Having a voice, having a choice: Children’s Participation in Educational Space Design

Eda Can\textsuperscript{a}, Göksenin İnalan\textsuperscript{b}
\textsuperscript{a}Istanbul Technical University
\textsuperscript{b}Istanbul Technical University
*Corresponding author e-mail: edablk@gmail.com

Abstract: Child participation is one of the core principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which asserts that children and young people have the right to freely express their views. Despite the increasing numbers of children’s spaces, there are few studies that describe the involvement of the children in these environments’ design and planning. Many of the children’s environment are modelled on adult’s values and needs rather than the needs of child users (Hart, 1992; Rayner et. al, 2012). This is the result of design process itself where there is a focus on designing for children, rather than designing with children (Wake, 2007). It is crucial that understanding children's knowledge, values, experience and use of place would help us improve planning and design of those children’s spaces. Therefore this study discusses the participation of children in the design of educational environments.

Keywords: Children Participation, Children’s Development, Built Environment, Active Learning, Participation to Design

1. Introduction

In the context of this article the concept of “participation”, especially “children participation in design process” is discussed. This article is firstly based on participation as a children’s right. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18. This paper especially examines the potential of children as a participate in architectural design process. Firstly, participation is discussed as children’s right through Article 12 and its relationship with other articles. As a second, the impact of the relationship between children and physical environment and the importance of children’s participation on this interaction is discussed. The various methods of participation are defined. In relation participation to physical design how children can participate to design are discussed.
2. Theoretical background

2.1 Children’s rights

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible (URL 1). Children's rights are the human rights of children with particular attention to the rights of special protection and care afforded to minors.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is set of universal standards for the protection and development of children which accepted in 1989 and 193 nations since 2008. According to CRC a child as any human person who has not reached 18 years old (UNICEF, 2006). Rights for every child may be made groups; cared for, protection, participating, freedom of expression, education and play, survival and development, rehabilitation and care (URL 2).

Recognition of children as subjects of rights is expressed, explicitly or implicitly, in a number of articles (Article 5, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 29) in the Convention (Lansdown, 2001; p.1).

Children are often rendered silent and invisible by adults although decision is related with children and their life. Because they are not seen sufficient experience of life (Roche, 1999). Children have to the right to be heard and have a say in all decisions affecting them, be that at home, in the community, at school or in individual legal and administrative matters. The Council of Europe places participation of children at the core of its children’s rights agenda. Child participation is a key strategic objective the promotion of children’s rights and also a cross cutting approach that is mainstreamed into the organisation’s standard-setting, monitoring and sector specific work. The Recommendation recognises Article 12 applies to every child to express their views freely. Article 12 (respect for the views of the child) both as a fundamental right and as a general principle of the UNCRC. It further recognises that Article 12 is linked to all other articles of the UNCRC (URL 3).

Article 12 actually says; “1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law (URL 4).”

Lansdown (2001; p.2) has interpretation about Article 12:

- All children are capable of expressing a view;
- The right to express their views freely;
- The right to be heard in all matters affecting them;
- The right to have their views seriously;
- In accordance with their age and maturity.

2.2 Children’s development

Children’s development defines by psychologists depending on; biological impact (genetic factors), impact of the environment (economic situation, school life, type of interaction in family) and interaction between biological structure and environmental characteristics. On the other hand, it was proved that children’s behaviors are shaped on physical and mental development process by environment (Cüceloğlu, 1990, p.332).
Children are born connected with the environment around them, like other mammals. Childhood is an ecosystem whose positive result depends equally on complex biological, social and cultural systems. Children grow up in physical environment with non-material relationships and they explore the world experiencing through the built environment (Koralek ve Mitchell, 2005, p. 115).

Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development:

Sensorimotor stage (0-2 years): In this period, intelligence is demonstrated through motor activity without the use of symbols. Knowledge of the world is limited (but developing) because its based on physical interactions / experiences. Physical development (mobility) allows the child to begin developing new intellectual abilities. Some symbolic (language) abilities are developed at the end of this stage.

Pre-operational stage (2-6 years): In this period, intelligence is demonstrated through the use of symbols, language use matures, and memory and imagination are developed, but thinking is done in a nonlogical, nonreversible manner. During this stage, the child egocentric.

Concrete operational stage (7-12 years): In this stage, intelligence is demonstrated through logical and systematic manipulation of symbols related to concrete objects. Operational thinking develops. Egocentric thought diminishes.

Formal operational stage (12 years-adult): In this stage, intelligence is demonstrated through the logical use of symbols related to abstract concepts. Early in the period there is return to egocentric thought.

Until children are six years old, they only learn by doing, through experience. The world around them is found by active exploration. Whereas adults are already ‘understand’ things, children still try to learn and explore the environment and all things around them. They normally enhance their creativity (Day ve Midbjer, 2007; p.4).

2.3 Why is participation important and what is the use of it

In principle, children have been empowered their social and economic rights for many years. These rights include education, health care, an adequate standard of living for proper development and play.

Environment affects the people’s thought, feeling and behavior. It shapes people’s habits, expectations and values. As well as environment impacts the people, people impacts the environment. There is an interaction between people and environment (Day ve Midbjer, 2007; p.50). Environment should be designed according to human needs and behaviors. Physical environment impacts physical, cognitive and psychosocial development and also shapes behaviors.

Social environment is very important psychological, mental and physical development of the children. As well as social environment physical environment also influences brain development. From environmental experiences, the brain learns how it ‘needs’ to develop. The way of experience is more important than what space tells for children. In this respect, participation is important for children development (Day ve Midbjer, 2007; p.3) (Table 1). Listening to children is about respecting them and also leading them to learn to value the importance of respecting other people (Lansdown, 2001; p.8).
Table 1. Benefits of participation (Kirby et al., 2003).

| Practical benefits to services (Kirby et al., 2003, p.11)                                                                 | Citizenship and social inclusion (Kirby et al., 2003, p.20)                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Improve service/product development                                                                                      | Provide inclusive practice that draws in those often excluded                                                            |
| Improve support to ensure individuals’ best interests                                                                    | Meet UNCRC expectations for the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives.                                 |
| Improve experience of services                                                                                          | Help ensure the right to be treated with respect, to be safe and protected from harm.                                  |
| Improve access to and use of services                                                                                   | Empower through being included; develop skills and knowledge to get heard and deeper sed-belief in ability to create change. |
| Improve service accountability                                                                                           | Enhance citizenship and political education, including knowledge of children’s rights, structures, services, etc.        |
|                                                                                                                                 | Develop more positive community relationships between young peers and between children and adults.                     |

2.4 Methods of participation

Hart (1997; p.161-191) defined the methods which are varied according to culture and local source (Table 2). Most of them is given as visual methods, they are improved the degree of community participation by people of all ages.
Table 2. Children’s participation by people of all ages (adapt by Hart, 1997).

| Drawings and Collages       | Mapping and Modelling                      | Interviewing and Surveys                  | Media and Communication                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Individual drawings        | Child-made maps                            | Interviews                                | Print journalism                       |
| Storyboards                | Mapping personal worlds                    | Surveys                                   | Photography                            |
| Collective drawing         | Making a community base map                | Trails or ‘Scored Walks’                  | Video and television                   |
| Collage making             | Small-scale modeling                       |                                          | Radio production                       |
| Drawing on slides          | Full-size simulations                       |                                          | Performance                            |
|                             |                                            |                                          | Rituals and special events: festivals, |
|                             |                                            |                                          | parades and plant-ins                  |

Horelli (2002; p.612) discussed a methodological approach to participatory from the perspective of environmental psychology. Methodology is related with one or more paradigms. Paradigms are associated with a certain ontology and epistemology. Methodological approach is chosen according to problem. Environment behavior design- design research is stick operating post positivist paradigm and it is seen epistemologically problematic.

Action research (AR) which can be applied from various theoretical perspectives (psychological, social, critical, feminist) is the most suitable methodological approach. AR can be used in education, working life, organizational development, waste management, urban and rural planning. AR method developed into participatory action research (Horelli, 2002; p.612). Horelli (2002; p.621-624) listed types and examples of enabling tools for participatory planning (Table 3).

Table 3. List of types of enabling tools for participatory planning.

| Observation,                  | Brainstorming,                      |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Survey methods,               | Games and trade-offs,               |
| Paper and pencil tests,       | ICT techniques,                     |
| Mapping,                      | Exhibits and interactive displays,  |
| Behavioral plan analysis,     | Information dissemination,          |
| Walking tours - visits,       | Lobbying,                           |
| SWOT-analysis,                | Networking,                         |
| Stakeholder analysis,         | Time planning,                      |
| Engendering statistics,       | Consensus building,                 |
| Audits and appraisals,        | Workshops and forums,              |
| Profiling,                    | Community action planning,          |
| Post occupancy evaluation,    | Planning for real,                  |
| Self-evaluation portfolios,   | ZOPP,                               |
| Photographing and filming,    | UCAT (design charente),             |
| Diagramming,                  | Political fund raising,             |
| Drawing and designing,        | Goal setting and prioritizing,      |
| Modeling and simulating,      | Strategic choice,                   |
| Role playing and drama,       | Panels,                             |
| Visioning, scenarios,         | Demonstrations.                     |
The methodological approach and selecting tools in participation design are chosen according to conditions (Horelli, 2002, p.614):

- Clarification of the context (situational culture; geographic scale; topics and goals of policy, program, or project; extent of intended action; access to resources)
- Eligibility of participants (representation of users, professionals, politicians)
- Definition of the level of participation (information-full control)
- Definition of the phases in which participation occurs (initiation-maintenance of results)
- Availability of various types of techniques, methods, or tools

2.5 Participation in practice

The ways in which children participation can lead to increased citizenship and social inclusion. There are some examples of increased citizenship and social inclusion (Kirby et al., 2003, p. 12):

Children rights: involving children helped fulfill their rights under Article 12 of the UNCRC.

- Empowerment: increased belief in their ability to create change and levels of control over elements of their lives.
- Citizenship and Political Education: increased children and young people’s political and social knowledge, and awareness of rights.
- Responsibility: increased levels of responsibility.
- Relationships: improved relationships and the perception of young people amongst communities, professionals and peers.

There has been a great deal of discussion and practical action to give effect to the principle embodied in Article 12 that children have a right to be listened to and taken seriously. It has become clear that children can become successfully involved in (Lansdown 2001; p.9):

- Research;
- Monitoring and making decisions regarding their health;
- Managing their own institutions such as schools;
- Evaluating services intended for younger people;
- Peer representation;
- Advocacy;
- Project design, management, monitoring and evaluation;
- Campaigning and lobbying;
- Analysis and policy development;
- Publicity and use of the media;
- Conference participation.

Hart (1997, p.89-160) classified of children’s participation in practice in six categories:

- Action research with children
- Environmental planning, design, and construction by children
- Environmental management
- Environmental monitoring
- Public awareness and political action by children
- From local to global through linking and networks
2.6 Participation in design

People always wanted to effect on decisions which is related with them. In 1960s there was a new movement and increased sense of social responsibility on physical environment. Community design centers supported for poor people and they were influenced by Paul Davidoff’s advocacy (Sanoff, 2008).

Different disciplines or fields, such as political science, community organization, or environment behavior studies, tend to define citizen or public participation in varying ways (Horelli, 2002, p. 609). Although participation is a policy buzzword, it has a long history. Relationship between individual citizens and institutions of governance was seen as a problem and from Aristotle to Marx to Habermas, all have had something to say about how citizens engage with the state and institutions of governance (Brodi et al., 2009, p.6,7).

One of the main factor which impacts the participation is democracy. Participatory design give a chance to people management of their environments. Participation provides citizens more active, involved in design and management the process instead of passive user (Sanoff, 2008).

The term participation is meant as having some influence over decisions and process. ‘Taking part’ or ‘being present’ is not exactly signified as participation (Kirby et al., 2003, p.5). By involving citizens more directly in decisions at the local level that affect their lives, the government aims to enhance democratic accountability, improve public services and contribute to social justice (Foot, 2009).

2.7 Children’s participation

Participation process began largely as an advocacy according to children needs, depend on children’s right in design has now become more common approach. Seven realms are defined in city design and planning (Table 4) (Francis and Lorenzo, 2002):

| 1. Romantic Approach | Theory |
|---------------------|--------|
| ‘Children as Planners’, ‘Children as Futurists’ Planning ‘by’ children. Children define and make their future, often without adult involvement. |

| 2. Advocacy Approach | Theory |
|---------------------|--------|
| ‘Planners for Children’ Planning ‘for’ children with needs advocated by adult planners |

| 3. Needs Approach | Theory |
|------------------|--------|
| ‘Social Science for Children’ Research-based approach that addresses children’s needs |

| 4. Learning Approach | Theory |
|---------------------|--------|
| ‘Children as Learners’ Participation through environmental education and learning |

| 5. Rights Approach | Theory |
|------------------|--------|
| ‘Children as Citizens’ Children have rights that need to be protected |
Participation is a process which children take part in the decision making with other people around problems that deal with their lives. Children experiences have an important role in the society (Chawla, 2001). In children’s participation projects process is as important as the end result. Participation as a democratic process provides the people positive impression for future citizens (Koralek ve Mitchell, 2005, p. 115).

Children Act 1989 says that children should be involved in decisions are being taken about children’s own lives. There are different type of participation models according to degree of participation. Hart (1992) improves the ladder metaphor of children’s participation model from the Arnstein’s model, and also new categories have been developed (Figure 1). The steps on this ladder describe the degree to which children are in control of the process.

Lather metaphor was explained step by step. Manipulation; adult led activities, in which children do as directed without understanding of the purpose for the activities. Decoration; adult led activities, in which children understand purpose, but have no input in how they are planned. Tokenism; adult led activities, in which children may be consulted with minimal opportunities for feedback. Assigned but informed; adult led activities, in which children understand the purpose, decision making process, and have a role. Consulted and informed; adult led activities, in which children are consulted and informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of adult decisions. Adult-initiated shared decisions with children; adult led activities, in which decision making is shared with children. Children-initiated and directed; children led activities with little input from adults. Child-initiated shared decisions with adults; children led activities, in which decision making is shared between children and adults working as equal partners (Hart, 1997, p.40-45).
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Figure 1. The ladder of participation (Hart, 1992).

Chawla (2001) defined different forms of participation, definition are based on children’s level of participation (Table 5).

Table 5. Different forms of participation (Chawla, 2001).

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

Prescribed participation
The child feels a moral and cultural obligation to participate and considers the opportunity to do so a privilege. There is some choice, but conventions within the culture are strong for this to happen.

Assigned participation
Adults such as teachers and parents provide opportunities for training in participation. This involvement is directed by adults, but the child experiences it to be meaningful.

Invited participation
It is adult initiated and controlled, but the child has the right to withdraw without feeling disadvantaged.

Negotiated participation
The child is assigned a participatory role, but has opportunities to negotiate how to carry it out and the level of involvement.

Self-initiated negotiated participation
The child initiates it and controls it, negotiating the level and type of involvement and how long to continue.
Graduated participation
As the child increases in competence, he or she has opportunities to practice new types of participation, assume new levels of responsibility, and find new occasions for meaningful involvement in the community.

Collaborative participation
It is initiated and supported by a group, which collectively negotiates the level and form of involvement.

Lansdown (2010; p. 20) thought that children’s actual participation is related with the level of their involvement. Also there are different theories which are informed children’s participation (Table 6).

Table 6. Theories informing children’s participation (Malone and Hartung, 2010).

| Discipline                  | Theories / conceptual frameworks                        |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Child development           | New sociology of childhood                             |
|                             | Social cognitive theory                                |
| Cultural and social psychology | Social constructivism                                   |
| Environmental psychology    | Affordance                                              |
|                             | Behaviour settings                                     |
|                             | Ecological systems theory                              |
| Human geography             | Geographies of exclusion                               |
|                             | Place attachment                                        |
|                             | Geography of childhood                                 |
|                             | Hybridity theory                                        |
| Community development       | Critical theory                                         |
|                             | Pedagogy of oppressed                                  |
|                             | Participatory action research                           |
| Environmental education     | Ecological literacy                                     |
|                             | Empowerment theory                                     |
| Educational sociology       | Nature deficit disorder                                |
|                             | Outdoor learning                                        |
| Urban planning              | Learning by design                                      |
|                             | Transformative theory                                   |

Children’s participation was classified three levels (Malone and Hartung, 2010; p. 25):
Consultative participation: In this level, adults try to understand children’s views in order to build knowledge and understanding of their lives and experience. Process is started and managed by adults.

Collaborative participation: In this level, adults and children are partnership, children can take part in any stage of decision. Collaborative participation provides opportunity for shared decision-making with adults and children.

Child-led participation: In this level, children can initiate activities and advocate for themselves. The role of adults is act as facilitators, prepare conditions, support and advice them.

Different variety of disciplines work on children’s participation which have been adult or community based theories.

“Sinclair (2004) summarises the importance of the involving children:

- Uphold children’s rights: Children are citizens and service users and share the same fundamental rights to participate as others;
- Fulfil legal responsibilities: The right of children to be consulted is included in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Children Act 1989, Best Value Framework;
- Improve services: Consulting with children enables services to be improved and adapted to meet changing needs, that children can help define; participation gives them a level of influence and an element of choice about the provision offered and can help them understand their own wants and needs;
- Improve decision-making: Participation leads to more accurate, relevant decisions, which are better informed and hence more likely to be implemented;
- Enhance democratic processes: Representative democracy can be strengthened as children gain new opportunities to become active members of their community, whether in schools, local authorities or organisations;
- Promote children protection: A recurring theme of successive inquiries into abuse has been the failure to listen to children. Participation is an important aid to protection;
- Enhance children’s skills: Participation helps in developing skills useful for debate, communication, negotiation, prioritisation and decision-making;
- Empower and enhance self-esteem: Effective participation can provide a sense of self-efficacy and raise self esteem.”

Children have their own activities and their own time and their own space. Clark (2005, p.4) tried to find a way to enhance young children’s creativity and physical engagement with their world. Clark developed the Mosaic approach which shows the effects on his work of several influences. First, has been the view of the child promoted through the sociology of/for childhood as an active subject, someone worth listening to, not least as an expert in her or his own life. Second, has been the field of international development, in particular the Participatory Appraisal techniques devised to give voice to the least powerful voices in communities (Clark, 2010, p.3). Mosaic approach which includes multiple methods as follows (Clark, 2005, p.4):

- Observation: narrative accounts of children’s progress through the day.
- Child conferencing: a short structured interview schedule conducted one-to-one or in a group.
- Using cameras: children using single use cameras to take photographs of ‘important things’.
- Tours: tours of the site directed and recorded by the children.
- Map-making: 2d-representations of the site using children’s own photographs and drawings.
• Interviews: informal interviews with staff and parents.

Clark tries to find way of viewing children, including them, as experts on their on lives. The possibility of participation which is reciprocal; children can be involved in different stages of the design and architects can become engaged with the views and experiences of children. This way of thinking about participatory design (Clark, 2010, p.178, 188):

• Discusses meanings and values;
• Promotes reflection;
• Bridges disciplinary boundaries;
• Fosters the hundred languages of children and adults;
• Involves children and adults, users and professionals;
• Includes ongoing encounters rather than one-off consultation.

There are some principles are defined for democratic participation of children (Landsown, 2001; p.9-10):

• Children must understand what the project or the process is about, what it is for and their role within it;
• Power relations and decision-making structures must be transparent;
• Children should be involved from the earliest possible stage of any initiative;
• All children should be treated with equal respect regardless of their age, situation, ethnicity, abilities or other factors;
• Ground rules should be established with all the children at the beginning;
• Participation should be voluntary and children should be allowed to leave at any stage;
• Children are entitled to respect for their views and experience.

3. Conclusion

Taking children’s view and involve them decision making have positive outcomes such as (Chawla, 2001; Kirby et al., 2003):

• Increase self confidence
• New skills
• Increase understanding of democratic values and behaviors
• Increase sense of belonging
• Programme and policy development
• Improve quality of children life
• Increase sense of community
• Practise children’s rights in real life
• New social networks
• More positive public attitudes and relationships to children
• Public education regarding children’s rights

This research is a part of an ongoing Ph.D. thesis. In this paper reference to the theoretical background is done. Later in the research process the relationship between participation and the environment needs to be verified by first pilot projects and then this theoretical background will be tested on an educational environment as a case study. The preliminary conclusion of this article is participation in design has the potential to empower children by increasing citizenship and social interaction. As a result, this type of participation also benefits the personal development of children.
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