

# CHILD FRIENDLY CITIES



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# The childfriendly city: a long way to go

Frank Eckardt

Children are the future of the city. What is planned and built up today will be inhabited and used by the later grown-ups. To make cities a better place in the future for the children of today – that is a commonly shared idealism in urban planning and politics.

As desirable as such future-oriented urban planning is, one cannot really be satisfied with the image associated with this concept of children and childhood. Children, one might think, will only be fully-fledged citizens and subjects of urban life in the future. In this view, which is still often found in discussions about urban planning, children are however only a kind of „adults-in-the-making.“

The notion of children as non-full members of urban society is a legacy of Enlightenment thinking that can be traced back to thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the inventors of modern pedagogy. According to them, children should first be brought up to be citizens and without the institutional education and guidance of adults they would remain immature and unable to formulate their own views and interests.

Such a well-intentioned view leads to the fact that children are granted protection from too many demands and dangers that would impair their physical and psychological development. A look at the situation of children worldwide shows very clearly that the need for protection must still be at the fore of every policy for children. Stresses and threats take on different forms at different times and places and therefore it is always required to undertake new efforts to ensure safe spaces for children.

While the historical and emancipatory Enlightenment has not yet been realized, this perspective on children also has a problematic side. Seeing children only as human beings with shortcomings suppresses the many skills and abilities that children have. This also includes expressing their own points of view. Of course, one must not apply the standard of adults to their possibilities of expression, but must give them

chances out of their particular life context, so they can communicate their own needs and wishes.

This insight has also spread in many cities which try to integrate children into urban planning projects. Nevertheless, the participation of children is still a marginal topic in urban planning and therefore the UNESCO network for child-friendly cities is certainly very important. The work documented in this brochure is intended to present supporting and informative articles that aim to improve the participation of children in urban planning.

The following chapters are the result of a study project in the master program „European Urban Studies“ at the Bauhaus University Weimar in the summer semester 2020. Due to the global pandemic, this project took place under difficult conditions, whereby the possibilities of empirical fieldwork were very limited. Regardless of this, the authors have created case studies in their home countries which provide important and stimulating ideas for a child-friendly city.

On the one hand, this brochure makes it clear that there is still a long way to go before the concerns of children in urban planning receive the necessary attention. On the other hand, the examples given in the individual chapters also show that there are creative and interesting approaches in many places that need to be further pursued.

Planning and building a city for children - this is how the quintessence of our publication could be formulated - means not only thinking about the future of children, but also allowing them to participate in urban life as early as possible and in their own way.

Weimar, 21. January 2021





# Effect of closed neighbourhoods on children in Russia (on example of Saint-Petersburg, Russia)

Anna Zhabenko

## **Abstract:**

Due to some factors, children are limited in their movement and communication with other children from next neighboring yards/neighbourhoods. Particularly, it is connected with specific neighborhood's spatial organization (high-dense road network inside the block) and the tendency of entrance limitation for non-residents. In fact, children are limited in the space, they can present in, what in its terms could have an effect on the communication process, opportunities between children and their socialization process. This research is focused on the analysis of the physical environment that is provided for children, the enclosed neighborhoods' and parents' control influence.

## **Introduction**

The neighbourhoods have a great impact on children and their social life. Notably, according to Foot, Chapman and Smith, children who lived close to each other had a high-quality friendship. Coates 1985 argued that neighbourhood friendship was more frequent, emotionally intimate and longer-lasting compare to others. Moreover, the plays in the neighbourhoods have a significant advantage of mixed-age in the group (Aikins 2020). There's a positive effect in the friendship between different ages playmates as it contributes towards their development in terms of learning new skills from the older children or serving as role models for children who are younger. In this case, parents should promote the social networks with neighbours to encourage their children's relationships and provide extra supervision opportunities.

For the last years in Russian context appeared a new tendency on closing the backyards and controlling the entrance opportunities, particularly in central quarters of Moscow and Saint-Petersburg. It is reflected in appearance of fences with combination locks, so only the residents are able to get inside. There are several reasons for such measures. At first, there is a great lack of free parking spots, particularly in central quarters and 'sleeping districts' what encouraged people to leave the cars in different backyards. In addition, the spatial planning inside several districts has a high-dense road networks. In fact, the backyards are overwhelmed with traffic what makes the movement inside the block not safe, especially for small children. The second reason is preventing unwanted people to get inside the backyard, raising the level of safety in the neighbourhoods. This process could remind the fortification in Los Angeles with closed neighbourhoods and creation of a false perception of extra threats from outside (Davis 2006). As result, children are becoming really limited in provided space and their movements as they have

no ability or permit to visit other spaces, particularly with no parents' accompanying. Thus, the social circle of the children could be also limited. The goal of this research is to investigate these effects of closed neighbourhoods on children and their socialization process, estimating the importance and impact of the environment and parents.

According to that the research question is: 'What are the factors that influence on segregation of children in the neighbourhoods?'

The research is conducted on example of a new residential complex 'Carskaya Stolica' in Saint Petersburg with a specific spatial planning organization and enclosed inner spaces.

Within this research, the following factors are supposed to be taken into account and estimated:

- Parental control and impact;
- The influence of existing physical environment;
- How children do determine themselves, their social circle and children from other neighbourhoods;
- What are children's and their parents preferences in communication, to which groups

In the framework of this research, the childhood is investigated by the post-structural approach, as the focus is on the process how the children are embedded to society. The second focus is on their socialization process.

### **Research assumptions**

The existing situation with closed neighbourhoods, limited and separated spaces for children causes several problems for children's communication, what has an effect on their socialization process. Children are not free in their movement basically by the parents' control and their representations of the children's security.

### **Research Methodology**

For this research, several methods were chosen in terms of a better understanding of cause-effect relationships. The research was conducted in the following steps:

- The first step was a literature review, gaining the basic knowledge of the neighbourhoods' role and impact on children and their socialization process.
- The observation of the neighbourhood. The main focus was on the children of different age groups and their behaviour in this area, taking into account the adults and their ways of monitoring children. The second focus was on the urban environment, spatial planning features and the tools that could restrict children's' movements.
- The territory analysis according to the physical environment and barriers (gates with electronic locks on the entrance to the backyards) observation.
- Analysis and subjective estimation of the public spaces, as for adults as for children.
- Interviews and other forms of communication (free talk) with children of different age groups, their parents or monitoring adults and other people, with who children could contact in this neighbourhood (shop-sellers).

### **Literature review**

The neighbourhood research is a broad study field in different disciplines, including economics, epidemiology, demography, sociology, and psychology (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997). By the mid -the 1980s, the main research questions were determined by neighbourhood residence influence on children's well-being and neighbourhoods effects on children and youth. To date, the researches in this area have advanced much further providing theoretical models of neighbourhood effects and more information about the factors that have a straight influence on children's emotional and behavioural problems, which in turn has an impact on the process of socialization of children in society. Nevertheless, the study of enclosed neighborhoods' effect on children is relatively new, particularly, not presented yet in the literature according to Russian context. Due to that, the research aimed to gain the basic knowledge of the processes in the neighborhoods to take into account the factors that influence on children and their socialization process, to anticipate possible impacts of closed neighbourhoods and limited communication on children.

One of the main findings in the neighbourhood researches is in the correlation between the average income of the neighbourhoods and children's cognitive abilities. In nonexperimental studies of Leventhal and Brooks (2003), it was suggested that children and adolescents living in high-income areas had the higher cognitive ability and school achievement than children in middle-income neighbourhoods, from small to moderate associations. Also, children from low-income communities had more mental and physical health problems compared to children in middle-income neighbourhoods. The presence of affluent or high-income neighbours was positively associated with preschool and school-age children's verbal ability, IQ scores, and school achievement—the effect of the neighborhood on adolescents by community social control. An important limitation of the Leventhal and Brooks study “suggestive evidence from nonexperimental studies reveals that neighborhood residence may be differentially associated with outcomes for Latinos compared with European and African Americans, pointing to acculturation as a potentially important and unexplored variable moderating the effects of neighborhood structure” (p.30). Another essential outcome of this study were three theoretical models regarding the potential pathways of neighbourhood effects, which were used for further studies, particularly in the research by Edwards and Bromfield (2010).

In the study by Edwards and Bromfield, authors assume that the knowledge about the mechanisms that could explain the differences in the outcomes of children living in disadvantaged and advantaged neighbourhoods is limited. Due to that, the main focus of their research was the effect of neighbourhood social processes (also referred to as neighbourhood social capital) on young children's emotional and behavioural outcomes.

Their research is based on the findings of Vinson, who suggested that neighbourhood social processes play a significant part in shaping the community's wellbeing according to the results of social cohesion research. “The study showed that the strength of associations between indicators of disadvantage—such as unemployment rates and child maltreatment—were reduced in areas with higher levels of social cohesion (i.e., the strength of social bonds and

connectedness of people living in an area)” (Edwards, B. & Bromfield, L., 2010, p.8). Authors also pointed on the limitation of the previous neighbourhood influences researches as the mechanisms through which neighbourhood disadvantage could influence children's social and emotional outcomes have not been examined. According to Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, there are three possible mechanisms that could be considered as the explanations:

- the quality, quantity and diversity of and access to recreational, social, educational, health, transport and employment services in the community directly affect child and youth outcomes as well as the outcomes of their parents;
- neighbourhood socio-economic disadvantage has a detrimental impact on parental mental health, parental behaviour (e.g., parenting style, supervision and monitoring, routines and structure), and the quality of the home environment, which in turn affects child and youth outcomes;
- neighbourhood social processes (i.e., the social connections between parents in the neighbourhood that encourage trust, support and a shared understanding and norms of behaviour) are undermined for those living in more disadvantaged areas, which then affects child and youth outcomes (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

According to Kohen, Leventhal, Dahinten and McIntosh (2008), neighbourhood social cohesion plays a role in reducing the impact of neighbourhood socio-economic disadvantage on children's behaviour problems.

Due to the research Edwards and Bromfield made an important conclusion, that parents' perceptions of neighbourhood safety and sense of neighbourhood belonging influenced the difference children's levels of conduct problems due to neighbourhood socio-economic disadvantage, on example of Australian neighbourhoods.

Roosa, Jones, Tein, and Cree (2003) proposed a theoretical model for understanding the way in which neighbourhood social processes affect children's outcomes, and they assume that:

- neighbourhood socio-economic status influences both residents' perceptions of their neighbourhood and neighbourhood social processes;
- residents' perceptions of their neighbourhood also affect neighbourhood social processes;
- neighbourhood social processes affect children's outcomes (Edwards, B. & Bromfield, L.,2010, p.8).

During this research, the authors investigated the mentioned above effects on 4–5-year-old children's hyperactivity, emotional symptoms and peer problems.

Particularly for analyzing the residents' perceptions of the neighbourhood, authors based on four features: neighbourhood facilities, neighbourhood belonging, neighbourhood safety and neighbourhood cleanliness. The parameter 'neighbourhood belonging' in its turn consisted of four items that assessed parents' trust of neighbours, a sense of identity with the neighbourhood, how well-informed they were about local affairs, and knowledge about where to find information about local services.

The analyses showed that only neighbourhood safety had a statistically significant association with children's levels of hyperactivity, emotional symptoms and peer problems. Nevertheless, neighbourhood belonging had an even stronger association with children's outcomes. Following this research, it is an essential finding that neighbourhood safety and neighbourhood belonging could explain some of the differences in children's behavioural and emotional problems, what increases the importance of community development in fostering the social capital.

The examination of the literature regarding Russian contexts showed a particular gap in the studying of the neighbourhoods' effects on children, particularly in the sociological field. The perception of childhood in the district from a psychological point of view in Russian context is introduced in a book „The secret world of children in the space of the world of adults“ by Osorina M. Osorina describes the importance of children's investigation of the surroundings and some specific features of the socialization process. The author argues that in the age between 3 and 5 years children start their social life as the child

begins intensively to master the problematic practice of interacting with other children in the game and then in other situations. The significant discovery of children of this age is the idea of partnership.

Street children's playgroups develop spontaneously, but usually, their backbone are the children living in the neighbourhood. Having familiar children with whom you can play regularly is of great value for a child after three years (as well as for their parents). We can say that the number of peers corresponding to gender, age, development, as well as the variety of convenient places for play, are essential characteristics of the richness of the environment in which a child lives. The children's yard company usually brings together children - peers with the maximum difference between the oldest and the youngest in two or three years. Such a moderate age difference is of great psychological importance; therefore, it is typical as a principle of organizing naturally developing children's societies. Age difference creates the necessary difference in mental potentials, stimulating all members of the group. Other modern researches regarding Russian realities suggest that the disappearance of yard play as a cultural phenomenon led to the fact that children began to experience difficulties in assimilating systemic moral norms and moral principles (Retih 2014). As a result, children lack the skills of empathic behaviour, which is necessary for communication. The disappearance of courtyard companies deprives the child of the opportunity to gain experience of cooperation and mutual assistance, leadership and teamwork. Also, a big plus of yard games was that they developed physical, physical activity, and this contributed to the harmonious, healthy development of the child. Today, most children are interested in static activities - drawing, board games, watching TV, which does not activate the body and leads to physical inactivity (Retih 2014).

Summing up the literature review, it is seen necessary to take into account for further research the following findings:

- effect of social cohesion in the neighbourhood
- influence of residents' safety perception and belonging to the neighbourhood
- the significance of age-mixed groups

## Case of study

### *General information*

The research of the neighbourhoods' backyards was conducted in a new residential complex (the delivery term 2014-2016), „Carskaya Stolica“. This project is classified as business-class in the central district of the city near the embankment of the Obvodny Canal with a well-developed transport network, which increases the value of the district. Due to these facts, the neighbourhood is considered middle and high income. According to the real estate website, Novostroy.su, the complex accommodates approximately 7,500 people, and the residents are provided with a concierge service and a video surveillance system.



St. Petersburg source: ESRI World Map

### *Analysis of the physical environment*

One of the choice factors of this complex for the research is the specific spatial-architectural organization, where the mid-rise buildings are forming small quarters. The area can be roughly separated on three blocks according to the closeness of houses to each other and the split by vacant green lots. The boulevard in the centre of the 2d and 3d blocks is supposed as the main public area

with several playgrounds for children and recreation zones. On the west border of the neighbourhood, multilevel parkings are located, what is seen as a good spatial planning decision in terms of segregation the neighbourhood from the railway lines. Due to the shape of the dwellings, each house has an internal enclosed space. The plan of the area is represented on the scheme 1 with the possible entrances to the courtyards. Depending on the size of the house the number of admissions differs, from one to three and all the gates are equipped with an electronic lock, what raises the inner space safety and makes the access for other neighbourhoods residents almost impossible. Moreover, the car access in the courtyards is limited with permission to stay not longer than for 30 minutes.

The absence of cars in the yards, limited access and the surveillance system should make the inner space perfect for children, but in blocks 2 and 3 the courtyards are vacant. The playgrounds in the yards exist only in block #1, which is a higher class than other dwellings. The vacant lots between the blocks are not used as recreation zone but as an extra parking space. It should be marked that besides the multilevel parking, there are parking slots along the roads with no regulations and limitations on parking zones which has several negative impacts on the whole area. First of all, the residents of the nearby neighbourhoods are leaving their cars here what causes the next effect, chaotic spread of a high amount of cars all over the district (Varlamov, 2017)\*. Thus, the risks of car accidents are rising, making the area not safe. Here is seen one of the central contradictions of the project: The inner space of the dwellings was designed in terms of higher safety, what is a useful feature for the children space, but all the facilities are handed down to the area with more increased potential threats. The fact that the playgrounds exist only in the yards of higher class dwellings is seen as a not equal and segregating condition.

Under a critical look at this neighbourhood area in terms of physical environment estimation, none of the recreation zones could be considered as appropriate for leisure time, particularly for children or teenagers.

The quality of the physical environment, particularly the level of greening and landscaping, in this

\*Varlamov Ilya Russian blogger, focuses on the landscaping and the quality of urban environment in Russian cities



neighbourhood is inferior. The inner yards are covered with concrete with a small land of grass in the centre. Such area is nor suitable nor exciting for children. The area nearby the dwellings is not supposed for the children’s use, moreover, as it was mentioned, is not safe due to the high amount of cars. The only recreation area for the residents is the central boulevard, which quality was commented as:

“What kind of s\*t have you put in the modern neighborhood? I wish the director of a construction company all his life to sit on a bench without a back and look at this concrete flower bed. We should also pay attention to the trees. It is difficult to notice them, since instead of mature trees some sticks were planted here for 100 rubles...”

“Have you robbed a Soviet sanatorium?” (Varmalov 2017)

The main boulevard has a paving part in the centre and green lines from each side with five playgrounds, but it should be marked that lawns are not used as recreation zones in the Russian context. People are not supposed to walk on it, sit, have a picnic; several zones have a sign “not to walk”.

As it can be seen on the pictures, the quality of the playgrounds is also relatively low, and the maximum age of the users is limited by 12 years. Such circumstances suggest the residents have extra equipment for children playing or finding other places for entertainment. Besides, there are no bike lanes in this area, as in the entire neighbourhood. Another considerable disadvantage of this area is the obsolescence of trees. At the moment, there are no mature trees but several seedlings, which means the territory is deprived of tree cover for 10-15 years. Some authors argue, particularly Mouratidis, that tree cover has an impact on the perceived safety of the area. The higher tree cover is associated with more increased perceived safety even after controlling for neighbourhood deprivation, urban form attributes, and sociodemographic variables (Mouratidis 2019). Within the framework of this study, the factor of safety perception of the neighbourhood is essential for the analysis.

## Observation

Due to the observation\*\* the physical environment analysis of the neighbourhood was conducted (the visual evidence of the environment were gathered, subjective assessment of the territory). But the main objects of observation were children, teenagers and people with children. The focus was also on their behaviour pattern in this neighbourhood, the way and intensity of contacting with the urban environment and other tenants.

The monitoring of this area was conducted in several days, during the working week and on the weekend; naturally, the higher amount of people was on the weekend. The observation had a particular limitation, due to the fact of no free access on the inner territories in the dwellings. The only possible monitoring was possible next to the gates with a limited overview. According to gathered information, courtyards are mostly empty, and the children were detected only in several yards: in the 1st block on the playgrounds, where the children were also under the adults' supervision; in blocks 2 and 3, the children had been seen in the company of talking adults, biking in the yard under adults' supervision. While trying to get inside, the assistant was stopped by the residents and threatened to call the police.

The main observation took place in the public areas, particularly the main boulevard and on the vacant green lot between the 2d and 3d blocks. The boulevard contains two main playgrounds on each side, which were busy with kids of the age 3-7 years old under the adults' monitoring, majorly women. Three other smaller backgrounds are along the boulevard with a considerable less amount of children. Some adults were walking along the boulevard with their children biking. The older children (school aged) were noticed walking here alone, some were playing with their peers. The older groups of children showed no interest to the playgrounds, using only several swings. Teenagers mostly occupied the benches or other fences which could be used for sitting, holding the conversation and playing with their phones. The vacant green lots are mostly empty as they are used as parking spots, but still, in this area, several groups of teenagers were noticed, biking, listening to music and even drinking beer. On the benches closer to vacant lots, homeless people were sleeping. During the general observation, it has been noticed that the

\*\* The observation was carried out by Dmitriy Rodin, the assistant in this research. Provided description can hold a subjective point of view, but the main goal was a description of the citizens' actions in this area and the personal experience of contacting them.



major of children outside are pre-school aged under adults' supervision. The smaller kids (3-6) were playing together, making a group not more than of 3, while the children of 7-11 have mostly been seen walking alone, the teenagers are making bigger groups. The major of children prefer to be in contact with their peers. From subjective point of view, the children have a small interest to the existing playgrounds.

### *Interviews*

One of the aims of this research was to conduct interviews, in the main queue, with children of different ages, their parents and other residents of this neighbourhood. For the interviews, four questionnaires were designed (Appendix 1), each for the particular category: 1. For children 5-12 years old; 2. For teenagers 12-17 years old; 3. Parents or other monitoring adults; 4. „Third person“ (Sellers in stores and others). The questionnaires aimed two goals: 1. to clarify the conditions and circumstances under which the children are allowed to walk in the backyard and the public spaces; 2. to find out the details about children's circle of communication. The interviews could take place in the format of a questionnaire and free conversation.

It was planned to conduct approximately 3 to 5 interviews for each group at different sites (in the backyards and on the public playgrounds). Unfortunately, unforeseen circumstances have arisen. The interviewing took place within two days, but in the end, the assistant was threatened to call the police both times. On the first day, an incredible impact was exerted by a man who was offered to participate in the interview as a parent. As part of the interview, to aware parents and comply with ethical standards, at first, questionnaires were provided to parents to obtain their consent for talks with their children. At first, the man agreed, but after reviewing the questionnaire, he asked the right to conduct such a study, the assistant's identity documents and assumed that law enforcement agencies should be interested in his personality and threatened to call the police. Such reaction led to particular social behavior and some of the parents refused to participate in the questionnaire.

On the first day, four interviews were successfully conducted: a woman with 2 daughters, one of her

daughters of 6 years old, woman with her grandson and a seller in a local store.

As the district is considered relatively new, most of the residents have recently moved in, interviewer 1 has been living here for six months. According to the received information, we could suggest the woman is a housewife and has enough time for childcare: they go outside every day, sometimes several times a day, preferably to the public playgrounds; the daughters are age of 4 and 6 years old, due to that they are not allowed to walk alone, even in their closed courtyard. The children are always under the supervision as the woman considers this district as not safe. During the interview an interesting discrepancy in information was noticed: according mother's perception her older daughter keeps contact with approximately ten children from this complex. From the daughter's words, she keeps friendship only with one child, who is from the same backyard than her; with other children she "meets and communicates". The children from girl's communication circle are of different ages, but with no big age difference and they meet only on the common playgrounds. The family doesn't visit other backyards.

The next interviewer-2, a woman with 2 grandchildren is a new tenant, who lives in the district only for several weeks. The boy is 5 years old and a girl is 3 years old, both are not allowed to walk alone, even in the yard, so far mostly they are playing only to each other. Most of all they come to the common playgrounds, around 3 times a week, sometimes the older boy can go outside with an adult for biking in the yard. Parents prefer to take the children somewhere else for walking or other time spending. The perception of the neighbourhood in terms of safety is not identified so far.

Interview-4 was conducted with a seller woman from the local store. The woman is not from this neighbourhood and considers this district as safe, due to the district pricing policy "this is an expensive residential complex", but paying attention to the broken window in the shop (already for a couple of weeks), she replied "everything happens". Based on this interview, many children come to the store alone, but all children are school aged, while younger children are always accompanied by their parents. The seller knows regular customers but does not



keep in touch with any of the residents of this area; also there is no communication with local children. On the second day of interviewing, the form of interviewing was as free talk in terms of less suspicion from the residents, but while trying to get inside in one of the backyards the assistant was threatened again by a police call.

The Interview-5 was conducted with a woman with a daughter of 7 years old, as a free talk. They also live here for several months, but the girl is not in contact to anyone yet, and there's no perception of children's closeness in the neighbourhood. The woman considers this district as not safe (as everywhere) with a hideous quality of landscaping, according to that, they go outside only 1-2 times per week, and the girl is always under mothers monitoring. Additionally, the girl pointed on a police office next to the neighbourhood, but as it is seen, it has no impact on the safety perception of this district.

Interview-6 was conducted with the bakery saleswoman in a free talk form. She was unable to comment on whether she considers this area safe as she comes from another district. According to her, many children come alone to the bakery, but only of school age and older, the younger ones only accompanied by their parents. The woman doesn't keep contact with any of the residents but finds the community polite here. Regarding the playgrounds in the courtyards, an interesting comment was received, as in her opinion, there's not enough space for the playgrounds in the backyards.

Interview-7 happened spontaneously with an old man, resident of this complex, as he thought that assistant was looking for a particular house. The man commented the yards and a lack of playgrounds for children as other objects of qualitative landscaping. According to his observations, there are no children in the yards, in different places; the little children are with their parents, older ones and schoolchildren are walking here alone, but mostly coming back from school or other sites, while they do not appear that often outside paying. Moreover, the man told about an accident that happened to his neighbour from a different floor. Several weeks ago, the neighbour from the second floor was robbed, despite the closed entrance to the backyards and supposed concierge and surveillance systems. In terms of security, the man noted that in this neighbourhood, in his opinion,

as everywhere.

The last interview was with three teenagers that were sitting closer to a vacant green lot. They were drinking beer, not trying to hide cans. In their opinion, this district is generally good as it is new and all the necessary facilities are in a walking distance, the inner spaces of houses are well-protected as they are closed with locks. These teenagers are not going to public playgrounds and communicate only with their peers, mostly schoolmates.

### **Main results**

This research was conducted using the chosen methods: literature review, analysis of the physical environment, interviews and observation. Unfortunately, due to some obstacles it was not possible to conduct the interviews in a proper way as the residents showed their mistrust and suspicion. This leads to several main findings of the research:

- Residents of the 'Carskaya Stolica' do not consider this area as safe. The residents remained vigilant, this is evidenced by the threats of calling police in cases of the attempt to get inside in one of the inner backyards, the interview with a man who found the questions inappropriate. Interview results also demonstrated the residents' perception, as they considered the district as not safe as other quarters in Saint Petersburg. Moreover, we should take into account the lack of trees in the neighbourhood, what influences on the subjective perception of the territory, intensifying the unsafe feeling. The last point is the fact of robbery, which is a strong prove that the taken precautionary measures do not provide required level of safety. According to Edwards and Bromfield, the residents' perception of the neighbourhood has a strong influence on their children, what leads to the next finding.
- Children in this neighbourhood are in the risk group in terms of behavioral and emotional problems. Parents' perceptions of neighbourhood safety and sense of neighbourhood belonging have an impact on children. This research is limited by a lack of information about the residents' belonging feeling, but we could suggest this sense is not strong, due to the observation. Roosa, Jones, Tein,

and Cree argue that residents' perceptions affect neighbourhood social processes and children's outcomes. In the case of 'Carskaya Stolica' with a non-safety perception by the residents, we can assume that children are under negative impact and in a risk group.

Regarding these facts, we can conclude that the unsafe perception of the residents is one of the main factors that effects children's' socialization process. According to the analysis of the physical environment and conducted interviews, we can assume that:

- Existing playgrounds do not provide enough possibilities for children's needs what limits their communication to other children. The quality of all the playgrounds is considered as low, the children didn't show intense interest to the playgrounds, especially the older groups. Moreover, the absence of the playgrounds in blocks 2 and 3 and their presence in block-1 is seen as inequality. We can suppose that it makes a certain segregation between groups of children from these blocks, as the children from block-2 and 3 have the public playgrounds as the only opportunity while the children from block-1 are provided with the playgrounds in the courtyard. In fact, some groups of children have more contact to each other than others. Based on this statement the next finding is assumed.
- Limited contact to other children loses the positive effect of communication. Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn argue that there is a correlation between the neighbourhoods income and childrens' mental health. For preschool and school-age children, the presence of affluent or high-income neighbors was positively associated with children's verbal ability, IQ scores, and school achievement. As 'Carskaya Stolica' is considered as middle and high income neighbourhood, the communication between children should have a positive impact but, on contrary, the children from block-1, which is a higher-level income, are limited in the contacts with children from blocks 2 and 3. Moreover, according the interview results, we can argue that children are limited in their contacts in this neighbourhood, as children have a few close

contacts and prefer communication with their peers. This leads to the next conclusions.

- Children are limited in communication in the neighbourhood and deprived of the opportunities for new strong connections. Based on the statements of Foot, Chapman, Smith and Coates the children who lived closer had high-quality friendships that were more frequent, emotionally intimate and longer lasting. According to the interviews, children from 'Carskaya Stolica' do not make strong connections to each other.
- Children are limited in their communication skills, particularly with older groups what affects their socialization capacity. According to several authors, the mixed-age groups are important for children and their cognitive abilities, forming their moral norms and moral principles. In case of 'Carskaya Stolica', on the backgrounds of limited contacts in general, according to the interviews and observation, mixed-aged groups were not found.
- Segregated spaces lead to segregation of children groups. As it is mentioned, the difference of the quality in the backyards can affect children and their communication to other children. Moreover, we have an interesting evidence that children from one backyard are closer to each other. This finding has a certain limitation and requires further investigation.
- Parents have the prevailing approach to children as children - future citizens, which disregards their needs and interests. The research showed a strong parental control over children. In terms of communication, some parents also showed their position that they would prefer their children to communicate with their peers. The children are instructed not to talk to unknown people, particularly with a certain category.

According to the received results, we can assume that the major influence on children and their communication process have their parents, controlling their movements and the people they communicate, taking into account their perception

of the neighbourhood, but the segregated spaces and low-quality environment for children intensifies possible negative effects, separating children and limiting their communication.

In terms of the research question, the results show that main factors that limit children's communication process and affects negatively their socialization process are:

1. Parents' approach towards children.
2. Perception of the neighbourhood as unsafe.
3. Unequal segregated spaces for children.

#### *existing limitations:*

This research may reflect the major processes that are happening in similar new neighbourhoods but it can differ from the same research in older neighbourhoods, in terms of different historical and social background, different social connections between the residents.

For further research that would be focused on enclosed spaces effects on children, it is essential to proceed it in a neighbourhood with a better physical environment for children and a better perception of the residents in terms of a more 'clear' picture of the cause-effect relationships.

#### **Conclusion**

In accordance with the articles 15 from United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child, they have the right to meet with other children and young people, to join the groups and they have a right for the appropriate environment for such practice. In case of 'Carskaya Stolica' the research showed that these children's rights are ignored and a great role are playing parents in the socialization process of children. Also, it was proved that the enclosed spaces and the spatial segregation has an impact on children's communication and contacts to each other. For the better outcome, it is necessary to improve existing environment for children, landscaping and fulfilling the backyards with appropriate facilities for children and to take into attention the greening quality of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood possesses a good potential according to the income indicators and specific spatial planning. The enclosed spaces of the backyards could be an appropriate and safe place for children, particularly as the cars' entrance is limited, on contrary the movements of children

should have more varieties. In this case, parents have the responsibility of their children's socialization and communication opportunities to other children. The social cohesion influences parental mental health and the behavior. Strong social connections between parents in the neighbourhood are able to encourage trust, support and a shared understanding of behavior norms, contributing towards closer children's connections.

#### *Acknowledgment*

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# Creating Safe Urban Areas to Improve Children Interaction with the City Through Engaging Supporting Associations

Arghavan Latifi Alavije

## Abstract

During the recent forty years, due to the wars and conflicts in Afghanistan, Iran has been a host for many Afghan refugees. Since refugees and immigrants in Iran have usually been marginalized in suburban regions, Afghan children are always encountered with several risks and dangers during their presence in urban spaces. In this paper, the challenges and hardships of the Afghan children aged between 7 to 12 in the urban spaces of Golshahr neighbourhood in Mashhad in the northeast of Iran have been scrutinized. In addition to interviewing experts, the storytelling method is also used to contribute children in determining the aspects of their ideal city spaces. Moreover, the assessment action sheet of UNICEF is used as a guideline for gathering situational assessment information. The results obtained from both methods revealed similarities in terms of attitude of children and expertise towards problems and deficiencies. The involved groups unanimously emphasized on the negative effects of the limited access to safe and secure places for children's playing and social and physical dangers threatening children playing in the neighbourhood.

## Introduction

As reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than half of the world's refugees (around 18 million) are under the age of 18 years old (UNHCR 2020). Many have left their homelands in early childhood and been raised in refugee camps or in a new host society, some others were born, somewhere far away from where their parents were born or lived. Related to these statistics, over one fifth of the world's refugee population are Afghans who have left their country in search of security and a better life. The presence of the Afghan refugees and immigrants in Iran goes back to more than 40 years ago, when the migration flow of Afghans started due to the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1979. Since then, the migration waves have continued as a consequence of civil war in the 1990s, insecurities caused by Taliban presence, economic turmoil and lack of services and facilities. During these four decades, after Pakistan, Iran has always been the second primary destination for Afghan refugees; and based on the official statistics, currently, it hosts about 1.5 million Afghan refugees and immigrants, however it is estimated that the unauthorised data ought to be triple of this figure. According to accredited statistics obtained from the Census conducted by the Iranian government in 2016, almost half of the Afghan immigrant population are children with the age of under 18 years old.

Regardless of the long history of Afghan immigrants residing in Iran, living under refugee status and impracticality of obtaining residence and citizenship in Iran have caused them troubles achieving their basic rights like access to education, health care services and employment (Mamiko 2008, 4; Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2012, Bar and Sanei 2013, 30-59; 853-855; Abbasi-Shavazi and Sadeghi 2015, 90). Before 2015, about 130,000 undocumented Afghans were deprived from attending public or private schools in Iran (Bhoyroo 2019). The only choice they had was a

handful of Afghan schools which were managed by non-governmental organisations. In 2015, a law was passed that allowed immigrants to enroll in public schools without any kind of residence permit (Bar and Sanei 2013, 9-10). From this year, the number of students in the non-governmental Afghans schools decreased since they were provided with the chance of enrollment in schools within the proximity of their own neighbourhood. In addition to the problems related to accessing citizenship services, Afghan children face wide arrays of problems in urban areas. Since Afghan refugees and immigrants are allowed to reside only in certain defined zones (Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2008; Nourpanah 2014; Yarbakhsh 2018), those who illegally live in Afghan-free sections are severely isolated because of their resident status. Due to their illegal residence, they are always concerned about being identified and returned by the Foreign Immigrants Affairs Administration. As a result, their children are obliged to stay at home to have the least exposure to the host society.

Furthermore, Afghan families have left their homes to live in a peaceful and safe condition and to experience a higher quality of life (Chin and Kalena, 2015) somewhere outside the borders of Afghanistan, but insecurity, unsafe urban areas and inadequate services are serious issues threatening Afghan children in Iran urban spaces. In Iran, a significant number of refugees and immigrants live in suburban neighbourhoods with poor welfare and security levels compared to other neighbourhoods. In these neighbourhoods, children are exposed to physiological risks such as violence and bullying, kidnapping, sexual and racial harassment and physical dangers such as car accidents while playing in urban spaces (Monsutti 2006, 16-17; Bar and Sanei 2013; Nordström 2010, 515-517).

This study focuses on the Afghan communities who live in the Golshahr neighbourhood in Mashhad in the northeast of Iran. In this region, the nature of the problems facing Afghan children are somewhat different. In the current study, refugee children are addressed as a vulnerable group who are unable to identify dangers and are “at risk” in public spaces in Golshahr neighbourhood. Although Golshahr suffers from the lack of appropriate urban spaces for safe and secure interaction, children spend a considerable amount of their time in the neighbourhood in

residential streets and open grounds without adult supervision. The statistics of children’s abuse and harm in this neighbourhood are seriously worrying in a way that supporting organizations have focused all their efforts on reducing the presence of children in the urban spaces. Following this trend, inevitably, children will gradually be kept away from attending urban spaces and this is where the problem begins. This research aims to find a way to implement the activities of stakeholders and the beneficiary institutions in community settings such as youth centers and child play areas. In order to find out the current condition of the refugee children and private organisations activities in Golshahr neighbourhood, the Unicef Practical Guide for Developing Child Friendly Spaces was applied. For gathering children’s attitudes and expectations toward their neighbourhood spaces, some Afghan children with the age of between 7 to 12 were asked to imagine their neighbourhood in 10 years later and tell a story about their ideal city spaces.

The background of research will next clarify the main discourses and positioning of this study. After this, the Unicef Practical Guide for Developing Child Friendly Spaces will be presented. Subsequently, the case study, the methodology for participating children and the participants in the interviews are explained. And finally, the results of the data gathered through the guideline and storytelling method will be presented and discussed.

## **Theoretical challenge**

### *Background*

In this paper, the focus is on the social and physical aspects of children safety in the urban spaces. To describe features of a child friendly space, Nordström (2010; 2019) categorizes the verbal descriptions of children. The normative dimensions which were previously introduced by Horelli as a theoretical framework for child friendly spaces are used as the basis of classifying the responses of the children to a simple question inquiring their expectations from a child-friendly city. Nordström carried on a study group consisting of 12-year-old children from three regions in Stockholm, which are geographically, culturally and socially different from each other. For the results, she explains the dimensions of basic services, safety and

security and urban and environmental qualities were chosen by the majority of the children. Nordström and Wales (2019) describes the perception of safety and security from children's point of view, which is seeing the physical dimensions and their attitude depends on their well-being. However, based on the above mentioned differences in the areas, the priorities of the chosen dimensions in each area are different (Nordström 2019). The research is a great effort in providing a link between children's views and impressions and the areas of planning a child friendly space.

In the field of the presence of refugees in the open areas in the cities, Rishbeth, Blachnicka-Ciacek, and Darling explore the engagement and the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers towards urban parks. In this context, a wider variety of green spaces including squares, river-sides, sport fields and community spaces are taken into account. For this purpose, a fieldwork in Berlin, London and Sheffield is conducted, in which two groups of interviewees are addressed. The first group consists of asylum seekers and refugees from various countries and the second group contains stakeholders from both refugee support and greenspace organizations. The results of the fieldwork show both positive and negative aspects of urban parks. Although there have been positive statements on the quality and accessibility of these spaces, dark experiences about feeling lonely, culturally lost and being unwelcome have also been argued. In order to draw attention to different supporting methods, strategies and projects that can assist asylum seekers and refugees to take advantage of greenspaces the term of "curated sociability" is proposed (Rishbeth et al, 2019). Using the proposed concept, realistic and unique responses to the risky and disturbing aspects of green spaces have been provided .

Children in this study are considered as a 'vulnerable' group in the society. In this regard compared to other children, refugee children are facing more problems due to their refugee status and their limitations. The definition of the vulnerability has always been debateable. Stephens (2012) sheds light on the controversial views toward the concept of vulnerability. She defines that each region and neighbourhood possesses a unique and exclusive pattern of social vulnerability, which relies on local

characteristics of the region such as political and social beliefs and prejudice. Toward finding the vulnerable groups, it is proposed to determine the social group which suffers from the most social marginalization caused mainly because of their ethnic, religion or class. As far as the vulnerability of children is concerned, it is suggested to carry out a child-centered approach in order to discover various vulnerabilities of each age group and to find out a correlation between the existing risks and the vulnerability causing for each age group. Therefore, a practical method toward the vulnerability of child and teenager is proposed to address personal vulnerability based on illness, disability or social condition. Urban refugee children, because of their special social condition, can be notably vulnerable. This has roots in the fact that refugees usually suffer from experiencing vigorous situations such as wars and internal conflicts. As these social groups face the most social marginalization through being settled in the most marginalized urban regions, they can be identified as vulnerable groups.

Involving children in order to find their real concerns and use their attitudes in the decision making process have always been challenging. During recent decades, various methods have been proposed for children's participation in urban planning, which vary according to the age and level of participation of children. Applying techniques such as city mapping for creating children spatial perception (Freeman, Ergler and Guiney 2017; Hennig 2019; Mohareb, Elsamahy and Felix 2019), engaging through computer games (Poplin 2012; Andrade, Bruno de, Poplin and Sena 2020) and storytelling to narrate the condition and the design of places by space users (Childs 2008; Poplin 2012) have come up with remarkable results. Cunningham et al (2003) applies the story-writing method in order to contribute children between 6 and 12 as well as adults in the long-term regional development planning of Blue Mountains City (an Australian suburban community). For this purpose, the council of the city held a story-writing competition, in which the rules and guidelines led children to write stories in favor of some predefined development scenarios. One guideline was used for children between 6 and 9 referred to as junior children. The instruction for the first group focused on the condition of their home, its environment and the

limitations in the year 2025. For the senior children (aged between 10 and 12) emphasized on the context of town rather than home in the year 2025. It has also introduced more serious restrictions and limitations. In order to obtain results which can be collectively analyzed, the adults were also inquired about similar issues and restrictions.

#### *Research question*

The current study discusses the challenges and hardships which Afghan refugee children in Golshahr neighborhood in Mashhad are facing and looks into the way of creating child friendly spaces in this region. In order to carry out this research, the following questions are presented as the main questions of this study:

- To what extent programs and activities of the Refugee Child Supporting Associations, charities and NGOs could help safe and secure interaction with the urban spaces?
- How can these actions be formed in the context of urban spaces?
- Considering the fundamental underlying issues in the Golshahr neighbourhood, how can creating a safe area be achieved?

#### *Research assumptions*

To answer the above mentioned questions, hypotheses have been determined and proposed as below:

- The hypothesis is that the Golshahr neighbourhood has potential for creating safe areas in it.
- It is presumed that by implementation of the existing programs in the supporting organizations, the required basis for creating safe urban areas would be provided.

## **Methodological approach**

### *Discussion on chosen method - A Practical Guide for Developing Child Friendly Spaces*

A Practical Guide for Developing Child Friendly Spaces is provided to assist UNICEF staff and partners to find out the main principles of a child friendly space and assists them on the way of establishing these spaces. Its main purpose is to provide the supporting knowledge and practical guidance for planning and operation of child friendly spaces. There are several key actions in the guideline, which starts with situational assessment of the target community which plays a significant role in evaluating the effectiveness of the current programs and determining the required actions. The situational analysis should mainly focus on children particularly the most vulnerable children in the target community. The aim of this key action is to define the condition of the community including the progresses and the demanded measures. This step can be taken with the cooperation of local members of the target community such as children, teens, local formal and non-formal educators, schoolteachers, the unions of teachers and parent teacher associations.

The second key action focuses on the community mapping in order to determine the actors/programs relationship. This is a crucial step which results in a matrix implying the roles and status of different members of the community. In the next key action, a collaboration should be made between the coordinating groups which are active in the fields of children such as protection and education. This step ensures the coordination of the activities done by various actors in the community. The fourth key action guides on the possible methods of understanding the daily routines and life of children and families. This step helps planners to discover the mismatch between the desired and the real daily life of the affected people. This measure would be fruitful in terms of finding whether the implemented programs are working effectively. It can be also beneficial to amend the programs and provide opportunities for people to rebuild their lives.

The next key action of the guideline deals with the available resources which can be applied to the affected community. In this context, the resources such as material resources, human resources and



media tools and facilities should be taken into account. It is recommended to make an inventory list to define the community resources. The key action number 6 includes determining the demands of children and the gap in services. In this stage, it is suggested to use maps and diagrams to find out areas where the least benefited groups are located. The seventh key action is about validating the results and findings through discussing them and receiving feedback in separate meetings with local leaders, groups of women, teens and men. Finally, in the last key action, the responsible partners for implementing and operating child friendly spaces should be chosen. The main criteria in the selection process are the capacity and the appropriateness of the partner. In this research, the assessment action sheet of the guideline is used to determine the risk increasing situations for children. The assessment action sheet targets children-related issues such as educational needs, protection and psycho-social threats, community-based and cultural structure of raising awareness about children's issues, beliefs and attitudes, gender roles and discrimination, language and ethnic minority.

#### *Realized approach*

In this study, the predefined and intended approach was to engage a high number of refugee children in the process of evaluating the various programs with the aim of achieving child friendly spaces. However, because of some restrictions, the methodology had to be modified. The restrictions can be categorized as predictable and unexpected ones. For instance, the Corona pandemic brought about an unexpected situation which acted as a barrier in the way of accessing refugee children. On the other hand, from the beginning of the project, it was somehow clear that, due to several reasons, the implementation of this project needs a longer time. Therefore, considering the introduced limitations, the realized approach of this research is the interview with experts and limited number of children participation, instead of a high level of children's engagement. The model of restriction, intended and realised approach of this research is depicted in figure 1.

#### *Contextualizing case - Setting*

This study was carried out about Afghan children in Golshahr neighbourhood in Mashhad from May 2020 for about 5 months. The main reason for choosing this section of the city is having a large number of Afghan residents among other neighbourhoods. Therefore, many charities, national and international refugee supporting organisations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) serve Afghan refugees in this neighbourhood with various services. Along with this reason, due to having a better condition in terms of urban amenities and services, Golshahr witnesses the strong presence of children and adolescents in urban spaces that need to be organized.

#### *Contextualizing case - Case study*

Golshahr neighbourhood is one of the oldest suburban regions located in the east of Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province, Iran (figure 2). This region used to be a village called 'Golshan' and today due to the large number of Afghan residents, is known as 'Kabul Shahr' or 'Kabul City' (Monsutti 2006; Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2012; Abbasi-Shavazi and Sadeghi 2015). Gradually, the agricultural lands in Golshahr had turned into rented residential houses and later became a part of the city of Mashhad. As reported by Monsutti, formal data shows 50 to 65 percent of the Golshahr population, about 35,000–40,000 individuals, are Afghan refugees and immigrants (Monsutti 2006). Since Mashhad is known as the first religious metropolis in the world, it has been the main target for Afghan refugees at any point of time. Zanganeh et al. state that a major portion of Afghan immigrants (86%) have been settled at the time of their arrival in the suburban areas of Mashhad such

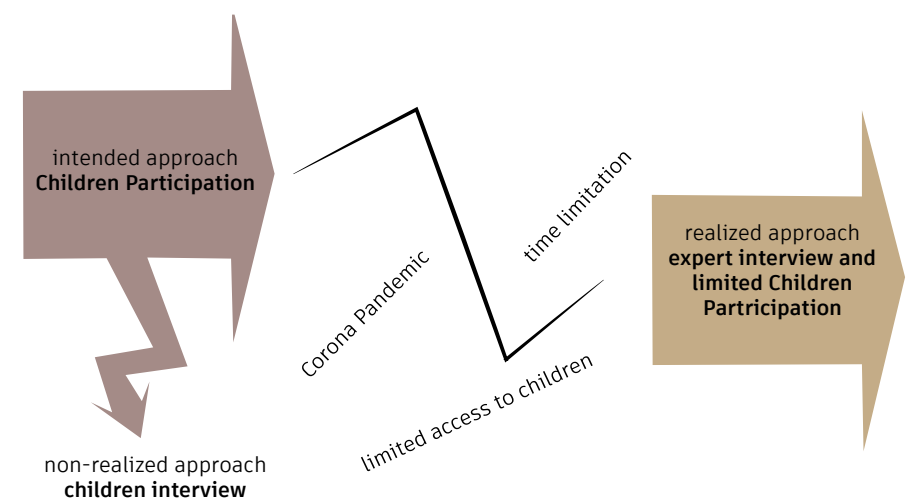


figure 1: The model of restrictions, intended and realized approach of the project

as Golshahr, Panj-tan, Ghaleh Sakhteman and Tollab. After the initial settlement, based on the reasons including factors of insecurity and low access to facilities and utilities, financial condition and the ability to afford a better house, cultural and ethnic difference, the housing problems, low income and family issues, around half of immigrant families have altered the residence more than once in Mashhad. Among the above mentioned regions, Golshahr neighbourhood is the most popular destination of these intra urban movements (Zanganeh, Hamidian and Karimi 2016).

### Participants

This paper illustrates the programs and activities which are designed for Afghan children by social workers, supporting associations and educators. For this purpose, a serie of semi-structured interviews were conducted with social workers being active in Hami Organisation (private supporting organisation for refugee women and children), Ghadir Charity, Talashgaran Group-Network (supporting organisation for street children), Imam Ali's Popular Students Relief Society. Moreover, connections have been built with the circle of Afghan social activists, journalists and photographers. In conjunction with this topic, the paper examines whether the activities of these groups can be implemented in urban context. In order to involve the children's point of view, Afghan boys and girls with the age of 7 to 12 years old are closely engaged through a storytelling method. In Iran, children go to elementary school from the age of 7 to 12, and based on the gathered data in the observation part, it is the same age that Afghan children in Golshahr neighbourhood start to explore their surrounding environment by themselves. They walk to school and return from it without being accompanied by adults, go through the residential streets, play in parks and green spaces and officially attend their neighbourhood spaces alone. For the expert interview, 17 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with 6 employees in supporting organisations from above mentioned NGOs, 9 social activists and 2 private stakeholders who run an art gallery and a youth center in the neighbourhood. In the children participation part, 6 Afghan refugee children aged between 7 to 12 have been engaged through a storytelling method.

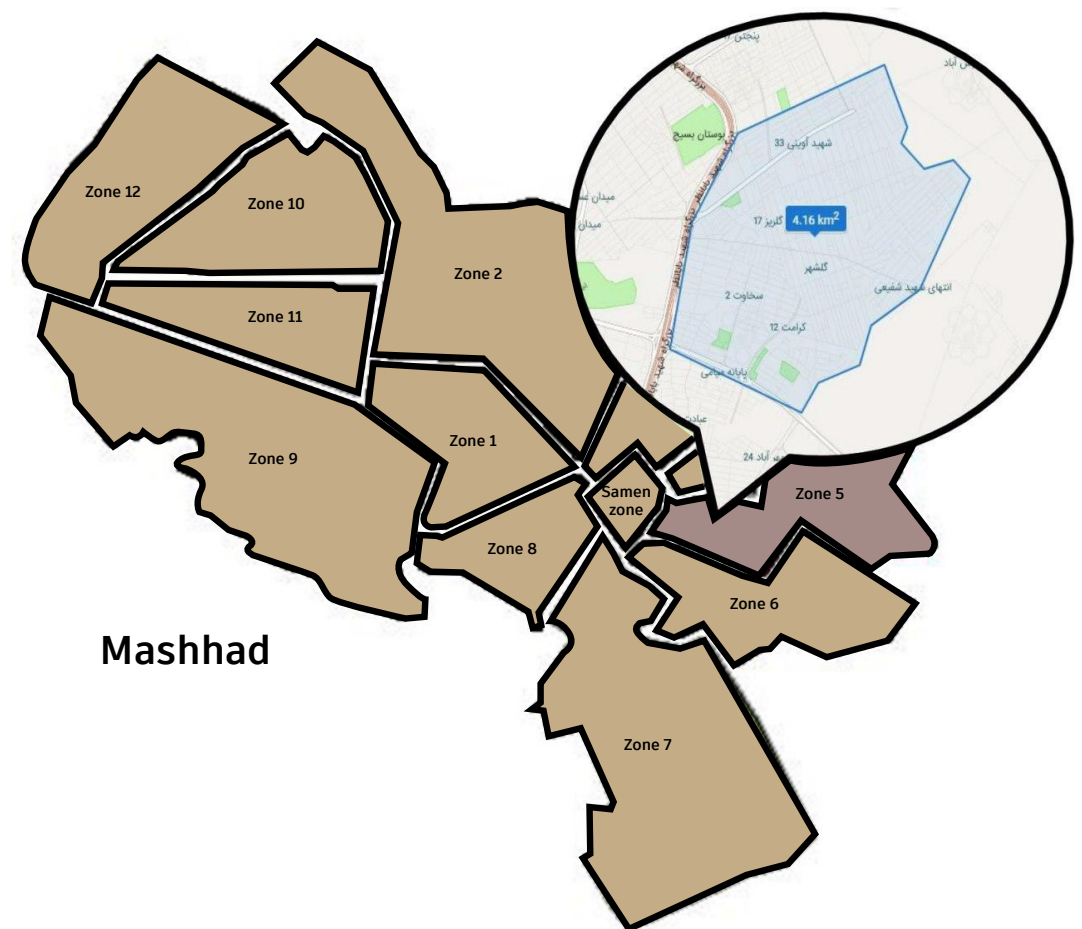


figure 2: The location of Golshahr neighbourhood in Mashhad

They were asked to imagine Golshahr in 10 years and were inquired to describe in which part of the neighbourhood they prefer to spend their freetime, how much time they would like to spend in the urban spaces, what type of activities they would do and what facilities they would have. To achieve more realistic results, some limitations, facilities and services of their neighbourhood were explained to them. For instance, they were told that they are not able to change the location of the neighbourhood in the city or cannot have a sea or forest there. They were provided with an appropriate amount of time to think about their story, and their parents were asked to inform the author when they were ready. For some children preparation took a couple of hours and for some others took 1 to 3 days. Due to the Corona pandemic situation all the interviews were carried out through Skype and telephone and their length ranged from approximately 45 to 75 minutes.

## Research results

The core concept of this paper is to enhance the quality of children's participation in the urban spaces through implementing the programs designed by stakeholders. To find out whether these programs are applicable, the type of children activities, the number of hours they spend in urban spaces, problems and barriers to achieve a safe and secure presence, the active groups in the field of children's rights in this region and the developing plans and programs were explored and the results are categorised in the following classification.

### *Children activities*

In Golshahr the number of children of each family is more than other families in Iran. Therefore, the families are not able to take all the children to school and bring them back. Besides, most of them cannot afford school transport services, thus the children usually walk to school alone. For one or two weeks, the families accompany them to teach them the way and after that they go back and forth on their own. This is the most common activity of children in urban spaces.



Figure 3: Children playing cards in the street, Golshahr neighbourhood in Mashhad (<https://bit.ly/3gDFalq>)

Younger children with the age of less than 12 years old usually play on the streets near their houses with neighbours' children without direct supervision of their parents. For the age range of this study, there is no difference between boys and girls in playing on the streets. Girls are allowed to play outside the house just like boys, however the type of games are different. Boys play games which involve them more physically with lots of movements and in the meantime, girls put a rug on the floor and play with dolls and play house games. It is conspicuous that the number of boys who play in the streets are more than girls, and it goes back to the limitations that families set for them.

“There is no age limitation for children to spend their freetime outside [in the urban spaces] but depending on the age, there is a difference between the spaces in which they play. For example, younger children's playing territories are alleys and streets near their houses. For older children this territory ranges up to farther streets and sometimes even extends to the border of the neighbourhood but they rarely go outside the living zone”. (Interview with Jalaludin, Social activist, experts in „international law and human rights, Golshahr)

In contrast with Iranian children who mostly play computer games, watch TV and spend their freetime with a tablet, Afghan children spend their freetime in open spaces and spend their natural energy. The type of games that children play in this neighbourhood is somehow different. These games which have come from the past generation are not very popular among children from other parts of the city, games like Tile bazi (marbles), Alak-dolak and playing cards (figure 3).

“Right now as I am talking with you, I am in the street and a bunch of children aged between 8 to 10 are playing a very simple game, they are running toward walls and touching them and returning. Just simple as I explained to you. In general, due to the low income of families, most of the children do not have access to modern gaming devices such as tablets, scooter and rollerblade.” (Interview with Hanieh, Social activist, freelancer journalist, Golshahr)

Since playing football needs no special equipment and children can play it everywhere, it is the most popular sport in Golshahr. In every corner of this neighbourhood, boys with different age ranges

gather and play football with the minimum facilities on the clay or asphalt fields even without a football goal. Most of the children have a dream of playing in club teams.

“ There will be a big football field with green grass close to our house and my cousins and I will play there everyday after school. We are going to become famous football players and will play in the World Cup against Messi” (Story from Mahdi, 8 years old)

### *Problems*

In Golshahr, children spend most of their freetime in the street rather than other spaces. They play with their peers in streets and alleys near their homes, but most of the streets in this neighbourhood fall short of the usual standard in terms of quality and safety. Narrow residential streets, absence of pedestrian areas in local streets and lack of traffic lights in intersections create an unsafe place for children.

“Cars will be far away from our streets, so we [my friends and I] can play without interruptions. We do not have to stop our game to let the cars pass .” (Story from Hasti, 9 years old)

“But in general, since people are aware of these dangers, in the residential streets and alleys drivers drive carefully and with the minimum speed. On the other hand, whenever a car passes, children who are playing in the street stop their play and clear the way for the car and then resume their game.” (Interview with Saleh, social activist, journalist, Golshahr)

Although the issue of drug dealing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods has always been a serious issue, statistics show that Golshahr has a better condition in comparison with other disadvantaged neighbourhoods. There is a district called ‘Ghale Kohne’ (old castle), which is known as a place for selling drugs. The existence of this area has led the rest of the neighbourhood to be less involved in drug dealing.

“Since nobody suspects children, some of them deliver drugs to the customer instead of their parents who are drug dealers. We acquitted them several times of these charges. This is one of the most difficult parts of our missions.” (Interview with Simin Mohammadian, Social activist in Ghadir Charity)

Golshahr encounters a severe shortage of green spaces such as parks for children or other social groups. Lack of local parks and playgrounds in an

accessible distance is almost mentioned by all interviewees. Children indicate that their ideal neighbourhood will have playgrounds in the vicinity of their homes and they do not need any permission for playing there all the day.

### *Supporting associations and the residents programs and plans*

To benefit from the services of supporting organisations, people need no identity papers. These associations provide services for every child. There are no priorities; hence every family which is in need is eligible. On the other hand, the residents invest in the children’s social training themselves while they believe the measures taken by Iranian government are not sufficient and comprehensive. Therefore, they do not have trust in state services; for instance there is a cultural center in the neighbourhood which was founded by the government budget many years ago but Afghan immigrants do not trust them because the owners are Iranian.

### *Education*

Iranian Homes’ under the auspices of the Imam Ali’s Relief Society are located right in the problematic neighbourhood and provide a wide range of services for all residents. For supporting children, they concentrate on social and educational issues. They hold pedagogical classes for school dropouts and students with poor standing as well as extracurricular classes in art and sport. Additionally, Hami organisation has started their activities with the establishment of a school for students who have left school for any reason such as lack of residence document, having an age higher than the educational level, educational gap and financial problems.

“We persist in having a continuous presence in the neighbourhood. Our educational classes are held everyday because in this way we could be able to build the trust between us and them [refugee children]. They should see us everyday, so we will no longer be strangers to them. On the other hand, we can somehow establish security there.” (Interview with Maryam Mahmoodi, Social activist in Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society).

There are several circles of local communities who arrange recreational and educational programs and workshops for children in Golshahr. These plans are



Figure 4: Children national day fest, Hami organisation in Mashhad (<https://bit.ly/3gKl5d1>)

carried out voluntarily by ordinary people without the help of official and governmental institutions. Mostly, their programs are free of charge for Afghan children, however sometimes a small fee for renting the venue is collected. Some of the residents devote a lot of attention to children's future and put efforts in educating children both in cultural and social aspects.

"I am a professional photographer and so far I have held many photography workshops for all age groups, for amateurs and advanced. In this regard, other people similar to me, who are experts in a special field hold classes and workshops in their realm of expertise like story writing, film making, poetry,...." (Interview with Reza, social activist, freelancer photographer, Golshahr)

#### *Sport and recreational activities*

Imam Ali's Relief Society has established a professional football league for boys, in which 'Iranian Homes' from different cities have a team. They provide Afghan boys with equipment and facilities such as football shoes, clothes, professional coach and

standard field. Moreover, Talashgaran Charity holds entertainment programs such as puppet theaters for children on various occasions like international children's day and national holidays. They operate these kinds of performances in public spaces to be accessible for every child. Also Hami organisation which has the most organised recreational programs for Afghan children operates their plans inside the Hami branch. The main problem in this regard is the fact that Hami is located outside Golshahr neighbourhood and practically, children have limited access to the services of this organisation. However, their charity bazaar, where Afghan children also have stalls, is very popular among Golshahr children.

#### *Social workshops*

To develop trust among residents and encourage them to attend their programs and workshops, supporting organisations use the cooperation of people of the neighbourhood. Hami has operated a series of plans under the name of 'Social Facilitators'. In these workshops, elite immigrants from the community were invited and attended training classes in different fields. After finishing the training courses, the social facilitators went into the neighbourhood and taught the immigrants what they had learnt. Since locals can have better influence on the residents rather than other instructors, this measure can be more effective.

"We have held several 'social life skills' workshops for children and teenagers to improve the quality of their social life. Life skills training workshop has been carried out with the theme of effective communication and refusal skills, 'skill of saying No', for juvenile and adolescents" (Interview with Sabzekar, Hami Association, Tolab St. Mashhad).

Some local residents by designing group activities and engaging children in educational programs teach them teamwork and social behaviours. In the meantime, by taking part in such workshops children are staying away from dangers lurking around them. One Afghan refugee explained how he kept the children in his family away from teenage gangs by providing them with recreational activities. "We arranged to play football together every Friday, after that we gathered and dubbed a movie... it took a year until we finished the movie but they learnt many good social behaviours. After a while, other parents

asked me to hold these workshops for other children as well. I rented two classes in an institute and taught them computer skills. But the admission capacity was limited ” (Interview with Vaseq, animator, Moria camp greece)

### **Conclusion**

The type of social problems that Afghan refugee children in Golshahr struggle with are to some extent different from what the similar groups experience in other cities. In cities where Afghan immigrants and refugees are legally not allowed to reside, they are severely isolated because of their resident status. Due to their illegal dwelling, they are always distressed for being repatriated. Therefore, they decrease their social activities and even avoid having any communication with supporting non-governmental organisations. Moreover, Afghan immigrants and refugees generally settle in suburban districts of the cities known as disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where a mixture of the many ethnic and social groups live. In such districts, they are usually exposed to bullying by other foreigners.

“Among families who live in the neighbourhoods with social problems, Afghan families have been bullied from other ethnic groups like Kolis, Tork, Kurd.” (Interview with Maryam Mahmoodi, Social activist in Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society)

Nevertheless, the condition of Afghan children in Golashahr is utterly different; the majority of the population are Afghan immigrants and the social and ethnic characteristics of the neighbourhood is reasonably integrated. The neighbourhood is very lively and there is a strong unity and empathy among the inhabitants which has formed during more than 40 years.

How entering the neighbourhood and building relation with residents are the most important part of starting activities in refugee neighbourhoods for supporting associations. To build trust among refugees firstly they should begin their projects in places which refugees frequently attend such as mosques. The experiences reveal that in the beginning, locals have no trust in any governmental and non-governmental organisation. Even when they use the services, they gave the wrong address and telephone number because they were afraid that we would introduce them to the Foreigners’ Office

to deport them to Afghanistan. Furthermore, the persistent presence of the supporting association in the neighbourhood is crucial, in a way that they should regularly operate their programs and workshops to become a reliable neighbour for residents. On the other hand, experiences show that the accessibility of the programs plays an essential role in making children and their parents interested in using them. Therefore, it is important that supporting associations be located in the neighbourhood center to be able to provide services to a greater number of children. The results indicate if the above mentioned issues have been figured out, Afghan families will be eager to use the services presented by both supporting organisations and social activists. They prefer their children take part in such activities rather than aimlessly spend time in the street. Otherwise, they state that due to their other preoccupations, they cannot supervise their children during taking part in these programs. Thus, it is necessary for supporting organisations to be responsible for engaging children and taking care of their presence.

Conducting this research was affected by some limitations. The Refugee community of Golshahr neighbourhood is relatively closed and finding connection, establishing relationships and building trust in the Afghan immigration network is somewhat difficult and challenging. Alongside this problem, access to the information, contact and interview with organisations was done through a cumbersome bureaucracy which took weeks for starting the expert interviews. The Corona pandemic caused some restraints as well in terms of children participation.

In addition to prior studies, in this research, a mixed method containing interview and storytelling has been used in the context of refugees and immigrants in Iran. Applying these methods provided the opportunity to contribute the voices of children as well as experts in discovering the problems related to presence of children in urban spaces. The results obtained from storytelling are almost in the line with the ones achieved from interviewing experts and activists.

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# Children's perception of their City during the COVID-19 Pandemic from different cultural backgrounds

Arnisa Halili

## Abstract

Children have been suffering the most under the global COVID-19 measures. However, existing research on pandemics has proved that children's perspectives get mostly neglected. This paper looks at children from different geographical, social and cultural backgrounds and how they perceive their City during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three cases of three-years-old children from Australia, Germany and Kosovo will be presented. A particular sensitive methodology was applied to respect the current hygiene measures: Parents have conducted semi-structured interviews with their children and let them draw their City during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper highlights spatial spaces and symbols such as the playground, day-care centre, balcony, window and front door that were characteristic for the children's perception. Despite the different cultural backgrounds, it identified the lack of social contacts as a key problem for children. Lastly, the paper mentions relevant outdoor activities for children in the City during a pandemic and proposes to take them into account for further research.

\*Globally, the number of children living in monetary poor households could increase by 117 million by the end of 2020" (UNICEF Data 2020).

\*\* Three-year-old children count to the Preoperational Stage, according to Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (1936). During this period, children think symbolically and cannot take the viewpoint of others (McLeod, 2018). It is worth mentioning that the interviewed children are not seen as representatives of their countries but as individuals.

\*\*\*The country selection is primarily guided by the accessibility of this age group children due to the pandemic.

## Introduction

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, children have been and are still suffering the most (Vergin 2020)\*. Schools and playgrounds were closed, social distancing and stay-at-home orders decreed and unexpected routines became part of their life. The pandemic highlights how few places there are for children in the City.

Children's views on pandemics are mostly neglected (Braunack-Mayer et al. 2010, 9). However, it is essential to include the children since pandemics count as one of the most significant global threats in future (Global Preparedness Monitoring Board 2019). Therefore, the paper addresses the youngest members of our society and their perception of their neighbourhood during the pandemic. Since it is a global crisis, the paper is located in a global context. I interviewed three day-care centre children\*\* from different geographical, cultural and social backgrounds: Australia, Germany and Kosovo\*\*\*. The following research question has guided the paper: How do children from different geographical, social and cultural backgrounds perceive their City during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The paper takes a children's rights perspective stating children have the right to participate (UNCRC 1989). The research funds on the idea that children's participation in topics related to them can lead to positive child outcomes (Adelman et al. 1984, Allen et al. 1984, McPherson & Thorne 2000, Nicholas et al. 2 in Koller et al. 2010, 370). Moreover, "children are capable of participating in complex decisions" (King and Cross 1989 in Koller 2010, 371) and influencing their own lives (Noland and Raban 2015, 13). Their relationships with adults are characterised by negotiation. Thus, the paper also looks at children from a post-structuralist perspective (Foucault 1980 in *ibid.*), taking into account that there is no single definition of children or childhood (*ibid.*). Further, our idea of childhood or children influences research

with children, and “every construction of ‘childhood’ is exercising power” (Foucault 1980 in *ibid.*). Special attention is also paid to the language, the expression of emotion and movement of the children in the study, as language shapes our reality (Foucault et al. 2005, 1027).

The hypothesis at the beginning of the research is that the three children’s perception of their City during the lockdown will show similarities despite the different cultural backgrounds. The work is divided into a theoretical and empirical part. First, the current state of research will be presented. Then the paper will describe the selected methodology, which consists of an interview and sketching process. Afterwards, the paper gives an insight into the empiricism based on selected statements and the drawings of the children. Lastly, a conclusion summarises the findings and provides an outlook on further research.

### State of Research

Before COVID-19, pandemics like HIV or SARS have occurred. Hence, there is already research being done to study the impact of pandemics on children. Among them is the analysis of Klaus Geiselhart, Thando D. Gwebu and Fred Krüger from 2008, who are working on the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The focus of their research is the changing relationships and communication between children and their family members due to AIDS/HIV. Donna Koller et al. (2010) acknowledged in the context of the SARS outbreak in 2003 that children are barely included in discussions on health care issues and pandemic planning. Koller et al. research “exposed a range of children’s experiences associated with the outbreaks as well as recommendations for future pandemic planning” (Koller et al. 2010, 369). The children’s recommendations included policies and guidelines regarding psychosocial care, the containment of infections and management of different resources (*ibid.*). However, the spatial level and spaces for children in the City were not addressed.

Several papers were published during the COVID-19 pandemic. One was a study by Forsa on behalf of Save the Children on children’s thoughts during the pandemic (Vergin 2020)<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>.

Rakhi and Shailendra K. Saxena released a study in spring 2020 on preparing children for pandemics.

The authors take a different perspective on children than in the present paper. They believe that many children are not emotionally stable enough and need to be prepared for the pandemic and the measures accompanying it (Saxena and Saxena 2020, 187). Children adopt the behaviour of adults during the pandemic (*ibid.*). Therefore, adults need to rethink their roles as “parents, teachers, educational institutes, social media, and international children’s organisations” (*ibid.*).

Lastly, Rositsa Milkova’s and Cath Larkins’ paper “on the impact of COVID-19 of Roma Children and the barriers to their health and wellbeing and the potential of participatory responses” must be mentioned (Milkova and Larkins 2020, 1). They took an analytical perspective and reported about professionals, working with young Roma. Further, they formulated recommendations on “how vulnerable individuals could access preventative health-related services” on a European level (*ibid.*, 9). However, the children were not directly involved in the research.

The studies show that children’s views on pandemics are mostly neglected. Furthermore, there is a significant focus on school-age children. The spatial dimension concerning pandemics is also left out. Findings from the state of research have led the paper to involve a younger target group directly in the research. In the next chapter, the paper will present the methodology.

### Methodology

Children are less predictable than adults in interviews, which poses a particular challenge for researchers. Furthermore, social-distancing orders arose due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, a particularly sensitive method had to be identified to conduct the research.

The interview partners were three nearly four-year-old children from Bonn (Germany), Prizren (Kosovo) and Geelong (Australia)<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>. This age group is particularly interesting because they are in an egocentric phase, where they think symbolically and cannot take the viewpoint of others (McLeod 2018). At the same time, however, the children have already developed a strong speech flow.

The idea was that the interviews take place in a familiar environment with the children. Moreover, unnecessary travel should be avoided, and hygiene

\*\*\*\* 76% of children interviewed answered that they missed their friends (*ibid.*). 59 % felt bored.

\*\*\*\*\* The selected children can be considered as average children regarding their cultural backgrounds (e.g. no disruptive family relationships, parents live together).

standards respected. Therefore, the parents have interviewed the children and video recorded them at home. Although the selected interview partners can already speak fluently, free or narrative interviews can still be too demanding for children under five (Heinzel 2000 in Mey 2003, 10). Hence, the paper has decided to use the method of semi-structured interviews and provided the parents with guiding questions (ibid.). Following questions were asked: What does Corona mean to the child? What was different during Corona in your neighbourhood? The parents were allowed to modify the questions according to the child (ibid., 5). Besides the interview, I also wanted to integrate „childlike products“ to gain insights into children’s perspectives (ibid.). For this reason, the children had to draw in a last step how they perceived their neighbourhood during Corona and explain their drawing.

The interviews were conducted between the end of June and the beginning of July 2020. Thus, the children were still very close to the occurrence of the lockdown in their countries. The duration of the interviews depended on the willingness of the child. The combination of methods of verbal and non-verbal exchange in a familiar environment aimed at following the question on *How do children from different geographical, social and cultural backgrounds perceive their City during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

## **Evaluation of data material**

### *COVID-19 course and measurements*

In the following chapter, the work will analyse the interviews conducted and sketches drawn by the children. Findings must be seen against the background that the pandemic has taken different courses in the respective countries. Measures tackling the pandemic have also differed from country to country.

Australia has so far come through the crisis well. However, the state of Victoria, where the City of Geelong is located, has been hit harder. The government has implemented particularly strict measures, including the demarcation of the border with neighbouring New South Wales (Senzel 2019). There are also exit restrictions for residents (ibid.). Kosovo initially had a strict curfew, which was lifted

in June. Since then, infection rates have been rising and remain uncontrollable until today (ZDF 2020). In March, schools and day-care centres were closed in most Länder in Germany (MDR 2020). The subsequent lockdown in Germany was softer than in Australia and Kosovo.

What all three countries have in common is that schools, day-care centres and playgrounds were closed for a certain period. Furthermore, there were social distancing orders which remain until today.

### *Case: Australian Child*

The first interview I wanted to conduct did not take place in the original sense, but the paper decided to incorporate the experience still.

The interview request was initially not answered. Through social media, I learned that one parent of the child is critical towards Corona. It seemed that the interview request even triggered strong reactions of the parent: Shortly after my message, the parent expressed anger about Corona being everywhere in various posts and that even the three-year-old child was asking about it. Thereupon, I again sought the conversation with the parent to show understanding for the situation. Also, I wanted to find out whether the interview would take place.

In the end, it turned out that the parent does not talk to the child about the „C-word“. Although the child is asking about Corona because his daily routines have changed, the parent is trying to protect it from the discourse about Corona and create a “normal life”. The parent recommended interviewing school-aged children instead because the child is not able to speak about such a topic now.

In the end, the situation revealed an interesting perspective on “children” and “childhood”. The paper assumes there has been no negotiation process between the parent and the child if the child wants to participate in the interview. Instead, the parent has decided that the child would be unable to answer because of age. However, the child is almost four years old and has a substantial flow of speech. Moreover, the child is in an age phase where it cannot take on the perspective of others. Despite the parent’s attempts to protect the child from the „C-word“, the child experiences changes in their surroundings and asks for more information. Nevertheless, it was significant that this situation was part of the research

process. The course of events shows that „COVID-19“ is a sensitive topic for children and that the measures taken have also had a strong emotional impact on children. Therefore, not every child is prepared to speak on COVID-19.

#### *Case: Albanian child\*\*\*\*\* - Interview*

The interview with the Albanian child took place in the evening at its grandparents' house. It was sitting on a rocking-chair. The parent started the interview by saying "Let's talk a bit about the virus". The child pulled a face and looked angry. The reaction was followed by the sentence "the virus is really bad". After a long pause she added "very very bad". In the following, the parent wanted to dig deeper and see what the child knows about the virus. Therefore, the parent was asking how did the virus happen and why people are getting sick. The child had an immediate answer for this question: She stated angry, that everyone is sick. According to the child, people didn't wash their hands, feets and their bodies regularly. Therefore, they all ended up sick.

By mentioning that "everyone" is sick, she showed that she is aware about the global pandemic and that everyone is affected. The parent then asked how they can protect themselves from the virus. Here the child was referring to wearing masks and washing hands regularly. Furthermore, she continued demonstrating washing hands correctly and that she uses much soap. To this point, social-distancing orders and the lockdown were not mentioned. This might be due to the fact that the interview took place about one month after the lockdown in Kosovo.

The parent continued asking about the virus and wanted to know how the child imagines the virus. At this point in the interview, it becomes clear that the term "virus" is difficult to understand for the child. The answer to this question remains "The virus is a virus". It repeats the question of the mother in its own words "what should it mean? What should it mean?" and comes to an end that she doesn't know the answer. The parent is not satisfied with this answer and keeps on asking how she imagines the virus. At this moment, the child was becoming impatient and moved on the chair. She responded "I imagine the virus with with with with with Shpuma". Thereby she is getting louder and louder. The word "Shpuma" seems to be an invention of the child. The

parent asked what is meant by the term "Shpuma". The child only demonstrated with her fingers how big the virus is. Afterwards, the child claps her hands as it would have found the answer to the question.

Already at this point of the interview specifics when interviewing children become visible. Not only is the child moving and showing reactions during the interview, but she also invented its own words for the virus that seems indescribable. "Shpuma" might refer to "arms", because she later in the interviews draws the virus with many arms. It also might have wanted to say "shkuma" which means "foam" in Albanian. This aspect of the interview remains unclear.

After the hand-clapping, the parent summarised one more time the perception of the virus and measurements that need to be taken regarding COVID-19. Thereupon, the child agreed on the parents summary.

In the following, the spatial dimension of COVID-19 is being discussed with the child. The parent asked what she could see from the balcony of her grandparents during the lockdown. Although the lockdown was a month ago, the question caused sad feelings for the child. She said with a very sad voice that everything was closed. Every playground was closed, and there were no children outside. The parent continued by asking if the child has missed the playground during that time. Her answer seems very thoughtful. She mentions that she has toys inside, but she also wanted to go outside to play but there is the virus.

Here, the interview becomes particularly exciting: It is challenging for the child to talk about the past lockdown, while COVID-19 is not yet completed. Instead of saying the virus was outside, as she has done in the previous course of the interview, she pronounced the virus is outside. The end of the lockdown does not mean the end of the virus for the child. Furthermore, the child continues saying that it was never outside during that time and only used the balcony to look at the City. Here it can be interpreted that the child wanted to show it is behaving according to the rules.

#### *Albanian Child - Sketch*

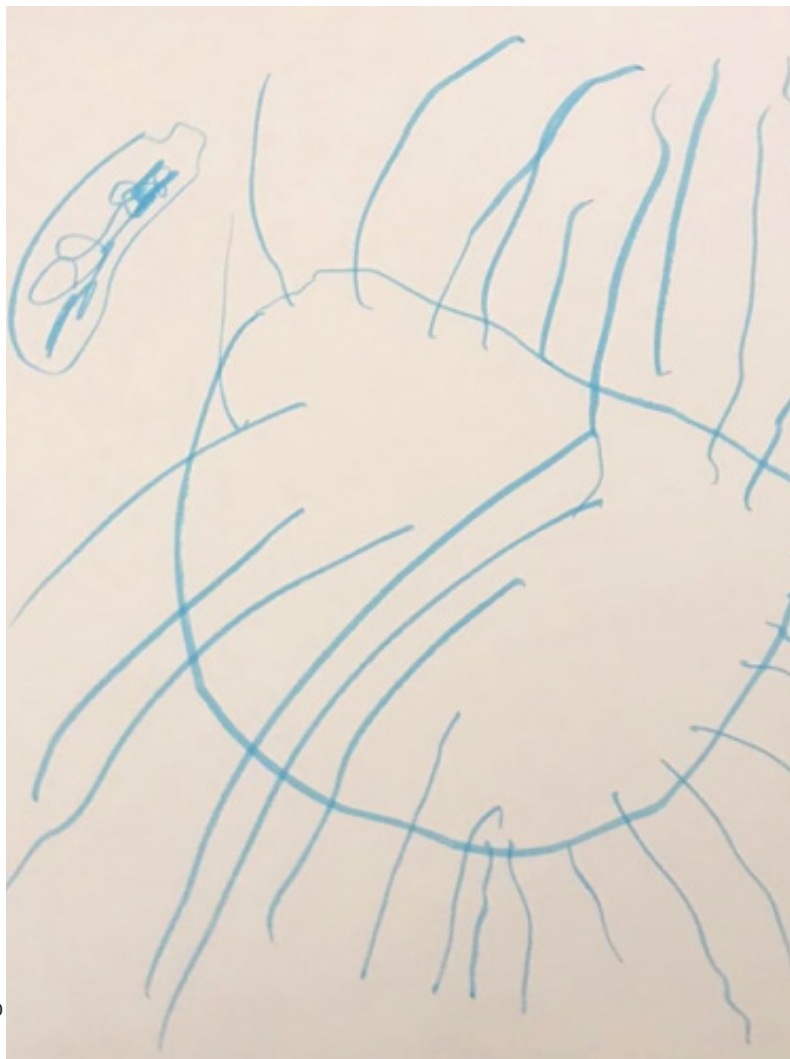
The sketching part of the interview brought the child much joy. Still, the child was in the same room and was offered by the parent various colours and paper to draw how she perceived the City of Prizren during

\*\*\*\*\*The interview initially took place in the Albanian language. The author of the paper translated the findings mentioned in the chapter.

the lockdown. The child decided to use the colour blue, and firstly drew a vast circle, representing the virus. Again, it mentions the word “Shpuma”, which might mean “arms”, because she is drawing the virus with many arms. The virus occupies the most significant space in the picture and can be seen much larger than the City. The City is merely painted into a corner.

Here it could be interpreted that the virus is taking over the whole City, and as she said in the interview over „Everyone“. Still, the scale of the virus and the City may also be because children at this age cannot think proportionally. This leaves a margin for interpretation.

When describing the drawing of Prizren, specific places and objects became important. The child drew the river of the City, playgrounds, her balcony and her front door. These objects and places can be read as significant spatial characteristics during the lockdown for the child. The fascinating aspect of the drawing is that there is no person in the picture. Also, no mask or soap was drawn in the picture, which the child mentioned before. Thus, the child states that



\*\*\*\*\* The interview initially took place in the German language. The author of the paper translated the findings mentioned in the chapter.

Figure 1: Prizren, Kosovo during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

nobody was outside during the lockdown.

Many narratives from the interview can be seen in the drawing, like the balcony or the lack of people. However, the significance of the river and the front door was added. Also, it can be interpreted to the picture that the virus plays a dominant role in the child's spatial perception. In the end, the child was happy about her drawing and seemed satisfied.

#### *Albanian Child - Summary*

When analysing the interview and sketch, it becomes visible that the virus causes strong emotion for the child. In the beginning, the virus was too abstract to describe. The answers were often accompanied by emotions like anger and sadness or movement (swinging on the rocking chair, touching the feet, and so on). Later the child finds a way to visualise the Virus. During the sketching, her spatial perspective during the lockdown became more evident: Playgrounds, the river, the balcony and the front door were particularly important.

The speaking part, as well as the sketching part of the interview, has shown that the child knows the virus is everywhere and affects everyone. Talking about the past, although the virus is currently still outside, proved to be a particular challenge for her.

It is worth mentioning that the interviewer played a significant role. The parent was patient, provided breaks during the conversation and was sensitive to the topic. Furthermore, the parent summarised the answers of the child and asked for her opinion. The language used by the parent was adopted to the language of the child. Also, the familiar environment in the living room of the grandparents helped to ease the situation of the interview.

#### *German Child\*\*\*\*\* - Interview*

The interview with the German child took place in the kitchen just before dinner. The parent started by asking the child directly what Corona means to him. The child reacted annoyed with “I don't know”. The parent then helped and added “It is a virus”. The child agreed on it with “yes”.

Then, the parent asked where the virus is located. The child answered with “In Germany” and waved his arms to the sky. The parent continued asking details about where exactly. “In the sky”, he added. This answer of the child seems particularly interesting

because it realised the virus is transmitted through the air.

The parent wanted to reactivate the memory of the child and asked what has been different during Corona. Here, the child referred to social-distancing orders. He was not allowed to visit his grandpa, and only his father was allowed to visit the grandpa. Later, he was again allowed to visit his grandpa. By later, he might refer to the time after the lockdown. Also, the child added that it was only possible to visit with a face mask.

Afterwards, he is speaking about his time at day-care centre. At the beginning, all his friends were there (mentions all the names and his own name). Then he pauses. The parent had to ask what happened. “Corona came and nobody was there anymore”, the child responded. “And who else was there in the day-care centre?” the parent continued The child said only him and two others. The parent wanted to know why exactly the three of them were allowed to be in the day-care centre. He reacts to this with “due to Corona and we still wanted to ride our bikes”. The parent wanted to point out that the children remaining in day-care centre have parents with system relevant occupations. However, he did not react to this and instead brought in an activity that was important for children during the lockdown: riding a bicycle. At this point, it is notable that the child directs the conversation.

When asked again what was different while Corona outside, the child reacted angrily with „I don't know“ and hit the table with the cutlery. This question seems challenging to him. The father reacted to this with another question “what did adults have to wear outside during Corona?”. The child said face masks and stated that it didn't have to wear a face mask because it is a young child. Only when it was visiting his grandpa, he had to wear a mask. The interview ends with this statement.

#### *German Child - Sketch*

The sketching part also took place at the dining table. The sketch shows the child's house, an empty street and free-standing windows. It reveals significant aspects of the child's perception during the lockdown, which did not come out during the conversation. It can be seen that the own house, as well as windows to look out, played an essential role. It might indicate

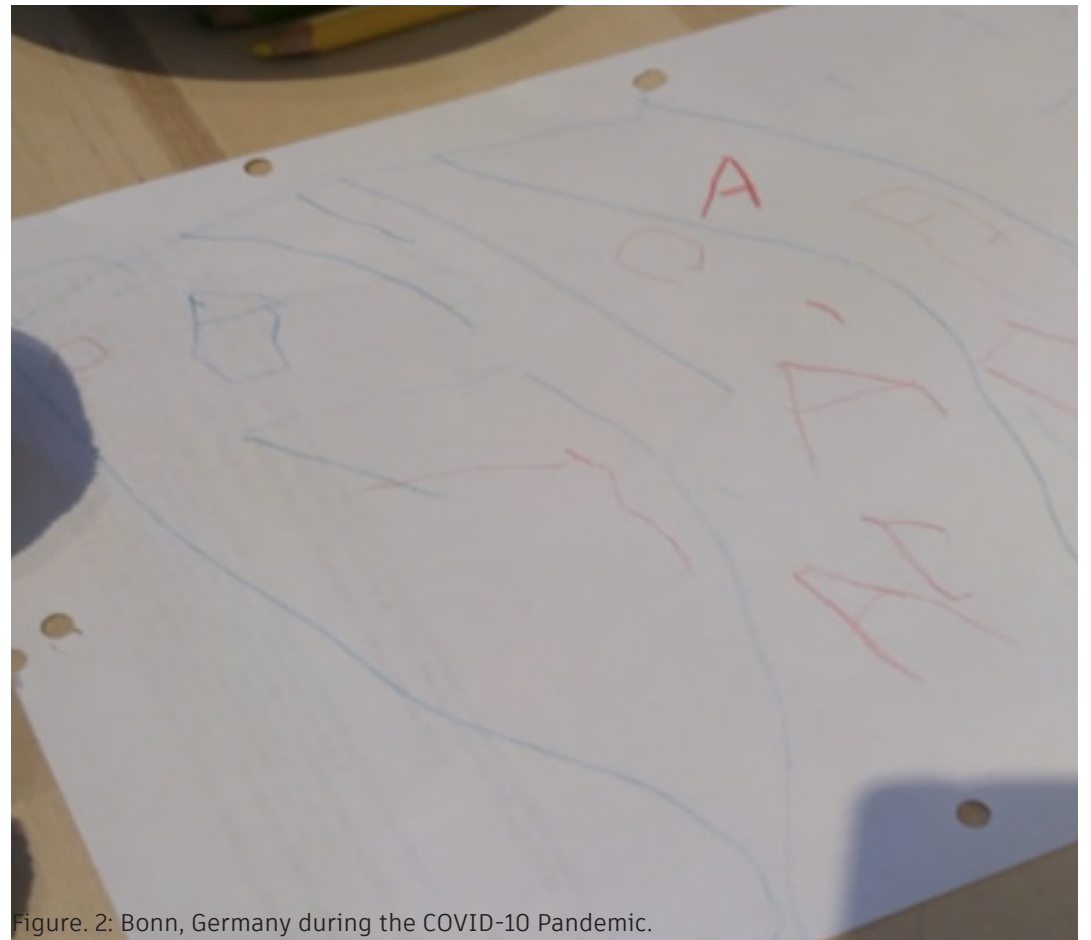


Figure. 2: Bonn, Germany during the COVID-10 Pandemic.

that the child has spent much time at home and little outside during the lockdown.

Also, the lack of social contacts is addressed: Although the child mentions all its friends and his grandparents in the interview, they are not visible in the picture. The street he had drawn was empty. This indicates that the child perceived its surroundings as empty during the lockdown.

#### *German Child - Summary*

Similar to the Albanian child, the German child first reacts with „I don't know“ to the question what the virus is. It seems that the term “virus” is too abstract for the child. Nevertheless, he surprised the interviewer by knowing that the virus transmits through the air (“sky”). In conversation with the child, we see that he finds it challenging to name spatial changes in the neighbourhood during the lockdown. When asked what was different during Corona, the child refers mainly to the social-distancing orders. The grandparents and friends were suddenly out of his everyday life. He can reveal the spatial changes during the lockdown only when drawing the house, the empty street and the windows.

However, the child's answers must be seen in relation

to the context of the interview. The parent decided to conduct the interview on a sensitive topic just before dinner. As a result, the child was impatient and even had to comment on his plate (“I don’t want Pesto”) during the interview.

At the same time, the interview also demonstrated that the parent had a specific idea of the child’s answers. When the child was speaking about the three remaining children at day-care centre the parent wanted him to say that those children have parents with system relevant occupations. Also, the parent was not satisfied with the picture of the child, although it revealed exciting aspects of its spatial perception during the lockdown. The parent contacted me after the interview and said that the child might be too young to answer the questions.

Nevertheless, it can be said that the interview with the German child has brought an exciting perspective. The child relates its perception of COVID-19 above all with social contacts such as friends and activities such as cycling. A different environment and time might have eased the interview situation for the child.

### **Conclusion**

The following paper has discussed the question How do children from different geographical, social and cultural backgrounds perceive their City during the COVID-19 pandemic? Thereby, the paper put forward the hypothesis that the children’s perception during the pandemic will show similarities despite the different backgrounds. A specific focus was set on the lockdown, but the children were also able to incorporate current perceptions of the pandemic. Three day-care centre children were selected as the target group. The paper would now like to look at the core findings of the research and reflect on the methodology.

### *Research Results*

The hypothesis put forward has been proven correct. Although the children set different priorities in their interviews, similarities could be found. The response of the Australian interview partner made clear that COVID-19 is a sensitive issue for children. The sensitive dimension of the topic also became apparent when interviewing the Albanian and German child. The term „Corona“ evoked strong emotions such as

annoyance, anger and sadness in them. Further, the term „virus“ was abstract for the children at first sight. The Albanian as well as the German child have first responded with “I don’t know” when their parents asked them what Corona meant to them. Still, after offering them some time and hints, they revealed exciting knowledge about Corona. The Albanian child noted that everyone is affected and Corona is located outside and continues until nowadays. Similarly, the German child located Corona in the air which demonstrated that it knows how the virus gets transmitted. Both interview partners were using the mask as a symbol for the pandemic.

Among the first reactions of the two children was that they missed social contacts. The Albanian child mentioned that no children were outside. The German child described in more details all its friends and the grandparents he was missing. The lack of social contact, especially during the lockdown, was also reflected in the drawings: The sketches showed no people in the City.

Both children found it easier to display the spatial effects of the lockdown by drawing. The sketching revealed spatial symbols that the children had not previously mentioned in the conversation. These symbols were a river and a street. Further objects mentioned were the front door and windows. As for the German child, the empty street played a major role in the picture while the Albanian child drew the river of the City and a playground.

However, the drawings differed in one aspect: the Albanian child drew a huge coronavirus, whereas this remains invisible in the picture of the German child. The Albanian child also used an invented term („Shpuma“) to explain the coronavirus.

The conversation about the spatial changes in the City during the pandemic also revealed differences: The Albanian child referred more to the appearance of the City as “empty” whereas the German child addressed activities like cycling that could be practiced during the pandemic. However, the most significant difference was the place and time at which the children were interviewed. The Albanian child found itself in a much more relaxed situation than the German child. Parents’ expectations of their children also shaped the situation. The German parent as well as the Australian parent, had the opinion that the child is not able to answer the questions, whereas the

Albanian parent had fewer expectations of the child. In the end, both children were able to participate in the research and explain their perception.

To sum up, COVID-19 is a topic that arouses strong emotions in children. A lack of social contacts mainly characterised their perception of the City during the pandemic. Symbols like the river, empty streets, the balcony, the door and the window have taken on a special significance during the lockdown. Also, places like day-care and playgrounds were essential for the children.

Since pandemics count as one of the most significant global threats in future it is essential to include children directly in research. For further research, it would be interesting to focus on activities that can take place outdoors for children despite the pandemic.

### *Reflection*

In the given COVID-19 circumstances, the method chosen has proved to be fruitful. Nevertheless, several aspects need to be respected for further research. In order to give general statements, stricter guidelines concerning time, place and breaks must be communicated to the parents. It would also have been exciting to do the interviews myself. The children would have probably given different answers if I had been present.

The physical distance was not the only barrier when analysing the empirical data. Also, the translation from Albanian to English and German to English has influenced the results. Every translation involves the risk of losing information.

The priorities set by the children also depended, for example, on the course of the pandemic in their country. In Kosovo, there was no day-care centre for children of parents in systemically relevant occupations, whereas this was the case in Germany. It might be one reason why the Albanian child did not mention the day-care centre. Due to the limited scope of the paper, the paper has not addressed the gender aspect when analysing the interviews, which is also essential to take into account for further research. Lastly, research on children must always consider to what extent researchers can take on the perspectives of children.

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# Children's participation in protests: cases in Mexico City

Cecilio Pedro Secunza Schott

## Abstract

The global scale 'Fridays for Future' movement signified in 2019 a major milestone to children's involvement into social and political issues, normally led from an adult perspective. This paper looks at the recent increase of children's participation in protests in Mexico City, as well as in a worldwide scope. It first examines the current framework of children's right to peaceful protest through international agreements and Mexican domestic legislation. Applying theoretical frameworks on childhood, children's citizenship and children's participation, the paper analyses significant cases of protests in Mexico City, in order to identify aspects that support shaping a "protest child-friendly city".

## Introduction

Protests as a manifestation of collective discontent against injustice, repression, or demands for a more democratic society, have been present throughout history in different forms and contexts. Whether fighting against colonialism, for labour rights, anti-racism, anti-war, anti-communism, anti-capitalism, among others; protest has become the default direct action in the pursuit of changing social, political, and economic paradigms (Article 19-INGO 2016).

While participation of children within protests has also existed in the past, there has been a substantial intensification of their involvement in recent history all over the globe (A. Daly 2013). Although this statement has particularly positive implications such as their impact on social and political change, it also raises questions and concerns over their right-to-protest and safety (ibid.). In this sense, UNICEF has reiterated its concern for the wellbeing and safety of children participating in protests that, in specific cases, have turned violent (UNICEF 2019).

Cities, as main scenarios for protests, are obliged to ensure the necessary conditions for children to engage in such events with complete security and full guarantee of their rights, that is, a "protest child-friendly city".

UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities Initiative describes this urban concept as the "...city, town or community in which the voices, needs, priorities, and rights of children are an integral part of public policies, programmes, and decisions." (UNICEF 2020). Moreover, the initiative designates such city as the one where children can "express their opinions and influence decisions that affect them" as well as "participate in family, cultural, city/community and social life" (ibid.).

Mexico City has historically had a deep-rooted protest culture. It is setting not only to local demonstrations but also hosts incoming protest groups from all over the country. From 2015 to 2017, more than ten

thousand demonstrations were registered in the city, accounting for 9 events on average per day (Arredondo 2018). Following a trend similar to the international one, participation of children in such events has increased substantially for the past years. Through relevant cases such as the 'Fridays for Future'-movement, the #ContingenteCarreola demonstration group, and protests for children with cancer; this work aims to examine what are the aspects of participation of children within protests in Mexico City and how do these aspects shape the construction of a "protest child-friendly city".

For the purposes of this paper, the term "Children" is understood referring collectively to what the CRC considers: "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." (UN General Assembly 1989). However, since this definition implies a broad group, it will also be considered what the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (LGDNNA by its Spanish acronym ) categorizes as children (under twelve years of age) and adolescents (between twelve and eighteen years) (Ley General de los Derechos de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes 2014).

Within the presented cases, a difference can be made between both subgroups, as for children that have willingly decided to attend a protest and are able to form their own views (more likely to be adolescents) (A. Daly 2013), in comparison with young children that are probably accompanying adults. Nevertheless, it is an erroneous assumption that young children are not able to develop attention to their autonomy rights and will not attend protests at their own will (ibid.).

The paper firstly presents a literature review of existing discourse on the main topic, including a description of the international and national legal framework on children's right-to-protest related concepts.

Afterwards, general discussion on 'children's citizenship' (Roche 1999) and children's participation (Hart 1992) is developed, applying subsequently this theoretical frameworks in order to analyse the selected study cases; finalising with key findings and conclusion thoughts.

## Literature Review

Like the tendency of children actively participating within different forms of protests, academic discourse on the topic is relatively new and consequently, limited in quantity.

Leading research on the matter is Aoife Daly (Ph.D.)'s work on children's rights and their involvement in political activity. Her first publication on the subject: "Demonstrating Positive Obligations: Children's Rights and Peaceful Protest in International Law" (Daly 2013), discusses around "...the positive obligation of States and argues that children should be recognized as a distinct, valid and sometimes vulnerable group that has the right to protest and the right to be facilitated in doing so." (ibid.).

Daly concludes that increasing participation of children in protests should be regarded in a greater extent: Since Children possess, according to diverse international human rights instruments, the same right-to-protests as adults, and are willing and capable of exercising that right. The author is currently working on research -to date not yet published- on the specific topic of climate change-related demonstrations around the world (ibid.).

Further research has been done by Svetlana Erpyleva (Ph.D.) through her article "Freedom's children in protest movements: Private and public in the socialization of young Russian and Ukrainian activists" (2018). Through a theoretical framework of contentious politics within the post-communist contexts of Russia and Ukraine, the paper discusses issues of political participation of adolescents during mass protests in these scenarios; highlighting the relation between private and public spheres of the adolescents, and its implications on their protest-activism. (Erpyleva 2018)

A highly contemporary-relevant work by Sommer et al. around the 'Fridays for Future (FFF)' strike movement aims to study the specific characteristics such as profile, mobilization methods, and motivations of the protest participants within demonstrations in Germany (Sommer, et al. 2019). So far, preliminary results have shown a significant extent of heterogeneity regarding age, gender, and motivations. Partially published, the research project is currently being expanded to a Europe-wide scope in order to make a comparative analysis between study cases (ibid.).

## “Convention on the Rights of the Child”

- Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

(cont.)

- Article 15

1. States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

2. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of these rights other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.” (UN General Assembly 1989)

Within the Mexican legal framework, the rights to freedom of assembly and association are recognized in the national constitution, stating that only citizens of the (Mexican) Republic may do so to take part in the political affairs of the country (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos 1917), this concerning foreigners. However, the definition of “citizens of the Republic” applies only to those who meet the requirement to “be at least 18 years old” (ibid.), thus excluding children to this right.

Nevertheless, similarly to what happens in the international context, specific legislation for children, through the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents explicitly states in its Article 75, that children and adolescents have the right to associate and meet (Ley General de los Derechos de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes 2014). Additionally, Article 74 of the same law, states that children have the right to be heard and taken into account in matters of their interest, in accordance with their age, evolutionary and cognitive development and maturity (ibid.).

Although this framework, in its international and domestic levels, limits its scope to general concepts such as the right to freedom of ‘assembly’,

‘association’ and ‘expression’; and the explicit “right to peaceful protest” and even more specific, the “children’s right to peaceful protest” are still not expressly recognised, it is indeed acknowledged as an amalgam of the other interlaced rights (Article 19-INGO 2016). For the purposes of this paper, the term “right to peaceful protest” or “right to protest” will be used hereafter.

### **Theoretical Approach**

Discourses on childhood have shifted radically over time from approaches such as essentialist, biological, psychological, and pedagogical, towards a “Sociology of Childhood”, where children no longer only act as objects of education, but also as research subjects (Eckardt 2020). This perspective considers childhood as a social construction, variable in function of different societies, cultures, gender, and history (ibid.).

In the sense, the concept of “children’s citizenship” has evolved from traditional adult-centric perspectives of citizenship for children, where they are considered “future adults” (A. Daly 2013), to recent theories that have broadened the concept and reconceptualized it (Roche 1999 as cited in Daly 2013); that which includes children as active members of society with a “legitimate and valuable voice and perspective” (A. Daly 2013). This broadened concept should act as a new model which can accommodate the specific and distinct figure of children, rather than utilizing it as a basis for exclusion (Cockburn 1998 as cited in Daly 2013).

The main alleged reasons for exclusion of children into “citizenship” include their age and phase of physical-cognitive development, which positions them as vulnerable, dependant, and recipients of protection (Burman 1994; Woodhead 1997 as cited in James 2011). Hence, a different standard of citizenship needs to be applied; one who acknowledges children “different, but equal” towards adults, with recognition of citizenship rights and, although in need of special protection, capable of participating in society in their particular forms (James 2011). These forms are yet limited, since in general (depending on national contexts), children are not allowed to vote, they are left without direct political empowerment (A. Daly 2013) and in need of finding different ways to act: protest in the form of demonstrations is one of them.

As stated in the aforementioned legal framework, the concept of “children’s citizenship” within the right to peaceful protest, comprises a grey zone where traditional age-related bounds of citizenship are applied.

Nevertheless, the new theories have served as a framework for conceptualising a children right to peaceful protest (ibid.), as analysed within the CRC (UN General Assembly 1989) and the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (Ley General de los Derechos de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes 2014). Furthermore, it is argued that children should not be considered as another group with the right to protest, as adults do; but rather, as a group with specific needs (and vulnerabilities) which should be satisfied in order to fulfil this right (A. Daly 2013).

### **Children’s participation in Protests**

As mentioned above, although the last decade has exposed an intensification of children’s participation in social and political change, their involvement has been present in history through diverse movements and protest actions (Daly 2020): participation of children at a great extent was documented in the movement against South African apartheid, during the protests of the ‘First Intifada’ within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, demonstrations versus social expenditure in England in 2010 (ibid.), as well as in 2006 in the immigrant rights demonstrations in the United States (Getrich 2008 as cited in Daly 2013).

It was not until 2018-2019 when a global movement of children acting against the climate crisis, led the discussion: Fridays for Future. The worldwide strike, initiated by student Greta Thunberg, assembled in March 2019 more than one million strikers, most of them children, within 2200 events in 125 countries (Fridays for Future 2020). Since then, the movement has been extensively praised and recognised, as a phenomenon within the climate change activism without precedents (Daly 2020).

Nevertheless, leading-children of the movement (e.g. Greta Thunberg) have also been targets of personal attacks, prejudice, and disbelief (Daly 2020) by certain media, politicians, and other opinion leaders. One of the most common critiques from “adultism”, as the „prejudice and accompanying systematic discrimination against young people“ (Gregoire y Jungers 2007, 67) , is related to the claim that

children are being “exploited” in such movements (Daly 2020); therefore, a recurring preconception-led understanding of childhood as not being able to comprehend and be aware of social issues.

Within the Mexican context, in 2016 a proposal to the Senate was presented in order to sanction the inclusion of children in demonstrations, claiming “their innocence is abused” (Barajas 2018). An amendment to the Article 64 of the LGDNNA was intended, by adding the text: “Children and adolescents have the right not to be used by persons or groups who violate the limitations on the expression of ideas established in Article 6 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States.”\* (ibid.). However, these “limitations” are vaguely defined and their definition for each protest-event would be unfeasible. In turn, this case shows a deficient awareness of legislators of the children’s right to peaceful protest within the international and national framework, as it has shown in other international cases.

As argued above, new perspectives towards children have recognized that traditional theories had previously underestimated them in their capacities and abilities (A. Daly 2013), with this, a right to protest has been made possible, like the one for adults. Nevertheless, they cannot be fully equated and ‘grouped’ with adults in protest-contexts due to the unquestionable fact that children have special needs and vulnerabilities due to physical and less developed capacities in comparison to adults (ibid.). There are potential main risks that children could face in protests events, such as threats to their physical safety and the risk that they could be manipulated, as Daly argues (ibid).

In this sense, UNICEF has repeatedly made official statements on their concern over participation of children in protests that have turned violent, with declarations on specific cases such as Venezuela (2017), Indonesia (2019), and Thailand (2020); however, they support and work to ensure the right of children, stating that “waves of protests around the world are a reminder that voices of children and adolescents must be heard and their rights protected” (UNICEF 2019).

Due to their stature in comparison with adults, children have a higher risk of their physical safety being compromised in case of violent protests (A. Daly 2013). UNICEF has reported cases of

\*Proposal made by Senator Arturo Zamora to the Mexican Senate of the Republic in 2016

imprisoned young protestors, injured, or sometimes killed (UNICEF 2019). Although, as argued above, considering them as “different, but equal” to adults, this should never serve as an argument for exclusion. The second mentioned risk: adult manipulation towards children constitutes a complex matter which to a certain extent could result indeed valid, nevertheless, it can also turn into a bias, once again, underestimating children’s capacity to understand issues which they are protesting for. In any case, adults face likewise the same risk of being manipulated by third parties to take part in protests that benefit organisers, yet they are not prevented to protest due to this argument (A. Daly 2013). In order to frame this situation, it is pertinent to analyse the “ladder of young people’s participation” (ibid.) which Robert A. Hart proposed as a modified version of Arnstein’s original scheme (Hart 1992).

8. Child-initiated shared decisions with adults	Degree of Participation
7. Child-initiated and directed	
6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children	
5. Consulted and informed	
4. Assigned but informed	
3. Tokenism	Non-participation
2. Decoration	
1. Manipulation	

Figure 1: Hart’s Ladder of Young People’s Participation Source: Adapted from Hart, 1992.

Hart situates “manipulation” as the last stage on the ladder of participation, arguing about cases where “children have no understanding of the issues and hence do not understand their actions” (Hart 1992), therefore this would constitute a case of manipulation. Nevertheless, drawing this division line is somehow problematic, taking into account the increasing discoveries about children’s awareness and understanding of their context (Roche 1999). As observed in the Mexican case for regulating children’s participation, the “innocence” factor is used to argue manipulation, thus presenting children as a homogeneous group incapable, to any extent, of accounting for their own action. A common example regularly regarded as manipulative is the inclusion of children by adult-led protests in

order to increase the gross numbers of participants (A. Daly 2013). Hart proposes for this case to take into account the particularities of the protest such as cultural context, and then evaluate to what extent they could be considered participatory (Hart 1992). He draws the line by evaluating whether “the issue concerns children, is understood by them, and is deemed by them to be important” (ibid), then, it could be considered an effective form of participation. To this effect, the ideal degree of participation relies on the first five steps of the ladder (steps 8-4).

### Protest Cases in Mexico City

Five cases of protests in Mexico City, where children have been observed to participate in a significant extent, have been selected in order to analyse specific aspects and particularities that could provide evidence on how does Mexico City’s protest events take place within the children’s right to peaceful protest:

#### *Friday’s for Future Mexico*

The school strike for climate, later known as “#FridaysForFuture” (FFF), started in August 2018 in Sweden, when the 15-year old student Greta Thunberg gathered a small group of young activists and sat in front of the parliament every day for three weeks as a form of protest against the government’s lack of action on the climate crisis (Fridays for Future 2020). Through posting the actions in social media, the then small movement drew attention all over the world (ibid.), including Mexico. Through a Facebook group, young students launched a call to organise the first Mexican protest under the FFF movement (Diaz 2019).

The “*Plantón y Marcha Pacífica por el Cambio Climático*” (“Sit-in” and Peaceful March for Climate Change), framed within the global-scale strike, was called on social media on Friday 15th of March 2019 through two different events: a “sit-in” at Mexico City’s Zocalo (main square) from 8:00, and later on a “march” at 14:00 from this site, towards the “Revolution Monument” (ibid).

Strikes (with the form of “sit-ins”) were called for every following Friday, with major gatherings held on Friday, April 12th, and May 3th (Fridays for Future 2020).

Before the UN Climate Change Summit 2019 (held

in New York), the movement summoned a third major strike for the previous Friday, September 20th, where approximately a thousand citizens and environmental-activists (mostly children) marched from the “Angel de la Independencia” monument towards the Zocalo (Gómez Mena 2019).

The participants organized the march by age-order starting with little children: pre-schoolers (accompanied by some adults), followed by students from elementary school, high school, universities, and at the end, adults (Nolasco 2019). A similar form of organization has been observed in certain recent feminist-movement protests in Mexico City, where men have been welcome to join the protest but required to do it at the end of the group: “...because they are not protagonists of the march, they are the allies of it.” (Carrillo 2020). Some parallels could be drawn regarding adults participating in children-organized demonstrations, considering them as “allies” of the movement; as argued by Hart, this could be assessed by the extent of the adult involvement, whereas being a “Child-initiated shared decisions with adults” up until “manipulation” (Hart 1992).

This “adult as an ally” perspective is mentioned in the official website of Fridays for Future México in “5 ways you can support the school climate strikes” (Fridays for Future México 2020), where the 4th point “Join the strike as an ally” clarifies that the vast majority of FFF strikes call for adult’s solidarity and are open to welcome everyone who wants to join; nevertheless, it also mentions to “keep in mind your role as an adult in the protest” and “...let the protesters speak in their own words... by asking young people for a short statement about why they are on strike” (ibid.). This approach besides empowering children to their own protest, makes their ideas and understanding of the issues directly visible to the public, thus avoiding to some extent critiques and attacks on perception whether they could be manipulated or used for adult purposes. Additionally, it could potentially increase the awareness of adults towards children on their underestimated social and political capacities.

Making children visible on their own protest movements is essential. Although Greta has become the symbol of the FFF global movement, there are other less well-known leading figures especially in the Global South (Daly 2020), such as Aditya Mukarji (age 16) and Ridhima Pandey (age 11) from India,

and Kaluki Paul Mutuku from Kenya, among others (Unigwe 2019). From the Mexican version of FFF, Jerónimo Zarco Martínez, a 16 years old student has become the movement’s spokesperson: „When I am asked, do you see a future in 20 or 30 years, that is liveable and where you can fulfil your dreams? I usually answer no. But when I go out on the streets and scream, at that moment I start to feel hope and I start to imagine that this future is possible” (Zarco Martínez 2019).

The four major demonstrations of Fridays for Future in Mexico City occurred between March and November 2019 (Fridays for Future México 2020). The first three happened within the “Zocalo-Revolution Monument-Independence Angel” axis, the most common path for demonstrations in the city. The later protest was planned to end at the Ministry-Secretariat of Energy to tackle specific environmental issues to this federal government department. To mobilize the protestors, all four cases required the closure of roads and surrounding deviations.



Figure 2: Fridays For Future demonstrations in Mexico City in 2019  
Source: Self elaboration, 2020 with data from Fridays for Future México, 2020. Map: ESRI World Map



Alternative protests of Fridays for Future in Mexico City occurred internally in several schools (including kinder gardens) such as the specific case of “Arenal Arte y Crianza” school, where small private demonstrations were held inside the school facilities (Fridays for Future México 2020). Young children were involved in the elaboration of placards with the assistance of teachers. Then, their protest was documented in pictures and uploaded to social media. This shows how digital technologies can produce new forms of protest that could suit certain groups of children and cope with specific vulnerabilities while still exercising their right to protest.

One significant aspect to analyse this specific event is the messages written on the placards: “Change the system, not the climate”, “There’s no planet B”, “Not one species less”, and “Reduce, reuse, recycle”. By the selection of the words, as well as calligraphy, one can speculate that the messages were written by adults and not by the children (less than 5 years old). Whether the children had some extent of involvement in the understanding of the messages is unknown.

Hart describes this form of participation as “Assigned but Informed” (assuming the young children were previously briefed and sensitised on the subject) (Hart 1992).

#### *#ContingenteCarreola*

A highly significant case developed within the protests for the mass kidnapping and disappearance of 43 students in September 2014: During a demonstration on December 6th, a call for leading the march with the called Contingente Carreola ( StrollerContingent) was organised: a group of parents accompanied by children (babies and toddlers) in strollers protested as an opening contingent of the march (Saucedo Añez 2015). Since then, #ContingenteCarreola (hashtag on social media used to promote the group) has been a recurring action participating in protests of the Feminist movement and more recently on Fridays for Future.

Controversial to some extent, the action has drawn attention due to two major facts: the average age of children participating and the position of the group within the structure of the marches. The children being up to three years on average, the group has been targeted with the recurring concerns on being used by their parents as “shields” to avoid eventual

violent action by law enforcement (Saucedo Añez 2015). So far, no violent incidents have been recorded for the multiple demonstrations where the contingent took part.

In order to make an assessment, this “direct action” should be evaluated within its immediate context: on what specific protest/march does it take place? Recalling Hart’s arguments: Do the issues being protested for affect directly or indirectly the children and are understood by them? (Hart 1992). Does it make a difference whether the mentioned contingent takes part in a politic-related protest, a demonstration against femicides, or a school strike for climate? On the one hand, considering the average age of the children (3-) in this case and by means of Hart’s ladder, the action would be placed, at first instance, under the Rung 2 “decoration”, according to his definition:

*Decoration, the second rung on the ladder, refers, for example, to those frequent occasions when children are given T-shirts related to some cause, and may sing or dance at an event in such dress, but have little idea of what it is all about and no say in the organizing of the occasion. The young people are there because of the refreshments, or some interesting performance, rather than the cause. The reason this is described as one rung up from ‘manipulation’ is that adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by children. They simply use the children to bolster their cause in a relatively indirect way.*

*(Hart 1992, 9)*

Although the stage “Decoration” is regarded under the “Non-Participation” category and could potentially use children as tools in order to brace the causes of adults (A. Daly 2013), it could also help increase children’s visibility in such contexts, hence normalizing their existence in public space (ibid.). Moreover, Daly argues that parents, within their right to protest, are entitled to take their children to peaceful protests as an exercise for introducing them, regardless of their age, to democratic political-social processes (ibid.). This paper would then argue that *Contingente Carreola*, under conditions of physical security, could be indeed beneficial from a children’s right to peaceful protest perspective.

### *Protests for Children with Cancer*

Since August 2019, several demonstrations have been taking place against the federal government due to a lack of medicine for children who suffer from cancer. Through different protests along the city, parents of children have organised to demand the health ministry for an effective supply of medicines, such as chemotherapies, that was cut due to a budget reallocation, as they argue since the new federal government took office (Animal Político 2019). As their demands were not effectively addressed, their protest actions kept through the year, sometimes escalating in intensity: On January 2020, the main vehicular access to the T1 of the Mexico City Airport was blocked by them, only this time, they were accompanied by their children (including those who are ill) (Milenio Digital 2020). As the group of adult protestors tried to enter the terminal building in order to publicly show their demands to the airport users, the children remained in the now-closed street (thus supervised by adults) which was used for making their own protest placards, as well as a playground. This particular case presents complex aspects that are meaningful to analyse: Considering the background of all-adult previous protests that were held repeatedly, without an effective solution, it is evident to assume that the decision to take the children (direct beneficiaries of the question that is being protested) to the actual demonstrations, is to make them visible (and their issues) to the public attention. Nevertheless, children's physical safety comes into the discussion. Some relatively violent episodes were held inside the terminal building while the parents were trying to access to inner areas, however, no issues were reported at the improvised playground outside (Milenio Digital 2020). Still, the issue of the children's health plays a role whether they should be in public open spaces, considering their clinical presentation.

Recurring once more to Hart's theory of children's participation, this paper argues that this particular event is consistent with the "Assigned but informed" rung (see Hart 1992). Although it is considered that the children were brought to the demonstration in order to be "viewed", it is yet not considered as a case of "Decoration" since the issue and main motive of the protest concerns them directly: no supply for their medicines. Additionally, it goes without saying

that the issue is not a complex matter for children's understanding even for the subcategory of young children. Hart states four important requirements for a case to be regarded as truly participatory:

1. *The children understand the intentions of the project;*
2. *They know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why;*
3. *They have a meaningful (rather than 'decorative') role;*
4. *They volunteer for the project after the project was made clear to them.*  
(Hart 1992, 11)

Although not a voluntary and children-led action due to a great extent to the children's health situation, their understanding, involvement awareness, and meaningful role would make this brief study case considered as participatory. However, a strong emphasis is made on having children's health and security as a priority over any form of protest, even considering this precise issue was the one triggering the movement.

### **Conclusions**

The extent of a city's child-friendliness relies on whether it effectively guarantees the rights of the children. The right to peaceful protest (through freedom of assembly and association) stands as the crucial step towards a city in which children can freely express their own opinions and influence on the decisions that involve them directly (UNICEF 2020). As described, Mexico City (as globally) presents an exponential increase in children's participation in protest movements, which has urgently to be responded by assuring conditions that enable a protest child-friendly environment. In this sense, the following conclusion thoughts were drawn:

- The current discourse over children's participation in protests (in both, academia and media) is limited in quantity in national (Mexican) and international contexts, considering the increasing cases for the past years. Whereas children (young children and adolescents) participating in adult-led protests or

own-children initiatives such as Fridays for Future, the urge for research on the topic is crucial from diverse perspectives such as children's rights, security, citizenship, legal framework, governance, pedagogical

- Although, as analysed, the framework of international agreements and domestic laws regarding children, explicitly declare children's right to freedom of assembly and right to freedom of association, however, higher levels of legislation do not recognize these rights due to the current boundaries of 'citizenship', where children do not take part. It is then imperative to raise the discussion on the matter in order to start redefining (a form) of binding citizenship for children that make them worthy of these rights in a broader and tangible extent.
- The awareness of the rights of the children that allow them to securely and peacefully assemble in the diverse forms of protest is still a pending issue for governmental authorities as well as civil society. Biases and misleading preconceptions towards protesting children originate with the disregard on the actual children's rights.
- The mentioned attempts for regulation on the matter, violate both the international agreements which Mexico is part of, as well as the domestic legislation that assures children's participation. Legislation in the future should not only avoid hindering the already guaranteed rights but also progressively consolidate the framework from a children's rights perspective.
- The 2019 demonstrations of Fridays for Future in Mexico City, regardless of their actual impact on public policies and domestic environmental agendas, showed an increasing openness on governments, media, and public opinion towards the idea of children participating in demonstrations. This could be partly due to the visibility that children gained since the beginning of the movement and the general perception that it was "their own" movement and adults taking part as allies.

- #ContingenteCarreola serves as a case for further discussion and research on whether there is an age limit in which children should start being involved in protest activities; arguing the possibility that they could be used as tools or 'decoration' to fulfill adults' interests or if these means are justified by the end (Hart 1992) in the case the issues protested for directly involve the children and would eventually benefit them.

A similar situation regards the protest for children with cancer at the airport: is it justifiable to make children visible (regarding their illness) as a desperate measure to draw public attention and eventually satisfy their demands? This paper, considering Hart and Daly's mentioned theoretical framework, argues that it could be indeed regarded as an effective form of participation in the case the issues directly affect or benefit the children involved, they have a degree of understanding on the matters, and their physical and emotional safety is guaranteed.

- From a city governance's perspective, there is a vast further research potential on how to plan and design protest child-friendly cities. How do spatial conditions could enable or hinder the right to peaceful protest for children?

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# There is No Space Like Home: Children's Spatialities in Times of Remote Learning

Galyna Sukhomud

## Introduction

In the past twenty years, the studies of the children's spaces and childhood as an emplaced practice have emerged in disciplines such as human geography, urban anthropology, urban planning, and urban design. Since the establishment of the academic journal "Children's Geographies" in 2003, the interdisciplinary field that merged childhood studies with a number of spatially focused academic disciplines has been gaining importance as an independent research field. However, despite the relative progress of bringing children's experiences in the focus of academic inquiry, such research still remains at the margins of social sciences and space-related disciplines.

Moreover, the center of attention in the studies of children's spaces is often directed to public lives and public spaces. Childhood is imagined as separated from other age groups and compatibilized to certain spaces such as children's playgrounds, schools, and kindergartens. Such attention can be explained by practical concerns about children's well-being and desire to create better places within cities and communities for children. However, this makes children's ordinary lives and the experience of private spaces and intergenerational encounters as well as negotiations of spaces invisible and a comparatively under-researched topic in spatially related fields.

However, in 2020, with the spread of the global pandemic of COVID-19 and the introduction of the remote learning and lockdown of public life, there has been a sudden decline of spaces available for children's use, including the lack of access to the spaces usually linked to childhood. Planned to be a temporary measure, the lockdown and distant learning lasted months and continues to be in place in many countries and regions throughout the world at the moment of writing. Thus, children's spaces have been drastically reduced and certain aspects of public life such as education have been placed in

the spaces of private, ordinary, and everyday life of home.

Thus, the following research focuses on the experiences of home by Ukrainian children at the times of remote learning. Being at the European periphery and the outskirts of the Global North, Ukraine had little attention from the world media at the time of the pandemic. Moreover, experiences of Ukrainian children with few exceptions (see Tymczuk 2013) are rarely in the focus of western academic journals in children's geographies or social science. However, considering vast socio-economic differences in Ukrainian schools and households that were ignored in decision making during the COVID-19 pandemic, the experience of children at home during remote learning deserves attention.

While recognizing the systemic problems associated with housing and education in Ukraine, the research tries to grasp children's experiences of remote learning by seeing spaces as relational and embodied. In times of COVID-19, the imperatives related to care about our health and body became politicized. However, the socio-spatial theory and research often excludes bodies, with the senses and affects, from accounts on spaces. Therefore, recognizing children as beings rather than becoming adults and experience as embodied and placed, the following study aims to discover:

*How do children experience spaces in their homes during the period of prolonged remote learning?  
How are children embodied in space and how do they arrange spaces via affective-embodied knowledge?*

## Literature Review

The following chapter discusses the theories that transcend universalistic and absolutist perspectives on space and see spaces not as detached from human bodies, experiences, senses, and emotions. In short embodied spaces can be understood as defined by

Setha Low -- “the location where human experience and consciousness takes on material and spatial form” (Low 2003, 9). Further, this chapter will present the research that places the embodiment, sensual, and affective experience in the context of children’s world. In such a way, the chapter seeks not only to review recently published works but also present the theoretical context of the research.

The turn towards the body in the spatial theorization can be traced back primarily to phenomenology. In the seminal work “Phenomenology of Perception” ([1962] 2012), Merleau-Ponty tries to understand the complexity of human consciousness, embodiment, meaning, and the perception that goes beyond the dualism of transcendental idealism and naive empiricism (Merleau-Ponty 2012 in Kinkaid 2020, 171). Thus, he starts by rejecting empirical and idealist views on the subject that ignores the connection between subject, body, and space (ibid). As a result, from a phenomenological perspective, the meaning, as well as space, is produced in „the first-person experience of embodied subjects situated in space“ (Kinkaid 2020, 171).

However, phenomenologists were not the only one that placed the body into a spatial analysis. Other prominent classic authors that reconnect bodies and spaces in different scales are the works of Foucault, Bourdieu, and Giddens (Low 2003, 9-10). Moreover, body, experience, and spaces have been the focus of anthropologists for a long time. This chapter presents some further recent accounts on embodied spaces.

#### *Relational theory of space*

As in phenomenological tradition, relational theories of space oppose the dualization of the existence of space and body and, thus, absolutist interpretation of spaces. The absolutist ideas about space refer to the Euclidean geometry as the reference system (Löw 2016, 226). In the absolutist perspective, space exists in its own right as a container of things, regardless of human actions (Löw 2016, 226). The absolute space merely contains human bodies. On the contrary, the relativist perspective considers space as the structure formed with relative locations of bodies (Löw 2016, 230). As a result, the relative space is not only a background of actions but is integrated into action (Löw 2016, 226).

In the work “The Sociology of Space. Materiality,

Social Structures, and Action” , Martina Löw (2016) develops her own concept of relational space:

*“Space is constituted as a synthesis of social goods, other people, and places in imagination, through perception and memories, but also in spacing by means of the physical placement (building, surveying, deploying) of these goods and people at places in relation to other goods and people” (225).*

Thus, according to Löw, the creation of the space involves two processes, which reflect the material and relational nature of space as a social phenomena. On the one hand, space appears the result of spacing - material arrangement of “goods, people, and non-human beings in relation to one another” (Berger 2020). However, the actors do not only participate in the creation of the spaces via positioning goods and inanimate objects in the relation to each other but also put their own bodies in relation to others, being a constituting part of the spaces themselves at the same time (Berger 2020). However, the arrangement of objects is processed differently by different individuals by the synthesis of memories, perceptions, and imagination.

Moreover, as the body and perceptions become the locus of the constitution of space, it allows for the merging of different spaces in one spatial form as the result of instant communication technology. Löw argues that virtual reality technologies make possible the overlapping of spaces by the movement of one’s own body (Löw 2016, 225). While the telephone connects two spaces through technology, in case of virtual reality, the body becomes a mediator. In such a way, not the physical arrangement but the body itself connects the spaces.

#### *More than representational theory*

More than representational theory or non-representational theory, as it was initially called, was urged by the works of Nigel Thrift. Thrift criticized the representationalism of geography and an extensive focus of the discipline on language and depiction, ignoring action and practice, the human body, and human lives. As a result, more than representational theory was proposed to extend purely semantic meaning-making and move the broader interest into: “how life takes shape and gains expression in shared

experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions” (Lorimer 2005 in Müller 2015, 521).

However, at the current stage, rather than rejecting the representation fully, more than representational theory shifts the focus toward practice, affects, and things in the production of meaning (Müller 2015, 521). For instance, Nigel Thrift argues that “[c]ities may be seen as roiling maelstroms of affect” and, thus, there is a need to include affect in the political geography. However, he understands affect not as simple as individual emotion but as a “form of thinking” and as “embodied practices that produce visible conduct as an outer lining” (Thrift 2007, 60). Therefore, more than representational theory tries to grasp ephemeral relations between individuals, spaces, and other things that were often ignored in the field.

#### *Embodied spaces and children’s geographies*

A number of scholarly works within a broad range of disciplines are dedicated to children’s spatialities and embodiment, embodied spaces, emotions, and affective experiences. The interest in the sensory and bodily experiences of children has a long tradition. Yi-Fu Tuan in “Space and Place” famously wrote that „the child knows the world more sensuously than does the adult“ (Tuan 1977, 185 in Mackley, Pink and Morosanu, 2015, 23). Moreover, children are often described as being “in touch” with their senses, while adults are constantly “disembodied” (Leder, 1990 in Mackley, Pink and Morosanu, 2015, 24). As a result, taking the particularity of children’s interactions with the world, it is often argued for the need to include children’s scenes and bodily practice in the research. Using phenomenological anthropology and more than representational theory, Mackley, Pink, and Morosanu (2015) discover children’s embodied knowledge making of home in the use of digital media and energy consumptions. The authors propose to see children’s environment as a constellation of the material and immaterial and children “perceivers, makers, and ‘knowers’ of the ever-changing configuration of place” (Mackley, Pink, and Morosanu 2015, 21). To access children’s embodied knowledge about the home, the authors applied sensory and visual methodology.

They asked children to make video tours of their homes to share their experience of everyday life. Additionally, the authors could visit children’s homes and follow the children during their routines to track how the usage of energy is interrelated with specific domestic activities (Mackley, Pink, and Morosanu 2015, 28). As a result, the research was able to see how digital devices are used by children to configure the place in sensory and audiovisual ways, and how the restrictions on energy consumptions crafted the ways children use places as bathrooms. Thus, Mackley, Pink, and Morosanu (2015) emphasize the need to conceptualize typical ways of working with children, which solely rely on the language, and put an accent on the emplaced knowledge and research of children within their own environments.

Further, Karoff (2015) employs a phenomenological approach to study the relations between children’s play, emotions, and space. As Mackley, Pink, and Morosanu, she positions children in their environment, which is in this case playgrounds and conceptualizes play as a practice (Karoff 2015, 113). Further, the rhythms are understood as formed through the practice of play, while the emotional moods are a way of children experiencing the play (Karoff 2015, 120). Using theoretical accounts by Schmidt, de Certeau, Lefebvre, and Heidegger, the author uncovers the connection between the rhythm of play and emotional mood (Karoff 2015, 125). Karoff concludes that the mood is essential to playing but also dependent on the ways children inhabit the space and interact with it (ibid). Finally, Karoff summarizes that looking at the rhythms of play, it is possible to argue that “emotions are not something that children have but are explored through shared play practices.”

Overall, in the last two decades, many theorists have been working on the transformation of the understanding of space as solely physical or even socially produced. The recent theorization of spaces takes into account human bodies as consistent components of spaces. Moreover, the topic of embodiment and embodied knowledge becomes more present in the field of children’s geographies in recent years.

#### **Methodology**

Drawing inspiration from phenomenological

anthropology and relational theory, the following research seeks to uncover children's embodied knowledge of homes and homemaking in the period of remote learning. Firstly, the research recognizes the importance of the experience of children and considers children as being and not becoming. Furthermore, within research, the body is seen not as separate from consciousness, thinking, and the intentional mind (James 2000, 27). Additionally, space is conceptualized following the definition of Löw (2016) as created in the processes of physical placement of goods, people, and places as in the synthesis of places in imagination, perception, and memories. Children are seen as active makers of spaces via both physical rearrangement and perception and embodied knowledge of spaces to which they belong. Thus, considering children's experience of home and homemaking in times of remote learning, the study focuses on 1) how children arrange their homes physically (placing) a 2) how children arrange their homes through imagination and embodied knowledge.

In times of remote learning and a global pandemic, the spaces of home receive new meanings. Remote learning as a replacement of school experience is considered a special condition when the space of home merges with the space of school in one physical entity. While childhood has been increasingly domesticated in the countries of the Global North in the past two centuries, children's spaces have never been limited to such an extent as in times of remote learning imbued by national lockdowns and COVID-19 restrictions (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998 in Holloway and Valentine 2000, 774). Developing methodology, the research considers this multi-functioning and meshing of spaces entangled in children's homes.

Taking into account the complexity of tracing embodied experience, this research employs empirically grounded affective research methodology. Affective methodology tries to respond to the embodiment of social life experimentally and creatively. For instance, John Law's in their book "After Method" argues on the need to explore new "forms of knowing as embodiment" to reflect the messiness of social life (Law 2004 in Knudsen and Stage 2015). Thus, in order to receive embodied-affective data, I used mixed affect focused ethnographic methods - visual

and verbal methods at children's homes facilitated by Zoom.

*The research methodology consisted of five steps:*

1. A questionnaire filled out by the parents. The questionnaire's main function was informing parents about the purpose of research, getting permits to work with their child, gathering information regarding the age of the child, location of the school, their home and other people living in the household (optional).

Steps 2 and 3 were done using ZOOM video calls.

2. Semi-Structured Interview with a child. The interviews were focused mostly on questions about the process of online learning.

3. Mental mapping. Firstly, the children were given a task to depict their homes and their emotions/senses related to particular places. Further, the children were asked to draw on the map the places where they study and where they relax or possibly do both activities. Later, they had to explain both maps. While explaining, children received several clarifying questions related to their sensing, emotions, and imagination of homes and schools.

4. Analysis of children's non-verbal language and verbal intensification. Listening to children, I tried to note children's non-verbal signs and changes in language speed or intensity.

5. Auto-ethnography and self-reflection. At the end of the interview, I tried to reflect on my own experience and feelings.

While this research tries to focus not on the discourse but on embodied experience, language still plays an important part in the research. However, the language here is seen not as a simple representation but a modality of being-in-the-world. It does not represent but discloses the being-in-the-world (Reference to Ricoeur 1991 in Low 2003).

Further, including an auto-ethnographic component, I recognize the position of the dialogical involvement of the researcher in the production of knowledge in contrast to the positivist vision of the researcher as a detached observer. Researchers establish a conversation with the world, which implies that they



are part of the research processes, affecting it and being affected by it (Haraway 1998 in Knudsen and Stage 2015, 5).

The situation of Zoom complicates the research of the embodied experience but also facilitates it to some extent. Under normal circumstances, access to homes, particularly children's spaces at home, is complicated as people hesitate to allow strangers into private spaces. Even if one is granted access, the researchers would be placed in the most public part of the apartment rather than in the children's room. However, the facilitation of Zoom helped to interact with children in their spaces, which are the subject of research. Moreover, Zoom allowed the geography of the research to be extended from including only one city to multiple ones.

Overall, five children aged 7-13 participated in the research. Their demographic data are presented in table 1. All the names of the children are changed for privacy concerns. All children except for Pasha study at Ukrainian public schools. The participants were found via Facebook and personal network. Therefore, while they are coming from different cities, they are coming from relatively privileged backgrounds within the context of the respective societies.

Name	Gender (m/f/d)	Age	Grade	Location in Ukraine	Time of remote learning
Katherine	f	12	7	Bucha, Kyiv Oblast	Feb. 2020- May 2020, Oct. 26 - Nov. 3rd.
Kate	f	7	1	Kyiv	April-May 2020, October 2020.
Maryna	f	9	3	Kyiv	April-May 2020, October 2020.
Max	m	13	7	Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia Oblast	Spring 2020, potentially Nov. 2020.
Pasha	m	12	7	Chernihiv, Chernihiv Oblast	School is fully online since February

Figure 1: . Demographic characteristics

The conditions of the interview were different as the parents rather than the researcher decided the particularities of the participation of children. In all interviews except one, parents were present at least at some part of the research, which influenced what children were willing to disclose. In one interview, two children at the same time took part. In one interview, not only the mother but a little sister were present but did not take part. Such a variety of conditions complicated the research on emotions and sensing but did not negate the results. While the presence of

parents restricted children's potential expression, it also helped children to feel more protected, which is an important characteristic of the experience of being at home as well as a requirement while working with children. Moreover, it was still possible to track the changes in moods by non-verbal language and the intensity of their speech.

#### *Reflection on position of the researcher*

I recognize my position of power as an adult and a researcher acting on behalf of the Western institution and scrutinizing somebody's emotional experience in the private space of homes. To minimize potential power disbalance, both children and parents were explained the purpose of the research and informed that the child could terminate their participation at any moment without explanation. Further, despite the possibility of making a video recording in Zoom, only audio was recorded. Taking into account the lack of time to develop trustful relations, I preferred not to ask for video recording even though it would be useful as it could violate the personal boundaries of children, and consent for such recording could not have been provided under trustful and power-balanced conditions.

Moreover, the research design by purpose does not ask to indicate directly how big an apartment is, whether the child has some material belongings or not. The child is only asked to present their own perception of the apartment with a direct explanation that it can be not a real but imagined place. I tried to avoid sensitive topics and potential unpleasant topics to the best of my abilities and knowledge as, due to the time frame, it was not possible to develop the trust of parents and children and ensure their comfort as in long term ethnographic research. However, the lack of potentially invasive questions also helped to create a friendly atmosphere that facilitated the discussion and openness of children.

#### **Findings and discussion**

##### *The forms of remote learning in Ukraine during the pandemic of COVID-19*

The forms and organization of remote learning varied greatly among Ukrainian schools. With the start of lockdown in Ukraine on March 12, 2020, the Ukrainian government ordered to close schools

initially for the period of three weeks (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2020). However, the closure of schools lasted until the end of the academic year. During the spring lockdown, there were no national directives on the organization of the remote educational process, only recommendations. Moreover, in September and October, the government did not order the closure of schools at all but directed the recommendations about the possibility of remote learning. As a result, there have been significant differences in the organization of the educational process even within the small group of children that were part of this research.

The main difference between the children in different schools is the involvement of the teacher in the organization of the educational process. Most of the children in the research do not have any live online classes regularly, except for Kate, who is 7 years old and is in the 1st grade. All other children had to do the assignments sent by the teachers by email, chat, or via online sheets. In some cases, children were required to watch lessons on TV or YouTube. The lessons on TV and YouTube were part of the program of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine “All-Ukrainian Online School” that started in April 2020.

Pasha was able to get more support from the teacher since he studies in a private online-school from February 2020. For instance, Pasha comments that “*it is possible to make a consultation with the teacher on Skype. But only at a special time on a special day. Also, one can call the teacher anytime until 6 p.m*” (Pasha, 12 y.o).

However, Pasha and other children rarely used consultations even when they were possible. Max explains inconveniences contacting teachers via email instead of having live online classes in the following way.

*“We did not have ZOOM classes ... Or similar classes like that. We had simply Google Docs. We had a sheet, and there the home assignments appeared. And... I thought it was not so cool that we did not have such classes. And... we could not communicate with teachers. We were told, of course, that we could write an email but it was different. But it is different. Because you do not need to put in too many efforts. In Zoom, for instance, you can ask. Otherwise, you need to open the email...”* (Max, 13 y. o).

Moreover, children were detached not only from teachers but also from their classmates. Most of the children did not see their classmates during the lockdown but only communicated with them in chats that included the teacher or not. Most of the children never met their classmates in physical spaces after the beginning of the lockdown and remote learning. Max mentions going out only once with three friends, and Maryna remembers meeting her friend in the post office by accident.

Thus, after the closure of the schools, the local educational authorities had to decide on their own about the organization of the educational process. However, despite differences, remote learning meant for children, in most cases, doing assignments at home that included little contact with teachers and classmates. The children had to organize their studying process on their own, meaning also to arrange their spaces.

#### *Spatial organisation of remote learning at home*

Most of the children noted that they use available spaces at home in a mixed way, both for studying and for relaxing. In typical Ukrainian apartments, there is usually not enough physical space to make certain distinct divisions. However, children still arrange spaces in a certain way to create micro localities of learning and relaxation. Some places and objects are still clearly related to learning, and some others are to rest. Time is also used to arrange the modalities



Figure 2: Kate's map of home (7 y.o.). Studying space is marked in red, and space for relaxing is in green.

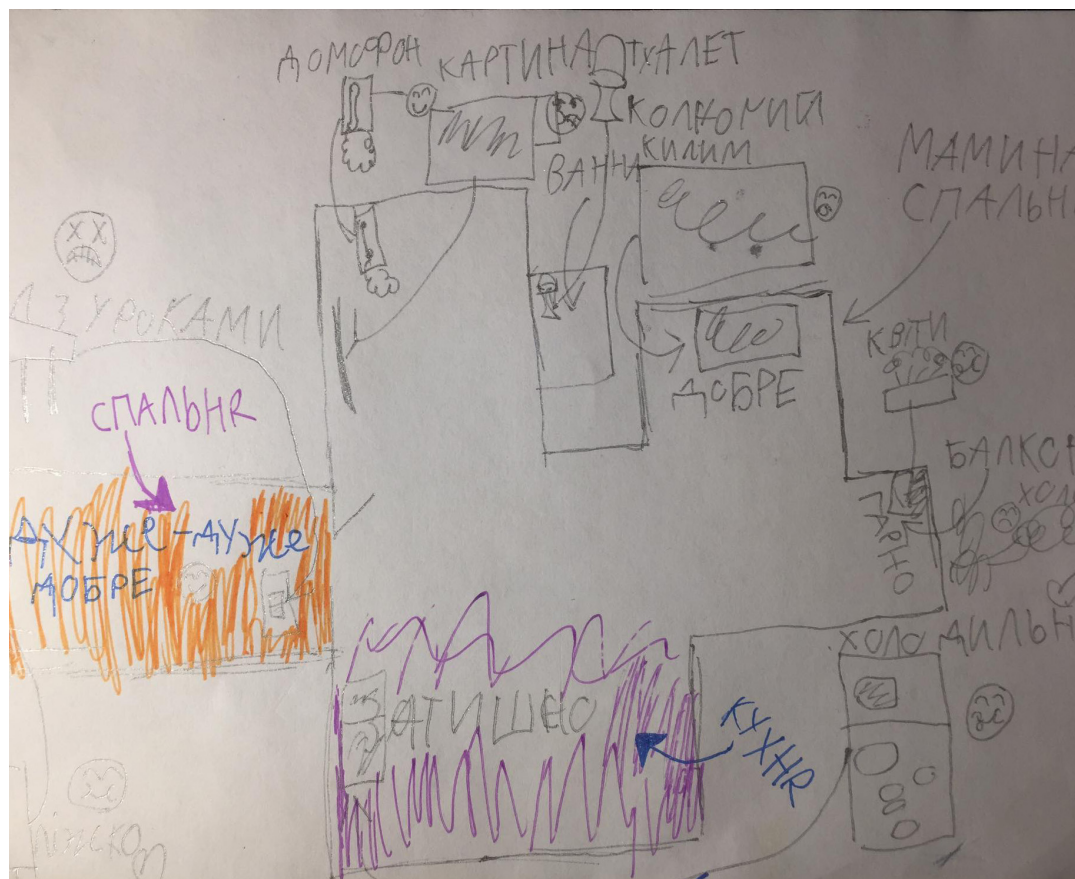


Figure 3: Mary's map of home (9 y.o.). Studying space is marked in orange, and space for relaxing is in violet.



Figure 4: Katherine's map of home (9 y.o.). Studying space is marked in orange, and space for relaxing is in green.

and functions of certain places at certain times. Time itself is embedded in the spatial division.

A good example of different rearrangement and negotiation of spatial functions within one home by different children can be seen in the practices of two sisters Kate (7 y.o.) and Maryna (9 y.o.). Kate and Maryna live together in the same room, but they organize the spaces differently in terms of relaxing and studying. Both sisters mark on their maps (Figure 2 and Figure 3) that their bedroom is the space for studying, and the kitchen is space for relaxing. However, in the interview, Maryna explains that she works mostly in the kitchen because her younger sister studies in their bedroom. However, Kate explains that she goes from the bedroom to the kitchen for the break when her class is over. For Kate, learning spaces are arranged by the scheduling of time, and they are particularly spatially marked within her schedule. The bedroom is her classroom, and the kitchen is for her a relaxation place but Maryna is likely to organize her studies and breaks in the kitchen.

Further, Katherine shares that she usually does not divide time and space clearly for learning and other activities. She states that *"I relax and do my homework and sit in one place. I sit in the chair, do [there] my homework, then play with the phone, do something for me, draw. I do not divide spaces by hours or in some other way"* (Katherine, 12 y.o.). However, when she talks about her table, she uses a particular work that denotes a school table in Ukrainian (Ukr: парта). Moreover, in her map, Kathrine also marks the table as the space dedicated to remote learning. Thus, some places are still more connected to one activity than another.

Moreover, the placement of some objects can rearrange the space in a new way. For instance, in his map, Max (13 y.o) draws his bed as the place that awakes the relaxing time for him (see Figure 5). However, inside the bed he places the book, and then draws the circle marking it as an element of learning. Moreover, on the table he also inserted the book to mark the learning practice at the table. However, for him the computer and the table are not particularly learning zones.

Thus, children manage to arrange their spaces to negotiate learning and relaxing functions via placement of different objects, changing the rooms

at particular times, moving within the room, marking some micro-locations as dedicated to certain activities. Such practices help to deal with a lack of physical spaces or overcrowding. However, children not only arrange spaces physically by moving objects or their own bodies, but they also transform spaces via their emotions, senses, and imagination.

#### *Embodied knowledge of home*

Despite the remote learning, the children that participated in the research imagine the school rather as a separate entity than their home. Children perceive their home as a safe place, where they feel more in control of their lives than at school. They oppose home to the school, which for many is a negative place.

For instance, Max explains that he likes to be at home and not at school. He lowers his voice, making interruptions, which stands somewhat in contrast to his generally very confident narration.

*“ I do not like school totally. To be there. And at home, I feel more relaxed. Because here I can at least decide something. I have my room, my mother, and my father. And I do not like to be at school that much” (Max, 13 y.o.).*

Further, Max enumerates the whole number of reasons why he opposes school to home.

*“First, in our schools, children are often shouted at.... And everyone considers it normal. I do not know why... Also, I did not like that the whole 6th grade I had to sit with the boy that I did not want to communicate to and be a friend. I do not like that I cannot choose where I sit. And also the problem is that I cannot choose what I want... For instance, I like math as I said. For instance, we were in the class, and we studied triangles and repeated ten times that the triangle has three angles. Of course, I understood it and decided not to write it. Then, they [teacher] came to me and shouted at me” (Max, 13).*

Kathrine also shares the experience of being shouted at or criticized by teachers as the reason for the negative emotions towards the school.

*“School does not have such pleasant emotions. But now it is ok. I go ... I miss a few classes.*

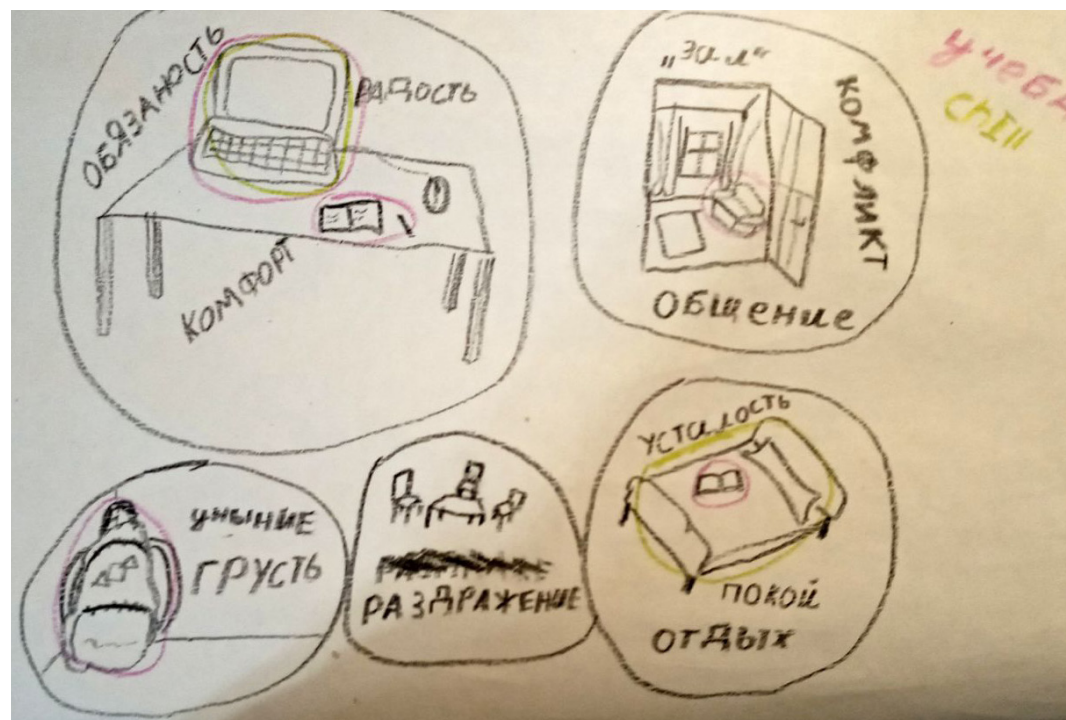


Figure 5: Max's map of home (9 y.o.). Studying space is marked in orange, and space for relaxing is in green.

*Because earlier, I skipped a lot of classes (silent voice). So.. how can I say. The school evokes mixed feelings but more negative... Because you need to stay there, to talk to the teachers but they can be often ... Because I had better grades but now some expectations... that I did not do something, but no one did but they .... But you studied better before” (Kathrine, 13 y.o. ).*

Telling this, Kathrine lowers her voice as she struggles to articulate the complexity of the situation. However, it is clear that the demands of the teachers and criticism build a negative picture of the school. Kathrine also mentions another reason she likes home more than a school:

*“It is more difficult to study at home. But other things like going to school, sitting at school, and listening to classmates screaming, running, and getting crazy. It is more convenient at home” (Kathrine, 12 y.o.).*

This negative and also emotional experience of communication at school makes some objects at home explicitly unpleasant. For instance, Max marks his backpack on his map of the home as connected to sadness. Pasha says that while he likes to play music, he developed negative feelings about the piano at some moment in his life.

*“First, I really loved the piano. Then, I started to have a negative attitude towards it because the teachers shouted at me all the time in the music school. But I love it again. When I feel bored, I sit to play my favorite melodies” (Pasha, 12 y.o.).*

Thus, the experience of children corresponds to the assumption about school as a place of control and discipline. For instance, James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) emphasize the divisions of the day into timetables and placing of children in classrooms not only facilitate learning but serve to discipline and control (in Holloway and Valentine 2000, 770). Children feel distinctly the disciplining of bodies by placement in certain spaces, like a particular table in class or the requirement to make notes constantly even when it is not necessary, as Max points out. Therefore, talking about school learning is not the first thing that comes to mind.

Moreover, the school reduced to the fulfillment of assignments is detached not only from the negative characteristics but also from positive ones. In particular, younger children miss their friends. Pasha also mentions that *“in the regard of friends, it is better to study in the classroom”* (Pasha, 12 y.o.). Talking about remote learning at different times during the interview, it is possible to feel in the pauses and lowering of voice that he misses the sociability of a real classroom while displaying a positive attitude towards studying at home.

Learning is understood as a practice which also is inherited at home, because usually children have to do their homework after school. Thus, learning emplaced in home is not a new experience. As the school’s crucial characteristics for children embodied experiences are not transferred to the spaces of home with distant learning, the embodied knowledge of home does not change drastically. Pasha confirms that *“The home as it was for me it stayed. Where I have the most of the rest. The remote learning did not change so much”* (Pasha, 12 y.o.). Home is still primarily a safe space and a place of rest.

Particularly, children see their room as the most comfortable and secure space as they are trying to avoid not only the control imposed by the school but only the one of home. Children in the research expressed the wish for privacy in multiple forms. For instance, Kathrine states by explaining her mental

map -- *“The toilet. It does not evoke any feelings. But it is the only room which you can lock. So you can sit there”* (Kathrine, 13 y.o.). Pasha also speaks about his room as the most comfortable place in the apartment. He says that *“I really love to stay alone locked there [everyone laughs]. I lock myself so no one disturbs me. I like sometimes to lie in bed or sometimes draw or to read”* (Pasha, 12). Describing their rooms in the maps, children indicated such feelings as comfort, rest, tranquility, warmth, cosiness. Their descriptions are both sensual and emotional. However, the emotional depiction of homes is not homogeneous.

While all children have warm feelings towards home in general, the space of home contains a whole mix of experiences. Kathrine tries to explain the complexity of her perception of home as: *“I do not have single associations. Sometimes I want to go for a walk after school. Sometimes I want to go directly home to have a rest. So I have pleasant .. and that .. I do not want [silent voice]”* (Kathrine, 12). She marks on her map that (Figure 4.) the entrance corridor of her apartment can be comfortable or otherwise depending on her mood. Max depicts the living room as a space of conflict and he says *“Sometimes I go to the living room and there are discussions, which leads to conflicts. But a calm one”* (Max, 13 y.o.). Kate and Maryna place the neighbours as unpleasant elements of home, because the neighbours come to complain about the noise. Kate also draws her sister Maryna as negative elements of the space but rather in a joking manner as they both sincerely laugh at it. Thus, the space and embodied experience of home is more complex than that of secure heaven.

Learning is understood as a practice that also is inherent to home because usually, children have to do their homework after school. Thus, learning at home is not a new experience. As the school’s crucial characteristics for children’s embodied experiences are not transferred to the spaces of home with distant learning, the embodied knowledge of home does not change drastically. Pasha confirms that *“the home as it was for me it stayed. Where I have the most of the rest. The remote learning did not change so much”* (Pasha, 12 y.o.). Home is still primarily a safe space and place of rest.

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avoid not only controls of school but only control of the home. Children in the research expressed the wish for privacy in multiple forms. For instance, Kathrine explains this by elaborating on her mental map -- “The toilet. It does not evoke any feelings. But it is the only room which you can lock. So you can sit there” (Kathrine, 13 y.o.). Pasha also speaks about his room as the most comfortable place in the apartment. He says that “I really love to stay alone locked there [everyone laughs]. I lock myself so no one disturbs me. I like sometimes to lie in bed or sometimes draw or to read” (Pasha, 12 y. o.). Describing their rooms on maps, children indicated such feelings as comfort, rest, tranquility, warmth, coziness. Their descriptions are both sensual and emotional.

The embodiment of space is easily noticeable on the maps. Children do not divide sensual feelings and emotional states or even body movements in their depiction of spaces. For instance, the bedroom of Max is depicted to contain resting (activity), tiredness (physical state), and tranquility (abstract emotional state). Moreover, on the map, Pasha describes some rooms through objects „my childbed,” some rooms by activity „study here,” „shower here,” some activities by feelings „I love to cook here” and some objects via their agency „the clothes hang and the shoes stay” (subscriptions in Pasha’s map translated from Ukrainian by the author. See Pasha’s map Figure 6.). The complexity of the embodied spaces is particularly visible in the maps of Kate and Maryna, who included other people in their homes like neighbors and parents or each other, other live things like plants, and even cold of the outside environment as part of their home (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). Thus, in many ways, children themselves depict space in the whole complexity and connected with their bodies.

Moreover, the emotional depiction of homes is not homogeneous. While all children have warm feelings towards home in general, the space of home contains the whole mix of experiences. Kathrine tries to explain the complexity of her home perception “I do not have single associations. Sometimes, I want to go for a walk after school. Sometimes, I want to go directly home to have a rest. So I have pleasant .. and that ... I do not want [silent voice]” (Kathrine, 12 y.o.). She marks on her map that (Figure 3) the entrance corridor of her apartment can be comfortable or



Figure 6: Pasha’s map of home (9 y.o.). Studying space is marked in pink, and space for relaxing is in green, “work” is in orange.

otherwise depending on her mood. Max depicts the living room as a space of conflict and says that “sometimes, I go to the living room, and there are discussions, which lead to conflicts. But calm ones” (Max, 13 y.o.). Kate and Maryna place the neighbors as unpleasant elements of home because the neighbors come to complain about the noise. Kate also draws her sister Maryna as a negative element of the space but rather in a joking manner as they both sincerely laugh at it. Thus, the space and embodied experience of home is more complex than that of secure heaven.

### Reflection on my experience

Studying home and experience at home is difficult as children often try to look good and not distress parents saying something unpleasant. As a result, they try to emphasize multiple times on what they like. However, sometimes, in occasionally occurring alterations in intensity of speech, such as the lowering of space, making pauses or other non-verbal expressions, it becomes visible that there are multiple layers of affective and embodied experiences and being at home all the time is not easy.

Moreover, I could relate well to children’s stories about school in Ukraine as they are very similar to my own. As a result, my own experience helped me understand children better even at such short encounters. However, despite this knowledge, I tried to be open to hearing different stories and different

interpretations, and I was happy to find such a variety of experiences.

## Conclusions

Remote learning is emplaced in the home by spatial practice. However, schooling reduced to learning without its typical components such as disciplining of bodies and projecting of social expectations does not change the embodied knowledge of home drastically. Children continue to consider school and home as two different entities, perceiving home general more positively because of privacy, the ability to control their time and bodies better, and the closeness with other family members. Despite the constraints of remote learning, children feel rather positive about such form of education and have a positive experience of being at home during remote studying.

Further, while studying at home is not strictly organized as in school in terms of time and place, children are involved in a rearrangement of spaces via physical movement of their bodies and objects as well as via sensual and affective knowledge-making. On the one hand, children perceive some objects and places of home as related to studying or relaxing at least at some period of time. On the other hand, they imagine and feel spaces for studying and relaxing differently.

However, the homes of children are not simply a collection of functional physical units and objects for different activities. Children depict their homes as embodied spaces, which include them and their bodies with their senses, feelings, emotions, and actions. Moreover, a children's home extends beyond the physical form by the inclusion of weather outside, plants, neighbors, and other family members. As a result, the space of children's homes appears as a multifaceted constellation of objects, places, bodies arranged physically but also via embodied experience.

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# Cycling infrastructure for children? Considering children's cycling to school in Vilnius, Lithuania

Gytis Nakvosas

## Introduction

Taking a bicycle to school is one of the healthiest, active and sustainable ways to accomplish daily commute to school and back home. However, cycling to school is not as prevalent as cycling for recreational purposes, and the urban areas can often be ill-suited for cycling. Highly regarded as beneficial to children's health by public health researchers and specialists, initiatives such as Safe Routes to School as well as larger government-sponsored programmes in countries like Denmark and the United Kingdom have been promoting cycling to school. As one of the key obstacles in promotion of cycling are inappropriate physical features of the environment, creation of new cycling-adapted infrastructure is an obvious choice. As such, creation of safe environments for cycling amounts to creating physical environments more child friendly.

During the last decades, Vilnius has seen a growth of cycling trips and an expansion of the network of cycling paths, and cycling has been considered as a mode of transport of its' own right and a healthy and sustainable alternative to car-based commuting. However, it has been unclear whether the discourse behind 'cycling renaissance' in Vilnius considers specific needs and requirements for children. Even if some schools boast high rates of cycling to school, applicability of such success stories is cast in doubt over the ambivalences of further expansion plans.

The aim of this research project is to analyse the conceptual correlations between child-friendly environments (influenced by the UNICEF programme of Child Friendly City) and planning for more cycling to school by children, and to analyse to what extent these notions are supported by the developments, discourse and planning guidelines in Vilnius. Therefore, these guiding research questions will be raised: a) What features of Child Friendly Cities concept are related to development of cycling to schools?; b) To what extent does the development of

cycling infrastructure in Vilnius consider children's needs as well as creates opportunities to foster cycling to school? It is supposed that the major concern relating child friendly aspects of cycling to school in theory as well as case study will be safety related.

This study consists of a review of existing literature on cycling/active commuting to school from various disciplines (public health, environmental-behavioural studies) while complementing it with research on child-friendly environments. The case study of Vilnius will be exercised through analysis of planning programmes and guidelines. The empirical analysis consists of findings from conducted interviews with three 'experts' in the field of cycling planning in Vilnius as well as a select group of schoolchildren that are active in orienteering.

## Literature review

Cycling to school has attracted interest from different disciplines of health studies, child sociology, psychology and urban planning. This section presents the scholarly literature concerning use of cycling for commuting to school as well as role of child friendly environments in promoting cycling to school. This topic is additionally connected to literature regarding children's independent mobility, active school travels (AST) or active commuting to school, which compromises both walking and cycling to school. In parallel, there has been considerable interest over child-friendly aspects of environment, planning for children's needs as well as interconnections between urban environment and mobility choices.

*Public health perspective towards cycling to school*  
Research on cycling to school is often approached from a public health perspective, which is concerned with declining rates of independent children's mobility as well as with health benefits for children associated with cycling or active commuting to school.

Academic interest can be considered as a reaction to decreasing share of children's independent mobility and active commuting to school or leisure activities across numerous countries of the Global North (Fyhri et al. 2011, Trapp et al. 2011, Hopkins and Mandic 2017). Cycling is concerned as a form of physical activity and active lifestyle, which in turn leads to smaller risks of health issues, such as obesity. Practices of cycling with higher, greater aerobic fitness, lower body mass index and other health metrics (Larouche 2015, 494). More broader benefits of physical activity include maintenance of muscle mass, lower risks of osteoporosis in later life as well as improvements in psychological state with improvements to self-esteem and reduction of anxiety, stress and depression (cf. van Loon and Frank 2011).

The studies linking children's adoption of cycling to various multi-level structural impacts adapt the social-ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979) of factors that affect human behaviour. It is asserted that macro-level influences, such as built environment and policies have smaller direct impact to individual behaviour as opposed to interpersonal factors (Larouche 2015, 495). Despite assumptions that more proximal influence is greater in changing the behaviour, more distant interventions (e.g. on policy or built environment level) have a larger reach to a greater number of individuals (Larouche 2015, 495). Such studies are cross-design and are oriented towards exploration of correlates between macro-level impacts and prevalence of cycling. More qualitative studies have focused on asserting opinions and perceptions have aimed at theories that evaluate children's readiness/eagerness to cycle. For example, Frater et al. (2017) investigates intrapersonal factors that relate to children's cycling to school in terms of Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and descriptive normative framework of Prototype Willingness Model (PWM) (2017, 206).

Ecologic approaches (such as in Trapp et al.) find correlations between positive individual, societal and environmental factors and uptake of cycling. It has found that distance and parental concerns about the safety of the environment were associated with cycling behaviour (2011, 4). Additionally, parental confidence in their child's ability to cycle to school mediated the relationship between perceived safety and cycling (2011, 8). Parents have been identified as

critical 'gatekeepers' to the uptake of active transport to school by numerous studies (cf. Hopkins and Mandic 2017, 2). Kytta (2008) considers the degree of children's independent mobility as a result of 'license to move' given by their parents. The perception of safety by parents has been noted in several studies to have a high influence on their children's uptake of cycling. Safety encompasses such subjects as perception of safe environments, infrastructure, accidents, responsibilities for safety, cycling skills (Hopkins and Mandic 2017, 346). Additionally, the notion of safety in research can refer to level of safety within the existing urban infrastructure that can be perceived by children or their parents. According to Timperio et. al., aspects of the social and physical neighbourhood environment may influence children's active commuting to school (2006, 48). Urban design and pedestrian environment have an impact on children's active commuting, as long distances, busy road crossings and poorly accessible and illuminated paths were negatively associated with walking or cycling to school (2006, 50). It has also been discovered that children prefer safer routes to shorter options.

As several studies have noted limited effect of cycling-promoting interventions through built environment factors, Hopkins and Mandic (2017) have explored the influences of personal and immediate family or peer networks on children's habits to cycle to school. Cycling intervenes into specific contexts of school that might impede upon the choice of cycling, as issues over lack of availability of cycling racks in school, strict dressing rules, inferiority towards 'committed' peer cyclists are raised by adolescents (Hopkins and Mandic 2017). Opportunities for socialization are related with youngster's likelihood to cycle, and studies have reported lower rates of cycling to school when a pupil experiences lack of social interaction while cycling as his peers/neighbours do not cycle (Benson and Scriven 2012). Even if children who cycle perceived cycling as an opportunity to having 'time alone, non-cycling children reported that bicycles limit spontaneous socializing opportunities after school, e.g. as carrying bicycle with oneself has been reportedly hindering socialization (Hopkins and Mandic 2017).

Other studies view children's mobility in the broader social framework, which can explain the expansion of

car travels to school. Fyhri et. al (2011) set out a list of social parameters including employment rates by sex, car ownership, participation in organized activities, access to mobile phones. By their assessment, trends of increasing motorization of children's travels in four observed countries can be explained by contextual framework of families' daily life. Employment is now common for both parents, and families with children are heavily motorized. Additionally, communication technologies (e.g. mobile phone) decreases the need for daily activity planning. These reasons, as well as perceived shortage of time during the morning hours increases the need to transport children to school or leisure activities (709).

### *Child-friendly environments, cities and urban planning*

Cycling to school, alike broader notion of children's independent mobility, constitutes a normative goal which is embedded into frameworks of child-friendly environments and child-friendly planning. This chapter will overview the concepts of interactions between places and children in environmental-behavioural literature as well as the role of Child-Friendly Cities (CFC) concept in broader planning literature. The relationship between children and places has been a subject to rich environmental-behavioural literature. The concept of Child Friendly Cities 'embodies a commitment to create better living conditions in cities for all children by upholding their basic human rights' and has influenced a series of studies that aim to operationalise the criteria for child-friendly places (Chatterjee 2005, as cited in Nordsstrom 2010). Taking an approach by Whitzman, Worthington, and Mizrachi (2010) - that children's independent mobility, possibility to explore public space are akin to children's right to the city (as cited in Broberg, Kyttä, and Fagerholm 2013) - shows a discourse on children based on their autonomous agency rather than a uniform group that is emboldened in the right's perspective.

An attempt by Chatterjee (2005) aimed to relate the psychological aspects of friendship by Doll (1966) to children's connections to places. Her definition proposes that child friendly place 'is an environment that promotes exploration and actualization of its many affordances for different activities and social interactions; offers opportunities for environmental

learning and competence by shaping physical characteristics of the place through repeated use and promoting children's participation in care and maintenance of the place; allows children to express themselves freely in creation and control of territories and special places; and protects the secrets and activities of children in these childhood places from harm.' (Chatterjee 2005, 17). Furthermore, Horelli (1998) developed 10 criteria of child-friendly environments, albeit subsequent Nordström's (2010) research suggests that children (specifically, 12-year olds) emphasise the importance of basic services, safety and security as well as urban and environmental qualities rather than all 10 criteria (2010, 519). Safety has been particularly important to children living in inner cities, covering topics of excessive car traffic and speeding as well as violence or drug use. Broberg, Kyttä, and Fagerholm propose to use a concept of 'Bullerby' environment created by Kyttä (2004) to describe an environment which allows for a high degree of children's independent mobility as well as numerous opportunities to actualize environmental affordances (2013, 112). Their research of children in Turku, Finland showed that the connection between independent mobility and diversity of affordances were connected was confirmed by GIS-based children's identification of locations with their perceived affordances.

Frameworks of normative dimensions for environmental child-friendliness by these authors can be applied to evaluate environments that are often used by children as well as to regard whether planning interventions (such as construction of new cycling infrastructure) create child-friendly environments. According to Chatterjee, 'possible links between citywide strategies and lived experiences of places could be established by providing a diverse range of physical and social settings and ensuring safe access to those settings (2005, 19). A child friendly city can be made up of numerous and interlocking child friendly places that children explore and engage with. Furthermore, research on mobility-promoting urban structures have found correspondence between active lifestyles for children and characteristics of physical environment (cf. van Loon and Frank 2011). More planning-oriented literature is concerned with practical interventions and implementation of programmes that encourage children to cycle

to school. It is assumed that home and school are particularly important environments to youth because of durations of time that are spent there. Built environment influences youth physical activity through access and design; parameters such as proximity relate to characteristics of built environment including density, land use mix, access to specific uses (such as schools), whereas street and park or playground design constitute the design branch (Figure 2, from van Loon and Frank 2011, 286). These features can be modified through planning interventions and policies such as providing greater access to schools by their location or connectivity, comprehensive traffic plans that enable active transportation, retrofitting street designs overall or specifically around schools (such as Safe routes to school). Van Loon and Frank (2011) propose a general argument for urban form interventions from the scientific literature. Urban modifications are long-lasting interventions (in opposition to alternative interventions) that can enable future behaviour change. Furthermore, these changes affect wider populations. Promotion programmes range in their methods and usually include several measures such as renewal/adaptation of infrastructure (streets in the vicinity of schools, cycling paths), skill-learning programmes (learning children how to cycle), promoting mindset changes (Fyhri et al. 2011). Focus is cast on national level policy measures in terms of consideration of children's car dependency, promotion of independent mobility, concerns over traffic safety. Trapp et al. concludes that urban planning strategies shall aim to promote more child cyclable neighbourhoods by putting schools and leisure activities in vicinity, improving street connectivity and reducing traffic volumes (2011, 9). According to Timperio et al., initiatives such as Safer Routes to School in the United Kingdom, which include employing traffic wardens, creating more pedestrian crossings or having traffic calming interventions, can increase the rates of children's cycling to school. Creation of child friendly environments is one way to determine whether features of the city are friendly. CFC initiatives envisages cities to be complex governmental organisations that uses legal and planning powers in order to transform the living environments of children at the family, neighbourhood and city levels' (Riggio 2002, 45, as

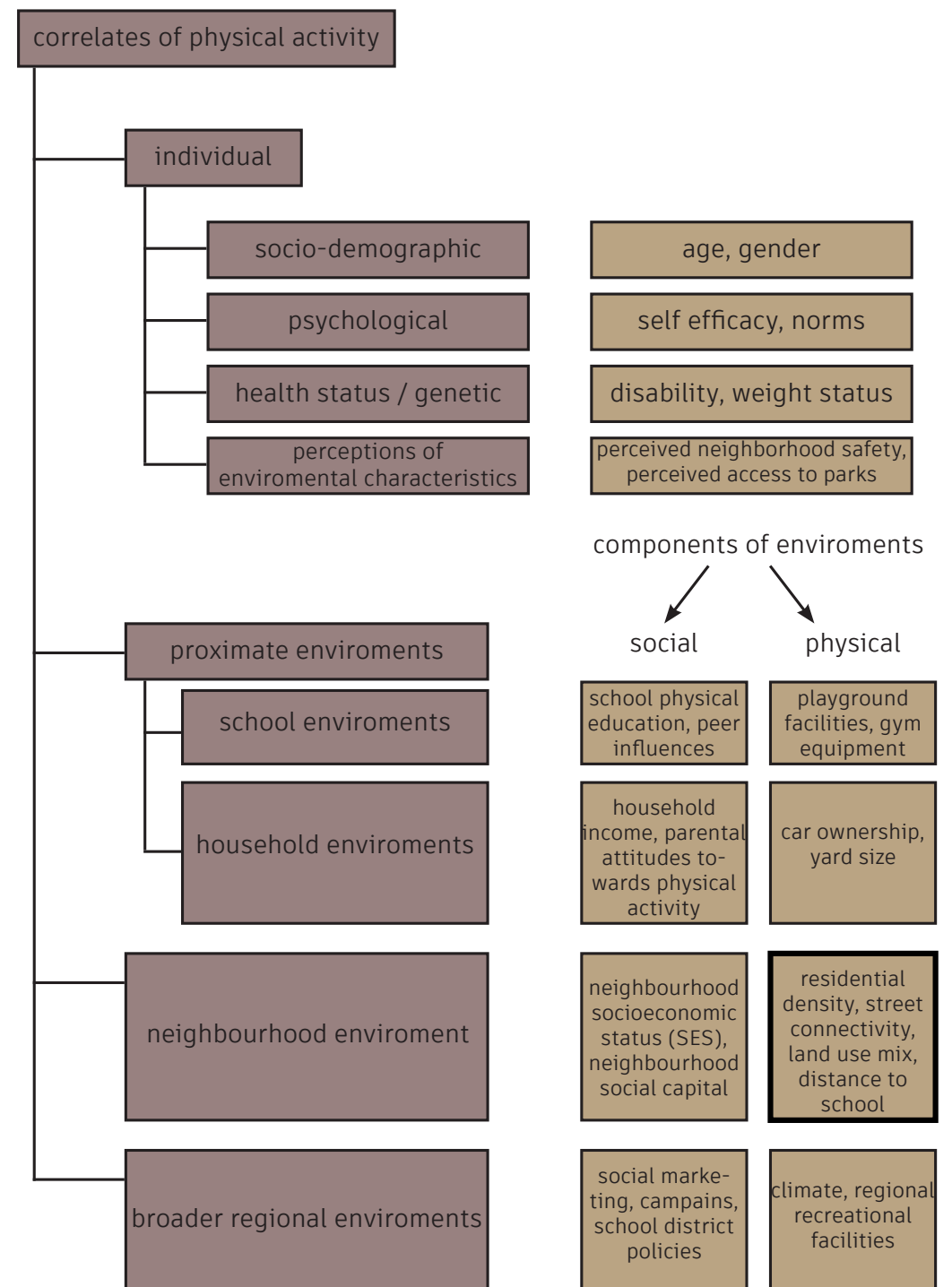


Figure 1: . An ecological classification of correlates of child physical activity. Taken from van Loon and Frank 2011, 285

quoted in Chatterjee 2005, 18). By committing to become a Child-Friendly city, a city must commit to provide outcomes of policies, resource allocation, governance actions are made in the best interest of children as well as 'safe environments with opportunities for recreation, learning, social interaction, psychological development and cultural expression' are provided; finally, children have the right to participate in decision making (Malone, 2006, 21, as quoted in Whitzman 2010). Departing from rights-based to needs-based approach, children have to the right to be recognized as an interest group

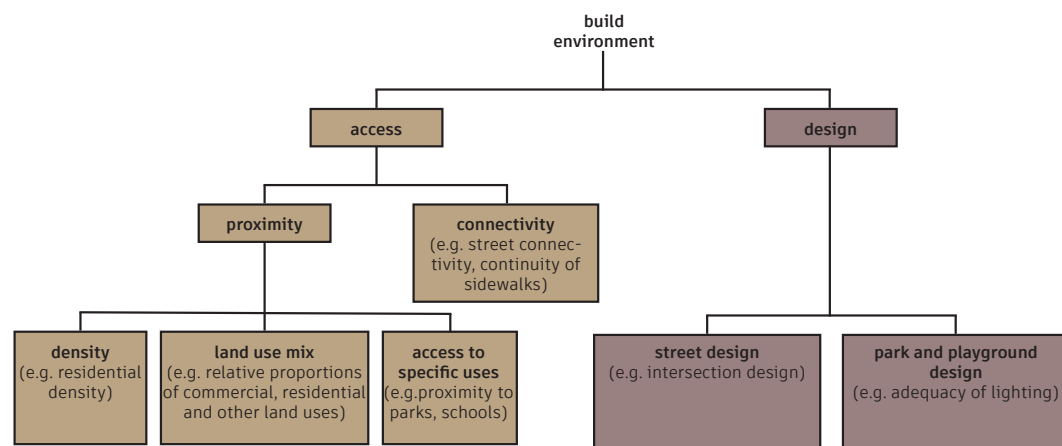


Figure 2. A typology of built environment correlates of physical activity. Taken from van Loon and Frank 2011, 286

that can only be expressed by themselves (Whitzman 2010, 477).

In conclusion, the scholar interest behind the children's cycling to school from various scientific disciplines reflects complex relationship between personal, intrapersonal, societal and environmental features which may impact the mode of transportation to school. There is a large consensus in public health as well as environmental-psychology studies behind positive impacts of cycling towards children's health and cognitive development. Furthermore, empirical research has shown similarities of factors that inhibit cycling to school, namely, issues over lack of safe environments for cycling, parental disapproval, convenience of driving to school as well as social aspects such as socialization with peers.

There is relative vagueness over what constitutes child-friendly environments and whether the Child Friendly City concept provides more explicit criteria for implementation. The attempts by scholars from environmental behavioural studies to define child friendly aspects can help to evaluate proposed planning guidelines and policies, and many of the proposed interventions (physical- or social- based) consider some aspects of child friendly environments. However, it is asserted that policy makers are not concerned with placemaking itself but focus on knowing the effects of the environment on health, wellbeing and education, which is why CFC is defined in those terms (Chatterjee 2005). Broberg, Kyttä, and Fagerholm (2013) agree to a conclusion by McMillan (2005) and Woolcock, Gleeson, and Randolph (2010) that 'questions concerning children's active lifestyle and urban form cannot be fully answered without a more thorough analysis of micro-scale data on

urban form and the social and ecological variation that occur throughout cities. Finally, Whitzman, Worthington, and Mizrahi (2010) claims that Child Friendly Cities approach provide an alternative focus towards children and a departure from social and health planning perspectives that have more significant impacts on land-use planning (Broberg, Kyttä, and Fagerholm 2013).

## Methods

This research project combines several research methods. In order to reveal the context of cycling policies and infrastructure in Vilnius, relevant municipal policies, programmes and strategic documents will be analysed in order to evaluate whether children are considered as a group of interest in the realm of cycling development programmes in the city of Vilnius. Secondly, three expert interviews with individuals with insights in cycling for children in the current conditions in Vilnius were conducted. These individuals include a cycling activist from the Lithuanian Union of Cyclists; 2) head of the Department for Sustainable Mobility in the municipal agency for public transport and mobility and 3) a community leader in a residential district with high rates of children's use of bicycles in commute to school. Finally, interviews with 7 youngsters involved in orienteering training (aged 13-17) took place. Discussions with this group provided valuable insights into present problems that an otherwise physically active group of youngsters' experiences in regard to cycling to school.

The validity of findings of this project is limited in several ways. The sample of interviewed children is not representative of the schoolchildren at large neither it represents the children that cycle to school. Secondly, only a handful of experts have presented their views which means that their subjective opinions cannot be fully taken as an evaluation of the existing situation, given that not all relevant authorities were being questioned in this project. Thirdly, limited scope of the research meant parents as a focus group were not included in this research.

### Case study: promotion of cycling for children in Vilnius, Lithuania

Cycling in Vilnius is covered by several major documents and guidelines. In this analysis, the focus is cast over the currently binding and proposed Master Plan of Vilnius (2007 and 2018), Special plan of Cycling paths in Vilnius and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan which was adopted by the Vilnius City Council. The Special Plan has been adopted in 2014 and set the priorities for the development of cycling infrastructure. The Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) is 1000-page integrated action plan containing guidelines on governance of traffic, public transport and connectivity in Vilnius, including involvement of various stakeholders for governmental, municipal authorities as well as non-governmental actors. It sets out goals until year 2030. SUMPs are a framework promoted by the European Commission, and financial support from the European Union can be attracted for the preparation of the Plan by local municipalities. The Ministry of Transport and Communications has initiated the adoption of SUMPs in select municipalities in Lithuania. Currently, 20 of 60 municipalities have prepared their plans. The analysis of the documents' compatibility with children's needs was based on research of the keywords (in Lithuanian) 'child', 'schoolchildren', 'school', 'youth'. This direct research is used to highlight explicit consideration of children's mobility in the contents.

The Special Plan was prepared in order to develop a network of main cycling paths in the territory of Vilnius. It sets a priority list of cycling paths that could be fully accomplished in the duration of 10 years and considers areas where cycling infrastructure (including bicycle racks, bike-rent stands) could be concentrated. Additionally, the plan is complemented with maps that outline the main cycling corridors. One of the main purposes of the plan is to provide alternative options for daily travels within the city. However, it can be said that the plan contains no reference to children or travels to schools specifically as it does not differentiate between different age groups of users. Similarly, the newly proposed Plan does not consider children's travels to school or children as a specific group of cyclists, as the Plan is concerned with promotion of cycling within the overall share of commuting in the city.

The Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan is a comprehensive document in regards with children's mobility. It considers the mobility factors, spatial concentration of schools and children, neighbourhood environments. Firstly, it is acknowledged that lack of education facilities in several neighbourhoods leads to long travels to school that are mostly convenient by car. A survey has shown that 29 percent of all school children are driven to school by their parents (Figure 3, taken from SUMP 2018, 505). It has been shown that more travels by car are done with younger pupils as well as to schools on the edge of city core areas that serve children from low density suburbs. The Plan suggests to consider increasing the connectivity between schools and the suburbs by strengthening the services of public transport, which can be deliberated with the schools and residents of target neighbourhoods (SUMP 2018, 505-506). The plan further aims to decrease the share of car travels to school by half (from 1/3 to 1/6 of total) by 2030. It suggests modifying school environments by traffic calming as well as to broaden the network of educational facilities so that it has high connectivity by alternative means (SUMP 2018, 791). Measures such as improving pedestrian tracks as well as implementation of 'safe routes to school' are suggested. Furthermore, networks of

45% apklaustųjų į švietimo įstaiga atvyksta viešuoju transportu, 29% - automobiliu, 24% - pėsčiomis.

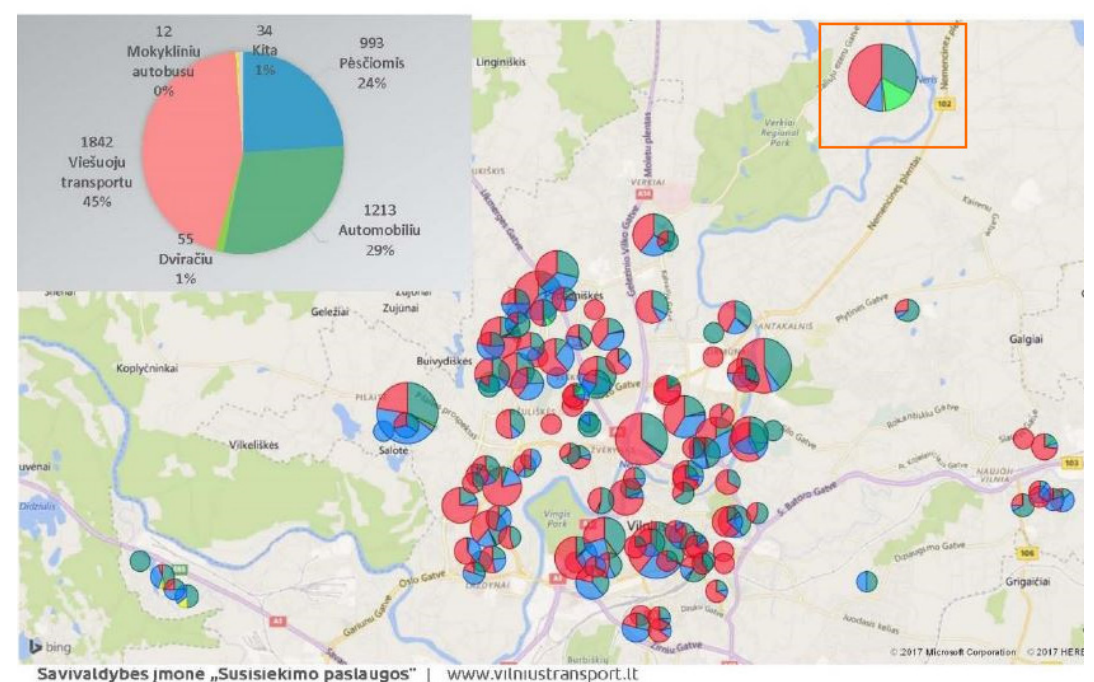


Figure 3. Modal share of schools in Vilnius. Blue colour – travels on foot, dark green – by car, light green – by bike, red – by public transportation. The school in Balsiai in the NE corner is highlighted with a red rectangle. Taken from SUMP 2018, 505

'local bicycle networks' should be suited to connect schools and kindergartens to the main network of cycling infrastructure (SUMP 2018, 813). Additionally, monitoring of the implementation of this Plan should include social-based measures that motivate schoolchildren to adopt sustainable travel habits.

The Plan highlights the problematic features of connectivity by foot in the neighbourhoods (such as typical housing estates), such as unsafe environments. Strategies on humanizing of environments aim to create environments of the city more friendly to car-free modes of mobility. Children as well as physically disabled residents are considered as a key group: 'travels on bicycle by children and other 'rolling' means will have a high impact on their mobility habits by year 2030' (SUMP 2018, 777). Specific chapter is dedicated children: it is stated that 'currently, environments in Vilnius lack universal design and are not friendly to children as well as physically impaired'; 'children are pushed away from public life of the city, <> their mobility is highly dependent on their parents', teachers' and other adults in the city' (SUMP 2018, 984). City environments are only 'forbidden' or 'very antagonistic' to children, which makes parents to use a car to transport their children to schools or leisure facilities. Measures such as creation of 'superblocks' with pedestrianised and calm streets with shared spaces that promote connectivity on social basis and independent mobility. Attention is given to home environments: as inner yards are full of parked cars, there is lack of feeling of safety and physical presence in the environment. The City is encouraged to promote alternatives of cycling, public transportation and cycling among children in order to foster sustainable mindset for commuting purposes (SUMP 2018, 985).

In addition to traditional policy measures, since November 2019, the city municipality of Vilnius, alongside other two city municipalities (Kaunas and Alytus) has been involved with Child Friendly Cities programme directly through cooperation with the local chapter of UNICEF. However, as of September 2020, no further developments have been known of publicly. Therefore, it is impossible to evaluate the scope of considered measures that cover for the needs of children and proposed formats of inclusion of children into deliberation processes. The press release from Vilnius City Municipality states

that the collaboration between UNICEF and the municipality will 'create opportunities for children to participate in decision making regarding matters that are important to them, when places or services for children are being created or developed' (Vilnius City Municipality, 2019a). By indulging in the Child-Friendly Cities initiative with the UNICEF Lithuanian National Committee, the Municipality of Vilnius pledges to conduct an investigation on the actual state of children's rights in the municipal territory and commits to draft an Action plan that defines objectives, measurement criteria, guidelines and budget in order to become more child-friendly city, which would also help to receive acknowledgement as a Child-Friendly City from the UNICEF (Vilnius City Municipality, 2019b). However, it is arguable that the top city officials see children's needs through the lens of parenting as well as broader structures of education. The press release presents 'achievements' of the sitting administration that consist of renewal and creation of new playgrounds for children, upgrade of kindergarten and school buildings, increase of share of expenses for the education needs in the municipal budget as well as multiplied funding for children's summer camps (Vilnius City Municipality, 2019a).

In conclusion, the documents show lack of explicit attention to children as users of the cycling paths. On the other hand, the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan provides rich consideration of child-friendly mobility aspects as well as various measures to make environments more friendly. This plan considers several important factors, such as connectivity of cycling-friendly infrastructure to schools, availability of bicycle racks. However, even if the plan contains various suggestions and proposals, it serves as a guidelines and recommendations, and are reportedly not strictly followed in the legislation that validates construction of the infrastructure.

## Findings

### *Children interviews: perceptions on cycling to school by physically active children*

To hear from youngsters directly, 7 interviews have taken place on 27.08.2020 and 06.09. 2020. 3 girls and 4 boys were interviewed, with an age range from 13 to 17. All youngsters have been actively

involved in orienteering, e.g. youngsters perform several trainings of running or navigation per week, individually or collectively, and participate in orienteering competitions that take place on the weekends. The questions were influenced by the questionnaire from the study of Frater et al. (2017) which uses the frameworks of Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Prototype Willingness Model (PWM). The authors of this study aimed to 'assess children's past behaviour, attitudes, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control and intentions related to cycling to school' (SUMP 2018, 208).

The chosen group may not be representative of school children at large. Through engaging in orienteering, which is a highly physical activity that requires strong navigational skills, independence as well as quick decision making, arguably, the children possess skills that are involved in independent children's mobility. Therefore, they might be assumed to possess skills that are developed by regular cycling practice.

The children can be said to rank high in their 'perceived behavioural control' which includes capability, confidence, ability, and perceived control (autonomy). Each of the interviewed children owned a bicycle and have cycled on numerous occasions with their parents, e.g. during vacations. Neither of the children was too afraid to cycle alone per se, and most of them have been doing cycling-related activities alone or with their friends. According to one 14-year old interviewee, during summer vacations at the seaside, 'cycling across villages and forests in the Curonian Spit has become a family tradition'. Children may ride bicycle with their friends, parents or adult siblings for recreational purposes, which can also include urban environments. For example, one girl mentioned that she often joins her adult brother's running session on a bicycle with his girlfriend. Similarly, a 17-year-old boy reported that he is doing multiple enduring cycling sessions per week since his ability to run has been hampered by his very sudden growth in height. A 14-year old boy has described himself an enthusiast of BMX cycling, and he regularly cycles to skate park to perform tricks with his friends.

It can be said that the children were strong in all the aforementioned parameters. However, only 2 of them had cycled to their school. The reasons given varied: 1) they are usually taken to their school by parents;

2) the school is very close, so children are usually walking; 3) they are taking public transportation; 4) the school is too far away from home; 5) reaching one's bicycle takes too much time. Therefore, the conversation largely rolled on their typical usage of bicycles.

Each youngster had clear preferences of their chosen routes and were critical towards perceived drawbacks of driving on a regular street setting which includes sharing space with pedestrians, riding through ill-fit infrastructure (e.g. old dilapidated sidewalks or paved ways with high kerbs). Most of the children have their 'usual' routes that are not necessarily 'safe' ones. To the younger respondents, their usage of bicycles tended to be more limited to their neighbourhoods and adjacent green areas. A 15-year old girl clearly expressed that there are two routes towards the forests, and she is not so keen to use the bicycle to go elsewhere (noteworthy, she possesses an electric scooter which she uses for middle-ranged trips from her home). Most stark independence was demonstrated by a 17-year old youngster, who expressed difficulties when riding alongside cars (I am nervous that I am making car drivers uncomfortable with my presence), even if the area he was referring to is a two-lane dual carriageway that is very unsafe for regular cyclists.

To talk specifically on possibilities to cycle to school, several children were living very far away from school even when residing in the city core. Two of the interviewees were attending prestigious or higher-level schools that accept students based on entry exams, or the child are registered to be residing within the school's neighbourhood even if they live elsewhere. Both were driven to schools by their parents, and reportedly, their schools were not on the way of their parents' workplaces. Noteworthy, some children from suburban localities could potentially have been interviewed but were eventually omitted since their distances to school reach up to 15 kilometres, which makes being driven to school the only viable option. Conversely, three children who lived 'relatively close' to school (up to 2 kilometres) were not cycling since walking or using public transportation is a more convenient option than cycling.

Difficulties in accessing and keeping bicycles at home was mentioned as a problem for some children,



mostly those who live in an older apartment building. Two children claimed that there is no convenient option to store one's bike in the building or flat and simply reaching one's bike (e.g. from the basement or from the flat) takes considerable time and effort given time-tight morning routines. However, some others expressed that they had no difficulty since they could leave the bike inside a garage (in an individual house) or easily access it in a basement locker (a 15-year old girl living in a newly built block of flats).

Question whether it is possible to safely store one's bicycle was raised and the majority of children have agreed that there were bicycle racks available or there were other options to leave the bicycle provided that it is locked. One girl had said that she did not know whether it was possible to leave a bike in the premises, only to be corrected by other students (who happened to go to the same high school) that the options existed. Asked whether they have noticed anyone cycling to the school or whether any of their friends cycle to school, all children have reported that they have seen cycles left by the entrance to the school building: One interviewee even claimed that „there are racks for bicycles that are usually full“, however, nobody expressed that people that are cycling to school are their acquaintances or friends. Asked whether they imagine cycling to school, only 3 had expressed an opinion that they might consider cycling to school one day. The 14 year old boy said that he 'only needed to get a bicycle lock' so he could try cycling to school (even as he uses a BMX bicycle and lives around 6 kilometres to the school, there is a relatively good connectivity within the cycling path network). The 17-year old boy said that he might try it 'for fun', as an alternative to walking (by 'fun' he implied that the ride would be adventurous and fast since he has to descend a large slope on his way to school). One girl, while living 10 km from her school, raised an important point about lack of time or facilities to take a shower and redress before the lessons start.

*Expert interviews: focusing on the establishment on 'normal conditions for cyclists'*

Three experts were interviewed via phone during September 2020. The questions asked were covering similar themes, however the questions were slightly

different as all the respondents represented different backgrounds and professional engagements. Most visibly, the interview with the community leader from Balsiai mostly dealt with the cycling in that neighbourhood.

The primary concern of these experts was the establishment of proper infrastructure for cyclists in Vilnius in general, and for the community leader, in Balsiai district. However, the opinions differed over the quality of the currently constructed infrastructure. All three shared their preference to connect the missing bits of cycling network first. The cycling activist criticized the design of the newly constructed infrastructure: *'Even if the most planning guidelines such as Plan of Sustainable Mobility has a 'good' quality, the final stretch of the implementation – design of newly constructed streets or cycling paths fails to meet technical requirements. It is the largest problem – the strategy is clear: 'we will promote cycling, etc', however the projects are realised in low quality and are uncomfortable to use.'* The municipal coordinator has noted the complexity of document and its longevity, however reiterated that *'our municipal agency is considering the plan very seriously, however there is still a long way to go.'* He further stated that personally he feels that city is doing *too little regarding soft measures or when it comes to communicating to people in order to change cultural understandings.* There was a marked detachment from several initiative people (as both the activist and the coordinator have been involved in drafting the Vilnius SUMP), other personnel in key departments were referred to as 'inert' and 'requiring time to learn about requirements for cyclists'.

Asked about specific needs of children in cycling, the interviewees were not singling out children as separate. In their view, proper cycling infrastructure must be child-friendly by default: the cycling activist told *'If children can use the bicycle path, it means that the road is truly safe to use for everybody'*, which was echoed by the municipal coordinator. Both have mentioned Dutch 'Sustainable Safety' system, where streets have either transit or 'calm traffic' functions, and infrastructure is suited so that *'the human factor/mistake does not cost human lives'* (Coordinator). *As the Dutch are seriously sticking to this system (there are no cycling paths to every house), the overall cycling experience is coherent,*

*unlike here, when transit in the large streets is being obstructed or 'calm streets' receive an outlook with several lanes and cycling paths (Cycling activist).*

Safety was the primary concern for all interviewees. Currently, the state of cycling outside the cycling network was described as difficult. Therefore, built environment interventions must come first. According to the activist, *promotion [of cycling] will remain 'promotion' if no infrastructure will be implemented, and parents will not let their children to cycle on sidewalks with hard or to use lanes for public transport. <> As there is no relevant infrastructure, mostly young and brave people can cycle in such conditions.* The interviewees expressed disapproval over the societal atmosphere including 'reckless driving culture' and 'official approach to road safety'. The cycling activist made a distinction between Lithuanian 'forbid and penalise' approach to safety rather than a more liberal approach taken by several countries. Accordingly, this leads to 'nihilist approach by users who realise that the infrastructure is ill-suited however they are expected to obey.' According to the municipal coordinator, the traffic culture can be influenced by infrastructure, but also, all actors in traffic should treat each other respectfully: *currently, given our culture, It is unsure whether a children can drive around safely in the Old Town, where cycling is organised among cars.*

*School in Balsiai: cycling to school en masse in risky conditions*

Particular interest was given to the school in Balsiai district after recommendations from the cycling enthusiasts. Balsiai is a low-density suburb of Vilnius, located almost 10 kilometres away from the city centre and modernist-era housing districts that dominate the cityscape. The neighbourhood has grown as a result of post-socialist era liberalization of residential construction, where former collective garden allotments had been gradually converted for permanent housing use. As a result, the district predominantly consists of 1-2 storey individual family housing. Around 15 thousand people live in the territory. For many years, this residential locality has been rapidly growing, yet basic utilities and education facilities were lacking. A new primary school was built in 2011, which has been extended to host students up to 8th grade. Therefore, this is one

of the newest schools in Vilnius which is built in a predominantly low-density residential area.

According to the community leader, around 300 children (out of approx. 1300) cycle to school every day. It is reported that the main group of cyclists consists of children from 4th grade to 8th (final) grade (11 to 15 year old). Younger children come rarely as parents worry about the safety: *there are no cycling paths, no sidewalks; children go mostly on roadway, in 'living zone' streets, avoiding main streets; but sometimes they cannot avoid them and situations with cars and children cycling can become difficult. It leads to unsafe conditions for cycling: there is plenty of 'extreme' for cyclists as well as for drivers, more so as children are not sometimes fully aware of cars.* Some children arriving from further away also take the main transit route, which was described as dangerous. Community leader anticipates the new cycling paths *as for a salvation* claiming that the newly constructed cycling paths will serve for connectivity while creating more safety and serve the children's needs first. Even if the streets are not intensively used and some streets are marked as 'living streets' with 20 km/h speed limit, the drivers disregard this: *we should not compare ourselves to the Netherlands bearing in mind our driving culture'. This rather unique share of cycling to school in comparison to other schools in Vilnius tends to be a result of conscious efforts by the community to include cycling to school. It was as part of the 'Scandinavian' concept of the upcoming school. The surroundings of the school have roofed cycling parking locations with cycling racks, with the interviewee claiming that 'she has not seen analogue solutions in the city schools, <> it can be claimed that the inclusion of cycling infrastructure to the construction project has fully paid off'. Another marked difference is the easiness to reach the bike: in comparison with city core areas where children might find it difficult to carry their bike multiple floors to their apartment, single family houses have an advantage that it takes little time to take the bike from the garage or the inner yard.*

## **Discussion**

The concepts of child-friendly cities and child friendly places share several common objectives as the main aims set out by the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, which is the single document explicitly mentioning

children's needs. Expert interviews have revealed that there might not be such differentiation in the safety design conceptions (such as Sustainable Safety, the quoted Dutch 'Sustainable Safety' approach). It can be considered that the aim of cycling development document and programmes is to provide safe infrastructure, which fulfils some of the criteria of child-friendly environment developed by several researchers. However, there is a lack of consideration of neighbourhood level interventions. The creation of large-scale network is prioritised over creation of 'local' cycling path networks between neighbourhoods. It signifies a linear-based connectivity approach whereas place-based interventions are absent or lower on the preference list. Arguably, Vilnius has been struggling to come up with effective neighbourhood-level governance schemes and cycling mobility plans might not be the primary tool to create walkable and cycling friendly environments in the neighbourhoods.

Interviews with the youngsters and the community leader emphasised the importance of place-based facilities, whereas the cycling activist and the municipality official both focused on the large-scale planning objectives first. As explained by the community leader, the school in Balsiai district was being constructed with attention to provision of cycling infrastructure. This is somewhat lacking in the cycling documentation – although the suggestions in the SUMP and proposed school-level 'Travel plans' represent a place-based approach. However, there are wider cultural safety concerns that may reflect the preference for creation of major infrastructure (e.g. separated bicycle lanes) that create safe cycling opportunities.

The discussions with youngsters revealed a complex picture of individual perceptions of the environment as well as reasons behind their choice or resulting outcome whether to cycle to school or not. Children did not necessarily live close to their attended school and were using other options. However, some of them were driven to school even if there were alternatives. SUMP addresses lack of independent mobility to schools, however the planning documents do not address this issue explicitly. Furthermore, residential environments often inhibit cycling because of lack of parking spaces. Given the fact that 2/3 of residents in Vilnius live in a modernist-era housing estates,

higher attention to provision of bicycle parking facilities in the neighbourhoods could be given in the planning guidelines. Additionally, the opinion of children reflected that schools could be more cycle-friendly, something that was also addressed in the SUMP.

## **Conclusions**

This study project aimed to explore the adaptability and inclusion of children's concerns into the discourse of Child-Friendly-Cities and in case study of Vilnius, Lithuania. Safety related concerns usually dominate the agenda in discourses that concern children and their environments. Rather, research of child friendly aspects reveals a broader picture of parameters that relate to autonomy, free movement of children as well as ability by the environment to offer rich affordances. The case study has shown that safety is seen as a prerequisite for proper cycling, even in contexts where cycling to school is rather popular. Promotion of cycling in the city includes children as any safe infrastructure must be properly suited for various groups. Moreover, the interviews with children have revealed a broader picture regarding cycling and what would approaching cycling signify to their daily routine. Their habits of cycling use as well as perception of cycling to school represent meanings and factors that are often overshadowed in consideration over children in more adult political and planning policy discourses. Somewhat positively, the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan offers a broad picture that reflects complex relationships that affect cycling as a mobility choice as well as considers children as autonomous actors that can adopt cycling through creation of more child-friendly environments and societal discourse. The review of existing literature over the fields of public safety and environmental behaviour studies can add a contribution to studies which aim to explore child-friendly aspects of cycling environments and infrastructure as well as frameworks that explain environmental and social aspects to cycling. This study, through collection of opinions from adult experts and physically active children can put forward a contribution over consideration of various directions for action that promotes cycling beyond investments in cycling infrastructure and is oriented towards the needs of children.

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# Childhood of Vietnamese urban children in the era of digital technologies

by Ha Phan Nguyen Hai

## Abstract

As the era of digital technologies is thriving in recent years, it is often to see smartphones and other digital devices as inseparable items of the Vietnamese youth, even young children under 10 years old. Besides the concern on how technology could impact children's growth and development, the question of how children themselves perceive and use digital technologies is also important.

This research concentrates on studying the experience of the new generation of urban children in Vietnam with leisure by digital technologies. It is a qualitative study conducted with ten children between 10 and 16 years old in two major cities of the Vietnamese Northern and Southern sides. The purposes of the research are to understand how Vietnamese urban children experience and perceive digital leisure, how it is different from physical traditional games and recreations in their opinions, and what are the pros and cons of growing up with modern technology for those children in terms of creating childhood memories and personality development.

## Introduction

Over the past ten years, Vietnam has witnessed a rapid increase in the use of digital devices such as smartphones and tablets, as well as the number of Internet users. According to statistics of market survey agencies, digital devices in Vietnam are increasingly popular. Specifically, in 2019, Vietnam's population has reached a milestone of approximately 97 million people, with 64 million Internet users, an increase of 28% compared to 2017 (Hoang Ngoc, 2020). The chart below shows the proportion of digital devices and Internet usage compared to the population of Vietnam in 2019 and 2020 at the same time of year.

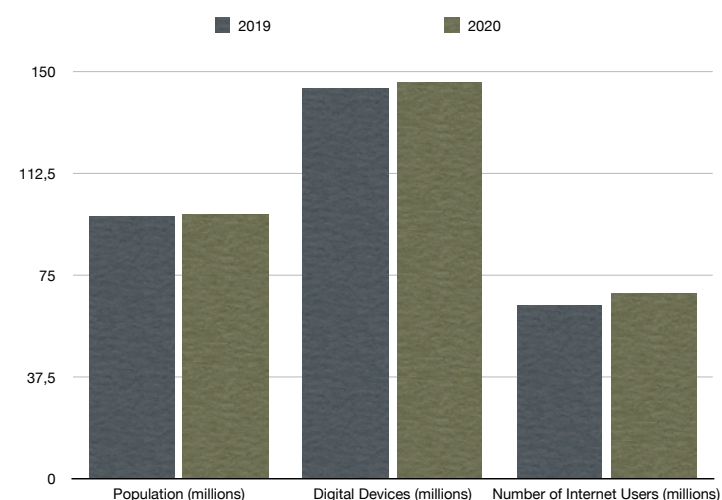


Figure 1: use of digital devices in vietnam, source: [https://media.suckhoedoisong.vn/Images/nguyenkhanh/2020/08/04/tre\\_dung\\_dien\\_thoai\\_2.jpg](https://media.suckhoedoisong.vn/Images/nguyenkhanh/2020/08/04/tre_dung_dien_thoai_2.jpg)

Along with the development of technology, the series of mid-range and low-end phones are constantly being released, making it easier for many people to own smartphones and access the Internet. If about 5 years ago, owning a smart device required the lowest cost from 1 500 000 VND (about 60€) for basic functions, then at present, with more than 700 000 VND (about 27€), a person can own a smart device full of basic features such as calling, accessing the Internet and social media, etc. Therefore, owning

digital devices exclusively by young children and teenagers is increasingly easy and popular. In 2019, a statistic shows that the age distribution of Internet users in Vietnam is greatly young, with 17% are children of age 6 -14, and 23% are adolescents and young adults.

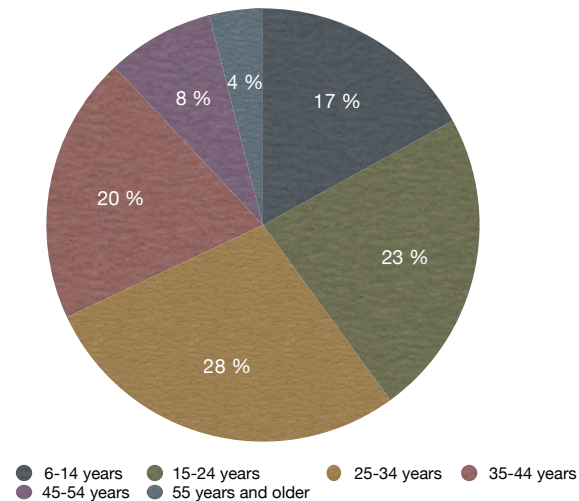


Figure 2: Age distribution of internet users in Vietnam as of May 2019 Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262216/age-distribution-of-internet-network-users-in-vietnam/>

In 2014, a social survey by the Research Center of Culture, Education and Social Life under the HCMC Ethnology and Anthropology Association has conducted in four major cities: Hanoi, Da Nang, HCMC, and Can Tho. The survey gathered replies from 1 051 respondents, who are parents of 1 802 kids from 3 to 12 years old. The result reveals an alarming fact: up to 78% of surveyed children under 6 years old use digital devices. According to the survey's findings, smartphones or tablets are often serve as babysitters when parents cannot spend time with their kids, especially those under school age. (Minh Giang, 2014)

The annual reports of „Research on children's habits of using online devices in Vietnam“ from 2014 to 2019 by TotallyAwesome - a Global Digital Advertising Company for Children and Families shows the level of children's interest in television is declining and being replaced by smart devices. Research shows that nearly 80% of Vietnamese children love and choose to use the Internet instead of watching conventional television channels. In addition, children increasingly access diverse content through numerous online channels and platforms than before. They often spend up to 91% on screen time during weekdays and

76% on weekends. (Nhu Think Hoang, 2019)

Digital technologies have changed how children spend their time, especially spare time; and how they engage in social interactions. Internet-connected devices nowadays become favorable tools for children to join diverse online activities. On the one hand, online activities can stimulate imagination, creativity, and play. Up to a certain point, these help with learning, reading, and navigating information (Chaudron, Di Gioia & Gemo, 2018). On the other hand, young children are more often upset about or vulnerable to risks of internet harms as being victims of online scams or bullying. Children can be very trusting, for example, if they are invited to meet someone after playing a game or chatting on social media (Minh Giang, 2014).

Digital technologies have also changed how children perceive and learn about the world around them at a very early age. Modern technology becomes a part of every family's life and plays a certain role in children's personality and intelligence development (Bruce-Lockhart, 2018). The childhood of urban children nowadays is no more limited to their backyards or the surrounding neighborhoods, it can reach out to the world.

By listening to children's perspectives, this present research on “Childhood of Vietnamese urban children in the era of digital technologies” focuses on finding answers to the following questions:

- How do children of age 10 to 16 experience digital activities? What are the pros and cons of using digital technology from the children's points of view?
- What are the factors that affect a child's decision when choosing activities to play? Regarding digital or physical games, indoor or outdoor activities.
- How do children feel about their experience with digital leisure compared to traditional games and recreational activities in terms of creating memorable moments or happy memories?
- How do children's interests in leisure activities change during their growing up?

- To what extent adults can leverage digital leisure to increase interaction with their children and strengthen family bonds?

This paper presents the key findings of the analysis regarding interviewed children's usage of digital devices, their perceptions, and the digital skills they may acquire in the home context. It provides insights into the perceptions and attitudes of children towards digital technologies and recreational activities. Through the children's perspectives, it reflects the nature of leisure time and how it means for children in terms of relaxation and the desire for social connection. The paper also discusses the effects of digital technologies on children's personality and intelligence development. Eventually, it concludes on the concern of interviewed parents in guiding and managing their kids' digital technologies usage and increasing family interaction by technology itself.

### **Methodology**

The research uses the qualitative and interactive interview approach, with the form of communication by talking and using illustrations. The interviews have been conducted online with ten children (six boys and four girls) of ages 10 to 16 in two Vietnamese major cities: Hai Duong and Can Tho. Their parents also participated in a few questions. The interviewed children are from sufficient families and can exclusively possess at least smartphones. Each interview lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the degree of mutual understanding between the interviewer and interviewees. The interview questions concentrate on four main themes: Children and digital activities, the sensation of urban children between physical toys/games versus digital leisure, the evolution of children's interests in recreational activities during their growing up, and parents' perception of technology-related parenting. The research analysis bases on analyzing conversations combined with observing children's behaviors and attitudes, as well as their family context (such as the number of siblings, younger and older siblings, family's financial capacity, the education of parents and the sex of the child).

### **Children and digital activities**

*How do children engage with digital technologies for the first time?*

Young children start contacting with digital devices at a very early age in the home context. The interviewed children respond that since they began to perceive and remember things in their living environment, mostly under the age of 5, digital devices have been parts of their daily lives. As the children are from large urban areas and sufficient or affluent families, the number of digital devices they have seen and use at home are huge and increasing as they growing up. The kind of devices that the children can own or access are basically similar among those families (such as television, smartphones, tablets, music players, etc.) although their quality may vary due to different economic status and financial capacity of the family.

Digital devices serve as babysitters or virtual friends for the interviewed children. They often play with digital devices not only when their parents cannot pay attention to them, but also when the family gather and have leisure time together.

*Researcher: How old were you when you first started interacting with or using digital devices?*

*Girl: I cannot remember exactly. Seems like since I was born. My family has a big TV for me to watch cartoon every day. And mom often gives me her smartphone to play game when she cooking (Ngoc Han, 13 years old).*

The interviewed children describe how they learn to use digital technologies as self-learning. This process often includes close observation of use and interaction with digital devices by parents, older siblings, cousins or peers. Most of the interviewed children first interacting with smartphones or smart TVs were offered by their parents or older siblings. Then the children mimic the behavior of others, and continue to use and learn from mistakes or errors that occur in the process of using such devices.

*I learnt it from mom. She showed me Tom [a character in the mobile game named "Talking Tom Cat"] on her smartphone and let me play with him. It is fun! (Hong Anh, 11 years old boy). I saw my*

*sister using her smartphone. She used to let me watch movies or play game on the phone with her so often. Later my sister got a new smartphone, then she gave me her old one (Hai Son, 16 years old boy).*

*What devices do children often access and use?*

The interviewed children can use a wide range of digital technologies. Before the age of 10, most of them have experience using different devices - smartphones, smart TVs, tablets, computers, etc. However, the children more prefer smartphones and tablets, because they are multifunctional and portable. Besides, most children's favorite digital devices are with a touchscreen. The fast speed and visual effects of touch navigation and diverse apps seem to support the children's playfulness and limited literacy skills at their early ages (Chaudron, Di Gioia & Gemo, 2018).

Smartphones are the most favorite in the interviewed children's responses. They are good for gaming, watching videos, listening to music, searching for information, taking photos and recording videos, chatting with friends, and accessing social media. In summary, for the children, they are handy and versatile compared to other devices. In addition, it is also important to note that the more interesting and diverse functions the device offers, the more children favor it.

*On my next birthday I wish my dad would give me an iPhone 11. I have tested one in the store; it can load heavy games faster and the graphics are also nicer than my current phone. (My Duc, 15 years old boy).*

The use of tablets, laptops, and computers is often controlled and limited by parents mostly when the children are under the age of secondary school (11 years old). When they are more grown-up, they can own smartphones or computers as a means of communicating with family or friends and supporting their studies.

Television is also a familiar device to the interviewed children. Although they did not mention it as their top choice, they often use it with family members and prefer to watch online content on Netflix or YouTube.

*What are children's digital activities?*

Children often use digital technologies for leisure activities, for getting information and learning, for creation and art activities, and for communicating, sharing, and connecting with family, friends, and even the world outside their normal social circle.

When the interviewed children were under 6 (the school-age in Vietnam), they could often play with digital devices as they had more spare time at home while their parents were busy with works. Since they go to school and have to spend more time studying, their parents become stricter with time for leisure in general and digital leisure in particular. Normally, they are allowed to use digital devices for entertaining from 2 to 3 hours in the late evening on weekdays, and often longer on weekends.

Using, playing or entertaining "alone" is often described by the interviewed children when asked about whom they interact with when they use digital devices. Although on online games or social media, children often play or communicate with friends or other peers, they consider physical interaction as 'the real connection'. In few cases, children will use digital devices with their siblings (if they have siblings) or cousins, friends to entertain when they meet.

➤ **Leisure activities: entertainment time with videos, movies, and games.**

Most favorite activities of children when using digital technologies are for leisure, entertainment and relaxing. However, the types of recreational activities they choose are different between ages and genders, as well as occasions.

Children use digital devices to play simple games and watch cartoon when they were under 10, while when they get older, playing multiplayer online games (which are more complex) or watching movies, series, using social media, following streamers, celebrities or influencers, etc. are their frequent activities. According to the responses of the interviewed children, the boys mostly chose to play online games or watch videos on YouTube that also regarding game or technology, or sometimes to watch anime (Japanese film and television animation). Meanwhile, the girls love to listen to music, to watch music videos, beauty vlogs (video blogs), movies, and to access social media.



*I like to play LoL [League of Legends – a multiplayer online game] with my friends. This game is very cool and challenging. It is favored worldwide. I also often watch the livestreams of the game battles on YouTube (Hai Son, 16 years old boy).*

*Instagram is my favorite app. I can take cool photos with various effects and share with family and friends there. I also enjoy watching the Insta-Stories or Reels from my friends and people I follow (Quynh Chi, 15 years old girl).*

The interviewed children describe the occasion of using digital devices for leisure as mostly at home and having nothing (or important things) to do or anyone to play with, they will spend time to go online to entertaining themselves or interact with people on the virtual network. It is also important to mention that the Internet connection is greatly essential for children when they use digital technologies. Most digital leisure activities that children usually attend are based on online platforms: online games, online channels that offer diverse and numerous videos and movies based on children's taste and demands (such as YouTube, Netflix, or Tiktok), online social networks that they can share mutual hobbies, interest, knowledge with their peer communities (such as Facebook, Instagram). It is therefore not surprising that most of the interviewed children have at least two or three accounts for different use on the Internet.

#### ➤ Getting information and learning

Google and YouTube are the most well-known and widely used platforms by children for supporting their learning and studying process. It is normally that parents in Vietnam starting equip their children with laptop or computer when they attending secondary school or high school as necessary tools for their study and homework (Gia Hung, 2017).

The content that children often access for information and learning are educational videos or instructional videos from teachers or other instructors. They can also discuss and gain knowledge on online educational forums. The other common purpose is to keep in touch with their class schedules and lessons. Especially, in the current time of the COVID-19 pandemic, online classes are becoming more popular

and essential than ever.

*My class has a group page on Facebook. Teachers often post the class schedules or learning materials there. Our class can also discuss homework or sharing useful materials very fast and convenient (Phuong Thao, 16 years old girl).*

*Because of Corona, I do not have to go to school. The classes have to be online. It is pretty annoying sometimes when I cannot follow my teacher. But it is also cool that I can freely eat my favorite snack and the teacher will not complain (Gia Bao, 13 years old boy).*

Although not the most favorite functions for the children, learning apps are also chosen when they learn with digital devices. In particular, language learning apps (mostly English) are installed and often used as an extra practical program that is 'fun to learn' for them rather than official lessons in school.

#### ➤ Creation and Art activities

Drawing and painting with apps are described by some interviewed children as their regular activities, mostly when they were under 10 years old. As they are growing up, children who have passions for arts still using digital devices as a part of their practice. But the apps and the devices will need more advanced functions and upgraded features.

Other favorite creative activities of interviewed children with digital devices are taking and editing photos with various filters and effects, recording videos to capture memorable (or funny) moments in their lives, or making dancing or singing clips to share widely.

The interviewed children aged between 13 and 16 highly enjoy creating online content on the Internet. Making blogs, vlogs, or writing fan fiction are popular trends among those teenagers in the virtual world. Sharing creative works and receiving positive interaction are the ways that children found enjoyment. And the main factors that motivate creativity in children are the recognition and support from their viewers.

*I love making Tiktok videos. There are lots of super cool trends there that many teens are following. My account currently has over 200 followers, most*

*are my friends, but when I get compliments from strangers, I also feel really joyful (Ngoc Linh, 15 years old girl).*

➤ **Communicating, sharing, and connecting**

Based on the Internet connection, digital activities regarding communication are indispensable to the interviewed children at the age above 10. From this age, the social circle of children is getting larger. Their communication targets will no longer be defined merely among family and near friends.

The first target of communication is their family, as parents often use phone calling, video calling or messaging to manage the children schedules and activities when they are not home. If family contact is mostly obligated for children, friend connection is more voluntary and frequent. Besides, the number of friends gradually increases as children growing up: old friends, new friends, close friends (mostly from school) are listed prominently in their phone or social media contacts. Peers and communities that children share similar hobbies and interests with are also the familiar target groups of communication. Thanks to the advantages of the Internet, particularly social networks, children can communicate, share, or attend diverse online activities there regardless of time, space, or distance. The possibility of establishing new contacts that exceed the physical boundary but share the same interests often excites them.

*I got a Japanese friend on an Asian fan page of Blackpink on Facebook [a famous Korean girl band]. He is very humorous and friendly, so we made friends. Besides sharing common interests about Blackpink, we also often exchange interesting things about the cultures of our countries (Vinh Quang, 16 years old boy).*

It is needed to mention that social media such as Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram is the favored virtual environment of teenagers (between ages 13 to 17) and young adults (between ages 18 to 24) in Vietnam. According to Q&Me, an online market research agency provided by Asia Plus Inc., Facebook is the most popular social network in Vietnam (Q&Me, 2018). The table below shows the proportion of Facebook users in 2017 and 2018 based on different age groups, in which groups of the youth account for more than 40% of total users.

age groups	January 2017		January 2018		increased percentage
	number	proportion	number	proportion	
13-17	7.200.000	16%	7.400.000	13%	3%
18-24	15.290.000	33%	17.000.000	31%	11%
25-34	14.950.000	33%	18.000.000	33%	20%
35-44	5.430.000	12%	7.300.000	13%	34%
45-54	1.940.000	4%	3.100.000	6%	60%
55-64	770.000	2%	1.300.000	2%	69%
65+	320.000	1%	540.000	1%	69%

Figure 3: source: <https://buzzmetrics.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/04/10.png>

The Vietnamese youth love sharing almost every moment of their life on social media, where they can reach a large number of people in and even out of their social circle (Nu Vuong, 2016). Contacts and relations in the virtual world can form a child's identity and self-esteem, which is not much different from real life. 'Selfie-esteem' (Schillaci, 2015): a new form of self-esteem built up through the responses children get on the internet when they post and share photos. It is the way children get affirmation that might hard to find in the real world. The greater number of likes, shares and comments, the higher level of pleasure and confidence they might get (Nu Vuong, 2016). The youngsters initiate participating in social media often because of the need to be part of a certain community. Most information and activities, as well as the latest news and trends of the communities in which they are connected, will be posted and shared online. Thus, to be well informed and avoid being 'ancient humans' (the words that Generation Z, who were born between 1997 and 2012/15, use to call people who are not knowledgeable about digital technologies or top trends on social media), most Vietnamese teenagers create their own social network accounts to connect with schoolmates or other peers from their affinity groups since ages 13 to 15 (Buzzmetrics, 2018).

*On Facebook, I can easily find groups or pages on topics that interest me. Particularly, I have found an LGBT group in my city. So, I can connect with people who are understanding and cheerful, people whom I can share my thought and problems with (Quynh Chi, 15 years old girl).*

*I also have a Facebook account. My sister created*

*it for me to connect with her because she is working abroad now. I can chat with her and see her new photos. I also can see my other friends and cousins too (Gia Bao, 10 years old boy).*

*What skills do children develop through using technology?*

The ability to observe and learn responsively in using digital devices is the first skill that children gain through their usage. Most interviewed children describe their technology learning progress evolving faster and easier gradually as they keep interact with various digital technologies.

Besides, children from the age of 15 begin to develop critical thinking and ability to argue as they can access and understand information and knowledge from enormous sources on the Internet. Their regular sources are YouTube or some forums for social literacy, both in Vietnamese and English language.

*There are numerous fun educational and knowledge base videos there. Lots of knowledge from there are useful for my daily life or my study. Sometimes, thanks to that I can argue with friends or parents about some subjects more confidently (Hai Son, 16 years old boy).*

On the other hand, in some cases, children are getting aware of how to attract public attention, motivated to develop individual values. As social media is greatly popular in Vietnam, the effects of ‘online celebrities’ or ‘influencers’ on children and adolescents are widespread and still cannot be fully measured (Tram Bi, 2019).

*How do children (from 10 – 16) perceive digital technologies?*

Prominently in the opinions of children, the advantages of digital technology outweigh its disadvantages. All interviewed children found it fun and joyful when playing with digital devices. They describe the digital and Internet world as limitless and greatly interesting. Thanks to digital technologies and the Internet, children can learn about diverse things, from scientific to cultural- social subjects. Especially, they enjoy the possibility of getting new information and following new trends in a flash. Last but not least, the Internet world is an infinite free space for children to express or do whatever they

want. That is a reason why they are often ebullient online but reticent and timid in real life.

Mostly only children who are above 13, have lots of experience in using the Internet, and/or get sufficient instruction from adults are aware of the risks from the digital world such as scams and abusing, cyberbullying, or violent and sexual content.

Noticeably, cyberbullying is the most common negative impact of the Internet environment for the interviewed children. Some of them have memories of being deeply hurt by being criticized, bullied or boycotted on social media. The injuries can exist and last a long time as it is hardly possible to completely terminate the information once it is spread on the Internet.

### **The sensation of urban children between physical toys/games versus digital leisure**

*Which kind of physical toys/games that urban children know?*

In Vietnam, while children in the countryside are familiar with handmade or self-made toys from natural materials such as wood, stone, plants, or fabric, urban children merely know and play with manufactured toys made from plastic and/or run by electronic power. The interviewed children’s memories about their physical toys often are what they received from their parents. The types of toys are common such as balls, dolls, robots, cars, construction toys, kitchen toys, etc. Regarding the physical games, mostly are movement games such as Hide and Seeks, Hopscotch, Blind man’s bluff, Chinese Jump-rope, etc. or board games such as Parcheesi,

Monopoly, Chess, and Cards. The children learned those games often from kindergarten or their older siblings. With movement games, children need appropriate space to play. However, in Vietnam, most crowded cities do not offer enough parks or outdoor neighborhood playgrounds that safe and friendly for children. Thus, to play active games and activities, visiting playgrounds in amusement parks or kid’s centers is roughly the only option. Nonetheless, not all children can go there as often as they need to be transported by their parents, and the play is not free. In the recent years, board games are increasingly popular among the Vietnamese youth (Cam Tu & Nguyen Son, 2017). The characteristic of the game

amuses and increases social interaction between players while not requiring large space or outdoor space to play, which is hard to find in the dense urban areas of Vietnam. Various board games have been imported into Vietnam and have attracted the interest of children as well as young adults. Specifically, the Werewolves of Millers Hollow and Uno Cards are the most well-known.

*What are the factors that influence children's choice of playing with physical toys/games or with digital devices?*

The answer to this question can be sorted according to four main factors: weather, time, place to play, and whom to play with. The following table summarizes the choices of the interviewed children based on that.

factors	conditions	choices
weather	Hot and sunny, or rainy	Be at home to play with digital devices
	Cool and no rain	Go out to play physical activities
time	In the evening; after school; on weekends or holidays	Go out to play physical activities
	In the late evening or at night; after finish homework; in the dinning time with family	Use or play with digital devices
place	at school	Play physical games with schoolmates in break time
	at home	Play mostly with digital devices
	n the parks or amusement centers	Play with physical activities or electronic games
whom to play with	With friends or siblings	Mostly choose physical games
	With parents	Often choose digital activities such as watching TV, going to the cinema. (And getting less regular as they growing up)
	Alone (or with siblings when at home)	Usually choose digital activities

*Which kind of leisure activities are more joyful for children or they more prefer?*

By using actual video and visual illustrations, the researcher has examined the reactions and responses of the interviewed children to understand the nature of their choice in relation to leisure activities. Accordingly, activities that have interesting or challenging progress, are fun to play in groups, can satisfy the imagination and curiosity of children are often their favorite options. Children like to spend time on activities in which they interact and socialize with people they are closed to, mostly are friends or schoolmates. In particular, most interviewed children expressed a strong preference for board games.

Generally, physical activities are still the most preferred options for children, as they can physically interact with others, express their emotions, and get connected in real life through looking, smiling, touching, and moving.

*Children's most memorable memories with leisure time*

According to the narratives of the interviewed children, the most joyful or memorable memories of a child often relate to his/her moments with family and friends. Those moments are on special occasions such as Traditional New Year Holiday (Tet Holiday), birthday party, or summer vacation as they will have a long time break and can gather with their loved ones. It does not matter that they play with digital or physical objects. The foremost importance is whom they play with and the physical and mental connection of the interaction they might get.

*My happy memories are that in every Tet Holiday time, my parents could stay home for a long time and took me and my brother on a trip, or so many of my cousins came to play with us. There was plenty of food, sweets, and lucky money too [the money that adults will give to children as a wish of luck and health, this is a tradition of Vietnam] (Minh Khang, 13 years old boy).*

### **The evolution of children's interests in leisure activities during their growing up**

During children's growth, their preferences and habits in choosing the types of interaction and entertainment change according to the perception and the skills they have acquired. In the pre- school ages, children often play with what adults offer them: play with toys or digital devices at home; learn to play movement games from parents, siblings or kindergarten.

As the urban children grow up in dense cities, have less time to go out and appropriate places to play with friends, they usually spend their free time at home to play with digital technologies. The types of game or activity that children chose to entertain are also getting more complex and diverse. Their features shall please children's curiosity, desire to take adventurous experience, and need of relaxing along with widening social connections.

Besides, there is a phenomenon of feeling nostalgia

for the days when they still were little kids and could have joy from little and simple entertainment.

### **Urban parents and technology-related parenting**

#### *Parents' perception of digital technology in relation to their children*

Parents of the interviewed children claim that digital technologies are essential and unavoidable for children as the role of technology for life is increasingly developing. From their points of view, technology is the present as well as the future. At the beginning times, parents let children in contact with digital devices often due to the needs of finding 'babysitters' or 'SOS solution' to deal with their children (Chaudron, Di Gioia & Gemo, 2018). Later digital devices such as smartphones, tablets or laptops become the necessary equipment for children's daily life and study. Or in some cases, parents use digital devices as the rewards for motivating children in studying.

When being asked, parents' awareness of digital technology's impacts on children often firstly regards their child's physical and cognitive health. Besides, they also concern about harmful risks from the Internet such as scams, abusing, and inappropriate content (violent and sexual content) (Minh Giang, 2014). However, little do parents know about cyberbullying, online criticism, and toxic trends also have huge effects on children and their mental health (Duc Thien & Thien Dieu, 2019).

Most parents are not as proficient or as well versed in the use of digital devices and the internet as their children. Therefore, they are not able to use advanced functions on digital devices or internet platforms to restrict and manage their kids' Internet usage. They often come up with manual solutions as limiting the using time, keeping the devices away or checking on the user history (Minh Giang, 2014).

#### *To what extent parents can leverage digital technology to increase family interaction?*

The manners that the interviewed parents use to spend time with their kids by digital technologies vary in circumstances and time. Mothers are often stricter than fathers. They inspect and regulate the time and content of digital activities that their children engage in. Whereas, father tend to be more flexible

and indulgent. The structure of a family also affects how children will be taken care of. Families with full parents can spend more time with their children than single parents, as they can take turns to pay attention to the kids. Besides, parents with a large age-gap with their children may have less 'energy' to play with or monitor the children's activities frequently. Parents' knowledge and skills of digital technologies play an important role in their technology-related parenting style (Loredana & Massimo, 2020). However, the majority of parents interviewed are not significantly aware of how to effectively interact with their children by using digital devices, to manage their kid's screen time, and protect them from the traps on the Internet.

#### *Advice from experts*

(Family Medical Practice Vietnam, 2019)

- Preview apps or programs before allowing children to watch or play with them. It could be better when parents test the digital activities first or experience together with their children.
- Encourage children to use or play digital programs based on group interaction that the whole family can also engage in.
- Enhance knowledge and skills in technologies to use advanced features such as program filters or program security controls to manage children's use of digital devices and the Internet.
- Care more about what digital content children access to, how they experience and feel about it, and to what extent it influences on the perception as well as emotion of children.
- Discuss and explain the content (for example advertising, commercials, or content that beyond the knowledge at the children's age) when watching or playing with children.
- Educate children, especially those at the adolescent ages, about appropriate behaviors on the online environment and the diverse risks from social networks.
- During children's growth, parents need to have

different measures suitable for each stage of their child's development.

### Findings

- How do children of age 10 to 16 experience digital activities? What are the pros and cons of using digital technology from the children's points of view?

The first finding from this research is that children's digital engagement mostly initiates and develops at a very early age (under 5 years old) in the home context. Children self-learned using digital technologies through observing and copying their parents or older siblings' behaviors. Urban children can use a wide range of digital technologies, mostly including smartphones, smart TVs, tablets, laptops, and computers. Particularly, children more prefer smartphones and tablets as they are multifunctional, handy, and portable.

Besides, the Internet connection is an indispensable thing when children using digital devices. Children's digital activities usually focus on four main purposes:

- Entertaining with videos, movies, and digital games
- Getting information and learning
- For creation and art activities
- Communicating, sharing, and connecting, in which social media is greatly popular

The more children interact with digital technologies, the more observing and responding abilities they might develop. On the one hand, by using the Internet, children can learn and improve their knowledge as well as their confidence and ability to criticize certain issues. On the other hand, they getting more interested in attracting public attention and affirming individual values. Children (from 10 to 16 years old) perceive digital technologies with more positive benefits than negative consequences. From the children's point of view, digital technology and the Internet world are free spaces with infinite potentials, which might hard to find for them in real life. Most children, who have significant experience online and/or are well-informed by adults, can be aware of negative impacts on the digital world such as scams and abusing, cyberbullying, inappropriate content, etc. Particularly, cyberbullying and online criticism are the most unpleasant experience for the interviewed children as the psychological trauma

from that may last for a long time.

- What are the factors that affect a child's decision when choosing activities to play? Regarding digital or physical games, indoor or outdoor activities.

Children in urban areas, especially dense cities, do not have much chance to contact with nature and play outdoor activities. Their toys mostly are manufactured and offered by adults. The physical games they play often occur in playgrounds at school, in amusement parks, or kid's centers. And their experience with traditional classic games is not as popular as kids in the countryside.

In recent years, board games are the preferred choices that increasingly widespread among Vietnamese children and teenagers. Those activities are greatly appropriate to the context of urban children, as they do not require large space to participate in, encourage logical and strategic thinking, increase group interaction, and bring lots of joy.

Besides, the factors that influence children's choice of playing vary between four main elements: weather, time, place to play, and whom to play with. In general, urban children like spending time with their friends to play (indoor) physical activities, while when using digital devices, they often play alone.

- How do children feel about their experience with digital leisure compared to traditional games and recreational activities in terms of creating memorable moments or happy memories?

Basically, it doesn't matter if children play digital or physical activities, the activities that can leave good impressions and memorable memories on children's hearts are which can encourage physical interaction and strengthen the connections with their significant people such as parents, siblings, and friends.

- How do children's interests in leisure activities change during their growing up?

The interest of urban children in leisure including both physical and digital activities as they are raised with both types. The more children grow up, the more complex and advanced characteristics they look for in the games or activities they engage in. In this regard, digital technologies can offer unlimited joy for children as the virtual world is boundless and increasingly developed. Whereas in contrast, physical

activities in real-life need appropriate space and time to conduct, and could be affected by various factors. Thus, urban children, when coming to adolescent ages, often find it difficult to play physical games in the crowded cities where have limited offering for active (outdoor) activities.

► **To what extent adults can leverage digital leisure to increase interaction with their children and strengthen family bonds?**

Parents should invest more time in playing with or instructing their children. An effective manner to well manage children's screen time is reviewing or experiencing the programs that children use and regulating the online time and activities of children. In addition, parents need to improve their digital technology knowledge and skills to match their children. As a result, parents can comfortably play or discuss with their children about technology and what has happened in the digital world in which they participate.

### Conclusion

The latest generation of urban children in Vietnam was born in the era of digital technology. Therefore, digital devices and the Internet are just normal parts of their daily life. Entertaining by digital technologies is just a form of leisure that co-exists with physical recreational activities in the children's options list. However, the activities that can facilitate physical interaction, satisfy curiosity and adventure desire, bring joy and relaxation usually excite children and give them good memories. To foster a healthy childhood for children and raise them safely with digital technologies, parents play an important role in managing and navigating. From the parents' point of view, technology is the present and the future of children. Thus, the parenting style of urban parents cannot avoid relating to technology. For the sake of their children, parents need to improve the knowledge and skills of digital technologies to instruct, support, and manage their kids' screen time in the most appropriate ways. Besides, being aware of what is going on with children in the online world they engage in is essential action parents should do to instruct or support children in time.

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# A CHILD FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

## Can growing up as a minority negatively affect a child's development and how they view the world?

ILERI OBISESAN

### Key words

- Bame (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic)
- PoC (Person/people of colour)

### Growing up as the 3%

The websters dictionary defines an urban planner as “one whose job is to develop comprehensive plans and designs for the use of space within cities, towns, developments”. Child planning can be understood by adapting this definition to benefit a child's development. A child friendly environment is not just about physical safety and the discussion on whether children should be allowed to materialistically contribute to the environment around them, but this is mainly focused on the psychological effects of the environment around them. A child friendly environment needs to be safe for all children against things that may be particularly specific but fightable. Just because you are born or live in a country where your race isn't in the majority shouldn't mean that your early development is vastly different than others.

In the United Kingdom the population, as per the last census in 2011, showed that in England and Wales there was total population of 56.1 million people and 86% of that population were white. The population of Asian ethnic groups were 7.5% of the population, black ethnic groups were 3.3% of the population, mixed or multiple ethnic groups were 2.2% of the population and other ethnic groups came to 1%. This census was taken 9 years ago and what is likely to occur is that with the rise of the population in the next 10 years the population of these various ethnic groups would also rise. In comparison to the 2001 census the population from black African doubled and the white British group decreased from 87.4% to 80.5%. This trend should follow in 2021. (Great Britain, Census, Population of England and Wales 2018)

What is also interesting from the 2011 census is the greatest proportion of diversity were in major cities, for example London is the most ethnically diverse part of England and Wales where 40.2% of the population identify as a BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) person. London has the least

population of white British people at 44.9% whereas the North East of England, a more rural area has a 93.6% of white British majority. Also, of the 3.3% of black British people in England and Wales, 58.4% live in London and the rest of the population can be found in other areas in both countries. (Great Britain, Census, Regional ethnic diversity 2018)

When understanding child development and how they navigate their surroundings it's important to analyse the surroundings they are birthed into. It opens the question that a child of BAME ethnic origin grew up in London surrounded by people of either the same race as them or other ethnic minorities would grow up differently to a child of ethnic minority that was born in a rural town or smaller city surrounded by little to no people of ethnic minority and that their experiences would differ greatly. Although this statement can be proven by market research there are many reasons why this argument can be proven wrong and this can be down to class, family income and personal environments.

The main argument to conclude is whether growing up as an ethnic minority can negatively affect the way that you view the world. Growing up in an ethnic diverse space can have both its positives and negatives that a person who grew up without ethnically diverse surround could not relate with. For example, in London and large cities where gang culture is an issue that law enforcement have, young 'person of colour', male especially, can be targeted by police if they appear to be dressed in a particular way or their appearance fits a generic description. From April 2018 to March 2019 there were "4 stop and searches for every 1,000 White people, compared with 38 for every 1,000-black people" (Great Britain, Stop and Search 2020). Young black men are much more likely to be stopped in a routine 'stop and search' than their white age mates. In rural areas where there is little gang activity and knife crime it may not be as much as an issue that a young person of the same demographic may face, as a black person who grew up in a suburban town I can agree with this.

London being the capital city of England is what, arguably, attracts the various people of ethnic backgrounds, to the country's major city. With a large population of BAME persons in the city, many of them exist in the 'working class' bracket with a low household income. Crime rates can also be seen to be

more prevalent within ethnic minority communities, this perhaps due to an unfair system, which does not allow for the same opportunities. Schools in such areas are often underfunded with little government assistance, this lack of support negatively effects their progress in school and means students are less likely to get into a good university. A degree opens up more job prospects and means that there is a greater opportunity of getting a higher paying job. Many young PoC (people of colour) become a product of their environment and don't see a reasonable life past their community, that doesn't result in hard work for little pay and a difficulty in raising future children with their economic position.

Additionally, top universities which are historically well-regarded for example Cambridge, Oxford, Durham, St Andrews and Exeter have been seen to be less likely to accept candidates of ethnic minorities despite them having the same qualifications as their white counterparts. These universities are known for their lack of diversity and it is argued that this is racist behaviour. It may also be due to classism, that students of middle class are more likely to meet the requirements of the universities as they may have access to greater opportunities either being available through the school they attend, or due to their environments, for example their parent may know someone that they can do work experience for. Even as far back as starting school, middle class families are much more likely to provide their child with extra tuition to enter grammar schools which require an entrance exam. These grammar schools can offer their students with better teaching, more supportive staff and materials as well as events and assistance up to the age of entering university.

Market research that was conducted interviewed 40 people within the age range between 13-21 years old. The survey was anonymous and was conducted online. The survey asked questions regarding race and location, racism and prejudice. The results from this survey will be seen in this essay and help to answer if growing up as a minority can negatively affect ones childhood.

### **Class**

There are many other factors which may impact a child who is a minority in their community. One of them is class, being born into different economic

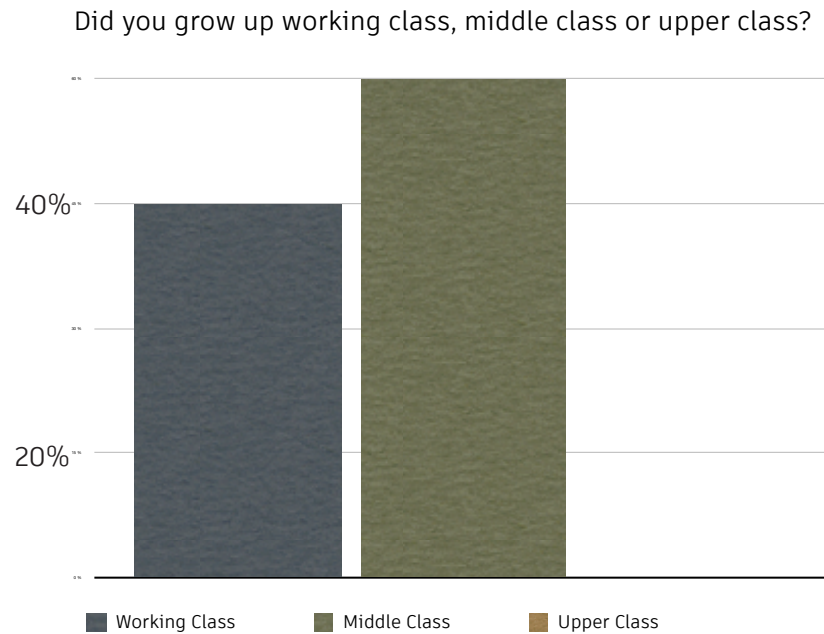


Figure 1: Respondents by class

brackets can alter the way you view life, being born into a privilege position can easily make you ignorant of how other people live. The question can arise that if you are born into a wealthier family as a minority would they experience racism frequently and is it more subtle or obvious.

From the results of my market research, of the 40 people who took the survey. The survey was taken by 35 people of various ethnic backgrounds: Black, Asian and mixed ethnicity, it was also taken by 5 people who identify as white. 45% of those were working class. It was interesting to note that 83% of the middle-class people who took this survey said there that their class does affect the way they view racism and 50% of working-class people said that is did also. This can open the conversation that working-class people of ethnic minority are more likely to be in communities of other ethnic minorities. One participant noted in their questionnaire that due to the community they were brought up in they “expected all black people to be poor”. This statement is a product of immediate environment and experiences, this clear generalization can also answer some of the reasons why working-class people are evenly divided on whether their economic position affected their view on racism.

In the same way, only 22% of the middle-class people who took this survey stated that they went to an ethnically diverse school. Which means that 88% of the middle class PoC who took this survey were

minorities in school and this can assist the claim that more people born into this category of life can see how that affects racism. Also 46% of working-class people who took the survey said that they went to and ethnically diverse school. Two conclusions that can be made from this evidence is that if you are an ethnic minority born into a working-class family your school is more likely to be ethnically diverse than if you were born into a middle-class family. What does that impact? Being a minority in a school environment immediately creates a reason for the child to be isolated or outcasted, either by their other school pupils or by themselves. The intensity of this separation is solely based on individual unique experiences. Many think children can be too young to understand racism but “Young children can explain income and status inequality by drawing on their observations that some people are treated differently than others and that this differential treatment revolves around the power and vale of various occupations.” (Tajifel. 1984). Thus if children can pull these parallels at a young age and understand class differentials then they must also be able to understand race differentials.

By simply being different and not fitting in with the crowd with something as background as race, can harm a child’s psyche. In the survey a participant addressed that themselves and others around identify with the desire to be white at a young age or to have “white people hair” as it was more desirable. This thinking could also be the product of what was consumed during the development period; on-screen diversity, the roles did ethnic minorities had; how the news covers a story of a young person of colour in comparison to their white counterparts. Children are usually honest people because at a young age they have no agenda to lie to cover up their true feelings. Many people describe them as having ‘no filter’.

### Location and Upbringing

Where a child is born can alter their perspective of childhood. A child who grew up in busy streets may remember the busy streets and noise and a child who grew up in a small village may think mainly of large stretches of land, peace and animals possibly. Difference in experience is not a bad thing it just creates a different perspective. White brits in London make up less than 45% of the population, making

them the minority in that city. It is the only location in the UK where white is the minority. This shows just how diverse this city is, and how populated it is.

This sparks the question: Is racism experienced differently there due to this? Due to the diversity of the city do ethnic minorities have good relationships with others? The UK's diversity is mainly populated in certain areas. With a population of 63 million in the combined countries England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, only just over 4% of Scotland's population is non-white. Majority of Britain's ethnic minorities live in London, Luton, Birmingham and certain urban areas in West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester, for example Bradford. Results from the 2011 census indicate that 81.5% of the general population live in an urban location, and 18.5% lived in a rural location – the ethnic groups most likely to live in an urban location were Pakistani (99.1%), Bangladeshi (98.7%), and Black African (98.2%)“A white person could grow up on the coast of Yorkshire, just two hours away from one of the most diverse cities in the region, and have next to no interaction with someone of a different ethnicity.” (Walker 2020). Due to children's curiosity they may unintentionally say something offensive to another child just because they look different and they have not seen a person of a different ethnicity to them. Children asking to “taste” the skin of a black person, as they relate the colour to chocolate and having not seen a black person before is a prime example that I have experienced. So, should we criminalize parents who do not raise their children in ethnically diverse locations. Obviously, no. Raising a child in a particular location would mainly be due to personal preference, the location of their occupation and frequently, the types and quality of the schools in their vicinity, and not about how diverse an area is. However, for a parent who is of ethnic minority it may be a factor they consider, they may prefer their children to grow up in a more diverse environment. A white parent may prefer to live in more a rural area or a particular area for their work, and it happens to not be diverse, then it becomes their responsibility to inform their child about other races that they may come across in their life, either through television and film, toys and books until they can have a suitable conversation about it. Simply by instilling these valuable conversations to a child it can allow them to be sensitive to other people

How old were you when you first experienced racism?  
(either to you or others)

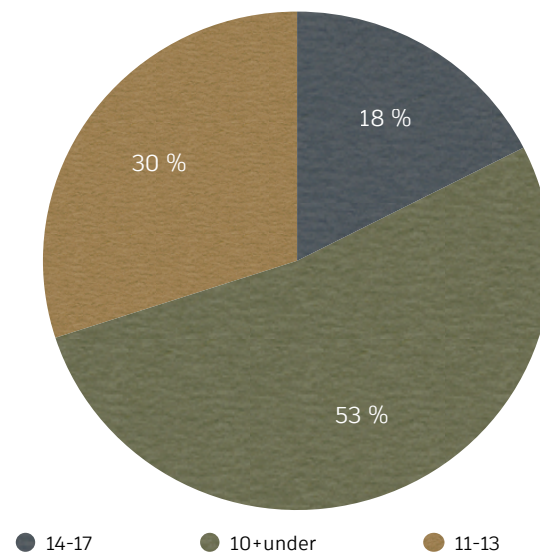


Figure 2: Age at which racism was first experienced

and welcoming to differing traditions and lifestyles. Although there may be benefits being brought up in an ethnically diverse location, there are still downsides to this. From the survey 100% of the people who grew up in a city said that their first racist experience was when they were 10 or younger. Additionally, 83% of people who grew up in a city said that had experienced prejudice from another person of colour and that racism has affected their childhood.

### Personal Environments

The immediate environment of a child has an effect on their childhood, the inner circle that a child can often be organized into a few categories: Home and family, School, extra-curricular and then also an extra category is open to religious families which are strong on community. Going to a school which is not diverse or where you cannot see people of the same race as you can make one feel isolated, especially a child who is being bullied or is just self-aware. Being outcasted or feeling isolated has a large impact on how adolescents walk through the early stages of their life, this can lead to many issues such as insecurities and loneliness.

Diverse schools are in diverse neighbourhoods, being a minority in a school setting can be isolating. According to the results 52.5% of those who took the survey have experienced racism under the age of 10. 33% of those who took the survey went to a diverse school. Of those who went to a diverse school 50%

had their first racist experience between the ages of 14-17, whereas the other 50% either experienced it under the age of 10 or between the ages of 11-13. 40% of those who took the survey said that they grew up in an ethnically diverse environment, while 37.5% said that they grew up with people of the same race as them.

This can conclude multiple things, firstly that there is no way to avoid racism and prejudice, attending a diverse or nondiverse school does not increase or decrease chances of having a racial experience at a young age. The survey overwhelmingly showed that that the majority of the 40 who took the survey had their first racist experience before they became an adult. “Racism is real in its effects on children’s live and its impact on our continuing relationships with each other” (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001), adults also can suffer greatly from racist experiences to it would be wrong to assume that children do not, simply because of their age. Even if someone may say that their racial experiences have not had an impact on their childhood, going through an encounter like that at a young age can easily be traumatic, and unbeknownst to them create stigma against certain people or places.

*“racism is a core social determinant of health that is a driver of health inequities. The world health Organisation defined social determinants are influenced by economic, political and social factors link was to health inequities. (...) These health inequities are not the result of individual behaviour choices or genetic predisposition but are caused by economic, political and social conditions, including racism” (Trent et al. 2019)*

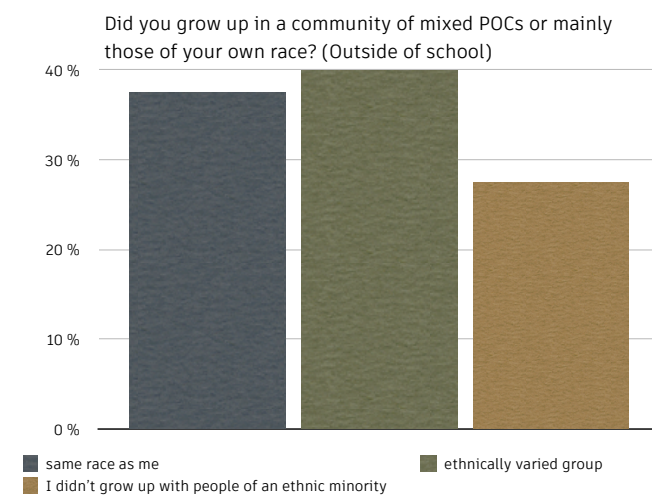


Figure 3: relationship with other minorities

## Relationships with other minorities

Although they are known as minorities as a whole and often are grouped as BAME or PoC, doesn’t necessarily mean there is a sense of comradery between people of different minorities in the UK. There are many similarities in their opinions and cultural overlaps and the fact that they too are likely to have been racially outcasted, but they don’t necessarily provide a united front. 13% of the UK are BAME (Black, Asian + minority ethnic) but many POCs have attested to being on the receiving end of racial discrimination and racially charged attacks from other POC people. The questions are if it is cultural, ingrained or even systemic?

The reason this this is important to cover is that racism and prejudice is not something a child is born with; they may be curious and ask questions but it not with bad intent at a young age. Learned behaviour is what is passed down to children either through word or actions. It is important to see the “child as the imitator, not as creator or master of language” Whether it be a parent openly being racist to someone they see in person or even on television, or by crossing the road when they see someone who is black, simply because perceive them as dangerous. This behaviour can easily be picked up from young eyes and implemented even without direct orders to. Simply because a parent or influential figure in their life does something, they see it as correct. Therefore, defining how impressionable children are and how one can manipulate them quickly.

From the survey results stated that 60% of the 40 people who took the survey have experienced racism from another person of colour. 40% of the 40 said that they believed there is unity amongst minorities, 17% were uncertain and 43% said there is no unity amongst minorities. In addition, 73% of people who thought there is no unity amongst minorities also said that that had experienced racism from another person of colour. In addition to this, people who took this survey were given the space to expand on their answer if they wished.

Responses:

*“Sometimes, when it comes to seemingly bigger issues such as police brutality, but less so when it comes to colourism and defence against microaggressions”*

*“More so amongst the younger generation.”*

*“No there isn’t unity amongst Asians and blacks. Rather there is competition to be viewed superior by white people”*

“Yes. This is simply because all minorities get targeted by the white people so when another ethnic minority group e.g. black people are being targeted, other minorities use this to their advantage, so the attention is off them”

“Definitely, I always feel safer when there are other minorities around.”

“I think so with younger generations, as there’s a sense of understanding and willingness to learn about other minority experiences. Though with older generations not so much - more of a sense of ‘I had it bad too’”

The diversity of these results also reflects in the survey, some people had clear strong opinions on the matter and others were either unsure or could not make a full decision. Interestingly, some people thought there is more unity amongst the younger generation as they grow up in a more accepting world.

### Overcoming the issue

To combat this issue that many children of colour are likely to encounter as they grow up is two address two of the most influential people in a child’s life, the parent and the teacher. Parents need to understand the reality of the situation, and not chose to wipe race issues under the rug. In the book ‘The first R: How children learn race and racism’ the authors note that “most white adults, including many scholars, believe that very young children are incapable of seriously understanding the implications of race and racism[...] “white adults abdicate their responsibility to recognize and combat racism, when they deny that race and racism can even exist in serious forms among young children” (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001). Through this they avoid having race-related conversations in the home, or even shy away from correcting negative behaviour in this manner stating that ‘kids will be kids. However, “research shows prejudices begins around three to six years of age

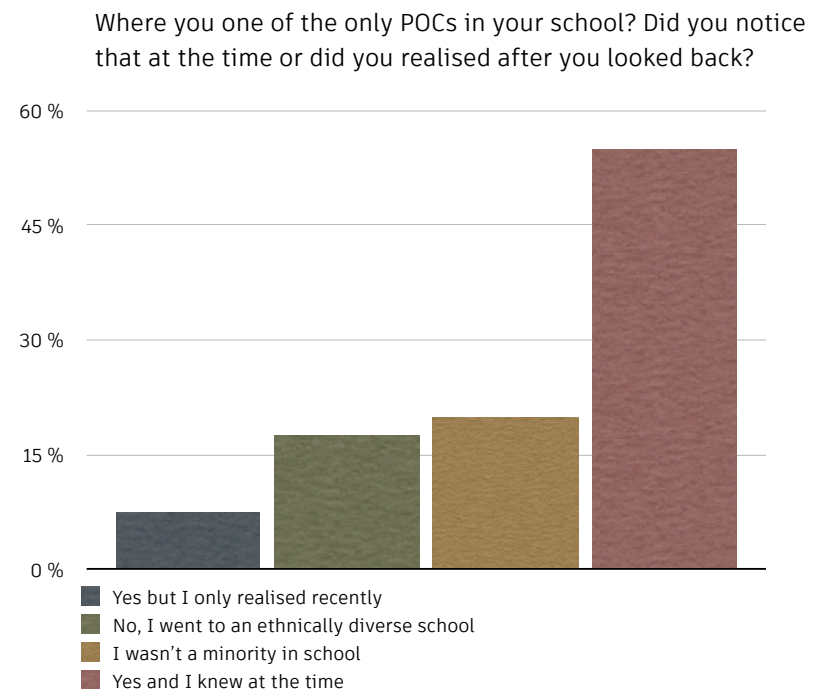


Figure 4: POCs in school

when children’s social cognitive ability is developing” (Aboud et al. 2012) with some arguing that children tend to show the greatest explicit levels between four and seven. This shows that from an early age children can “recognize race and are socialized to form particular attitudes about themselves and people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds.” (Boutte, Lopez- Robertson, and Powers-Costello 2011). Consequently showing how important the early stages of development are in a child’s life and how it is necessary to teach and correct the right behaviours from as young as necessary.

In the authors book they address the theory that children two to five know little about racial and race matters because of the “egocentric stage of cognitive development” that they are in at the time. This means that they are “unable to really perceived any viewpoint or attitude except their own” (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001). They continue to say that children are better to be taught fully about racial matters once they are well into education around six years old. Despite that, before this time simple rules of respect and fairness to be instilled before this time. It is vital that teachers to commit to this to make the schooling environment safe and comfortable to be in. School is such an important aspect to cover as in a child’s life it is where majority of school time is spent. In UK schools’ children spend at least six hours in school a day, not including after school and before school clubs that may occur. Most schools have classes five

days a week, with a few exceptions which have six days a week. By subtracting the average holiday time British school children have, in a state school, children spend around 39 weeks in school, 273 days. This is a large portion of each year to be in an environment and ensure that environment is welcoming, and children feel secure enough to learn and make friends in very important with their development.

Additionally, a very important thing to address is that it exists, many people are convinced that racism simply does not exist because they cannot see it. That is not the case, mainly those who say that are white people who have not experienced life as a person of colour. In some country's racism can be very forthright and apparent and in others it can be more inconspicuous. Racism in many western countries is systemic and aside from verbal or physical abuse, stereotyping, assumptions, and disrespect can be just as harmful. "The question is not how children become racist but rather how racism is sustained and perpetuated in a society that insists it is dead or mortally wounded" (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001).



Figure 5: Image shows grime music artist Stormzy on stage Getty image (2019)

On December the 18th 2019 a famous black UK musician and grime artist Stormzy (see figure 5), did an interview with an Italian newspaper, where he was asked if the UK was racist to which he replied "definitely 100%", he then went on to say that people say "Oh no, we're not racist. But there's a lot of racism in the country," with people brushing it off to the side because "there's loads of black people" in London. The interesting part of this interview was the public's response to this interview. Many people went to their social media accounts to share their outrage at Stormzy's comments, calling his claims ridiculous and brainwashing by the media. On the one side there was a very negative response but on the other side many people banded behind the artist to say that they agreed with him. Interestingly enough many people of colour took to social media to share their stories of racial discrimination they had faced from a young age, in an attempt to prove to unbelievers but also to open up a conversation which many have not been so easily spoken about.

Similarly, since the 25th May 2020 after the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, by a police officer in Minneapolis Minnesota, United States, millions of people globally have sparked the largest civil rights movement in history. Protests opposing racism and seeking justice for Floyd, and other innocent black people killed through police brutality, began in America but have now taken place in 60 countries and 6 continents. A popular slogan through the UK protests was that the "UK is not innocent" (see figure 6) with people stating that the UK is racist.

Many black and people of colour racially profiled or victimized based on an opinion on the way they are dressed or who they spend time with. In the survey when asked if there were any "preconceived notions other people had about your race" 90% stated that there was and when asked the responses followed.

Responses:

*"Yeah when I'm walking through school with my black friends, even if the groups were only three or four, we get told by teachers that we look like a gang and to spread apart"*

*"whenever slavery is mentioned the class turns to stare at me"*

*“I don’t know, people always think Asians are super smart and they assume I play instruments”*

*“I get scared to share strong opinions because I don’t want people to label me as the angry black girl”*

*“even if there’s a lot of people being noisy people always think it’s the black girls first”*  
*“people think black men are dangerous”*

*“someone once told me they thought all black people were poor”*

*“I got told my dad cooks dog meat, because we are Chinese, and he owns a restaurant”*

From these responses some hold more severity than others but all show reality of the stereotyping ethnic minorities face as they grow up and go through school. It is important to remove these harmful stereotypes and to “no longer deny the deeply racialized Organisation of our social worlds” (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001) so that we can make significant change and alter how generation after growing up and perceive the world. Van Ausdale and Feagin theorize that the process of undoing our current situation and teaching children should be “first to address, reduce, and eventually vanquish engrained racist ideas and discriminatory practices in all social settings and institutions” (ibid.).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, childhood is a, innocent and fragile period in a person’s life. It is a large process of development and change, as the body grows physically, the mind develops, and emotions thoughts practices and process become more complex with age. To create a child friendly environment, one must consider the well-being of all types of children from different backgrounds in this environment. Be accepting and realizing that many people’s childhood has been framed by their experiences and, racism and prejudice can only bring a negative outlook in a child’s life. A theory that is rising amongst some black people today is that they have a victim mindset-meaning that they believe due to what they have experienced that there is no hope. This upsetting



Figure 6: Black Lives Matter demonstration London, Getty Image 2020  
mindset is damaging to a person and can prevent them from experiencing life as one would normally, fear of racism can stop them from travelling freely, working in certain organizations and living in certain countries and cities. These mentalities are developed from a young age and are often the result of trauma and work as a form of self- preservation. However this not how to live life and they way to combat this is to unlearn these beliefs and it starts with creating a safe, friendly, open and equal environment for children at the start of childhood in all of their environments, especially school and home. Overall, growing up as a minority can be a negative experience, parents and teachers should be well educated in this matter to ensure the child’ environment is desirable, but this can be avoidable when there is good social development and awareness.

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# Intergenerational contact in public spaces: The role of urban design

Magdalena Janzic

## Introduction

During the last decades, the everyday life of the Western world has been changing in many ways. The different socio-economic processes, such as technologization, aging of population, migrations, and urbanization have led to the changes in family structures and relationships (Cortellesi and Kernan 2016, 103), as well as in the perceptions and usages of public spaces.

The care for the children and the elderly, traditionally taken in the private, family environment (Rosebrook 2002, 31), has been delegated to public institutions, such as kindergartens and retirement homes, as the other adult family members tend to work outside the home (The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 10). The growing generational separation reflects in the daily life of the children and the elderly groups by decreasing the possibilities of interactions and mutual learning (Cortellesi and Kernan 2016, 103). In the cities, children tend to be confined to the kindergarten or school and nuclear-family home environments, which decreases their opportunities for establishing contact with people of different age groups (The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 9) and grow understanding and empathy towards others different than themselves.

Given the trend of the aging of the population (Burton and Mitchell 2006, 5) on the one hand and the decrease of the number of working-age citizens in Europe, on the other, the Together Old and Young (TOY) presents concerns about the potential conflict between generations over the increasing financial burdening of the tax contributors the future (The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 9). The decrease in contact between the children and the elderly may lead to children creating negative stereotypes towards the old age since the “stereotypes are developed early and remain influential through life” (Hannon and Gueldner 2008, 60). To maintain European social sustainability, social cohesion is of vital

importance (Burton and Mitchell 2006, 12). This fact was recognized by the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon which related the “European Union proper functioning to intergenerational solidarity” (The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 9).

In this context, the public space represents an arena where the children and the elderly are visible to each other and may interact. An important condition for a public space to accommodate various age and social groups and allow them to connect in an accessible environment is to provide inclusive design and functions (Haider 2007, 83). Urban environments are becoming a principal setting for new generations of children to grow and learn (Krishnamurthy 2019, 86), so it is of great importance to provide a public and informal setting for the children, as future decision-makers (VanderVen and Schneider-Munoz 2012, 124), to acknowledge diversity.

Under the hypothesis that an age-inclusive and accessible public space as the scenery of democracy and plurality may support the social cohesion (Biggs and Carr 2015, 106), this paper will investigate the role of urban design of a public park in Zagreb’s residential area in fostering contact between the children and the elderly by revising the existing research on the topics and field research. The field research will consist of two parts. In the first part, we will examine the presence and the quality of the design elements which accommodate the specific needs of the two age groups, according to research-based inclusive design guidelines. In the second part, by using the participant observation method, the research will focus on the everyday practices of the park users and analyze how the elements of inclusive urban design influence the interactions between the children and the elderly.

## Methodology

To investigate the interactions between the children and the elderly, I have opted for the participant

observation (Bernard 2015, 252) and the systematic observation methods (Bernard 2015, 294). The fieldwork was conducted daily from the 23rd of May until the 31st of May 2020 on the public green area, which includes a children's' playground, in one of Zagreb's residential neighborhoods, Knezija. The daily time slots of field research were distributed to cover the times with most child activity, which was on the afternoons (16-21h) on five consecutive days from the 25th to the 29th of May, and during the mornings (10-12h) and afternoons (16-21h) on the weekends the 23rd -24th of May and the 30th -31st May.

The green space and the playground feature some of the design elements which correspond to the inclusive design guidelines developed by Elizabeth Burton and Lynne Mitchell in 2006 after extensive qualitative research on the elderly who suffer from dementia and their experience of public space. Moreover, some of the playground elements correspond to the recommendations on child-friendly spaces created as a result of the project "Child-friendly urban design" which took place in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, and Jerusalem, Israel, in 2016 and 2017 (Krishnamurthy et al. 2018). Basing the analysis on the concept of "generationally intelligent spaces", as spaces "that allow different generational groups to meet, interact and include ways of negotiating the shared use of their environment" (Biggs and Carr 2015, 106), and the above-cited design guidelines, I will identify the design elements recognized as inclusive and age-appropriate.

The observations were structured to focus on the interplay between the users and the built environment to assess the inclusivity of the design in practice, on the one hand, and the interactions between the park users themselves to assess whether the design would support the interaction between the children and the elderly, on the other.

For the first set of information, I have systematically observed the movement patterns of the children and the elderly, their perceived comfort in the space, and their practices while dwelling the park, to record the presence of both groups and their ease in the usage of space.

The unobtrusive participant observation has been acknowledged as an appropriate method to investigate some aspects of childhood (James 2001,

247), as it does not impose the researcher's authority over the children (McKechnie 2000, 65). The observations were highly focused on the moments of child-senior interactions, in a manner of Bernard's "behavior sampling", meaning that while observing the park users, the focus is not put on a preselected individual, but on a specific set of "rare but important behaviors" (Bernard 2015, 297).

To maintain the observation unobtrusive, the age groups were defined rather loosely. I observed the behavior of children which I assessed to be younger than ten years old, which corresponds to the preschool and primary school age in the Croatian schooling system. As for the elderly, while some researchers consider above fifty-five years old as a senior age (Rosebrook 2002, 33), I preferred the Cortellesi and Kernan's (2016, 107) definition of the elderly as older than sixty-five years old. I concentrated on the persons whose physical traits, such as grey hair or the walking cane, could be identified as senior by children and who appeared to be careful in navigating the outdoor space.

### **Generational intelligence and design**

In this section, I will present the research conducted on the topic of child-elderly relations, as well as the research on inclusive urban design.

#### *Intergenerational communication and social sustainability*

The globalization processes, such as urbanization and technologization, have led to the changes in the familial relations, local communities, as well as wider social structures. The TOY project, conducted in six European countries under the European Commission Grundvig Lifelong Learning program, elaborates on these processes as an underlying reason for increasing generational separation in the urban environments.

The geographical separation of different generations within a family, caused by the globalization of the labor market, has led to a disruption on the traditional caregiving structures (The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 9). The most often familial residential model being the nuclear family, which consist of working parents and their children, the care for the children and the elderly is often consigned to the professionals at specialized public or private caregiving institutions,

such as the nursing homes and childcare centers (Rosebrook 2002, 31). While the children tend to spend a part of their day in the kindergartens and schools, after which they reunite with parents, the institutions for the elderly are typically residential. This way, the possibilities of regular contact or shared activities of the children and their elderly family members is diminished (Rosebrook 2002, 32). Furthermore, due to the natality drop in most European countries, children tend to grow up with fewer siblings (The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 9). Consequentially, the children have less opportunity to meet and form relationships with any age group other than their own or one of their parents. The societal age segregation, elaborates Rosebrook (2002), “is both geographically and emotionally distant, and the intergenerational contact missing from today’s family life is not easily found in other parts of society” (32).

As for the elderly, the trend of social and spatial segregation from younger generations has been recognized (Biggs and Carr 2015, 107; The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 4; Rosebrook 2002, 32). Like any type of social segregation, generational segregation imposes the problem of social sustainability and community development (Burton and Mitchell 2006, 12). The previous research has found that the generally negative attitudes towards the old age in the society reflects the children’s views of the elderly (Hannon and Gueldner 2008, 60). With a limited opportunity of direct engagement with the elderly and establishing relationships and acquiring knowledge, it is possible for stereotypes and prejudice acquired indirectly to prevail. Research also suggests that “stereotypes are developed early and remain influential throughout life” (Ibid.) and can lead to prejudicial behavior. In the context of Europe’s aging population and consequential change in the welfare systems and economical structures, the tendencies of stigmatization and alienation of a large part of the population are extremely dangerous, as they can potentially inspire the generational conflict (The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 9).

It has been demonstrated, however, that direct and quality contact between the children and the elderly in the controlled settings, such as participating in intergenerational activities, has a positive effect on both age groups (Rosebrook 2002, 31; VanderVen and Schneider-Munoz 2012, 123; Cortellesi and Kernan

2016, 102; The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 15; Hannon and Gueldner 2008, 61). Regular interactions between the children and the senior adults, Rosebrook (2002) emphasizes, “have a positive effect on both the development and learning of young children and on older persons’ quality of life” (31). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that the direct experience with the elderly within or outside of the family, rather than acquiring information about the old age through other means, can promote the formation of positive attitudes towards the senior age (Hannon and Gueldner 2008, 61) and develop trust in young people, indispensable for “harmonious relationships” between generations (VanderVen and Schneider-Munoz 2012, 123). Likewise, continue VanderVen and Schneider-Munoz (2012), for the elderly, connections with youth contribute to their “own trust in the world” which “enables him or her to still play a meaningful role” (Ibid.).

The mutual recognition and positive attitudes between generations are of great importance for the stability and sustainability of communities, and in a wider sense, for social sustainability, as they strengthen social connectivity (VanderVen and Schneider-Munoz 2012, 118), as well as empathy (Biggs and Carr 2015, 106) and altruism (VanderVen and Schneider-Munoz 2012, 123). Biggs and Lowenstein define the mutual understanding as “generational intelligence”, that is, “the ability to put oneself in the position of other age groups, [which] relies on a recognition of a distinctive self, of generational difference and the negotiation of empathic generational relations” (Biggs and Carr 2015, 108).

An important aspect of generational intelligence is the provision of accessible and inclusive public space, which allows for different age groups to dwell, meet, and connect. When intergenerational approaches to planning are applied, the positive outcomes in the local communities, such as citizenship development and social inclusion (The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 6), as well as increased safety (Hannon and Gueldner 2008, 74) can be perceived. Finally, “paying greater attention to intergenerational contact between young children and older adults in public spaces represents an opportunity that can produce positive outcomes for the greater good of all generations” (Cortellesi and Kernan 2016, 102).

### *Generationally intelligent public space*

In the context of institutionalization of care for the children and the elderly and the nuclear family residence model, when the generational segregation manifests as spatial separation, the role of the public space as a meeting point between different social and age groups becomes emphasized (Haider 2007, 83). To strengthen that essential aspect, the physical features, that is, the design of public spaces should be inclusive enough to allow a variety of groups to use it safely and comfortably. It was widely recognized that the urban planning and design have been fixated on accommodating the needs of the working-age adults (Cortellesi and Kernan 2016, 104; Biggs and Carr 2015, 100), that is, the “average fit” (Burton and Mitchell 2006, 7). As a result, the urban environments “may present physical or institutional barriers that can exacerbate social exclusion, isolating particular social and age groups from mainstream society” (Biggs and Carr 2015, 102).

The possibility of using the public space, and specifically the possibility of meeting different groups of people is equally important for the children and the seniors. For the children, explains Haider (2007), “the ability to experience a variety of activities, people and places (...) is especially stimulating” (85) for the development of a child’s creativity (86) and critical consciousness related to social change (87). Similarly, Burton and Mitchell (2006) emphasize the fact that for the elderly the public space provides the opportunity for informal social interactions with the people in their proximity, which is of great importance for the elderly to maintain contact with their environment, especially for those who may not have many opportunities to socialize (41-42).

The researchers have recognized that the intergenerational contact in public spaces has been influenced, among more general causes such as institutionalization, by the increase in children’s digital entertainment, a higher appreciation of adult-organized activities, and a higher awareness of the risks (The TOY project consortium 2013, 10; Haider 2007, 85). As a result of those factors, there is a lower probability for the young children to play in public spaces, such as parks or streets, where they would usually meet different age groups (Haider 2007, 85). However, Stevenson confirmed that if the environment is conformed to the child-friendly

criteria, “children spend four times longer outside without parental supervision than if it was not suited to them” (14). The environment appropriate for children would, therefore, not only attract children to frequent the public space, but allow them to dwell and explore, which then provides them with the opportunity to better connect with the environment and the people in it.

Haider (2007) and Burton and Mitchell (2006) define the inclusive design as an “approach” (Burton and Mitchell 2006, 146), rather than a define design style, which makes the use of the space accessible “to as many people as possible regardless of age, ability, and economic or ethnic background” (Haider 2007, 83). Burton and Mitchell (2006) argue in favor of an alternative perception of the human “ability” when considering urban design. Previously, the researchers elaborate, the main design options were either to expect of the people to fit the environment, or, in case of dealing with physical disabilities, producing special design solutions which specifically targeted the disabled. The “social model” of disability focuses on adapting the built environment to minimize the difficulties of using it, having in mind a variety of users and the possible obstacles they could face navigating the urban environments (7).

The intergenerational perspective, according to Haider (2007), supplements and enriches the concept of inclusiveness (83). For Biggs and Carr (2015), it is “necessary to incorporate the idea of the importance of the intergenerational interactions in the public policies and urban design, to create an inclusive and intergenerationally intelligent space and cope with the spatial segregation” (108). Furthermore, the space conceived to include all age groups can promote the sense of “community participation of all stakeholders, including children, in the public space” (Haider 2007, 83).

The intergenerationally intelligent urban space, concluded Biggs and Carr (2015), should aim “to enhance social and emotional understanding between age groups, increase harmony and reduce generational conflict” (109), considering the economic vulnerability and ageist social norm alongside the physical environment (Ibid.). Therefore, if we were to assign the concept of “generational intelligence” to a specific public space, it should exhibit the design features which promote inclusivity, considering

the specific needs of the young and the senior age, and by accommodating different age groups allow the intergenerational contact and promote social cohesion in the urban areas.

### **Observation conducted in a public green area with a playground**

In the following section, I will analyze the correlation between the generationally intelligent design and the intergenerational contact based on the inclusive design guidelines, and the data obtained by participant observation in a public playground in Knezija, a residential neighborhood in Zagreb, Croatia, which counts around 10 500 inhabitants (Grad Zagreb 2017).

#### *Inclusive design elements*

Knezija's park is located in the center of the neighborhood. Prior to the building of the children's playground in 2007 by the Konzum supermarket chain company and the Zagreb Municipality, today's park was an unbuilt green area. The park is situated beside the cultural center and connects the essential neighborhood amenities. In the buildings surrounding the park, there is a local post office, a library, a pharmacy, a bakery, a supermarket, a neighborhood's health center, and several coffee shops whose terraces are oriented towards the park. Even though there are several children's playgrounds in the neighborhood, this park appears more lively due to its favorable position within the neighborhood, as well as proximity to several residential high-rises. The main paths to connect the above-cited amenities pass through the park and intersect at the children's playground, which creates a positive environment for short interactions, as many people who would normally not be interested in visiting the playground now find the playground path the most convenient. The walking directions existed before the building of a playground, so the pattern of movement was not disrupted. According to Burton and Mitchell (2006) respecting the established structures when redeveloping a space adds to the familiarity and legibility of space, which makes it more welcoming for the elderly (61). Haider (2007) considers the playgrounds in most western cities to be actors of segregation, and, by being specifically oriented towards the children as visitors, to "limit

intergenerational socialization" (85). While this case seems likely in gated or geographically isolated children's playgrounds, in the case of the Knezija's park the daily fluctuance of the neighborhood's residents through the park ensures the functioning of a park as a meeting point between different social and age groups.

Moreover, the total of the green area provides seating apart from the playground but turned towards the playgrounds. These seating places are often occupied by the elderly reading the newspaper or resting, and who have chosen the public seating instead of the nearby coffee shop terraces. These benches are distanced from the playground, but still form part of a lively and dynamic atmosphere in the afternoon and evening hours when the park is heavily occupied by the children and their parents or guardians.

In terms of specific inclusive design elements, the park exhibits several features found child friendly by Krishnamurty, Steenhuis, Reijnders, and Stav (2018), as well as those considered age-inclusive by Burton and Mitchell (2006).

One of the major factors to consider while assessing the inclusivity of a public place is traffic. Both Krishnamurty et al. (2018) and Burton and Mitchell (2006) recognize the traffic as a major hazard for the children and the elderly in the public space. The authors recommend a clear separation between the pedestrian zones, cycling lanes, and roads (Burton and Mitchell 2006, 125; Krishnamurthy et al. 2018, 151). The playground and the sidewalks, normally the most active areas of the park, are encircled by the "buffer zones" and markers which separate the dwelling zones from the road. From the northern and the western side of the park, there is a residential building and the cultural center to isolate the green area from the traffic. From the southern side, there is a fence with the doors which can be closed to prevent child play in the building's parking area. Finally, from the eastern side, there is a green parcel with trees between the playground, and the on-road parking, as recommended by Burton and Mitchell (2006, 125). In accordance with the age-friendly guidelines (Ibid.), there are three marked pedestrian crossings around the park to connect the green area with the surrounding. There is only light traffic in the neighborhood, so the residents often disregard the marked crossings and move freely according to their

intuition. However, the benefits of the traffic safety of the park can be observed in the afternoon hours (16-21h), when parental supervision over the children riding bikes or roller-skates in the park seems to be relaxed, as there is no possibility of the child slipping on the road.

The awareness and ease of movement are addressed by the paving. Burton and Mitchell (2006) have observed that the generally plain, non-reflective, and non-slipping paving (125) or the gently sloped transitions (99) are easier and more comfortable for the elderly to move through the public space. Apart from the comfort in movement, the transitions in color or texture of the paving, or other physical boundaries, such as fencing or low walls, can help both the children and the elderly to differentiate between the areas of different use of ownership (Krishnamurthy et al. 2018, 145; Burton and Mitchell 2006, 88). Such boundaries still allow movement and for the environment behind it to be seen, so they don't appear intimidating (Burton and Mitchell 2006, 75). The Knezija's playground exhibits the different paving colors and patterns which differentiate between the play areas, the walking paths through the playground, and the sidewalks. However, the observation of park users has shown that the movement of different age groups is not necessarily influenced by paving.

The inviting atmosphere of the green spaces compared to "hard grey spaces" (Krishnamurthy et al. 2018, 145) contributes to the level of comfort and sense of being welcomed in the space (Burton and Mitchell 2006, 109). Both authors emphasize the importance of small-scale greening available for informal activities for the neighborhood, instead of a larger, but more deserted areas for the children and the seniors. The smaller scale, in the case of Knezija's park, creates a familiar ambiance for the neighbors to dwell.

The design principle of "legibility" is among the most important ones in creating an age-friendly environment (Burton and Mitchell 2006, 109). It refers to shaping the environment in a way that is identifiable and understandable for older people. It can be achieved by placing visual markers to delineate space, as is the case with the greenery and the sidewalk in Knezija's park, and opting for street furniture whose design refers to the previous models and whose function is clear (Burton and Mitchell



Figure 1: Inclusive design elements. From right to left: gentle slope transition and a marked crossing roads, the legible and familiar design of the bench, alternating tiles to mark different usage zones, a see-through fence to mark ownership zones.

2006, 75). The benches, an important asset that allows dwelling in the park, are of the same model as other pieces in the city, for which they can be recognized. As for the specifically child-friendly design, the playground, and therefore, the park, is not age-specific, which Krishnamurthy et al. (2018) recognized as beneficial (150). The playground elements can accommodate both younger children in the parent's company, as well as the older, pre-teen children. The authors also point out the importance of climbable objects and non-designated play spaces for the children's development. The climbable objects enhance strategic thinking, focus, and risk assessment (Krishnamurthy et al. 2018, 145). The Knezija's park features both a climbable play element and the trees, which allows choice for the children. Furthermore, by being surrounded by sidewalks, the park provides extra spaces for play, creativity, and interaction with the other park users (Krishnamurthy et al. 2018, 144).

Given the fact the park's design in many aspects corresponds to the research-based inclusive design criteria, the Knezija's park can be considered age inclusive. The claim was confirmed during the nine-day field observation covering the workdays and the weekends, when the park was occupied by many passersby for whom the park was the fastest and most convenient direction, and by those who spent time in the park, belonging to most diverse age groups.

#### *Intergenerational interactions*

It should be emphasized that the observation was conducted during the time of Covid-19 related restrictions enforcement. Even though it was previously argued that children are less likely to play outdoors today (The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 10; Heider 2007; ), the new patterns of everyday living in the cities, where the work and schooling passed to an online, non-presential format, have



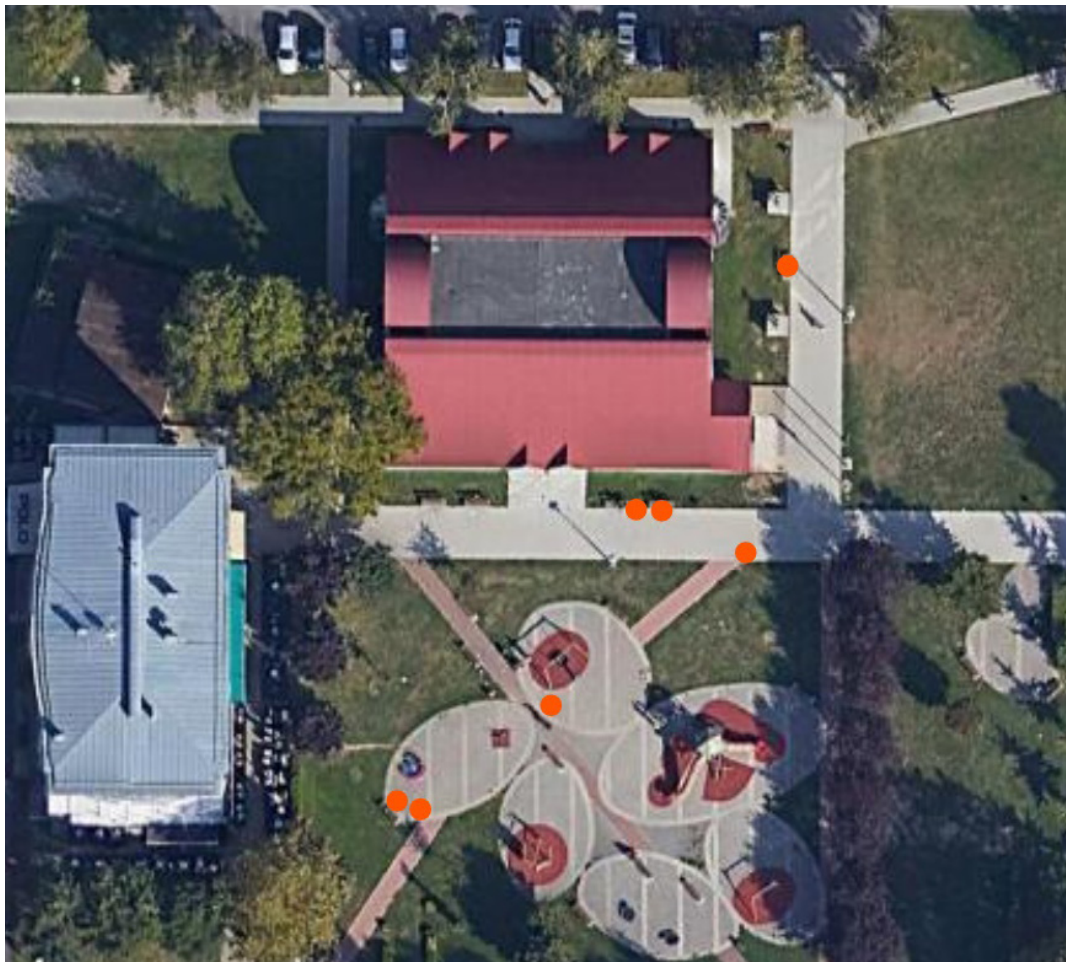


Figure 2: Locations of short interactions between the children and the unfamiliar senior persons.

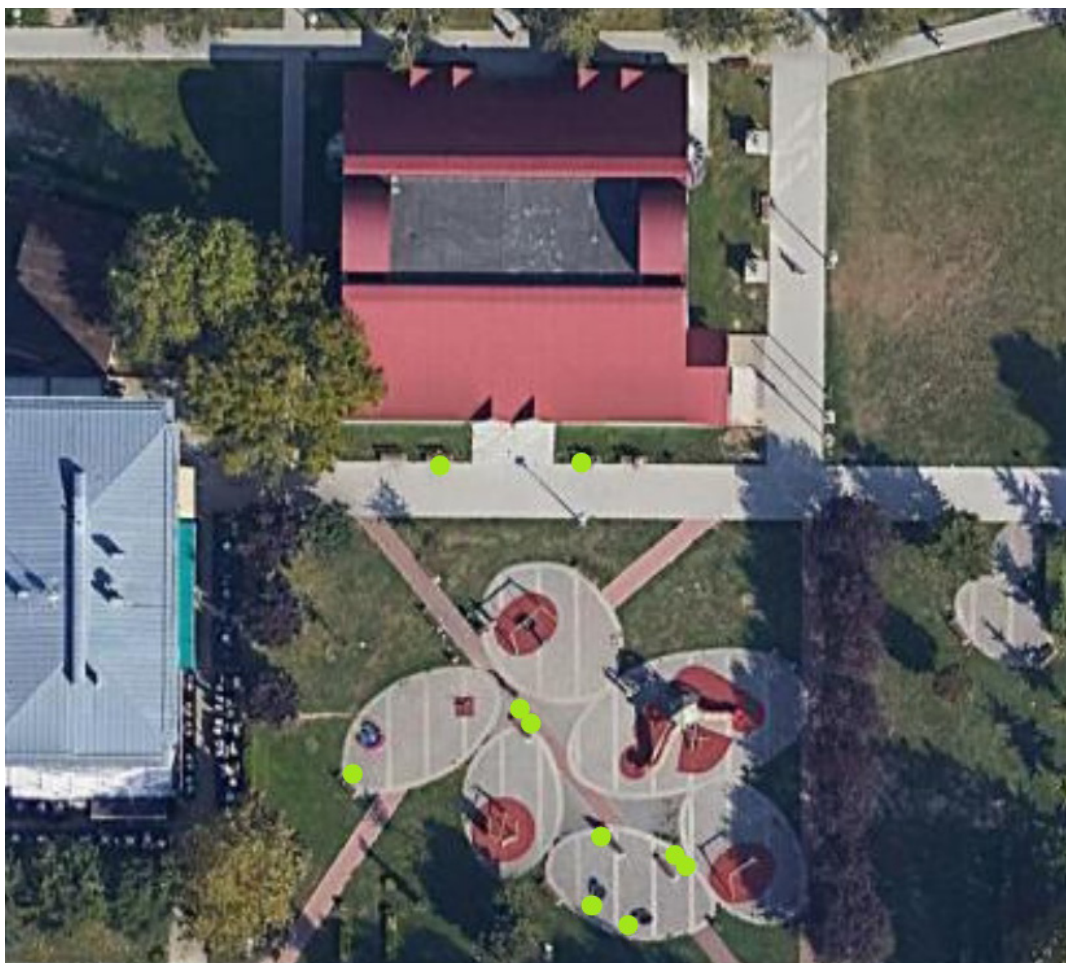


Figure 3: The locations of conversations between the children and the grandparents/guardians while spending time in the park.

affected the usage of the outdoor space. In this case, the observation was fruitful, as many children and parents, after spending a lot of time indoors, chose to go outside to play. Similarly, the elderly in the neighborhood were strongly advised to stay in their homes, yet many chose to go for a walk and opted for a park with a children's playground.

The behavior sampling (Bernard 2015, 297) of the interactions between the preschool and primary school-age children and the senior age persons has led to the following observations. For the analysis, I have distinguished two different ways of intergenerational interaction.

The first group of perceived interactions is establishing short, non-verbal contact. Such interactions occurred mostly between the children and the elderly which appeared not to share family bonds. During the thirteen-time slots of observation, I have marked this behavior seven times, both during the weekdays and the weekends. Four times, it occurred during the early weekday afternoon hours (16h-18h), when the park was occupied mostly by mothers or grandparents and pre-school age children, and before the arrival of middle-age adults and children, usually around 18h. The other three times, the interactions occurred in the morning hours during the weekend morning hours (10h-12h), while the same groups were present in the park.

As it can be seen on the image, all of seven short interactions occurred on the sidewalk, or in a pathway through the playground. In the morning hours, the elder persons were passing by, establishing contact with a child while walking. In the afternoon hours, the elderly were accompanied by a partner or a friend while resting on benches, which would be shaded by the cultural center in the afternoon hours, and observe the activities in the park. The children would use the sidewalk to run or to learn how to ride a bike and would then stop to interact with the elderly.

The contacts were very short, around one minute, and they were consisting of a greeting, a smile, or a friendly gesture. Even such short interactions, argue Burton and Mitchell (2006), are important for the wellbeing of the elderly, as they provide them a connection with the present and with their environment. One of the interactions observed consisted of an exchange of smiles between an old man, and a very young girl playing around the carousel while her mother was

sitting on a nearby bench. The man was carefully passing near the carousel, and as the child stopped the play to observe him walking, the man also stopped. They exchanged laughter, and the child directed unintelligible words to the man (Fieldwork notes, Thursday 28.05.20.). Both acknowledged each other's presence, and by interacting expressed an interest in each other.

Biggs and Carr (2015) argue that age often becomes "a performance, based on a socially restrictive and stereotyped persona" (107). This performance is partly conditioned by the materiality of the urban environment, which can be enabling or disabling. For Debord, the age performance relates to the "possibilities of psychosocial empathy between generations" (Biggs and Carr 2015, 107). The material conditions of the park allowed for both groups to share a positive environment, each using the park at their convenience. The mutual acknowledgment in a comfortable and positive context of the park may contribute toward creating a positive image of old age and this way, promotes positive responses.

The second type of interaction was engaging in conversation, mostly between the children and the elderly who appeared to share family or other caregiving bonds. This type of socializing was of longer duration and could be observed daily during the weekday afternoons (16h-21h), while during the weekend afternoons the children were mostly accompanied by their parents or peers. The socialization consisted of the elderly supervising the children playing.

In this case, the elderly would take the children to the playground, and opt to sit in the benches near the playing equipment. The playground provides seating near every play element, and near the paths through the playground, which allowed for the grandparents to stay close to the children in every moment and being able to comfortably sit on a bench.

The TOY project recognized the relationship between the children and the grandparents as informal and positive. "Not having ultimate parental responsibility for grandchildren", the researchers claim, "means that relationships may revolve less around rules and discipline and more around enjoyment and communication" (The TOY Project Consortium 2013, 11). In the park, it was often the case that the children would find peer company to play with, and

the grandparent would then supervise the whole group. In accordance with the TOY project research, what appeared interesting in the park was the sensation that the children viewed the grandparent more as an accomplice than as an authority. Such sensation is based on the observation of two different groups of children, in both cases groups of girls supervised by one grandmother, approaching the grandmother, seated a few meters apart, after climbing the playground element to laugh and share the experience (Fieldwork notes, Thursday 28.05.20. and Friday 29.05.20.).

A regular and quality contact between the seniors and the children, supported by the economically and physically accessible, safe, and comfortable outdoor environment, Rosebook (2002) claims, influences both group's self-esteem (32). The observations showed that the children appreciate the proximity of a grandparent, as they wanted to communicate their positive experience with them. Anna Stevenson (2017) found that providing an appropriate and accessible neighborhood facility has a wider impact on the community. The social contact, she argues, reduces stress and isolation for those taking care of the children (15). By allowing a safe and comfortable space for the elderly to spend quality time with the children, as observed in the park, they are more likely to frequent the place and strengthen the bonds with the grandchildren.

While the wider consequences of such contact can only be investigated in a longer time span, the observation showed that, when the environment is appropriate for different age groups, and therefore allows physical proximity while both groups can use the space comfortably, the positive interactions between the children and the elderly with or without family bonds occur. It can, therefore, be deduced that the park in the Knezija neighborhood is an intergenerationally intelligent space, and in cases when both groups occupy the space, they do establish contact.

## **Discussion**

This research showed that implementing age-friendly and child-friendly design principals into the public space, in the case of the Knezija's neighborhood park, results in frequent usage by both age groups, as well as the young and middle-age parent and

caregiver group. Appropriate material design of the park and the playground allowed the “equality of access” (Burton and Mitchell 2006, 12), and therefore the physical proximity of the children and the elderly. The method of participant observation allowed to perceive the comfort and safety of both age groups in using the space, which contributed towards creating a positive atmosphere.

The study of the contact established between the children and the elderly, considering the built environment the socialization took place in, refers to the previously demonstrated benefits of intergenerational connections. It is evident that the observed interactions between the children and the elderly who appear not to share family bonds cannot be considered a “quality contact”, as defined by the Hannon and Guelder (2008, 64) while researching organized intergenerational activities. However, the observed behaviors in the Knezija’s park suggest that sharing the space does benefit the children’s awareness of different age groups, as on several occasions they openly showed interest in a senior person. Considering the processes which result in diminishing the everyday contact of the children with their elderly family members and neighbors, the mutual acknowledgment in a positive and enabling environment might support an understanding of personal differences and similarities, and the equality of each person in the public space.

To examining the long-term influence of children experiencing social and age diversity in the public space and whether that experience would affect their attitudes in the future, a long-term interdisciplinary study would be required. As Biggs and Carr (2015) stated, the design of the built environment should be orientated towards the “development of an intergenerational urban community” (108) in the future. The intergenerational approaches are emerging as the western population is rapidly aging, and its consequences for the urbanized society are only to be seen.

### **Conclusion**

The previous research has confirmed the value of intergenerational connections and quality interactions both for the children and the elderly, as well as for the strengthening of social cohesion and contributing towards social sustainability in

the context of Europe’s population aging and other processes which lead to generational segregation in the urban areas. The need has been recognized in the design research area to investigate how to accommodate the specific needs of the previously disregarded age groups, the young and the old, in the public spaces.

The goal of this research was to detect and analyze the convergence of the age-friendly and child-friendly urban design principles in a public park in Zagreb’s residential neighborhood. Biggs and Carr (2015) have recognized that there was little research existing on the topic, and this study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the inclusive design and its role in fostering intergenerational interactions. By recurring to the participant observation method, the field research provided an insight into the positive atmosphere created in a generationally intelligent space, and the role of the design elements in allowing the two age groups to meet and interact.

Finally, the research showed that the child friendly and age-friendly design principles into the public space is meaningful, as it allows both groups to be unrestrained by the built environment and to focus their attention to the people in their environment. In the park in the Knezija neighborhood, whose design corresponds to some of the principles of inclusivity, two different groups of interactions between the children and the elderly. The positive environment and inclusive design promoted the interaction in cases where such contact might not have occurred, as demonstrated by the short interactions between the unfamiliar children and the elderly. In cases where the connections between the children and the elderly already existed, the enabling environment added quality to their socializing, as it provided comfort and safety.

The public spaces are a valuable resource for maintaining the understanding and appreciation of urban diversity. The interplay of the urban design elements and the intergenerational interactions observed in the Knezija’s park can possibly be observed elsewhere. Therefore, adapting the existing environments to be more inclusive, or implementing the inclusivity principles in future developments, is probable to foster intergenerational contacts and improve the resident’s wellbeing, and for that valuable, in any context.

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# “Vulnerable Conditions of Childhood in Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods and the Importance of the Child-focused Local Practices: Tarlabası Case and Tarlabası Community Center Example”

Dilşad Aladağ

## Introduction

The involvement of children in the city is significant to strengthen children's sense of belonging to their city, enhance their agency. Also, it is essential for creating awareness about their rights, the development of their cities, including child-friendly environments. However, living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods can create difficulties in terms of children's participation, agency in addition to their access to their rights (Niederberger, Krieken, 2008). Children possessed to face with inadequate social and educational facilities, insufficient infrastructure due to vulnerabilities of the neighbourhood. Especially in cities like İstanbul where disparities can be observed through various reasons, children of several areas are coping with the spatial injustice in the city from very early ages. Inadequate public services, lack of safe open spaces and green environment, insufficient educational and social resources are affecting children's wellbeing and restraining their opportunities for a better future.

One of these districts of İstanbul, Tarlabası is a segregated area for long years even though it has a very central location nearby city's famous shopping district Istiklal Avenue. The physical environment of the district is severely deficient for inhabitants, especially for children. Majority of the Tarlabası's inhabitants are ethnic minorities, victims of internal forced migration and external migration, refugees and illegal immigrants. Therefore, besides the condition of space, residents are coping with the integration problems, stigmatisation and poverty (Islam, Sakızoğlu, 2015). In addition to that, the district has been facing with the ongoing urban renewal projects and state-led gentrification process from 2007, which caused new physical and social obstacles for inhabitants.

In these conditions of the neighbourhood, Tarlabası Community Center (TCC) creates opportunities for inhabitants through their right based activities and their knowledge of women and child studies. TCC founded in 2006 in collaboration with of Research Center for Migration Studies at Bilgi University. The main goal of a non-profit organisation is creating possibilities „to make equal conditions in terms of the participation of city life for people in the Tarlabası that is one of the versatile disadvantaged areas in İstanbul.“ (TCC, 2020). They conduct their practice with the principles of social justice, human rights, equality and democracy (TTC, 2020). Especially, child studies have great importance in their practice. They observe and report the conditions of childhood in Tarlabası and they organise cultural activities, program educational events and open up a safe space for children of Tarlabası. From 2006 to today, more than 15.000 disadvantaged children, young people and women find support in TCC.

Tarlabası Community Center is a common space in the severe conditions of Tarlabası where children can be part of it through various programs while public institutions are extending existing inequalities through insufficient services. This paper aims to examine the role of Tarlabası Community Center regarding children's physical and social conditions in the deprived neighbourhoods of Tarlabası district. Moreover, it will be searched what TCC's activities' impact on children's awareness about their rights and agency, particularly regarding their relationship with the city is. The analysis later will investigate one of the TCC's recent project from 2019, „Children's City“, which strengthened children's understanding of the right to the city while searching the possibilities of child-friendly city environment in Tarlabası with the participation of children.

The analysis will start with a literature review on the problematic situation of globalised childhood definition in the face of growing inequalities in children's life. Moreover, scholars' opinions on how segregation and life conditions of versatile districts influence children's living conditions will be analysed. Following that, various journal articles and newspaper articles on Beyoğlu and Tarlabaşı will be reviewed to explore what are the difficulties that communities are coping with in Tarlabaşı. Further, for the analysis of the conditions of childhood, this paper will borrow two surveys for the quantitative explanation of the situation of children living in Tarlabaşı. In addition to these survey analyses, an interview that was conducted for this paper with the director of Tarlabaşı Community Center, Gökçe Baltacı, will be a resource for understanding the current circumstances of Tarlabaşı's children.

Moreover, with a focus on the child-focused practices of Tarlabaşı Community Center, this paper will analyse how TCC creates opportunities in the compelling conditions of Tarlabaşı through investigation of yearly activity reports of TCC, documents on their principles, previous interviews and written articles on TCC. The interview with Gökçe Baltacı fulfils the analysis on the working principles and goals of Tarlabaşı and how children are benefiting this place. In addition to that, „Children's City“ workshop project of TCC will be investigated as part of this research. Results of the workshop series that was produced with the participation of children will bring children's voice to the study during Covid-19 conditions.

### **Literature Review**

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines children as any person under the age of 18. Following that; the second article in the child-friendly booklet states that „All children have all these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, what they think, what they look like, if they are a boy or girl, if they have a disability, if they are rich or poor, and no matter who their parents or families are or what their parents or families believe or do. No child should be treated unfairly for any reason.“ (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). Although children's rights defined and accepted globally, conditions of childhood and the child rights adaptedness is uneven

around the world due to global, national and local unevenness. Children have to be confronted with the inequalities in different geographies and cope with the tragic results of these situations which weaken them in the long term (UNICEF, 2015).

Niederberger and Krieken criticise the globalised acceptance of childhood, children's rights and children's agency ‚beyond status and class‘ in their study „Persisting Inequalities: Childhood between global influences and local traditions“. They state that „Children act within the frame of social, economic and political structures that often limit the scope of possible action.“ (Niederberger, Krieken, 2008 p.148). Further, their study remarks that the actual conditions of childhood and the everyday life of children have remained very diverse although there are several institutions like schools or kindergartens around the world which accepted these global criteria and definitions of a childhood long years ago (Niederberger, Krieken, 2005 p.153). Across global, regional and local levels, these diversified conditions can be strengthened through disparities of class, race, income in addition to continuing inequalities based on generation and gender differences (Niederberger, Krieken 2005 p.149, p.153).

In addition to global influences, children face with unevenness due to different types of segregations which creates inequalities in social and spatial contexts. Children are the most influenced group in the face of the race, income and spatial segregations primarily because segregation has influences on educational attainment through a diversity of mechanisms operating at several different spatial scales (Quillian, 2014). In his study „Does Segregation Create Winners and Losers? Spatial Segregation and Inequality in Educational Attainment“, Lincoln Quillian examines the consequences of segregation for educational opportunities. Although this study focuses on the US American context, the result can be adapted to other segregated residential areas due to typical results of segregation effects through the lack of social institutions and public services (Quillian, 2014 p. 403). Segregation constitutes a social formation of intergenerational social closure which increase the disadvantage of disadvantaged groups and decrease future opportunities for the young generations (Quillian, 2014 p. 404). Study of Quillian explains that youth in segregated communities had

to cope with income inequality, racial stigmatisations and service inequalities as part of other local contexts (Quillian, 2014 p. 403-405).

Ann Owen's studies on Inequality in Children's Context (2016) also support that spatial segregation creates considerable disadvantages for children who grow up in impoverished neighbourhoods. Educational outcomes of expanding inequalities as a result of economic disparities shape their future negatively (Owens, 2016 p.350). Lastly, Alison Pugh explains influences of inequalities with Bourdieu's theory of habitus in his work titled „The theoretical cost of ignoring childhood: rethinking independence, insecurity and inequality.“ According to Pugh, although Bourdieu's work focused on adult tastes as evidence for the artificial differentiation of class, his theory of habitus, the selection of settlements inscribed by practices undertaken at an early age, documented the structural results of symbolic boundaries (Pugh, 2014 p.80). Also, the author mentions Annett Lareau's influential ethnographic research (2002, 2003) which extended Bourdieu's argument through showing that class-based childrearing disparities sowed portentous skills and inclinations in children with consequences for their trajectories through life. (Pugh, 2014 p.80)

Sarah Cook, UNICEF Innocenti Director, pointed out that the report shows that the happiness of children is not only related to individual circumstances and the economic situation of the country, but also specific political measures. Cook urged governments to pay more attention to children's happiness in their policies (DW, 2016). According to the UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 13, Turkey is considered as the country with the highest inequality of educational opportunities among 41 other OECD countries (Bilen, Akbulut, 2016). Here, once again, it should be remembered that what needs to be done is to establish the rights granted to children to protect them from the harmful effects of poverty and the state must be the provider and follower of these rights (Bilen, Akbulut, 2016). However, in cases where top-down institutions do not fulfil their duties in terms of providing equality for children, the existence of bottom-up practices, NGOs, the child-focused local practice can have significant impacts on children's lives in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

## Evaluation of Tarlabaşı District

### *An Island in the Cosmopolitan Life of Beyoğlu*

At the centre of Istanbul, Beyoğlu, the commercial, entertainment and cultural centre of Istanbul, was always an area of a great diversity includes people from various ethnic backgrounds and cultures (Eraydın, 2009). In 19th and 20th century, during the rule of the Ottoman Empire, European origin people and non-muslim Ottoman communities were living in Beyoğlu. Following the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the population has changed as a result of population change with Balkan countries. Other visible alteration happened in Beyoğlu's inhabitant profile after non-Muslim citizens had to move from the city due to Istanbul Pogrom in 6th-7th September 1955 (Eraydın, 2009). Further, Turkey has experienced extreme inner migration to bigger cities from Anatolia and especially from the south-east and eastern regions. People who could not afford middle-income neighbourhoods chosen to live in different parts of Beyoğlu (Eraydın, 2009).

Tarlabaşı was one of those neighbourhoods which were suffered a lot after the flight of non-Muslim residents and mostly preferred by the most vulnerable inner migrants. Especially with the construction of Tarlabaşı Boulevard in late 1980, Tarlabaşı became disconnected from cosmopolitan Beyoğlu life and vibrant İstiklal Street. As a result of building barrier-like infrastructure, the way for gentrification of one side and the method for dilapidation of the other side was triggered (Islam, Sakızoğlu, 2015). The visible disparity grew in years, and Tarlabaşı became commonplace for stigmatised groups like sex workers, LGBT communities, workers in the informal economy like recyclers and vendors. Furthermore, displaced Kurdish communities who were the victim of forced migration in the east and south-east of Turkey move to the neighbourhoods of Tarlabaşı from the 1980s (Islam, Sakızoğlu, 2015). In 2011, Tarlabaşı experienced yet another wave of migration this time predominantly of Syrians fleeing the Syrian civil war. They became arguably the most fragile and unwanted inhabitants of Tarlabaşı district. (TCC, 2018)

In 2005, a state-led urban renewal project for Tarlabaşı was announced by Beyoğlu municipality as part of making Istanbul a global city plans (Islam, Sakızoğlu, 2015). In the report that prepared in 2003

about the upcoming urban renewal projects, the district presented as a place of poverty, migration, lack of integration, marginal groups and crime. (Ünlü, 2003) The project introduced as a recreation of livable and safe Beyoğlu's cosmopolitan lifestyle in Tarlabası's unhealthy and unclean environment. Advertisements of the project openly discriminated inhabitants as occupants of the area (Bayhan, 2013). The municipality also legitimised the plan through continuing existing stigmas characterising Tarlabası as a 'criminal', 'terrorist' and 'decaying' district. (İslam, Sakızlıoğlu, 2015)

Various academicians and organisations criticised Tarlabası urban renewal project due to its possible results such as growing gentrification processes, displacement of inhabitants and its severely top-down decision-making process (Islam, Sakızoğlu, 2015). However, the project started on the 20.000 square meter area where 269 building (200 of them were cultural assets) were located (Islam, Sakızoğlu, 2015). After the project, community feeling and solidarity damaged and people could not continue their business, they did not feel safe anymore and lose their hope for an in-situ upgrading in the neighbourhoods (Islam, Sakızoğlu, 2015).

According to the report of Urban Strategy Incorporated Company in 2008, 75% of Tarlabası residents were tenants, %20 of them were householder and %5 is an occupant. (Göker, 2014) Also, 15% of inhabitants had an income below the hunger line, 66% of them had an income between hunger and poverty line (Dinçer and Enlil (2003) in Sakızoğlu, 2007). As Sakızoğlu (2007) demonstrated in her research, Tarlabası residents also had to face another form of poverty that comes with the difficulties of concentration and integration. Further, statistics on the education level shows that 90% of the women of the neighbourhood are illiterate. (Sabancı Foundation, 2011) When the job profile analysed, temporary and insecure works like panhandling, garbage collecting, hawking are the most common jobs. Moreover, textile workshops operated at home are typical informal workplaces that widely used child labour. (Sakızoğlu, 2007) Lastly, crime rates and prostitution are inevitable facts of Tarlabası district. However, according to Sakızoğlu (2007), the high crime rate and the existence of prostitution is not the only reason of stigmatisation; it is only a part of actual reasons.



Figure 1: Location of Tarlabası and its surrounding diagram: Dilşad Aladağ, image source: Google Maps

In the changing condition of Tarlabası in years, poverty did not decrease; on the contrary, it reproduced with the existence of renewal project and construction sides. Tarlabası Community Center's 2016 report noted that a woman from Tarlabası said „They demolished everywhere because of urban transformation. Houses were left empty, neglected, in ruins. Ever since they closed this place, marijuana and pills sales increased. Mouse pressed and insect was everywhere. However, we only want the municipality to clean the streets and the environment.“ (TCC, 2016). Amid criticism and struggle of the Chamber of Architects and public organisations, the urban renewal project was eventually cancelled in 2017 (TCC, 2018). However, uncertainty remains regarding the future situation of the project (Pişkin, 2017) and the conditions of the construction area. Therefore, besides the physical challenges of the site, marginalised residents of Tarlabası had to cope with uncertainty and had to face stigmatisation and neglect.

While discussions were continuing on the conditions and future use of Tarlabası, Tarlabası Community Center, which was founded in 2006, analysed these



conditions and their severe impacts on the everyday life of the. Tarlabası residents. According to their research, more than half of the community stated that they perceive prejudice and act of discrimination from the society while 75% of the survey participants was saying that they are not benefitting from municipality services (Çağlayan, Şahin, 2006). In addition to that, their research included a question regarding their expectation from a community centre in the area. The most common answer was a place that children can safely play (Çağlayan, Şahin, 2006).

### Conditions of Childhood in Tarlabası

For understanding what the conditions of childhood are, there will be two surveys examined as part of this research. The first survey with children and adults which was conducted by Basri Çağlayan and Bahar Şahin (Çağlayan, Şahin, 2006) as part of Tarlabası Community Center in 2006 focused on children's living conditions and their access to education, leisure time, social life, media and information. According to their analysis, 88% of 5-13 years old children is going to school; however, 38,16% of 13-23 years old children and the young group doesn't go to school, 42,11 of them goes to primary school, and only 19,74% of them goes high school. According to their answers, 44,7% of them thinks their most significant problems are related to school and education. Furthermore, 60,9% of them stated that their mother is illiterate, and 46,27% of mothers did not have any institutional education before. In addition to details

regarding education, 13-23 age group stated that 72,5% of them doesn't have a personal room while 30% of them doesn't have a personal bed in their house. Lastly, 18% of them indicated that they have to work to keep food on the table at home. These quantitative data that TCC provided in 2006 shows that children have difficulties in terms of access to education, to relaxation and social life in addition to their responsibilities for financially supporting their family. (Çağlayan, Şahin 2006).

In addition to these data, the second survey with children which was conducted by Çiğdem N. Yılmaz in 2005 for her thesis focusing on spatial experiences of Tarlabası district's children. According to her study, 66% percentage of children participant live in two rooms or one-room apartments. 50% of all children also mentioned that number of households is 3-5 people and 33% of all stated that they live in the same apartment as 6-8 people. According to Yılmaz's question based on the ownership of goods, only one child mentioned that in his/her house there is a washing machine, fridge, television, dishwasher and computer at the same time. 69% of children said that they have only 3 of these devices. Furthermore, 12% of children stated that they play at home while 38% of the children answered that they play on the streets, and 20% of them plays at school. In addition to these data, most of the children stated that the positive sides of the area are friends, neighbours and solidarity. On the contrary, the majority of them indicated that burglary, dirtiness, trashes, fights and guns are the opposing sides of the area. Lastly, 49% of the children noted that cleaning their neighbourhood is a good method to make Tarlabası a better place.

Among these survey analyses, the interview with Gökçe Baltacı that conducted as part of this research in 2020 can extend the knowledge on children's situation in Tarlabası. According to Baltacı, conditions of childhood in the district worsened in years with the influences of macro and micro politics. Firstly, the urban renewal process, which started in 2011 created physical difficulties in addition to the displacement of relatives and friends. Also changing economic conditions of the country increased the poverty and decreased the municipal services accordingly. Macro and micro-politics triggered existing stigmatization. Lastly, after the Syrian Civil War, Tarlabası became a commonplace for Syrian migrants, especially after



Figure 2: Tarlabası Streets after renewal projects started source: „Beyoğlu'nun üvey Evladı: Tarlabası.“ Sabah. October 24, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2020. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/galeri/yasam/beyoglundun-uevey-evladi-tarlabasi>.

2015. Migrated children had to cope with language and cultural barriers, stigmatization and poverty (Baltacı, 2020).

In Tarlabası, the district face difficulties in accessing public services, inequalities in the education system, deficiencies and the political situation of the country. These all increase the deprivation of children living in Tarlabası and make it difficult to access their rights. Apart from material deprivation, children residing in Tarlabası also experience deep deprivation in terms of benefiting from fundamental rights and services such as education, health, social and urban facilities (green areas, parks, clean environment, social activity areas, etc.) (TCC, 2020). Baltacı states that numerous children have to work for being part of house economy, especially Syrian children work in different types of informal jobs in the city (Baltacı, 2020).

Baltacı also remarks in the interview that houses in Tarlabası neighbourhoods are very small, the average size of apartments is 50-60 square meter where children from different age groups and genders use the same room with their families (Baltacı, 2020). Therefore, Baltacı's interview and Yılmaz's quantitative data shows that streets are becoming places that cover the lack of space at home. Also, Baltacı adds, „Tarlabasi is not a safe place in terms of social and physical conditions of the street. Although there are dead-end streets that children can have car-free space, the cleanness of space is very problematic and municipal service is not sufficient. Therefore, as the Tarlabası Community Center, we aim to offer space for children in the uncertain conditions of the neighbourhood“ (Baltacı, 2020). According to Baltacı, especially children who can't feel comfortable, safe and strong to express themselves on the street, Center become an alternative space (Baltacı, 2020).

Consequently, previous studies and collected data shows that Tarlabası is a vulnerable district in Istanbul, where inhabitants experience stigmatization and segregation. Also, migration backgrounds of Tarlabası residents enhance the influences of poverty and restrain opportunities. In these circumstances, the most affected group is children who suffer from lack of physical, social services and prospects in addition to existing severe conditions of poverty. There are various problems that they face in terms of their access to education, social activities, media,

information and public services. In these conditions, Tarlabasi Community Center offers various social and cultural programs in addition to providing a safe space for children. They organize programs and host activities by the Center include; art and educational workshops for children (TCC, 2018).

### **Evaluation of a Case Study: Tarlabası Community Center**

#### *Child-focused practices of Tarlabası Community Center*

Tarlabası Community Centre describes its motivation that „tries to make equal conditions in terms of the participation of city life for people in the Tarlabası that is one of the versatile disadvantaged areas in Istanbul.“ (TCC, 2020) The Center is a right based NGO that was opened in 2006, and since then has provided social, psychological and educational support for over 15.000 disadvantaged children, young people and women. (TCC, 2018) Children studies and child-focused activities have a central place in their practices. In contrast to the top-down approach of the municipal city planning, TCC is an example of a bottom-up development in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. (Bosswick, 2009) They conduct their practices with the support of various national and international financial supports and yearly donators. Currently, they have also several supporters such as; Bernard van Leer Foundation, Sabancı Foundation, Istanbul Bilgi University, Consulate General of Sweden, Turkish Philanthropy Fund and Emerging Markets Foundation (TCC, 2020). In addition to funding programs, TCC has various volunteers every year who get training in the Center and be part of workshops and activities. In 2014, due to financial problems, TCC had to move from 5-floor building in Tarlabası. Tarlabası community offered help and supported TCC to find a new affordable place for the continuity of the Center's practices (Balyan, 2019; Baltacı, 2020).

Children are the most affected group by practices such as social and economic disadvantages, educational inequalities, violation of rights and violence; therefore, child studies are Tarlabası Community Center's top priority field of work and the primary beneficiaries of TCC are children living in the region. (TCC, 2017) TCC's practice is based

on national and international laws and standards, especially the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in all of its work with children. TCC considers child participation as a right for every child who is a beneficiary. They organize their practices and the activities that they plan based on child participation with a child safety perspective. Child participation in TCC aims to establish a system where they can influence the decisions to be made more strongly by not accepting the social norms of children as „needy“, „weak“ or „passive“ from the adult perspective. On the contrary, they are supporting the empowerment of children through facilitating their access to the mechanisms where they can convey their requests and complaints. (TCC, 2020) Individuals express themselves more openly and comfortably in an environment where they feel safe. Therefore, TCC takes care to implement child safety principles based on this principle and create a safe environment. According to Baltacı, every day, there are four different workshops on the program and average 50-60 children visit the centre for them, further, each month around 150 children benefitting centre (Baltacı, 2020).

In addition to being transparent, informative, respectful, and child-friendly; TCC endeavour for being volunteering and inclusiveness, educationally supported, and sensitive to risks and accountability. (TCC, 2020). Tarlabası Community Centre also works for raising consciousness about children and human rights in society and coordinates its activities accordingly. The best interest of the child is the priority of all its activities which comply with this principle. In its practices, TCC is against all kind of violence, and the focus of peaceful service under the umbrella of art and education is essential in all activities carried out at TCCC (TCC, 2020). TCC yearly reports details of all their activities, educational programs and workshops. Furthermore, TCC annually reports how many children attended to these activities and from which ethnic backgrounds and genders. According to the 2019 reports, TCC conducted 245 workshops in 2019, and 2155 attendance happened in total (TCC, 2019). Balanced participation of children from Turkey and children from Syria can be observed from the report (2019). Also, it is essential to note that women-focused practices of TCC also has an indirect positive impact on children from Tarlabası. Many parents learn

how to be literate, receive psychological support and gain knowledge about finance and law, which can be also helpful for children in the long term. (Baltacı, 2020)

Çok Güzel Atölye (Very Good Workshop) was the most featured workshop which was held weekly to gain gender equality and nonviolence perspectives (TCC, 2019). Encounters of the children in the workshop reproduced within the framework of „play“ with a large group and small group activities. Children of Tarlabası also have a magazine called „Parlayan Çocuklar“ (Shining Children) that children work in the production process from content creation to preparation for publication (TCC, 2019). This magazine is the only example in Turkey that children produce themselves (Baltacı, 2020). Furthermore, other workshops were focusing on the development of children’s perception of body, imagination and cognitive development, artistic production skills. For children from 3-6 years old, TCC tries to create a playing group, for older children, TCC offers academic support groups every day, also, through „Discovery Workshop“ series, children search how to organize activities for other children (TCC, 2019). As Baltacı states, besides their informative and social functions, the whole program of TCC is actually creating a common ground for children who have different migratory backgrounds, who don’t speak the same language (Interveiw, 2020). She says, „As TCC, we are working for children to trust each other, learn what their rights and get strengthened together.“

In addition to these practices, TCC also organize various trips to heritage sides of the city, to museums and cultural institutions, which gives children a chance to discover their city (Baltacı, 2020). Also, TCC collaborates with several other institutes and support children’s involvement to other important events such as Children Charette at Boğaziçi University, Children’s Participation Symposium at Bilgi University, Council of Youngs at Arter Museum. Lastly, TCC organized parties and festivals with children around their neighbourhood for special days (TCC, 2019). According to Baltacı (2020), these events are creating a bond between children and Istanbul, through these programs, they feel more part of the city. They feel they gain recognition through entering these institutions, which are extraordinary encounters for them. However, she also criticized the

situation that children still only able to enter these public spaces only as part of TCC (Baltacı, 2020). Therefore, she adds „Still we need strongly advocate for the right to the city and commoning these public spaces, especially for the accessibility of all children.“ (Baltacı, 2020).

### “Children’s City” Project

In the interview, Baltacı (2020) explains how they initiate „Children’s City“ project as part of their 2019 program:

*„TCC is working for children’s rights; however, the main point in our practices is conditions of Tarlabası, being in Tarlabası, which is a segregated place in Istanbul that experience the urban renewal process. Therefore, this immanent position of TCC makes us forget to talk about the city itself, to discuss child-friendly spaces. Because we live in Tarlabası and every activity we organize is related to the place, however, still, it is valuable to bring space itself at the centre of discussion. To remind children and us. We recognized that we should work on spaces of Tarlabası from the beginning. Our first act was redesigning the space of TCC with the participation of children. Then a bigger scale came, to research what exposed by children in Tarlabası’s spaces and what they want for their neighbourhood. As a result of this, the idea of „Children’s city“ project was originated. „( Baltacı, 2020)*

From June to December 2019, Children’s City project was realized as a series of three workshops and two trips in the city. The project was initiated by TCC and conducted with Gizem Kıyığı, who is an urban planner and historian, experienced with child-focused planning practices. The project, which was realized with the Micro-Fund grant programme, sponsored by the European Union and run by the International Children’s Centre (ICC), aimed to make fundamental rights violations that children experienced visible. (TCC, 2019) Twelve children, ages 8-12 who is from Turkey (Kurds, Roma, and Turks) and Syria (Dom, Abdali, Turkmen, Kurds) living in Tarlabası, attended the workshop. After they observed these violations through their eyes and steps, they developed solution suggestions for equal access to urban life which aimed to transform tools for communication

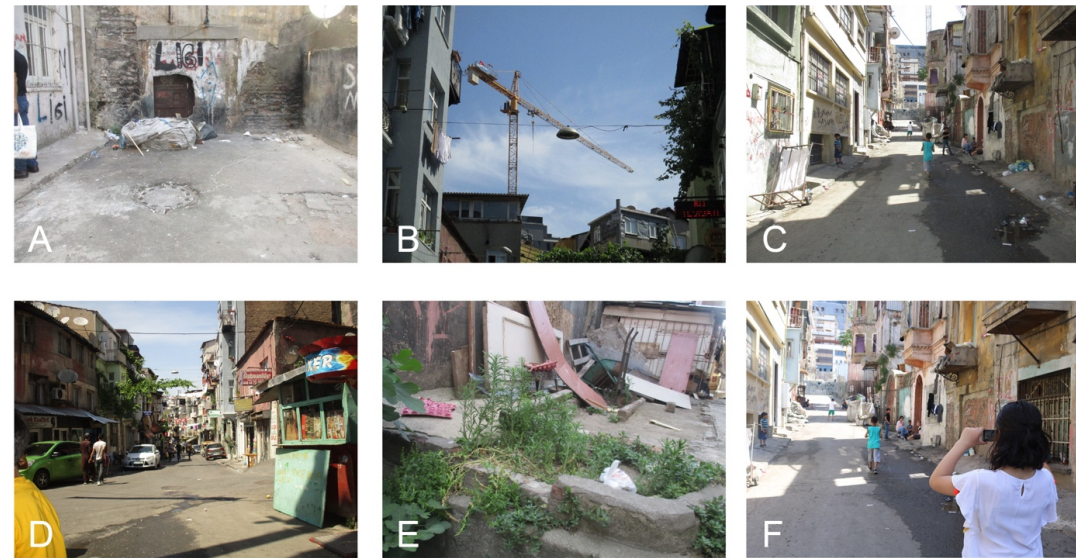


Figure 3: Photos of the right violations in Tarlabası from children’s perspective, Children’s City Project, 2019

with related institutions. (TCC, 2019)

According to the workshop booklet, the first „City Right“ workshop started with an investigation of the rights violations that children experienced in urban life through the streets they preferred or avoid to use. The first step focused on how children build a relationship with their city and their neighbourhood where children lived and marked on the Tarlabası map. In addition to that, the workshop was a critical thinking process on right violations. During the next workshop, „Walking in Beyoğlu“, children photographed the streets in Tarlabası where they spent their time with intensity, used or frequently play with the critical perspective of the first workshop. After the trip, children and TCC talked about children’s photos as a group. It was observed that the children often mentioned parked cars on sidewalks, dead ends, left garbages on the road, potholes, ruined buildings and street writings. (TCC, 2019).

From the pictures that children took and their notes related to problems in the photos, it is possible to follow their perception and understanding of what is problematic in the city space for children. Children are recognizing the dirtiness of streets and seeing this as a problem needs to be discussed, they photographed empty spots, sidewalks, dead-end streets which are full of spoils of recycling job. In addition to dirtiness, children mention the conditions of street animals and threatening street for them because of cars, and lack of food. Lack of traffic lights, spaces that children said cars occupied on the streets and sidewalks. In addition to that, they photograph the density and mention the lack of



Figure 4: Collages of the dream Tarlabaşı: Children's Design, Children's City Project, 2019

open spaces, playgrounds and green areas closed to their houses where they can play safely. Children see the problems regarding infrastructural omissions such as hollows, puddles on the streets. Further, the issue of sound pollution also was mentioned by children. It is essential to recount that; children also remarked their observation on social aspects about the happiness of people and need of social facilities to enjoy life in their neighbourhoods.

In the final session, „If You Designed The City/ Tarlabaşı...“, children redesigned their dream Tarlabaşı through collages on the photo of the place they took its picture by using colours and patterns. At the end of the project, it should be noted that the children's awareness of the rights violations they experienced in participation in the city is remarkable. (TCC, 2019) In their scenarios, more space reserved for children and a greener neighbourhood was the two biggest titles shared by workshop participants. They suggest caring about the conditions of animals in addition to human beings. Their collages are referring to cleaning the existing niche vacant areas, seeing them as an opportunity for beautifying through wise interventions. Further, they also changed the facades of neglected old buildings. In one of their photos where there is a construction lift and where the sound pollution was particularly mentioned, collage was removing the construction site to make the place beautiful and peaceful. In addition to these details, among the children's suggestions for what to do were more pedestrian crossings, traffic lights, greening streets and more trash cans on the big streets.

With children's suggestions, TCC determined to

do many new workshops on what can be done together with on this issue (TCC, 2019) According to Baltacı; this workshop triggered children to think on the possibility of their participation in decision making and power of their agency (Baltacı, 2020). According to her statements, TCC aims to continue these workshops because children gain a critical perspective about their right to the city and document first the right violations on the street. But also, they document their experiences and create mappings through their stories from their perceptions. She explains their future goal regarding this workshops with these words „We wonder what stories they have in those places, with the neighbourhood itself, with the details on the streets that we have never noticed, can we do something with children in a narration where we can combine studies on urban space and collective memory with children. „(Baltacı, 2020)

### Conclusion

Children's participation and agency may not be achievable in the vulnerability of disadvantageous neighbourhoods where children have difficulties, even the accessibility of fundamental rights and public services. While conditions are remaining due to inadequate public services and policies, children's opportunities for a better future is worsening due to social and economic barriers. This research shows an example disadvantageous district from Istanbul, Tarlabaşı, which does not offer adequate safe space and conditions for children's wellbeing. In addition to long years of stigmatisation and segregation, Tarlabaşı's residents who mostly have migratory background had to confront state-led urban renewal projects and displacement. Children are the most influenced group from the impacts of income, race and spatial segregation. Physical and social obstacles of areas such as lack of indoor and outdoor spaces, inadequate public services, and results of poverties are creating barriers in terms of their social and educational improvement and children's future opportunities.

In the political frameworks and existing policies, public institutions continue to neglect the situation of segregated neighbourhoods which can increase the vulnerability for inhabitants and especially for children. Studies of scholars show that hierarchy and inequality can be part of the structure of existing

public institutions like schools and kindergartens, and children experience stigmatisation in these institutions. This problem is also a case for the public institutions in Tarlabası. According to the director of Tarlabası Community Center Gökçe Baltacı, besides the criticised quality of education children with migratory background experience racial stigmatisation in schools which creates many problems especially for Syrian and Kurdish children in their daily life (Baltacı, 2020). As Baltacı states that, especially this situation shows how the child-friendly, right based practices are essential and necessary in districts like Tarlabası which receive massive migration and cope with urban renewal process (Baltacı, 2020).

Therefore, a rights-based non-governmental organisation, Tarlabası Community Center (TCC) which established in 2006 to support the equal participation of residents in urban life in Tarlabası was investigated as part of this research to see its advantages for the children of Tarlabası. As it can be seen from examined reports and conducted interview, TCC has been carrying out projects concentrated on empowering children, young people and women, raising consciousness about their rights and opening safe spaces where they can express themselves. (TCC, 2018 and Baltacı, 2020) This paper shows that, in addition to creating awareness about their rights, children from different ethnic backgrounds encounter with each other in the common space of TCC, learn and perform together, improve their language skills. Therefore, TCC helps for empowerment and integration of children in Tarlabası.

Furthermore, through the case workshop “Children’s City”, which this paper examined, TCC aims to strengthen the relationship between children and their city. Results of this child-friendly city workshop shows that children gained a critical perspective on their rights and documented their experience in the city and the conditions of their neighbourhood. Also, they experienced how they detect spatial problems, indicate the good for themselves through their unique experiences. Moreover, children proposed their ideas or created something for the problem that they noticed with their knowledge. According to Baltacı, this experience was enlightening for children because “Tarlabası’s children always complain about their neighbourhood; they complain about the lacking green spaces, public services, dirtiness. But

also they love Tarlabası, and this was the chance for themselves to reflect what can be done to fix these problems.” (Baltacı, 2020) In the end, Tarlabası’s children conclude the workshop by saying “if you do something good for children, it will be good for everyone.”. This comment reminds the sentence from UNICEF’S “A world fit for children” document: “By giving high priority to the rights of children, to their survival and their protection and development, we serve the best interest of all humanity.” (UNICEF, 2015)

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# Spatial Transformation of Play Areas: Play Areas From Urban Spaces to Designed Playgrounds and Its Impact on Right to Play

Merve Gül Topraktepe

## Abstract

This following paper analyzes the spatial transformations of children's play areas and discusses how these transformations affect children's right to play. To begin, the study presents there main themes to describe the research problem and question. Firstly, the paper examines the spatial transformation of play areas from urban open and green spaces such as streets, undefined green lots to the designed public playgrounds. Secondly, the paper discusses whether public playgrounds have the capacity to support children's play needs. Finally, the paper focuses on children's right to play in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to understand how designed public places correspond to the article 31 in the convention. Around three main themes the research question is put forward as to how the spatial transformation of children's play areas influences children's right to play.

Accordingly, the paper hypothesises the urban open spaces where children can play around freely is diminishing and children's play is confined to public playgrounds which are disputable in regards to children's right to play.

In this light, a public playground in the neighborhood in İstanbul is investigated by using observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis on the website of Ümraniye municipality. Questionnaires designed for both children and their parents had been collected and analyzed. Therefore, this study indicates that the number of designed public playgrounds have been increasing while urban open and green spaces are decreasing in İstanbul. Moreover, they are transformed in a way that responds to neither children's needs nor their rights to play.

## Introduction

Play as a common activity for children, promotes cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being (Bento and Dias 2017, 157) offers developing new strategies and behaviors that children can adapt themselves to their environment (Pellegrini, Dupuisa, Smith 2017, 261-267). Play can occur in indoor and outdoor places. However, outdoor places give a more open environment to children in the sense of variety of natural elements, less adult control, incorporating change and unpredictability (Stephenson 1999, 10-16). This open and free environment to play has great significance in promoting learning in children, moreover refusing children's desire to free play may damage their mental growth, emotional development, and overall sense of well-being (Gray 2013;2015). Furthermore, literature review release that the outdoor play spaces in the children's living area is important for two reason: firstly, outdoor playing support children's physical and psychological health, secondly, outdoor play areas help children to improve their social interactions with their environment (Bento and Dias 2017; Gray 2013).

Outdoor play areas where children spend their time can vary from designed playgrounds to free urban open and green spaces<sup>\*1</sup>. Although children living in urban areas have more opportunities in terms of health, education, protection (UNICEF, Shaping urbanization for children 2018, 55) spaces in urban areas where children can independently shape their own places are diminishing (Kylin and Bodelius 2015, 87). A critical outcome of this transformation is children are confined to designed public playgrounds and initiated to play with facilities provided by the government. While open areas for children are decreasing and number of playgrounds are increasing (In the case of İstanbul), the paper firstly examines the spatial transformation of playground from urban

\*1 Urban open and green space – encompasses green space, urban greenery, open space, public space, public gardens and parks. 'There are a variety of different terms and definition of urban open and green spaces, according to the way they are applied' (11th ASEAN Postgraduate Seminar, APGS 2017). The term refers to areas in this paper are: urban environment, urban space, public space, open space, urban landscape, urban greening, and green space.

open and green spaces to designed playground. Atmakur-Javdekar (2016) argues play is more effective when it is free, encourages exploration, curiosity, and imagination (129), thus this paper secondly explores whether the public playgrounds' capacity is efficient to support children's play needs. Children's play is recognized as essential to the development of a child, is thus mentioned as a right by the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC). Article 31, argues that play as a right should be recognized, respected, and promoted. However, according to the committee, the implementation of the right to the play of child under the Convention, the States have been giving poor recognition to the article 31 (General comment No. 17, 2013). Thus the poor recognition results in lack of 'investment in appropriate provisions, weak or non-existent protective legislation, and the invisibility of children in national and local-level planning' (ibid). Therefore, thirdly this paper analyses whether designed public playgrounds correspond to the requirements of article 31 in the Convention.

Within the frame of three main themes mentioned above, the research question is put forward on how the spatial transformation of children's play areas influences children's right to play. Therefore, this paper begins with an introduction of three main themes from an extensive literature review. Next, the problem is described and the research question is constituted with the focus on three main themes through the case study. Afterward, this paper hypothesizes that the urban open spaces where children can play around freely, get creative, and expand the scope of their imagination are diminishing and children's play is confined to public playgrounds which are disputable in regards to children's right to play. Further, the paper critically narrates a case in Istanbul and addresses all three concepts interconnected with each other: the spatial transformation of play areas, the capacity of designed playgrounds, and children's right to play.

#### *Spatial transformation of play areas*

According to International Play Association, governments and local authorities should be seriously concerned with preparing conditions for a child's surrounding environment in terms of reserving adequate and appropriate space for play, providing

free and safe movement between neighborhoods, and ensuring children can be a participant in making decisions that affect their surroundings. The proposal by the association emphasizes the importance of children and planning by saying: 'The needs of the child must have priority in the planning of human settlements'.

In the planning system, the local government usually thinks that provision of playgrounds and recreational programs fulfill children's right to play (Hart 2011, 136). In other words, cities are planned by adults with neglect of children's needs, therefore, free areas are melted in the urban realm, and children are confined to playgrounds which are designed by adult designers and planners. However, there is ample evidence that children's chances to engage in outdoor free play and their geographic freedom have been declining across the past several generations (Karsten 2005; Hofferth 2009 in Brussoni et. Al 2012, 3137). One reason for the decline is 'the 'failure' of the playground space to engage children with the public realm' (Pitsikali & R. Parnell 2019, 719).

The debate over children's play and playgrounds has been an important field of study. Some studies claim that the importance of natural, free spaces provides more play value than designed playgrounds (Woolley and Lowe 2013), Gagen (2000) argues that playgrounds in the United States draw children off the street and into a corrective environment. Earlier Cunningham and Jones (1999) claim that, although many changes in urban life did benefits in children situation by reducing diseases, increasing educational opportunity, and generally better nutrition, this changes at the same time prevented the free mobility of children as previous generations had the chance to find free play and imagination (16). Jane Jacobs in 1961, touch upon the planning system that gets the children off of the streets and into playgrounds. Jacobs (1961) claim that streets and sidewalks are safer than those playgrounds which are built far from the eye (74).

Playgrounds or open urban spaces are part of their everyday life apart from school and home where they are under the control by their parents or teachers. Therefore, playgrounds and open urban spaces are important in terms of children's agency, thus play place could be applied to any spaces that children choose to play (Shi 2016, 656). Nevertheless, this

paper mainly focuses on the gradually changing the environment of children and how does this change affect their right to play. Moreover, the paper takes critical approach towards increasing number of playgrounds while the number of free spaces is decreasing.

### Freeplay and playgrounds

National Playing Fields Association defines play as ‘freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behavior that actively engages the child’ (2000). Accordingly Clement (2004) claims that ‘The most successful outdoor play experiences usually involve the child’s free choice, which is self-motivated, enjoyable, and process-oriented. Natural experiences such as collecting leaves, throwing stones in a pond, jumping over small brush or logs, building sandcastles, collecting sticks or nuts from the ground, or creating hiding spaces challenge the child’s imagination and reasoning abilities.’ (p. 77) While the importance of play is underlined and given great emphasis as a right of children, policies related to city planning and design do not go beyond building a new playground in major cities (Hart 2002, 138). Moreover, Hart (2002) underlines that free play<sup>\*2</sup> in public spaces is important for the development of civil society and hence, for democracy. Therefore, it becomes inevitable to critically look at opportunities in urban environments for children’s play (Atmakur-Javdekar 2016, 109).

\*2 ‘Most times, the idea of free play is associated with playing outdoors in an unstructured manner where children have access to natural environments (Moore 1986; Moore and Wong 1997; Hart 1979; Moore and Marcus 2008 in Atmakur-Javdekar 2016, 114). According to Hart (2002), the diversity of natural environments affords an array of play opportunities for children in comparison to any designed play space’ (ibid).

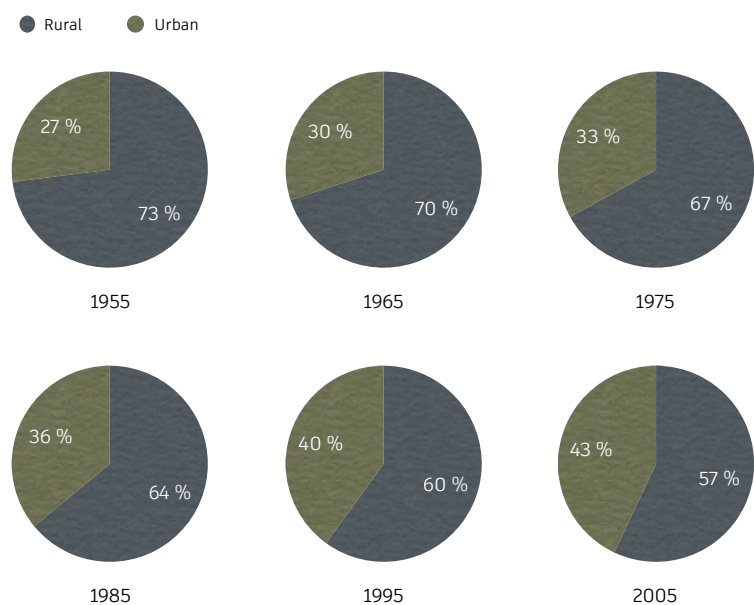


Figure 1: World population (0–19 years old)  
Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Population Division.

The urban population is growing around the world is truth can not be covered up (see fig.1). According to WHO (World Health Organization), ‘the urban population in 2015 accounted for 54% of the total global population, up from 30% in 1950 - it is expected to increase to 60% of world population by 2030’. Therefore the majority of the world’s children will grow up in urban areas. The concern arises here whether the planners should keep provisioning playgrounds as they used to do, or they should revising urban open spaces in terms of safety, types of equipment, creativity, and in order to ensure children’s right to play.

While the question of play and playground have been taking ground at the same time UNICEF launched Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) in 1996 in order to support municipal governments in planning and realizing the rights of children at the local level in the light of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as its foundation. International play association (ipaworld.org) is the oldest non-governmental organization founded in 1961, recently renewed its policy in 2014. IPA aims to protect, preserve and promote the child’s right to play as a fundamental human right and promotes the right of all children and young people to time, freedom, and space to play in their own way. Another non-profit organization Global Designing Cities Initiative is set up to turn cities into safer, more sustainable, and healthier cities through transforming streets. A part of initiative work on streets that enable children of all ages and abilities to utilize it. In 2009, Playing-out (playingout.net) is started as a grass-root movement with initiatives of parents. The movement support the idea of playing in the street where children can be close to their friends and families. Growing up bolder (growingupboulder.org) is also child-friendly city initiative works with children and youths to include their ideas in local government decisions. The initiatives give wide publicity to Article 31 as an idea behind their vision.

### Article 31 and playgrounds

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international legally binding agreement convened by world leaders in 1989 and incorporates the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion, or abilities

(www.ohchr.org). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes play as an international right in article 31 :

- 1.States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
- 2.States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational, and leisure activity.

Article 31 includes the children's right to play, to rest and leisure, and to be involved in cultural and artistic life. The first clause of article 31 state the principle that certain rights of every child such as rest, play, leisure must be recognized by the government while the second clause requires the government to take a variety of actions in order to make the first clause applicable (Shier 1995, 16). In article 31.1 right to play is particularly underlined and distinguished from other recreational activities, due to children's play's essential role in a child's development (ibid). Nevertheless, 2 clauses of the article interrelated and emphasize the role of States Parties as recognizing, respecting, and promoting children's right to play (Lester and Russell 2010, 2).

According to The Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child published by UNICEF Children's right to play is perceived as a "forgotten right" (UNICEF 2007, p. 469). The for that play is usually understood by adults luxury rather than a necessity of life (ibid.) Therefore, attention has been given to article 31 is most of the time insufficient, and seeing implementation in practice is rare (ibid). Although the principle 7 of the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child states: 'The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavor to promote the enjoyment of this right.' the importance given to the play and play areas is way less than education. Regarding neglect importance of play and playgrounds by governments, The Committee encourages the government to promote children's play. (UNICEF, the implementation for the convention on the rights of

the children 2007, p. 472).

### **Methodology**

This research aims to explore the spatial transformation of play areas and its effects on children's right to play by taking the Ümraniye district as a case study. This study is conducted through three steps; first with a literature analysis on three main themes explained above in the introduction part as background information to describe the problem and put forward the research question. The second is to observe the selected playground and investigate the semi-structured interviews with parents and children. Finally, the findings are utilized in order to conclude the study and open a new subject in the field regarding play areas and children's right to play. Qualitative methods are used in the questionnaire with open questions to understand children and their parent's experiences. Through this method, insight could be gain into how children and their parents perceive the spatial environment, playgrounds in this environment, and right to play.

A lot of previous research into children's outdoor play and playground have used questionnaire for children or parents. This research has designed a questionnaire for children and their parents to comprehend the chances over time better. 7 Children under 14 and 3 adults were invited to participate in this study to complete a questionnaire interview. Parents are selected among those who live in the area for more than 20 years to comprehend the spatial transformation of the neighborhood.

### *Problem description*

Three main themes unfolded in the following section with related facts and figures to describe the problem. In Turkey, 22 million 876 thousand 798 children in the 0-14 age range, 27.1 percent of the population, live in Istanbul (TUIK,2019). The number of children in the 0-14 age group in Istanbul is 3.363.26, 22.6 percent of the population (ibid). In Ümraniye district, the number of children in the 0-14 age group is 159.240, 24.4 percent of the population (mobil.umraniye.bel.tr.). The total number of playgrounds in Ümraniye is 212 and 127.400 square meters (ibid.). That means every child has a 0.79 square meters playground. In Germany, 0.5-2.4 m<sup>2</sup> playground is given per children, in France the amount is 5 m<sup>2</sup> and In England 6-8 m<sup>2</sup>

(Aydemir 2014 in Başaran Uysal 2013, 3). In Australia 14.000 m<sup>2</sup> playground is suggested for a 5000 population neighborhood (Uz ve Çabuk, 2005 in Koçan 2012). Istanbul, the most populous city in Europe, have been losing its open and green spaces especially in the urban areas (politikyol.com). Urbanization has been playing important role in this change by causing dramatic demographic change, therefore, influence the socio-economic character of the city (Keles 2004, 345). These changes have had, and continue to have, a profound impact on İstanbul's. Moreover, the way people are living including how children are spending their time with their environment is affected.

The first problem is that İstanbul's limited open spaces which remain from this rapid urbanization are unable to meet children's play needs and have been becoming dangerous for children (Tandogan and Ergun 2013, 165). Overall, rapid urbanization limited open spaces where children have more freedom to play outdoors and confined their play areas to public playgrounds. In İstanbul, playgrounds planners or designers usually think of children's play needs are satisfied through the provision of playgrounds that have almost the same material and equipment in every neighborhood. However, planners and designers neglect that streets, schoolyards, urban lots are other important outdoor options due to their closeness to children's houses (Bal 2005).

The second problem, In Turkey, the research is headed by Uskun et al. (2008) in the midwestern region of the country, determine the degree of appropriateness of playground equipment and the level of compliance with current safety specifications put forward that playgrounds for children do not meet many of the safety criteria and none of the playgrounds was designed for different age groups (560- 564). Another study is established in Ankara by Orhan et al. (2019) reveals that the majority of the playgrounds are not sufficient in terms of safety, creativity, and hygiene and the types of activities they provide are the same in almost every playground. In Turkey, playgrounds are specified in the urban green spaces, thus urban green spaces are important areas in terms of both creating a playground for children and creating spaces for the city to breathe (Ergen 2018, 21). However, when these areas are examined, enormous difficulties arise both in providing green areas and creating playgrounds for children such

as insufficient green arrangements and regulations according to the age groups of children (Uysal 2015, 424). Moreover, playgrounds should provide a wide variety of play equipment including free spaces for divIn the case of İstanbul, most of the playgrounds are infested with a limited variety of play equipment such as swings, slides, and seesaw.

Turkey signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and ratified it in 1995 (ohchr.org). Considering that 25,606,597 children in the 0-19 age range, 30.6 percent of the population live in Turkey (TÜİK), ratifying the CRC is no small commitment to Turkey's children and adult citizens (UNICEF, Children, and Women in Turkey, in Libal 2001, 36). According to the UNICEF Country Office Annual Report (2018), three main issues addressing the need of children in Turkey: the right to health, right to education, right to identity and nationality. On the national level risk factors are defined as poverty, gender inequality, and child marriages, child abuse, child labor, child trafficking (Realizing Children's Rights in Turkey, humanium.org). On the local level, the Directorate General of Child Services is established in 2011. Between 2013-2017 the Turkey Child Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan is signed by the committee of Directorate General of Child Services. According to the Directorate General of Child Services, children's rights should be realized on local level more effectively. However, in Turkey, it is seen that children do not know their rights sufficiently, they need awareness-raising activities and what is worse than this is local administrators are not very aware of these rights (Çakırer 2014, 41). Behind that straight forward, Turkey Child Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan (2013-2017) put forward that, providing playtime for children should be legislated as a 'right' and legally guaranteed. The third problem is that although children's right to play is accepted within the UN Convention on Children Rights and assured by the Turkey Child Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan, the right remains on the paper.

#### *Case and context*

Ümraniye evolved after the 1970s as one of the fastest urbanizing districts of Istanbul (Döker 2012 in Tahmaz 2020, 1). Today, Ümraniye is the 4th most populous district of Istanbul, and the most populous district on the Anatolian side (istanbul.gov.tr).

Altınşehir became a neighborhood in 2008. The spatial transformation of Altınşehir (see fig.4) cause limited open areas. The Population of Altınşehir neighborhood is 28.231 and 6.720 of the population consists of children under and 14 ages. The neighborhood has 10 open and green areas and 8 of them have public playgrounds (mobil.umraniye.bel.tr).

### Lale Park as a case study

The chosen playground site is number 7 where the author spend the childhood. In the selected playground, Lale Park\*<sup>3</sup>, observations and semi-structured interviews were carried out. Lale Park is typical public municipal free outdoor playground specifically equipped following the traditional (classical or conventional) playground\*<sup>4</sup> approach. The playground consist of two swings, one seesaw, and one compact sliding equipment, and four benches. While half of the area consist of play plastic equipments and benches, the other half left empty with a few trees. The playground and surroundings were observed\*<sup>5</sup> by the author during 2 weeks varying times during the day. Field notes, informal discussion, sketches and 9 semi-structured interviews were employed for data collection. The interviewed participants comprised 3 parents, 7 children (between 7 and 13 years). The children were interviewed in the presence of their parents after giving their verbal consent and questions prepared to understand their experience and views were asked.

### Findings

The plastic, colorful playing equipment is common in Turkey in every playground. Besides, there are always three or four, depends on the size of the playground, bench where parents, guardians can sit and supervise the children. First, the qualitative research method is used and interviews are done in a group conversation with 3 female parents age between 38, 34, and 31 who have been living in the neighborhood for more than 20 years

*The lenght of time in the outside, free places for play, group of friends and variety of games are decreasing*  
When parents are asked 'Where do you used to play when you were a child?' all the parents felt that streets, vacant lands to put it simply everywhere

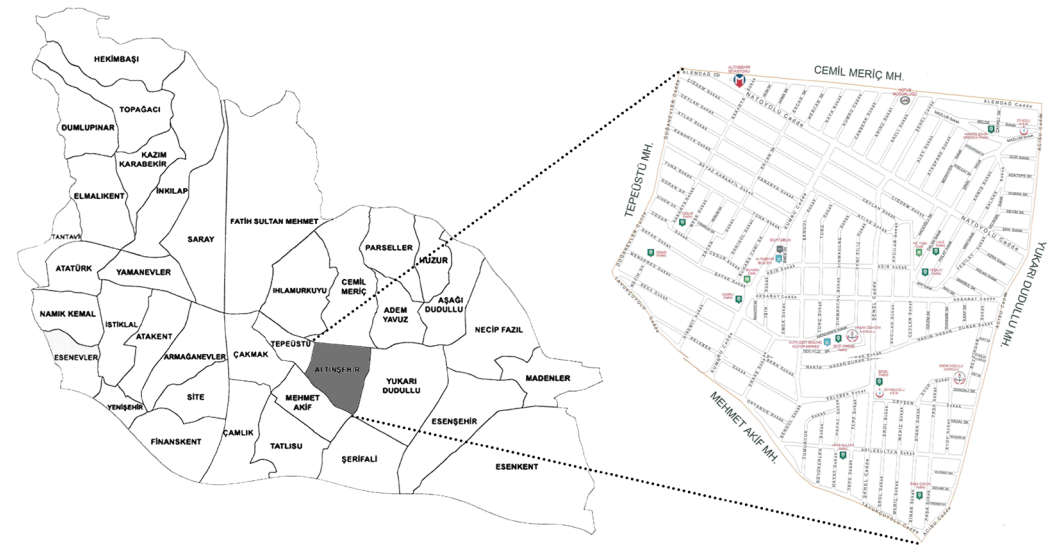
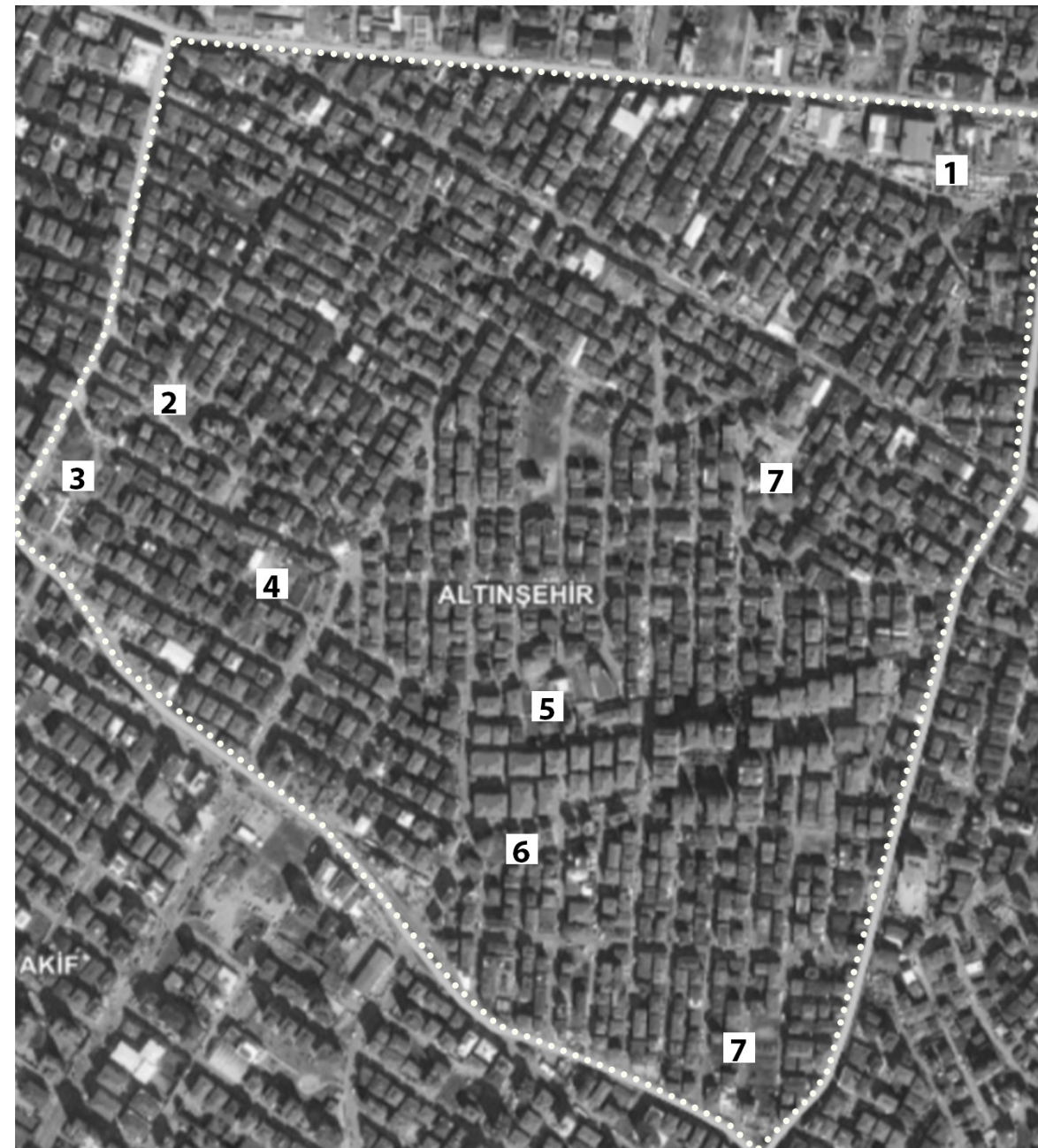


Figure 2: Location of Ümraniye in İstanbul, source: <https://www.umraniye.bel.tr/images/content/mahalleler/altinsehir.htm>



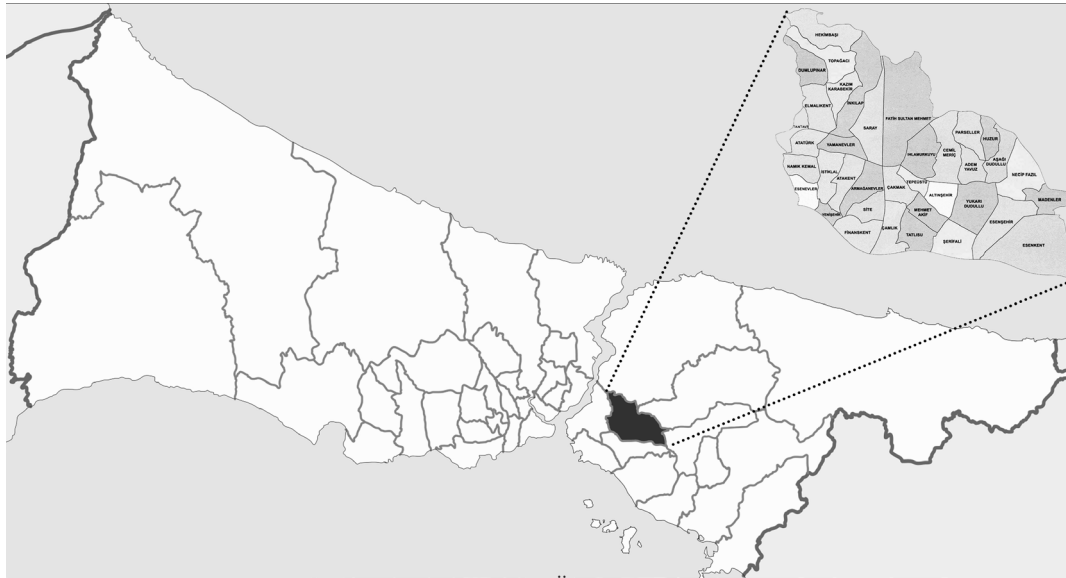


Figure 3: Location of Altınşehir neighborhood in Ümraniye, Source: <https://www.umraniye.bel.tr/images/content/mahalleler/altinsehir.htm>

was a playground. There was no playgrounds until 2000s in the neighborhood. They were free to play where ever they want, however, playing in the other neighborhood was still not safe due to lack of neighborhood relationship.

- We had no park in our neighborhood until 2006, so we never had a chance to play with play equipments. We were playing in the streets, sometimes inside the home but not too much, if there is a empty plot near you then you are luck, you could play football, volleyball any kind of games with the ball. We had no cords or volleyball net but we used to place a line between two trees to create a nett. Now there is no place to do it, our children expect us to take them somewhere else to play volleyball. (Parent 1, 31 ).

- Now I don't let my child play in the street because there is traffic everywhere, when he goes to park I go with him it is not safe, there are teenagers in the park hanging around, smoking cigarette and swearing eachothers. (Parent 2, 34 ).

- When we were kids we play in the street until the evening. It was known that when we hear 'akşam ezanı'<sup>\*6</sup> it is time to go home. Now I let my children play in the street barely 2 hours because I watch them from the balcony all the time. When I was kid we used to ride a bike in the neighborhood, now everyweeknd we take children to the 'meydan' (a car free area surrounded by shopping malls, restarurants) so they can ride their bikes. (Parent 3, 38).



\*4 'Traditional (Classical or conventional) playgrounds: Standard game It is based on hardware. Equipment is often used alone and is geared towards greater muscle activity and motor development. The most used hardware in traditional playgrounds will be swinging. 77.9% of child behaviors in these areas are functional and 2% dramatic. Connected playgrounds are formed by combining classical game tools. The game tool has become a structure due to its dimensions.' (Yılmaz and Bulut 2003,158)

\*3 Park in daily language present children playground, however, in planning system children garden is defined as a playground while park encompasses children gardens, open green areas.

\*5 The accurute observation hours is not calculated. The author used to live in the area since the establishment of the park in 2006 until 2019.

\*6 Ezan means 'call to prayer'. Akşam ezanı -evening adhan- is recited just before sun gets down.

- The primary school we used to go is 10 minutes away by walking, now my son goes there. When we were kids we have friends in other streets from school and we used to go their streets to play which was 5-8 minutes away. Now my son see his school friends only in the school. (Parent 1, 31)

In this research, the parents justify the time, place, and game restrictions due to their concern for the safety of their children both from traffic-related dangers and from strangers who seem like a threat. The parents are not aware of children's right to play neither convention, however, they describe play as 'enjoy one's childhood' and believe their children should play outside as long as it is safe. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013) also identified that one of the obstacles parents take children off of the street is the fear of unsafe environments. This fear has the three-fold consequence: confining children to the private sphere, limiting the time they spend outside, and controlling their presence in public spaces. Playgrounds are not different. Although, playgrounds have been planned and created by adults to protect children from unsuitable places and to provide them with meaningful and beneficial activity (Rasmusson 1998, in Jansson 2008, 1) case study shows that playgrounds are not safer neither beneficial in terms of activity than streets.

#### *Playground play is not preferable than play in another place*

The children in the study reported not being allowed to be by themselves on the streets of their neighborhood without provision of the parents. Playground is also not safety place for parents to let their children play by themselves. It is reported that for children it is slightly different playing in the playgrounds and playing in the streets or open green areas.

*Everywhere outside is fine. (Child 1, 10)*

*My mom don't let me ride my bike outside, because it is dangerous. I ride my bike in the balcony. (Child 2, 13)*

*If I go outside I go with my sister. We have skates and bikes but we can't ride in the street. Our parent take us to the bigger park on the weeknd, so we can ride as much as we want. (Child 3, 12)*

Children between the ages of 8-13 find playgrounds non-attractive. They think the playgrounds for younger kids where they can enjoy under the parent's supervision. Kids are keen on bigger playgrounds due to their variety of equipment, basketball court, and volleyball court, and car-free areas. According to the majority of the kids, at least one playground should be close to their home, however, they would like to play outside whether there is a playground or not.

*I go outside after school for only 1 hour, we go and sit in the park with friends because we think we are grown up and old to no play with the equipment. (Child 4, 13)*

*There are always old people in the park. When I want to play I hesitate because I am afraid they will think I am old to play. (Child 2, 13)*

*We have no park near by. We go to my grandparent's house (where Selen spent her childhood) so I can go to park with my grandmother. (Children 5, 8)*

Children who are 13 years old do not feel comfortable themselves when there are somebody's parents in the playground. One child report that once she played with the slide, and another day her mother warned her that she is old enough to not go to the park anymore. Even though that day her mother was not in the park, some other parents told about her play to the mother. However, playgrounds means movement and activity for children (Jansson, 2008, 7). When they go to the playground and sit there all day, in other words, do not feel themselves to play there for some reasons, that means these playgrounds needs to be revised in order to meet children's play from every age.

#### *Playgrounds and restrictions*

*Because of this mosque, if we make noise some old people come and warn us. (Child 4, 13)*



Figure 5: Lale Park, 2020 by author



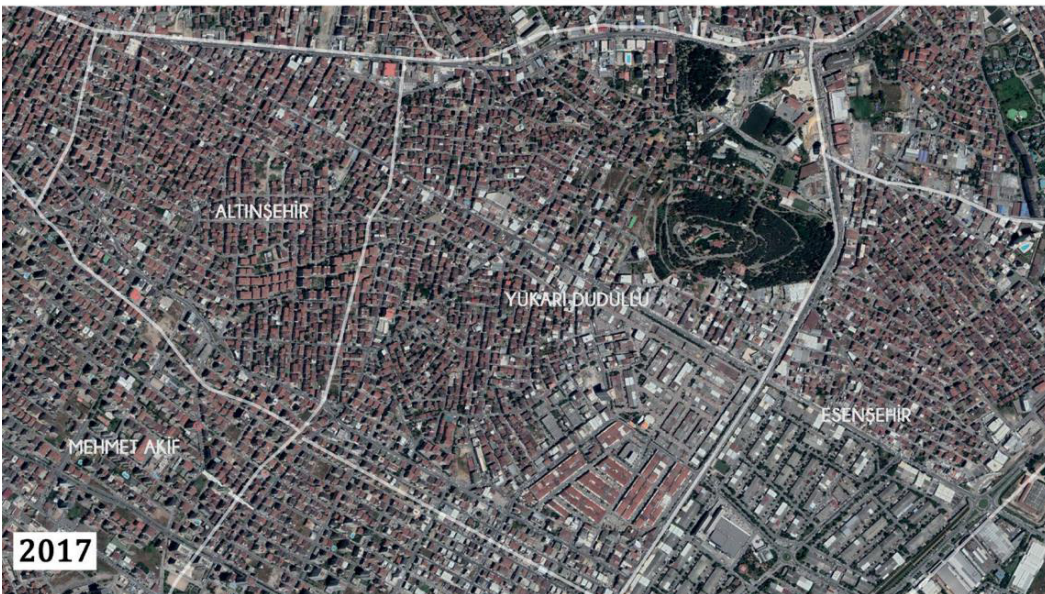
## 7. BÖLGE

YUKARI DUDULLU- ESENŞEHİR-  
ALTINŞEHİR-MEHMET AKİF MAHALLELERİ

1970



1982



2017

Figure 6: Spatial transformation of Altınşehir neighborhood  
Source: [https://www.academia.edu/38666792/Cumhuriyet\\_D%C3%B6neminde\\_%C3%9Cmraniye\\_%C5%9Eehirle%C5%9Fme\\_Toplum\\_Ekonomi\\_ve\\_Y%C3%B6netim](https://www.academia.edu/38666792/Cumhuriyet_D%C3%B6neminde_%C3%9Cmraniye_%C5%9Eehirle%C5%9Fme_Toplum_Ekonomi_ve_Y%C3%B6netim)

*Some people shout us from their balcony, 'be quiet, my baby is sleeping' (giggling). (Child 1,10)*

*we love going to this big park (the child means an open and green area in the sea cost, Maltepe, consist of play equipments, basketball and volleyball courts, natural environment for picnicing) because we can climb trees, once I fell off tho (giggling), you can run and shout and make new friends you are free to do everything. (Child 3, 12)*

Mosques and apartments proved to be not appreciated features around playgrounds. Children prefer to play in more open and green surroundings. In the open areas, children engage in a more flexible and natural environment thus they feel freer than playgrounds. One child reported that elderly people who go out of the mosque staring at children in a judging manner. Children feel uncomfortable to be bored into by elderly people.

*'I know that play is my right.'*

*I think it is true play is my right, I am a child, but tell this to my mother. (Children 6, 9)*

*If it is my right I will negotiate with my mom for staying outside longer.*

*'what do you mean it is my right ? - it is your right like going to get education in the school or going to hospital when you are injured because you fell off the tree. -ohh I get it now, I didn't know that.' (Children 7, 8)*

*Children see play as their right, instinctively. They are not aware that it is legally assured by Nations and Nations that ratify this convention are bound to it by international law.*

### Limitations of the Study

The present study has been limited particularly because of the case study had been conducted in small scale while the research question focus on a broad topic. The scale of the study as a main limiting factor might prevent a broad generalization of new findings. Corona restrictions effect the number of participant to interviews. Moreover, the demographic data is collected from TÜİK shows the number of children who are under 15, this data does not correspond with UN CRC's definition of child.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine spatial transformations of children's play areas and its impacts on children's right to play. Accordingly, three main themes is analyzed within broad literature review and semi-structured interviews with both children and parents. Parents were chosen among others who are mothers of interviewed children's and have been living in the choosen area more than 20 years. In this way this research was able to understand the first theme -spatial transformation of play areas- better in between 2000s and now. Moreover, the study creates awareness between parents that they are able to understand children's right to play better.

Throughout this study it is confirmed that, parent's utmost concern is children's safety, while planners and designers is 'doing their job' regardless whether it meets children's play need or it does not (Wyver et al 2010,272). Moreover, it also corfirmed that the need to renovate urban spaces to provide a better physical environment to children should be considered by local governments (Ergün and Tandoğan, 2013). Woolley (2007) argues there are four element to realize children's play: a place to play, time to play, games to play, and friends to play (90-95). Since this study is focused on the spatial transformation of play areas and its influences on children's right to play, it would discuss the play time, game types, play environment, and friends group.

Despite the limitations, this study shows that all four elements necessary for a satisfied outdoor play have been degrading between generations in terms of their shared memories about play outside. Interviews proved that the memories regarding outdoor plays greatly differ between parents and children. Another finding is that the first playground in the neighborhood constructed in 2000 and since then the number of playgrounds were increasing. However, the purpose of constructing playgrounds should be questioned by municipalities since the interviews show that children's time, free areas, friend groups and play activities are contrary to number of playgrounds decreasing.

This study contributes to the reconceptualisation of the 'free play' (Sruthi Atmakur-Javdekar 2016,8) and placing traditional playground spaces in the centre of the debate. Moreover this study adds to

the literature about how playing outside memories change between generations.

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# Rethinking Children's Perspective of Public Spaces in Dense Cities; Case Study: Westend District, Munich

Niloufar Rashid Zadeh

## Introduction

Throughout history, architects, landscape architects and urban planners have focused their activities primarily on the needs of adults. Cities have been around for thousands of years, but children's needs have been largely overlooked during the development of the cities (Accola, n.d., 1). With a closer look at the current trend of global urbanization, we realize that cities got more and more enchanting for families with children, urban environments are becoming the primary context in which new generations of children will grow up and thrive. This fast process of urbanisation has some effects, including a growing trend in which not only young urban professionals are moving to urban areas, but families as well. The United Nations estimate that by 2025 60% of the world's children will be living in cities, suggesting that for millions of children, urban environments will shape the contours of their lives and daily experiences (Krishnamurthy 2019, 86). However The designs of our environment have not yet accepted children's activities and play as the most essential function of early life (Tranter and Doyle 1996, 85). While man-made landscapes are not as effective as natural environments in fostering the development of nature immersion in children, there are still yards, parks, greenways, bosfonds, gardens and planted vegetation which can connect children to natural environments even when surrounded by urban environments. This is a beneficial aspect of child-friendly design. Playgrounds among all the places named above are one of the most common places that were discussed so far regarding child friendly design, as they are specifically constructed for children to use and are widely considered as protective and safe (Accola, n.d., 13-16). On the one hand growing pressure of building more housing in dense cities led to the marginalization and deficit of playgrounds and in bigger scale public spaces, on the other side children who are living in this high density residential

areas with less open spaces are facing a shortage of public spaces/playgrounds suitable for them to play. This research aims to discover children's opinions about open public spaces and playgrounds through a series of interviews with children and conducting a questionnaire with their parents regarding their family and housing situation and its possible effect on their preferences concerning public places.

## Children, Play, Playground, City

The benefits of city life are many services, social networks, cultural resources, shorter commutes between work and home, and it is this everyday combination of tasks, preferences and budgets that motivates families to opt for an urban residential location (Krishnamurthy 2019, 87).

As families reside more and more in urban areas, governments and local city councils are recognizing gaps in planning for their needs in higher density residential developments. As our cities become denser, issues regarding children's health, well-being and happiness must be seriously addressed in order to ensure quality of life, and their needs must be addressed openly (Krysiak 2020,100).

One of these needs is Play. Play is generally considered extremely important for children. In fact, it has been recognized as a fundamental right by the United Nations. According to Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, governments must recognize the right of children to play. At the same time, play has an important role in children's development. It is an important step towards preparation for adulthood (Tranter and Doyle 1996, 85).

"Play is essential in promoting interaction and cultivating social values that influence the shaping of society" (Lai and Low 2019, p. 13).

Children are playing to gain knowledge. Another reason is, because it is natural and a game is the best instrument to learn how to discover their life.

Outdoor activities and socializing are important so that children can learn about concepts like respect, collaboration, communication, and leadership while developing strength and agility, as well as a variety of new physical skills (Saaïd and Hasan 2014, 129).

Decreased child playing activities and mobility is the long term subject of arguments between many researchers and they have significant negative effects on a child's development, including increased obesity, diabetes, and mental health problems. From a physical health perspective, the effects of a sedentary lifestyle on children are evident in many countries in the west (Krysiak, 2020, 14).

Aside from reducing the likelihood of sedentary problems like obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases, playing has brought numerous developmental benefits. Children who play outdoors in a regular way have more advanced motor fitness, better awareness, better thinking and observation skills, more refined imaginations, and more positive feelings about each other. Significant correlations were also found between children's ability to play and explore independently with positive outcomes for mental health and a sense of control over their own lives (Ibid, 14). So, playing is a crucial activity for children to enhance their physical and social abilities and a way to step into adulthood as a healthy human being.

Therefore, the place for playing outside gains more importance. A child's playground is an outdoor place where play equipment is installed and intended to be used by children for play, development of competence and positive self-confidence. A playground that is viewed as a tool for children to see the real world is part of children's growth. For psychological reasons, it is best to provide children with appropriate playgrounds (Saaïd and Hasan 2014, 128).

Due to the policy of urban consolidation, we have noticed a rapid densification and verticalization of our cities. Over the past few decades, the amount of time children spend playing outdoors and independently has significantly decreased access to their neighborhoods (Krysiak 2020, 5). Besides that, the decrease in the number of natural and informal play spaces in the neighborhood, the increase in traffic, the perceptions of „foreign threats“, the increasing use of technology as a substitute for games and the pressures on academic performance

have all contributed to the rapid decline in the number of children participating in free play (Ibid., 14).

In cities like Munich, one of the most prosperous cities in Germany, in which the housing market is under massive pressure, where rents are increasing rapidly and property is only available at horrible prices (Moser 2018, 167). A reduction of parks, playgrounds and open spaces as well as scarcity of private backyards (Krysiak 2020, 32), are a growing concern. The preservation of sports grounds and the restoration of houses play an important role and have a symbolic meaning for many of the activists and inhabitants of the inner city of Munich.

Providing safe, engaging, and natural play environments is especially important as our cities continue to densify and land becomes more valuable. To ensure that child-friendly design strategies are taken into account when developing compact neighborhoods, the planning policies need to be revised and design guidance given to developers, planners and architects based on the needs of the children and their perspective on suitable open spaces (Ibid., 112).

### **Theoretical Approach**

It is important to notice that this research is conducted in the context of childhood studies. From the early 1900s until now this field has experienced different paradigms and discourses in studying childhood.

Leena Alanen (2001, cited in Bösch 2016, 10) identifies three main fields within this academic thought: the deconstructive sociology of childhood, the actor-oriented sociologies of children and the structural sociology of childhood. The childhood deconstructive sociology is particularly concerned with the way ideas and practices arise. Childhood is the result of societal attributions that have to be identified and deconstructed by scientists.

This research mainly uses the field of deconstructive sociology of childhood since it deals with the relation of housing in dense cities and children's perspectives about the public places and playgrounds as well as actor-oriented sociologies of children since the study is dealing with the question of children's perspectives and opinions and it is reflected also in the methodology of this research.

## Research Questions

This study is looking to answer the following questions:

- How do children perceive and use the available public places in the neighborhood and what kind of additional public places would they like to have?
- What is the relation between children's perspectives toward public spaces and their housing situation?

## Research Assumptions

Concerning the first question, there are two somewhat contradictory assumptions conceivable:

- a) Due to the high density, the children are just happy about any available public space. b) Due to the high density, the few available public spaces are so overcrowded, that the possibilities of usage are limited and children therefore will demand more and/or bigger ones.
- Children will appreciate and use public places more as fewer space per person is available at their homes.

## Background Information

One of the best case studies in the urban context in Germany representing the objectives of conducting research in a dense urban area is the Bavarian metropolitan region of Munich in southeastern Germany. The core of the region is the city of Munich. The area of the metropolitan region is around 26,000 square kilometers, which corresponds to 38% of the Bavarian territory (Büttner et al. 2014, 12). Munich offers an attractive job market and a high quality of life. This leads to continued growth in both the population and the economy (Kinigadner J. et al. 2016, 95). With almost 6 million inhabitants, almost half of the Bavarian population lives in the Munich metropolitan region (Büttner et al. 2014, 12). The city of Munich is the core of the region with the most jobs and the largest population. In 2015, the city had a population of over 1.5 million (Kinigadner et al. 2016, 95). As population and job development is declining in many areas of Germany, it is increasing in the Munich metropolitan region. For the greater area around the city of Munich in particular, there is one of the highest forecasts for the increase of jobs and population in Germany. The population

growth is mainly due to migration from other parts of Germany and other European countries, but also due to positive birth rates. People moving to the region are faced with an already very tight housing market, where housing is very competitive and expensive. The prices for real estate, houses and apartments have been rising for several years. Real estate in the Munich region is considered a safe way of investment that puts additional strain on the real estate and housing market (Büttner et al. 2014, 12). There are disadvantages associated with these positive development trends and the prosperity of the region. Population growth requires an increasing supply of housing. However, construction activity cannot keep up with the number of people moving to the region. In the most central locations in particular, adequate accommodation is either not available or not affordable. As a result, certain populations are settling in suburbs where more space is available at a lower price. In return, they are forced to accept less accessibility and fewer utilities (Kinigadner et al. 2016, 95). The Munich metropolitan region is a clear example of how its general attractiveness is increasingly burdening not only the urban infrastructure, but also the housing market in particular. The limited supply of new apartments in any form and shape from affordable, social housing to new luxury and modern apartments, contrasts with increasing demand both inside and outside the greater Munich area. The resulting housing shortage thus increases the cost of living in Munich, which is now the most expensive housing market in Germany not only for highly qualified workers, but also for many other professional segments of the labor market (Büttner et al. 2014, 3). As a consequence, playgrounds and specifically football pitches in the city are one of the targets of new housing projects. In terms of area, Schwanthalerhöhe (Westend) is the smallest district of Munich and at the same time it has the third highest population density share among all Munich districts (Figure II), which makes it a suitable for a case study for the purpose of this research, conducted by only one person with limited time and resources. Schwanthalerhöhe (Westend) (Figure I), named after the creator of the Bavaria statue, Ludwig von Schwanthaler (1802 - 1848). It forms the western outskirts of the city center, delimited by the main railway line Hauptbahnhof-Pasing and the railway

line Hauptbahnhof-Ostbahnhof. The emergence of Schwanthalerhöhe (Westend) is closely linked to the industrialization that began here around 1840, as a result of which Wilhelminian-style workers' quarters emerged in high-density block development. Even today, almost half of the housing stock dates from before 1919. Extensive cooperative settlements from around 1900 define the cityscape in Westend, the part of the district west of Ganghoferstraße. As today, most people in Munich refer to the whole district as "Westend", further on for convenience of the reader, I will use the terms "Schwanthalerhöhe" and "Westend" equivalently. In the eastern part of the district, poor building stock, inadequate housing standards and environmental pollution triggered extensive renovation measures at the beginning of the 1970s, as a result of which the economic structure in the district also changed. Almost two thirds of the jobs are now in the service sector, trade and public administration. As in other areas close to the city center, in Schwanthalerhöhe a high proportion of one-person households can be found. The proportion of families with children is below the city-wide average. People of working age make up almost three quarters of the district's population. (Statistischen Amt der Landeshauptstadt München 2019, 64-65).

### Methodological Approach

This Research explores children's perspectives on public spaces and playgrounds in the Westend district in Munich and aims to employ a mix-method design in 3 stages.

- I. Gaining basic knowledge about the district, through on-site impressions gained by observation
- II. Conducting interviews with children.
- III. Gaining additional information from the children's parents through a questionnaire

### Limitations of Research

It is important to keep in mind that this research is subject to certain limitations. First of all, when doing my observation of the public places and playground in Westend, I was only there at a certain time of the day and the year. In addition, as all public life, also the public life in Westend is influenced by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, because of

### City District 8 - Schwabenhöhe

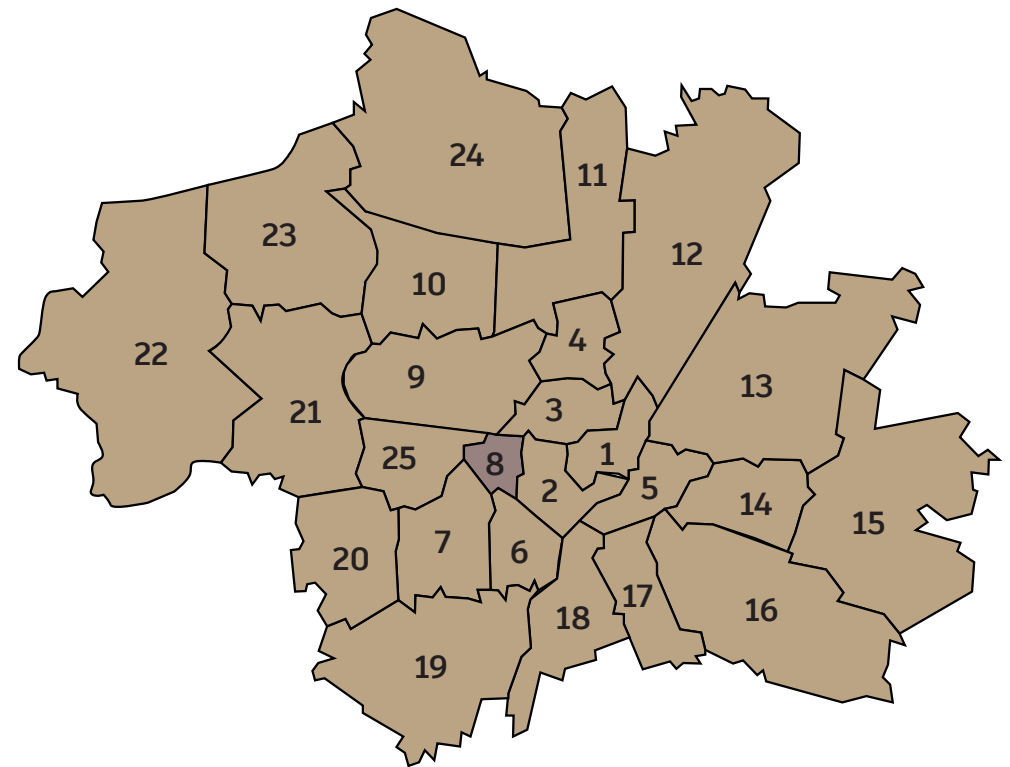


Figure 1: Location of Schwabenhöhe (Westend) in Munich 2019  
source: www.muenchen.de/statamt

### Population density by districts 31. December 2018

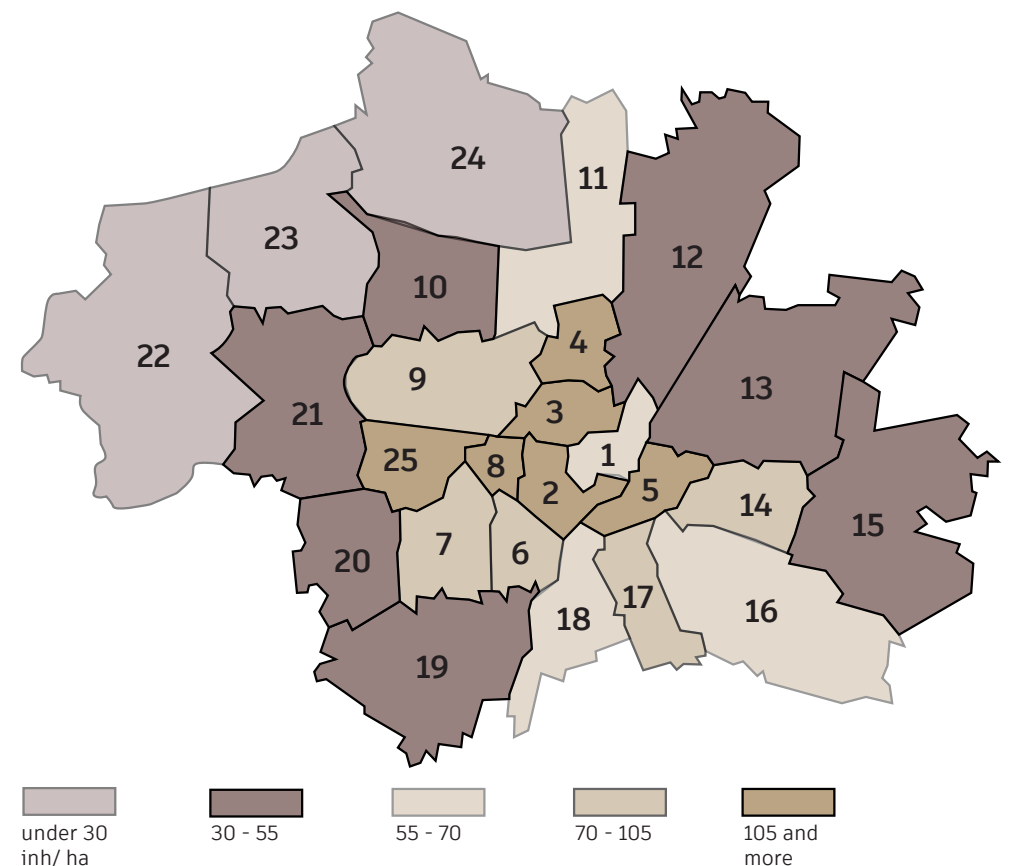


Figure 2:: Population Density in Munich Districts  
source: www.muenchen.de/statamt



the language barrier, me living in Munich only since a while and the summer holidays, I managed to only get access to a very limited number of children, who all go to the same school and are within the same age group (7-8 yrs). Also, children of other ages within the age group of 6-11 probably would have boosted my analysis. Considering the scope of this research, I can say that the selection of methods is sufficient, even though given my level of German, I have struggled a bit here and there, picking up all nuances during the interviews. This research cannot speak universally about all children's perspectives about public places and playgrounds in Munich, it just tries to give an impression of the perception of the children in the respective district.

### **Observation**

The first step was observing all public spaces and playgrounds within the Westend district where children around the age 6-11 can play. After analyzing all public places on the map, I detected 7 potentially suitable places within the district and one other place in the neighbouring district.

Theresienhöhe playground was the first place I visited. This playground consists of two green areas. One is empty of playing equipment and tools and the other one is a playground with three main tools for children. Two out of the three tools are for smaller children (kindergarten age) and one is for children around primary school age. The whole equipment on the playground is placed on sand. There is a low fence around the whole area and some lawn inside including some benches for the parents. Outside, there is a stone fountain right next to the playground, which some children were also playing. There is table tennis outside of the playground area for everyone to use, but at the time of my visit it was occupied by older men (aged 60+) to sit on it and have a picnic with some drinks. Outside, there is also a long stone bench to sit on and some couples were sitting there and having snacks a bit further away from the playground. Towards the main street the whole area is covered by trees and big bushes. On the opposite side, adjacent to a shopping center which features supermarkets, fast food restaurants and other stores that attract a lot of people, there are stairs that some people were using as a place to sit and eat outside. The next destination I visited and observed was

Theresienwiese. This is the area that Oktoberfest is held on every year and that has an area of around 420,000 square meters. It is located in the Ludwigsvorstadt-Isarvorstadt district but has a border with Westend in the south-eastern part of the district. Theresienwiese is bordered in the west by Ruhmeshalle [Hall of Fame] which is closed at the moment with its stairs mainly used by people as a place to sit around and drink under Bavaria statue and in the east by Esperantoplatz, a square named for the international language Esperanto.

At the moment the area in the middle of Theresienwiese is empty but there is a ring surrounding it that has a pathway for bikes and pedestrians as well as benches for people to sit and tree lines along the whole ring plus some green areas covered with grass. There are some small playgrounds located on this ring in a specific distance from each other. At that time of my visit, there were no children there playing in any of them. There is also one bigger playground beside the metro station inside the ring with some swings and green grass surrounding it. Here I saw the only time on Theresienwiese some children playing, using the swings and running over the green areas inside the playground.

Bavariapark which is located behind the Bavaria statue and the Ruhmeshalle in Westend. Inside the park there is a beer garden. Many families with children were visiting this place while I was there. Beside the entrance of the beer garden a snail statue is located, which seems popular among children. Inside the manmade landscape of the park that resembles natural landscape, there were many families with their children busy playing games on the grass. There is a narrow pathway for pedestrians around this open space that has a small scale playground on its side and some smaller kids (3-5 yrs old) were busy playing with their parents on the side watching them. Some benches are also located randomly inside the park. There was a birthday party for a small child at the open green area and while going out I passed another group of children celebrating a birthday with their parents organizing a treasure hunt.

The fourth destination was Georg-Freundorfer-Platz. The surrounding path, lined with a white seat wall and with its dark basalt paving. The slightly curved meadow, the football field, the table tennis and chess set, the summer curling alley and the

adventure climbing garden, makes this playground, in my opinion, a lucrative place for children. Georg-Freundorfer-Platz looks like a meeting point for residents as well as a multifunctional area to play and linger. This public space is one of most crowded playgrounds in the Westend district, as far as I noticed. The cafes, restaurants, ice cream parlors and bakeries, which are located around Georg-Freundorfer-Platz explains this overcrowding.

Gollierplatz is located between Trappentreustraße and Bergmannstraße in the center of Westend. This rectangular shape public space has a playground in the middle, which is separated by a fence from the rest of the area. The playground is divided in two by two big play tools. Some small and primary school children were playing with these two tools and some parents were standing inside the playground and watching their children. There are some random seats within the playground but mostly outside the fence. On the eastern corner of Gollierplatz there is an old fountain in an antique style that gives a beautiful facade to the area. There are some benches around it to sit on, which were used by a couple of older people at the time of my observation.

Quartiersplatz is the central square of a new residential area in the districts of Westend and Sendling. At first glance you can easily notice that this playground with its own special landscape has been created by a landscape design company and is relatively new. The play area consists of multiple sections made of different materials and have different functions for children to experience different types of play opportunities. On long orange benches around the whole playground families can sit and watch their children playing. I recognized that the games and tools were designed for children of different age groups. Though there were many families and kids at Quartiersplatz, one could notice at some areas of this man-made playable landscape with implemented tools for kids, there were absolutely no kids. Like the area with equipment for gymnastics.

It seemed mostly used by families that are living in the neighborhood of this designed playground. The housing around was completely different from the housing around Georg-Freundorfer-Platz, for example. With a closer look at buildings facades, one could easily notice the quality of the buildings is far worse. Also in some other areas close by one could

see a lot of private playgrounds inside the garden areas of buildings that clearly shows that they are of a different level. This inequality was shown in form and design here more than in other areas in Westend and reflecting on the economical differences between families who are living there and elsewhere in Westend.

One of the other public places was the bunt kickt gut place. Bunt kickt gut is a project of intercultural understanding; the initiative has set itself the goal of providing young people of different cultural and national origins with meaningful and healthy leisure activities and opening up opportunities for social and cultural learning.

The idea for bunt kickt gut, the intercultural Munich street soccer league, arose in 1997 from the care work of children and adolescents in Munich shared accommodation for civil war refugees and asylum seekers. Through football, the children and young people come into contact with other Munich children of German and foreign origins („Die Idee“ 2020).

There are several places within Munich city, but the bunt kickt gut headquarter is located in Westend and it comes with a football pitch. At the time of my visit, I saw children playing football and enjoying a summer afternoon day on the football pitch. There were no parents around since the children looked older (around 10-12 yrs), but there was a high fence all around the pitch that made the access of other people from outside impossible. The access apparently is only from the inside building, therefore it makes the pitch a safe place for children to play on their own.

The playground Trappentreustraße is located close to the south/western border of the district. It is surrounded by bushes and trees and next to at least two child day care facilities. It can be accessed from a part of Kazmaierstraße that has been turned into a pedestrian area. There is also a possibility to access it directly from the backyard of an adjacent housing block, which also has its own (private) playground and is separated by a metal fence with a gate from the public playground.

The playground itself is divided into two areas: The main, bigger one consists of a bit of green space with a small hill (which, judging from the marks in the grass, is used by the children to bike down from it). This green space is mainly covered by a lawn and

couple of trees, which along with a small path surround the main play areas, that are placed on sand boxes: Big metal and a bit smaller wooden monkey bars, that both also have big slides. For smaller children, there is a small wooden shack and small swing a bit on the side. Also, there is a small water playground, where water can be diverted onto/into a couple of basins while it flows down. Around the play area, there are some banks placed for the parents to sit and watch their children playing.

The smaller area is separated by bushes from the main area and seems to be more targeted at older children and teenagers. Here, a table tennis plate, some bars for sports, a hammock and further opportunities to sit down can be found. All in all, this area looks a bit shabby and a bit less taken care of than the main area. At the time of my visit the whole playground seems rather deserted. In the main area, there is only one family with its two children, of whom one child is biking around the grass and the other, much smaller one, is on the swing with its mum. On the table tennis plate two younger teenagers are playing table tennis.

### **Interview**

An interactive interview proposing different forms of communication such as photos (Fernqvist 2010, 1310) to find out about children's perspectives and their usage of public spaces is the approach this research seeks to follow, which is in consent with the sociology of children and gives them more scope to participate in an interview. For this purpose with this research I was keen on interviewing a large number of children within the age between 6-11 in primary school level, since they have a better understanding of their surroundings compared to younger children. Also, they already have some independence in their own opinion about what they like and what they dislike. But because of the language barrier and parents' general unwillingness to participate in random interviews with strangers on a playground, it proved unfortunately impossible to interview children directly on playgrounds. In addition, the start of the school summer holidays made it hard to get access to children within the desired age range among my wider circle of friends. Fortunately, I managed to get in touch with some families through a friend of mine, who lives in Westend and whose

child is in the desired age group. With her and her son, I did my first interview. Afterwards, she sent an email to some parents, whose children go to the same primary school class as her child and asked for their cooperation. Unfortunately, among around 20 parents only 3 got back to me. I arranged a time and an open place to meet with two families. The meetings were done respecting COVID-19 precautions and in the presence of one of the parents, who also helped me as interpreters, when necessary. After some time, I managed to find a new source to reach out to more families: A friend of a friend who organizes football classes and games for children in a club inside Westend called Westend United was so kind to send out information about my research and my contact detail to all parents whose children are participating in the club. Sadly, only one family got back to me recently. I tried to fix a time to do an interview with two children of this family (6 yrs and 9 yrs) but due to the busy schedule of their mother and some events in the family, eventually such a meeting turned out not to be possible, even though their mother had been eager to cooperate with me initially.

The participants were three children, two boys and one girl who were 7 and 8 years old. During the interview I asked 9 questions related to play and playgrounds and showed them pictures of all of the places that I had observed. The first question was about their preference to play inside or outside. The purpose of the second question was to find out about their access to playgrounds, so I asked them about the amount of time that they are going out to play. In the third question, I tried to gain knowledge about which places that they are going out to play within Westend. So, I showed them pictures of each public place and playground separately and asked them which of the places they know and if they know their names. There were common names among all the answers but also some variation. In a next step, I asked them to rate these places on a scale from 1-10 and after that we talked about the reasons for liking a place and disliking the other place to find out what kind of places children like and what are the reasons related to the place and spatial features or social circumstances. Then I tried to go further and asked them to feel free and name any other place in Munich that they would like to have closer and for which reasons. In order to find out what equipment

the ideal place/playground to play outside needs to have, I asked them about the elements or conditions that a place has to have in order for them to have fun playing there. In the end, I decided to give children more freedom to name any form and shape of place, not necessarily a playground that they would like to have access to in their own neighbourhood.

The reason behind this question was to find out which places or elements of a place are not available within the neighbourhood, but these children would like to have (better) access to.

### **Questionnaire**

In order to respond to the second research question about the relation between children's perspectives toward public spaces and their housing situation, this research used a questionnaire to gain more information from the interviewed children's parents. It features 19 questions and is designed in a way that would have allowed participation also anonymously, though none of the parents of the interviewed children cared to make use of this option.

It starts with questions about the number of people in a family, how many kids there are and how old they are, in order to know more about the family situation to find out about the possible relations with it and the interviewed child playing outside.

Since a child's perspective and opinion can be influenced by his/her parents, there are some questions about the duration of their stay in Westend and whether they grew up themselves in the district, how long they are living in Westend with interviewed child and how long they are living in the current apartment with the interviewed child. These questions aimed to find out more about the children's parent's relation to the district. As they presumably, if they (and their parents) grew up in Westend or lived there for a longer time and have a lot of friends there, will see the district with other eyes than children who recently moved there with their parents.

To analyze the access of the interviewed children to public playgrounds, I also asked for the address of their homes (but made the answer not mandatory; cf. above) and then details about the type of housing (one-family house, two-family house, three-family house or multi-family house) and how big the area of their house/flat is in order to see how much space the child has at home and how much space he/she is

sharing with other family members. When there is not much space at home, the necessity of playing outside for children might gain more importance. Also, one might gain some information about the density of housing in the district.

Since the financial situation of the families plays a big role in selecting the residential area and the type of housing, this research tried to focus on this matter from the selection of housing in an indirect way. So, in the questionnaire I asked, if they rent or own the housing currently live in. As an additional option, I asked if they rent a cooperative apartment (Genossenschaftswohnung), which are for historical reasons quite common in Westend (cf. above) and allow members after some time of membership in the cooperative to rent apartments at rates, that are considerably lower than the market price, with a preference given to families with children.

During the observation, I noticed private playgrounds and gardens inside the residential buildings. Therefore, I asked whether these families have access to these private playgrounds and gardens in their current apartment and how often their child is playing there, in order to find out whether the interviewed child is more interested in playing in these types of playgrounds or still prefers to play in public spaces and playgrounds and what percentage of families have access to them.

Access to the public places and playgrounds are of great importance in children's life. This research aims to analyze the access of children to playgrounds and public places. The reason for it is that better access provides more opportunities for children's outdoor activities and helps them discover their own neighborhood better. So, I asked the parents of the interviewed children how many minutes by foot it takes to go to the next public playground where the interviewed child can or could play.

As mentioned before, the feeling of parents can have an influence on children's opinion and they can see things through the filter of their parents, hence I asked them to rate their satisfaction about their housing situation and their life in Westend and residing and living in their direct neighbourhood.

The following questions focus deeper on the interviewed child's situation of education, his condition at home and his/her dependency. In order to find out more about these issues, I asked whether

she/he currently has school every day or has school every other day (due to the COVID-19 pandemic). Whether he/she goes to a public school or goes to a private school, goes to school (usually) all day or goes to school (usually) half the day. Does she/he (usually) go to an after-school care center after school? Is he/she (usually) not accompanied by adults on his/her way to school? Whether she/he goes to a school in Westend or outside of Westend). And, if he/she (usually) goes to the playground or other public places to play unaccompanied by adults. A final question is, whether the interviewed child has a room of his/her own or needs it to share with somebody else and how big that room is.

### **Answers and Results**

Considering the limitations described above, resulting in the low number of only three interviewed children, in the following I will first give a concise picture of each child, based on his/her answers in the interview and answers from his/her parent in the questionnaire. Then I will try to classify the obtained information, while keeping in mind the qualitative nature of the research, which – even more due to the low number of participants – should cause extreme caution when it comes to possible generalizations.

Child I is Max, an 8 year old boy. He lives with his parents and his baby sibling since September 2019 in a 65sqm flat that is owned by his parents. He has his own 9sqm room. The flat is in an apartment building without any playground in the backyard, close to the south/western border of Westend. His parents have not grown up in Westend and moved there with him in September 2019. They consider themselves very happy living in the district and happy living in their direct neighborhood. Max goes to a public school in the district and, because of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of the interview, only had school every 2nd day of the working week. Without pandemic, he would go to school the whole day. Usually, he is not accompanied by grown-ups on his way to/from school, but doesn't go out alone playing at public places. The closest public place for him to place is less than 5 minutes by foot from his home. According to his mum, he is daily/almost daily playing at Georg-Freundorfer-Platz and 1-2 times a week at Gollierplatz. Max himself prefers to play outside compared to inside and says that he goes outside to play every

day of the week. Among the public places to play, he knows Georg-Freundorfer-Platz and Gollierplatz, which he rates 8 on a scale of 1-10. He likes Georg-Freundorfer-Platz because it's closest to where he lives and he meets his friends there and Gollierplatz because it's close to his school. He dislikes the area around the big snail monument in Bavariapark (which he didn't mention before as an area he knows) as he has the opinion that there is too much paved area and not enough grass around it. Despite this expressed dislike for paved areas, he names as the one and only criterion for a public place to be liked by him to play there, that his friends are there as well. In accordance, he would like to have the Munich branch of the Spanish cultural institute, Instituto Cervantes, (located in the city center) closer to his neighborhood, so he could meet his friends from Spanish class more often.

Luca, a 7 year old boy is child II. He lives with his parents and two siblings (age 4 and 6) in a 105sqm flat in an apartment building right in the center of Westend. The flat is owned by housing cooperative (cf. above) and Luca has his own room of around 12sqm. His mum grew up herself in Westend and has lived there for 35 years. In consequence, he himself also lived there his whole life and in the current flat since 2015. The building also has a backyard with a playground, where Luca plays 1-2 times a week, according to his mum. She considers herself very content living in the district as well as living in her direct neighborhood. Luca usually goes to school unaccompanied by a grown-up and has school all day long. His school is located in Westend. There is a playground close to his flat, that can be reached within less than 5 minutes by foot. Luca goes 3-4 per week to play at Georg-Freundorfer-Platz, around every two weeks to Gollierplatz (which is the closest to his home) and Bavariapark and around once a month to Westpark.

Luca prefers to play board games and Lego inside to playing outside. Still, in summer he goes out to play every day, while in winter only 4-5 times a week. He says that he mostly goes to Bavariapark and Georg-Freundorfer-Platz and sometimes to Gollierplatz, Quartiersplatz and Theresienwiese. Unfortunately, he didn't rate all of these places on a scale from 1-10, but only named the ones he gives a 10: Theresienwiese due to a new climbing facility for children built up

there this summer and Westpark, which located outside of Westend, because of a water playground, that also features some climbing facilities. In contrast, he dislikes the playground in their own backyard as they are there “all the time” and it has just a carousel and sand and no swing, even though swings and slides are “the coolest thing”. So, naturally his ideal playground needs to have a swing and a high slide. Also, there should be very big monkey bars, a small sandbox and a water faucet, so one can mix sand with water. As a place, that he would like to have close by he names a swimming pool (preferably like the one from a vacation in Serbia) and ideally in his backyard, which he suggests to put in instead of the sandbox, that is there currently (“just put the sand out and the water in instead of it”).

Child III is Theresa, a 7 year old girl, who has a 4 year old sibling. They live with their parents in a rented 125sqm flat, close to the south/western border of Westend. Her mum grew up in Westend and lives there (again) since 10 years, meaning Theresa lived there her whole life. The building has a non-public (private) playground, where Theresa plays almost daily. She has a 20sqm room of her own and goes to a public school in the district. She doesn't go unaccompanied by a grown-up to school or back from it nor out to play. She usually goes to school all day every working day, but at the time of the interview due to the COVID-19 pandemic only every 2nd day. Her mum considers herself very content with living in the district and her direct neighborhood. The nearest public playground is less than 5 minutes away by foot. Among the public playgrounds, she goes 3-4 times per week to Georg-Freundorfer-Platz (which because of the big monkey bars they also call “Affenspielplatz”) and around every two weeks to Bavariapark and Gollierplatz. In addition, she goes once a month to a playground named pirate playground, which is in Westpark.

Theresa prefers playing outside to playing inside and plays outside every day. She knows Bavariapark (5), Georg-Freundorfer-Platz (8), Gollierplatz (9) and Quartiersplatz (10) and rates them on a scale from 1-10 as indicated in the brackets. She likes the swings in Bavariapark and the labyrinth at Gollierplatz and dislikes the slides in Bavariapark and a small wooden house at Gollierplatz. Outside of Westend, she likes to go to the zoo as there is a playground with a long slide and to Westpark as there is a playground with

3 long slides. A good playground in her opinion should feature very long slides, trampolines and a climbing wall. If she could have anything closer to her home, she would choose a rollercoaster, named “Die wilde Maus” [The wild Mouse], which is usually at Oktoberfest.

Even with only 3 interviewed children, one can see that their perception and usage of public places not only shows similarities, but also differences. While for Max the possibility of meeting friends and their accessibility is paramount for liking and approving of a public playground, Theresa and Luca make somewhat more “urban planer friendly” remarks by referring mainly to the type of equipment and tools that are available for them. Therefore, it comes to no surprise that Max likes the places the most, where he actually goes the most according to his mum. And also the additional place he would like to have closer, he has chosen in order to have more access to friends. Theresa and Luca on the contrary do not go most frequently to the playgrounds, they like the most. While Luca seems to be quite fed up with the playground in the backyard of his building due to the poor quality of equipment, it's still the place he finds himself playing the most outside. This could also be a reason why he, as the only one of three children states, that he prefers playing inside to playing outside. Theresa also finds herself playing the most in the playground of her backyard, even though a playground she rates 9/10 (Gollierplatz) is less than 250 meters from her home. However, she also rates the outside playground, she goes to the most (Georg-Freundorfer-Platz) still quite high (8/10) and didn't express any dislike of the playground in her backyard. It appears, that one can see an influence of the parents and/or the time of living in the district for the child: Max, who moved with his parents to Westend less than a year ago, recognized considerable less public spaces than Theresa and Luca, who grew up in Westend and whose parents live there since a long time as well or even grew up there themselves.

It also seems only natural, that Max as the only of the three children without an access to a playground in the backyard of his building happens also the only of the three of them who goes to a public playground every day. But another reason for this may also be, that Theresa and Lucas smaller siblings are not babies as Max' sibling is and therefore his parents

can dedicate more time to him and his needs while the parents of the other two children might not only find themselves with less time at their disposal, but might also face the need to compromise a bit more between the different needs and wishes of their children, when it comes to their playing preferences. However, one can also imagine that Theresa and Luca have the advantage of being able to play with their siblings (which are closer to their age than Max' baby sibling) and therefore don't go out to public playgrounds every day, which would also explain Max' focus on the opportunity to meet friends as the most important factor for a public place.

Compared to the other two children, Max also lives in an apartment that offers the fewest space per person, which might be another reason why he goes to an outside playground every day. Nevertheless, the lack of a private playground on the premises of his building combined with lack of siblings, he can play with seem to me to be the more convincing factors.

### **Conclusion and Outlook**

Judging from the information obtained from the three interviewed children and their parents, one can see that children's awareness and recognition of their surroundings in the form of public places and playgrounds grow with the amount of time they (and maybe even their parents) have lived in a certain area and the relative closeness to their home. This should not come as a surprise and will most likely be true for most adults as well.

Being exposed to different equipment and different tools, the interviewed children seem to be able to make clear statements not only on what they like at a certain playground and what they don't like, but also on how their ideal playground would need to be equipped. However, there seem to be also some limits to drawing conclusions on how to equip playgrounds as one might find oneself otherwise thanks to the boundless imagination of children in a playground that has a roller coaster or a backyard with a swimming pool. (Given that the scarcity/overcrowdedness of public pools is a subject that has been discussed in Munich since some years and that as a compensation for Oktoberfest, which has been canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the event "Sommer in der Stadt" ["summer in the city"] the city of Munich allowed fairground entertainers to

place their carousels, roller coasters, etc. on various public places, on 2nd thought these ideas might not be as far out as they seem at first).

Consequently the interviewed children seem to give bigger importance to the equipment of a playground than its surroundings as can be seen with Quartiersplatz. Theresa rated it 10/10, mainly because of the trampolines there (and also Luca said that he liked it, even though without rating it), but both of them go there not very often. As Westend is small and Quartiersplatz is not that far away from their homes, the main reason for this seems to me, that their parents have a certain dislike for the area, which I also could sense a bit in the parents reactions, as it is in the middle of buildings that are mainly social housing and doesn't offer the same level of comfort/hipness as e.g. Georg-Freundorfer-Platz.

Considering this, it is conceivable, that there are public playgrounds, that are rated very well to the children's liking and therefore should be frequently used, but in reality still remain not as frequented as they could (and probably should) be, since the children's parents don't feel comfortable enough spending time there. This could result in a downward spiral as children, who value being able to meet their friends at playgrounds, such as Max, might also not be that keen anymore to go to these playgrounds.

Concerning the housing situation, one can, again to no surprise, see that the lack of a playground in the backyard of a building will result in the child more often frequenting public playgrounds. When it comes to the effect of the density of the housing itself, no direct conclusion can be drawn from the sample of interviewees. Also it seems to me, that one should be careful in drawing a direct line from the density of a district to the perception and use of public places: As in the regarded case, Westend's density as a district doesn't have to seem that much of a negative effect on the interviewed children. Its relatively small size somehow even seems to have some positive effect as public playgrounds are close, no matter where someone in the district lives, and (potential) friends to play with are fairly easy to be found on its playgrounds, even though Georg-Freundorfer-Platz seemed already overcrowded to me. However, one also has to take into account that the two big open public spaces Theresienwiese und Westpark are located just outside of Westend and also used by

its inhabitants as district borders within a city are, of course, somewhat arbitrarily drawn. The same research in the center of a big dense district without any accessible “outside relief” probably would have provided other outcomes.

Regarding non-public backyard playgrounds, there can be different point of views: On the one hand, they surely provide children living in an apartment building (block) with a very close and rather safe opportunity to play outside. On the other hand, their small size, which usually also prevents providing a broad variation of equipment, can even result in children not liking to play outside at all, if such a – in the eyes of the children – poorly equipped backyard playground is offered to them as the “main choice” by their parents and even more so, if there are not many other children, they can play with, living in the same building.

Therefore especially in dense city areas, it seems to me from an urban designer perspective a better choice when constructing new apartment buildings to rather use space designated to several non-public backyard playgrounds to create one or two bigger well equipped public playgrounds. It might even make sense, especially in dense areas, to investigate, if and how some already existing non public playgrounds within apartment complexes might be opened up for the public and run by the municipality and, by doing so, turned into more successful playgrounds benefitting children and their parents alike.

According to my research conducted with the three children and their parents, such a successful playground, needs to be close, to offer suitable equipment to play, to attract enough (potential) friends and to offer a sufficient level of comfort for the parents to be willing to spend their time there.

For further research, a quantitative research with a statistically relevant number of children in order to find out how the usage of public playgrounds by children is affected by the average space, that is available per person at their homes, could be interesting. Also a quantitative research on the effect of available private playgrounds on the use of public playgrounds could be of interest.

On the level of qualitative research one could imagine the institution of e.g. randomly chosen panels of children of different age groups in a district of a city, that yearly rate the equipment on the public

playgrounds and are also presented as potential new equipment that is already in place somewhere else. Something similar could be done with the parents concerning the surroundings of a playground. Ideally, this way, one might not only be able to avoid playgrounds becoming useless for the ones, they are mainly designed for children and their parents, but also make some public playgrounds successful again, even without a roller coaster driving through a pool.

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# IS THE CITY OF ANKARA A CHILD-FRIENDLY CITY? A STUDY OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION TO PUBLIC SPACES AND PLANNING PROCESSES

Ömer Altaçlı

## Introduction

The city of Ankara became the capital city after the establishment of Turkish Republic. The founding elite of the republic have wanted the city to represent the secular values and scientific mentality of the regime. It should have been the first modern and planned city of Turkey. After the establishment of the republic, Ankara was subjected to a series internationally open competitions for the city's first plans. In 1924 and 1925, German architect and planner Carl Lörcher from Berlin prepared the first plan of the city. Due to the uneven development of the city and its population, Lörcher's plan became insufficient. While the city of Ankara had a population of 40.000 people in 1924-5, it was above 100.000 in 1930s. In 1932, the city's second plan is made by another German planner Hermann Jansen by winning a contest. Jansen had put emphasis on the living inhabitants of the city. The acceptance of his plans was a sign of the values and visions that the city administration has for the city and its inhabitants. While the first ten years of the city illustrate the vision of the republic for its cities, the question was whether this vision that is based on planning, participation and public good could be transmitted to the upcoming years of the city for the sake of its future.

Although early republican period of the city of Ankara represents the most disciplined and planned period of the city, the development of city is often distracted by excessive population increases, urban sprawl and unplanned urbanization. Especially starting from 1950s, cities in Turkey became the centers of attraction for the wide strata of the population. Very tense rural to urban migration started to immensely affect the physical shapes and developments of the cities. Ankara was one the most affected cities amongst all. While the city was mainly hosting the

state officials and soldiers due to being the capital, it started to push thousands of rural based populations to itself. Increasing population and urban sprawl necessitated new plans after plans and none of those plan could have guessed or softened the effects of future urbanization of the city. Future projections of city planning for the city of Ankara had always stayed behind actual developments. For example, the plans made and approved in 2007 projected the population of the city as 5 million in 2023, but in 2018 Ankara was already beyond the population of 5 million people.

The rural to urban migration waves that are started in 1950s, still continue shaping the city today. The city has been for a long time struggling with overcrowdings, traffic, unemployment, pollution, problems regarding water and food and crime. Those problems that are present today in a great degree causing from wider structural problems of the country but in particular planning strategies and administrative mentality of the city municipality. Although the city of Ankara has a vast surface area, high density populations in small districts, very dense settlements and car-oriented traffic constitute the major problems of the city and lower the quality of life of its inhabitants. One of the most affected groups from the current picture is children. While the city is trying to deal with its growing structural problems, it often fails to include children in designation of necessary spaces in accordance with their needs. The planning mentality in the city most often consider children as passive agents and tend to exclude them from decision making processes. This results with the creation of new spaces by the hands of planners and municipality officials according to what they consider what children need. By doing so, the city loses the perspectives of children who are the potential providers of new ideas.

The city has diversity of urgent problems that are waiting for serious attention by the city administrators and its inhabitants. Children like the aged people are among the most effected groups due to the current situation of the city. Those specific age groups like others are in great need of taking to be account in the shaping of the city in accordance with their needs. This is not only important for meeting the needs of particular groups but also vital for common good of all. Inclusion of children in city planning and decision making mechanisms in the creation of new public spaces has meant benefiting from them and their opinions for a more creative and livable city. Turkey and particularly the city of Ankara provide a bad picture about both taking children's right to have a space of their own into account and inclusion of them in planning and city administration. UNICEF Turkey's research in 2004 proves that while children in Turkey are happy at their private lives, they are unhappy at outside due to lack public spaces and playgrounds. The UN's movement of child-friendly cities initiatives aims understanding the real needs of children and providing a better living conditions that are components of the perspective essentially lacking in the city of Ankara.

Although the paper starts with a small discussion of Ankara's planning history and planning vision of the republic, this research particularly aims focusing on the current developments and mentality in city administration since it directly interpenetrates children's relationship with the city. Considering the dominance of neo-liberal perspectives in city planning and city administration, money and profit based look towards the city have been very influential in governing the city more than the last two decades. Especially the considerable economic growth in the last 20 years of the city and the country let variety of sectors like construction, health, energy, agriculture, finance and real estate to flourish and dominate the attention and current agenda of city administrators. This significant increase in the power of capital caused very fast changes on the physical shape of Ankara. Newly built business centers, residential areas, official state buildings and livelihood in real estate market put construction business and building and car oriented look to the city into center. While newly opened residential areas are allocated for the usage of upper class families, middle and lower

class families gradually started to live in denser city districts. Children were one the most ignored strata of the population during these developments.

This paper has a specific focus on the relationship between the city and children. It aims to discover whether children of the city of Ankara have enough public spaces to offer children in accordance with their needs and demands and whether they are able to participate in decision making mechanisms as free minded individuals in the city. It has been argued in this paper that together with the ambitions of strong economic development, different social groups who need particular attention of the city administrators and policy makers are neglected. Despite the considerable costs of an economic focus for the city and the quality of life of its inhabitants, the city administrations have been unsuccessful in provision healthy public spaces for children of different age groups and inclusion of their opinions in policy making. In searching of Ankara's ability to offer children of different age groups a livable city and a place that they can emotionally attached, this paper aims benefitting from existing literature regarding the relationship between the city of Ankara and children and also the interviews that are made with two experts who are researching particularly this subject in the city. The parts that the paper employs are like following; literature review, research question, hypothesis, research and methodology and conclusion.

### **Literature Review**

The concepts of children's point of view and children's participation in decision making has been increasingly becoming popular and important in children and urban research, policy programs, municipal administrations (Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006). This has become so particularly after the UN's declaration of Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1989. This convention is quite vital in both prevention of human rights violations and making impressive progress in perspectives towards the children. While it was quite common to make negative and passive conceptualization of children and childhood, false assumptions regarding who can possibly have interest and capacity in making plans, it is now a sign of civility and progress to treat children as individuals who have their rights to participate in public sphere,

contribute to the decisions about their immediate environment and organize the decisions about their own life (Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006). According to the Convention, all the states put signature on the agreement have to guarantee that they will protect the children's rights to live, to express themselves, to be protected, to develop and to participate. This convention is the most widely accepted agreement on international ground (Topsumer et al, 2009).

Although the concept Child Friendly Cities Initiatives or places is widely discussed in the literature and has variety of definitions, the concept itself in a considerable degree depends upon the Convention of UN and it, in its wider terms, aims a fresh perspective in local administrations to protect children's rights and supporting them to be able to be visible in local decision making mechanisms (Topsumer et al, 2009). Through the implementation of the UN's Convention, Child Friendly Initiatives aims guaranteeing the rights of every young citizen to participate the decisions about their locality and express their ideas about their cities. According his case study on the city of Izmir, Gokmen (2016, p.470) claims that providing a better standard for children' living in the city require recognizing, understanding and realizing children's rights. This can be achieved only through a substantial interest and attention to children' lives and the participation and support of all the different stakeholders in the city. In this regard, being child friendly requires a cooperation of local and national governments, families, institutions, variety of agencies and children themselves (Gokmen, 2016, p.470).

Cities in their nature have an immense potential to produce hierarchical structures and inequalities. Children constitute one of the most vulnerable groups of societies. Increasingly more children, today in the world, are under the risk of poverty and bad living conditions and constituting the future poor or indigent adults (Topsumer et al, 2009). The most basic motivation lying behind child-friendly initiatives is that although most of the children of the world live in cities, those cities are often deprived of or lack of a child-friendly perspective and thus city administrations are often insufficient to take the necessary steps in accordance with children's needs and to manage the inclusion of children to social life (Riggio, 2002, p.46). Since the beginning of

child-friendly cities initiatives, it has aimed to reduce poverty and to support a sustainable development in cities. Projects like "growing up in cities" provides a ground and a future horizon for the cooperation of city planners, disadvantaged groups of people in society and environmental activists. Such cooperation may succeed to take the basic rights of children and environment into account and to create healthier conditions under which whole children of the city can attach themselves to the place.

There are considerable pieces of work within the body of child friendly cities literature that are focusing on the barriers to young people' participation to planning and decision making processes. Understanding of those barriers constitutes an important step on the way to analysis and improvement of child-city relationship. Obstacles ranging from children and young people's lack of political power in decision making to lack of capacity and skills of planners to work with them, laws regarding the regulation of public spaces ignore or block children' agency and capacity to participate in improvement of their city and immediate environment. Depending of the context, those barriers and obstacles may further be complicated by challenges like safety, physical degradation, poverty and illiteracy for the participation of young people (Severcan, 2015, p. 251). Apart from that it is very vital to take disadvantaged young people who are living in relatively poor neighborhoods into account. The participation of disadvantaged young people in policy making and planning process may be challenged due to their economic backgrounds like the availability of public spaces in their neighborhoods (Severcan, 2015, p. 252).

Due to even more obstacles and barriers that are listed above, majority of world cities mostly remain unfriendly for children (Riggio, 2002, p.46). Including the city of Ankara, to be able to overcome this unfriendliness towards children, cities require developing important strategies. Despite the volume of the unfriendliness towards children in world cities, there are quite limited numbers of scholarly work to deal with existing problems (Severcan, 2015). To be able to set a healthy relationship between children and city, some scholars put considerable attention to the agency of children (Severcan, p. 253). Developing a sense of agency for children requires particular

attention of policy makers and families. For families, as being children's primary learning environments, should constitute a role model for children to increase their agency (Stolle and Cruz, 2005, p. 95). Just like families, schools and media are occupying important places in learning environment of children. This puts responsibilities on schools and media to support younger generations' agency. Within such relationalities, one of the most vital tasks remains on the shoulders of the national and local administrations. Providing the necessary setting for all the other institutions like education, economy, family and media constitute an important process especially for disadvantaged groups (Severcan, 2015).

Those barriers and possible strategies to deal with them for cities are particularly important for the city of Ankara. Since the city is having an immense migration from its immediate cities and also almost all over the country, it is experiencing the problems of overpopulation and some other problems regarding car and building based city planning, urban sprawl, loss of green spaces and lower space for each individual due to dense settlements. In their study of children aged between 11-14, Tavsancil et al (2015) points out that 62 percent of all respondents agreed on the close proximity of buildings to each other and dense settlements. The study of Tavsancil et al is quite important in the sense that it is the first and the vastest study of children in the city of Ankara. Children from the whole districts of the city constitute the participants of the study in accordance with density of each districts. The findings of the study are very important in seeing the city from the eyes of children and it is as follows; more than 51 percent of them stated that the city is not clean enough, more than 51 percent of all children didn't find sufficient the services of the city administration to prevent air pollution, 61 percent of them responded that there are lots of places in the city used as garbage collection area (Tavsancil et al, p.117).

Parallel to the answers that are given to density of the city, 47 percent of all respondents (total of 83.556 participants aged between 11-14) think that the city is full of concrete reflecting to its appearance (Tavsancil et al, p.117). The results show that children are very well aware of the urban problems of the city; 71 percent of the all respondents think that

the proximity of businesses and industrial sites to the residential places causes an increase in the air pollution for the inhabitants. While 66 percent of them think than dense traffic causing from cars constitutes one the most important problems of the city, 60 percent of them agreed on that traffic accidents occur very often in the city. This study shows that how children are very careful observers of their environment; while 60 percent of all children thinks that roads and pedestrian ways are always under construction, 59 percent of them thinks that when the weather is rainy, water accumulation on the streets becomes a serious problem. Public transportation also constitutes a very important element of the city. While 48 percent of the children don't find the volume of public transportation sufficient, 74 percent of them thinks that public transportation is always very crowded and 69 percent says that children most often can't find a place to sit in public transportation (Tavsancil et al, 2015, p. 118).

Child friendly cities literature particularly underlines the common misperception that children playgrounds and a space for children to meet are not enough factors to have a healthy relationship between children and the city (Severcan, 2015, p.144). According to UN's children rights convention, the concept of child friendly places requires a perception beyond playgrounds and fun places. Above all, to be able to provide better places for children, city and policy making practices should aim providing accessibility to health, prosperity, housing, transportation, education and other infrastructural services for all the children of the city and a proper ground for them to be able express their ideas on the subject matters of their interest (Severcan, p.144). This framework provided by UN corresponds to the fieldwork of Horelli et al. (2009) in Finland. When children aged between 13-18 were asked to describe the features of child friendly places, common answers given to the question are like following: security, a proper housing, accessibility to the basic services like health, education and transportation, participation, public places to socialize, decent environmental standards, sustainability and continuity of the feeling of place attachment (Horelli et al, 2009).

Considering this wide definition of the concept child friendly cities, the city of Ankara appears to have a long way to promise its children a better environment

to live. While the city is trying to deal with problems like overpopulation, urban sprawl and unplanned urbanization, dense car traffic, very little green spaces and air pollution, the city should also have a perspective regarding children and benefit from their opinions simply by being inclusion in planning and policy making. The research made by Tavsancıl et al (2015) pointed out that 59 percent of the children thinks that the streets of the city is not clean enough and 69 percent of all children agreed that the streets of the city are always full of parked cars and other motored vehicles. What children consider as problematic is not limited with cleanliness and car-oriented transportation of the city. According to the study, 60 percent of them think that streets and pedestrian ways are often under maintenance and 53 percent of all rejects the idea that the city has sufficient green spaces for all (Tavsancıl et al, 2015, p.120). Picturing the city of Ankara through the eyes of children has a great potential to reconsider and reprioritize the real problems of the city for governors and planners.

### **Research Question**

For this paper, it has been aimed focusing on the current picture in Ankara whether the city is able to provide better living conditions or has a tendency to see the importance of providing sufficient conditions for children. Since today it is possible to measure the quality of life in cities by simply looking at policies, attitudes and attention that are given to children, their opinions and wellbeing, this research has been conducted to analyze whether this is the case in the city of Ankara. Going beyond the common consideration of children's needs as playgrounds, this paper questions the quality of life of children by taking their availability to open public spaces, children's perception of sufficiency of public transportation and security, the volume green spaces and children's relationship with green spaces, participation of children in planning and policy making into account. Formulation of such research question doesn't exclude factors like class, gender, ethnicity and religion that are intersecting with almost every problems regarding the city and the major spheres of inequalities and injustices, but rather intends to putting the vitality of conditions under which children live on the actual agenda of

scholars, policy makers and planners.

In Turkey, considering quite limited numbers of scholarly work that are dealing with problems causing an unfriendly environment for the wellbeing and future of children, such works have great importance for opening up the ways for a more sustainable future. Researches that are stressing the importance of child friendly cities are not matters only for the healthy development of children, but also cities developing such perspective are more capable of solving their wider structural problems like dense car traffic, urban sprawl and overpopulation with participation and contribution of children. While putting more importance on inclusiveness itself is a sign of a healthier democracy, it also opens the ways for benefitting from creativity children and increases the ability of cities to produce strategies. This is only possible through removing the barriers and obstacles that have been put until now on the way of children to express themselves, take their authoritative shares in decision making process. From wider urban planning mechanisms to the very local urban policy processes, children have their rights to shape the environment they live. This paper is an inquiry of the capability and vision of the city of Ankara regarding children's mental and physical wellbeing.

### **Hypothesis**

In this paper, it has been claimed that the city of Ankara and its administrators are not doing well in provision a child friendly city and a better environment for children. The administrative mentality in the city, insufficient green and public spaces, growing problems immense urbanization, car-oriented traffic, overpopulation and migration are among the major problems of the city. It appears like city planners and policy makers are lost in seeking solutions for those immense problems so much that children are always left behind or ignored. According to the answers of my interviewees, the city administrators tend to produce projects what they think as good for the children (Interviewee 1, 2020). It wouldn't be wrong to claim in the light of interviews, city planners and policy makers are not aware of the possibility of or don't intend to providing services and solving the problems of the city by taking children's opinions, creativity and contributions. Although there are couple of initiatives that are caring for participation of children

in planning and policy, still the idea of creating child friendly places and better environments for children is seemingly new.

Although the city has variety of deficiencies and wrong implementations to criticize, this research particularly intends to challenge with the common perception of children as weak political actors and future adults. Such a perspective of children tends to ignore children and their participation during production of projects, reduce children's needs to playgrounds or at least not capable of benefit from their ideas and creativity. It looks like the city of Ankara is suffering from this perspective that is ruling the city. Prioritizing the problems and needs of children and recognition of their rights as political actors in planning and policy making requires a fresh perspective towards children and place making. This paper has been written with a belief that academics and scholar's works are quite important in recognition of children's rights and creating child friendly cities by keeping the relationship between city and children on their agenda. While the city of İstanbul is the most popular city for scholarly works regarding needs of children, the rest of the country including Ankara needs much more attention of academics.

### **Research and Methodology**

In this research, the purpose is picturing the actual environment in the city of Ankara in terms of the place of children's physical and mental wellbeing among the city's priorities. In this regard, searching, scanning and analysis of existing data and qualitative techniques like structured interviews will be the main methodology of this paper. For such a purpose, it has benefitted from existing literature of child friendly cities, researches, statistics and the results of two special one semi-structured and one structured interviews conducted with two academicians working on the same subject in the city of Ankara. According to the data that is collected for this research shows that there are diversity of factors and variables like class, ethnicity, religion and historicity and cultural features of a neighborhood cross cutting and effecting the relationship between children and the city (Interviewee 1, p.1, 2020). While more specific and neighborhood or district based analysis provide more detailed and accurate information in terms of differences within the city, this research has been

aimed at focusing on the general picture in the city like administrative mentality, the city's capacity to provide a proper ground for participation, open public spaces, green areas and a quality and diversity of modes of transportation.

According to my first interviewee who is working on the relationship between built environment and children in the city of Ankara, the city requires the cooperation of all the stakeholders to cope with existing problems and differences between different neighborhoods are among the problems that need to be stressed most (Interviewee 1, p.1). While there are examples of neighborhoods in which children need the help of their parents to be able to go to school in terms of security, at the same time, in some other neighborhoods, children have opportunity to gain their independence in terms of their actions and mobility. This difference between the poor and well-off neighborhoods can be so high that it may considerably effect and shape their future particularly the children living in poor neighborhoods. In this regard, evaluation of the relationship between the city and children necessitates taking a look at the differences between neighborhoods and different parameters income level, security and ethnicity that are affecting the quality of life of children (Interviewee 1, p.1).

On the other hand, the city presents so complicated webs of relationships of different parameters that it becomes more difficult almost impossible to make generalizations through just one parameter and isolating the others. My first interviewee states that place, time, class, social and cultural factors are very important parameters in development of neighborhoods. But those parameters have their influences in different degrees in each context or neighborhoods. While in one neighborhood social class and income level appears to be the dominant determinant in the characteristics of the neighborhood, in another district ethnicity or religion may be playing the major role. Also, the city of Ankara is composed of quite diverse range of neighborhoods having quite intrinsic and different characteristics. For example, examination the quality of life of a child, requires to know what kind of neighborhood it is. It can a neighborhood that is historical or completely new born, can be composed of multistore buildings or a well-off neighborhood. In

this regards, specifying the conjecture and context is important in understanding of differences between neighborhoods in the city (Interviewee 1, p2).

According to my first interviewee, after the cooperation between UNICEF and the administration of the city of Ankara, the city started advertise itself as child-friendly city. However, reversely it remains quite far away from being a child friendly city. My interviewee claims that discourses that the administration use to describe the city are quite assertive and stays on a shaky ground (Interviewee 1, p.2). For example, the city of Ankara has a children assembly in which children gather periodically and express their ideas, projects and demands regarding their life in the city. However, it remains quite symbolic and symbolic children's assembly itself proves that the municipality's claim of being a child friendly city is just an empty claim (Interviewee 1, p.2). On the other hand, there are also some other municipalities in Turkey that are sincerely working on producing child friendly projects and refrain from such big claims. As a matter of fact, the numbers of such municipalities and their cooperation with diversity of institutions are increasing throughout the years. Although there are a long way to go further in terms of a better cities for children in Turkey, the municipalities with sincere intentions are trying to contact and communicate with children, taking their ideas about how they perceive their cities and informing them about their rights to shape their environments (Interviewee 1, p.2).

When we delve into city making and planning practices in the city of Ankara, analytically it wouldn't be wrong to evaluate the administration mentality through two different levels. In the first level, the city administration and local municipalities tend to shape the city in accordance with what they think good or beneficial for children through their own initiatives and perspectives. My first interviewee claimed that the city of Ankara has considerable amounts of such city making practices and projects. Such practices are quite common and it is possible to see quite bad examples of it throughout the city. Usually municipalities, architecture and planners develop projects for children based on their own drives, thoughts and visions. In most of the cases, such projects have problems like functioning properly or being accessible to all (Interviewee 1,

p.3). In the second level, political power holders, policy makers, architectures and planners promote children's participation in city making processes and produce projects in accordance with their needs and demands. Projects that are developed with such perspectives are quite rare. Even in participatory project, the volume of participation remains at very low levels and in most of the cases participation doesn't reflect on the actualized projects and space (Interviewee 1, p.3).

As touched upon above, one of the serious problems in the city is that administrators' sincerity and perspectives towards the issue. My first interviewee claimed that there are a lot of projects in the city shown as quite participatory and child friendly to convince normal inhabitants. However, when you look at any project that is advertised as participatory, it is very easy to realize that it is actually not. My interviewee responded to me that although children are quite competent even more than adults in perceiving their environment, developing coping strategies for problems from financing a project to selection of place, the municipality and people responsibilities are ignorant of their capacities. The city can benefit from children's abilities only if they are given the opportunity to express themselves and to be a part of city making practices (Interviewee 1, p.3). The administrators' endeavors to advertise their projects as participatory and child friendly despite the fact that they are not prove that such projects have credibility in the eyes of the city's inhabitants as political actors and voters. It also shows that quality and sincerity of administrators, power holders, planners and architectures are quite important factors why the city is lacking of a child friendly perspective.

Taking the last 20 years of relatively noticeable growth trends in economy into consideration, almost whole administrative capacity and attention are allocated for economic trends and major infrastructural investments. Since construction business has been the leading player in the economy, buildings without a proper aesthetic and functioning started to dominate the spirit of the city. According to my second interviewee, while shopping malls and highways had developed substantially in both quality and quantity in the last 15 years, there is not a significant change in numbers of public spaces

that are allocated for the use of children in the last decade despite the fact that child population have increased considerably (Interviewee 2, p.1). One of the important reasons behind such a fact is that the city administrators tend to see any activity like infrastructure, tourism or industry other than children as more important (Interviewee 1, p.3). The municipal mentality is most often based on quite short term administrative calculations and it can easily consider children as weak political actors and non-voters. This perspective of city administrators reflects upon the city in actualized projects and current picture of the city that both are quite far from being child friendly.

### **Conclusion**

Although current discourse in city making, urban planning and design underline the great need for participatory process, the actual situation in different geographies and cultures varies considerably. While the importance and functionality of promoting children's participation in policy making and planning processes has been acknowledged in some countries, the selected city of this paper doesn't have the signs of properly functioning city democracy in which all the stakeholders are able participate in decision making processes. This situation has consequences on the shaping processes of the city and on the lives of its inhabitants. While the administrative mentality in the city tend to prioritize economy, tourism, major infrastructural investments and urban renewal projects, these priorities' effects are twofold. On the one hand, the needs of inhabitants particularly children cannot be met by the current plans and policies. On the other hand, city and policy makers are not able to benefit from ideas and creativity of its inhabitants. This paper aims keeping this discussion up-to-date to provide a better environment for children.

As it is discussed in the literature review, considering children's answers that are given to the questions regarding their experiences of the city of Ankara, there are diversity of problems that are constituting the source of stress for the lives of children in the city. The city and its administration appears to accumulating or saving the problems ranging from transportation to major infrastructural issues, lack of green and public spaces, dense residential living standards, dense and car based traffic and

overpopulation rather than solving them or creating a proper ground for a collective bargaining against those problems. Delving into the statistics presented in the literature review, even in the best or most optimistic answers, around half of the children aged between 11-14 disagree the positive arguments. As it can be drawn from the answers the city administration neither has a tendency and a proper mentality to solve the problems together with children and other inhabitants nor is able to produce solutions for increasing troubles by itself. The data that is collected from existing literature, conducted interviews and previous studies show that the city of Ankara mainly because of its administrative mentality is stumbling in face of its increasing problems and thus, not able provide a child friendly environment for children.

According to the interviews made with two academicians who are working on the relationship between built environment and children, the most prominent and outstanding conclusion can be obtained is the administrative attitude towards children. The perception of city administrators, policy makers and planners remains quite "old school" and the most salient feature of this perception appears as neglect, override and disregard. It can be concluded that the most suffering stakeholders due to this current picture are children and the city itself. From provision of sufficient and accessible public spaces to alternative forms of transportation, provision of necessary green spaces for all, urban sprawl and overpopulation seem to be the most urgent problems of the city and waiting for participatory solutions. In case of lack of solutions against growing problems regarding the city, it is very likely to occur place attachment problems. To be able to cope with those immense problems children and other stakeholders must be included in problem solving, decision making and planning processes. Provision of a healthy and sustainable future for children necessitates a fresh look and perspective towards both the city and children. Particularly children's rights stemming from UN's Child Convention should be protected, promoted and executed.



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# Territory Of Childhood: Examination Of Historically Developed Yards' Environment In Samara City, Russia.

Petr Slastenin

## Introduction

In the last decades, the historical environment of Samara city was examined many times from different perspectives. However, the subject of childhood is rarely presented in recent studies that create a large field for the research.

Until today, Samara's historical center represents a sort of conservancy area of traditional way of live including the way in which children interact with the urban environment. To the great extent, it happens because of the original undamaged morphology of city blocks and parcel structure. Enclosed yards were formed in the 19th century and took current shape during the 20th century. Nowadays they are in danger because of the ongoing gentrification and new development, which does not take into account the historically established boundaries.

The aim of the project is to characterize the historical environment of Samara city from the perspective of childhood through the example of one historically developed city block.

## History of the site

In the May 1782 Samara got its first regular geometrical plan. The main urban unit became a rectangular block of the size 120 to 250 meters. Each block was divided approximately into 16 equal in area households. By the mid of 19th century, Samara had become an important political and trade centre. In 1850 the city became a capital of Samara Province, which triggered the urbanisation process. The construction of Samara-Zlatoust railway line in 1870's enabled rapid development of flour-milling industry and emergence of other big factories. All these processes launched mass housing development in the city. According to the land management standards, citizens were able to buy a land inside the block and establish a private household. Due to the diverse demand and special

regulations of boundaries establishment in the block, the area, shape, and length-width characteristics of households varied. Normally, each block had from 16 up to 32 independent households (Sinelnik, 2000). After the revolution of 1917 the concept of private property was abandoned, which affect the city structure to the great extent. Large part of housing stock was converted into so-called communal flats. The idea was to provide equal living conditions for everyone.

Typical communal flat in historical part of Samara is a former merchant house (also worker or servant house, warehouse) with several living rooms, one for each family, and shared kitchen and sanitary facilities (if any). This unification led to significant changes in households' structure. Some of them were enlarged or combined with others. Increased amount of families required additional entrances and staircases, which usually had been engineering by tenants themselves. Lack of space inside flats required construction of additional storage facilities, so-called barns, some of them were used as a coal storage cells. Complex and diverse social structure of communal flats triggered numerous conflict situations which also found reflection in built forms such as fences, independent pathways, new additions, windows etc. Soviet government was seen historical environment as invaluable and as a temporary housing stock. The initial idea regarding to the historical center of Samara was to enlarge blocks and demolish almost all existing buildings. However, after relative humanization of soviet society in 1960's, government began to provide historical center with central heating, wide water, gas, and canalization supply (Sinelnik, Samogorov, 2010)

Until today, it is quite easy to trace the pre-revolutionary boundaries of former private households. One way or another, they shape present

structure of many blocks in historical part of Samara. In the literature, the territory of former household is called 'yard' or parcel and can be characterized as an enclosed space within the boundaries of the street, existing buildings and structures, and brandmauer walls.

Nowadays, after reappearance of private property in 1991, structure of historical environment in Samara city have changed again. On the one hand, most of the housing stock was privatized together with the land along the perimeter of buildings. Some communal flats were divided into separate apartments (however, they are still very common in some blocks, as well as municipal housing – communal flats that were not privatized by tenants). On the other hand, the land inside the yards which is free from structures is still mostly unprivatized. Nowadays, tenants are commended to establish condominium partnership within each yard to register their title to the land. The process is characterized by numerous violations of a right or of a law and still ongoing. The complexity of the situation is also determined by the fact, that some tenants don't want to take the responsibility and privatize the land. Furthermore, a lot of buildings have a status of heritage and simply cannot be renovated without special project and supervision. At the same time, city administration does not have resources to maintain the land and buildings which leads to the decay.

The current situation around historically developed environment in Samara can be characterized by following features:

- 1Poor condition of housing stock, presence of emergency buildings\* and ruined buildings, barns;
- Poor condition of utility services, in some places lack of utility services;
- Unclear division of responsibilities between city administration and tenants;
- Lack of resources for property maintaining (insufficient financing from city administration; the majority of tenants belongs to the working class and does not have spare money);
- Unfinished process of boundaries settlement and



Figure 1. Barn in Samara's yards. Photo by Petr Slastenin. Sign translation: 'youth is not old age'

ongoing privatization of land;

- High degree of space personalization and vast amount of authentic cultural artefacts including heritage;
- Oncoming gentrification.

For the present research, I have taken the block 39 in Samarsky borough which is located on the main pedestrian street of the city centre, in proximity to the important transport hub – Square of Revolution.

### Research Methodology

As it will be shown in the paper, the subject of childhood relates to the variety of site characteristic. To avoid project scope creep, decision was taken to concentrate on the single block and analyze different facets of the environment. The main research question of the project is 'What are the main aspects of growing-up within the space of historically developed yards in Samara city?'. In order to answer this question, following research methods were applied: (a) literature review; (b) graphical analysis of the site; (c) observation; and (d) qualitative research (interviews with tenants and mapping sessions with children).

Main hypothesis of the research is that childhood in

\* Legal term. Emergency housing stock - the residential premises in apartment buildings that are recognized ... as emergency and as a subject to demolition or reconstruction due to the physical depreciation during their operation (Federal Law, 2007)

the yard gives some benefits that can be achieved in other neighborhoods of the city only to a limited extent. The research was shaped by following assumptions:

- The space of the yard can be seen as a safe haven of childhood;
- The yard is an intermediate space between the home and the street;
- Growing-up within an enclosed space of the yard provide children with better socialization, community spirit, intergeneration experience, creativity, responsibility for the surrounding environment, cooperation skills etc.

### Literature review

Preliminary study of the literature on the subject shows that the topic of childhood is rarely presented when it comes to the historical environment of Samara city. One of possible reasons for that is general absence of interest towards the city's historical environment. This territory is usually seen by majority of citizens and politicians as marginalized and retrogressive. Beyond that, most of studies on the topic of Samara's historical center deals more with physical aspects of environment and rarely take into account social aspects, such as growing up processes. However, some previous attempts of examination yards' space with respect to subject of childhood can be found in the literature.

In studies by Rogodzina (2010), Repina (2014), Malahov and Repina (2017) the space of the yard is seen as an ideal place of childhood. A yard's space is presented as 'a lively unit which is an archetype of ideal urban relationship, scale and space, where all decisions are rendered collectively, where people do not feel estrangement, where children are under control of the community, where everyone can be an independent person, where human being feels its importance through the human scale of the environment and can actualize contradictive intentions such as – communication, life openness and closeness, privacy and isolation; where one is a stage director of the space and behavior' (Repina, 2014). This idealization of yard's space has its limitations. First, it does not consider the present-day state of things, particularly numerous problems

that face yards inhabitants. Second, it applies to the nostalgic perception of the space which to some extent prevent any forms of development on the territory.

On the contrary, very pragmatic and sober position can be found in municipal public documents. For example, the aim of the project 'Forming a comfortable urban environment' in Samara city 2018-2022 is to 'create a condition for the systematic increase of the quality and comfort of urban environment by complex provision of urban amenities' (Samara administration, 2017). However, previous experience shows that this approach also has certain weaknesses. It does not take into account specific context of historical environment and in fact results in so-called 'rush for the indicators' – unreflective production of new playgrounds citywide.

Further analysis of official documents has revealed the position that city authorities uphold when it comes to children. According to Samara regional law № 18 (2019) and Children's Rights reference edition (2017), child is 'a person under the age of 18'. In general, official documents emphasise on the problems of children's safety and accompanying challenges. Children are seen here not as a fully legitimate participants of urban life, but rather as future citizens who should be guarded by city authorities until their adulthood. There are no institutionalized participation procedures for children in regional law\*\*. Furthermore, there are no special requirements about the quality of urban environment for children. On the other hand, several restrictions can be found, such as: 'children under 14 don't have complete right for freedom of movement and choice of permanent or temporary residence' (Children's Rights, 2017, p.17), 'children under 16 are prohibited to stay in nighttime in public places, including streets, stadiums, parks, squares, public transport vehicles ... facilities in the field of trade and public catering etc., without parent(s)'s (guardian's) supervision' (Children's Rights, 2017, p.18). The need for those statutory regulations is accounted as a measure of increasing children safety and preventing juvenile delinquency and vagrancy.

To sum up, literature review reveals the lack of information on the subject and domination of one-sided approach (either nostalgic or pragmatic) with regard to the subject of childhood in historical center

\*\* be fair to say that the degree of citizens' participation in decision-making process in Samara, as well as in Russian province in general, is very low due to low efficiency of democratic institutions.

of Samara city. One of the aims of this paper is to fill the gap and provide a critical insight into the topic.

One of research tasks was to identify historically established yards' borders in the block 39 and to assess yards' morphological characteristics (spatial, functional etc.). For this purpose, author uses special marking for each identified yard (e.g. V1, C5, F3 etc.) The territory of the block 39 can be characterized as sufficiently homogeneous environment. Graphical analysis shows that there are 21 yards of different shapes and dimensions (see figure 2). The structure of the site was formed in the late 19th century, most buildings are dated from 1860's to 1910's. The typical form of the yard can be described as follow. Capital (main) building is faced to the street. The access to the yard's space is provided through the arch or a gap between building and brandmauer wall. Inner buildings are located along the lateral yard's borders and in the rear, rarely as free-standing structures (see yards F4, F5, C4). Brick and half-brick (usually the ground floor is made out of brick or stone, and upper floor out of wood, sometimes with brick facing) usually have wooden extensions with entrance and staircase. As a rule, originally free space between capital buildings was built up with barns (garages and storage facilities). Nowadays, some of them are either ruined or abandoned. Another common utilization of open space within the boundaries of building's sidewall and brandmauer is arrangement of the garden. Most yards have small semi-private gardens with fence or community gardens with flower beds and vegetables. Rear part of the yards is normally less dense than the front one and usually was used as a place for public toilets (before centralized drain system was installed in soviet times). Nowadays, yard's surface is typically covered with asphalt. Constantly repeated pipe breaks make communal services fix communications one time in several years, that is why yard's surface usually looks like a patchwork of old and new asphalt fragments. As it is shown on the figure 3, block 39 is surrounded by three types of streets. Leningradskaya street is the pedestrian street of the city centre. Two out of the three yards that border this street have pure social function (L1 – one of the oldest hotels in Samara; L3 – former sewing workshop, demolished, nowadays is free from structures). Yard L2/C2 is a combination

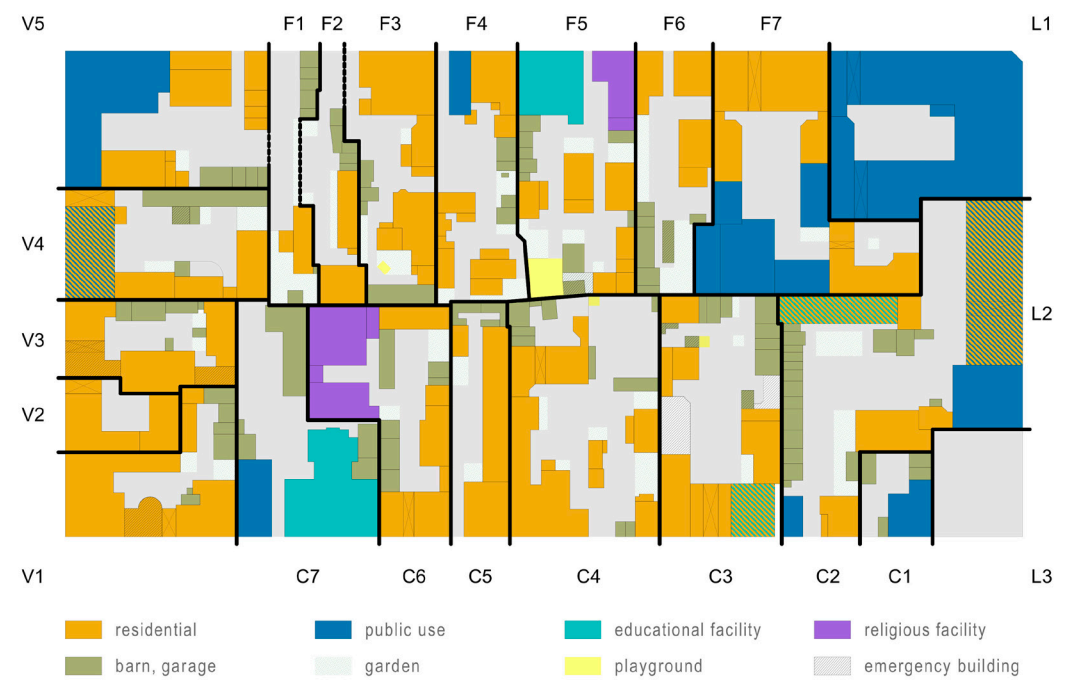


Figure 2. Block 39. Morphology and functional zoning.

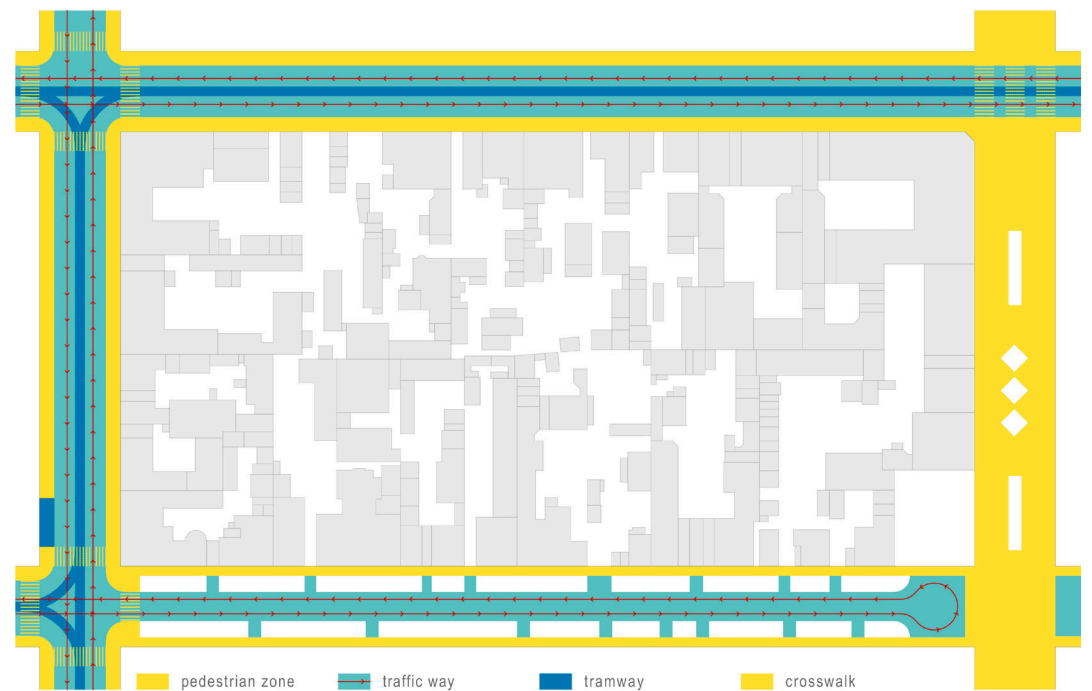


Figure 3. Block 39. Transport scheme

of 2 formerly independent households, which were united as a result of pedestrianization of the street to provide a car access for buildings that face the street. One of buildings is the outpatient hospital that also have loading zone from the yard. Second street is Chapayevskaya. This is a dead-end street for cars, therefore it is the most quiet and green street around the block. Most of yards contain only housing, except for yads C1 (café, office), C7 (musical school and garages). Yard C6 has a synagogue in its rear part which has the access throughout the yard's territory. Two last streets Venzeka and Frunze

have much in common. Both are busy city roads with municipal transport such as tram, bus and public minibus taxi and have lack of green infrastructure and narrow sidewalks. Three yards that face Venzeka street (V2,V3,V4) are quite small (historically due to the special regulations of boundaries establishment for short side of block), ground level of buildings along the street is converted into shops and offices that have access only from the street side. Yards V5, F1, F2, F3 have fuzzy borders and unclear access from the side of the street. For example, the access to the yard V5 (and loading zone of the large store on the corner) is carried out via gate of the yard F1; yards F2 and F3 have shared gate. Yards F4-F7 have clear boundaries, additional functions are presented in yard F5 (kindergarten and orthodox church, both buildings face the street) and F7 (restaurant in front building and office in the rear part).

### Observation

The observation took place during the research several times. The aim was to (a) assess general conditions of the environment; (b) to identify yards with presence of children; (c) to collect more specific information about yards that cannot be achieved based on graphical analysis of the site; (d) to collect photographic evidences. The limitation of the method was inability to access several yards, for example V2, or certain parts of yards (F1, C4).

In general, observation provided important information regarding to life of children in the block. Chapayevskaya street is the one where children are

free to walk without adults supervision. Numerous pavement drawing and presence of children shows that the street is used as a place for gathering, playing and as a transition space when children travel between yards. A lot of children use bikes, scooters and rollers for moving. Venzeka and Frunze streets do not demonstrate such child friendliness due to the traffic and narrow sidewalks. Leningradskaya street has a lot of public amenities such as benches and fountains, and is actively used by local children as well as Chapayevskaya. However, as an important public space of the city, it is usually full of people, and, as a rule, children walk here under supervision of parents or nanny. Older children use Leningradskaya as a venue for gathering and to experience urban life (listen to a street concert, have small talks with other children and adults, buy street food or ice-cream etc.). A lot of children also use wheeled vehicles here due to the convenient seamless paving of stone slabs.

As a result of observation, the most lively and children populated yards were identified as V4, F5, C3, C4, C6. All these yards are relatively spacious and serve as a permanent place of residence for approximately 10 children of different age. Yard F5 contains the only organized and maintained playground in the whole block which serves as a park for kindergarten pupils in the morning and afternoon and as a venue for local children in the evening. During the day, up to 25 children gather here at a single point in time. Yard C3 is provided with some children infrastructure (sandbox, bench, litter-box, swing) but it is in a bad condition. Yard C3, as well as yards C6 and C4, also has some self-made forms, such as playground from wooden pallets, rope swing, educational drawings etc. Other yards perform less or almost absence of children activity. During observation days, few or no children were found there. Yards F7 and C2/L2 have four/five-storey apartment buildings and are the most populated yards. However, there is no playing activity there due to the abundance of cars and absence of free space. Small yards such as V1, V3, F1, F2 consist of one or two low-rise apartment buildings with several family's residence and probably only few children live in there.

There are indicators that in some yards children are unwelcome and seen by tenants as a marginalized group who are in charge of damaging property and noise production. Yet, it is not the case for other



Figure 4. Yards L2/C2, C4, C3. Photos by Petr Slastenin

yards where tenants put efforts to make the yard's space more child friendly. In case of yards C3 and F5 different tenants within the same yard show different attitude towards children ranging from complaints to complete acceptance.

Collected photographic evidence can be found in Appendix 1.

### Qualitative research. Interviews with tenants

Interviewing was an important part of the research. It aims (a) to provide better insight into the perception of the environment by adults, especially by parents; (b) to learn more about advantages and disadvantages of the enclosed yards for growing up processes; (c) to investigate how the environment can be improved in order to provide better conditions for children and what are the main challenges of this process; (d) to challenge the idea of the yard as a safe haven of childhood. The main obstacles of conducting interviews in the historical part of Samara city are tenants' suspiciousness, and perception of the interviewer as a subject of decision-making process or as a representative of city administration. First point can be explained as a precautionary measure against oncoming/ongoing gentrification. In recent years, some people were displaced from the neighborhood which makes tenants feel insecure and unconfident about the future. Second point reflects common position that numerous problems of the territory can be only solved by active involvement of city administration. Under this circumstance, any survey is seen as a possibility to give a message to the authority. However, interviewing process went well and most of tenants got the aims of the research right. In total, fourteen interviews in thirteen block's yards were conducted.

In general, most of interviewees access the environment as regular or even negative for children. A lot of tenants complain that borough and city administration do not maintain yards' territory and buildings properly. Even though a lot of housing was privatized, authority still have responsibilities such as capital repairs and rehousing of residents of emergency buildings. Childhood related issues are rarely presented in a dialog between tenants and authorities and both parties are more concern about provision of basic living conditions. Most of interviewees argue that general degradation of the

Yard	Free area, m <sup>2</sup>	Children	Age group	Gate	Children infrastructure	Gardens	Additional functions*
V1	280	2	2-16	yes	no	2	
V2	160	no data		yes	no data		
V3	250	no data		yes	no	1	
V4	570	8-9	2-14	yes	no	2	
V5	670	3	no data	no	no	1	loading zone
F1	370	no		no	no	1	
F2	400	4	0-7	no	no	1	
F3	520	5-6	2-7	no	self-made sandbox	1	office
F4	710	6	10-14	no	no	2	
F5	660	up to 25	7-12	no	playground	3	kindergarten, orthodox church
F6	500	no data		no	no	1	
F7	830	no data		no	no	1	office, loading zone
L1							
L2/C2	1540	no data		no	no	1	children center
L3		no housing					
C1		no housing					
C3	780	11-12	4-16	yes	playground	1	
C4	1400	no data		yes	self-made playground	3	
C5	350	4	0-5	yes	no	1	
C6	500	7	2-16	no	educational drawings	2	synagogue
C7		no housing,					

\* functions inside the yard apart from housing. Shops and offices that are faced on the street and

territory affects children to the great extent, but this problem is above the subject of childhood and affects all age groups. Overall assessment of the location of the block 39 within the city is rather positive. A lot of interviewees see proximity to the pedestrian street, the embankment of Volga river, educational facilities, parks and transport hubs as an advantage (Int. 1,2,8). With this respect, the lack of play infrastructure is compensated by accessibility of public amenities in the city center. Rich history of the place and presence of cultural heritage is also seen as a preference. Five interviewees did not find any positive aspects of the yard's space itself (Int. 2, 3, 6, 8, 14). The enclosed



## Yards' characteristics

	Useless barns	Sanitary	Cars	Utility services	Emergency buildings
no	yes	rats	1-2	pipe breaks	yes
no	no data				
no	no	open basement	organised parking	no data	yes
no	yes	drain problems	up to 5	pipe breaks	no
no	no	dirtyness	up to 10, alien	no data	yes
no	no	no data	1-2	no data	no
no	yes	abuse as a toilet	up to 5	no data	yes
no	yes	abuse as a toilet	up to 5, alien	pipe breaks	yes
no	yes	earth closet, no stormwater drain	up to 10, alien	pipe breaks	yes
no	yes	no recultivation	up to 15, alien	gas line in bad condition	no
no	yes	dirtyness, no recultivation	up to 5	no data	yes
no	no	overcrowding (former dormitory)	up to 20, alien	no data	yes
no housing, hotel facility					
no	yes	abuse as a toilet	up to 15, alien	no data	no
no housing, empty site					
no housing, office, café					
no	yes	no recultivation	up to 10	pipe breaks	yes
no	yes	no data	up to 5	no data	no
no	yes	drain problems	up to 5	pipe breaks, ground settlement	no
no	yes	no data	up to 5	pipe breaks	no
no music school, garages					

don't have access to the yard do not taken into account

nature of the yards and presence of gate is seen as a positive aspect that provide the level of safety for children, intimacy and ability of supervision. However, as interview 1 shows, the safety-related problems not necessarily have outer nature and children can also be affected by negative attitude and actions from people who live in the same yard. As the survey shows, problems of safety are not central, but still an important issue and concern of many tenants.

Many interviewees emphasize on high level of creativity and self sufficiency of children who grow up in Samara's yards (Int. 1,7,9,13). Presence of uncommon spaces and build forms in yards

positively affects children's imagination. They create own games, experience different types of physical activity and have a degree of freedom compare to their peers in other districts of Samara who use same infrastructure on the daily basis. There are some activities that other children are not able to experience such as swimming in the rubber pool on the lawn, doing gardening, taking care of local cats and dogs (Int. 4, 5, 13). Another positive aspect is that children of different ages play all together, form a community and network of friends (Int 1, 9, 13). Overall, locals appreciate social aspects of growing up in a yard and perceive it as strengths. According to interview 5 'yard was an ideal place for children during corona pandemic' and they were free to walk outside and play as usual.

Disadvantages of the environment can be formed into several groups. First, interviewees complain about emergency buildings and low living conditions there (Int. 3, 6, 9, 11, 12, 14). Only few buildings in the whole block were renovated in recent decades while most of them have been maintaining by tenants since soviet times. In yards C3, F7 and V1 interviewees report about falling bricks. Numerous barns and ruins decrease quality of life in yards and occupy space that can be used as playgrounds or gardens (Int. 4, 7, 8, 11). Second group of negative aspects is made of sanitary related issues. Bad quality of canalization (Int. 3, 7, 12), constant pipe breaks and suspension of water supply (Int. 1, 3, 5, 11, 12), abuse entrance arches and territory of yards as a toilet (Int. 3, 7, 8), unrecultivated soil under former public toilets (Int. 7, 9), lack of stormwater drain and wetness (Int. 5, 12) and even rats presence (Int .12); all these problems are seen by locals as central and solving them considers as a task of prime importance. Third common problem is presence of cars. In yards L2/C2 and F5 parents bring their children in kindergarten or child centre and abuse yards' space as parking lot (Int. 7, 8). The territory of the yard F3 is fully occupied by cars of office employees (Int. 14). In yards V5 and L2/C2 zone of public facilities can be found. Presence of cars is also a source of anxiety for tenants in yards F3, C3 and C5. An egregious example of constant fight against cars described in the interview 6. Tenants put self-made flower beds to reserve some space for children, otherwise cars occupy literally all free space of the yard. Finally, interviewees complain

about the lack of basic infrastructure for children such as playgrounds, benches, and sport facilities. To sum up, disadvantages and challenges are the most discussed topics in almost all interviews and tenants are very sensitive to numerous problems of yards. Interviewing shows that some specific characteristics of the yards, such as the lack or availability of free space within the yard, cleanliness or dirtiness, are controversial factors, as responders in different yards have different opinion on the subject. Further quantitative research should be conducted in order to specify the impact of these factors on children.

Most common improvement that tenants suggest to make yard's territory more child friendly is arrangement of a playground with sandbox, slide and swing. Interviewees in yards V5, F3, F4, F7, C2/L2, V1, C6 propose to increase the amount of green infrastructure, such as gardens and flower beds. Many interviewees see provision of sport infrastructure for children as an important measure to increase the quality of yard's space (Int. 4, 9, 10, 12). New climbing frames, rock-climbing walls, rope swing also can prevent usage of barns and trees as climbing objects. Another common suggestion is provision of a yard with better functional zoning (Int. 4, 8, 11). Tenants suggest to organize parking zone and free space for children (today cars are free to occupy any place in the yards). Some interviewees argue that organization of events such as workshops, volunteer cleaning and yard's fests can also improve the quality of space for children (Int. 4, 9, 13). Forming an authentic identity of the yard space is seen as a good initiative by tenants from yards F3, V1 and C2/L2. In the yards, that can be freely accessed from the side of the street, almost all tenants demand to install a gate or an auto barrier.

Common threat that share majority of interviewees is a continuing decline of the territory (increasing amount of emergency buildings, communication breaks, littering of the yards). On the other hand, tenants voice concerns about the possibility of 'perpetual construction – the endless process of reparations and new development' (Int. 13). Some interviewees argue that the situation is 'fossilized' and it is just not possible to improve anything (Int. 2, 10). This pessimistic position is partly caused by the fact that locals are not confident in the future: some of them afraid displacement, others put hope on possible emigration to the place with better

living conditions. Most respondents do not believe in active help from city administration side, neither that crucial improvements can be done only by their own efforts.

Integrated analysis of examined territory based on graphical analysis, observation, and interviewing can be found in summary table. Transcription of interviews can be found in Appendix 2.

### **Qualitative research. Mapping sessions with children**

During the research, I was able to organize 2 mapping sessions with local children in yards C3 and C6. The aim was (a) to investigate how children perceive the space of the yard; (b) to learn what are the main challenges of growing up in historical environment of Samara; (c) to collect ideas how the space can be improved and become more child friendly from children's perspective. Both sessions were divided into two stages. First, children were asked to draw their yard as they see it and identify both favorite and unloved places, places of different activities, interesting facts about the yard. Second stage was to draw how the territory of the yard can be improved. Children were asked to put new objects, 'demolish' unnecessary objects, reorganize the space etc. Both sessions lasted 1 hour and conducted on the territory of studied yard. First session involved 6 children (4 girls and 2 boys) age 7-16 (yard C3). Second session involved one girl age 6 (yard C6).

As mapping session shows, children identify gardens and playgrounds (both organized or temporary/self-made) as the most favorite places in the yards. They have a lot of special points, such as 'strawberry bed in the garden', 'wooden staircase, which is the best place to hide', 'old rope swing', 'secret pathway to neighbor yard' etc. They talk cheerfully about favorite games such as 'shark' (off-the-ground tag, they are pretending that all asphalt is a surface of water and they have to move only using safe spots like small lawns, stones, steps etc.) or 'surviving' (they are mining bricks from brandmauer walls or old buildings and use it as a currency to buy self-made 'magic potions'). Last example can be seen as an illustration of offline or real-life application of online game Minecraft. One girl made a story about her adventures in the yard together with her kitten.

During mapping sessions some disadvantages of the space had been revealed. First, children do not like

## Stage 1



## Stage 2

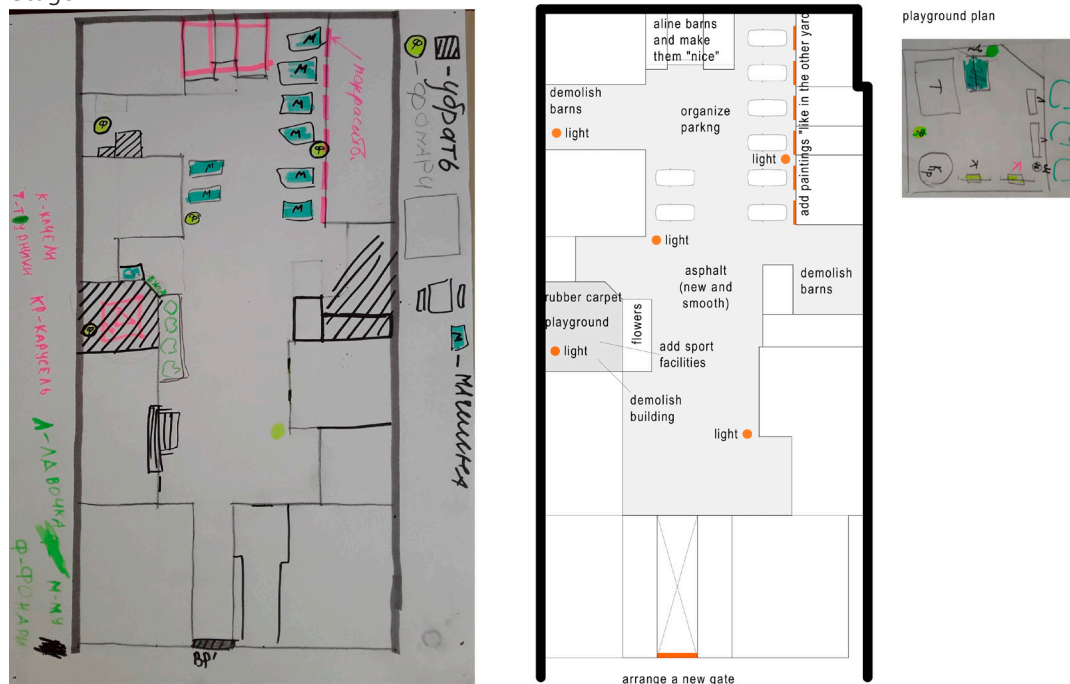


Figure 5. Mapping session 1. Yard C3. Children's drawings and transcription.

numerous cars in the yards (however, most of cars belong to their families and they argue that this is a norm; it shows that children think in terms of existing state of things, not critically). Second, they feel better when the gate is closed, and strangers cannot come inside (for example yard C6 does not have gate because laity and clergy are constantly coming into the synagogue; girl who lives there complained that she does not like 'barbate strangers' and she would prefer to close entrance arch). Third, children share

main concerns with adult interviewees regarding to the bad conditions of buildings and barns (children from session 1 show a negative attitude towards old brick walls, unpainted barns, open cellars filled with garbage, general 'visual littering' of the space). Fourth, children are not free to use whole yard and there are some restricted zones (near someone's windows, near expensive cars, barn roofs).

Analysis of drawings from the second stage can provide information about what is missing in the yards from the children point of view. Most of suggestions refer to good examples from other places or from the yard. Children from session 1 proposed to demolish abandoned house and arrange a playground 'as like as the kindergarten playground in the neighbor block' with special rubber carpet for playgrounds, swigs and litter-box. Girl from session 2 proposed to increase the area of drawings with cartoon characters that already exist near the entrance in the yard and arrange an additional garden. Furthermore, children offered some uncommon improvements like construction of creative house (for art exercises), summer kitchen for weekend gathering, dance spot, toy-sharing point in one of barns ('secret barn'), better illumination of the yard during winter time etc. As it can be seen on the figure 5, children spend a lot of time trying to organize parking lots in a proper way. It proves that better spatial organization of the yards is an important subject for local children. Some controversial measures also have been proposed, like covering the entire surface of the yard with asphalt. It can be interpreted as a safeguard against mud emergence after rains.

During the sessions it was estimated that children from yards C3 and C6 have social connection and visit each other regularly. Yards have own unique names: C3 is a 'Red' yard (as it has red gate), C6 is 'Smechariki' yard (of the name of cartoon character that is depicted on the wall drawing inside). They also know adults from different yards on the street. This fact shows that in the environment of old city center, children are involved in community life and can participate in it.

As a result of mapping with children following can be stated: (a) mapping sessions with children is an appropriate and valuable source of knowledge about the territory; (b) children activities and way of communication is a reflection of special spatial

conditions that they experience; (c) children have strong connection with their yards and have feeling of belongingness; they have an intention to improve and adapt yard's space and they hire imaginative approach for this purpose; (d) children are able to obtain the experience of intergeneration and intercultural communication.

### **Research results**

Main results of the research can be formed in two groups: (a) general findings and (b) challenges of childhood in historically developed yards of Samara.

#### *General findings*

The research shows that the idea of Samara's yard as an ideal place for children or safe haven of childhood nowadays call into question. This is rather a very personal perception of the space by adults who used to grow up in this environment or a nostalgic position than a state of things. Majority of interviewees do not refer to this idealistic image and concentrate on numerous problems of the territory. According to the results of observation, only several yards from 21 can be characterized as a lively space of childhood.

From the morphological perspective, most yards have clear structure and boundaries. However, as it was shown before, the enclosed nature of a yard can only be seen as a precondition for emergence of high-quality environment for children. Presence of functions other than housing likely decrease the quality of the space for children dramatically which can be seen through the example of yards V5, F7, C2/L2, partly C6. It can be stated that multifunctionally of the space within a single yard can be seen as an obstacle for provision of child friendly environment. On contrary, monofunctional yards with gate or access control perform better results in this context (yards C3, C4, C5, V4).

During the research, some aspects of the environment were assessed as positive. Growing up within historically developed yards provide children with opportunity of communication with peers and community members. Yard's space can be characterized as an extension of home or 'common home' and serves as a buffering zone between home and street. Children stay under control of community which is less strict than parents control. In this term, growing up in the yard ensure certain level

of independency and freedom for children without sacrificing safety standards. However, additional studies to understand more completely the key tenets of interdependence between safety and freedom of children are required.

As interviewing shows, the enormous architectural potential of the territory in terms of development child friendly environment is seen by locals as a valuable only to a limited extent. The majority of tenants have very narrow vision of future child-related development due to the uncertainty about land rights, permanent social tension, broken authority promises, limited resources etc. In this regard, children rather present a marginalized group of citizens and their problems are solving by a leftover principle. However, grassroot initiatives, that aim to improve space quality, constitute evidence that subject of childhood become more relevant.

#### *Challenges of childhood in historically developed yards of Samara*

Most challenges relate to the bad quality of existing housing and communal services. This is a 'bitter legacy' of soviet time when territory was not maintained properly. In recent decades most of problems were exacerbate and new challenges emerged, such as ongoing gentrification, privatization, large scale automobilization and uncontrolled development. In this regard, topic of childhood and child friendliness of urban environment pale into insignificance. However, there are several problems that affect children directly.

First problem is presence of emergency buildings, ruins and barns that turn yard's space into high-threat environment. Solving this problem is a critical task. Bad state of housing stock in block 39 can cause physical injuries but also it increases fire risks. Some buildings have structural damage which appear in breaks on facades, inclined walls, falling objects etc. Another related problem is pipe breaks. Some interviewees report on annual breakdowns. It has several negative effects: suspension of water supply, ground settlement, barrier point during reparation works. After leaking removal, services and utilities workers usually leave the point of break without paving, sometimes for a period up to one year like in yard V1. This creates additional source of danger for children. Most of existing sanitary problems also

relate to the bad condition of communal services. The research shows that nowadays cars are 'pushing' children out of the yard. Spontaneous parking lots in yards F5 and F7 literally take all free space. Presence of loading zones in yards V5 and C2/L2 turn yard's area into driveway that is unsuitable for children's use. Some yards that contain only housing also lose the quality because of car-related issues like unorganized parking, abundance of cars and car washing.

Even though majority of tenants complain about lack of standard children infrastructure (swings, slides, sandboxes, benches etc.), this problem cannot be seen as a primary importance. To some extent, it has positive aspects such as high mobility, development of a child's creative abilities and personal aptitudes, creation of individualized playgrounds. As observation shows, provision of standardized infrastructure is not a sustainable solution that might increase the quality of the space significantly. In this regard, each yard should be examined individually and equipped with individual forms such as it was done in yards F3, C3, C6.

Perhaps one of crucial challenges of the block 39 is uncertainties about the land rights. There is little understanding how responsibilities are distributed through the territory. On the one hand, tenants are not allowed to install any objects on the unprivatized land or make any changes (at the same time, there are still no precedents of privatization of land within the yard by tenants association in block 39). On the other hand, city administration does not have resources to maintain yards' territory properly. Under these circumstances, problems of infrastructure, ruins, barns, basically all the problems that prevent provision of qualitative environment for children, remain unsolved for decades.

## Conclusion

Historical environment of Samara's center is rich and authentic. Around 60 blocks from 140 still have the original structure, however this number is in decline. Due to its morphological characteristics, this valuable environment support children who live here to obtain a unique urban experience.

The aim of present research was to examine the territory of block 39 and to investigate what are the main aspects of growing-up within the space

of historically developed yards in Samara city. As it was shown, a yard is not a safe haven of childhood anymore (if it was at some time). Yet the idea can be a reference point for the future development, not only in the city centre, but also citywide.

Numerous problems of the territory, that are indicated in the report, affect children. Next step is to find proper solutions how these problems can be possibly solved and how the territory of block 39 can be developed to make it more child friendly. Further research should be done in order to examine other blocks, yards, streets in the city centre and to assess conditions of growing up processes there. It might help to negotiate the stigmatized character of the 'old city' of Samara and be a valuable source of ideas and experience for further development.

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# The Lack of Child-Friendly Cities in America: An Exploration of Richmond, VA, USA

Sarah Pritchard

## Abstract

Richmond, the capital city of Virginia (VA) in the United States of America (USA), is a bustling metropolis center filled with multigenerational families, diversity, many anchor institutions, and a plethora of people. Yet, the city design is not representative of all of these groups; this issue begs for attention that planners typically neglect. Throughout this case study, there was a focus on the functionality of child-friendly cities and how they can be adequately implemented. It reviews the development of Richmond, VA, and its current policies. This case study aims to discuss and analyze why cities in America have failed to follow through with the child-friendly city initiative, as well as the comparison between how European cities have used this initiative to better living for their citizens and demonstrate how Richmond can implement some of these measures. It may be useful to city planners in the United States in similarly sized cities, to create cohesive spaces.

## Introduction

The city of Richmond is the capital city of Virginia (VA), and it encompasses the headquarters of many businesses and many cultural centers on the East Coast. It also houses a large central business district (CBD) with many large corporations' offices and headquarters. Richmond is a city that is continuously growing and developing to adapt to its people. The city has undergone many changes throughout the entirety of its history and is still in the process of being updated to match up with present times. Various populations have called Richmond home for generations- families with kids, couples, young adults, single people, multigenerational families, minority populations, older adults, and the homeless, among others. In fact, over 45% (in 2019 data) of the percentage of Richmonders' households were families consisting of a guardian(s) and children (Town Charts 2020). For a city that garners so much diversity and has to support so many people, they have not adequately taken into consideration those generations that will call Richmond their home for the foreseeable future. This creates many issues and forms a city that does not represent its citizens. Cities that do not properly represent their citizens have low population rates, high obesity rates due to the lack of walkability, and overall very unhappy residents; this makes the city fall into a sort of slump without engaged residents, creating an environment that no one wants to move towards. Issues such as these are the reasons that many countries are developing CFC initiatives and trying to eliminate the possibility of citizens moving out of their cities.

In Richmond, there is not an easy way to combat these issues. Public comment is one of the only ways that citizens can voice their concerns, these are allowed at forums involving new development plans and zoning disputes; as well as commentating through emails, letters, and walk-ins to the Office of Richmond Planning. Still, many community members

do not keep up with this, nor do they have the drive to do something unless it directly affects their livelihood. This problem creates quite a divide between the community and the planners as there is no direct form of communication between the two, leaving the city a little out of touch with the community and its demands. A large portion of the population is the kids and young adults who, unless they seek out the opportunities, do not influence planning policy at all. Leaving prevalent groups out of the process, promotes a significant problem as children and young adults are likely to be the people that live there for an extended portion of their lives; so not having an inclusive child planning process, the city is not able to become child-friendly. This particular case study aims to comprehend why Richmond and many other similar cities in America fail to keep up with their European counterparts in terms of CFCs.

Richmond is in the works of developing the Richmond 300 Plan, a part of the 30-year plan method commonly used in urban planning in America. This plan will officially be implemented in 2037 in time for the 300th anniversary of Richmond. City planners have worked especially hard to ensure that this process has been advertised to many populations of Richmond that would not typically hear about it. They have reached out to as many citizens as they have been able to via email, word of mouth, and ads all over the city. By doing this, they are able to target traditionally marginalized groups that typically do not get a say in the local government. These groups are people who lack representation and typically need government assistance, but do not really have a way of articulating their necessities. These actions represent a commitment to the citizens that Richmonders have never before seen at this level and it is the first step into creating a city that may represent all.

As American cities become increasingly more of a haven for younger generations, they need to include planning that reflects that, including incorporating child-friendly policies to ensure all cities are inclusive for everyone. This way, positive growth can be fostered. When this growth is fostered, more people will be inclined to flock to the cities to live and in turn the economy will improve along with the workforce creating more opportunities. When children are implemented into planning processes

there is a higher rate of happiness in the city, the economy becomes stimulated, and more people are likely to move in; which is a positive for city officials and for residents. Richmond studies show that population will continue to grow, meaning we need to accommodate for those in the future and work to steer away from conventional city planning as many groups such as the elderly/baby boomers will not be the majority of our city in seven to ten years. As these groups are phasing out of the city, the city is still yet to update for the influx of young people that will inhabit it within the next few years.

The Child-Friendly City initiative was implemented by UNICEF after the UN created the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. After this convention, the way that children were treated was changed dramatically and promoted the acceptance of children as humans rather than just objects with no rights (UN 2020). UNICEF defines a Child-Friendly City (CFC) as: “A city, town, community or any system of local governance committed to improving the lives of children within their jurisdiction by realizing their rights as articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

Under this initiative, there are many goals for the city and for its children including: providing social services, protecting them from all forms of exploitation, promoting healthy lifestyles, quality education, allowing them to influence decisions, participating in many aspects of social life, ensuring their community is environmentally sound, and that they possess a fair chance at life regardless of any stereotypes (UNICEF 2020). These goals not only provide a safe haven for children but also allow the community to become a better place for all of its citizens. It is extremely important to put these values into place and strive to meet them in every city built.

There are many approaches to a CFC, such as the essentialist approach, the biological approach, and the sociological perspective. The essentialist approach focuses on the taking of different research into account and is generally timeless; this allows the cities to be designed and barely needs updating as it does the bare minimum and holds up consistently. The biological approach considers children in an intermediate phase of growth (Eckardt 2020). It refers to them as ‘competent,’ which gave the idea that children can eventually design cities the way



that they need them to be created. The sociological perspective brought a different view to the forefront, which was that childhood was a social construct and varied throughout every culture. Hence, every specific area was responsible for cultivating space that fits in with their lifestyle (Eckardt 2020). With these ideas in mind, the construct of a CFC can be collectively built. This paper combines all of the approaches as they all provide relevant points. Children play a significant role in cities and affect lots of social interactions between all people, yet the cities do not always consider kids when planning. The UN Rights of a Child really emphasizes the importance that children play in a society and how they strengthen the way a city operates.

As childrens' minds develop they learn the layout of the city through 'processes of place appropriation' which is a form of spatial learning, when kids grow up in social and institutional settings they are more inclined to learn about the world around them and how everything is interconnected (Eckardt 2020). When children grow up in a city, they start to familiarize themselves with every aspect of their community that is essential to them, so they know how to get to the park, the grocery store, the school, and various others. They learn where these critical places are in relation to their homes, and as they grow older, they learn where these locations are concerning others. This development helps children to recognize why these places are so vital to them and helps build a relationship between the children and these respective places. It is not as widely practiced in America versus other parts of the world, as most cities lack walkability and transit-oriented development (TOD) that typically make it easier for children to be transported in a city, instead they rely on cars.

Participatory planning of all citizens is the main goal, including children. Participatory planning has many benefits and can improve the legitimacy of democracy; which can lead to empowerment of citizens through their decision-making, they know the area the best, it improves the quality of the area, and allows for the increased mutual understanding between citizens and planners (Kirkhaug 2016). This is why it is absolutely essential that children must be added to the process and methods of participatory planning. Not only does it have benefits for the

children, but also can improve the livelihood of their parents and make their lives easier.

There are several effective methods of studying children and their sense of their home communities. These methods are instrumental in collecting data, but typically, in America, they do not utilize these, including child-mapping, observations, canvassing, surveys, and personal interviews. Each of these methods are used in various different ways for one goal of understanding the population. Many other countries expand on these methods to gather as much accurate data as possible.

This study and the data that was collected can be utilized by planners and various other professionals to create an American city that can be deemed child-friendly. The data can also be used by Richmond City planners to demonstrate the need for children to be involved in the planning process (as well as various cities alike), as many aspects of the city would improve if children were to be included in some point of these planning processes. The study will expand knowledge and understanding of how moderately-sized cities in America fail to follow through with the child-friendly city policies as well as how they can change that narrative to improve cities for all citizens.

### **Theoretical challenges**

In this paper, there is a focus on cultivating a city for not only the adults that inhabit it, but also the children that will spend their developmental years learning about the world through these streets. The main discourse was built on the idea that kids think more creatively and for the greater good of all members of the city without barriers. Allowing children to participate creates connections to their city, helps them become more involved members of society, and ensures that the community is actively engaged for all generations to come (Mintzer & Suttie 2019). This discourse demonstrates the importance of kids in the planning process and is developed by one of the only cities in America that is officially deemed a CFC by UNICEF. The positioning of this case study could take various different routes, but ultimately two were directly identified and utilized. Children as subjects positioning centers around how childrens' thoughts are utilized to create more conducive city designs for various generations, not just their own (Eckardt 2020). The post-structuralist society for

children focuses on finding out how children are embedded (or should be embedded) into planning processes/considerations (Eckardt 2020).

#### *Research Questions*

- Why does Richmond struggle with making the city child-friendly?
- What can cities such as Richmond do to change this dynamic and ensure children feel comfortable in the space they are growing up?

*These research questions were crafted with the purpose of being able to identify the problem and come up with a valid solution. Through the course of this study, these questions' answers will be brought to the forefront.*

#### *Research Assumptions*

- Richmond does not have any inclusion of children in any planned or existing planning structures.
- Richmonders will perceive the city with low-walkability and not very child-friendly.
- Parts of Richmond will have more child-friendly areas that are typically in gentrified areas, the lesser gentrified areas will be deemed 'unsafe.'

These assumptions were reached based on observations of the entirety of Richmond and Richmonders throughout the past few years. The assumptions are not representative of the final results of the study, but are representative of the assumptions before the study was even conducted.

#### **Methods**

This case study went through an extensive analytic process to ensure that all aspects of Richmond's child-friendliness were observed and understood. At the beginning of this case study, the most recently updated (2020) Draft Richmond 300 Master Plan was reviewed and analyzed for a desktop study. Every quote involving a family atmosphere and any child-friendly policy that the city of Richmond may have in place was pulled out of the literature. Once this was finished, other pieces of the existing planning structures in Richmond were examined and assessed. This process allowed for an understanding of the city

planners' mindsets and the methodology behind why the city was planned the way that it was.

In order to understand the thought process of the city residents and how they interpret the city concerning its planning as well as its child-friendliness, a survey was conducted. The study included many pertinent questions to understand how residents have perceived the city entirely. This survey asked basic demographic questions to find out how long the participants had lived in Richmond, if they lived here as a child, their age, and what part of the metro area they live in now. Furthermore, more memory-based questions asked were in an attempt to gain more perceptions of Richmond. Some of these questions included: in a hypothetical world, would Richmond be a city they would raise their children in, rate the adult-friendliness and child-friendliness of the city, use descriptive words to describe the city, and many others. The survey was created via Google Forms and shared through Facebook on different pages in the Richmond community.

The process of finding the literature and studies to back up the information was slightly tricky as there are not many case studies about the child-friendliness of America, so most of the information discovered was focused on the European child-friendliness through UNICEF and how Richmond differs in comparison. This represents a realized approach which allows for all of the viewpoints to be showcased and analyzed properly, to better understand how the data can be interpreted.

#### **Literature review**

Literature regarding cities that are deemed child-friendly in America was quite challenging to find, as there are not many cities that can be considered this holistically, except for Boulder and Denver, Colorado. This being the case, the literature found highlights the benefits of the implementation of the CFC initiative as well as ways that many prominent countries have utilized it. The rationale behind finding these pieces was to understand how other studies approach the initiative and to discuss the discrepancies between case studies.

*Creating Child-Friendly Cities: The Case of Denver, USA (Kingston 2007)*

As one of the only cities in America that practices the

child-friendly initiative, Denver is a model for all of the other United States' cities. This article focuses on how Denver has used child-friendly planning to their advantage and how it has enhanced their city. Denver has created various committees to be the spokespeople of the initiative and have also adopted a 'Learning Landscape,' which has changed 46 neglected schoolyards into multi-use areas for the benefit of over 18,000 low-income students in the area, by giving them a safe space to play and develop. The city has also put a significant amount of money into creating safe routes through Denver's neighborhoods for children to get to school without the heavy reliance on buses, which contributes to their own health, safety, and the walkability of the city. They have also poured millions into the free and reduced lunch program for children that are less fortunate, which enables kids to get a balanced set of meals and improves their livelihood and strengthens their ability to learn. These programs have made an influential impact on Denver and its children; programs that can be easily implemented in other American cities to make a world of difference for children and their families. Denver's case study came to two very relevant conclusions; building partnerships are essential to the growth of a city and the fact that change takes place over time, not immediately.

*The Child-Friendly Cities Initiative in Italy (Corsi 2002)*

Many European cities use the CFC initiative and are rightly deemed CFC by UNICEF; also, most countries that are part of the EU have at least two cities that follow the initiative as well. This particular study focuses on how important participatory planning is in particular regions of Italy, but for a different reason than previously stated. In Italy, this type of planning is seen as a way of making children active citizens that understand the economics and aesthetics of the city that they want to create. The results of this case have fostered an environment where children are in control of improving their lives and their needs are properly met through conversation with planners as well as architects who respect them. Fano, Italy is an example of this, where workshops have been crafted for children to partake in and learn about the impact of what they do (or build) in the city. This

has tremendously built up mobility, increased green space, and increased monetary support from the Ministry of Education.

*Child-Friendly Cities: Good Governance in the Best Interests of the Child (Riggio 2002)*

This piece of literature was a little different than the previous two articles, as it did not focus on one city but rather a multitude of municipalities and the step-by-step process of cultivating a CFC (and how those worked in the municipalities). It was found that a few very important principles were utilized in all of the cities; these were a child-friendly budget specifically for children denoted parts of the city, the protection of urban children from policies that may not afford them human rights, and giving them 'the right to play in a crowded city,' which enabled more green spaces to be created as well as creativity to be born.

*Children's Views on Child-Friendly Environments in Different Geographical, Cultural and Social Neighborhoods (Nordström 2009)*

This study focuses on how children in different neighborhoods perceive their environments, and it compares its results to Finnish-Italian studies very similar to this one. It uses a framework from Horelli, as well as the results are reached through the child-mapping methodology, which allows children to describe their community by drawing it as well as creating a visual representation of the spatial planning they encounter. The Horelli framework is that of 'normative dimensions for environmental child-friendliness,' which were established in 2002. It establishes ten normative dimensions and gives each of them an abstract definition. Each of the dimensions was a unit of measurement of the child-friendliness for the Italian and Finnish cities. The conclusions of this paper indicated that it is essential that young children have a say in their cities and in order to do so, Horelli's framework must be utilized to open planning to a form that considers everyone's views.

*Summary of Literature*

Each of these reports was chosen to highlight the importance of child-friendly planning in cities and the ways in which this was achieved. They all came to a similar conclusion that emphasized the importance

of children and their viewpoints in the building of cities. They were fundamental in the analysis of Richmond and its existing principles as opposed to those the city should focus on moving towards.

## Discussion

### *Analysis of Existing Planning Structure*

The existing planning structure of the City of Richmond includes minimal language allowing any members of the community to make public comments about how city planning is happening; there are ways of doing so, but they are not advertised very well. They do, however, have over 130 civic associations that are affiliated with and that they receive input on projects to better the community; these are specifically supposed to consider the thoughts of the citizens of Richmond. The new 30-year-plan for Richmond, Richmond 300, which contains slightly more information about cultivating a city that has everyone in mind and getting public opinion on the planning structures, is aiming to replace negligence as best as possible. When sorting through the Richmond 300 Draft Master Plan (2020), there were a total of 10 quotes that reflected the planners' commitment to all ages in Richmond. These quotes were quite generalized and seemed not to be completely genuine. There were a plethora of quotes that did include goals for creating a family-oriented community. A set of goals and objectives were created to show what each of the main goals for the new plans and who it took care of, objective five is most closely aligned. It guarantees that 'every day Richmonders' will be involved in the process of planning and creating a Richmond for all. Goal 5: Planning Engagement cites, "foster a planning engagement culture that effectively and equitably builds people's capacity to organize to improve the city and their neighborhoods" (City of Richmond 2020, 99). In objective 5.1, the city aims to "increase public knowledge of planning processes," this shows a commitment to engaging the community that they serve as well as improving it for generations to come. Through objective 5.1, there is an emphasis on the involvement of all stakeholders and all who call Richmond home. First, planners wanted to ensure that the process is fully advertised to the community and that people may know how they can contribute to creating change. Secondly, they are planning to

develop an annual report that allows any member of Richmond (or interested parties) to see how the Richmond 300 Plan is being implemented as well as how well the strategies are panning out. Then, the Richmond Planning Board is planning on hosting events so all residents, especially the in-movers, can see the progress of the goals and objectives throughout the year as well as suggest other ways to promote success. Next, data collected from the Civic Association database will be marketed to residents and staff of the city, so that it can be analyzed appropriately. Following this step, the board will create an extensive list in which these civic associations can be duly noted, and new associations can register; then, the Richmond Guide to Neighborhood Associations can be updated appropriately. Finally, by combining all of these processes, a new set of engagement methods will have been compiled so that "traditionally underrepresented groups" can be heard rather than those who are typically the ones to speak out. Goal five incorporates all of these objectives so that all of the groups that make up the city of Richmond can have their voices heard and make a difference in their community. While this promotes a significant step towards improving the planning process, it does not explicitly include groups like children that would need to be integrated into the process in different ways. This represents a complete lack of thought for all communities of the city on the planners' behalf.

### *Survey*

Once the survey concluded, the results were analyzed and thoroughly sorted. The study was advertised to various people on the Facebook platform, in and around the Richmond Metro Area; in the end, 26 respondents were identified and utilized. Each respondent was asked a series of questions to determine their life status and how they felt about the city of Richmond. They were specifically designed for Richmonders to showcase how they felt about their city. The questions asked were as follows (each item with an asterisk denotes a required question):

- Did you grow up in/around the Richmond Metro Area (while under the age of 18)?\*

- If you answered yes, please specify where (which county/city)?
- What is your age group (0-15, 16-30, 31-45, 46-60, 61+)?\*
- What is a distinct memory from your childhood in the city?
- Did you ever visit a park (playground, state park, or recreational area) in the City of Richmond as a child?
- If you answered yes to the above question, please provide some feedback as to how well you thought this area was executed or not. Please also provide where specifically.
- Would you consider Richmond a walkable city?\*
- In a hypothetical world, is Richmond a city that you would raise your child in?\*
- How adult-friendly would you consider the City of Richmond (scale of 1-5)?\*
- How child-friendly would you consider the City of Richmond (scale of 1-5)?\*
- Which are words you would use to describe Richmond? If you do not agree with any of these, that is perfectly okay (clean, versatile, innovative, safe, walkable, a city of the people, bustling, touristy, polluted, quaint, none, other)!\*
- Any last comments about how you perceive Richmond and how you felt there as a child.

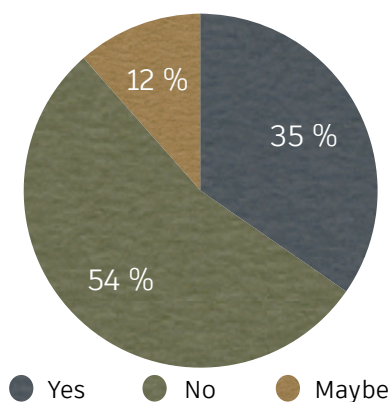


Figure 1: Final results of respondents wanting to raise their children in Richmond

Over 70% of the study respondents disclosed that they had resided in Richmond as a child/teenager, which means nearly 30% of the respondents had lived there after their developmental years and had seen the city through slightly different eyes. It is, however, important to include that these respondents did not all specifically live in the City of Richmond, but also the surrounding metro areas and neighboring counties. 65% of the respondents were in the 16-30 age range with the next highest age group being 31-45 with about 20%. This is extremely important to the data set as it shows that most of the respondents were in the younger age brackets, so they have seen the more “modern Richmond” as opposed to the “older Richmond” that older age brackets may have seen. These are small pieces of data, but holistically they can really change the results and must be considered while reading the data.

Reviewing the rest of the data presents many interesting factors and a world of new considerations for Richmond planners to ponder upon. Hopefully, this case study will shed light on the ways in which Richmond planners can properly implement similar data and create cities for the community.

When asked what the survey respondents’ most distinct memory of childhood in the city was, over 80% of the responses were in spaces that are heavily advertised and in gentrified parts of the city. Many of the other remarks made were about how people perceived the city as a ‘scary’ and ‘dangerous’ place. These results are quite telling of how Richmonders see the city and how unsafe they feel it is. If people perceive that the city as a dangerous place to be, what will it mean when locating their families to the city? The results of this particular question provided insight into how Richmonders think and how they will base their familial decisions.

These results played a part into the following question, where it was asked if the respondents (hypothetically) would raise their children in Richmond. In which over half of the results were a no; this is quite symbolic of how Richmonders perceive the city and demonstrates that Richmond has a long way to go before residents will willingly favor raising their children there. Quick ways of remedying this may include building a park on an abandoned lot, creating safer pedestrian paths, and promoting Jane Jacobs’ ‘eyes on the street’ phenomena. Figure 1

represents these results.

Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate perhaps the most important results. Both graphs are representative of how low confidence the respondents have in the child-friendliness of Richmond. This data alone should display the need to create innovative spaces for children in the city. It is quite telling that the majority of respondents ranked adult-friendly spaces much higher than those of the child-friendly spaces. With the results in the child-friendly having at least one vote in every category, implies that certain areas of the city, such as the Fan, that garners more money that can be spent on parks and fixing up streets. With the increased allotment of money, children may be able to included in the planning literature, while planners may be able to use this to create a city that accommodates for the needs of the citizens and those that may locate to the city, including the children.

The rest of the data that was collected gave very similar results, that brought to the forefront the issues that Richmond was experiencing and how each of them could be combated by child-friendliness. Multiple respondents stated at the end of the that they would favor Richmond more if it had more sidewalks, safer areas to convene, more convenient ways to get around the city, and a focus on not being as business-oriented. These results shed a light on the way that city planners are currently designing Richmond and call for an update of the system to reform the city for the better.

### Conclusion

It has become very evident at the end of this study that Richmond has an abundance of work to do before it can be deemed a CFC or even an inclusive city, despite many efforts to solve this issue. The results brought forth problems that need innovative solutions in order to bring new populations to Richmond and retain those living here. The conclusive results emphasized a desperate need for child-friendly spaces in Richmond and how residents recognize how prevalent this is of an issue. Perhaps if these recommendations and results were to be taken into consideration, Richmond would be a safer place for all that inhabit it.

Through the process of conducting this research, there were limitations that presented themselves. Access to information and the ability to make

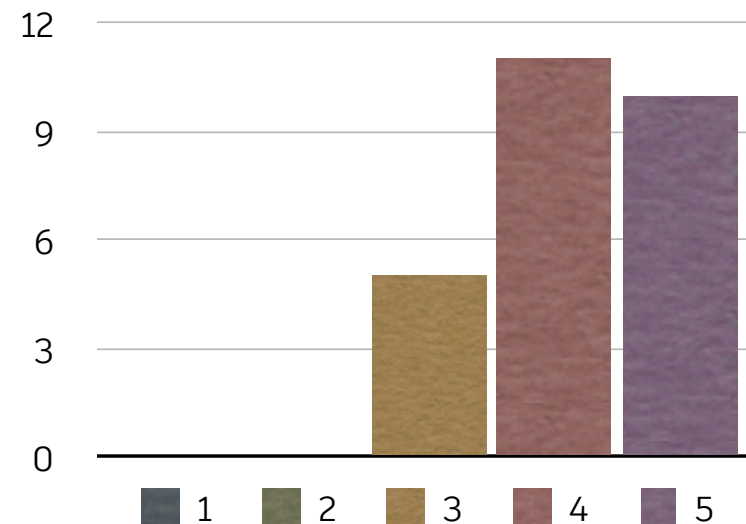


Figure 2. Final results of how adult-friendly respondents ranked Richmond on a one-five scale

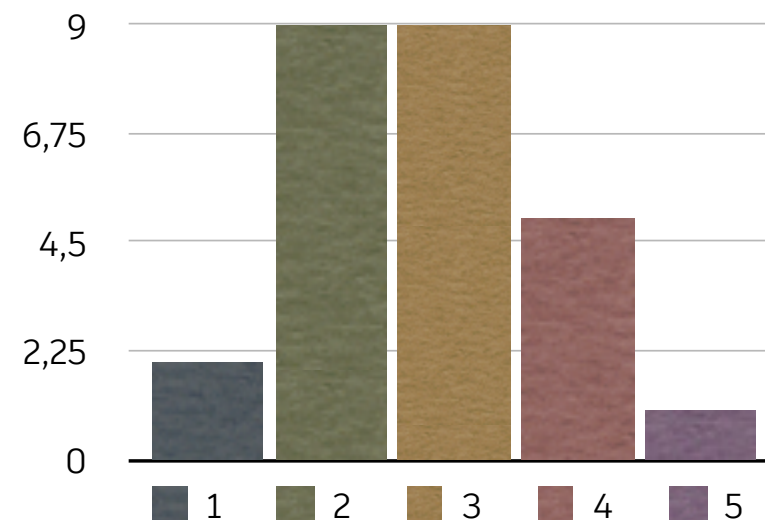


Figure 3. Final results of how child-friendly, respondents ranked Richmond on a one-five scale

observations in person was severely hindered by the COVID-19 crisis. Before this research should be holistically considered, a personal study should be conducted without these limitations, if possible.

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