Children and their Environments

Learning, Using and Designing Spaces

Christopher Spencer and Mark Blades
University of Sheffield
Children and city design: proactive process and the ‘renewal’ of childhood

Mark Francis and Ray Lorenzo

I know we’ve come a long way. We’re changing day to day. But tell me
... where do the children play? – Yusuf Islam
(formerly Cat Stevens)

How can designers and planners better engage children and youth and include their ideas in urban design? This chapter focuses on the culture of childhood today and the limits it places on meaningful children’s participation in design and planning. We examine some of the ideas children themselves have about city form and suggest a more proactive process for city design. It is our hope that through more meaningful participation, critical aspects of childhood can be renewed, including children’s access and reshaping of the built environment (Gaster, 1991; Perez and Hart, 1980).

We have previously developed a historical and critical review of children’s participation in city planning and design over the last forty years (Francis and Lorenzo, 2002). We suggested that participatory efforts with children can be viewed in at least seven distinct approaches or ‘realms’ – advocacy, romantic, needs, learning, rights, institutionalization, and proactive (see Table 13.1). The proactive realm is seen as the most integrative and effective way to involve children and youth in design and planning. At the same time, this approach can also help create places that better satisfy the needs of all citizens including children. It can, we believe, activate a process of childhood renewal rendering local environments, and entire cities, accessible, comprehensible and friendly to children of all ages.

Changing childhood in cities

There is evidence that childhood has changed from one that is child-centered to one that is over-controlled and over-structured by adults (Postman, 1994; see Rissotto and Giuliani, this volume). This change has led to children spending less time outdoors including on streets, in
Table 13.1. The seven realms of children’s participation in city design and planning (Source: Francis and Lorenzo, 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Romantic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>‘Children as planners’, ‘Children as futurists’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Planning ‘by’ children. Children define and make their own</td>
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<td></td>
<td>future, often without adult involvement. Much of the ‘rights’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>movement grew out of this approach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Child-defined cities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Schools, communities, architects and planners, futurists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key participants</td>
<td>Individuals: Mayer Spivak, Nanine Clay, Simon Nicholson, Ray</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lorenzo.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Organizations: World’s Futures Society, World Wildlife Fund,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Childhood City.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research advances</td>
<td>Contributed important concepts and case studies.</td>
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<td>Design advances</td>
<td>Provided useful ideas about what cities would be like if</td>
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<td></td>
<td>planned entirely by children. Developed innovative</td>
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<td></td>
<td>methods and proposed children’s participation as a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>global issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>Relied on children to envision and make their own communities,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>future environments, etc. Did not typically involve adults in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Still practiced by those seeking more child-generated ideas of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the future. Visioning has become the standard first step in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>official participatory process such as Agenda 21.</td>
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<td>2. Advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>‘Planners for children’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Planning ‘for’ children with needs advocated by adult planners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Represent the interests of children by advocating their needs as</td>
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<td></td>
<td>adult professionals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Citizen group; public planning bodies making decisions and plans</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that effect children’s lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key participants</td>
<td>Individuals: Paul Hogan, Jeff Bishop, Karl Linn, Randy Hester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizations: Planners Network, Association of Community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design Centers, Congress for New Urbanism, some private</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and public firms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research advances</td>
<td>Developed politically sophisticated methods and theories of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>participation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Largely replaced by other realms</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Needs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>‘Social science for children’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Research-based approach that addresses children’s needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Define the spatial needs of children and incorporate them into</td>
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<td></td>
<td>design.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Largely academic, but has expanded to include design and policy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>makers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Individuals: Kevin Lynch, Roger Hart, Clare Cooper Marcus,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Florence Ladd, Robin Moore, Joost van Andel, Patsy Owens,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louise Chawla, Gary Moore.</td>
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### 4. Learning

**Approach**
- Participation through environmental education and learning.

**Theory**
- Learning outcomes of participation is as important as physical changes; architects teach children about architecture.

**Objectives**
- Teachers; environmental educators

**Research advances**
- Has contributed important methods
- Increased use of natural environment and vegetation in outdoor places for children.

**Limitations**
- Designers and decision makers do not always utilize research knowledge; children are frequently not directly involved in social science research.

**Status**
- A specialized but active part of child participation projects.

### 5. Rights

**Approach**
- 'Children as citizens'.

**Theory**
- Children have rights that need to be protected.

**Objectives**
- Mandate children's participation in planning and city decision making.

**Audience**
- City officials; international organizations.
- Roger Hart, David Satterthwaite, Sheri Bartlett, Robin Moore

**Participants**
- Organizations: IPA; UNICEF; Childwatch International; Save the Children.

**Research advances**
- Has developed useful new methods.

**Design advances**
- Has created child developed plans for neighbourhoods and cities.

**Limitations**
- Tends to focus more on children's rights and less on their environmental needs.

**Status**
- Popular in many countries due to United Nations mandate and support from international aid organizations.

### 6. Institutionalization

**Approach**
- 'Children as adults'.

**Theory**
- Planning 'by' children but within institutional boundaries set by adults, authorities, and clients.

**Objectives**
- Mandated/required child participation.

**Audience**
- Typically official city plans and programs.

**Participants**
- Individuals: city officials; child advocates

**Research advances**
- Useful methods.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 13.1. (cont.)</strong></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design advances</strong></td>
<td>Numerous case studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limitations</strong></td>
<td>Tends to create limited results or results counter to what children really want.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
<td>Becoming more of the standard way of child participation today.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7. Proactive Approach</strong></td>
<td>‘Participation with vision’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theory</strong></td>
<td>Planning ‘with’ children. Combines research, participation and action to engage children and adults in planning and design. Children are active participants in process but designers/planners play an important role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objectives</strong></td>
<td>Develop participatory plans and designs with children that incorporate their ideas and needs. Plans should be focused on strong vision of both empowering children and making substantive changes to the city environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience</strong></td>
<td>Children; community organizations; design professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>Individuals: Randy Hester, Marcia McNally, Laura Lawson Organizations: Japan/Taiwan Group; Community design centres, some private and public firms, non-profit organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design advances</strong></td>
<td>Contributing useful theory and methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limitations</strong></td>
<td>Not always possible in every project; requires designers/planners with special training and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
<td>Becoming a more common form of participation.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

parks and natural areas in favour of indoor, institutionalized and virtual environments. The loss of childhood is especially pronounced in cities today. It also threatens the ability of design and planning to effectively improve the lives of children and youth.

The last four decades of childhood have seen both negative and positive change. Most alarming is that in ‘developed’ cities, children are increasingly disappearing from the urban scene. They are not using public space and when they are, it is under the watchful eye of adults, caretakers and authorities. While there are good reasons for this, such as concerns over safety and security, the cost to both child and urban life is significant (Blakey, 1994). As researchers have pointed out, these cultural, economic and technological factors have contributed to the denial of the rights and needs of children to inhabit, freely, and enjoy our cities (Alexander, 1993; Hart, 1997).

Goodman had already predicted in 1962 several of the ‘inevitably modern conditions’ which would, in successive years, ‘render our cities unmanageable’ and unliveable with respect to children. These include traffic, the distancing of the countryside and distinct natural places; the weakening of neighbourhood identity and social networks; the loss of accessible, unstructured play spaces; hidden technology, labour mobility
and increasingly stressful family time schedules (Ulrich \textit{et al.}, 1991; Taylor, 2001). Cultural changes since then include demographic patterns and the reduction of family size, parental fears, and real dangers regarding urban safety, the institutionalization of child care and recreational opportunities, the concentration of commercial distribution centres, consumer behaviour (of children and others) and the extraordinary evolution of communication technology. In addition, there has been a net diminution of the recognition by parents and adults of the importance of neighbourhoods and informal city places for growing up, learning, socializing, and acquiring 'culture' (Lynch and Carr, 1968; Lynch, 1978).

Many children today are captive in their homes and often alone. They are institutionalized, over programmed, information stuffed, TV dependent, 'zoned in' and age segregated. While they may be intellectually advanced, too many lack direct experience with the built and natural environment (Lorenzo, 1992; Postman, 1994). Children have largely lost the capacity, desire or permission to move autonomously in the urban milieu. They have become increasingly dependent on adults ('mommy cab drivers' and 'daddy coaches') and no longer possess the 'street smarts' which previous generations of children utilized to move around and grow up in cities.

Children, unable to experience autonomous contact with their peers, with their elders, with nature, with their neighbourhood and city, are too often troubled children. As a result, they too often grow into troubled adults. Roger Hart notes that this situation is not limited to the cities of the so-called 'developed world' (Bartlett \textit{et al.}, 1999).

Around the world urban children and adolescents speak of their fears and of their desire to live in peace and safety among their neighbors. For many children this is a more pressing concern than even the need for food or health care. It is a concern, too, for those who are committed to raising strong and responsible citizens. Children who grow up in environments that provoke fear and limit social interaction are handicapped by this distortion of community life, and are unlikely to develop the understanding or skills that are fundamental to life as responsible and involved adults and citizens.

At the same time, there have been important positive advances in ways to design cities for children (Lynch, 1981). This has included an increased understanding of children's needs in public space (Stine, 1997; Altman and Zube, 1989) and the increased use of participatory process that engage them in design and planning (Driskell, 2001; Hart, 1992, 1997; Sutton and Kemp, this volume). Colin Ward, for example, has examined, in both historic and cultural terms, the place of childhood in both urban (1978) and rural environments (1988). Our view is that good
design and planning alone, even with direct participation of children and youth, is not enough to change the culture of childhood today. Adult attitudes need to be transformed as well to the point where children's access to and experience of cities is once again valued. This is where the proactive approach to city design is useful.

**Urban design and the loss of childhood**

City design is partially responsible for the decline of childhood. By the 1960s most Western cities had already been 'planned around children' and included playgrounds, and schools, and specialized places (Cranz, 1982). Before then, children were relatively free to move outside this framework. They selectively used places planned for them but also sought out and used other places such as streets and found spaces (Jacobs, 1993). Traffic was a problem, but in many United States cities children continued to move about independently and many were able to play on the street. They met together in mixed age groups and met freely on residential streets, on street corners and in vacant lots. They possessed a relatively wide range of action and a considerable knowledge of their neighbourhoods. This is not usually the case today. Children have
lost a street sense and city knowledge. A decline of natural areas and
habitat has created a changing relationship of children and nature
(Chawla, 1995; Kahn and Kellert, 2002). Even everyday activities such
as walking to school have been replaced by car pools and buses.

The changing nature of children, participation, and
city design

In response to largely a top down or technocratic approach to urban
planning and design, there has been a gradual emergence of more of an
innovative approach towards the planning, design and management of
cities. Participatory city planning and design, from the mid 1960s,
introduced a new actor into urban decision-making processes, the user.
Before then, children were largely ignored during the processes of urban
development. City planning was no longer viewed as an exclusively
political or technical process, but also a socio-cultural process. The
processes of planning and design were expanded to include ongoing
community conversations between individuals, groups, interests, plann-
ers and decision makers concerning alternative visions and projects for
urban spaces and city life.

Figure 13.2. Gardening is one way for children to exert control over
their local environment (Photo: Francis).
Figure 13.3. Children developing park design ideas in a workshop (Photo: Lorenzo).
Children and city design

Early on, children and youth were recognized as one of those social groups most harmed by the worsening state of our cities and, as such, researchers began to systematically study and document their essential, and often overlooked, needs in urban places. Contemporarily, architects, planners, educators and researchers, mainly in England and the USA, developed various arguments underlining the value of involving children and youth in the very processes aimed at improving the urban environment.

What began largely as an advocacy process on the part of adults to expose the needs and defend the rights of children in design and planning gradually became more of an accepted and mainstream approach to planning. Children's participation, like participation in design and planning in general, has been evolutionary, moving through several distinct stages from tokenism to more effective participation to institutionalization (Hart, 1992; Francis, 1999). Advances regarding the theory and practice of user participation in general have aided this evolution (Davidoff, 1965; Arnstein, 1969). Significant progress has been made on techniques that effectively involve children in design and planning (Moore et al., 1987; Lepore and Lorenzo, 1990, 1993). Additionally, better practices aided by empirical research and theoretical advances have rendered more convincing arguments for the value of children's participation (Chawla, 2001; Hart, 1997; Moore, 1990).

In Europe, this transformation was aided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ratified in 1989. The Convention confirmed the right of all children to a safe and healthy immediate living environment to play, socialize, and express themselves. According to the Convention, children possess the right to receive information, express their views and be listened to regarding all matters that concern their well-being. In the many nations that successively ratified the CRC, children advocates and sensitive political leaders astutely utilized this institutional basis for the passage of innovative, far reaching national and local legislation which widely promoted Child Friendly Cities (CFC) and the participation of children in their making. As a result, funding and programs such as Agenda 21 in Europe, now support participation in design and planning and are more common in all Western nations.

What do children consider a 'child-friendly city'?

While an impressive literature exists on the needs of children in cities, little has been written on the overall characteristics of a city that can be truly considered child friendly. One noteworthy attempt at defining the
Figure 13.4. Children developing their ideas at the Bologna Children's Congress (photo: Lorenzo).
dimensions of child-friendly cities is the book *Cities for Children* (Bartlett *et al.*, 1999). This grew out of a participatory effort sponsored by UNICEF and UNEP involving over eighty international experts from various fields in a three-day workshop in preparation for the UN Habitat II Conference in 1996. The authors intercross all aspects of childhood experience with the complex nature of urban governance and policy making. They stress the importance of process: collaboration, citizen and children participation, learning from the documentation and exchange of best practice. It has, however, two shortcomings which appear endemic and natural to most UNICEF sponsored efforts: the problems and solutions of children in ‘developed countries’ are underrepresented, as are considerations concerning the physical design of CFCs.

Few of the efforts to define ‘child-friendly cities’ have begun with the views of children and youth themselves, but children gathered in Bologna, Italy undertook one such effort in April 1994. Over 300 children from almost 100 elementary and middle schools from all over Italy met for three days with adult facilitators, educators, planners and administrators to discuss and identify problems and ‘propose solutions’ to their urban condition. All of the children were involved already in local
participatory design projects promoted by the WWF Italy. This effort was to eventually involve over 1000 schools and recreational groups from 1992–96.

The resulting document *The Children's Manifesto: How to Win Back our Cities* suggests some direction for future city design (see Table 13.2). Kids, when asked, can be quite inventive and creative about city design. Ideas proposed included increasing the number of gathering places in neighbourhoods and town centres. Providing more natural areas and elements was also a common theme. Traffic and parking were seen as barriers to their use of the outdoors and many creative ideas were provided to better manage traffic in cities. Children also wanted more say over how and where they use their free time.

**Qualities of city design for children**

Given the effort by both experts and children to define good cities, we now know some of the essential qualities that are critical for children and youth in city design (Owen, 1988). From our own experiences in Italy, Norway and the United States in collaborative design efforts with children, we have attempted to extrapolate the most repeatedly indicated ‘characteristics’ of better city places.

*Accessibility*

For children, especially the very young, traffic is the principal impediment to their use of city spaces. The places they design are ideally close to home (streets, piazzas small green spaces) or when further away, they need to be better connected to home and school by pedestrian or cycle paths. Traffic in residential streets can be moderated based on the model of the Dutch ‘woonerf’. ‘Woonerf’ (Street for living) is a Dutch term for a common space created to be shared by pedestrians, bicyclists and low-speed motor vehicles. They are typically narrow streets without kerbs and sidewalks, and vehicles are slowed by placing trees, planters, parking areas, and other obstacles in the street. Motorists become the intruders and must travel at very low speeds below 16 Km/h (10 mph). This makes a street available for public use that is essentially only intended for local residents. A woonerf identification sign is placed at each street entrance. Parents, teachers and other adults should be involved in the transformation processes as children recognize that the problem is not only of a physical design nature, but is principally cultural involving parental and adult fears.
Children and city design

Table 13.2. Children's manifesto 'How to Win Back Our Cities' (Source: World Wildlife Fund, 1994)

We, the children gathered at the Children's Congress in Bologna, declare our intention to 'win back our cities. We ask the adults and those who can decide to help us and to help those who, like us, want to change the current state of things.

We need:
- Gathering places where we can meet friends;
- To be able to interact with nature, even in cities. Which means: playing, climbing, building huts, listening, looking and understanding;
- To roam freely throughout the city without serious risk;
- To acquire the trust of others;
- To experiment with a series of different experiences: sleeping out of doors; strolling together, 'kites between the houses'; 'bridges between the windows', etc.
- To have the possibility to decide how we spend our free time; which means being trusted by adults.
- Remember that in the city, amongst others, there are children and youth, the elderly, physically challenged persons, animals, etc.

In our cities we want:
- To have at our disposition spaces entrusted by the city administrators directly to us children;
- Spaces where we can play in the immediate vicinity of our houses;
- Streets where cars must go slowly;
- To do all that is possible so that open spaces can be managed by those community members who have more free time (e.g.: the elderly);
- To have more occasions to meet new people, more neighborhood and street fairs;
- To have spaces which are not furnished with the same old playing structures, but which we can modify and change;
- To have more available sports facilities;
- To have children's theaters;
- If meeting places are lacking, children remain isolated and do not have the possibility to grow;
- To communicate with the 'others' (the sick, kids in difficult situations, foreigners, etc.);
- Frequent interchanges with groups from different realities. A meeting place, different that the usual hangout, not with the title 'The Children's Piazza' but with something special like water - a safe exciting place to play;
- To be able to be alone;
- To be able to be in the company of others.

In our cities we want green spaces:
- With lots of natural elements;
- With many trees, bushes and with high grass to hide in;
- With lots of fruit trees, from which we can pick fruit;
- Without fixed, unchangeable play structures;
- With the possibility to find branches, twigs, leaves, mud and stone to build huts and hiding places;
- With large lawns to role on and dive into;
- Easily reached by public transport;
- Used frequently by lots of people;
- Safe and closed to traffic;
Table 13.2. (cont.)

- With lots of water at our disposal to play with;
- With paths with lots of slopes to ride our bikes on;
- Available in every neighborhood.

In our schools we want:
- To use courtyards to play in and to meet our friends;
- To plant gardens;
- School buildings that are easy to get to;
- A beautiful, colorful school in the middle of a garden.

To save us from the suffocating traffic, we want:
- To be able to move about safely in the city, at all hours;
- Streets with bike lanes;
- Eliminate the autos which park on the sidewalks;
- Quiet zones which are closed to traffic;
- To have more public transport;
- Places to leave our bicycles;
- Paths without steps with ramps for bicycles and wheelchairs;
- Public transport which is accessible for everyone. Smaller buses;
- Green barriers (hedges, etc.) which impede parking on the sidewalk and paths;
- Street signs that are understandable and friendly.

To decide our future, we want:
- Children’s councils which make decisions;
- Regularly scheduled meetings with administrators;
- To be informed;
- To be listened to.

In conclusion, it’s clear that we want to be able to contribute to decisions that affect us!!!!

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Mixed use and mixed users

Children appear to be against strictly mono-functional zoning. They do not desire special places for children only but want to be able to meet and interact with other age groups and other cultures. They want to be able to observe and ‘try’ functions and activities that are not limited to an adult conception of ‘play’. Recreation can and should be mixed with work, commerce and culture. Their ideas fit well with current thinking about the desirability of mixed use and zoning being advanced by new urbanist architects and planners (Calthorpe, 1993).

Sociability

Children want to be able to meet with other children and youth of various ages autonomously. For younger ones, places they imagine and design are primarily open spaces. Teenagers tend to request, in addition, closed places such as music and art centres, libraries, and community
Children and city design

centres. Children and youth want to be involved in the management of some places.

Small, feasible, flexible

Children do not prefer large investments to create places they like. They often favour small scale construction that utilizes recycled and low cost materials and includes natural or 'green' elements. They expect a role in the construction and management of the site and are highly favourable to places that are flexible in form, materials and uses.

Natural, environmentally healthy, growing and in movement

'Green' places are very often requested. They are 'softer', change through time and seasons and require care. Children request the presence of 'other living creatures' and know that caring for a place and considering carefully its design can represent opportunities for active, effective environmental education. They recognize this not only for themselves but also for other members of their communities. Access to water, preferably in a natural form and in movement, is a prime request in all projects (Moore and Wong, 1997).

Urban and place identity

Alongside the desire for nature and country, there is an equally strong call for urban places in children's projects. Density allows for more opportunities for encounters and more different faces and activities. Complexity in scale, form and function in children's projects evokes the idea of the piazza or market place, which in the Italian context are 'off limits' to children. Children know that places need to be identifiable. Signs and signals can be designed into the physical plan. Colours, materials, plantings, etc. are often their 'design solutions'.

Places and opportunities for participation

Most projects designed by children require continuing and permanent participation. They are flexible and require ongoing care and involvement by children and other users. An eleven-year-old at the end of a design project in Perugia City General Plan sums it all up:

... the most important part of all the work was that I finally felt useful and proud of what I (we) had done. It's beautiful that 'big people' asked my collaboration in designing the future of our neighbourhood. I was able, with my classmates, to
express my opinions, my doubts, and my problems. I really felt 'big' (i.e. adult) and 'bravo'... like an apprentice architect. I don't know if our 'ship' will 'arrive in the port' but I won't lose hope and I'm sure that at least a few of the 'thousands' of proposals we (and others) developed will be built. At least we can say that we've contributed to the future of our neighbourhhood.

Proactive process

Despite the great advances made in children's participation and child-friendly cities, contemporary cities remain, in most cases and for the most part, unfit for children. As children's lives have become more institutionalized so has children's participation. It requires planners and parents to rethink and modify past approaches to make children stronger advocates for their needs in planning. A new approach is required, one that is proactive and involves the ideas of children, adults and professional designers (Hester, 1999; Francis, 1999; Sutton and Kemp, this volume).

Proactive process is a fundamentally different approach to children's participation. It relies primarily on multiple points of view and multiple participants. It is typically an inclusive process that involves children, adults, planners, designers and decision makers. The process also depends on active listening and learning on the part of all participants. Differences and conflicts between children and adult ideas are made clear and directly negotiated. It also involves concepts of equity, justice and sustainability to be addressed as part of the design process. Proactive process relies on a variety of social science methods such as environmental autobiography as a way for adults to rediscover their own childhood experiences and share them with their children. It also can include the use of interactive and digital media and the Internet as a tool in the design process. (See Table 13.3).

Proactive process assumes that the participation of children working together with other social and age groups will, eventually, contribute to the creation of liveable, ecologically sustainable, child-and adult-friendly cities. This requires a process where the acquisition and exchange of values, knowledge, and skills is critical. It is a form of design as negotiation where children work with adult designers and planners to develop program and design ideas. We have found in our work that despite the limits placed on their development by adults today, children still possess a strong curiosity to explore and learn, and when asked, can be the catalysts to transform city design.

Roger Hart (1997) has argued for such shared decision-making with adults:
Table 13.3. Dimensions of proactive process with children

- Is an inclusive process that involves children, adults, planners, designers, and decision makers.
- Involves learning on the part of children and adults.
- Involves active listening by adults and designers.
- Includes the ideas of professional designers and planners.
- Involves negotiation between children and adults.
- Is not romantic about wanting to return to an earlier and more primitive form of childhood.
- Addresses concerns of safety and security by getting children outdoors.
- Uses new and interactive media as a tool in the design process.

Figure 13.6. Proactive processes require children to work actively with adults as when presenting their ideas to the City Council (photo: Lorenzo).

I do not want children as a separate society. We are trying to prepare children to be participating members of society. There is a naïve wing to the children's rights movement that talks about children's power, and the child's world as separate. This is nonsense. The movement should be about children's rights to have a voice with adults. So often in newspapers one sees pictures of children carrying out some project in the community with a headline like 'New Park Built By Children' and the adults pretend that they had nothing to do with it. It is, of course, often patently obvious that it was an adult-controlled project, thereby making a mockery out of the idea of children's participation. We need to make
Renewing childhood: a call for design and research

One way to move toward a new culture of city design is to adopt a new research and design agenda, one focused on the true ideas and needs of children today. Urban designers need to experiment with creating new forms of spaces in cities for children beyond just providing traditional elements such as playgrounds and schools. Future urban design must make more of an effort to incorporate children’s rights into plans and policies (Bartlett, 1999). The current movement to create healthy cities by promoting higher densities and urban forms that support biking and walking is an encouraging development in this regard (Bedard, 2000). Proactive process is one of many paths needed to restore childhood and make cities better places for all people.

Notes

1. Our purpose here is not to review fully the reasons and effects of the changing culture of childhood. The literature on ‘the loss of childhood’ is extensive and examined elsewhere. See, for example, Bartlett et al., 1999; Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Postman, 1994.

2. This congress, which was organized in 1994 by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and sponsored by the City of Bologna, saw the participation of over 300 children of elementary and intermediate school age. The children were representatives of approximately 100 schools from all over Italy involved in WWF’s national campaign – ‘Let’s Win Back Our Cities’. Parallel to the children’s workshops, numerous teachers, planners, and city administrators took part in seminars and working groups with over 400 schools involved.

3. The children are criticizing here a recent practice in some Italian municipalities to dedicate a piazza to ‘children’ – almost like a ‘monument to the war dead’ – empty spaces which are supposed to assuage the city’s conscience regarding children.

References


Children and the design process


Children and city design


