

Children & Outdoor Urban Spaces Planning

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Abstract

This paper introduces the outcomes of an inquiry regarding the territorialized children's spaces or areas. The systematized layout of a city or metropolis makes it unfeasible to allocate spaces for children, and that gives no alternatives to provide unauthorized areas which are used to meet the children's requirements. Thus, the paper at hand is centered on public or metropolitan (urban) areas to point out the disproportion and contrast in society. This paper attempts to investigate the availability of public spaces that the children can easily use in housing districts. Several studies were examined to acquire information about the role of public spaces in the growth and improvement of children, public spaces availability, urban planning and its function, in addition to papers discussing friendly settings for children.

Keywords: Children, urban planning, .

1. Introduction

The cities should be turned into a friendly and accepting environment for whoever lives in it, this environment must provide accessibility to the different areas and spaces in the city, to allow its residents an easy and leisurely movement, and to make it possible that they revel in the various activities and entertainment the city provides freely and unlimitedly.

Across the world the majority of children are obliged to reside in reserved and governed settings that are designed befittingly. Usually, the environment where the children reside and reciprocate is basically the fruits of architects and planners and is subjected to certain designing principles. Adults are responsible for creating these places, which are known as child development or child focused places.

One can recognize the various impediments the children living in this world on a daily basis, which are attributed to a number of reasons; the rapid development of their surroundings portrayed by vast highways and streets, traffic jams, newly built neighborhoods and so on. These substantial alterations and changes have their impact on children on several levels such as their self-reliance, movability in addition to the noticeable decrease in the children access and usage of public open places.

Urban design is a major contributor in producing public open areas that are considered inviting and appealing both to children and their families, in addition to being secure and located near the children's houses. However, in city's urban designing and planning treat children's areas as limited areas that can be used limitedly for some sports and amusement, and are isolated from the general public open spaces.

The paper's primary objective is to perceive how the children contributed in the processes of designing and planning of major cites, and to recognize both the impediments and advantages of offering a space that allow children to get together, be energetic and lively, to inspect and investigate, to enjoy their times with their peers, to interact with their environment and to spend time in the open air.

The problem of open spaces availability and accessibility for children will be reviewed in addition to the approaches that can be adopted to handle these spaces. The main characteristics that draw the attention of users to open spaces will be highlighted in addition to discussing the part urban design play in outlining districts and neighborhoods

1.1 Understanding childhood

This must be approached by asking several questions; who is considered a child? What does the term child actually refer to; a youngster, and adolescent or simply an inexperienced individual?

According to Cunningham (1995) the term childhood cannot possibly be approached apart from the entire community. Infancy can be defined as the phase starting with childbirth and continue to childhood, however, in case childhood is solely referred to, that implies that infancy is included. Childhood ends at the age of 18, this particular age is of great importance, high school is finished at this age, and 18 year olds can individually and freely determine their own educational course, which is considered a supposed sign of adulthood instead of the actual adulthood.

1.2 Childhood development and open space

imply that there is a relationship connecting the environment with children's corporeal, mental, societal and psychological improvement.

In 2006, Karsten and Van Vliet talked to a sample of 79 parents living in the Netherlands; the entire sample understood the importance of allowing children to spend their times outdoors. The parents generally

required roads with less traffic, vegetated districts, available playing fields and spaces that are not entirely designed for children, such as balconies, yards and broad pavements. (Karsten and van Vliet, 2006).

In 2006, Veitch and others interviewed a sample of 78 parents living in Melbourne from different socio-economic classes; low, middle and high. The questions concentrated on the effects of free play on their children. As was expected, parents expressed their worries regarding traffic, safe roads to neighborhood's parks and outsiders who might hurt their children. The parents observed that when there are greater numbers of children in an area, it is more likely that they will spend their times outdoors. Overall, the parents demanded to have playing areas that support inventive and ingenious activities that include all ages and parks within the walking distance. In case of people living in apartment blocks, their demands were mainly about their need to have playing areas and joint yards where the children can spend their time and play safely. (Fjortoft, 2004; Veitch et al, 2006).

As Fjortoft (2004), a comparison between two sets of children was conducted for duration of one year. The first set resumed their usual routine, as for the second they were asked to spend time in an adjacent woods for a period of 1 to 2 hours daily. After analyzing the acquired results, it was concluded that the children who spent time in natural surroundings displayed substantial growth in their physical fitness and a favorable growth in stability and synchronization.

An experiment was conducted in Freiberg, Germany in 2004, the researcher evaluated the environment based on specific standards in an area with a radius of 200 meters and enclose 4000 children's houses, the results concluded that in case of a suitable environment the amount of time the children spend outdoors with no parents' supervision is approximately 4 times more than other environments that are less suitable. (Blinkert, 2004).

As for Morrow (2000) an interview was conducted for a sample of 99 children who were students in two secondary schools situated in the lower socio-economic classes in the United Kingdom. The researcher concluded that the groups of youngsters usually form a virtual group of friends founded in areas nearby schools, downtown, the road, the homes of friends and relations and on some cases a couple of houses instead of a closely confined and recognizable geographic sites. Homogenous topics mentioned in the interviews were usually the absence of playgrounds that were considered clean and protected in addition to heavy traffic. (Morrow, 2000).

1.3 Physical activity

Children's overweight or obesity is inversely proportional to the levels of physical activities performed. (Dollman, J, Norton, K & Norton, L 2005,). During childhood an increase in the physical activity can protect the child from the dangers of some serious incurable illnesses in the future, such as diabetes, cardiac illness, high blood pressure, obesity in addition to some types of cancer. (Crawford, D & Jeffery, 2005). The children's chances to be active is actually ruled by several assisting components that include the effect of parents and family on the child, schools' physical education program, the ecological determinants that surround the child such as urban planning, the security level of the neighborhood in addition to the availability of parks and playing areas. (Crawford, D & Jeffery,2005)

1.4 Access to public play open space

The term access is individuals' capability to reach and be able to move around and inside of the park. Regardless of the location of both children and youngsters' homes, they need to have a facilitated access to the different areas in which they can enjoy their times and have fun, cost-free, and have the privilege of coming and going to the park whenever they wanted. The condition of the play area appointed to children is extremely important, but so is the children's chance to spend time and play in different open public areas. It is really essential to allow an improved access to public areas in addition to an improved administration, for it is considered of the same significance as the condition and facilities of the public areas. If the chance to play presented itself, children are sure to seize it, and they need to be given more chances to play and have fun. What characterizes a lively and energetic society is having children in public areas having fun and playing. (Free Play Network and PLAYLINK, 2006).

Having appropriate and favorable public spaces that the children and youngsters can use, is not only beneficial for them, it is beneficial for the community as a whole. As long as public areas operate properly, they can be an open common resort that everybody can make use of, a public area can be a space where people can socialize and an environment that allow to meet and communicate. Having a place where children can play and spend time in a natural setting is extremely beneficial to them, for they have a tendency to be more energetic and lively in such settings, and according to several studies, allowing children to interact with nature have its favorable impact on their psychological and intellectual well being.

In 1997, Valentine surveyed a sample of children's local movability in an urban environment, his main focus was going to and coming back from school, in addition to the availability and access to the neighborhood's parks and provisions. (Valentine, 1997). The availability and accessibility to parks and open areas for different types of people; children, families and disabled children is of great importance. This also affects the accessibility to the park, the ability to navigate its interior, in addition to where the facilities are placed which includes

restrooms and providing covered shady relaxing spaces. (Seeland,& Nicole,2006).

The time the children usually spend in parks or other open public areas is extremely affected by several factors; the children's capability to get to certain locations within the neighborhood alone, the parents worries and fears often prevent the child from spending time alone in the park or allowing the child to go to and return from the park without an adult. (Vetch et al 2008).

2. Catering for varying needs

The manner with which parks are designed and utilized can substantially differ based on age, sex, physical aptitude, the region in addition to the ethnic group. It is important that parks serve the inactive and dynamic usage. According to children the inactive usage involves meeting and interacting with other children (City of Darebin 2005) whereas the dynamic usage of the parks involve using different sports gear, strolling, skating and other types of sports. As for age variations, it is noticed that young children are expected to go to parks accompanied by family to play and spend time in the playing area. (Morris, J, Wang, 2001). As for children in elementary schools the most common usages of parks are using playing equipments, walking and playing baseball, basketball and other ball games. (City of Darebin 2005). Teenagers however, use the parks to hang out in addition to planned games and other casual games including different ball games. (Zakarian, JM 1994). A few papers and articles can be found that focus on encounters, conceptions and observations of youngsters coming from different cultures (or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse CaLD) or environments about open public spaces and parks. Moreover, an interview was conducted in the city of Darebin for a group of youngsters, and it was concluded that it is necessary to understand that locals and other people coming from different societies and backgrounds (or CaLD) regard and use parks variously. Youngsters and children coming from different environments and cultures (CaLD) can be discouraged to use parks because they are anxious and worried from encountering rejection, apartheid and absence of cultural perception. Moreover, children and youngsters coming from different cultures may have different skin color or different way of clothing, which make them stand out in public places, and they can be falsely misunderstood to have hostile and unsocial conduct or thought of as gangsters. (Cottone, C 2005). Although some parks are equipped with certain gear such as a wheel-chair swing, there are greater problems concerning handicapped children and youngster that must be underlined and considered in papers and articles focusing on parks' availability and trepidation of disparagement. (Seeland, K & Nicolè, S 2006).

As to Walsh (2006), he emphasized on the variation of age groups regarding the necessity of providing children with play areas. Children of young age needs constant supervision when they spend time in the play areas, which demands both visional and physical availability to reach the children. As for older children they must be allowed separate entry to restrooms and beverages. And finally, adolescents might require spaces to play sports in addition to gatherings and meetings. (Walsh (2006).

3. Children need a safe & healthy environment

Basically, the well-being and stability of children in their environment rely on several conditions; security, wholesomeness and most importantly providing health support and services. It is essential for the children to be in an environment in which it is possible to keep the children safe from the different kinds of illnesses. In the Middle East and North Africa areas, the death rates for 5 year olds were lowered immensely and fast in the past years, with a rate higher than any other area across the world. Nevertheless, death rates remain greater than other areas, comparable to profits and earnings, approximately 500,000 children less than 5 years old die yearly. (Evans,1998)

In many countries the high estimates of injuries caused by traffic accidents are a well known phenomenon. Death and injury estimates in countries with low and middle wealth are much greater than the estimates documented in both Europe and the USA, and that is due to the badly preserved streets, the various usages of lanes and lack of emergency stopping lanes, pavements and out of harm's way crossways. (Manciaux, (1986). In this area children aged between 5 to 14, are the most affected category with traffic accidents, and that is but an indication that roads are basically dangerous places for children. (Manciaux, (1986).

4. Attractive open places for use and play

The patterns followed in planning and designing neighborhoods are considered contributive elements and determinants. A variety of peculiarities of the design can have an impact on spending time and playing in the open air, among these: expansive roadways, high speed, shortage of pavements, insufficient parks inside the district or the neighborhood, traffic jams in highways and avenues that limit the residential districts and segregate them, which influence the children particularly the ones who can walk and ride their bicycles by themselves. (Handy et al. 2008).

To what extent a certain urban area is considered appealing depends on the way its spaces are used in addition to the experience the individual gets when spending time in it, how good it is to set down and relax, to

walk, to ride the bike, to enjoy the scenery and chat with others. When a public open area is considered appealing and friendly it attracts different people to use the different areas and enjoy them in addition to giving the people a sense of security while spending time there. (Western Australia planning commission, 2004). The following chart displays the factors that can be produced or altered in order to have an impact on the magnitude 'quantity' and the characteristics 'quality' of the children's experience in public open spaces as well as parks.

5. Child friendly city

The way with which a neighborhood can be turned into a child-friendly environment can be best described through the perspective of children, for they comprise the part of the community that have the knowledge of the characteristics of a 'walkable city'.

The best approach to be followed in order to create child friendly neighborhoods is for designers and architects to discuss the flaws in the design. This implies creating an ingenious connection that links the dissimilar and contrasting demands. To be able to work out the proposed requirements, planners must consider the community's circumstances as the beginning. An open-minded and progressive approach is required to identify the flaws and defects so that alternatives and modifications regarding the reformation can be discovered. Yet, in the end to make such procedures effectual and productive in everyday tasks, it is necessary to make the children perceive those procedures and suggestions to be able to employ and benefit from them. The basic concentration on the children's usual routine in addition to their activity models necessitates the consideration of the children's willpower as well as the imperative provisions that lead to the growth of self-sufficiency and independence in children. Thus, provisions that are considered suitable for children are required to be produced, and they correlate with the children's mental and bodily capabilities and aptitude. (Robert Bosch (2010).

6. Conclusions

Inadequate accessibility to provisions and facilities to exercise is assumed to be a major cause of the decreased degrees of bodily activities amidst individuals encountering socio-economic impediment. According to the results of this paper, there were no variances in the general public spaces' availability and accessibility in different neighborhoods; high and low income, where children have parks and public spaces that are near their houses, this conclusion oppose other studies and papers, Estabrooks et al (2003) for instance, concluded that less provisions for physical activities were found in low and middle class districts in comparison to high class districts.

A substantial extent of additional contact and cooperation exists amidst the aforementioned organizations, analysts etc, in addition to extra adjacencies that link open public areas and parks which create a balanced design and plan, encourage an understanding of the society and assist in improving the wholesomeness and health of children and youngsters.

Among the main conclusions in this paper is a conclusion that implies that parks are of great significance when it comes to the effectiveness and liveliness of children. This conclusion is homogeneous with specific papers in the same field of study, which indicates the importance of having close by parks, provisions in addition to the general characteristics of the park, especially the playing area that encourage the children to use these areas.

Chawla 2002

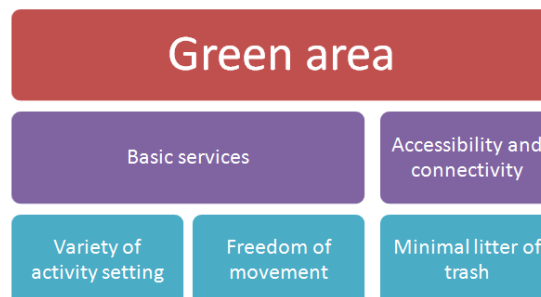


Figure (1), Child friendly neighborhood definition by chawla, (2002)

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