

## **Designing Cities with Children and Young People: Beyond Playgrounds and Skate Parks**

Kate Bishop and Linda Corkery, Editors (2017)  
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This important publication on urban planning and design for children and young people, edited by Kate Bishop and Linda Corkery, brings together a significant number of viewpoints on issues relating to the re-thinking and re-designing of our cities with children and youth in mind. This publication aims to represent an interdisciplinary and international body of work by researchers and practitioners to set out suggestions that will inform policy-making and design around the world. The editors are taking up a very ambitious endeavor at two levels: first, by attempting to address the paramount goal in childhood and youth studies, namely to include children's and youths' own views and perspectives in policies that affect them (Askins & Pain, 2011; Nolas, 2015; Valentine, 2004); and second, by balancing being both a scholarly work of high quality as well as a policy-informing document that aims to address policies on change in urban planning and design.

The volume is separated into four sections, complimented by a very significant appendix which presents particular case studies of the issues discussed. The first section of the book addresses global and general issues on the topic of children's and youths' engagement in urban design within the frame of sustainability—in social as well as environmental terms—and functions largely as an introduction of the debates discussed across the rest of the book. A number of innovative methods are discussed, if briefly, as in the chapter by Derr, Chawla and van Vliet---. The second section of the book addresses the very issue of research with children and youth, setting forth among others, questions that relate to difficulties and particularities of such research, as well as how to conceptualize findings and reach the right audiences. Chapters in this section aim to demonstrate the potential of research to inform urban planning and design. The last two chapters of the section, following up from two more generic chapters, discuss site- and project-specific examples, and thus bring the section's overall argumentation forward. For instance, a very interesting chapter by Carroll and Witten explores the significance put forth by children on accessible urban public space, drawing on a project of redesigning urban spaces facilitated by the authors in Auckland. The third section of the book explores questions of impact, with experts discussing policies and the impact of research, raising significant points on both state-level as well as more grassroots-initiated discussions on policies. The chapters of this section aim to demonstrate how, when state-level political processes take into consideration the views of children in a substantial way, political ground could be gained that might set forth socio-political change, as is demonstrated in the chapter by Corkery and Bishop in a study of how this has functioned in a particularly persistent way in a case from New South Wales. Beyond state-level policy making, the chapter by Wooley explores how similar political pressure and social change may be set forth through grassroots activism—drawing from a case study of campaigners for the use of

outdoor environments in the UK. The fourth section of the book presents the perspective of practitioners working in the field, focusing on participatory and action research projects. The contribution from Dimoulas in this section addresses a significant issue that is characteristic of the often-problematic gaps that may exist between policy makers and young people, namely in this case the influence that the young can have on the design of community youth centers.

On a methodological level, the book authors suggest a number of useful innovative methods for researching with children and youth, as well as a number of suggestions for actively engaging participants on redesigning spaces in the urban environments. Epistemologically, perhaps more ethnographic approaches that focus more on children's actual views and uses of existing urban environments (Varvantakis, 2018; Ward, 1979) might have benefited the overall project. Additionally, while the chapters of the book address an impressively international range, the foci remain to a large extent within the Western world. The book could benefit by including more research from the non-Western world, as such perspectives might inform our usual assumptions about children's meaning-making and use of public space.

It must be noted that the book has a truly stunning design, which to my view benefits the aim of addressing policy-makers beyond a usual scholarly audience. The high-quality illustration and design helps bring forth the concepts and projects discussed by the authors, as well as helps highlight their relevance for wider audiences. The structure of the book is particularly well thought out, and assists non-specialists navigating the research findings and suggestions that are put forth by the authors. To this end, the appendix at the end of the volume provides a very comprehensive selection of examples of projects that make use of research to impact urban design. The volume is thus addressed on one hand to scholars of education, social sciences and urban studies who focus on childhood and youth, and on the other hand on professionals working in urban planning and design.

This volume constitutes a very significant and welcome step forward towards rethinking the ways we engage children in the design of our cities. It is but a step, however, and in the progress of "decolonizing" urban spaces for children, we need to remain critical of our projects, self-reflexive, and conscious of the fact that even the term "child-friendly cities" is one coined by adults.

## References

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Review by Christos Varvantakis

**Dr. Christos Varvantakis** is an anthropologist, working as a researcher at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He completed his Ph.D. at the Freie Universität Berlin and he has undertaken research in Germany, South India and Greece. His research focuses on childhood, politics, urban environments and visual and multimodal research methodologies.

### **Editors' Response by Kate Bishop and Linda Corkery**

The editors would like to thank Christos for his generous and comprehensive review. We were particularly delighted that he picked up on so many of our deliberate editorial decisions. The design and full illustration of the book is indeed meant to increase its appeal, breadth of potential readership, and help to animate the research and practice discussions within the chapters, as are the case studies at the end of the book.

The main emphasis for us was on acknowledging the expansive body of participatory research work with children and young people that now exists in the Western world and the contributions this work has made, as well as the challenges still needing to be addressed. Another central aim was to shift urban design and planning focus from designated and sanctioned environments, routinely allocated and associated with children and young people, to the broader envelope of urban public space and young people's everyday use of it.

We certainly recognize that there are cultural stories in this space that are not included in our book and are eager to extend our networks for this kind of work throughout Southeast Asia, China, Japan and India, for example. No doubt there will be much shared experience and many internationally relevant themes that could advance the discussion on participatory work with children and youth in city design.

We would like to thank CYE for enabling this review of the book and for allowing us to respond. We hope its readers find the book beneficial whether they are new to this field of work or well experienced in it. Lastly, we would also like to publicly thank all the authors for their interest and commitment to the book and for their generosity in sharing their research and practice worlds with us.