Children's Participation in Urban Planning –Understanding Frameworks and Initiatives for Effective Participation

Ar.Priya R Khatavkar[1]
*B.Arch, M.Arch (HD),
Associate Professor,K S
School of Architecture
Research Scholar, SOA, Christ
University*

E-mail ID-
pkhatavkar@gmail.com

With 18+ years of experience in Architecture, Construction Management and Academics, Ar. Priya contributes to teaching pedagogy through her industry experience and insights.

Abstract:
According to the National Institute of Urban Affairs, India houses the largest child population in the world. India houses 19 percent of the global population of children. Children living in cities and towns comprise a significant 34 percent of the total urban population (NIUA,2016). As the children's population continues to increase day by day, an emerging and pressing question asked is "Does the city meet the everyday requirements of children?". When these generations of children in urbanized areas are being shaped by the physical settings surrounding them it becomes important for them to engage in the planning process. (Russo, A., & Andreucci, M. B., 2023). Children are often an unnoticed, adult-dependent unskilled group who are thought of as not capable of fruitfully contributing to policy decisions (Cohen, N. B., & Torres, J., 2015). For children living in the context of cities and urban spaces, physical environments are not only adult directed but constricting in nature. With children being more than one-third the city's stakeholders, it is crucial to involve their voices in the planning process. This paper takes an overview of the International and local frameworks and measures, global and local case studies which encourage children in the participation process. The obstacles that prevent and discourage participation of Children in Urban Planning and the parameters which encourage an effective participatory approach are pointed out in general.

Keywords: *Children's participation;Child-friendly; Urban areas; Legal frameworks, Smart Cities Mission*

1. Introduction:
According to the National Institute of Urban Affairs, Children below eighteen years of age constitute roughly one-third of the total population. Out of which, those living in urban areas constitute 34 percent of the total global population. (NIUA. 2016).Large scale migrations, rapid

STHALA/ISSN 2582-9491

Prof. Dr. Uma Jadhav[2]
Professor, SOA,Christ University

E-mail ID-
uma.jadhav@christuniversity.in

With practical experience and academic expertise in the fields of architecture and sustainable rural development, Dr.Jadhav has a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities that arise in real-world. This enables her to inculcate a practical and hands-on approach to her teaching pedagogy. She's committed to promoting sustainable development and fostering the growth of architecture and the planning industry.

urbanisation, increasing population density lead to urban areas which perform poorlyinterms of providing meaningful spaces for everyone especially children. Residential sectors lack natural settings like parks, open spaces and vegetation affecting availability of safe accessible spaces for children's outdoor playgrounds and physical activities (Winterbottom, K. E. et al, 2010). Increasing urbanisation has resulted in fewer opportunities for children's physical activities when compared to the previous generation. This implies decrease in independent mobility and active play leading to sedentary lifestyles which has further led to health issues like Child diabetes and obesity.

(Krysiak, N. 2019). By not being engaged with the natural environment enough, Children miss out on the physical experiences of childhood (Heft, H., &Chawla, L. 2006). A significant cause of urbanisation failing to provide healthy environments is because children are not considered and involved in the planning process. Children are not acknowledged as the significant stakeholders of the city nor are they viewed as having the necessary competence which can be incorporated into the planning process.(Nordström, M., & Wales, M. 2019). The notion of urban areas being viewed as adult designed and adult controlled spaces excludes children from inclusivity in planning decisions. Not being included in decision making processes whereby children can get to shape the environment in which they live makes them marginalised and invisible. (Knowles-Yánez, K. L, 2005). Many studies indicate the need to include and involve Children in Urban development and planning.(Knowles-Yánez, K. L, 2005). Recent research points out that children would like to be involved in caring for their neighbourhoods (Chatterjee 2005). Urban areas need to serve the different needs of each demographic group. In a context where children are hardly seen or where their voices are hardly taken into account, legal frameworks help address child participation.(Ellis, G et al, 2015). Child participation enables sustainable urban development (Nors, E., 2021). Participatory processes help learning happen for both the Child and the planner. In addition to environmental and social benefits, Children develop additional skills and become active democratic citizens, promoting societal growth and progress (Nors, E, 2021). Hence Children's participation becomes an essential component as a form of

engaging in and desiging urban spaces.

1.1 Models of participation:

There are many Children's Participation models suggested for promoting active and successful involvement in planning and design. According to Matthews and Limb, all Participation is mere "tokenism" until that time when children are considered as equal participants in the decision making process. (Matthews and Limb,1999).

Children can take on various roles in the designing process. (Druin. A, 2001) points

Figure 1: Role of the Child in design of new technology
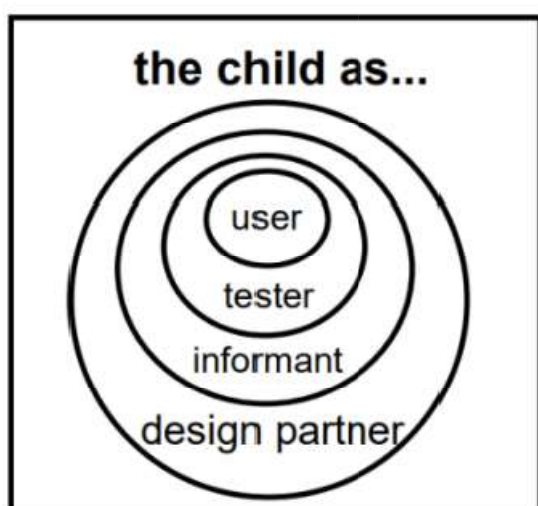
Source: Druin. A, 2001

Out that children can take on the roles of user, tester, informant and design partner in the process of design. Though these roles are discussed in the context of designing and prototyping new technology, these four roles could also be extended to the participatory process in Urban design and planning.

Figure 2: Hart's model of participation
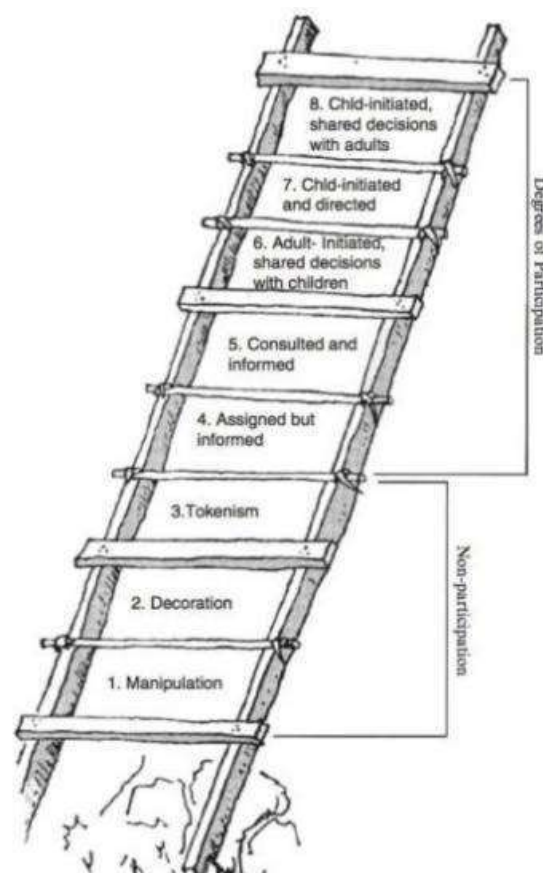
Source: Hart.R, 1992

Hart's approach on children's participation demonstrates how involvement can happen across a range of agencies.

According to this framework, Non-participation would include manipulation, decoration and tokenism. The highest degrees of participation would be child led and child initiated participation.(Hart.R, 1992).

According to (Kohli.A, 2022), Hart's model depicts participation in a linear format in a research sense where it does not take ground reality into consideration whereas, the ideal scenario in the case of Urban Planning in India, is an adult led initiative where children are active stakeholders.To encourage and implement children' participation suggestive legal frameworks has already

been proposed at global as well as local levels.

2. Global Frameworks:

The first instrument that advocates for the involvement and engagement of Children worldwide is the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Ratified by almost all of its member nations, it emphasises the importance of the State in its obligations to fulfil Child's rights. The UNICEF and UN HABITAT play a crucial role in promoting and upholding children's rights as specified in the CRC by spreading the idea of child-friendly cities. The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) promotes children's visibility in child planning schemes in addition to offering an outline for children's involvement in urban planning. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) initiated the Growing up in Cities Project which was devoted to including Children in community planning. (Derr, V., &Kovács, I. G. 2017). Additional studies acknowledge that children desire to be a part of planning process within their communities.(Chawla 2009). It is seen from these global initiatives there is a progressive emphasis on children being included in designing urban environments.

2.1 Global case studies

2.1.1 Growing up Boulder - A Housing Strategy Initiative:

In line with the International frameworks stated above on Child participation in Urban planning, The City of Boulder, Colarado came up with its project "Growing up Boulder"(GUB) initiative.

This Child friendly initiative is founded on the participatory planning activities and methods of the "Growing up in cities project". In addressing its Housing Strategy problems of density and affordability, GUB emphasised on young people's suggestions for designing child Friendly Neighbourhoods. School students of Primary and secondary grades discussed their ideas and took part in a line-up of design evaluations and discussions. Along with the students, urban designers, architects, and city planners participated in the final design evaluation.A report and a public presentation shared the outcomes of the evaluation with twenty representatives of the city, further prompting to include the suggestions of children into the Comprehensive Housing Strategy. The representatives included experts from the community planning department, Boulder's housing division, planning board and design board.(City of Boulder, 2014; Derr, V., &Kovács, I. G. 2017).

This case study highlights the prominence of participatory procedures for children. It proved that children could comprehend complicated political concerns and provide useful advice that would help create sustainable solutions.

2.1.2 MehrPlatz, Vienna

Centered on the guidelines of the UNCRC and as a pilot project, MehrPlatz aimed to improvise the attributes of public spaces for children through their involvement. The project addressed the necessity to create quality open spaces for the young population. Through planned walks around the city with adults and through maps, young people identified spaces and spots which could be used for play and other activities. They gave their suggestion for the improvement of the spaces. Among

which some were accepted and implemented by the decision makers of urban Vienna (Freutel, 2010)

It is worthy to note that there were many levels of participation by both adults and the children. The project was transparent in their attempt to include the young in decision making. The approach used to work with children was creative and conducted through many different methods.

3. Urban planning in India - Legal frameworks

India having ratified the UNCRC in 1992, has adopted the guidelines of the global framework into its National Policies. Over 31 million minors less than the age of 18 reside in metropolitan areas.(NIUA, 2018). Children lack decision-making authority despite being the primary beneficiaries of urban planning. The Urban Planning ecosystem of India is quite broad and there are legal frameworks in place regarding children's participation. The National Policy for Children, 2013 `is contingent on the UNCRC and is in agreement with the Sustainable Development Goals. The policy promotes age-specific initiatives for play, recreation, leisure and cultural activities consistent with global legal frameworks (childlineindia.org).The framework which came subsequently - "The National Plan of Action 2016", (NPAC 2016) is in accordance with The National Policy for Children, 2013 and expresses constitutional and policy commitments made for children in India. The NPAC 2016 has developed plans and prioritises creating recreation spaces and prospects for children to play in the key sectors of education and development. NPAC 2016's aim is to provide an atmosphere where children learn about their rights and actively participate in all decisions that affect them..

In spite of these legal frameworks in place it has been acknowledged that children's needs and inclusivity has not been taken into account in urban planning processes and discussions about urbanism (NIUA, 2016). To increase children's participation in the planning process, the IndianGovernment has developed potential ideas in various cities and urban missions. This is a part of a larger effort to reflect children's needs and inclusivity into urban planning.

National urban Missions like Smart Cities Mission, PradhanMantriAwasYojana (PMAY) and SwacchBharath Mission (SBM) have come up with Guidelines and processes which are nudging cities to be child friendly and inclusive. (NIUA, 2019).

3.1 Indian Case studies

3.1.1 Initiatives of the Smart City Mission:

It can be seen that the effort to execute the global and national guidelines regarding participation of children has been attempted in Indian case studies.

The 100 Smart Cities project of the government makes a focused effort to make better quality of life for residents in city planning. The aspirations of city dwellers are considered using a participatory approach. The Smart City Mission strives to demonstrate active involvement of youth and children in the planning process.

The mandate is to advance the health and well being of children by focusing on improving physical environment that would nourish their physical and mental development.

The report states that 160 projects have been identified to create green corridors, make walkways and cycle tracks and to use open spaces in an innovative way.

The Smart Cities Mission in cities like Jaipur actively involves school children for the improvement of their city proposals. Painting, Logo and blog writing competitions had many children from different schools and colleges taking part in them. Children's thoughts and perceptions were represented through their words, drawings and paintings. (NIUA, 2018).

Figure 3: School Drawing Competition "My Smart City Jaipur - Vision 2050"

Source: (NIUA, 2018).

It is seen through this mission that children demonstrated the need to take care of and to shape their environment.

3.1.2 Initiatives of the Smart City Mission -Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge:

In another case study "Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge" was hosted by the Smart cities Mission. The challenge aims to achieve neighbourhood level improvements which endorse a better quality of life for early childhood development. The challenge formulated multiple projects which were complementary and integrated with the neighbourhood. One of the examples of the Challenge includes the conversion of a dump yard into a Putaani (tiny) park in Bangalore. This was an effort to create a pocket park - a much needed space for leisure and recreation, for the resident caregivers and children in the midst of dense urban fabric. A recent photo of the converted park shows children of different age groups using the place for their various activities.(bernardvanleer.org).

Figure 4: PutaaniPark , Bangalore

Source: bernardvanleer.org

This project has taken up a participatory approach with the caregivers of young

children, health workers and experts of early childhood development. The project has involved young children and caregivers during the execution of the park. This in turn has given the children and residents a sense of ownership for community spaces in and around their neighbourhoods.

4. Impediments to Children's involvement in Urban Planning :

Despite the recent initiatives to include children's opinions in decisions that shape the environment, non-participation still exists in a significant way. Political and economic systems act as a barrier to children's participation. (Mansfield, Batagol, and Raven, 2021). In spite of children having a Legal priority, the power lies in the hands of influential professionals and adults who have the economic and voting advantage. The ability to be listened to is reduced when there is no economic power and liberty to vote. (Kylin and Stina 2015). In this case participation simply becomes "Tokenism" as expressed by (Matthews, H., and Limb,M., 1999). One of the barriers would be that when sufficient adult expertise already exists regarding the creation of children's environments, Children's views about these environments are considered to be redundant (Clark, 2012). Some of the key insights of Kohli.A, 2022 in her work on barriers obstructing children's participation in India for Urban Planning are given below:

• Public participation is limited to only Surveys. Some actors understood participation as just survey whereas others included collaboration from different groups. This difference made participation difficult to happen.

• Urban planners understand that inclusivity of Children and their agency in urban spaces are limited to the playground.

• Children have the in between status of not being under privileged adults and nor are they the privileged sector of society. This makes it easy for them to be forgotten.

• The absence of skill sets to collaborate and work with children was a barrier.

• The adult mindset which regarded Children as contributors of fanciful and economically not viable ideas. Adults felt that children could not comprehend complex planning processes. Hence this gives the planners to make decisions on their behalf.

• Governments have limited guidelines restricting the involvement of children. Non existence of state sponsorship also limited participation.

• Lack of education in planning processes in schools impacts children's participation.

5. Observations:

An essential component which would allow children to effectively participate is the support of adults. (Ayerbe, A. A., &Báez, N. P., 2007). Adults and professionals oversee planning and make important choices pertaining to Urban development. Despite the fact that more national, international, and local initiatives encourage and promote participatory procedures which are inclusive for all age groups of residents, the engagement of citizens, particularly children, seems to be only minimal. Failure of the local municipalities to take into account

Children's opinions and insufficient political will are one of the basic causes why children are excluded from design considerations and urban planning decisions (Chawla 2009). Therefore, it is crucial to guarantee them equitable involvement in this process and comprehend the underlying obstacles that restrict their potential.

A child-centered perspective on citizenship and involvement is essential for fostering a successful children's participation. There needs to exist a culture of participation, which is currently missing. This culture of participation must be used to create cities for children and all (Ataol, Ö. et al, 2022).

For a successful participatory approach with Children, the connection with enablers such as Social workers and NGOs and executors such as Urban Planners and Architects needs to be strengthened. This will enable the planners and designers to involve children with the expert skill set of Social workers and NGOs. Similarly, connection between the Children and Decision makers can also be strengthened. (Kohli.A, 2022).

In the report of the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA, 2018), it is seen that government schemes in India initiated a participatory approach. Children did represent and demonstrate their views for city planning. But it was not explicit how far their demonstrations were considered nor was it clear how much influence the children's perspectives had on the city planning decisions. Similarly in the report on Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge (bernardvanleer.org), the age group, level and depth of participation of children remains unclear.

Overall it is seen that India is attempting to include children's voices at the local levels. But the adequacy of the efforts in terms of the levels of participation and the complexity of the participatory approach needs to be looked into.

Further research needs to be done to investigate the collaboration between the central, state and the local Government for an effective and in-depth participation. It can also investigate how much of a participatory approach or participatory environment, policies have offered to children and what could be done to improve the mechanisms for Children's participation.

6. References:

1. Ataol, Ö., Krishnamurthy, S., Druta, O., & van Wesemael, P. (2022). The inability of Turkey and Istanbul in institutionalisation of children's participation in urban planning: A policy analysis study. Children & Society, 36(5), 1064-1085.

2. Ayerbe, A. A., &Báez, N. P. (2007). The city and children's participation. Children Youth and Environments, 17(2), 187-198.

3. Chatterjee, Sudeshna. 2005. "Children's Friendship with Place: A Conceptual Inquiry." Children, Youth and Environments 15 (1): 1–26.

4. Chawla, Louise. 2009. "Participation as Capacity Building for Active Citizenship." Les Ateliers De L'Ethique 4 (1): 69–76.

5. City of Boulder. 2014a. Comprehensive Housing Strategy. Accessed June 6, 2014. https://bouldercolorado.gov/housing/comprehensive-housing-strategy.

6. Clark, A. (2012). Healthy Environments (L. Brooker& M. Woodhead, Eds.). Open University, 46.

7. Cohen, N. B., & Torres, J. (2015). Accreditation of child-friendly municipalities in Quebec: Opportunities for child participation. Children, Youth and Environments, 25(2), 16-32.

8. Derr, V., &Kovács, I. G. (2017). How participatory processes impact children and contribute to planning: A case study of

neighborhood design from Boulder, Colorado, USA. Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability, 10(1), 29-48.

9. Nordström, M., & Wales, M. (2019). Enhancing urban transformative capacity through children's participation in planning. Ambio, 48(5), 507-514.

10. Druin, A. (2001). The Role of Children in the Design of New Technology. Behaviour and Information Technology. 21. 10.1080/01449290110108659.

11. Ellis, G., Monaghan, J., & McDonald, L. (2015). Listening to "generation Jacobs": a case study in participatory engagement for a child-friendly city. Children, Youth and Environments, 25(2), 107-127.

12. Freutel, T. (2010). Children´s Participation in Urban Planning - a comparative study of Vienna, Copenhagen and Madrid [Master Thesis].

13. Hart, R. A. (1992). Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship (No. inness92/6).

14. Heft, H., &Chawla, L. (2006). Children as agents in sustainable development: the ecology of competence. Children and their environments: Learning, using and designing spaces, 199-216.

15. https://bernardvanleer.org/app/uploads/2022/01/Repor t_Nurturing-Neighbourhoods-Challenge_Stories- from-the-Field_2022_single-pages.pdf

16. https://www.childlineindia.org/uploads/files/knowledge-center/The-National-Policy-for-Children-2013.docx

17. Knowles-Yánez, K.L. (2005). "Children's Participation in Planning Processes." Journal of Planning Literature 20(1): 3-14.

18. Kohli, A. (2022). Cities for children: Uncovering barriers to include children in urban planning processes in India.

19. Krysiak, N. (2019). Designing child-friendly high density neighbourhoods: transforming our cities for the health, wellbeing and happiness of children. Cities for Play.

20. Kylin, M., and Bodelius S. (2015). "A Lawful Space for Play: Conceptualizing Childhood in Light of Local Regulations." Children, Youth and Environments 25:86–106

21. Mansfield RG, Batagol B, Raven R.(2021) "Critical Agents of Change?": Opportunities and Limits to Children's Participation in Urban Planning. Journal of Planning Literature. 2021;36(2):170-186. doi:10.1177/0885412220988645

22. Matthews, H., and Limb,M.(1999). "Defining an Agenda for the Geography of Children: Review and Prospect." Progress in Human Geography 23:61–90.

23. NIUA (2016) "STATUS OF CHILDREN IN URBAN INDIA, BASELINE STUDY, 2016" Delhi, India.

24. NIUA (2018) "CHILDREN" IN THE URBAN VISION OF INDIA, 2019" Delhi, India.

25. Nordström, M., & Wales, M. (2019). Enhancing urban transformative capacity through children's participation in planning. Ambio, 48(5), 507-514.

26. Nors, E. (2021). Children and youth participation in urban planning-Are we there yet?: Exploring the involvement of children and youth in urban planning in the cities of Stockholm and Gothenburg.

27. Russo, A., &Andreucci, M. B. (2023). Raising Healthy Children: Promoting the Multiple Benefits of Green Open Spaces through Biophilic Design. Sustainability, 15(3), 1982.

28. Winterbottom, K. E., Mehta, S. S., & Roberts, J. R. (2010). Using Nature and Outdoor Activity to Improve Children's Health.

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING –UNDERSTANDING FRAMEWORKS AND INITIATIVES FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION