My friend Faeza was a dentist in Iraq until she had to flee her home under the threat of religious persecution. After a long wait, Faeza and her family received asylum in the United States. In 2009, they arrived in Tucson, Arizona – a mid-sized, Sun Belt city, 50 miles north of the US–Mexico border. I met Faeza the next year, when she came to demonstrate Iraqi family dishes at *Tucson Meet Yourself*, the annual traditional arts festival that I lead. Scheduled to participate only on the first day of the event, she came back the next two days eager to soak in the mix of multicultural sounds, tastes, and colors offered in the city’s public square. Faeza told me years later that the festival was ‘the first time’ she ‘felt at home in the United States.’

Emotional connections for individuals engaged in large public events are commonly touted as one of the benefits of civic investments in placemaking. Pragmatically, however, these outcomes are remarkably difficult to measure. While large crowds mobilized on behalf of a social cause or a communal ritual can thrive on feelings of shared ownership, festivals are especially challenging because of their reputation for distraction. Despite this potential liability, over the years, I have heard many artists and community members share sentiments of sociability and belonging similar to those expressed by Faeza about the *Tucson Meet Yourself* festival. This was confirmed yet again in 2017 when folklorist Cliff Murphy arrived in Tucson to conduct an evaluation of the event. He was surprised to discover the taxi driver who picked him up at the airport eager to share unsolicited stories about the many ways the annual festival had been part of this man’s family history (Murphy, 2017). In this essay, I aim to explore the dynamics that inform a distinctive sense of rootedness in and with the public in this staged event. The Tucson festival’s ‘distributed benefits model’ of evaluation can offer insights to planners and cultural advocates interested in assessing the impact of placemaking projects through a lens of social equity and inclusion. I hope also to demonstrate the value of methodologies that center self-critique and ethnographic reflection as indispensable practices in the evaluator’s toolkit.

In assessing the impact of cultural productions, the most common evaluation methods are able to capture snapshots of activities in delimited times and spaces – numerically, they can account for how many people attend an event or how much is generated through sponsorships and sales. When other social measures are added to the mix, surveys, interviews, and case studies can provide additional insights on how people ‘feel’ during the event or how they perceive significance in more universal terms (such as ‘this festival places our city on the map,’ or ‘the event helps increase our community’s pride’). Recent interest around the role that racial equity and healing and neighbor-
hood-based wealth creation strategies play in creative placemaking suggest the need to expand the depth and breadth of the questions we ask to assess the impact of public events (Getz et al., 2018; Nowak, 2007). Aligning evaluation efforts in the service of these goals implies paying more attention to the divergent ways that benefits accrue to participants across a range of social positions and levels of investment. In some cases, this will require upending the metrics that conventionally made sense to favor considerations of an ‘emotional’ nature, such as the sense of belonging (Lee, Lee, & Choi, 2011). As evaluators embrace the challenge to be more responsive to community needs, ‘the event’ itself may no longer serve as the main unit of analysis. Instead, the radial effects produced cumulatively by the nexus of relationships, hopes, intuitions, affinities, and intentions generated because of the event, and the process of preparing for it, are likely to grow in significance.

In the nonprofit field, the types of supportive actions that enable or increase the ability of people and organizations to do more for themselves are called ‘capacity-building.’ But capacity is a multifarious variable, at times tied very specifically to increased metrics of money or people, and at other types more broadly diffused through enabling relationships and a sense of agency. For Tucson Meet Yourself, the task of standing up an infrastructure of production for a specific event has always implied sustaining a flexible, aspirational platform that hopes to strengthen the ability of the communities of artists and tradition-bearers served by the event to do more and better, with their own assets, communities, and aspirations, and in their own terms. Instead of thinking of the event as the final product, the festival inspires a horizon of impact that includes the multiple ways artists and communities might ‘use’ the festival as fuel for activities of cultural autonomy and renewal. Most of those activities will be after-effects, carried out beyond public view and statistical reach, or outside the curatorial guidance of event organizers.

Most evaluation approaches in the cultural policy arena start by inferring the value of festivals presumptively, through the application of somewhat circular logic: festivals are good for communities because… well, how can they possibly do any harm? (Giorgi et al., 2011). The practices and suggestions for assessment that I discuss here aim to activate different logics of accountability. The experience of Tucson Meet Yourself underscores an understanding of impact as essentially a measure of ‘change’ in someone, something, or somewhere. The crucial question is not ‘what’ gets celebrated (since we all can agree that good music and food is fun for anyone) but for ‘whom’ does the staging of celebration makes the most ethical and material difference? In this framing, a reimagining of the festival takes place; one less concerned with festivity properly and more oriented to the event as lab and incubator. Attendance goals remain important, but not exclusively. Surely, the festival’s credibility in making claims about a horizontal distribution of benefits is in large part connected to its large attendance – approximately 150,000 people over three days. But this numeric accomplishment is always judged in relation to what else happens. The festival frequently inspires actions that take place in locations and places where people carry on beyond the spotlight. As a result, the event has gained an identity in the public’s perception less as ‘party’ or ‘shopping expedition,’ and increasingly more as a restorative ritual of cultural democracy. For many cultural producers, this affirmation will seem too good to be true. The key question I wish to address, therefore, is how does a staged event accomplish this? I believe the answer is embedded in the ‘folklife’ framing of this event, an architecture of inclusive planning and equitable ‘return on investment’ that can be adapted to a variety of other placemaking projects.

**The grounding: folklife is about folks**

*Tucson Meet Yourself* – the event where Faeza found her bearings as a new American – calls itself a ‘folklife festival.’ This category of festival represents a specific type of multicultural, public, celebratory, and educational gathering, which has synergy with the intentions of creative place-
Rituals of regard

making (Gillespie, 1996). It resembles other common events – the street fair, craft show, music festival, religious holiday, and ethnic pride day, among several – but it differs from those by prioritizing education as the main rationale for the event. Folklife events grow from ground-level research or ‘fieldwork’ that lead to collaborations with key cultural authorities and representatives. (Santino, 2016; Bauman and Sawin, 1991). The folklife movement can be understood as one of several antecedents of the ‘creative placemaking’ field as practiced today. The term folklife evolved from the older form folklore. While folklore referenced primarily the oral transmission of stories and songs, folk-life emerged from the need and desire to emphasize the holistic study of everyday life practices (from food and architecture to body adornment, traditions formed around occupations, and others). Early scholars understood the study of tradition as being imminently attached to geography. Thus, they noted with specificity how the community culture of a maritime area, for example, is different from that of an agricultural setting. As such, the aspects of community associated with folklife are aligned with the premise that good creative placemaking practice begins with acknowledgment of cultural assets that already exist in communities.

*Tucson Meet Yourself* is one of the largest place-based, heritage arts festivals in the United States. The challenge of producing the event lies in keeping a focus on the educational mission while also trading in the common forms of festival presentations – music and art as entertainment and ethnic ‘others’ as showmanship (Hutchinson, 2009). Increasingly, the festival has also ventured into practices that are relevant to community development. Given these intersections, the evaluation of the event can go in many directions: how people tend to think about festivals more generally – either too broad, as a free-flowing indulgence, or too narrow, as only an economic booster – further complicates evaluation. The focus on folklife, however, disrupts this simplistic binary. An essential challenge stands at the center of this community-informed framing: how does the project engender value for the people it claims to serve? Cultural strategies for belonging cannot just feel good or make sense to the professional animators, producers, and intermediaries who dream them up (Bissell, 2019). By definition, a festival whose stated mission is to represent the ‘life’ of the ‘folk’ carries a special obligation to inclusion and equity. ‘Doing right’ by the ethnic, cultural, or folk community that has agreed to share in a public setting the ceremonies, objects, stories, or foods that are usually reserved for insiders of the cultural group becomes the evaluative metric by default. The publics served by a folklife event, too, are rarely only tourists, casual browsers, or consumers. Like in other models of participatory action research, the ‘folks’ in ‘folklife’ assert their role as self-appointed evaluators with greater ‘skin in the game’ than mere spectators.

The *Tucson Meet Yourself* festival has been called ‘the festival of festivals’ because it aggregates under one annual signature City-namesake banner, multiple independent cultural associations, ethnic groups, artists, and small businesses, many of which hold their own smaller events throughout the year. A non-alcohol, family event held every October since 1974, 90 per cent of attendees are local. Sharing a formal affiliation with the University of Arizona through a parent nonprofit organization, the Southwest Folklife Alliance, the festival presents every year close to 400 performing artists, traditional artisans, food vendors, and community exhibitors. All artists receive compensation for their participation. Food vendors – mainly churches, associations, and small ethnic businesses – report sizable earnings during the weekend, monies that in most instances represent their single largest annual fundraising opportunity. Between 45 and 65 different ethnicities or folk-communities are represented at the event in any given year.

**Predicaments of evaluation**

In the search for revitalization strategies that can help neighborhood and communities, public officials and cultural advocates have turned to festivals as a preferred off-the-shelf tool. Festivals
promise to transform local economies, uphold civic pride, attract tourism, and harness a variety of creative placemaking energies that translate to higher and better outcomes of social vitality and community identity (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006; Cibinskiene, 2012; Wood, 2009). In the United States, more people participate in festivals than in any other arts event (NEA, 2010). Festival audiences also tend to more closely resemble the nation’s diversity by race, gender, age, region, and ethnicity than any other group of art-goers.

Yet, despite growing enthusiasm, it is common to hear pushback on the value of festivals among certain actors in the community development field. Because of growing skepticism and competition, a resurgence of interest in festival evaluation has taken place recently (Williams and Bowdin, 2007; Wallstam et al., 2020). My own approach to the evaluation of the Tucson Meet Yourself festival has undergone a curious evolution. From an initial generic, well-meaning anthropological disposition to ‘check in’ with participants through informal post-event debriefs, I have reoriented my approach towards an evaluation model that makes reciprocity the north star of all we do for and with festival participants. Reciprocity implies consultation with the communities represented and a fair chance for those ethnic and cultural groups to ‘gain something’ from being associated with Tucson Meet Yourself. Each year we are reminded of this essential principle when festival staff begins anew the meticulous consultation process for festival participation with our two home-based Native Nations – the Pascua Yaqui and Tohono O’odham communities. Participation by these core partners is never assumed a priori. Each year, festival curators sit down with tribal representatives to discuss what is working and what needs adjustment. Only then is the decision to participate made. In this light, the arc of festival evaluation shifts from a practice performed at the conclusion of the event to a framing that guides the event’s planning.

Assessing the success of Tucson Meet Yourself started out in conventional terms: gathering reliable data that demonstrated the value of the event to the greater community of sponsors, public officials, and opinion leaders. To that effect, we codified the festival’s attendance estimates through a triangulated spreadsheet; surveyed thousands of participants and audience members (over 5,000 live questionnaires taken on site); determined the rate of waste diverted from landfills to assess sustainable practices; and calculated the impact of the festival on the local economy by accounting for cascading related business transactions. In the last few years, we also added the visit of a Guest Folklorist to evaluate the event from an outsider’s perspective. Through methods of participant-observation, the Guest Folklorist writes a brief report addressing three questions: what are we getting right; what needs improvement; what practices have you seen or heard about in other festivals that we should consider emulating?

In the process of designing a more grounded evaluation approach, I find particularly useful the distinction between ‘indicators’ and ‘indications’ of success articulated by urban planner and scholar Maria Rosario Jackson (2019, p. 10). Indicators refer to the regime of recurrent, reliable quantitative data used by professional evaluators and researchers. They represent the menu of metrics that help planners forecast impact and formulate hypotheses. Indications, on the other hand, says Jackson, emerge from on-the-ground observations by diverse publics and, most importantly, directly impacted populations, perhaps initially only as ‘clues’ and forms of ‘discernments.’ They may not at first glance convey the rigor usually attached to quantitative data, but they are nonetheless in every instance as ‘thoughtful and disciplined’ observations, signals, and insights as any other form of impact narrative.

Common festival evaluation methods tend to focus too often on narrower transactional outcomes (i.e. hotel bed taxes, sponsorship activations, ticket purchases, brand hegemony, etc.), or in otherwise largely amorphous social outcomes (i.e. social cohesion). The benefits analysis that derives from a folklife perspective defines success through a slightly different lens. Here are three key elements I have learned are foundational to an expanded equitable approach: longitudinal
Rituals of regard

learning; grounded relationships; and equitable returns. Below, I expand on these evaluative lessons as indications of impact learned in the trenches of folklife work. My hunch is that organizers and advocates in other sectors of the creative placemaking field have grappled with similar ideas. A shift from a preeminently outcomes-driven approach to evaluation towards more spacious and generous process-evaluation models can reconcile the differences between evaluations deployed as administrative accountability ‘from above’ and evaluations ‘from below’ that place greater value in ‘the voices, knowledge, expertise, capacity, and experience’ of those we are most eager to serve (Stern et. al., 2019).

Longitudinal learning

Once during a busy Tucson Meet Yourself festival a few years back, a woman stopped me dead in my tracks as I was making my way to a stage to introduce two Cuban musicians. She shook her finger at my face and said sternly: ‘are you the director of the festival now?’ I nodded affirmatively. She retorted, ‘So you are the one who brought in “the gays.” That is just wrong. This used to be a nice cultural event and now you changed it. Thank you (not) very much!’

The woman was referring to a creative partnership Tucson Meet Yourself had established that year with the Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation. On the morning of the last day of our festival, the footprint and infrastructure of the event flips and becomes the site of the annual Tucson AIDSWALK. The partnership is a stroke of genius for efficiency. It benefits both organizations financially, creating substantial cost savings for the AIDSWALK and generating a ‘fee for service’ revenue stream for Tucson Meet Yourself. But the arrangement is not only transactional. We also incorporate the ritual unfolding of the AIDS Names Quilt Project as a public folklife experience featured prominently on the grounds of the festival. In that setting, gay and lesbian couples, transgender individuals, and other relatives of AIDS patients or loved ones co-mingled in public view. In a way, the woman was right. The festival had changed. But the change was not the result of a new ideology, as her comments implied. The change she noticed reflects the normal flow of folklife in context: new communities form and they come closer to each other, or they evolve into something different than we are used to seeing. One year a group from Ghana staged a collective dance on the street. Although I have tried, I have not been able to locate them again to repeat the same performance. The Danish club, a favorite of the public for decades, aged and decided the new scale of the festival imposed an unbearable burden on their single-item aebleskivers booth.

Assessing the work that leads to inclusive cultural participation demands a different set of tools than have been commonly available in evaluation designs. The temporal frame required to effectively assess how dynamics of public inclusion ebb and flow can exceed the resources of most evaluation budgets. Folklife-informed methods of evaluation consider a festival’s publics through patterns of change and adaptation that can escape momentary observations. In Tucson Meet Yourself, the immediate absence of the Danish Club – a common negative feedback recorded in the annual surveys – can only make sense in light of the club’s very dense history with the festival and their eventual phasing out by necessity of personnel and effort. In the orthodoxies of ‘community engagement’ we are too often accustomed to deploying the concepts of audience and participant as monolithic wholes. However, more equitable evaluation outcomes could possibly emerge by accounting for the variability of needs and desires of differential actors in the event, many of whom will come in and out of the ‘covenant’ through zig-zag lines instead of linear progressions. Apprehending the impact of the festival experience as a nexus of feelings, clues, epiphanies, and accruals of value that stretch and change over time can deepen how we understand the fit between what an event offers and what the public wants. Accordingly, city
planners, funders, and advocates will have more information to make recommendations for scaling up, downsizing, realigning, or even retiring festivals as these needs and publics change or evolve. Under the current evaluation paradigm, public events either only ‘succeed’ or ‘fail.’ Opportunities for festivals to change course, retool, reverse, modify, or refocus are rarely encouraged or rewarded.

**Grounded relationships**

In 2018, for the first time in 45 years, the *Tucson Meet Yourself* festival was nearly rained out. Previous decades had given us sprinkles or quick showers, but nothing like the two inches of rain that came down that year. The festival went on as scheduled, but the hardship on the staff and logistics was enormous. The public, however, seemed better prepared than the event organizers. Festival photos for 2018 revealed long lines of people at food stations wearing raincoats and ponchos or huddled together under large umbrellas. More aspects of the festival carried on as usual than anyone could have predicted. Technical teams stepped up and not a single act out of 100 performers was cancelled. Some food vendors reported having better sales that year than previously. In hindsight, festival 2018 was a phenomenal testimony to the resiliency of the festival’s mission and authentic relationships with community. We also gained insights about how volume and size can cushion downturns. We estimated the rain caused an attendance reduction of approximately 40 per cent; from our usual 150,000 to around 90,000 people. Even then, it felt like business as usual.

One group among all participants was astonishingly cheerful about the rain. The Tohono O’odham, whose tribal name translates in English to ‘people of the desert,’ took the disruption in stride. As one of the festival staff members hurried among puddles in the street, she ran into Bernard, the elder educational liaison for Tohono O’odham manual artists. Bernard told her: ‘we are happy; we pray for rain in our ceremonial songs, and here it is.’ A fundamental truth about folklife-informed methods of assessment was revealed in that moment: who gets to define what should count as success? The Tohono O’odham’s interpretation of the rain stresses the relational nature of participation as a nexus of interlocking and differential effects for multiple constituencies. Most evaluation methods tend to go in the direction of linear progression towards ascendant certainties, leaving little room for equivocation. I recall once receiving an evaluation questionnaire for a strategic planning process developed by a major consulting firm in which every single question asked, ‘on a scale of 1 to 10 how enthusiastic are you about X.’ This type of phrasing reinforces a ‘no way to go, but up’ boosterism that is all too frequently the trademark of many festival and creative placemaking efforts.

Bernard’s comment blunted the commonsense evaluative inclinations of the rain ‘crisis,’ but not by way of naive optimism, but by centering the climatic event in the larger universe of cultural context and meaning.

As the days passed and both festival and rain stopped, I learned to appreciate the Tohono O’odham’s playful sense of reversal. My own evaluation framework relaxed, allowing a more complex picture to emerge of the multiple ways in which ‘the rains of 2018’ produced both felicitous and dreary outcomes. The best parts of the *Tucson Meet Yourself* festival that year where the improvisations and surprises that mediated between the opposing poles of good and bad, or, sunny and rainy circumstances. For instance, we celebrated the remarkable skills of the electrical crew deployed to protect equipment and power distribution. In his review of strategies for cultural belonging, Evan Bissell notes that when evaluations are based only on ‘changes that build towards a pre-determined goal, there is a danger of erasing experiences and processes that are vitally important to people’ (Bissell, 2019, p. 43).

480
Rituals of regard

From my own vantage point as the person who understood better than most what detrimental effect the rain would cause to festival finances, to the staff member who encountered Bernard in the street, through the loops of informal conversations that circulated competing interpretations of the rain, an essential element of trust was necessary for a critical evaluation of the event to take hold. Trust develops over time as an outgrowth of respect. Trust makes room for dissenting points of view. Although there is a growing body of research on what are recognized to be ‘social impacts’ of festivals (Robertson et al., 2009), not nearly enough attention has been directed to assessing the role of relationships as the essential anchors that translate the value purported by creative placemaking projects. For instance, what are the mechanisms by which staged events establish different kinds of relationships with various publics? How are different levels and scales of relationships codified as usable data? What effects do relationships have on the accrual of value of an event over time?

For Tucson Meet Yourself, the greatest challenge remains, year after year, how to make visible those foundational relationships as the distinguishing mark of our brand of festival. Furthermore, how can the measure of this strategic differential factor be shared with new partners who may or may not have the clarity of mind to understand the unique lens of folklife that frames our work. This challenge caused me to think more carefully about the things people ‘see’ at the event (the physical built out and visual arrangement of the festival) in relation to the things they ‘experience’ (the sensory educational offerings). Our grounding in folklife practices advises us to look for points of data not readily apparent. This inclination shows up, for example, in the types of questions we choose to include in the festival’s survey. Thus, we decided to be direct and ask pointedly: ‘how is TMY different from other festivals you’ve attended?’ This data collection exercise ties into a generalized festival culture of reflection, trial-and-error, learning, and adjustment. It contributes to cementing a commitment to an evaluative approach that mirrors the way cultures actually work – never static, monolithic, or simple; instead, always contingent, emergent, and regenerative.

Equitable returns

One afternoon a year ago, I met my friend Danielle for coffee. We had been introduced by a common friend to work on a community social justice project. As we exchanged basic facts about our lives, Danielle told me her mother was ‘part of Tucson Meet Yourself.’ When I asked in what capacity, Danielle said, ‘she works at the festival, she is a part of it.’ I didn’t recognize her mother’s name as one of our staff members, so I assumed she was one of the hundreds of volunteers I didn’t know personally. But Danielle’s repeated assertion that her mother was ‘part’ of the event caught my attention. After a few more questions, I learned that she volunteers at the food booth of the Thai Buddhist Temple where she also gathers for worship throughout the year. It is undoubtedly reassuring to hear the brand of the festival claimed equitably by community members through multiple points of access – temples, schools, and workplaces. The application of ‘equity’ in creative placemaking projects implies a recognition that the project must yield benefits that feel tangible and consequential for all partners. In some instances, people will be satisfied to accrue those benefits in the form of social rewards. But no one should be expected to cheer for intangibles if there are other pressing needs or goals at stake. Material benefits, particularly for participants such as artists and food vendors who risk financially the most, must be understood as a valid expectation from the event.

I often joke that at Tucson Meet Yourself everyone makes money except Tucson Meet Yourself. I am referring, of course, to the administrative costs of putting on the event. Generating surplus revenue from the festival is, objectively, a sound goal that the leadership of Tucson Meet Yourself clearly
understands as part of a long-term capitalization strategy for the program. However, prioritizing
surplus revenue is not where the festival draws its bottom line. This decision is not without risk,
but the principle behind it has shaped a number of qualitative measures that have cemented the
festival’s credibility among the most vulnerable groups the event claims to serve. For example,
cash payments to artists, and artist-related expenses like hotel and transportation, account for
30 per cent of the festival’s budget. Were *Tucson Meet Yourself* to skip these investments in artists,
the potential profit or surplus generated from these savings would be around $65,000 annually.
Hypothetically, this is a ‘surplus’ that the festival could be reinvesting in other programs or set
aside in a reserve. The decision to pay the artists a fair level of compensation is inscribed as part of
the mission of the event – not just as an optional ‘beneficence’ the organizers can disavow at will.

The festival’s relationship with food vendors is structured slightly differently but illustrates
the same principle. Food vendors pay a flat fee for participating in the event; the festival does not
ask for a percentage of sales or collects any additional taxes. All 100 per cent of the fees vendors
pay go directly to cover costs that the festival must pay to the City, County Health Department,
and to subcontractors such as the electrical/power distribution crew that provide the essential
infrastructure food vendors need to succeed. In effect, the charge to vendors does not cover,
per unit, all the compounded expenses. The festival subsidizes the vendors’ expenses through
fundraising and sponsorships. In addition, the festival does not ask vendors to provide their own
individual liability insurance – a requirement that would represent a hardship and obstacle to
participation for many of the small clubs, families, and associations. Since the festival takes on
added risk by including food vendors in one comprehensive insurance package, festival staff
perform detailed and careful coaching and due diligence working with each individual vendor
to mitigate risks. In the ‘covenant’ of participation between festival and community partners, the
festival delivers above the call of duty. This is recognized amply by vendors, who can trace with
transparency a direct correlation between the festival’s expenditures in marketing, staffing, and
infrastructure and their success in sales at the event. The takeaway I want to stress here is not an
argument for financial risk. Rather, I wish to highlight the reality of how production decisions
always pivot on values. Values of social inclusion can orient organizations to take measured risks
when greater community goals of equitable participation are at stake. While deficits or break-
even budgeting practices should never set the standard for moral high ground in equitable
evaluation, I have learned that the finances of an event tell an important story about what and
whom is prioritized for investment.

**Success as actionable democratic participation**

As evaluation practices in creative placemaking continue to evolve, my hope is that the three
realms of impact I have described above can offer pause and consideration. While the word
‘folklife’ may never appear in the vocabulary of the community development field outside those
efforts explicitly directed by folklorists, the values and methods of this field of practice can shape
the thinking and design of cultural strategy conversations at multiple levels (Zeitlin, 2016). The
process of staging cultural events is a call for community-building. Learning to trust the pub-
llic’s response can be painstakingly difficult and simultaneously rewarding. Recently I learned
that one festival participant who sells food from his home state of Oaxaca, Mexico, also owns
a local pizza business. When he was asked why, if that was his way to make a living, had he not
requested to sell pizza at *Tucson Meet Yourself*, he answered unaffectedly: ‘the festival is where I
share my culture; the pizza is just a business.’ In positioning the festival as a platform for demo-
cratic participation, there is always an implicit risk that people might interpret the offering in
their own terms. What if this man would have insisted in selling pizza? Can an immigrant from
Mexico claim pizza as heritage food? In some ways, the choice of pizza would not comply with the festival’s formal requirement for an authentic connection with the culture of the seller. On the other hand, assisting immigrant communities secure a living and earning a ‘day in the sun’ in the city’s civic culture is a core value of the event.

Sometimes the real value of creative placemaking efforts lies not only in leaning forward to uplift opportunities for community celebration, but also in looking side-glance and acknowledging threats against the inclusion of certain actors. Community organizers have always understood the dynamics of social wellness as a paradox of affirmations and inversions (Fox-Piven and Cloward, 1978). Not only is the driving question in the example above one of authentic Mexican food choices, or about giving opportunities to local vendors to make money, but also about protecting the space for agency and dissent. In other words, asking ourselves, what would be lost if we didn’t do this work?

Evaluation practices that aim to capture the energy and significance of these tensions are needed now more than ever. Festivals and other staged public events must generate something more than feelings of goodwill. Democracy depends on the circulation of ‘oxygen’ around more complicated forms of cultural diversity than we have been willing to acknowledge – one in which ethnic and immigrant groups can step outside the coloring lines of stereotypical representation to find common cause with other minoritized folk groupings (Gold, 2005). Evaluations must aim to capture and tell these multilayered and multivocal stories. In city parks, schools, streets, or neighborhood parking lots filled with democratic impulses, evaluators must ask questions that lead in the opposite direction of what is expected.

Acknowledgement: I obtained permission from Faeza (real first name) to share this story. I am grateful to her and her family for their friendship and collaboration.

References


Further reading in this volume

Chapter 6: Listen, connect, act
*Kim Cook*

Chapter 9: From the dust of bad stars: disaster, resilience, and placemaking in Little Tokyo
*Jonathan Jae-an Crisman*

Preface: ‘Disastrous forces, accidental actions, and grassroots responses’
*Tom Borrup*

Chapter 11: *Free State Boulevard* and the story of the East 9th Street Placekeepers
*Dave Lowenstein*

Chapter 12: Public transformation: affect and mobility in rural America
*Lyndsey Ogle*

Chapter 14: Experts in their own tomorrows: placemaking for participatory climate futures
*Paul Graham Raven*

Chapter 16: More than a mural: participatory placemaking on Gija Country
*Samantha Edwards-Vandenhoek*

*Martin Zebracki*

Chapter 21: Placemaking through parkour and *Art du Déplacement* (ADD) as a Singaporean applied performance practitioner in London
*Adelina Ong*

Chapter 22: Embedded Artist Project: Epistemic Disobedience + Place
*Frances Whitehead*

Chapter 23: Routing out place identity through the vernacular production practices of a community light festival
*Gail Skelly and Tim Edensor*

Chapter 24: Artists, creativity, and the heart of city planning
*Tom Borrup*

Chapter 31: Seven generations: a role for artists in Zuni PlaceKnowing
*Theodore S. Jojola and Michaela P. Shirley*