



# THE ARROYOFEST PROJECT: BUILDING CAPACITY AND CONNECTING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

**Urban & Environmental Policy Institute**

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## STORIES OF ARROYOFEST

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### **THE ARROYOFEST PROJECT: BUILDING CAPACITY AND CONNECTING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES**

#### **THE MAGIC OF ARROYOFEST: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES**

On June 15, 2003, at four different locations, from Lincoln Heights in the City of Los Angeles to the freeway entrance-way at Glenarm in Pasadena, more than 3,000 bike riders and several thousand walkers descended on the Historic Arroyo Seco Parkway, better known as the 110 or Pasadena Freeway. More than 90 banners, produced by students in several dozen K-12 schools in the Arroyo Seco corridor, were draped along the sides of the freeway providing color, ideas, and symbols for a new kind of public space, albeit a temporary one. The bikers and walkers eventually made their way through a special opening in the fence to Sycamore Grove Park where a community festival was taking place. Almost seventy booths hosted by community groups, environmental organizations, and event sponsors greeted the cyclists, walkers and community members who came out for a day that included children's programming and, at a main stage, to hear performers from local community bands, dance groups, and poets, as well as various speakers.

This event, ArroyoFest, was part of a broader agenda for building capacity and connecting the diverse communities along the Arroyo Seco corridor. The event, as dozens of participants noted in subsequent e mails and phone calls, created an enormous sense of possibility and opportunity. James Rojas of the Latino Urban Forum, one of the groups that helped organize ArroyoFest, put it this way: "Arroyofest went beyond our expectations about creating a linear temporary plaza where the community could come together. It struck a chord in LA where people from all walks of life were able to experience a peaceful and silent freeway. Elderly women with parasols, Latino families, hipsters, and just regular folks were all there. Arroyofest showed that there is a hunger and need in LA for public space even if it is temporary, and it suggested that even a car-oriented city like LA can change its ideas about freeways."

ArroyoFest, the event, was the culmination of a process of education, outreach, and organizing. But ArroyoFest also represents the beginning of a type of community renewal, establishing opportunities for linkages and for developing and implementing new agendas while strengthening the capacity of groups along the Arroyo corridor to act together. This Report provides the background to ArroyoFest, the multiple activities that preceded it, and the plans for the future of the type of community building it generated.

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#### ***BACKGROUND AND EVOLUTION OF ARROYOFEST***

In 2001 and 2002, as the plans for ArroyoFest were developed, a program of organizing and outreach for the event became a springboard to establish a broad community coalition and network of organizations working to improve the quality of life in the Arroyo Seco corridor. Stretching from Pasadena to downtown Los Angeles, the corridor consists of diverse neighborhoods, some strong historical and cultural traditions, and a developing set of grassroots movements focused on key daily life issues such as transportation, housing, and the need for open space.

Connecting the rugged San Gabriel Mountains with the Los Angeles River, the Arroyo Seco is a 22-mile stream and canyon. Along with the transportation corridor associated with the Historic Arroyo Seco Parkway, the Arroyo Seco links together a wide range of diverse communities. These include the Upper Arroyo cities of Pasadena, South Pasadena, La Cañada-Flintridge, and the unincorporated area of Altadena. These in turn link to the communities of the Lower Arroyo which consists of the neighborhoods of northeast Los Angeles, including all or parts of the communities of Chinatown,

Cypress Park, Eagle Rock, Garvanza, Glassell Park, Hermon, Highland Park, Lincoln Heights, Montecito Heights, Monterey Hills, and Mount Washington. Historically, the Arroyo was at center of the Arts and Crafts Movement in California and was celebrated both for its natural beauty, cultural life, and diverse neighborhoods. In the early 1900s, the stream, rail transportation, and a unique lifestyle (emphasizing the outdoors, health, and the arts) served to connect residents of the area and create what became an Arroyo identity.

Today, Arroyo residents mirror the diversity of the Southern California region. According to the 2000 Census, of the nearly six hundred eighty thousand residents of Arroyo communities, about 47 percent are Latino, 27 percent are White, 15.5 percent are Asian, and 7 percent are African American. The Arroyo continues to welcome new arrivals, as it has for more than a century, with forty two percent of Arroyo residents born outside of the United States.

Arroyo Seco communities are also economically diverse. Per-capita income across the entire Arroyo was \$21,268 in 1999 – a few hundred dollars more than the average income of Los Angeles County as a whole. Income varies within the Arroyo, ranging from less than \$10,000 in the least affluent zip code to more than \$60,000 in the wealthiest.

Residents of the Arroyo are less likely to drive alone to work than residents of Los Angeles County as a whole, and more likely to walk or bike to work or to take public transportation (even before the opening of the new Gold Line light rail system). Two-thirds (66 percent) of adults working outside the home drive themselves to work. Another 14.4 percent carpool. And 9.3 percent take buses or other forms of public transit, a figure that is as high as 21 percent in some zipcodes in the Arroyo. Finally, just under 5 percent walk or bike to work (up to 20 percent in some zipcodes).

Despite its diverse communities and rich history, the area, in recent years, has suffered from lack of political clout and limited attention by policymakers, internal bickering between cities and between neighborhoods, and class and cultural tensions that have mirrored broader tensions within southern California as a whole. At the same time, Arroyo communities have generated an active civic life and spawned a number of political and environmental coalitions and cultural movements that have focused on opportunities for community and cultural renewal as well as for restoration of the Arroyo Seco stream, the Historic Parkway and Arroyo cultural identities and artistic traditions.

From these movements, and in recognition of the need to create a focus on the Arroyo itself, a number of neighborhood activists, academics, and issue-oriented advocates came together to form an Arroyo Seco Collaborative. That network of organizations and activists in turn began to discuss ways policymakers and community residents could focus on the Arroyo. From those discussions, the plans for ArroyoFest were set.

The ArroyoFest Freeway Walk and Bike Ride and related community festival was originally scheduled for October 6, 2002. However, the date for the event was changed to June 15, 2003 due to delays caused by the enormously complex logistical and permitting requirements and, especially, the issues around insurance in the post 9-11 environment. The additional time for planning the event allowed organizers to address each of the particular (and often burdensome) requirements and numerous barriers associated with the physical closing down of a freeway for an event of this kind. The rescheduling, moreover, provided opportunities to undertake far more extensive community outreach and organization building, the core intent of ArroyoFest, aside from the desire to generate attention regarding the Arroyo.

A number of the agencies involved were highly skeptical at first, such as the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the California Highway Patrol, and the Transportation and Police Departments of the three cities through which event participants would assemble and pass through. "You've got to be kidding," was a constant refrain ArroyoFest organizers heard from agency staff, both formally and informally, about the ArroyoFest idea of bikers and walkers taking over the freeway. During some of the early meetings regarding permitting, traffic plans, or other event requirements, a kind of cultural disconnect seemed to characterize the communications taking place between the community activists on the one hand and the transportation and public safety

bureaucracies on the other.

The key to the success of the organizing for ArroyoFest was a combination of the outreach, organizing, and political mobilization that subsequently occurred, as well as the event management team that was also pulled together. During this period of event planning and community and political mobilization, numerous outreach activities were pursued. These included teacher training workshops, letter writing and the soliciting of sponsorships and endorsements, new educational and research initiatives, new types of partnerships, and the development and dissemination of a community-based policy agenda. At the same time, the event planning proceeded along two paths: pulling together the event management team to address the permitting and agency decision-making associated with the event, and the planning of a community-oriented event based on wide participation, community involvement and ownership, organizational networking, and educational goals. Most importantly, the ability to make ArroyoFest itself happen – a freeway closed to enable participants to see the Arroyo in a new light -- was seen as an act of empowerment for all who participated as well as for those who weren't able to come or didn't know about it until after the fact but identified with the outcome.

As part of the development of ArroyoFest, a steering committee of organizational representatives was established that included a number of community organizations, Neighborhood Councils, and homeowners associations reflecting the diversity of the Arroyo corridor. Aside from its community representatives, the steering committee also consisted of representatives from environmental and transportation groups, academic partners, and historical and cultural organizations.

This process of organizational development included the establishment of a new non-profit organization ("ArroyoFest") that served as the host of the ArroyoFest event and related activities that took place before, during, and after the June 15 event. Several databases were created to support the outreach for ArroyoFest. These included organizations, schools, small businesses, and individuals supporting the effort and willing to identify themselves as Friends of ArroyoFest. It also included sponsors of the event (both grassroots sponsors, small businesses, and larger organizational sponsors), and an Honorary Friends of ArroyoFest group of elected officials and other well-known public figures. Outreach activities (talks, community presentations, door to door activities, etc.) to grassroots groups, religious organizations, K-12 classrooms and teachers, and small businesses were especially extensive. In early 2003, ArroyoFest established its own website ([www.arroyofest.org](http://www.arroyofest.org)) and list serve. Periodic electronic bulletins went out to hundreds of people in the region. The website included information about the event and related activities, research and educational information, and community links, while the Bulletins provided details of event planning and participation, opportunities for residents to get involved, and post-event follow-through.

From the outset, event organizers also sought to develop an event management strategy that was in keeping with the community nature of the event: maintaining a focus on "connecting communities", getting support from local neighborhood groups and businesses, going to public agencies and elected officials to provide in-kind resources, and soliciting regional businesses, particularly those who were supportive of the community and environmental themes associated with ArroyoFest. A decision was made to keep a low registration fee for the bike ride (\$10) to encourage as many community participants as possible (even though other bike rides have charged as much as \$35 for registration), and to allow folks to participate even if they didn't have the money (or came late and weren't able to register). There was no charge for the walk event for similar reasons (encouraging community participation). At the same time, despite the logistical complexities involved, four separate locations were selected for the start of the walk (and a fifth location for the Community Festival) in order to maximize the neighborhood character of the event (that is, residents able to enter the freeway within or proximate to their own neighborhood). These approaches proved important in attracting substantial local community turnout (more than 50% of all those who attended) and maintaining the neighborhood and family-oriented character of the event itself.

Nevertheless, to pull off an event of the magnitude, complexity, and unprecedented nature of ArroyoFest required an approach to the management of the event that included a high level of professional guidance and skill. Towards that end, the management team involved in the annual L.A. Marathon event (that includes a bike ride component as well) was hired as a consultant to the

ArroyoFest community collaborative. In addition, a traffic management consultant was hired to develop a traffic diversion plan acceptable to Caltrans and the city transportation agencies during the hours the freeway was closed. Bringing in these event management consultants helped in turn facilitate resolution of the logistical and permitting issues that initially appeared as seemingly insurmountable problems.

Since ArroyoFest, information for a "How to" manual, describing specific logistical, permitting, outreach and event management issues has been gathered. The manual will be published this winter and made available to groups around the country considering similar events, including an emphasis on the community nature and capacity building aspect of such an event.

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## ***CREATING CONNECTIONS AND BUILDING CAPACITY: ORGANIZING FOR ARROYOFEST***

### ***Teacher Training Workshops and K-12 Participation***

One of the key goals of ArroyoFest was to create a sense of connection and identity with the Arroyo. Toward this end, ArroyoFest organized two teacher-training workshops on strategies and techniques for integrating study of the Arroyo's environment, community and history into local classrooms. These workshops included the development of a resource guide for teachers on the transportation, history and culture, watershed, and environmental issues of the Arroyo. The guide included activity ideas, resource lists, and suggestions for how to integrate the study of the Arroyo into the K-12 curriculum while also meeting state standards. The workshop provided a series of field activities and talks by major researchers and practitioners in those areas as well as professional education and salary point credits for those who participated. The first workshop, entitled "A River Runs Through it: Connecting the Communities of the Arroyo Seco," took place on October 15, 2002 and involved 30 K-12 teachers. The second workshop expanded the format of the first workshop and was held over two consecutive weekends (April 25-26 and May 2-3, 2003) with about 25 teachers participating. Both workshops brought together teachers from the Pasadena, South Pasadena and Los Angeles Unified School Districts to talk about their common interest in teaching about the Arroyo. Teachers were able to discuss both obstacles and opportunities to making the community their classroom and pursuing place-based education.

In part through this network of teachers as well as through outreach by ArroyoFest organizers, students were mobilized across the region for the ArroyoFest event. This included the creation of the ninety 10 and 12 foot banners about ArroyoFest themes and then decorating the freeway with the banners on the morning of the event. Other students created outfits such as huge steelhead trout hats to commemorate these one-time Arroyo inhabitants that were worn in advance of and the day of the event. Students and teachers from several schools walked together during the event and in one memorable moment, L.A. City Council member Ed Reyes pulled a Trojan Horse that had been made by students at Nightingale Middle School up from the start of the walk that began at Avenue 26 in the Lincoln Heights neighborhood. Also from that starting point, a group of Latino soccer clubs donned their outfits to walk as a group on the freeway and to demonstrate the importance of the need for more parkland, one of the core themes of ArroyoFest.

### ***Research and Educational Initiatives***

As part of the research and educational activities associated with ArroyoFest, a number of programs were developed. One of these involved a research collaboration, funded through the University of California Transportation Center, on the Arroyo Seco Parkway/Pasadena Freeway. The research identified the history and current opportunities associated with the concept of the parkway as a primary transportation corridor and the problems associated with its evolution into a high-speed but highly congested and accident-prone freeway system. Several students participated in the research, including those involved with the three-way UCLA, Occidental College, and Caltech course that was held in Spring 2002. Publication of the research, including a Final Report and an article for the UCTC

journal Access, took place in early 2003. A Los Angeles Times article on the findings of the research, as well as the plans for ArroyoFest, was published on March 25, 2003.

Another research program, the Historical Ecology Research Project, focused on the ecological history of the Arroyo Seco watershed. The research was designed to better enable watershed managers, agencies and local conservation groups to make informed decisions about how to direct future land-use in and along the Arroyo Seco Corridor. The project focus was multi-disciplinary and required the integration of personal diary entries with old photographs as well as scientific reports on the flora, soils and hydrology of the region. Research also included detailed soil mapping of the Arroyo Seco corridor, the creation of a geological timeline and longitudinal profile of the watershed, a review of original land surveys of the Arroyo Seco, and a cataloguing of the historical survey maps and photos. Interim research findings from the study were presented to community groups focused on watershed and open space issues and were also incorporated into the Pasadena Master Plan record by one of the lead researchers on the project.

The major ArroyoFest-related academic activity involved the three way Spring 2002 collaboration between Occidental College, Caltech, and UCLA on the topic "Re-Envisioning the Arroyo Seco Corridor." The course was taught by Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, chair of the Urban Planning Department at UCLA, William Deverell, Associate Professor of History at Caltech, Robert Gottlieb, Luce Professor of Urban and Environmental Policy at Occidental, and Marcus Renner, one of the coordinators of ArroyoFest. The UCLA course involved a joint architecture and urban planning design studio for graduate students, while both the Caltech course (offered through the History Department) and Occidental course (offered through the Urban and Environmental Policy Program) involved undergraduate students.

The three-way course provided an innovative collaboration that stressed the interdisciplinary nature of the topics and produced a series of research reports that were presented at a community forum attended by a number of community leaders and residents. Occidental research topics included "Multimodal Transportation Connections in the Arroyo Seco Corridor," "Bikes on the Gold Line: A Comparative Study," "Analysis of Arroyo Seco Park: How it Meets the Needs of its Users," "Basketry of the Tongva American Indians of the Arroyo Seco Corridor," and "Gangs and Graffiti in the Arroyo Seco Corridor," among other topics. The UCLA teams emphasized planning and design issues such as the "Revitalization of the Park Way District," and a study of transit-oriented development at one of the planned Gold Line light rail transit stops. The Caltech group, which focused on the historical and cultural aspects of the Arroyo, produced a report on the Arroyo Seco as a "Sanctuary from the Surrounding Environment." Several of the students who participated in the three-way course subsequently became involved in various Arroyo-related community projects, including ArroyoFest.

### ***Small Business Outreach***

As part of the broader goal of connecting communities, a small business program was developed. This included a small business affiliation with ArroyoFest (helping with outreach, providing in-kind services, small donations, etc.). In turn, the businesses were placed on an illustrated map of businesses and services and other key community and cultural places in the Arroyo corridor that was distributed at ArroyoFest. Residents are able to use the map (produced by a local artist, that includes a visually striking view of the Arroyo and its communities) as a resource guide for interesting and community-oriented places, businesses, and institutions in the corridor. Since ArroyoFest, requests have been made to obtain copies of the map and it will also be featured at several community sites. Participating businesses are located in all corners of the Arroyo. The project and associated outreach has in turn laid the foundation for future partnerships between small businesses in the corridor. With the new Gold Line light-rail serving the area, small businesses, such as restaurants, bike shops and art galleries, can also work together to promote the Arroyo as a destination to residents from other parts of Los Angeles County.

### ***SweatX-ArroyoFest Environmental Justice-Economic Justice Partnership***

As part of the organizing and outreach, as well as the effort to network constituencies and departments.oxy.edu/.../festReport.htm

organizations as part of ArroyoFest, a partnership was established between ArroyoFest and SweatX, a clothing cooperative of former sweatshop workers. The basis of the partnership was the production, sale, and profit sharing for the official ArroyoFest t-shirt for the ArroyoFest event. The t-shirts have the ArroyoFest design on one side and the Sweat-X logo on the other and also serve to promote the cooperative.

SweatX, the brand name of a line of clothing apparel, was founded in the spring of 2001 through start-up support from the Hot Fudge Social Venture Fund. With more than two-thirds of all garment manufacturers in violation of minimum wage laws and 98% out of compliance with health and safety standards, Hot Fudge was particularly interested in identifying an alternative business model in the garment industry. The philosophy of this new cooperative business organization, which includes a number of former sweatshop workers, is to provide a living wage, full health benefits, the right to choose a union, and participation by the workers in overall company decision-making. The company was also formed in part to respond to the growing interest of consumers and organizations to purchase clothing not made in sweatshops.

The ArroyoFest/SweatX partnership was designed to promote both organizations and the ArroyoFest event through the sale of the t-shirts and to provide business and a source of income for the SweatX company. It was also designed to bring attention to each group's supporters and constituencies about the significance of their respective economic and environmental justice agendas. Start-up funds for the initial production run of the t-shirts were provided by Amalgamated Bank (a union-run bank located within the corridor in Pasadena) and American Union Financial (a union-oriented financial service). Both groups wanted to support SweatX and also wanted to be highlighted as sponsors of ArroyoFest. After the first run of the t-shirts was completed, outreach was undertaken to individuals and groups (such as unions, community organizations, and environmental groups) to purchase the t-shirts in advance, individually or in bulk, at a cost of \$10/shirt. The cash from the advance orders was used to print additional t-shirts for the June 15 event and to spread the word about ArroyoFest and SweatX. The profits from the sales at the event were subsequently divided between the two groups (75% to SweatX, 25% to ArroyoFest, to help pay for event expenses).

Educational materials about SweatX (and sweatshop-related issues) as well as Arroyo-related issues were made available with the sales and distribution of the t-shirts. Additional purchases post-ArroyoFest have occurred, both through the web site and from people who have visited the ArroyoFest storefront office on Colorado Boulevard in Eagle Rock.

### ***Community-Based Policy Agenda***

During 2003, an ArroyoFest research team was established to solicit input and engage in dialogue with community participants about a wide range of corridor-related transportation, economic development, environmental, and cultural and historical issues. These dialogue sessions helped develop the background material and the series of recommendations for an ArroyoFest community policy agenda. This took the form of a policy document that was completed and disseminated shortly before ArroyoFest. Follow-up policy briefings of key elected officials and other policymakers based on the ArroyoFest community policy agenda will take place in the fall and winter of 2003. In addition, the ArroyoFest research team will work with community-based organizations interested in the development of their own policy agenda framework for action and education. Plans for "listening sessions" and other means to obtain additional feedback are also in the works. In addition, several elected officials, including L.A. and Pasadena City Council members, have indicated interest in highlighting an Arroyo-related agenda.

### ***Political and Community Support***

Political and community support was crucial to the success of ArroyoFest, both as a community event designed to stimulate long-term educational and organizing goals as well as enabling the event to occur at all. ArroyoFest organizers felt it was crucial to develop a strong community base of support, in part to make agencies such as Caltrans aware that community support needed to be

taken into account in relation to permitting and other event requirements. At the same time a concerted effort to develop political support, among both elected officials and key agency officials, was also pursued. This included a January 2002 luncheon at Cal Tech's Athenaeum room for agency and elected officials, attended by 60 people, that provided Caltrans and other agencies with the first strong indication of the breadth of political support. That was followed by solicitation of letters from elected officials to Caltrans in support of ArroyoFest. It also included the development of an "Honorary Friends of ArroyoFest" list of sponsors and supporters that included the Governor, Senator Feinstein and several members of Congress, the State Assembly and Senate, mayors of the four cities directly involved (Los Angeles, Pasadena, South Pasadena, and La Cañada-Flintridge), City Council members, and top agency officials (including the heads of the California Resources Agency and the Department of Business and Transportation (which oversees Caltrans and the CHP). The Caltech luncheon and subsequent mobilization of political support also helped connect elected officials in unique ways and begin a dialogue about the importance of cities and agencies working together to benefit the area. One week prior to the ArroyoFest event, a joint-press conference was held at the site of the Community Festival with elected representatives from each of the four cities, along with the regional head of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. For the event itself, each of the cities made key in-kind contributions, such as police support, shuttle service, and recycling services.

### ***The Urban & Environmental Policy Institute's Role***

Part of the success of ArroyoFest was due to the educational, research, and community outreach and organizing resources and skills provided by the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI) based at Occidental College. The research, organizing, and capacity-building work related to ArroyoFest fit well with UEPI's mission of action-research, community-based learning, community partnerships and policy analysis and development aimed at actively contributing to the development of a more livable, just and democratic region. Located within the Arroyo corridor, UEPI's storefront community office at 2106 Colorado Boulevard became ArroyoFest headquarters. UEPI provided major resources, including a staff coordinator, student volunteers, web development, and office supplies and computers, to facilitate the ArroyoFest event and its community capacity building and community linkages goals. UEPI also took the lead on the development of the Community Policy Agenda document, the three-way course involving UCLA, Caltech, and Occidental, and the initial hosting of ArroyoFest (for permitting purposes) until the new ArroyoFest non-profit organization was created. For UEPI, its work on ArroyoFest, and the community organizing and outreach work associated with it, represented a model for how an institution of higher education should be connected to and become part of a larger community.

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## ***STORIES OF ARROYOFEST***

ArroyoFest was a magical moment, far exceeding expectations for how participants would experience the event and begin to re-envision the connections between communities and the opportunities for change.

Among the more than 3,000 bike riders were a large number of families (June 15th was Father's Day), including lots of children. Bike organizations contributed to the promotion and helped turn out members (and regular bike event participants). But most of the riders were new to organized bike events, and many were community participants who heard of the bike ride from the thousands of posters, fliers, and community announcements that had blanketed Arroyo neighborhoods in the month to six weeks prior to ArroyoFest. (More than 125,000 fliers and entry forms and several thousand posters were disseminated in this way).

The experience for the bike riders was in many ways a revelation about how a bike ride not only provided pleasure but could potentially serve as an alternative form of transportation. One South Pasadena mother wrote that after "having received some information 2 days prior to the event, [I] managed to get my father involved for the bike ride (being that is was Father's Day) as well as my beau (heaven forbid he miss a chance to cycle on the freeway). Best of all both of my children

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... (heaven forbid he miss a chance to cycle on the freeway). Best of all, both of my children (daughter age 10 and son age 13) had the opportunity to cycle on the freeway (12 mile ride) with a significant sense of purpose! Such a reward and life lesson that my children and I will never forget! Everyday that we drive the 110 Freeway, both children are still amazed that we cycled so far in such a short time!"

Both the bike riders, walk participants, and residents adjacent to the freeway also noted how uniquely silent it was that morning and how much appreciation and connection to the green space and natural surroundings of the Arroyo was possible. One participant noted that while he knew that parks lined the Parkway, "seeing and experiencing them as I went by was magical. I could feel the cool air coming out of the tree-covered parks. I always knew the Parkway was built to be beautiful, but seeing it at the appropriate speed clarified my vision." One of the speakers at the Community Festival who lived close to the freeway in Highland Park spoke of how disorienting – and liberating – it was to "open my window in the morning and hear birds and the wind and breathe the air in a way I had never experienced before."

Several of the events that took place that day separate from the walk and bike ride emphasized a connection to the Arroyo and the need to redefine and recapture "Nature in the City." One tour took participants to the nearby Debs Park where the Audubon Society has established its first major inner city park and nature education program. During this event, several participants (including those who lived nearby!) exclaimed that they had not previously been aware of the park and the opportunities for "nature exploration" associated with it. The Audubon Society tour leader also noted what a noticeable difference there was in the sounds in the park. "I could hear birds sing," he wrote, "and not just parrots. And I saw red-tailed hawks, bullock's orioles, and red-shouldered hawks nesting near the Parkway" One of the local leaders of a major national environmental organization (Environmental Defense) participated in one of the walks with several friends, including the 12-year old daughter of a family that lived in a nearby neighborhood. "There was a quite extraordinary moment that symbolized to me the power of ArroyoFest," the environmental leader told ArroyoFest organizers. "My friend's daughter was walking with us and at one point let out a shriek. 'That's a passion flower,' she cried out, pointing to a delicate flower growing along the edge of the freeway. 'I know it, because I studied it, but I never thought I'd actually see one!'"

Part of the focus of ArroyoFest was the opportunity to explore and promote alternative transportation options to the car and the freeway. The Gold Line, the new light rail system from downtown Los Angeles to Pasadena whose route paralleled the Arroyo Seco Parkway/Freeway and the stream, was close to completion at the time ArroyoFest took place (it opened about six weeks later). Part of the message of ArroyoFest was identifying car/freeway alternatives such as the Gold Line, along with expanded bus service, commuter and recreational bikeways, and pedestrian pathways, as contributing to the possibility of connecting rather than separating communities (as freeways often do) and ultimately re-envisioning the Arroyo. Several ArroyoFest participants noted that the organizing for the event brought an increased attention to those alternative transportation options, based in part on the distribution of the thousands of fliers and posters showing bus and bike routes between the Festival at Sycamore Grove Park and the four starting points for the walk and bike ride. One ArroyoFest participant described how she had sought information on how to get back from the park to her home about a mile and a half away in the Hermon neighborhood. One of the ArroyoFest speakers who lived nearby in Highland Park and was herself a frequent bus rider, provided information on the #81 bus that stopped by the park and continued north to a point just a few blocks from the participant's home in Hermon. "You know, I've lived seventeen years in my home in Hermon and I never knew about the #81 bus, let alone used it to get to various places such as the park. And it actually stops close to my work in downtown L.A.," she continued, recognizing an opportunity she had never seized before.

These ArroyoFest stories and experiences are the kinds of opportunities and possibilities for connecting communities and building capacity that have been associated with the organizing, research, education, and policy development activities that predated and have continued since the June 15th event. Plans are now in the works for future teacher training and K-12 community-based departments.oxy.edu/.../festReport.htm

learning opportunities, for extending and ultimately implementing a community-based policy agenda, for expanding the action-research and community policy agenda, and for developing new community partnerships and collaborations.

ArroyoFest has also had an impact of the Southern California region as a whole. The symbolic act of shutting down the state's oldest freeway for a community event received significant local and national media coverage. ArroyoFest provided an opportunity for people from across the area to show their support for more parks, alternative transportation systems, healthy urban streams and rivers, a greater appreciation of local history and diverse neighborhoods working together for a better quality of life. ArroyoFest struck a cultural chord in freeway-centric Southern California in its argument that other, more community-centered systems and policies are within reach. It was, in many ways, an historic moment for the region.

The impacts from ArroyoFest are particularly noteworthy in relation to the complex issues of class, ethnic, and racial diversity among and between different neighborhoods and cities along the Arroyo corridor. During ArroyoFest, a neighborhood leader involved with the Mt. Washington Association, one of the middle class neighborhood organizations that had a booth at the festival, told an ArroyoFest organizer that the event had been enormously revealing and transformative for herself and her organization. "For some time we have been disconnected and sometimes in conflict with the groups from [adjacent, low-income, and largely Latino neighborhoods] Highland Park and Cypress Park. But working together on ArroyoFest and having a chance for our organizers to talk with each other in this setting [having adjacent booths] was eye-opening. We've now had an opportunity both for collaboration and communication and quite possibly a sense of partnership for the future." As this story suggests, perhaps more than any other goal, the capacity to connect – and thereby empower -- is what makes ArroyoFest an important moment in helping transform the Arroyo Seco and its neighborhoods as well as the region itself.

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