciate Nature.

Experiencing Nature

Throughout my educational practices in this master, I had to deal with all the factors described above in different situations. Sometimes one factor was present, sometimes more than one, but the two factors that were always there were the lack of freedom in expressing their bodies and the failure in getting ownership over a situation. After researching with colleagues from both MEiA and the places I teach, reading my bibliography and thinking about the causes of why these two factors have always been present, I see this as a reflection of how social interactions in our society are constructed and propagated today.

The writing that follows is divided in three chapters, the first one is about Nature and the *Caiçaras*, the communities and our relationship with the land. In the second chapter Nature is related to the health of human beings, and their lifestyles in cities and society. And the third chapter is presented as a continuation of the previous two, with educational practices explored as part of an investigation into art education aiming to create a connection of humans with Nature.



View of a friend's house in Paraty, Brazil 2020.

METHODOLOGY

This is a practice led research towards the development and application of educational artistic activities around the city of Rotterdam with the aim of raising awareness and connection with Nature for those who live in cities and/or have little access to Nature. The activities presented here were administered in the form of workshops inspired on Joseph Cornell's book *Sharing Nature*, in which he presents a four-step method called *Flow of Learning*, where Nature experience is structured in a sequence of games and activities oriented according to people's interest and energy level.

These activities are for everyone, which means that my romantic idea about this research is that all layers of society would become aware of Nature and would take care of it, and this way we could slow down the accelerated pace of the climate crisis and the exploitation of the natural resources.

This research intends to show that a person's relationship with Nature happens through practical and lived experiences, which would explain the choices to combine practical, artistic and intellectual immersions in a shared environment, preferably outdoors. It also intends to demonstrate that for those who have little or no access to Nature during their lives, the need for a facilitator who teaches and guides through the experience is essential for this process to happen.

Further on, the intentions of this research lie in showing that for those who live in cities, the connection with Nature takes place through a mindset of awareness and recognition in a continuous process that requires constant work to activate a place of presence and appreciation.

The workshops presented in this thesis were chosen based on the degree of interaction between both parties, me and them, the participants; and in the discussions and reflections that these workshops brought. The parameters for its evaluation were based on the effect of such in my pedagogical approach in the construction of a flexible plan, in giving freedom and space to curiosity and fun to emerge. To this end, I took notes and photos during the workshops and soon afterward wrote descriptive and critical reports in which personal insights and participant comments were integrated.

The collected data in the form of reports, photos, footage and artworks from the applied activities supported the subject-matter in its theoretical conception and in answering the research question: *how to connect with Nature while living in the cities?* In addition to the educational approach, two interviews took place as support for understanding the concept of the word Nature in its significance for me and for this thesis. These interviews took place during my last visit to Brazil earlier this year, and I only transcribed the parts I used in the thesis.

For the interviews, I prepared a list of questions that guided a live recorded meeting. Moreover, I went through places, communities and people that share the same ideology of awareness of Nature and environmental consciousness, I sought knowledge, modes of behavior and experiences, these were also the places where the workshops took place, usually the frequenters of NGOs and social institutions, like *De Stad Uit* and *Thuis in the West*.

On top of that, my personal experiences as a member of a traditional community, immigrant, artist-educator helped me to analyze and build the argument in favor of the need to preserve Nature for our health and that of the planet.

Cycles of nature

*Open your eyes, give yourself a moment. Breathe
Open your mouth, give yourself a sound. Exhale
Open your arms, give yourself space. Stretch*

Awake

*Stand up. Look outside the window, there is light
The day has just started
Slow as falling dew
Fresh like the first breeze
Calm like winter sunbeams.*

Midday

*There is hunger
The lion inside your stomach is alive and he asks for food
His mane is big and shines like the sun in the high sky
We could eat a whole country*

Afternoon

People walk, talk, they don't stop.

Evening

*The still brightness
As fast as the dark blue defeats the big beast
The light that shines fades away in the glowing sky
Shinning sun. Further no more*

Night

*Drop your shoes, move your toe, rest your head
Prepare to bed
Let me take you by hand to the dreamland
Where the wind blows pieces of hope
And silence waits for stillness*

But wait,

Before I'm gone

*Close your eyes, end your thoughts
Once again, don't forget. Just relax
Tomorrow is yet to come
The cycle hasn't begun*

Francisca Santos, 2020

Chapter 1 . NATURE

If we look closely at our daily lives, we will notice that yesterday is not so different from today and tomorrow, and most of the things we do are related to our basic survival, whether we are conscious about it or not. And so, for all living beings, the purpose of life is to stay alive in the first place, life will always try to remain alive in every situation. However, for humanity today and because of demands from structures that are beyond our power of acknowledgement, we were induced to believe that it is part of our existence to acquire objects and respond to tasks that are not intrinsically related to our survival, rather to sustain a chain that ends in the exploitation of beings and the natural resources of our planet. This dazzle is making us detached from the very meaning of existence, it confuses our morals and values, it creates a reality that is not sustainable for the planet and its future generations.

The demands of the Anthropocene era are in discordance with the available natural resources of our planet, in short, man exploits more than he preserves, and it gives no time for biological systems to recover. The current model of economic growth oriented by the pursuit of instant gain and profits, does not respect the needs and limits of ecosystems and populations. When I was interviewing Juliana Ferreira, PhD in Geoeconomics, she said that if we keep up with the fast and intense pace of exploitation, demand and consumption, this could lead to human extinction, since climate change is a reality that affects the entire planet and does not guarantee a healthy planet for the next generation, in her words:

“The effects of the environmental crisis that we face nowadays certainly have impacts on the public health of the human population, with an increase in the frequency of heat-related illnesses and areas prone to dengue and yellow fever, for example. Or even from contaminated and/or polluted areas. Changes in the rainfall regime can seriously threaten the food security of large populations and the water supply, causing population contingents to move, migrating to other regions.”

(J. Ferreira)¹

The natural systems (water, air, soils, fauna etc) disrupted by human exploitation are the fundamental basis of the resources that sustain life on our planet, they play an indispensable role in the maintenance of ecological services, such as guaranteeing the quality of the soil, air, freshwater stocks and protect global and local climate regulation. They are also of great importance for improving the quality of life when supplying natural healing resources, such as medicinal plants, whole food, green and safe areas for occupancy.

On the other hand, when we live in harmony with the natural urges of life, respecting Nature and according to our survival needs, there is time and space in our mind to simply exist and enjoy the manifestations of life around us. Even though this idea might sound radical and outdated, it is not, it is a call to live a more sustainable life in which we are connected to Nature, to the place and people we inhabit with. Thus, in my understanding, basic survival includes in its meaning the increase of communion and care as opposed to the excess of money and goods.

Throughout my research I found great inspiring figures, among them, the world-renowned Brazilian indigenous activist Ailton Krenak was my most valuable source, his book *Ideas to Delay the End of the World* is a transcript of a lecture given at the University of Lisbon, in Portugal in 2019. It was the first time I read something by him. In this book he cites my people, the Caiçaras as one of the few Traditional Communities that still follow the rites of

1. Original interview in Portuguese, carried out on 01-15-2022 with Juliana Ferreira PhD in Geoeconomics and teacher at public school in Góias, Brazil for over 20 years.

Nature, as isolated constellations of our society that enjoy life as it is, at least as it should be, with dance, happiness, simplicity and connection to Nature. He also talks about the invisible political economic forces that disrupt our relationship with the Earth in order to produce and profit without respect for it, in his opinion the world is about to end anyway, and the only thing we can do about it is delay its end by being humans that we once were, who commune, share, enjoy and live simply connected to Nature and ourselves. In his words:

“Urbanization got these people from the countryside and forest to live in the favelas and in the suburbs to become labor in urban centers. These people were ripped from their collectives, from their places of origin, and thrown into this blender called humanity. If people don’t have deep bonds with their ancestral memory, with the references that support an identity, they will go crazy in this crazy world we share.”

(KRENAK, p.9, 2019)

He keeps saying that “the idea of us humans detaching ourselves from the earth, living in a civilizational abstraction, is absurd” (KRENAK P.12.2019). The term “civilizational abstraction” refers to the idea of man and the Earth being detached from each other. Krenak says that this is where the problem started, as man stopped recognizing himself as Nature and thus exploits it without respect, consideration and the awareness that in fact, he is degrading himself. He says that this was a strategy by large corporations to act in their own interests, that this idea “suppresses diversity, denies the plurality of forms of life, existence and habits. It offers the same menu, the same costumes and, if possible, the same language for everyone”.

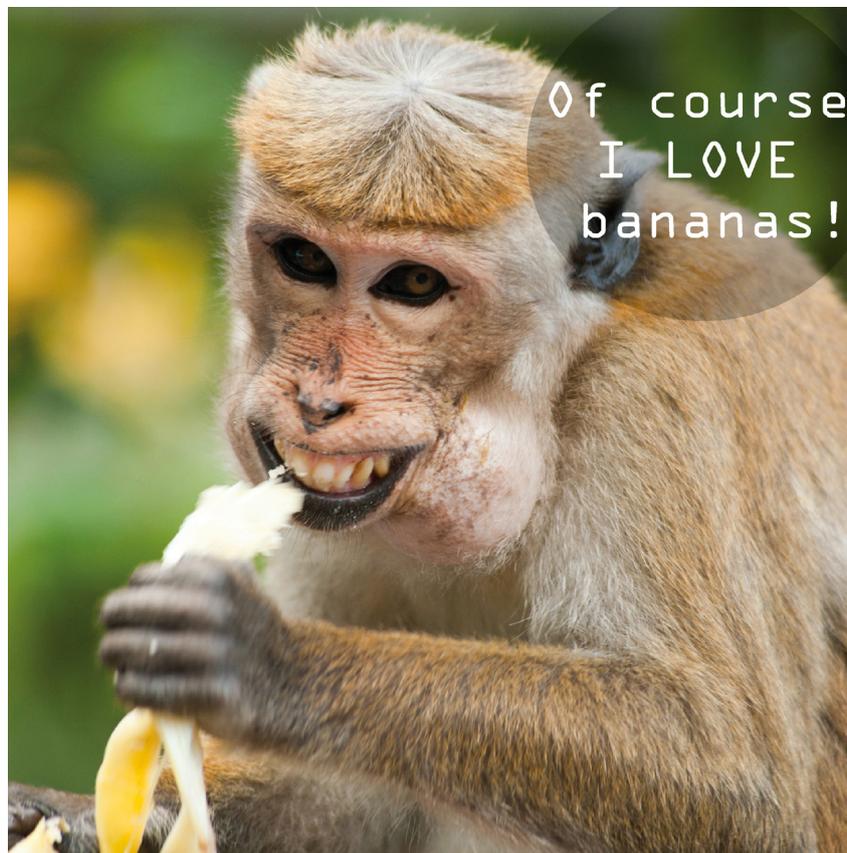
Similar ideas are discussed by Moore when she brings up Intersectional Ecologies as a method to revisit and critically investigate the intersections between places, practices, race, gender, technologies and ecological futures. One of her arguments is that what lies behind colonial and capitalist impulses to exploit Nature is the belief that humans are separate from the natural world (MOORE, p.2, 2016). That the logic behind these systems are based in the alienation from Nature, which would make humans believe that we are superior (AMMANN, p.9, 2020). Such beliefs dissociate man from his connection to the land and break down his sense of identity.

As a Caiçara I am closely connected to Nature, therefore I stand for its preservation in the sense of being aware of how our actions and choices contribute to the actual environmental crisis we face today. However, as a symptom of modernity, the environmental crisis cannot be reversed only with actions coming from common people, it depends on agreements from big corporations and large financial institutions around the globe. The economical political system in which we live has a massive contribution and responsibility in building a broken relationship with Nature and with ourselves, and this affects the general health of the world, including all the beings, ecological systems and especially those who live in cities, where the access to Nature is usually limited and belongs to specific areas.

Nonetheless, my goal is to show ways of connecting with Nature, regardless of the place and position we are in society, by using the right tools and means, through education we can access the natural system that is available to us everywhere. For this, in my artistic practice I position myself as an activist in favor of Nature experience, by drawing the landscapes of Rotterdam and producing social media content in which I suggest activities to become greener aware. My focus is city life, because that is where I am living right now, and it is also the place where I felt the lack of Nature for the first time. However, the center of this research is led by the educational activities carried out in the social institutions of Rotterdam that I attended sometimes as a volunteer and sometimes as an educator.



#naturewellbeing Project 2021



1.1 CAIÇARAS

Earlier this year, I returned to my homeland for the first time after three years away. There, I realized how important this research is for my people, the Caiçaras, and how my conception of Nature has changed. I also had the opportunity to talk to local people and interview one person, my cousin Jacira Lopes. She is an environmentalist and activist lawyer that fights for the right to remain in our territory, exercise our culture and end constitutional violence.

She explained to me that the Caiçaras suffer different types of threats, first from mass tourism, as we live in the coastline of the RainForest, which is a popular tourist destination for Brazil and the world; and, secondly and even more, by governmental laws, which do not respect, recognize or act in favor of our people, place and culture. Even though there is the decree 169¹ by ILO (International Labor Organization), in which we have our rights guaranteed as a traditional tribal population to act according to our culture and ancestry, one of the reasons, according to her, for the government's flaws in preservation is the lack of public service, which means that although the law exists, there is no real human work monitoring and inspecting these areas. In addition, within the public environmental agency, it is common to have disagreements between employees about how to deal with the problems that threaten the Caiçaras, since in practice it is these employees who should instruct not only the tourists but also the Caiçara himself in how to act in different situations, such as invasion of property. All these leads to a variety of problems, like recurrent exorbitant fines that cannot be paid place the Caiçara as an environmental criminal; hostile and unannounced environmental visits, often armed with heavy weapons, causing fear and insecurity over the land; as well as loss of housing and the right to exercise our errands and ancestry, such as fishing, planting and building.

These factors affect the daily life of my people, especially the ones who live in environmental preservation areas, like my cousin's family. That is why, in 2009 a group of people created the *Fórum De Comunidades Tradicionais*² (Traditional Communities Forum), a social movement that gives voices, identity and a net of support to the Caiçaras, Quilombolas and Indigenous peoples from that region. So that people like my cousin's family, who often suffer from those types of threats described above, know how to navigate within the Judicial system when these situations happen. During our interview I asked Jacira: what is a Caiçara? What makes us a traditional population? She said:

“I like to call a contemporary Caiçara, the person who goes to the sea in a canoe, who fishes by line, grows food, knows how to read the wind... we are a simple and humble people. The Caiçara is the one who lives in front of the sea, who has the beach in front of his house to work on the fishing net and the forest in the back to grow his food and hunt. It's that person who knows everything about living in front of the sea, who speaks and thinks like one. It is also about our customs, but especially about our family. The family is very important because it holds our roots; I talk about my own home but also my community.”

(J. Brienza)³

1. https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169

2. <https://www.otss.org.br/>

3. Original interview in Portuguese, carried out on 01-23-2022 with Jacira Brienza Pereira Lopes, a Caiçara from Cachadaço's beach in Paraty, Brazil.

Later in the same interview I asked Jacira about the Caiçara who do not live in front of the sea, like the new generation that was born in cities and does not have the same access to the sea that their parents and grandparents had, but were still raised with the same values morals, listening to stories, speaking the dialect, eating traditional foods and eventually going to the sea and Nature, like me. She has a radical opinion on the matter, in which she says that these people are not the real Caiçara, but I disagree. For the reason that follows: to begin with I am a part of those Caiçara that do not live in front of the sea. Today I am living in a European city, for example. In my view, racial heritage is a complex subject, it depends on many nuances and the context where each person is inserted. There are not always rational and concrete references, but subtle and conceptual. It can be as a feeling or identity, like the person is a Caiçara because he or she is somehow linked to Culture and ways of living. She kept saying:

“Although the Caiçara are not united in their daily lives, we are united when the community needs it, whether to build a clay house in collective effort or to help someone in need, otherwise we also get together to celebrate fishing, Folia de Reis and Fandango’s dance. It has always been like this; however, this union is being lost with the arrival of mass tourism and because of the economic development of some parts to the detriment of others. The proximity in the community is lost, greeting everyone on the way and asking for their family and health, which categorizes the place as a small village, is no longer available.

Everything is growing, turning into a business, there is no longer a caring relationship between us. In the past, everyone took care of our children on the beach, we knew who the father and mother were and protected their children, but now this has been lost mainly because of economic growth. You get stuck in the day to day, meeting the demands of tourism. It is a madhouse, in the race for money and survival the Caiçara lost himself in the process. It is a saddening sight.”

(J. Brienza)

In this sense, I agree with Jacira. Money took away the values of communities to be replaced by commercial operations, it transformed people into customers and the collectivity into individualism. It had the ability of erasing fraternity and compassion to create envy, dispute and social inequality. When we talked about it, she was pretty aware of how the arrival of massive tourism, and therefore money, had affected her life and the lives of others. She said that for many Caiçaras the only trade they had was land, so they sold it in the hope of making money, but it turned out to be a bad decision because either the money was insufficient to buy new land, or they were not familiar with business and commerce, so they ended up losing their money and their land. Now, she said, this same Caiçara wants to go back to live in front of the beach, but he cannot because he has lost his right, and the only option left for him is to return as an outlaw, who illegally appropriates the land, or as an employee.

The reality that the Caiçaras face today can be replicated for many other peoples on the globe, whether they are part of a traditional population or not. It is the reality of our time that has corrupted our values, that has taken away our freedom and filled us with ideas of consumerism and instant pleasure, that most of the time are unhealthy and selfish, in order to profit at the expense of others. Meanwhile, the exercise of a society where man celebrates communion and care are increasingly left aside. The honor of individuality is an illusion because man is per se a collective animal, who needs to share and live among others. The problem now is how are we doing this?

The contemporary man is the man from the Anthropocene era, who have changed the natural features of their own world, making it almost unrecognizable. When discussing with Juliana Ferreira about how the Anthropocene affects our planet's natural system, she told me that not surprisingly, there is currently a growing consensus that we are experiencing a sixth episode of great extinction, this time as a result of the environmental transformations caused or potentiated by humans. Human activity is interfering so much with the planet that it jeopardizes humanity's own survival. The increase in population and economic production; the increase in the capacity to intervene in Nature; the swelling of urban agglomerations, added to a vision of exclusionary development – all this has led to the outbreak of ecological imbalances all over the world. Deforestation, erosion, flooding, loss of species and habitats, pollution and contamination of water bodies, atmosphere, soil and subsoil and climate change, are some examples that illustrate the impacts resulting from the dynamics of current society on the environment.

Fortunately, there are people like me and my cousin who want less from life, just enough to exist as human and have time to appreciate the manifestation of life around us. People who value the moment when they are connected to Nature, to themselves and to other living beings. That is why the pedagogical approach of this research is based on the experience of Nature as a way of giving value to it, when we experience something, we create intimacy, therefore we care. We care because we learn to cope with it, we learn to harvest the benefits and we understand that Nature gives back what we sow. It is a relationship of respect and appreciation, like when the sea shows signs that a storm is approaching, we should listen to it and wait for the right moment to act, if necessary. Otherwise, we could lose our canoes, or even worse, our lives.

1.2 COMMUNITY

Human beings are social animals. In the dawn of humanity, communities began with the need for mutual protection, in the search for shelter and food. Over time, man conquers the frontiers of the unknown and this need, although still the basis of the community, has expanded to the desire for communion, cooperation, integration and sharing. Moreover, due to the complexity of human emotions, I can say that the need for community is related to cultural identity and the feeling of belonging, in the sense of recognizing oneself as part of a family, a group, integrated into a system with specific characteristics and place of happening.

Within this system, the community is sought as a living organism, in which each part contributes to the functioning of the whole. When dividing a community into families, each family has a function inside of the community that is essential for the system to keep operating properly and healthy (ORR et al, 2015, p.80). The qualities of cooperation, integration and sharing are a manifestation and demonstration of the skills and knowledge that each family, or group, possesses, and when that is needed, the community asks for it. As Jacira pointed out in the section before, when she talked about the collective effort carried out in her community with a member who needed to build a house out of clay. In that hypothetical situation, the service would be shared among the members available to do the work, so the younger, stronger men would be responsible for the heavier work, while the eldest would prepare the lightest part while monitoring the work of the young, as he has more experience in the subject. Meanwhile, some women would prepare the food and the children would help as best as they could. As a result, the community gained stability and support for individuals who are disadvantaged by age, physical disability, or other circumstances, because the entire family system compensated and produced what the community needed.

The exercise of the social function of individuals is very important for the collective. Using people's specific skills and knowledge within the community, ensures the sense of identity and the feeling of belonging, as it characterizes the social subject, person or group defined by the sets of social role assignments, that have to be put off from time to time, and this is determined by the social constructs that derive from socioeconomic production and our ideals and behaviors.

There is also the establishment of a feeling of self-respect when the group, or individual, contributes to a community, because the activities that are executed by them are recognized by others belonging to the same group or association, thus creating inclusion and approval between the parties involved. This means that one of the most relevant aspects to create this feeling of belonging to an association or group or community is the basis of their cultural identity. An important consequence of community life is the collective educational and ancestral learning, resulting from the involvement between the parties in which knowledge, stories and experiences are shared, preserved and passed on from generation to generation in everyday life. Unlike what happens in most educational institutions, knowledge belongs to the group, or family, which is transmitted from one to another, incorporating values and transmitting skills necessary for coexistence in society, with real problems of everyday life. Thus, survival knowledge and skills are acquired through real world learning (ORR et al, 2015, p.80), modeling how the whole community must carry out work and sustenance with future needs in mind, no matter how difficult the conditions. It is a system that celebrates life, places, and places high value on careful taking of the land's resources.

Once again, thinking on the example of Jacira's clay house, the education process takes place when the group shares knowledge and experience with each other and integrates individuals to build whatever the community needs, in that specific place and using the land's resources, which in this case would be clay and, perhaps, bamboo and vine. The process of learning through practical experience and direct observation relies on relationships, collaborations and the collective knowledge of all parties involved. Although these do not necessarily hold the same physical and mental capacities, they bring the community together and create a sense of identity and an atmosphere of interaction and sustainability.

The encounters, observations and experimentations resulting from these moments of collective effort are a part of the educational aspect of a community. As well as curiosity on how things work. This curiosity opens space to combine thinking and doing, abstraction and practicality, which is a fundamental combination in being able to navigate real-world problems. The experience of a real-world situation when considered in conjunction with the application of practical skills, enables a person to solve a problem in a tangible way, which is subject to any type of outcome - positive, neutral or negative. This prepares one for adulthood by creating lived experience and a sense of connection to moments of frustration and success that a person will eventually have to face. Furthermore, relationships built through curiosity, or the need to solve a problem, which may have resulted from a certain situation, foster a connection between the parties involved and the place where the situation occurred and consequently, the feeling of belonging, because it creates emotional connection between people, places and natural systems. This chain of interrelations provides a small glimpse of how the interactions within a community bring humankind and Nature closer together. It is about recognizing the region in which you live and holding attention for that place; it is about knowing the skills to live accordingly in that place and to know that everyday human behavior and personal choices can alter the level of interest and involvement with a place.

Thus, the community proves to be indispensable in the functions and roles of each social individual, both in their educational trajectory, from the point of view of handling and learning motor and specific skills and conceptual thinking, as in the understanding of individuality, belonging and identity.

However, when I think of the community as the basis of our cultural identity, linked to the land, or place of its occurrence, as a primordial characteristic to promote the feeling of belonging and foster education as modes of behavior, I am inclined to also look at these vectors from the perspective of an immigrant, because they are not isolated aspects but rather complementary features of the same subject, that also includes other variants.

The basis of our cultural identity has as a reference the feeling of belonging to a specific place, with its own characteristics and culture, and those codes and values are absorbed throughout our lives. This means national culture, institutions, symbols and representations that we find at all times of our lives, that is, it is a constituted identity, built on a diversity of constructed experiences and situations throughout our lives but especially related to the places you lived and your involvement with the communities of that place. For me, as an immigrant, these references are becoming confused and mixed. Because I belong to the social category of immigrant, I live, to this day, moments of transition and adaptation to the Netherlands.

In this process of becoming part of the culture and the place, therefore being able to adapt and understand the country's ways of behavior and its natural manifestations, it is essential for me to be a part of communities with which I share similar interests in Rotterdam, to be more specific, linked to Nature, to Education and Art. That is why throughout the years that I've been living in the Netherlands I've been involved with different communities, the ones that are relevant to this research are those that I was able to act as a social agent of change and apply the educational methods developed during this master's program. I would like to emphasize that all communities act in some way in and for the place where they exist, modifying the behavior of those who frequent them and, as a newby, I had to understand how to integrate myself into them.



De Stad Uit team, 2021.

1.3 PLACE

In this thesis, the definition of place presents itself as a complex body of particularities in its own natural processes and social functions. Understanding this definition implies that for a person to fully experience a place it is necessary to recognize its natural system and comprehend its modes of behavior, those that create identity, since in each place these are specific and variable according to their own definition. Therefore, as part of the search to connect with Nature in Rotterdam, I had to engage, recognize and incorporate this into my own life experience.

Before describing the connection between man, place and Nature, it is important to clarify the difference between a resident and an inhabitant, as this was the process that happened to me. As described by the writer, environmental researcher and politics professor, David W. Orr, the resident does not form relationships, does not observe the place in which they are situated, and does not share knowledge with the locality. Instead, a resident is a person who mainly occupies indoor spaces and is usually a temporary dweller who moves in accordance with income rates, going where the rates are the highest. On the contrary, an inhabitant involves themselves in their surroundings and with the local people from a place or neighborhood. An inhabitant is someone who bears knowledge of the land and an understanding of its resources. They carry with them the scars of their own homeland and can become homesick.

The two kinds of occupation described above reveal the degree to which a person is involved with a certain place, and therefore with Nature itself. Such involvement presents itself in the form of affective relationships and through recognition of a place's specificities, such as natural manifestations. Participating as a collaborator in a public garden or helping a neighbor to prune a tree at the right time of the season are actions which demonstrate this involvement with Nature and with the local community. On a deeper level this connection is linked to the needs and aspirations of human life and can be perceived when, for instance, someone feels homesick.

This state of feeling homesick is a symptom of a lack of identity, hence the need to feel being a part of something, to feel united with something bigger than yourself, perhaps even something spiritual. What is the bond that links a person to a place? Maybe one's family is the first reason, but it is not the only one. Currently I live in a foreign country, away from my blood family, but together with my husband who is also my family, and friends whom I consider to be part of my family as well. While I miss people from Brazil, the experience of homesickness and related distress extends further than this. It is a feeling of being displaced from my familiar habitat and of not being able to recognize Nature, the environment and the culture around me. In order to feel this recognition, I need to develop an appreciation for the functions and characteristics of the place in which I now live, and learn from it.

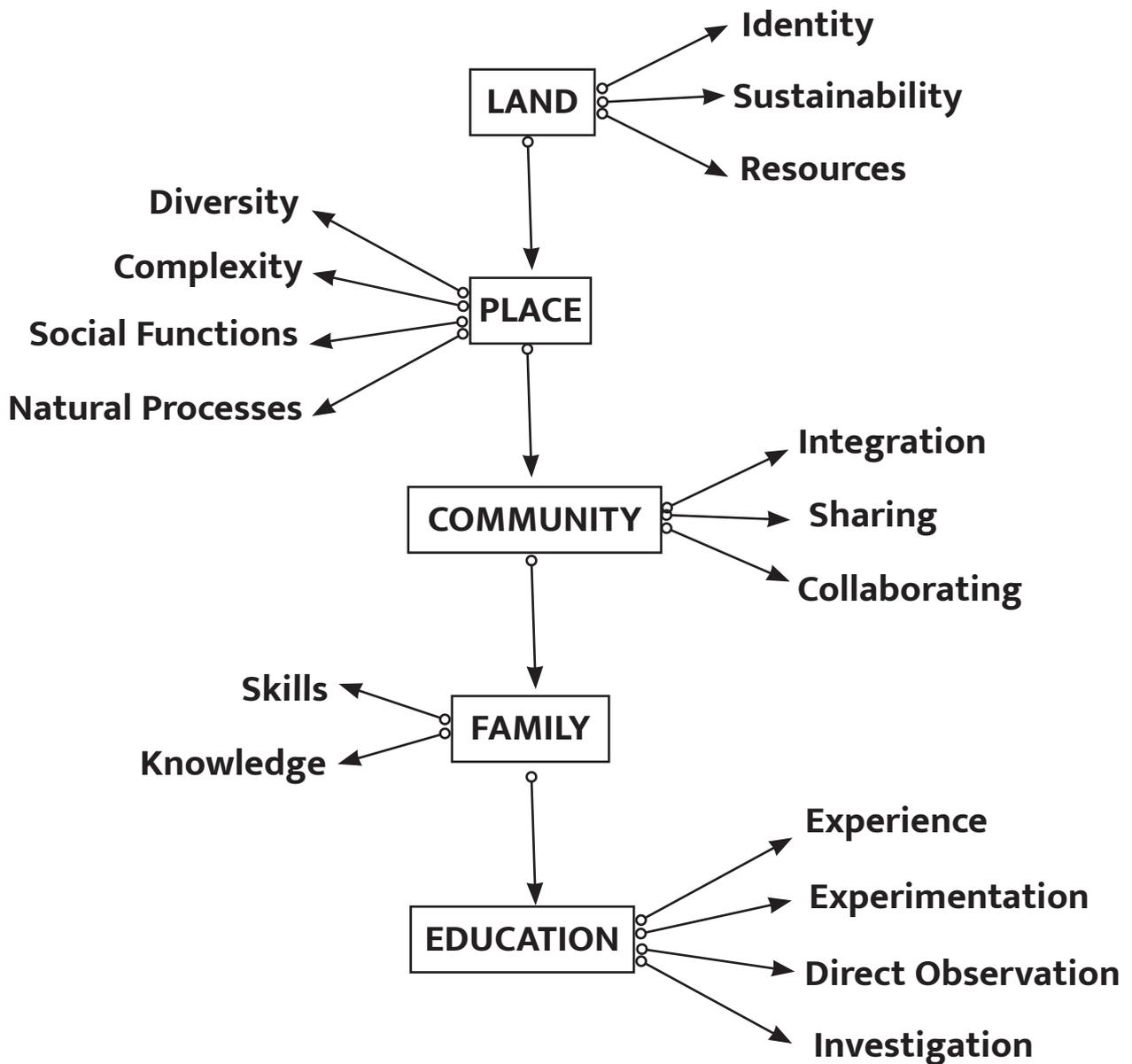
From both my own experience in Rotterdam and analyzing Orr's description, I understood that the starting point for becoming part of a based community is to live and interact with the people and place where they occur. The word 'place' here unfolds in two meanings, both associated to geographical characteristics, first as the area where the community exists on a small scale, such as the building or region of the city; the second, on a larger scale, related to the earth, such as in which part of the planet this place exists.

The place labeled as 'areas' was explained earlier in the previous section, where social functions and natural processes, that is, the interactions between plants, living beings and the environment, are the basis for its definition. When thinking of a place as a piece of land at a specific point on the earth, its characteristics are described in relation to its ecosystem and natural systems, such as the air, water and soil, responsible for creating identity and holding natural resources.

Analyzing both meanings, it is possible to make a parallel between man, place and Nature, as the parts responsible for this are related to the consequences of what it means to be part of a community. In other words, the place we live shapes us according to its environment, it tells us about the opportunities and challenges in life. While living in tropical countries it is most common to know about a bigger variety of fruits, once they grow better with sun and warmth. The intensity of biodiversity affects not only fruits but also all vegetable kingdoms. You are likely to be exposed to a wider range of fungi and parasites, and the diseases that come with it. When living in a cold country, due to lack of sun, the culture of storing food for the winter is part of survival knowledge. Differences in the operation of natural systems shape people in their culture and modes of behavior.

The next chapter demonstrates how the lack of Nature affects human health and degrades the planet’s natural resources because of the life in the cities.

The diagram below shows a schematic relationship of the subjects, from land until education.



Chapter 2. THE PLACES WE OCCUPY

Epiphany

*A splash of a moment when everything around you is breathing
and is connected to each other.
As subtle as the constant movement of droplets in a huge waterfall,
the shape of nature unfolds to me.*

*Suddenly, I just want to sleep, it is still afternoon but my body asks me to
laydown and close my eyes. I try to look at my watch to see the proper hour
but the numbers are out of focus. My mind starts to fade way and I decide to
surrender to its needs. I'm not sure for how long I was gone but when I wake up
and look around, I notice that something is different.*

*I start walking outdoors, on the way I see a tree, she talks to me.
She tells me that the air outside is fresh, that I should go to the garden.
In the garden thereare more trees, they are all together in a gathering of peace.
They tell me the day is hot, that I should go for a dip.*

*On the trail to the river, two butterflies
come to me. They say the water is clean, that I should take a sip. I look up,
its getting dark, I should probably return. On the way back, an ant strikes my thumb
and tells me the ground is soft that I should walk barefoot.*

*Back in the garden, the trees are still there, together in peace.
I start to feel cold and I ask a tree if she can hug me.
Her branches are long and wrap around my body,
I like it so much there, I feel at home.*

*I change my clothes now I dress green. The Mother Nature has spoken to me,
she sewed my existence she made me an adaptable skin.
It is how it should be in this dream of reality we are all living beings.*

Francisca Santos, 2021



2.1 GET IN TOUCH WITH

The contact with Nature brings several benefits to the physical and mental health of human beings (MYERS et al., P.228, 2020). This contact can take a variety of forms, from seeing a tree outside a window to a garden on the sidewalk, as long as you have contact with it, you are likely to experience Nature and absorb its healing properties. When it comes to mental health, the list of benefits includes reduced levels of anxiety, depression and mental distress.

It is no wonder why most of the people who live in cities do not recognize the natural world around them. There are so many tendencies and temptations within our society to push us away from natural things. Our food comes in cans or wrapped in plastic. Our clothes and belongings are made using different types of petroleum. The buildings and furniture are formed from cement, fake glass and Styrofoam. Our jobs mostly require us to spend all day sitting in a chair. Leisure is formed around consuming new products. Even our vocabulary is moving away from natural words and closer towards digital terminology. I can say “I Whatsapped a screenshot of a google backup of one terabyte and saved the file in my desktop” and be easily understood. There is a transition happening from the natural reality towards the virtual reality. Throughout this journey, the mind forgets the body. It disconnects. It is always busy with virtual data, restless. Consequently, nature is set aside. And we can already feel the damage from that. The level of mental health disorders is at least 10% of the global disease burden, and depression alone is the biggest problem (MALLER et al, 2006).

Although depression is considered to correspond to a set of genetic, biological, environmental and psychological factors, and it can be triggered by internal factors, which are related to the person itself, or external factors, which are those that the person cannot control, its increment is closely related to the habits and demands of our current society. The high levels of stress and anxiety shared among the world’s population are a consequence of the changes we have experienced in relation to psychological and social issues in recent decades, which makes us more vulnerable to developing them. Not only are medication and therapy sessions essential in its treatment but also strategies that promote quality of life and well-being, such as physical and outdoor activities, preferably in green areas, social interactions and meditation.

Our society has learned from industry that to overcome an illness like the one above, medicine prescribed by doctors is sufficient. However, if medical practices included experiencing nature as a valuable part of the healing process, then patients would have a greater chance of success in their recovery. Get dirty, like we used to do when we lived in the countryside. Walk barefoot, laydown in the grass. Climb a tree, eat it from the trunk. The answer can be much easier, if we listen to the research indicating that a garden in hospitals has positive influences on health outcomes (COOPER, 2007). A room with a view of trees facilitates stress reduction, which helps the body to reach a state of balance, by observing the tree and its interaction with the climate helps the mind to fly away from its personal problems and concentrate at the present moment.

Greenery calms down the neural system, improves mental and biological well- being, and increases life satisfaction. It is a gateway for people to gain autonomy over their own inner healing sources. Nature teaches us to interact with our own bodies, with others and with the environment around us. Outdoor moments help us to expend energy and stimulate human senses. Nature contact has many ways of acting favor to our health, whether is in psychological terms, in which stress recovery and attention restoration are conquered through a mechanism of relieving stress and mental fatigue, where you do not need to do anything apart from being present physically in a place surrounded by green life; or on making outdoors physical activities, in which the reduced noise, improved air quality associated with vegetation, and social interactions are all predictors for a better mental health. These effects operate across

the lifespan, across culture, across time scales from brief to prolonged (MYERS et al., P.229, 2020). In other words, Nature is beneficial for all, especially for those who are in need of mental health or in a healing process, after a surgery or trauma, and it doesn't have to be just near forests, living near a sea or river, or even having plants inside your house, reduces stress and hypertension. Contact with Nature can reconnect us with greater dedication and presence in experiences.

However, in the last few hundred years, there has been an extraordinary disengagement of humans from the natural environment (MALLER, 2005) because of the exodus from the countryside to the cities, in search of better job opportunities, to study or even to deny the simple rural life of their ancestor in favor of a modern and updated life, according to the invisible expectations of the capitalist system. This shift has affected our society, we are part of Nature, and we need it, not only as a source of food, raw material and spiritual connections, but also for our mental and physical health. Mental illnesses, such as depression, panic attacks, anxiety, are symptoms of the modern and industrial life that we live every day in cities, as one of the consequences of the lack of Nature in people's lives. Whilst medical technology continues to improve the capacity of nations to combat the global infectious disease burden, public health strategies struggle to cope with the rapid changes industrialization and urbanization have meant (MALLER, 2005). Rather than expected by those who once migrated to the city, urban life does not offer the same opportunities for all its inhabitants, little access to parks and green areas, prolonged living in small spaces, constant contact with different types of pollution and violence, increasingly worsen the health of the urban population and is closely associated with the emergence of mental disease.

Whoever felt any symptom related to mental disorders, on a small or bigger scale, may also share a feeling of emptiness, like a great void inside you when you don't belong, when you cannot relate to the things around you, and you don't see yourself as part of it. On the other hand, the ones who have experienced the magnificence of nature know that this void can transform itself into fulfillment and delight, once you give in to it. In the words of Rachel Carson:

“Those who dwell, as scientists or laymen, among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life. Whatever the vexations or concerns of their personal lives, their thoughts can find paths that lead to inner contentment and to renewed excitement in living. Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of the birds, the ebb and flow of the tides, the folded bud ready for the spring. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after the winter.”

(CARSON, p.62, 2020)

Carson speaks about rescuing awe and wonder, but also about belonging, as a metaphor to take over the place you inhabit and explore it through the eyes of a child, when the world was fresh and beautiful, and everything could be an adventure to collect new experiences, places and emotions. Most importantly, when the feeling overcomes the known and you are open to receive what nature could give you. It is like an awakening to that state of wonder intrinsic to every child, which exists in all of us but which we sometimes forget.

This experience of feeling the natural world around us stimulates human connections and creative potential, as we start to recognize ourselves as part of these natural spaces, constituting bonds of affection and fostering the feeling of belonging and awe. These are crucial to our mental and physical health as they teach us about purpose, meaning and

enjoyment, thus giving us life satisfaction. It makes us part of something, a place, a group, a community and with that, rescues the feelings of love, caring, sharing and empathy.

I can still feel in my body the impressions of what nature causes in me, it's like an ocean of pleasure and wellbeing, even when the experience is not so pleasant sometimes. Like the other day, my body movements were stiff, and it was getting harder and harder to get home with the bike because of the cold and windy weather. If I close my eyes, I can feel the cold rain and wind wetting my body little by little, this feeling at first would not be the most pleasant, but because of it, I also remember arriving at home and enjoying with so much delight the hot shower after that cold, windy gust storm, hard to be conquered.



Rotterdam; Winter, 2019



My cousins in Brazil, resting after working on the plantation, 2021.

2.2 ECOLOGICAL GRIEF

There is a gap between man and Nature that needs to be relinked, that is broken, scarce, almost empty; it is a corrupted sensation of believing that man and Earth are two different things, that man does not need to interact with the surroundings where he lives, that he can use as he wishes all the natural resources of the planet with no restrictions or respect and still thrives in the future. But what man does not know is that without a planet, there is no future; and he is killing it with pollution, climate change, chemical products, biodiversity loss and land use. When a mountain is killed to extract minerals from the ground, to use its rocks, trees and water to produce products such as fuel and gas, its stories are killed, and with it the knowledge associated with the practice of knowing its existence there, in that specific place. Like this, little by little, we become orphans from the mountains, from the beaches, from the trees, from the species, from places and from our own stories and ourselves.

When was the moment we disconnected from Nature? I remember I used to play in my backyard, digging the soil in the search for worms, building bridges for ants, looking down for frogs, hunting beetles. Where did all this go? The world is not the same as it used to be when I was a kid and certainly isn't the same as what it once was for my grandparents. There is less forest, less biodiversity, less free time, but instead more objects, more needs and more technicality.

Since moving to Europe, with Corona and the Internet being normalized as a tool for work and communication around the whole world, I feel that I have transferred my connection from Nature and beings to goods and virtual reality. I spend much more time in front of the screen than before, and many of those hours are spent in the search for pleasure, comfort, people and purchases. In the past I would go for a walk in the garden or a dip in the river instead.

Although my rational mind knows that such habits are harming my health and contributing to the environmental crisis we face today, my emotional mind is addicted to this way of living and behaving. It is very hard to cut off this mechanism. I have to constantly remind myself about the toll to me and for the planet. After all, in the end, that shift does not bring the life satisfaction I seek, does not bring me lasting happiness, on the contrary, it makes me aparted. Apart from feelings, people and connections with meanings, it makes me feel sick in the mind and weak in the body. And I think we are all living and experiencing this, to a greater or lesser degree.

We are living in a moment of ecological grief, a feeling that affects our mental health with high rates of mood disorders and emotional responses, such as sadness, distress, anger, fear, hopelessness, anxiety and depression due to environmental changes in the world or in anticipation of its losses (CUNSOLO, 2018). It's a grief upon the impacts of the Anthropocene that affects in a deeper way those who are closely related to the natural world, to the land and to its physical and climatic features. They become out of place, dislanded, mourning in the absence of their personal and collective cultural identity and ways of knowing. Like myself and my people, the Caiçaras.

The manifestations and experiences from my childhood, used as a reference to understand the cycles of nature and ways of knowing, are no longer the same. As a child, I remember my uncle teaching me how to look at the sky and follow the clouds three days in advance, before going out to sail in the sea so I could predict wind, rain, or sun. In winter, when it was a full moon, we would wake up in the middle of the night to fish mullet on the beach, my uncle would tell me that the mullet shoal travels north in winter along the route in front of our house and when it was full moon they would come at the closest possible to the beach to lay their eggs in the water to complete their reproductive cycle, that would be moment we would fish them.

Today these knowledge and practices are threatened either by climate change, which has changed the climate so radically that these technologies are not always hooked when applied, whether by the landscape that has been transformed into something else, like a private condominium, an urban space or a port of discharge, or even because of government laws that aim to extinguish such practices, while being conniving with large scale industrial practices that are more damaging for the environment and create poverty and social inequalities.

Our time is specialized in creating absences (KRENAK, 2019, p. 13). As the modes of living in society are no longer available to us, it is not part of the script to commune and share, the idea that a human being exists only for the pleasure of his existence has no place in the economic, political system in which we live. There is an imposed curriculum that has clouded our understanding of what life is all about. And that creates vanishment of our own lives, in which we were once responsible for our own choices and happiness. We no longer know what the meaning of living in society is, we forgot what the very meaning of experiencing life is (KRENAK, 2019, p. 13). It is a feeling shared among all of us. Those who are still able to encounter the pleasure of being alive are the ones who challenge the structures of society, they are the excluded, they are the ones in the margins of the world, in the margins of this very same society who made us orphans from our own lives and natural resources. They are those people who can dance and make art and enjoy detours. They are those who do not respond to the ceaseless inputs of work, schedule and production. They are those who follow the utopian idea of seeing the world from the perspective of the total rejection of capitalism. They take naps in the afternoon, and celebrate the moon and the fire, and this simplicity can be a threat for a capitalist that leeches dreams and time out of people.

These are the ones who are still alive. Sometimes they are caught up by the machine of production and they forget about their existence, but as soon as they remember of life, they return, they begin moving their bodies and walking around looking for their constellations, those places where they can just be, without supervision or prospective, they can just exist and share their existence with others.

These constellations, as Krenak called them, are the places where individuals become collective beings. In these places we can share knowledge and tell stories; and talk about our land and ways of living; and celebrate and respect diversity and resistance. Yes, resistance, a very important word to discriminate what these 'collective beings' represent to this planet. These are the places of healing and learning, where we experience life the way it should be, connected to nature and humans, and respecting diversity, differences and ancestral wisdom. But still, man continues to live in society, a broken one but active, maybe too active, to the point of thinking that he can extrapolate all available resources, especially those who live in cities, where everyday life is usually excluded from the contact with Nature.



Morning walk with colleagues, 2019.

2.3 MAKE IT LOCAL

The first image that comes to mind when the word city enters the room is a mixture of noise, mess, confusion, little silence, space or free time. City life can be consuming and busy, can push us away from the greenery which is mostly seen in specific parts, like in parks; and it is one of the causes of major impact on natural ecosystems (MYERS et al., 2020, p.327). Most of the people who live in big urban centers face the lack of time or space to connect with Nature and their surroundings¹. They are preoccupied with making their own living, with paying the bills and bringing home food and goods. It is like living in a jungle made of concrete with one predominant species called human beings, where you have to fight for your place and position every day. In fact, cities hold most of the global population, around 55% and by 2050 it is expected that 7 out of 10 people in the world will live in cities².

In this scenario, we must prepare ourselves for what the future holds, by transforming, adapting and respecting the spots where we live, work and play. The places we occupy in our daily life have a profound impact on our health. They affect our exposure to environmental hazards, determine our vulnerability to violence and disaster, shape our behaviors, and frame our social interactions (MYERS et al., 2020, p.325). Considering that cities produce more than 80% of the global gross domestic product (GDP), that cities consume two thirds of global energy consumption and are responsible for more than 70% of the greenhouse gas emissions produced in the world², this makes them the biggest contributors to global climate change and pollution just because people and economic activities are concentrated in urban areas¹. Thus, it is essential that we design and organize our cities in a sustainable way.

National and local governments have an important role to play in this storyline, with place-based policies and interventions that enhance planning system and local capacity, it is possible to adequate and manage the challenges of urbanization, such as the increasing of global waste, public system of commuting, low access to leisure and nature places and air pollution. Among the problems of accessing healthy habits while living in the cities, land use and transportation are two key features that have an exponential effect on our daily health (MYERS et al., 2020, p.332) due to its urban sprawl, most cities rely on motorized transportation, therefore damming the air condition and reducing features such as sidewalks and bike lanes that encourage walking, cycling and promote physical health. Once we raise awareness about the importance of nature in our lives, its effect on our well-being and health, then we can act differently in relation to the spaces we occupy every day. It is worth saying that in Rotterdam many places can be reached by bicycle and most of the time there are bike lanes along the way, making it accessible to people cycling throughout the city.

Although the changes that will affect the big part of the population of the world have to be made by the local governments, small actions made within the community of each place has an important and significant role in the regions where it occurs. Some of these actions are closer than we think, they promote health, foster well-being and reduce the damages and exploitation of our natural systems, but it requires a change in the mindset, a mix of education and behavioral change together with governmental policy and corporate responsibility. As collective beings and urban citizens, we can give vent to these changes and enjoy its benefits.

It is incredible to think about how small communities contribute to diminishing the impact of large centralized economic systems, and consequently contribute to the preservation of the planet's ecological resources. Through self-organizing, communities create a web of human interaction which transforms how food, goods and services are exchanged, and socialize into a scheme that is cheaper, democratic and sustainable.

1. UN-Habitat World cities Report 2016, Urbanization and Development Emerging Futures. Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Human Settlements Programme; 2016.

2. World Bank Urban development. April, 2020. At: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urban-development/overview>

Last year I prepared a folder in which I described activities to connect with Nature for those who live in cities. This folder is included in this thesis as support material. The contents of the folder are separated by the seasons, depending on which season we are, there will be activities specific to that season. In winter, when the outdoors is less inviting, we can, for example, rearrange the potted plants close to the light and then add new soils full of nutrients, another activity suggested in the folder is to prepare a long-term food, from scratch. Managing vegetables and grains when preparing a complete meal is a way to nourish not only our body, but also our mind, as it activates the five senses, teaches us to appreciate the small and simple things in life. At most, seeing the sunset or sunrise always brings a feeling of fulfillment.

However, the actions to be made within the communities are those that involve a feeling of benefit not only for ourselves, but for the whole, which is the community itself. Examples are from being part of collectives, offering volunteer work for any type of need,



transforming public spaces, starting a garden on the sidewalk or just to talk to neighbors and ask about their lives and listen carefully. When the sense of community is activated in a person, he or she understands that being in the community is being present, acting and being part of it. Often, the best contribution within a community is to talk to others, because from there you get information on behavior, where to go, what to do to solve a problem, how to fulfill the goals of preserving our natural system and thus creating bonds. This can be done by sharing tools, books, meals, furniture, listening advice, recommendations, stories and, occasionally doing and receiving favors here and there.

When considering education, the difference between what is taught and what is retained is a thin line made of intellectual knowledge and practical experience. Within a traditional education system, teaching is mainly composed of intellectual knowledge delivered in an abstract manner; formed by expressions and ideas and detached from situated experiences. The goal when studying a subject is to acquire

the ability to reflect and articulate through words and speech what has been taught in an abstract manner. This reflection resonates with Paulo Freire's pedagogical critique in which the student is seen as an empty vessel, without knowledge of his own, therefore ignorant, thus, the teacher, holder of this knowledge must fill this vessel and remove this ignorance.

This traditional education system usually follows a fixed curriculum and does not allow space to discuss unexpected daily issues, which might emerge inside the classroom. This method of education leads to segregation between what is taught and how it applies practically to daily life.

On the other hand, communities are formed through collective practical experiences, as of learning by doing. The process of learning through experience differs in its constitution from traditional education systems as it relies on relationships, collaborations and the shared collective knowledge of all parties involved. Both communities and schools are fundamental in the educational career of a human being, and each reflects the needs and limitations of the place in which they are established.

In my educational approach, I used the relationships of a community, the collaborative aspect of the games proposed to be played, combined with the shared feeling of inhabiting a place, to activate the sense of Nature through the exchange of knowledge and practical activities.

We can also contribute to the governmental policies by using public transport, cycling, walking or sharing a lift, instead of a one car per person. Another big step towards the raising of a collective consciousness that is worried with the future of global biosphere, is reducing the consumption of fast food and meat, once its production demand high maintenance, water consumption and land use that contributes to the formation of greenhouse gas emissions and disrupt the natural landscape with the extensive use of farms suitable for it.

Instead, buying groceries at street markets or from local producers gives the opportunity to acquire a variety of vegetables that are not always available in fast food places or in supermarkets chain, as a consequence, nurturing the connection with local communities enriching their economy and even boosting a person's immune system, as the variability in food consumption is essential for a high immune system and good health. It is essential that we understand that the choices we make every day and the solution to protect and preserve natural systems are on the same page, so we can start to take responsibility in this net. Nevertheless, cities are also places of culture, commerce, education, exchange, diversity and innovation, with appropriate policies, cities can be in harmony with people and nature, therefore prepared for our lives now and in the future, providing good health, well-being and access to enjoy the positive things city life can bring to all of us.

When I started this research, one of my first struggles was: where do I find nature in the city?

The standard answer was simple: in parks. But what if that option isn't available to everyone? Then again, where do I find the nature of the city? After a while, with a lot of effort I was able to answer that question, but now, from a different perspective. As I said in the first chapter, I understood that Nature is everywhere and all around, but for the connection with each one, we need to be open to it, you have to seek it out and feel the delight of its presence. If you live in the suburbs, far from parks or in the city center, you can find nature not only in the climate, but also in the trees and little rocks, in the weeds, in unconventional places like mold on a wall.

The important thing is to look for it. In addition, growing plants on the deck or balcony, joining a group to start a public garden, opting for outdoor activities or even making fresh vegetables to eat brings you closer to Nature.

And if you have the privilege of having a small backyard at home, like me, the possibilities increase. Because of this, it is easier for me to separate organic waste from non-compostable and make my own soil with composted organic waste. I also have direct contact with the soil itself, I put my hands and feet on the ground, and this helps me to unload the



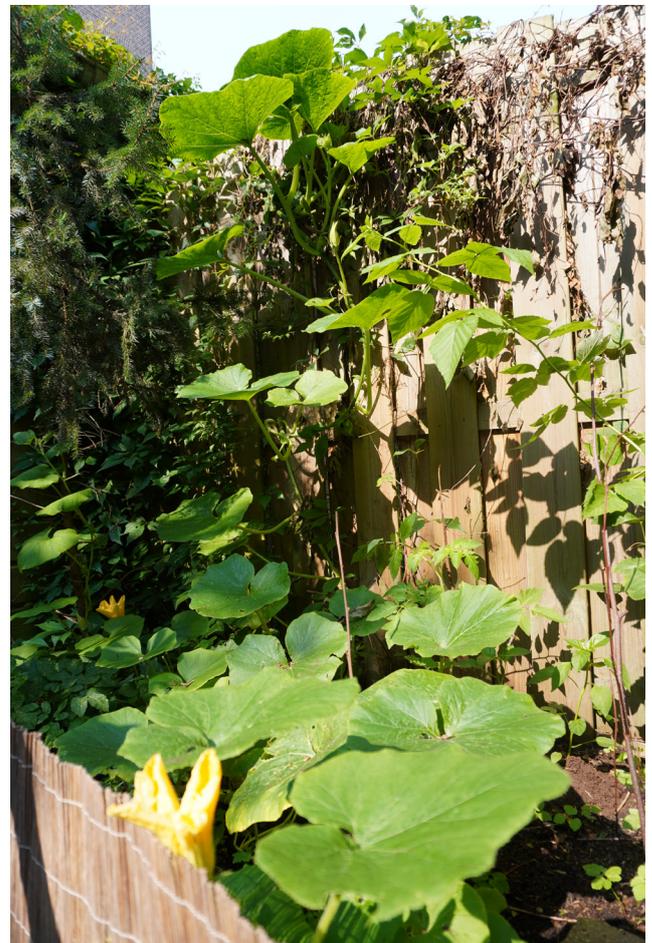
stress of the week and relax my mind. I tend to eat my meals while looking at the trees and plants in the garden, and sometimes I eat outside, even when it is cold, with a blanket and a hot cup of tea to enjoy the afternoon sunset.

A small part of the yard is covered with tiles that I use as a fireplace, so when I walk around town, I sometimes find scraps of construction wood or pieces of wood cut from pruned trees, which I pick up and take home, and use them in a future fire. I also collect dried leaves to use as a starter for the same fire.

I know that having a garden living in the city is a privilege that is not available to everyone, in fact only to a few. In this scenario, those who need it most are those who have the least, the marginalized, the poor, the least educated, with fewer opportunities, in short, those that belong to a disadvantaged social class. That is why in my artistic pedagogical project I have developed simple but effective activities in which Nature can be recognized and accessed by everyone, independent of their social status, but instead because of their involvement with the community they inhabit.

For that, since the beginning of this master I went to places, community centers and NGOs in the city of Rotterdam, whose focus is to meet the needs of those who are somehow in a lower social position within the Dutch society, like me, also immigrants, Latino woman, immigrants housekeepers, war refugees, elderly people who suffers from loneliness and children from concrete neighborhoods whom usually holds double nationality, one of whom is referred to the Dutch colonies spread around the world, in others words, the ones who cannot afford private extra curricular lessons of any kind.

Nevertheless, these activities are for everyone, which means that my utopian idea about this research is that all layers of society become aware of Nature and take care of it, therefore, slow down the accelerated pace of the climate crisis and exploitation of the natural resources. Although the places I have cited were the ones that accepted me, as a non-speaker and immigrant in Dutch society, they gave me space and credibility to experiment and work on my educational activities, which I am very grateful for.



2.4 BIOSPHERE PEOPLE

We are 'biosphere people' (ORR et al, p.288, 2005), a type of animals supplied with objects whose origins come from around the world that are largely unknown to us. It is a complex relationship, if on one side, the world has become smaller through time, meaning that we can acquire products, culture and habits from faraway places, through goods, services or leisure, in a shorter time frame. On the other hand, these places are mainly foreign to us, they belong to an abstract idea of what they are, of how they function or how they look like. It is an idea constructed from images, books, products, news, social media, or even friends that went on a trip to those countries for a short period of time. The math is very simple: how many of us Western citizens have ever been to China? And how many of the products we have at home come from China?

The process of making these products is divided into phases and steps, different stages of the production happen in different locations of the globe, basically the raw material is extracted from poor countries while advanced technology belongs to rich countries. On top of that, most of the manufactured products come from the so-called feedstock countries, like the BRICS¹ (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and their productions happen to feed the market of rich western countries. In this way, sustaining a model of society that lacks equality, opportunities and does not recognize human rights for all, due to the super-exploitation of workers through the frequent extraction of surplus value and the simultaneous process of marginal inclusion of the same in the existing labor markets. This model indicates a new subordinate insertion in the capitalist world system, largely supported by State policies in accordance with a variety of alliances between national and international governments and monopoly companies. Whole countries and cultures are then hijacked to serve as cheap labor and resource means.

The biosphere man lives the illusion of the conquered world, as if he had in his own hands all the possible options in the world, as if he could access them from the comfort of his own home. It is like an open menu, where options range from what to eat, how to dress, where to go, in which the selections are country or culture. However, this endless menu has some implications, to start with, it turns men into displaced people, for whom the immediate places are no longer sources of food, water, livelihood or sacred inspiration, it breaks the connection between man and place. Secondly, it perpetuates colonization, as the same system of land and labor exploitation, but adapted to the realities of today's society. Therefore, keeping the structures of economic and political power centralized in specific areas of the planet and the rest treated as barns, producers of raw material.

To this equation we can add cultural massacre and importation of intellectual commodities as consequences of the modern type of colonization in which the white man conquers, exploits, import and impose his own culture to other civilizations without a sense of respect or recognition, but with appropriation over their symbols and denial about their laws, knowledge and modes of behavior.

Finally, the natural system of our planet suffers the consequences of the actions of the actions of the biosphere man. The increase in population and economic production; increased ability to intervene in Nature; the swelling of urban agglomerations, added to an exclusionary view of development – all this led to the outbreak of ecological imbalances all over the world. Deforestation, erosion, flooding, loss of species and habitats, pollution and contamination of water bodies, the atmosphere, soil and subsoil and climate change, are some examples that illustrate the impacts resulting from the dynamics of current society on the environment. In

1. BRICS is the group composed by the five major emerging countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa -, which together represent about 42% of the population, 23% of GDP, 30% of the territory and 18% of the global trade.

short, the model of society we live in today does not stand for a sustainable future, rather it degrades our natural systems, resources and human relationships.

Taking under consideration what has been said about the biosphere man and the structure used in the manufacture of products, it is possible to affirm that this dynamic directly affects our health and well-being. Looking at my own example: the moment I start thinking about the origin of the objects around me I realize that I was caught up in an unhealthy cycle that was making me unconsciously help to keep this sickening gears spinning. Part of the causes for it is due to the nebulous relationship between objects and their origin, making it difficult for me to access the sense of identity of the society in which I was inserted.

To heal that I had to go back to my own origins and understand what my relationship with the land is like and I had to understand what it is to inhabit and be part of this society, which for me is an ongoing process, but I managed to overcome some barriers. But still, when I think about the products I buy every day at the supermarket, their origins remain unknown to me. As a Brazilian person I am used to eating tropical fruits so when I moved here this was the type of food I went for and I could find many of the tropical fruits I used to eat in Brazil, fruits like avocados. But living in northeastern Europe and eating avocado all year is a symptom of detachment from the identity of the place, along with a weakened understanding of the concept of community and Nature's cycles.

In fact, an avocado does not grow throughout the whole year and, as it is imported from tropical or mediterranean countries, it is subsequently harvested before becoming ripe and then transported a long distance in order to arrive here. Its cost (what cost is higher? transportation? *nao esta claro*) is higher than the price of the basket. For society, it means less incentive for local farmers and consumer disinterest in local foods, such as Pancs – non-conventional edible plants. For the planet, it means extra use of natural resources in its transportation, storage and production.

But the avocado is right there, in front of me, I like them, and is very accessible, I have the money to buy it, so why wouldn't I? The ecstasy of this thought would be an unrelated merit: that I have worked hard, and I deserve to eat what I want! More or less. In this journey, I discovered that the causes of unhappiness, compensation, depressions and heavy workload, that affects not only me, but the world population, are the same in all parts of the globe: the race for money and the illusion of capitalism, in which the purpose of life becomes a plan to earn more and more money, and after that, power and influence over other people's lives. And it's never enough, because what's behind, what's being sold is the way to happiness and peace, but that you'll never get from goods or power because it has to come from within, from your connection with yourself and to what really matters. It's like the old saying, what's the point of flying first class if you're sad? There will be no place in the world that can change that for you because happiness and peace are qualities to be found within yourself, and not outside, on objects or situations. Money does not bring peace and does not pay for happiness. For sure, the influences of people, places and things affect our inner being, but the way capitalism sells happiness, through consumerism and goods, is not there. And I can say this because I've been experiencing it since I moved to Europe.

When I moved to the Netherlands, I was able to buy products that used to cost me a lot of money, effort and labor, but here, being one of the biggest economic centers in the world, these products are available to everyone. Expensive branded products became available to me as well, and in my first year I spent most of my income buying everything I wanted, beauty products, clothes, electronics, accessories, things like that. Partly because I thought I needed to, but mostly because I felt the pressure from society, friends, social groups and co-workers, to buy in and be inserted as an active civilian who contributes, collaborates and follows the rhythm of the place we live in, so every Friday the shops are open longer and during the Christmas holidays it is normal to give someone a gift, and I did that, bought things. I was

immersed in the capitalist dream, and I thought it was working, but after a year of buying things, my house was full of unused objects, I had little space inside the house and no money in my savings account to do the things that really matter, like visiting my family in Brazil, and I was unhappy.

There was a moment when I realized that although I could buy the things I wanted, these things didn't make me happy. It took me some good inner work to realize that happiness has to come from within. I had to ask myself what really makes me happy? Then I discovered that happiness is an intrinsic condition of the human being, but out of ignorance we can't always access it. On top of that, quality of life regained its importance in my life, the one that differs from life standard, for the WHO - World Health Organization, the definition of quality of life is "an individual's perception of their position in life, within the context of the culture and value systems in which they are embedded and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns". It is an explanation that includes the influence of physical and mental health, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs and their relationships with characteristics inherent to the respective environment in the subjective assessment of individual quality of life. And life standard is related to the level of material comfort in terms of goods and services available to someone.

The concepts described above delineate with great relevance the caliber of this research, in which the quality of life overcomes the life standard, and thus capitalism is defeated by simplicity. Perhaps this is a bold statement, but it is worth thinking about to argue that what sickens our society is the structure of a system that values things over people. For me the answer is in Nature because I believe that the way to grow towards simplicity is through Nature connection and awareness. Nature as the mother of creation created us, human beings, and when connected to her we can access our inner being and our own happiness. As I said before, it's a mindset, one of presence and appreciation shared among all living beings and experienced through the natural systems.



The next chapter discusses the educational practices explored during this master's research to connect and access Nature while living in cities.

Chapter 3. NATURE EXPERIENCE

In the course of my search to find ways of connecting with Nature where there is little access to it, I discovered that this connection happens at a subtle level. That is, it is neither rationalized nor measurable, it has its own time to happen, it is accessed differently for each one and belongs to a specific and particular place for each of us. When it comes to adults, this connection is usually accessed through their childhood memories and the moments when they were in Nature, which is also one of the reasons why it is so important for children of today to be in contact with Nature, so that they can create value through the memories of the time they spent in it. Furthermore, this link, when it happens, is ephemeral, which makes us work constantly in the process of raising awareness and activating the mentality responsible for providing us with the experience of being connected to Nature in that space where its presence is not easily recognizable.

As a concept, this subtlety means that the educational outcome of my approach is more sensorial, emotional and ephemeral than rational and measurable. It does not correspond to a direct method, since it is malleable and adaptable to each situation, group and day. It requires flexibility, spontaneity and 'thinking on your feet', in short, it is not for everyone. The educator must trust his/her intuition and share the same values of what is being taught, which is the value of Nature for humans.

Therefore, for Nature Education to be structured and considered as a discipline within schools or educational institutions, it is necessary to have specific training courses that bring the subjects such as the experience and preservation of Nature as the focus. If I had to conceptualize a course like that, I would combine practical and theoretical knowledge. It would include First Aid, Health Implications, Growing Food, Living System and Place, Ancestral Knowledge... and so on.

From my point of view, the purpose of Nature education is to teach about the importance of Nature for ourselves and for life on the planet. The implications of this results in a pedagogical approach that needs to incorporate concepts that usually are not explored in a traditional educational system, such as the concepts of curiosity, spontaneity, simplicity, community, self-healing, freedom.

We constantly have to remind ourselves about the value of being in Nature and about the benefits for our body and mind (see chapter 2). Those who have attended the educational practices that I have applied during this research were subtly affected by the influences of Nature around them, I could see how people were moved and how their memories were activated, telling me stories about their childhood and the time they spent in Nature with their loved ones and focusing attention on the surroundings with surprise and awe. I cannot say how long these effects lasted and how it changed their everyday life, but I see some of the same structure and results here as art teaching. I remember that when I ministered a workshop on Natural Dyeing using natural fibers and pigments, for adults, at Pier 80, our group of 10 people got excited from the beginning. I heard comments and questions about what natural fabrics are and where they could extract pigments from. They were amazed at how these ordinary elements could dye in such specific ways the fabrics. This particular gentleman asked me many questions about the process and results, up to a moment when he remembered his childhood when his grandmother used similar techniques to dye her curtains, scarves and the like. He concluded his thought by saying that this was "the way things were made in the old days". From his comment I can deduce that Nature education brings within us the memories of our lives when we were connected to our surroundings.

In fact, it happens both ways, creating and rescuing moments when we were present with body and mind. Many times, these moments are not rationally acknowledged, but are part of our repertoire of living experiences that build our individuality and personal histories. Just as the man talked about the past, this other old lady talked about the future. She was the only person who brought her own fabric to dye, it was a pillowcase, when I asked why she chose that piece to dye she answered, "I'm preparing for death". These comments are examples of what I said earlier about the subtlety in Nature education, when it accesses the fragile in the shape of memories, when it arouses curiosity about ordinary elements in our lives, in this case grains, spices, vegetables and fibers. When it makes us think in the future, even if it is through death, which is a future present in the life of every living being, the end of a cycle.

The feedback from these two participants made me think that in Nature education the notion of flexibility and openness are two important aspects of the process, both emerge from the incalculable consequences of the pedagogical approach and both deal with the unexpectedness that requires the educator to be prepared for dealing with the unpredictable and peculiar situations of each day.

Considering the paragraph above, my educational practice is structured in activities in which the focus is to make people aware of Nature in our daily lives, using the natural materials accessible and available to us and stimulating the connection and recognition of Nature through critical thinking and practical observations. The pedagogical foundation largely refers to my positionality exposed at the beginning of the thesis. It is from there, and from the bibliography, that I took most of the educational practices that I have been applying over the last two years.





Tie Dye Workshop using natural fibers and pigments, for women at Pier 80, for WMO-Radar, Rotterdam, 2021.





Workshop with MEiA, 2021.

3.1 IT MAKE US STRONGER

I can say that I've followed a beautiful path of growth and transformation in my trajectory within MEiA - Master Education in Arts. When I look back, I see how this program has changed my idea of what education is. I've learned that, as educators, we must give space and time for people around us to understand and incorporate what is being taught. That sometimes it's better to do less but meaningful, less content, less actions can have greater impacts. Also, that knowledge does not occur as an exponential equation, it is circular and recurring. I've learned that you can be educational on an Instagram post. And that education is a journey shared by everyone involved in the process. Above all, I've learned that the educator does not have all the answers, even when the subject is his or her specialty. Lastly, I've learned that failure can lead to success if we change our perspective, and that we must trust ourselves on this road.

The first time I did a workshop focused on Nature awareness it took place with my fellow classmates in school. I remembered that I was so afraid of failure that I stayed up late the night before, anxious about the outcome. Everything I listed above happened, but in the other way around. I brought too much information, too many activities and I gave no space for the participants to relax and absorb. I also led more than necessary, and I felt I didn't know enough. But the worst thing is that I didn't trust myself, my experiences and my expertise on the subject.

At that time, I was reading *Sharing Nature* and using it as my guidebook to conceptualize the access to Nature and to do the workshop activities. The writer and Nature educator Joseph Cornell has developed a four-step method called *Flow of Learning* to guide you deeper into the relationship with Nature, its method is structured in a sequence of games and activities oriented according to people's interest and energy level. Out of curiosity and perhaps insecurity, I followed one of his activities step by step in that workshop at MEiA, which was also my first educational practice after two years living in Europe. It was an activity for our group of students that should be related to our research.

Needless to say, I considered the workshop a failure, given the variants I presented earlier, but also because I felt disconnected from my own truth. Later on, that feeling changed. With the help of colleagues and tutors, what I considered a failure actually brought conceptual, practical and emotional material for me to work with, fundamentally helped me to track back my experiences as an art educator and, most importantly, made me realize that the most significant tool for me as a Nature educator is my own history, expertise and relationship with Nature. This conclusion is one of my achievements in the trajectory within this master's program.

The methods proposed by Cornell have guided me along my journey as a Nature educator. Over time I realized that in fact, as Cornell explained - and I experienced; to be able to connect with Nature, one needs to achieve a state of mind that allows him or her to be present and experience the moment, and thus create emotional bonds with it and enjoy its benefits. His method consists in preparing different people, in their ages, physical body and mind, to immerse in Nature and discover its magical world. In my workshops I used it as a basis to read the group and understand what should be done for the group to engage and connect with Nature. Sometimes a group of children is full of energy, and before starting the approach to Nature, it is necessary to propose activities to release this accumulated energy, as in an action game, for example. Another time, a group of bored or lazy teenagers need stimulation about their curiosity to engage with the environment. Or maybe a group of adults is interested in learning about a certain subject and hearing from my perspective what I have to say about it -these are all examples from real situations.

The pedagogical approach which consists of recognizing the person's mood and from there apply different activities, presents a flexible and adaptable didactic to each situation and group, depending on the circumstances and needs of the group and eligibility of environment. I take the moment to say that this statement itself is a metaphor for one of the meanings of what Nature is and how to interact with, because in Nature things are often unpredictable, so it is necessary to be prepared for different scenarios and adapt according to the needs and possibilities available. Also, in Nature, things have their own time to happen, and no matter what, that time will come. It doesn't matter if you are anxious or unsure about the night that is approaching, at one point, it will become dark and if you don't prepare for it, you will suffer the consequences, for better or for worse. Not to threaten someone, but to teach that in life actions have consequences, and in Nature this is well demonstrated.



These are fixed features of Nature, and when a person is in contact with it, they learn to follow, respect, recognize, adapt, improvise and (perhaps) prepare themselves for the future. This action creates a sense of responsibility and independence, because they have to act and choose options, it's a survival instinct that prepares the person to deal with frustrations and expectations in adulthood. As my grandmother used to say: "Nature makes us stronger".

In the places where I work, my background is always taken into account. As so my positionality in the discussions about Nature education, the way I behave and respond to students in the workshops and how I interact with the environment around me, shows that my relationship with Nature is specific and from another region and culture of the planet. I often use the tag 'art teacher from the Brazilian rainforest' and this gives me credibility to speak with substance about Nature and art. Children and adults are curious about my personal story, about my childhood in Nature and the games I know. They are also curious to know where I learned to behave and respond to Nature with freedom and confidence.

When this kind of question comes up, I explain, with simplicity and normality, the type of things I do when I'm in Nature. Like sitting on the ground barefoot, closing my eyes and feeling the sensations in my body and around me. Sometimes I talk about a game I used to play as a kid, and I suggest we play it together. In June 2021, I did a workshop with children in *Speelpolder Schiedam* where we played one of these games. We collected dry thin branches, seeds, leaves and flowers to make sculptures and accessories with them. Although most children needed help building and weaving the objects, because the threads were difficult to keep crossed and tied together; they were curious about discovering how to keep it tied without using any wire. The results were amazing! A girl came out dressed 'like nature', with accessories all over her body and a boy, after a short conversation about crowns, gender and objects, changed his mind and wore his crown and bracelets.

When working with a public that has little access to Nature, you need to guide them through the experience. You have to show them the possibilities around, describing with words and actions what to do in Nature. That is because natureless people need a little push to help them explore the natural world, over time these people gain confidence and agency over their actions and decisions, in other words, they own their freedom. However, if your public are mainly children, then you are more than a guide, you are needed as the companionship that shares the rediscovering of joy, excitement, and mystery of the world (CARSON, 2000, p.31). Carson's words remind me of the workshop on Brienenoord Island, when I was with a group of children who had been restless for a while. After a few frustrated approaches I decided to play *Catch and Run*, but it ended up getting too loud and an island resident yelled at us for silence. After that event, a bond was created, and the children became more open to discovering the Nature of the Island with me. It was like I was their accomplice in something that shouldn't be shared with adults.

Unfortunately, for some adults, Nature can be synonymous with dirt, wildness and maybe danger. In this sense, the presence of a companionship that shares discoveries without judgment or expectations but rather with joy and enthusiasm is fundamental to create space for freedom and curiosity to flourish.

Anyhow, in both cases the educator seeks to light up that sparkling flame of curiosity and awe, feelings that are inborn in everyone but sometimes are forgotten.



Drawing Nature Workshop using collected materials from the surroundings, for children at Speelpolder, for De Stad Uit, Rotterdam, 2021. Photos from different days.





3.2 DIRECT OBSERVATION

In this section I will describe and evaluate the workshops from the previous section in detail, as these are some of the educational activities that I have applied specifically for this research. In some of them I will extend a little further than in others, because in these the process and its results both for me and for the public are easily recognizable. The activities were based, structured and conceptualized from different inspirational sources, such as my own experience as a child born and raised in the rainforest; the books in my bibliography; the conversations and observations with other colleagues and professionals in the field and from the internet and social network.

As I said before, my first workshop focused on Nature awareness took place within our MEiA group in 2020, with the activity *Noah's Ark* from the book *Sharing Nature*. Its introduction goes like this: "Noah gathered two of each creature before the big flood to perpetuate wildlife on the planet. In this game we have to find our pair to go inside the ark and survive the flood". For the game, participants are divided into two teams, from a deck of cards each person of one team gets a card with an animal drawn on it, which they will turn into and perform, the same goes for the other team. The deck has two identical cards for each animal. The goal of the activity is to find its pair on the other team. As no words are allowed, the person has to incorporate and imagine themselves in the animal's native habitat through gestures, sounds and movements. Like this, incorporating an animal makes one think of the whole structure in which the species lives, it takes us out of our comfort zone as if we were wearing another skin other than our own. For that, it is necessary to understand how the body moves in space, and challenge ourselves to do so.

Following up, when everyone found their matches, we switched the activity to a quiz session, in which questions were asked about the animals being played and their environment. People are invited to search in their body of knowledge for what they already know about these animals and from there, answer the questions. The activity is presented as a casual and fun game, and the participants tend to give answers based mostly on instinct. This is the expected reaction because when you follow to us, such as giraffes and polar bears, bringing them is an option to draw attention to the consequences of the climate crisis and the second part of the activity was entirely my idea.



Card Game for MEiA workshop, 2020.

After working for almost a year as a volunteer with the NGO *De Stad Uit*, I finally got the chance to lead a day with my own activities. The first time I did that was at a playground called *Speelpolder Schiedam* with children from *Bassischool De Boorg* in Rotterdam. As usual, when working for *De Stad Uit*, there were multiple activities happening at the same time. On that day there were five including my own, and in total we attended 120 children, but divided in two turns, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. Throughout the day I was with 10 groups of 12 children each, plus two teachers and parents, with a duration of 50 minutes each round. The day was long and intense, I worked about 10 hours, including lunch break. I learned and absorbed positive responses from every one round, and was able to notice what works and what doesn't. The activity is called *Drawing Nature* and consists of making ephemeral drawings, artworks and/or sculptures, using elements collected from the Nature around us.

Based on Joseph Cornel's method, where Nature experience is structured in a sequence of games and activities oriented according to people's interest and energy level, the activity begins with a warm up exercise, which proved to be an excellent tool to integrate and prepare the group to get into the mindset necessary to participate in the next steps. It helps to relax and indicates within the group who are the most open and enthusiastic about the workshop and who are not. It also gives an overview of the group, in terms of energy and predisposition. It is a moment to arrive and situate the body in that time and place, to look at each other and introduce the atmosphere of activity. In this first step, I make funny and playful movements and sounds to instigate the children's laughter. Laughing is an important moment of the educational process. When we laugh, our mind is emptied and a space is open to something new, it activates a layer of comprehension that goes beyond the rational mind, it's like you allow yourself to be present in the moment and to learn without effort. To laugh fosters the feeling of a group, as the ones involved in the situation are sharing the same moment. It allows the children to trust in their own understanding of things and it prepares them for the activity with positive expectations. I now use the warming up exercises in every outdoor activity I'm leading or whenever I feel the group needs to regain focus during the workshop. I suggest stretching, energetic, and relaxing body movements before the start or between breaks, so that the attention shifts from the mind to the body, giving the mind a little rest and time to regain focus.

After that, the next step is the 'treasure hunt', which is to collect from Nature things that catch the attention because of their shape, color, texture, size, smell and so on. And then find a place where we can build our artwork, if there is a table we go back to it, otherwise it can be anywhere along the way. For that day in *Speelpolder*, we had a table, so we went back to it. As a part of my general educational approach, I made the least interference possible. Once we were back at the table, I just asked the children to draw something with the collected things. At the beginning there was a little resistance, but eventually everybody got involved in the process. However, the interest was lost as soon as they reached their first drawing and I felt the need to suggest possible things to draw, so the activity would keep on going. During the day, these two approaches switched as the children showed their ability to deal with abstract references or not. As an art educator, I know that with the younger children less guidance is needed and as they grow into teenagers, the guidance has to be a balance between a few inputs to make the interest alive but not too much to the point they lose it completely. The same happened here.

There was a nine-year-old boy, who got involved with the workshop in many ways. While the other children collected mostly leaves, branches and flowers, he found shells, feathers and a hard block of mud, things that were not noticed even by myself before him. He sat at the table and tried out different positions and combinations with the objects, without any guidance. After a couple of attempts he came with a small drawing where two objects entangled at each other in a very peculiar way. When the workshop was over, he asked to stay for the next group.

Then two, three groups came, and I asked him to explain the activity, then he took the lead. This episode supports the idea that contact with Nature improves children's sense of emancipation and independence, in which they are encouraged and able to assume responsibilities and tasks for themselves and for others. When the opposite occurs, such as the lack of Nature, the chances of appropriating a situation are lower and codependency is higher. As stated in the Introduction, I believe this to be a symptom of how social interactions within our society are built and propagated today, especially when living in the cities.



In this sense, the word individuality has an important role to play, as our society uses this concept as a compliment or synonymous with strength and power, as someone who manages to be an independent person when he or she can create, build, solve a problem or earn money on his own, which is false because everything that exists in this world depends on something or someone else. Also, the media sells us products as unique and special personas, when the reality is that the majority of the population buys things that are mass produced and spread in different parts over the globe creating different sorts of hegemony. This hypothesis has corrupted the meaning of independence as a quality of ownership, emancipation and freedom into a distorted image of individuality that makes social interactions a mix of superficial layers and abstract meanings, as in social media, where interactions take place in virtual reality and do not correspond to real life. You can have 3.000 *Facebook* friends to comment on a post, but zero to meet when you need to vent. Finally, for safety reasons, most children in cities cannot interact alone

with the spaces outside their homes; the places where there is green life are restricted to parks or gardens, these places are man-made, adapted to its needs and pre conceptions, and where there is almost no wildlife.

In this way, when these children who have little contact with the natural world finally have access to it, they often don't know what to do or how to behave, it becomes more difficult for them to discover their own strength and independence through Nature as they lack intimacy with it, unless there is a facilitator to guide the first steps in the experience, this connection can fail.

Furthermore, activities such as *Drawing Nature* allow children to explore closely the place where they are at, stimulate concentration, curiosity, and it grows the feeling of belonging. When making the artwork, they think about and experiment with texture, shapes, smell, size, colors and how to combine it all in a way that makes sense to them. As I heard one boy asking another, "What is this?", and the answer was, "It's art!"

However, while I was there, I realized that in the introductory part it is essential to bring the group towards Nature awareness, by talking about its sacred existence and importance to our lives. Otherwise, the workshop assumes the character of art-education instead of Nature education that uses art as a facilitator. I noticed that with one of the 10 groups of the day, although they already had many flowers, leaves, stones and shells on the tables, this group was curious about this rare herbaceous perennial, the *Southern Cattail*. This plant is an edible medicinal plant that takes a long time to grow and form a unity with the landscape. With the teacher's help, the children began carelessly uprooting the plant, destroying its place and its integrity. When I saw this, I intervened saying that what we collected was enough, that we should stop and go back to the table to continue with the workshop. This helped to protect some of what was left, but most of the plants were gone. I felt responsible for its destruction because I was the one who suggested that we collect things that we find attractive in the first place.

The peculiarity of the situation was that I didn't feel comfortable calling the group's attention about the destruction of the local vegetation. Somehow, I felt like I couldn't come up with the subject of conscious actions towards the surroundings because the whole day was an extraction of Nature around us. But I learned that it is necessary to introduce the workshop as a moment of connecting with Nature, to explain that plants, trees and animals are living beings like ourselves, to talk about the biome, the natural systems and what is our place in that activity, therefore the situations that might come up are based in the shared feeling of respecting it. When you introduce the atmosphere of the workshop from the beginning as an atmosphere of respect and awareness, not only does it give people access to think about their actions, but it also gives me the right to call someone's attention to something I might think is wrong. It's about exposing my positions to the group so that they know where my critical thinking comes from, it's like an open door for discussion and leadership, because as soon as I present my ideas and beliefs about Nature, the group will know that I have a particular relationship with it, and will be more inclined to respect and listen to what I have to say.

When working on Nature, the meaning of freedom expands the limits of ordinary life. On that day, I saw children getting into the bushes and being curious and enthusiastic about the types of trees and trails they were seeing. They went to the forest by themselves, with confidence and autonomy. There were moments running and jumping in the bushes just to have fun, hanging in the trees and imitating the sounds of birds in the sky. They chose for it, no one told them to do it, on the contrary, some of the teachers asked them to stop and get out of the bushes, but at this moment, I interfered and told the teacher that it was important for them to experience freedom and try out things for themselves.



The experience in *Speelpolder Schiedam* made me think: what are the intersections between art education and Nature education? Essentially, both teach about the subtle, beyond that, it is about appreciation and presence; to observe, make connections and let the imagination flow through the world of fantasy and wonder. It creates emotional bonds with places, people and meanings for experiences and situations. On the other hand, what sets them apart? Perhaps the intellectual outcome is one thing, the types of memories, feelings, understandings and, especially, narratives that emerge from both experiences are pointed out as examples. Furthermore, art education has the characteristic of forming critical thinking to the extent that students are prone to reflect on their work, which is not something particular to Nature education, unless the facilitator brings the matter to the fore. Also, Nature education says a lot about body language and survival knowledge.

My pedagogical practice for this research converges these two in a way that makes it possible to explore and combine characteristics of both, e.g., when the acknowledgment of the environment around us and its influence on our lives foster critical assessments of it. As the girl who came to me at the end of one of the workshops and confessed her engagement with Nature by saying that she no longer fears it, she also asked me to come more times and repeat the experience. I believe it made her grow up on her critical thoughts over Nature.

Continuing with the description of the workshops, in May 2021, I went for a day on Van Brienoord Island with children from *Mariaschool for De Stad Uit*. The island is situated on the banks of the Nieuwe Maas River near Oud-IJsselmolde in Rotterdam. It is one of the few islands in the Netherlands connected to the sea, which lies 14km downstream. Due to this connection, some of the lower parts of the island are dry at low tide and submerged at high tide. This fact allows the place to grow in tidal Nature and wildlife with special plants, fish and birds. We were there to experience the Nature of this unique biome with a group of 42 children from age 10 to 12 years old, divided in two visits, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The groups I led had a schoolteacher to help me with language translation when needed. Each excursion lasted two hours in total, enough time to walk around the island, to play games, discover new places, species and to appreciate the view.

With the first group, the day started with a drifting walk through the trees, an activity called *Nature Shower*, which usually helps to calm the neural system, relax and reduce anxiety. On the way, I noticed that most of the children kept their heads down, so I suggested that we look at plants and slow down our pace until we were completely stopped. When that happened, we talked about biodiversity and its importance for life on the planet. We continued until we heard birds, then we did the activity *Sound Map*, from *Sharing Nature*, which consists of staying in silence, listening to the sounds around us and trying to identify how far these sounds are from us. There were many different birds and peeps, but we decided to follow the sound trail of one specific peep. Using a binocular, we found a small green parrot standing in a tree and, because the bird was green like the leaves, it camouflaged with the landscape.

This game brought the opportunity of speaking about camouflage in Nature, and an idea for another game, *Hide and Seek*, that we played for a couple of minutes: like the parrot, we tried to camouflage with the woods and, to call our colleague's attention, whistling the sound of birds. After that, the group was curious about the animals and life on the island. Using an amplifying glass we searched for crickets, ladybugs, ants and mosquitos. At the beginning of the excursion, it was hard to find any species, but now we could see life everywhere. We found a fallen tree and wondered how it fell, how old it was, and how plants feed themselves. Then, we walked towards the boards of the island, by the river where we noticed the influence of the tide in the biome; we analyzed the shells on the sand, the track of animals, and the algae's half-alive half-dead. At this moment, the children were surrounded by the environment around them, they were curious about everything I had to say about Nature. There was this one girl who fell and got dirty, at first she was worried, but after I told her that to get dirty is part of

experiencing nature, she relaxed and changed her mind to a positive reaction. At the end of the tour, I asked what they found most captivating about the day and the answers were all different. I see this as synonymous with success, as it shows how the experience was unique for everyone. When you have such an outcome, emotional links are created and established, making these children more likely to be open and careful towards Nature.

The afternoon group was different from the morning, the children were much more energetic, hysterical and unfocused. So, I applied once again the warming up exercises to release energy before focusing attention on Nature. Next, we started the tour in the same way as the first group, with a drift walk in the trees. While walking, a girl started screaming loudly and constantly making fast movements with her hands, saying that the leaves and branches were scratching her and leaving her scared. To equalize the situation, I started screaming even louder than her and I invited the whole group to scream together. Their first reaction was of surprise, I guess they were not expecting that, but following my example, they all screamed.

I thought this activity would be enough to encourage curiosity and to bond with the group, but it wasn't. I tried to convert the scream into silence so that we could hear the sounds around us, but they weren't focused yet and some of the children even mocked my suggestion. So, I decided to go to an open space so we could play running games.

When we left the forest, I suggested the game *Prey and Predator*, from *Sharing Nature*, and together we discovered some of the animals that have this kind of relationship. We found out how they communicate and tried to reproduce their sound, and soon this sound turned into screams and an island resident came to complain about the noise. The game was a success, the hysteria and complaints from the resident brought the group together and I gained confidence with the children, as if we had shared a moment of breaking the rules together. After that we continued to explore the island more closely. The children were curious to use the binoculars and glass amplifier I had with me.

The situation here was similar to the first group, but with this group their attention and interest was quickly lost. Throughout the day I tried to play different games but most of them were ignored. I believe that this group needed time to exhaust the possibilities of presence on that island and needed space to simply discover by themselves. With this group it would be productive to return to the island and continue the lesson.

I think the second group showed signals that they are usually locked inside places and because of that they have a lot of energy unreleased. Many times, they are probably cut off from their actions and natural reactions to factors of daily life. Maybe there is no encouragement to the ideas that might pop-up spontaneously, and that is why when I showed myself as an authority with compliance towards their actions and ideas, the group was caught by surprise. Maybe their usual environment doesn't offer enough space for these children to express all their freedom and ideas. I believe that after some meetings on Nature, with more time to discuss their fear and afflictions, they will be prepared to focus attention on the natural world around them.

Although all the practical activities and workshops that I have been carrying out over the last two years helped me to delve deeper into my subject and understand more how scientific research and educational practice are related, I had to choose just a few of them to talk about. The choice was made based on the degree of interaction between both parties, me and them, the participants; and, in the discussion and reflection that these workshops brought, these are exposed throughout this thesis.



Brienoord Island, Rotterdam, 2020



De Esch, Rotterdam, 2021.



Zuiderpark, Rotterdam, 2021.



Speelpolder, Rotterdam ,2021.

3.3 WONDER NATURE, AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Due to my work as a Nature educator, I was asked to write a three-day educational program for *De Stad Uit* which I called *Wonder Nature*. Unfortunately the program did not happen due to the disagreement between my approach and the organization's idea of how the connection with Nature should happen. This disagreement went against the ethics of my pedagogy and because of that I did not continue with the program. However, writing the program, and the discussions that emerged from it gave me the opportunity to analyze and debate my educational methodology. Although *De Stad Uit* is an experienced and recognized organization in the field of Nature education and social charity, that serves children from urban and socially disadvantaged neighborhoods, I think that the educational program misses some points in its design that would make the connection with Nature happen more easily and at a deeper level.

In this last section, I invite the reader to follow the discussion between me and one of the directors of *De Stad Uit*, the NGO with which I have worked for the longest time, and I present a brief, descriptive and analytical summary of the program I wrote for them. The discussions that emerged from our conversation were of great value both for this thesis and for me as an educator, first because they made me stand for my expertise in the field. Secondly, they made me reinforce my positionality - exposed at the beginning of the thesis, as the basis of my pedagogical practice, it is from there that I carry out my approach and deliberate choices, from a background of constant connection with Nature, exposed to its changing moods and reacting with instinct, spontaneity and precision. Thirdly, it made me conceptualize Nature education as an integrated system, a process that includes certain steps, atmospheres and specific approaches. So, I developed a program built to experience this process of connection with Nature, and through it guide each participant to reap the benefits of this connection. The ideas of freedom and emancipation served as the basis for the choices that structured and operated the program, which has its summarized version at the end of this chapter. It is important to remember that *Wonder Nature* was written specifically for this set up: children from *De Stad Uit*.

Most of the changes I suggested were well-received and accepted, but one main point that was of great importance to the program was not in accordance with the idea of Nature education of *De Stad Uit*, which is presented in the paragraphs that follow, in the workshop *Awaken Adventure Action*. Inspired by Cornel's *Sharing Nature* book, the activities are divided into three types of workshops related to the degree of connection with Nature in which the person identifies him/herself in that moment. These are called respectively: *Awaken Adventure Action*, *Forest Shower Wonder* and *Catch the Wild Artsy*.

- *Awaken Adventure Action* - as the name says, this workshop provides different types of active and competitive games, most of the games I suggested came from my childhood. They are recommended for anyone who is full of energy or with a mind full of thoughts, as it releases energy and tires the body. At this stage, the person is not ready to fully focus attention on Nature, either due to an excess of energy or a lack of enthusiasm, boredom and disinterest; these activities aim to propose ways to overcome these barriers through fun and competitive games, and here is the exact point (cuidado com o tamanho da fonte aqui!) of disagreement between myself and the *De Stad Uit* approach. It was suggested to me to erase any kind of competitiveness. On top of that, I was told that "to benefit from Nature one actually needs to be bored", which I completely disagree with.

When thinking about relationships with Nature, there is competitiveness in every group of animals and herds that fight either to protect their territory, or in search of food, or to conquer their partner. Competitiveness is part of life, therefore it is important for children to experience this kind of relationship because it prepares them for adulthood, just like in life, sometimes you win but sometimes you lose, and in these games children experience both sides. Also, in group activities you need to work together and depend on your colleague to achieve the goal, creating the sense of collaboration, responsibility and emancipation. This type of game also creates a relaxed atmosphere, unites the group and creates great memories.

Also, activities that involve running, jumping and catching, can benefit the participants with agility and reflex, while promoting the skills of escape, capture and also strategy techniques, allowing these children to further explore the outdoors with confidence, ownership and freedom. In addition, playing with rope, sacks or balls allows one to explore different movements of their bodies, such as throwing and kicking each other. In these games, the connection with Nature happens naturally, because of the activities, because we connect with Nature when we feel free to let go of the body and mind, if we get tired, we lie down or sit on the grass, get our clothes dirty, climb on a tree, look at the sky, look for a ball in the bushes.

As for the other disagreement, I first quote Cecily Maller:

"Nature is defined as an organic environment where the majority of ecosystem processes are present (e.g. birth, death, reproduction, relationships between species). This includes the spectrum of habitats from wilderness areas to farms and gardens. Nature also refers to any single element of the natural environment (such as plants, animals, soil, water or air), and includes domestic and companion animals as well as cultivated pot plants. Nature can also refer collectively to the geological, evolutionary, biophysical and biochemical processes that have occurred throughout time to create the Earth as it is today."

(MALLER, 2006)

Reading Maller's definition of Nature, I cannot ignore the fact that the food production processes are extremely close to Nature, as is life itself in its natural systems, such as soil, water and oxygen. Also, inside our homes, in our living room, there may be a pot plant, or a pet that we care for that brings us satisfaction. From her definition, Nature covers pretty much everything we interact with. Taking this into account, how is it possible to benefit from

Nature only when we are bored? If the oxygen we breathe is Nature, how can we not benefit from it? Apart from that, Maller goes on saying that “the healing effects of a natural view are increasingly being understood in stressful environments such as hospitals, nursing homes, remote military sites, spaceships and space stations”, as well as in workplaces, prisons and driveways. These benefits are better exposed in chapter two.

I believe that boredom is also a symptom of the lack of Nature in people’s lives. If you are to be in contact with the natural world, there will be so much excitement, discoveries, healing processes, physical action and especially changes in moods in the weather, in the landscape, in the beings that inhabit there, that it is almost impossible not to be affected in your body and mind from it, just by being in its presence, the effects and influences of its existence begin to be active, even when one is not aware of it. However, when it comes to natureless people, constant work is needed in order to reach that place of openness and receptivity, since this connection is fragile and ephemeral. It is necessary to keep up with the work of educating people about the presence and importance of Nature in our lives to preserve, prepare and protect ourselves for the future.

- *Forest Shower Wonder* – according to Cornell, there is a moment experiencing Nature when one is ready to deepen their connection through immersive Nature experiences. For that, *Wonder Nature* provides the space for one to observe the details, impressions and subtlety of its surroundings and get into a state of appreciation and awe, in which sensibility is flourished and deep emotional bonds are created. At this level the person is ready to experience direct observations, it is the climax of all workshops because it is the moment when he/she is at the highest level of curiosity and receptivity to create personal connections with Nature.

The purpose of this workshop is to activate our intuitive senses and to give voice to the impressions that arise, using the surroundings as a source of investigation and discovery. By giving space to our senses to flourish, we learn to perceive the world in different ways than we are used to, like when we close our eyes and expand our hearing, trying to hear a bird from afar. By doing this we are forced to hear all the sounds around us and identify which is which, where it comes from and/ or search on my own body of knowledge whether that sound is familiar to me or not. It is also a safe moment to expand and explore our senses, without the fear of getting hurt on your hearing by a loud horn or being awfully surprised by the smell of garbage. Many times, for those who live in the city, their senses are somehow numb or forgotten, because of the massive amount of information in the sounds of traffic, people, places; the looks of stores, building and signs; the lack of cozy places that are welcome to touch and feel; for the variety of smell coming from everywhere, including cars and sewers.

- *Catch the Wild Artsy* - at this level, the child is enthusiastic and open to receive ideas, suggestions and instructions, ready to focus attention and combine materials together.

For me, the kinds of learning which manifest from art and Nature education are similar in their outcome and methods, as both of them teach us to perceive the environment around us, culminating in a critical assessment of it. After a while, we realize that to produce artwork or experience Nature, we need to be present and focused on what we are doing. To be present is to be aware of our mind, actions and surroundings. Another part of this process is to lose ourselves and to deal with difficulties and frustration. Sometimes things do not go as planned, and we require perseverance. This is how it happens in Nature, art and in life, thus teaching these subjects prepares us for the situations that life will eventually bring.

Also, both can be used as tools to express the invisible, unnoticed, unspoken, the hidden things that are not so easily accessible or rationalized. The world is much more complex than what we can communicate using only words, and there are other forms of expressing an emotion or an idea. This is when art and Nature take their place. Perhaps a feeling like anger can be alleviated by climbing a tree or walking in the woods, collecting leaves for the workshop

while the mind deflates, for example. In both disciplines we learn about the subtlety and simplicity of life, and we can try out new things; we learn to go from one extreme to another and to enjoy the journey in between; we learn that we are responsible for our choices that they have consequences for us and the world around us, that a small action repeated many times can change the whole.

The concept and the graphic program are exposed on the following pages, allowing the reader to recognize how *Wonder Nature* was structured. By choice, I brought the first two pages, leaving aside the particularities of the program, such as activities, schedule, team, location and so on.

The program starts with the whole group gathered for a warm-up session, which aims to relax, integrate and prepare the group for the day. The warm-up session was better explained in the previous section, paragraph five, where I brought out the importance of this starting point as a moment of scanning the body and mind of the group, where the educator can identify the abilities and enthusiasm of each one in the group. Once in the wild, you must be prepared for changes in climate, environment and living species, your survival skills must be active, otherwise you may get hurt or miss an opportunity to experience a moment, like a beautiful butterfly flying around for example. Therefore, the educator, as the one responsible for the group, must know what the group's capabilities are before entering Nature. Besides, the warm-up tends to be a moment of integration and relaxation, in which the educator tells the group to let go of the mind and enjoy without judgments or expectations.

As the program does not follow a fixed timetable, after the warm-up, called *Group Enthusiasm Go Wild*, participants can choose which workshop they want to go to. The idea here is to make it available for the person to choose where they feel like participating, according to their mood, curiosity, enthusiasm and/or predisposition.

The first and perhaps most important aspect of *Wonder Nature* is to give freedom of choice to the participants, so that whoever comes to the program can choose whether or not to be a part of it and when participating in the activities. The educators are instructed not to cut off any spontaneity, speech, suggestion or action that may come out of the children. Why do I say that? Because, as stated earlier, these children come from concrete neighborhoods, with little access to Nature and freedom to play by themselves in the streets or parks, most of the time they stay indoors in front of the computer screen or playing video games, and many of them has problems with obesity at an early age. The source of this information comes from *De Stad Uit*, when preparing us with some insights about the groups that are coming, from the children themselves, and from my own observations as an educator in the field.



ZuidPark,
Rotterdam ,2021.



In this special day we will come to Nature and play together with joy and excitement. The goal is to have no goal at all, we just want to relax and explore the surroundings, with a lot of room for freedom and awe in Nature. Welcome!

CONCEPT

The idea is to give space, as much as possible, for each person to experience nature at their own pace and according to their needs and interests. The proposition is to start the day very slowly, with no obligations to participate in the activities. Maybe you just want to sit back and enjoy, and that's okay. In the words of Rachel Carson: *"Exploring nature is largely a matter of becoming receptive to what lies all around you. It is learning again to use your eyes, ears, nostrils and finger tips, opening up the disused channels of sensory impression."*

We start with an Enthusiasm Group Session to help participants Go Wild, and after that there'll be 3 options for engagement divided by Action, Wander and Art, after that we finalized the day with a picnic around the fire.

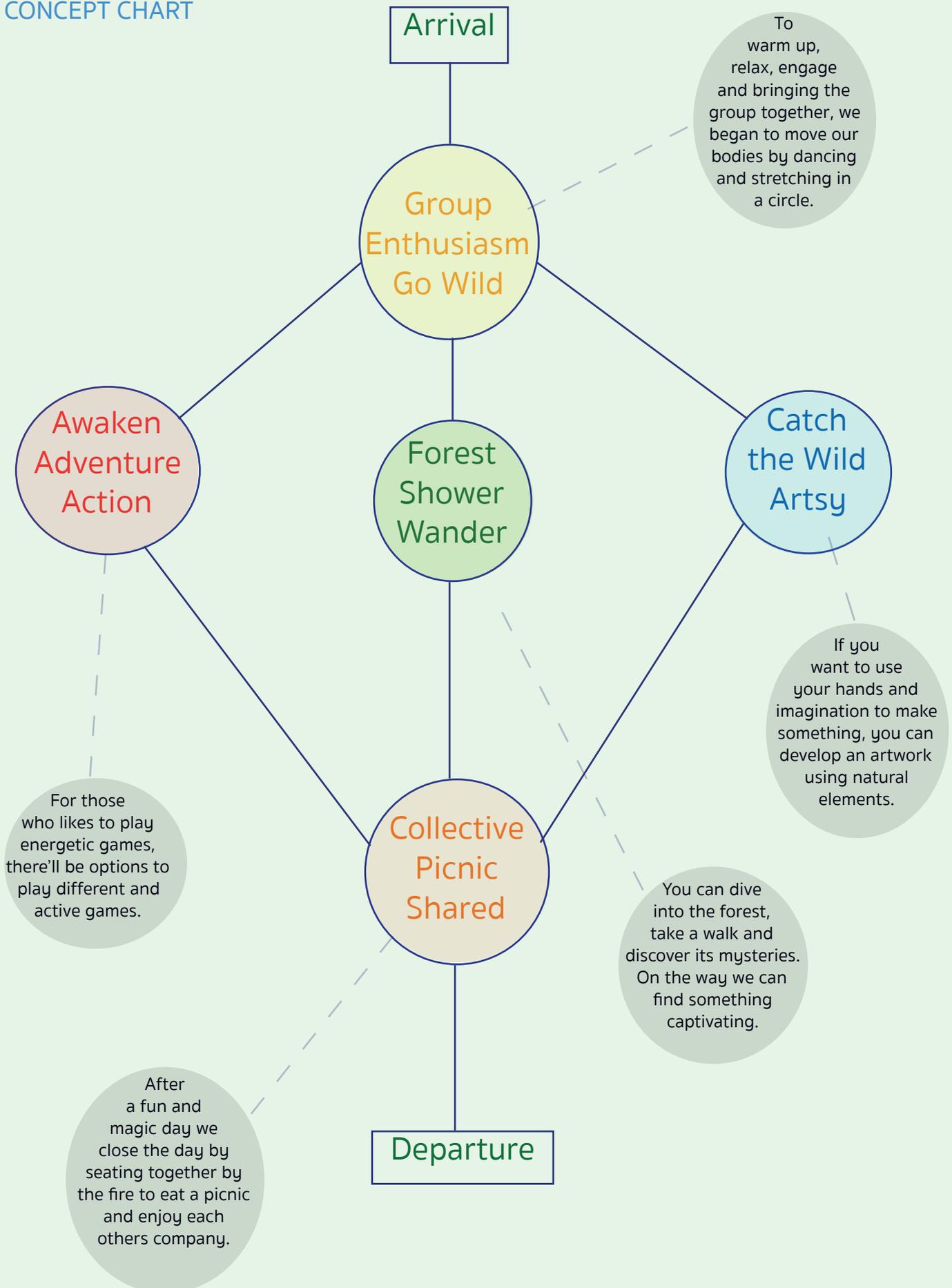
Parent Child Connection

It is a fact that children today spend less time in nature than their parents did, and this loss is taking its toll. Problems associated with the lack of nature include familiar maladies like depression, obesity, and attention deficit disorder. Kids who have direct access to nature are better learners. Exposure to nature has been shown to reduce stress and increase attention spans. Children that spend time outdoors are happier, healthier, smarter, cooperative and creative.

When outdoor activities take place with parents' other benefits are added to the experience. At first, children are more open to talk about issues and problems in their lives, thus nurturing communication and encouraging family unity. Second aspect is that a family experience in nature causes the reduction of parental fears — of traffic, of crime, and of nature itself, such as a broken arm or a calf wound — when out in the wild, parents learn to overcome this fear that overtime has been over-amplified, and allow themselves to give more freedom and trust to their own children.

Children need the companionship of their parents, or at least one close adult, with whom they can share discovering with joy, with excitement and mystery of the world in which we live in. Children are like sponge learners, they absorb and reflect on the environment around them, when in nature they will see the value that their parents place on that type of experience, thus creating that value for themselves.

CONCEPT CHART



CONCLUSION

One of my cognitions when participating in this master's program is that education has many dimensions, its boundaries are wide, and its modes of occurrence are countless. For me, education happens through interactions and exchanges between man, people, place and method. Particularly in Nature education, which is not a mandatory discipline for the curriculum of a traditional education, its flourishing can be subtle because of its unusual method, its immeasurable evaluation and unexpected results.

The research showed that a person's relationship with Nature happens through practical and lived experiences, which explains the choices in combining practical, artistic and intellectual immersions in a shared environment, preferably outdoors. It was also noticed that for those who have little or no access to Nature during their lives, the need for a facilitator who teaches and guides through its experience is essential for the process to happen.

The tools for accessing Nature education are other than the technologies established within traditional schools, they depend on completely different conditions. The opening of the group to new experiences and other perspectives is fundamental for them to get involved with the activity and thus leave freedom speak louder. Every now and then, the group needs to go outside to a place where there is at least a bit of green life around, like a park or a garden. The group also needs to trust the process suggested by the educator and each person has to create affection and ownership in the proposed activities. If some of these factors are conquered, then the group get out of their comfort zone and learn to relax, to enjoy and appreciate Nature.

Bearing in mind that the workshops applied during this master were each time for a different group of people, the most significant challenge I faced as a Nature educator was to find a group with which I could develop a continuous work. As my pedagogical concept is structured in the recurrence of Nature in people's lives, I believe that if I had the opportunity to work with the same group for at least a semester, it would have been possible to create and deepen the connection and care for Nature as an established condition.

Due to the number of practical activities applied, I now have a body of knowledge that allows me to carry out activities of connection with Nature in different settings and conditions, at any time, with little or many materials available. I am also able to discuss the importance of Nature to our lives more fluently and consistently, and to draw a parallel between our current social status quo and the interests of economic power over our choices and behaviors. The way society is structured is to make people into a functioning consumerist machine, with the least possible connection with Nature, and this has to be taken in consideration.

Meanwhile, in the cities, this connection with Nature happens through a mindset of recognition and appreciation of its presence, without any actions, thoughts or claims, but a continuous process that requires constant work to activate this place of awareness. This justifies the methodology used, once the goal of the workshops was to make people aware of the Nature existent in our daily lives, through specific activities but also by using speech to foster intellectual knowledge and critical thinking. It is a shift of attention towards little expressions of life that were not available before. It is a state of presence.

To be present is also to acknowledge the place where you are at. As if it is part of the equation to realize that places are different from each other, that each place has its own characteristics, particularities and ways of dwell. The places we live transforms us according to their environment and needs, something I learned from my own experience.

To live and to act in a place creates the feeling of being a part of it, of belonging. With the feeling of belonging, it is possible to value and take more care of the environment, its people, beings and things that participate in it. Some feelings are also recovered, like love, caring, sharing, human values, ethics and respect. Belonging creates an identity in the individual that will cause him, inserted within a community and a specific context, to strive and

collectively fight for a more just society. This will lead people to reflect more on life and the environment, creating more critical and reflective thinking with an emancipatory perspective.

As for the concept of the activities, Cornell's method proved to be effective, as the characteristics proposed by him match the different types of needs and configurations that each group and/or situation presented. In addition, following the step-by-step method proposed at *Flow of Learning*, it is possible to relax and let go of stress, anxiety and to create a bond with the place where you are. Moreover, being an art-nature educator requires one to be always present, sharp and never lose sight of the objective of the activity, which for me is to teach about the importance of Nature in our lives, creating connection and affective bonds with it.

As an art educator and a traditional community person, I was able to combine my own expertise with the Cornell's methodology, and to apply activities that best suited the occasion, according to group and my own analysis and available material.

For the interviews, I prepared a list of questions that guided a live recorded meeting. I also went to different communities and met with people that share the same ideology of awareness of Nature and environmental consciousness. I sought knowledge, modes of behavior and experiences in the places where the workshops took place, it was from there that I elaborated and critically evaluate my conception of how the experience with Nature affects a person.

The places I have cited were the ones that accepted me, as a non-speaker and immigrant in Dutch society, and gave me space and credibility to experiment and work on my educational activities, which I am very grateful for. Throughout the thesis, the reader found detailed information about the numbers, time, places, type of activities, analysis and experiences that I went through for this master's research.

Nature, the creator mother of life that sustains all existence in the universe, from whom everything comes and returns, is everywhere all around. Let's treat her with respect, consciousness and care, that's how it should be.



My mother, sister-in-law, friend and our dog on a weekday in Paraty, Brazil, 2022.

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