



## Workshop B

# Listen to the Kids in Participatory Urban Planning

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### Background

Urban development differs in societies around the world, but the general trend today is for rapid urbanisation and dense new building, often reducing the outdoor space children can use. In addition, urbanisation increases traffic with consequences not only for children's mobility but also for their health. Air quality is affected by traffic in several ways, resulting in disabilities that will remain with them into adulthood. Dense cities with fast growing populations also tend to increase anonymity. Parents do not want their children to go outside alone due to fear of strangers. Parents tend to accompany their children to school, activities, and friends' homes or drive them by car. This leads to more traffic as well as to fewer opportunities for children to explore and experience their environment by themselves.

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children have the right to have their voices heard in all matters in society that affect them. Since its adoption in 1989, studies have shown that children's voices can be understood using methods designed specifically for adult-child communication. Allowing children and young people to participate in decisions that affect their lives is a matter of respecting them as individuals in their own right, a position emphasised by the CRC. Children and young people can, and generally want to, share

their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives on issues that concern them. Adults need this knowledge to plan child-friendly, sustainable environments. Children and youth can help adults see new solutions or possibilities from a holistic community perspective. As the living conditions for many children and youth significantly differ from the conditions that their parents and other adults had themselves during childhood, we cannot rely on adults' recollections of their childhood experiences.

There is a lot of knowledge and experience about different methods for involving children and youth in urban planning<sup>1,2</sup>. One recent example is the project *Growing Up Boulder* that has been running for more than ten years and builds on experience from a large number of projects around the world. In the book *Placemaking with children and Youth*<sup>3</sup>, methods and tools for children's participation in different contexts are shown and explained. Mara Mintzer, Director of *Growing Up Boulder*, gave a brief introduction to the workshop based on her experiences with the project and also participated in one of the workshop groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Chawla, L., 2002

<sup>2</sup> Chawla, L. et al., 2005

<sup>3</sup> Derr V. et al., 2018



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The Uppsala Dansakademi performed an original dance based on the theme of childhood in today's society.

### Aim

Knowledge of methods for children's involvement is just one part of planning a participatory project. Even more demanding is how to go further and implement the results in planning and management practices in different contexts. The aim of this workshop is to identify strategies to help decision-makers within urban planning and outdoor management to act in favour of child participation and thereby actively contribute to healthier urban environments.

### Main conclusions

- *Methods and tools.* We, as advocates for children and youth, need to inform decision-makers and project-leaders about methods and tools that have proven to give good results. We also need to provide children and young people with the tools they need to participate and adults the tools they need to listen and understand children and youth. It is vital to continually develop, evaluate and improve methods and tools for including children and young people in urban planning.
- *We need each other.* All stakeholders and actors in urban planning processes, including

children and young people, have their role to play. The cross-pollination of knowledge and ideas between different sectors is essential for children and young people to be able to properly participate.

- *Make the benefits visible and relevant for different stakeholders.* We must ensure that the arguments and information used are relevant for different decision makers in urban planning processes. We need to share our experiences and help others to understand the benefits of including children and young people in urban planning for all stakeholders.
- *From 'can do' to 'must do'.* We need authorities at different levels to show their commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child through the provision of resources and stricter regulations that safeguard children's and young people's voices in urban planning.

### Workshop delegates

The workshop participants included people from several universities, authorities on local, national and international level, NGOs and entrepreneurs.

## Proposals from the Workshop

### Methods and tools

The starting point for the workshop was the methods to include children and young people in the planning process. A method's ability to facilitate adult-child communication is a key requisite of a suitable method. It is about providing children with the tools they need to participate whilst also supporting adults' ability to listen, understand and include children's and young people's perspectives. Discussions revealed that, whilst there is an abundance of suitable methods, urban planners do not always know of their existence, how to use them or when they should be used. Thus, the sharing of methods and the knowledge of how and when to use them is crucial in creating planning practices in which children can participate to their full ability. The combination of ever changing contexts and new technologies both requires and encourages the development of new methods which can best enable children to communicate their perceptions and experiences of their everyday lives.

The use and development of new and existing tools and handbooks which can help facilitate children's participation. Besides *Placemaking with children and youth*<sup>1</sup> other existing tools and handbooks mentioned included UNICEF's two handbooks; *Child Friendly Cities and Communities. Handbook*<sup>2</sup> and *Shaping Urbanization for Children: A Handbook on Child-Responsive Urban Planning*<sup>3</sup>. Another suggestion was developing a child rights checklist specifically for planners— see the *UNICEF Child Rights Toolkit*<sup>4</sup> for inspiration.

The significance of the scale and context at which data is collected on children's and young people's everyday lives was also discussed. It is the environments that children and young people interact in and with on a daily basis

which have greatest influence on their behavioural and health outcomes and data collection should therefore reflect this. To help us monitor this, discussions urged for the use and further development of qualitative and quantitative indicators.

### We need each other – the cross-pollination of ideas across sectors

The workshop contained participants from a range of different sectors and highlighted the importance of the cross-pollination of ideas across sectors. This was on display throughout the workshop as participants shared their experiences with each other. Discussions pointed out the use of existing networks and platforms within the field as arenas for the sharing and transfer of knowledge. One group highlighted the importance of joining forces to create “networks of champions” for children's rights. An example of this is the Swedish national network *Children, Youth and the Built Environment* (Barn, Unga och Byggt miljö/BUB) which provides a forum for several hundred practitioners, researchers and students to meet and discuss current issues surrounding children's and youth's everyday lives in relation to urban planning. Another international network is the *European Network for Child-Friendly Cities* (ENCFC) which meets at conferences every second year in a city known for its child-friendly urban planning.

Discussions also focused on the need to invite strategic partners to workshops and conferences so that they can learn about our experiences. One group also suggested using existing theory, such as network theory, to help understand the roles of different actors. The media's role in the sharing of experiences and the transfer of knowledge was also in one group as an opportunity to reach out to a wider audience.

**Essential to the safeguarding and promotion of children's and young people's inclusion in urban planning processes is the collaboration and sharing of power**

<sup>1</sup> Derr, V. et al., 2018

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF 2018 a

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF 2018 b

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF Child Rights Toolkit, [www.unicef.org/eu/crtoolkit/toolkit.html](http://www.unicef.org/eu/crtoolkit/toolkit.html)

**between different actors and agencies., It is also vital we recognise children and young people as urban stakeholders and that we need their knowledge and experience in urban planning processes**<sup>5</sup>. Different actors at all levels have their role to play and the strengths of each should be drawn upon. Universities and researchers have an obligation to provide evidence and raise awareness through the sharing of the latest research findings relating to children's and young people's participation in urban planning, as well as research relating to the health and well-being of children and young people living in urban areas.

#### **Make the benefits visible and relevant for different stakeholders**

To promote children's and youth's inclusion in the urban planning process the benefits must be made visible for all urban stakeholders and actors, including children and young people themselves. Central to this is the sharing of positive experiences to inspire others and the sharing of good practice and examples at both local and national level. However, to facilitate the understanding and relevance of the benefits it is vital that benefits are adapted and relevant to different stakeholders' agendas. For example, placing an economic value on the importance of including children and young people in urban planning may give issues more weight and make them less abstract for certain stakeholders. Discussions also highlighted the need for advocates of children's and young people's participation to "be brave" in their work. Key to this is listening to all voices and engaging with sceptics in order to understand and transform their perspectives.

Many discussions focused on the importance of face-to-face meetings with children. Several groups spoke of the need to increase interaction with children across all sectors and at all levels. In doing so, stakeholders can experience the benefits for themselves. Moreover, **it is only through the very experience of working with children and young people that it is possible to learn to communicate with them and understand what it is they are saying.**

Whilst it is important to share the benefits, it is also important to learn from mistakes. When children are included in the planning process it is therefore essential to document and evaluate the entire process in order to learn from previous successes and failures.

#### **From 'can do' to 'must do'**

It is time for higher level authorities to show their commitment to safeguarding children's and youth's inclusion in matters that affect them by allocating resources dedicated to their participation. In doing so, this both supports and encourages their participation but also confirms their importance as stakeholders in society by demanding action.

One group called for actors to take on a "new mind-set based on equality" and the recognition of children's and young people's needs for health, play and education.

Several groups called for formal support in the form of regulations at national, regional and local level which transform children's and young people's participation from a 'can do' to a 'must do.' In doing so, through their participation, children and young people can help to even out the balance of power through their role as key stakeholders.

Currently, children's participation is often just a recommendation. Possible forms of regulation should stem from the Convention on the Rights of the Child as is the case in Sweden where the Convention will become law from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020. In addition, one group suggested that conducting Child Impact Assessments (CIA) before submitting a planning application should be regulated.

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<sup>5</sup> Nordström, M. & Wales, M., 2019

### Further reading

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