Comparison of Methods for Participation of Vulnerable Children in Neighborhood Rehabilitation
(Case Studies: Tehran's Southern Neighborhoods)

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ABSTRACT:
Due to the poor social and economic conditions of vulnerable children's families, vulnerable children experience urban spaces for work and play more than other children. Although these children gain a solid understanding of urban spaces, which can be used in the process of designing desirable urban spaces in their neighborhoods, they are less considered in such projects. Thus, the methodology for the participation of vulnerable children is not developed well to be suited for their involvement in urban rehabilitation. This study examined the application of various qualitative methods to find the suitability of each method for vulnerable children participation in the urban rehabilitation, such as drawing, interview, visiting site and writing essays complemented with drawings, if desired. The results of the study in Tehran's southern neighborhoods reveal that certain group interviews and site visiting with these children could be more beneficial as compared to other participation methods. This is due to a number of factors including better verbal skills as compared to writing and drawing capabilities. Further, studies show that the participation of vulnerable children requires suitable measures to obtain their trust and encourage participation. None-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can play a significant role in this.

Keywords: *Vulnerable Children, Participatory Methods, Urban Rehabilitation, Tehran's Southern Neighborhoods*

INTRODUCTION

Community is the main pillar of the urban body; and balance of social life in cities depends on preserving Communities (Moztarzadeh et al.,2012) and of the main group of communities are children. According to the Human Rights Convention, vulnerable children are abandoned children or those who are subject to social discrimination or child labor. This includes migrants, children who live and work on streets, children who are away from their families for long periods of time andare those who are victims of economic poverty. Urban poverty is one of the main challenges faced by the children of the 21st century (Stephens, 2012). Children who grow up in poverty are more vulnerable than other children are. Working children who live in old neighborhoods are a major group among vulnerable children. The Children's Rights Statement and the Global Survival, Development and Protection of Children Statement are among the most important steps to protect children's rights,

which are particularly focused on vulnerable children. The content of the Children's Rights Convention (1989), which came into effect in 20 countries one year after being approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 1990, became operational in Iran after 1995 (Davar, 2007).

The "Growing up in Cities" 1994 and the "Child-Friendly Cities" 1996 projects are the two major projects developed by UNESCO and UNICEF in regards to protecting children's rights in cities. As part of these projects, a list of criteria for the quality of life from the perspective of children and the youth were developed, acknowledging the fact that there is no age limit for participation in the analysis and planning of the built urban environment. Further, the studies identify the needs of children and the youth in cities and regards children's welfare as the final criterion for a healthy residence, a democratic society and good governance, (Gleeson & Sipe, 2006). The key components of a Child-Friendly Cities include the extent of their influence on urban decisions, their opinion on their desirable city and their participation in social life and cultural affairs.

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Vulnerable children are present in public spaces more freely for various reasons including work, play and shopping for their parents. They, therefore feel the problems of urban spaces largely. Despite the valuable knowledge of these children in relation to urban spaces, data collection from them is very difficult considering their specific emotional characteristics (often unruly or depressed). Besides, most of children's participation methods are very generic and do not specifically considers measures to be adopted for vulnerable children. Regarding the potentials and the constraints of the participation of vulnerable children in making desirable places for their living, the main question of this study is formulated as follows: "What are the suitable methods to be considered in gathering data and information needed to improve the neighborhoods from the point of view of vulnerable children?"

The Methods for Children's Participation in Urban Planning and Design

Community cultural development, considered as part of an emerging sustainability framework encompasses a huge range of activities that give communities the opportunity to tell their stories, build their creative skills, and be active participants in the development of their culture (Haghi & Zabihi, 2012). Participatory urban planning and design has introduced a new component in the decision-making processes for cities since mid-1960s: children and young adolescents are now considered as the most important social group, which are exposed to the harms resulted from living in inappropriate cities and urban spaces (Spencer & Blades, 2006). Adults do decision making on urban plans and children are rarely involved in brainstorming or decision making in relation to their urban living spaces (Stephens, 2012). .Involving children in the process of planning and designing for cities will have further results simply getting better and more desirable urban spaces for children. Such participation helping them to listen to one another, developing their capacities for critical thinking, supporting their processes of discovery, and helping them to develop the knowledge and skills for making a difference in their world (Wolff, 2009;Zsuzsanna et al., 2010) .

The various methods for children's participation in matters related to their living environment include informal observations and "hang-outs", interviews, drawing, daily activity schedules, family and support networks, role playing, drama, puppetry, guided tours, photography by young people, behavior mapping, questionnaires and surveys, focus groups and small-group discussions, workshops and community events. Considering the fundamental differences between children and adults, data collection and analysis methods are different. According to the studies of Bachtel and others, the use of maps, drawings and diaries are among common data collection methods in relation to children's understanding, use and analysis of the environment (Bechtel et al, 1987). Also in the interview method, one common choice to deal with children is asking questions about children from adults,

parents, teachers or neighbors. It is usually more difficult to ask direct questions from younger children due to their limited verbal skills and literacy. Observation and interview are also among direct methods for analyzing children's physical behavior in urban spaces. Observation is the best method to provide valid information; however, it lacks scientific analysis. Researchers often use both methods (Bechtel et al., 1987). In order to achieve effective results, participation should be transparent, comprehensive, flexible and voluntary (Driskell, 2002). Hart has introduced a ladder of children's participation and values of their real participation (Mayo, 2001). The ladder includes below steps:

Child –initiated, shared decisions with adults;

Child -initiated;

Adult –initiated, shared decisions with children;

Consulted and informed;

Assigned but informed;

Tokenism;

Decoration;

Manipulation.

Therefore, depending on the situation, any of the steps of Hart's ladder or a combination of them may be used. This will be essential, if the participants are to be enabled to move up the ladder of participation, gaining the confidence and the skills to promote agendas for (re)development for social transformation. Young people who have already been defined as disadvantaged and 'disaffected' may be expected to be in correspondingly greater need of appropriate support, on a long-term basis(Mayo, 2001).

In experimental studies into the child-friendly cities in one of the poor districts of the Philippines, focus group interviews and workshops were used to get recommendations from urban authorities and children. The results show that these two groups saw problems differently. Recommendations of vulnerable children for having child-friendly cities were mainly personal and financial demands while the most important recommendations of the authorities included enhancing children's participation in the decision making processes, developing strategies to improve the involvement of the most vulnerable children, and considering the different cities' characteristics in implementing child-friendly programs (Racelis et al., 2005). Children as the key designers of the environment participated in the project conducted by the UNICEF in collaboration with internal organizations after the destructive earthquake in Bam in Iran in2003. Ten young Iranian architects were trained to help the children's participation. The main participation methods for the design of green spaces included drawing and questionnaire (Kamel-Nia & Haghir, 2009; UNICEF 2011).

Semi-formal deep interviews were used in the analysis of the urban movements of the vulnerable children in Uganda (Young, 2004). Similarly; interviews were used in a study in Istanbul to collect qualitative data from vulnerable children (Bademci, 2012). In many other studies, drawings and cognitive maps by children were identified as effective and flexible methods

to get the requirements and priorities of children from their neighborhood units (Blakely, 1994; Halseth & Doddridge, 2000; Mitchell & Kearns, 2007; Shokoohi et al., 2012). These studies and those conducted by many others (Archambault et al., 2012; Castonguay & Jutras, 2009; Othman & Said., 2012) usually do not developed methods for vulnerable children, and they used the same methods applied in child friendly cities projects. Since methodology is very important for approaching the accurate results, various methods for participation of vulnerable children are analyzed in this study to identify their applications and their advantages and disadvantages.

Case Study

The southern part of Tehran accommodates a higher portion of the middle and lower class as compared to the northern part. The target group was reached through public organizations for the protection of children in poor neighborhoods. Following initial studies, four neighborhoods in southern Tehran were selected: Darvazeh-Ghar, Mowlavi, Javanmard-Ghasab and Moft-Abad. Fig. 1 shows the locations of case studies in Tehran.

The neighborhoods of Darvazeh-Ghar and Mowlavi are situated in close proximity to each other and are similar in terms of physical fabric. They both have labyrinth alleys, very old buildings and residents who are considered among low income groups. The social condition of these neighborhoods is also very poor and unsafe due to addicts wandering and occasionally using drugs in public spaces. The Javanmard-Ghassab neighborhood in the most southern part of Tehran has buildings that are physically and visually decayed. The main physical difference between this and the other two neighborhoods is the existence of some public open spaces within its fabric. The presence of all age groups and both sexes in the open spaces of this neighborhood has resulted in it having better social safety as compared with the other two neighborhoods in its north. The

other case study is the Moft-Abad, which has a decayed fabric and many social issues such as the presence and gathering of addicts in open spaces. This neighborhood has been subject to rehabilitation during the recent years, which mainly included developing new buildings. However, these limited physical rehabilitations have not made much change in the economic condition of the neighborhood and its social fabric. The fabrics of the studied neighborhoods are generally similar in terms of physical conditions of the buildings and access network within the neighborhood and face social issues.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study benefits from different existing techniques in qualitative participatory studies. Lapan et al.'s methods (2012) were adopted to identify the degree of effectiveness of their proposed techniques while working with vulnerable children in southern neighborhoods in Tehran (Lapan et al., 2012).
Preparing survey documents:
Deductive method through writing and drawing
Interview:
Semi-structured deep interviews (individual);
Focused deep interviews (in groups);
Observation.
Participatory observations together with the children
To gain the children's trust and to familiarize them with concepts such as: city, neighborhood, good living space and to increasing writing and drawing skills, the researcher worked closely with none- governmental organizations for the protection of children in the southern district of Tehran called "the Imam Ali Society" as a teacher, from three months prior to undertaking the research. In addition, some data was collected through primary schools. The study group comprised children between 7 to 12 years of age. The techniques used include the following:
Drawing: This method was used subjectively through holding
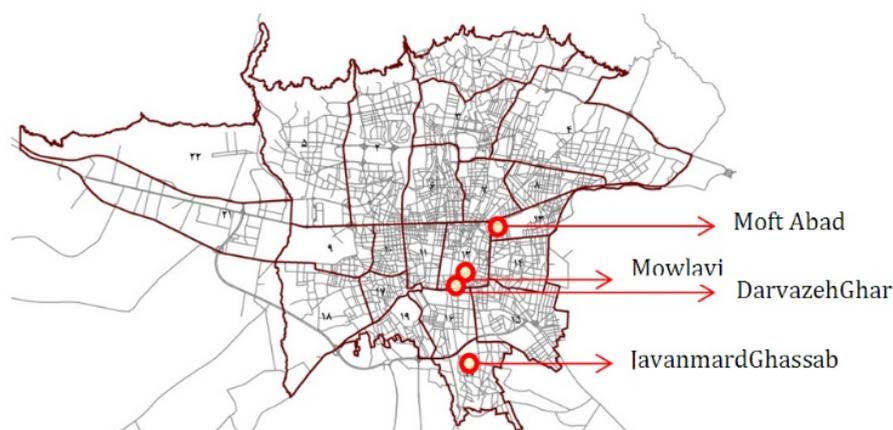

Fig. 1: The locations of case studies in Tehran

courses in Iranian House NGO in Mowlavi neighborhoods, where the researcher acted as the teacher in order to get the attributes of preferred urban spaces for vulnerable children. Five boys and six girls aged between 8 to 12 years old participated in the drawing exercise with topics such as drawing the city they live, the good city, a beautiful place, unsafe spaces and the neighborhood haunt. Competitions were held for topics of drawing the beautiful city in which the children did not express much interest. Analyzing the children's drawings was undertaken with the help of a children's psychology expert.

Interview: Two methods of deep interview and individual interview were used. The group interview was held with 12 children from the "Mowlavi Iranian House" with the topic being the desirable spaces of the neighborhood from their point of view. The interviews were carried out at various times during several days. The researcher, as the interviewer, led the interviews towards the main topic of "features of the desirable neighborhood". The children were given the liberty to control the conversation.

In the deep individual interview, 22 children between 7 to 12 years, including 16 girls and 6 boys were interviewed during several days. The interviews were carried out at The Science House NGO in Darvazeh-Ghar with the topic "the features of a good space and a good city".

Site Visit (Shared Observations and Visual Documentation)
Children from the neighborhoods of Javanmard-Ghassab (two children), Mowlavi (two children) and Darvazeh-Ghar (three children) and Mot Abad (2 child) participated in a day inspections of their own neighborhood. The children accompanied by the researcher from the NGO's office to their residence and they were asked to specify when they enter their neighborhood and describe the elements and features of it. Depending on the situation and based on the children's knowledge of their neighborhood, the following questions were raised: "What or which part of your neighborhood do you like the most?" What or which part of your neighborhood do you dislike? Is there anything in the neighborhood that limits or bothers you? Where are the recreational spaces in your neighborhood? Where do you

normally get together with your friends to play? Where does your neighborhood start and where does it end?" The result of this part was the identification of the desired and undesired elements, features causing fear in children and the boundaries of the neighborhood. Some general conclusions were also drawn in relation to vulnerable children's view of urban spaces.
Particular attention was paid while asking questions such as using simple terms similar to children's language. Consequently, the behavioral territories and the use of spaces by children in the neighborhood were investigated.

Writing Essays Complemented With Drawings, If Desired
In this technique, one secondary school having 104 boys between 10 to 12 years of age in Moft-Abad were studied. Through the schoolteachers, the children were asked to use essays, drawings or both based on their abilities or interest to present the features of their desired neighborhood.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Drawing
The majority of vulnerable children do not have the opportunity to learn to draw due to their day-to-day struggles to satisfy their primary needs. A significant amount of time was spent in the beginning of each course to teach them how to draw and express their thoughts visually. Therefore, they were mainly focused on drawing properly rather than the topic itself. On the other hand, vulnerable children usually have uncontrollable emotions and that is why it is very difficult and in some cases impossible to get them to draw the specified concepts or even their preferred subject. Many children are not capable of drawing what they have in their mind. Instead, they tend to want to talk about it. In many cases, there is a dominant person among the children, who influences what other children draw, resulting in the drawings being different from the children's actual opinions. Besides, many kids do not have a good understanding of the urban scale to draw. There is often the need to use a smaller scale or use other concepts indirectly.

There is a direct relationship between the age of the children and their understanding of 'the city" and how they present it.

Fig.. 2: A child drawing "a city': roads, cars and buildings"

Fig. 3: A child drawing "a good city: a neighborhood without cars"

Younger children draw a neighborhood and introduce that as a city whereas the drawings of the older children have more resemblance to a city. Buildings and cars are the key features of "the city" from the perspective of the children while in the drawing of "the good city" there is either no car or cars are drawn in separate lanes and are shown far away. Fig.2 and Fig.3 are examples of children drawings with topics of "a city" and "a good city".

The Javanmard-Ghassab neighborhood is a safe and secure space for women and children whereas children and women have less presence in drawings of the Molwlavi neighborhood. There were more green spaces, birds and flowers in girl's drawings as compared to boys. The drawing titled "the haunt" revealed that such places being social spaces in the neighborhood were unknown to girls whereas boys identified the football field as their haunt.

The advantage of this method is that there is not much need for efforts to gain the children's trust, as children usually trust their teacher enough to make them express their thoughts visually. Overall, considering the significant time, cost and effort required, this method does not provide the desired information for data collection. This method is mainly to educate the children.

Group and Individual Interviews

The outcomes of group interviews with children revealed little but important features of desired neighborhood spaces from the children's perspective. The absence of addicts, street fights, noise pollution and car in the desired neighborhood spaces, the location of factories and industrial uses away from residential areas, the location of homes close to shopping centers, cleanliness of the neighborhoods and the provision of playing fields were among the most important features discussed. The deep individual interviews provided better and more accurate results as compared to the group interviews. The key features in the order of frequency included proximity to nature, the provision of recreational facilities, the existence of trees, the chance to play with friends, security of streets, the absence of addicts, cleanliness and the provision of educational and cultural

spaces and facilities such as NGOs.

Most vulnerable children have been present in their neighborhood spaces since their early childhood. That is why they can easily talk about their desired spaces. In order to get honest responses, both methods require certain preparations to gain the children's trust. Considering their knowledge of the city, neighborhood and urban spaces, there is no need to use indirect concepts to gather information in relation to the city and neighborhood. This method increases the children's attention to their surroundings and more importantly, will create and strengthen the feeling of being seen and contributing to shaping the future of the city, which is important for the children. Since the city and its problems are a big concern for many children, most of them were very active in the individual and group interviews, which resulted in the interviews being carried out in a few sessions. Overall, it can be concluded that the interview method is effective, especially in limited timeframes. Less information is gathered in group interviews as compared to individual interviews, however, reaching an agreement on certain topics and getting group opinions are easier due to the opportunity for group discussions.

Site Visit

Fig,4 and Fig. 5 show the examples of tracks and views of the two out of the four neighborhoods under studies.

The group site visits had certain outcomes including the fact that there is a direct relationship between the children's experience, awareness, understanding of urban spaces and their sense of security. During the site visit, there were certain areas where the children accompanying the researcher were not willing to enter, or had to walk through them fearfully. The table 1 illustrates the results of the site visit.

This method requires spending relatively significant amounts of time as it needs preparing and gaining the children's trust in order to achieve the desired outcome. In addition, the coordination of times and site visits with children takes much time. Walking through the meeting neighborhood, there are side elements that reduce the children's focus, however, like interviews, this method raises the feeling of being

Fig. 4: The track of inspection in the Javanmard-Ghassab.

Fig. 5: The track of inspection in theDarvazeh-Ghar.

Table 1: Results of the visit of the subject neighborhoods with children

Neighbourhoods / Children's sayings	Mowlavi	JavanmardGhassab	Darvazeh-Ghar	Moft- Abad
Desirable spaces and elements	-Old trees in good locations -Colourful lighting of a new building	-Playing field, flowers and trees -Football field -Mosque and school -Open spaces	Cultural and recreational complex	-Some trees
Undesirable spaces and elements	-Addicts or criminal haunt -Areas where special group of migrants which called Ghorbati stay -Playing field	-Mud in brooklets -Areas where young boys stand	-All neighbourhood including park and alleys (due to the presence of addicts in all neighbourhood)	-Addicts or criminal haunt -Trashs and litter in urban spaces
Elements causing fear in children	-special group of migrants which called Ghorbati -Addicts	-	- Addicts and criminals - The route between home and school	-Addicts and criminals
Playing fields	-The NGO office	-Spaces outside home: Alleys, parks etc.	Nowhere (although there are 3parks)	-Playing fields of other districts -Some alleys and streets
Neighbourhood domain	Area with high physical and social security (small areas)	Area with high physical security (relatively big area) being centred around the playing field	Area with high social security (small area)	Area with high social security

important and paying more attention to their surrounding as the children spend time and get involved in discussions about their neighborhood. The main reason for the effectiveness of this method can be seen in talking about needs, interests, memories and features of what goes in the mind of the children in understanding their neighborhood. Overall, despite certain difficulties, comprehensive and important information is gathered through this method. If adequate time and certain pre-requisites are available, this method is very helpful in understanding the problems of the neighborhood.

Writing Essay Complemented with Drawings

From the 104 children who took part in the study, with the exception of one who did a drawing, all children expressed their feelings and opinions by writing essays titled "the description of a good neighborhood". Each child pointed out certain features of urban spaces, which provided significant information in relation to the environment, social activities, land use, accessibility and transport and physical features. Among the most important attributes mentioned by the children, in the order of frequency, were cleanliness and hygiene, existence of parks and sports fields, the absence of addicts and criminals in the neighborhood, less cars, less building demolition work (due to developing new buildings).

One of the key advantages of this method is that it is not necessary for the researcher to be present among the children. There is, therefore, no requirement for preparations as in other methods. The children's presence in and experience of neighborhood spaces due to small homes, play, work or shopping or discussions and exchange of information about what happens in the neighborhood

in haunts has made the children have strong opinions, memories and feelings about their neighborhood spaces. The disadvantage of this method is that some schools may not cooperate for certain reasons. For example, none of the girls' schools in these neighborhoods had willingness to cooperate and the research was therefore conducted in boys schools only.

Evaluation of Methods

Each of the discussed participation methods has certain advantages and disadvantages considering the timeframe, comprehensiveness, difficulty, effectiveness and possibility of clear interpretation. The key features of each method are mentioned in the table 2.

Based on the experiences gained from field studies, certain measures should be adopted in the application of each method to avoid competition amongst children. They should not be compared with each other. In this case, better results can be achieved through better cooperation between children and their instructors in order to express their needs. In addition, the good relationship between children and their instructors will turn into long-term friendships. However, rewarding the best drawing or essay should be avoided so that the children learn the concept of participation and its important goal, which is cooperation with others, from early childhood and not expect rewards or personal profit in return for participation in urban affairs.

Gaining the children's trust is a key principle in getting vulnerable children to participate. Trying to get honest responses should always be a key consideration. NGOs can have a critical role in this respect. The presence of the researcher or a specialist in such organizations can help in gaining the children's trust while approaching these

Table 2: Evaluation of methods of vulnerable children participation

Methods / Features	Need for preparation	Raising concepts directly related to the city or neighbourhood	Concentration of the child during participation	Need for technical tools
Drawing	++	+	++	++
Individual interview	++	+	+	-
Group interview	+	++	+	-
Site visit	+	++	++	-
Essay	+	+	++	+

++ High   + Moderate   - Low

Table 3: Relative comparison of features of methods for participation of vulnerable children

organizations makes access to vulnerable children easily.

Table 3 ranks different methods for participation of vulnerable children based on required time, comprehensiveness, difficulty, usefulness for children (educational, or the feeling of satisfaction), simplicity and the need for a children's specialist. The table shows that writing demands the least amount of time to get results. Site visit are better than other methods in terms of comprehensiveness and providing more details of living spaces (current or desired) and ease of interpretation of the results by architects or planners. Group interviews are more effective in reaching the goal of participation due to the emphasis on the concept of participation, including listening to others' opinions, expressing ideas, participation in group discussions and decision-making.

Subjective categorization of the results of the study in table 4reveals some significant outcomes such as:

Site visit and group interviews are the most effective methods for evaluation of the living space of vulnerable children;

The best method for recognizing the needs and desires and getting direct information from children are individual interviews;

Writing essays are the easiest method because of its ease of interpretation and time requirement.

Table 4: the application of methods for the participation of vulnerable children in neighborhoods rehabilitation

CONCLUSION

This study explores the advantages and disadvantages of different participatory methods of vulnerable children of 7- 12 years. The main contribution of this study is the evaluation of different methods and their applications in gathering data needed for understanding the problems vulnerable children are faced in their living environment. The research approved the Mayo (2001) findings on the significant role of none-governmental organizations to enable children's voices to be heard. More over this study developed these originations' roles in preparing the primary conditions in which children's involvement in the improvement of their living environments occurs.

Taking advantage of the sharp-sightedness of vulnerable children in relation to urban problems and in other words, their urban knowledge through appropriate application of various methods or participation of vulnerable children is a suitable measure for the rehabilitation of decayed neighborhoods. A comparison of various participation methods revealed that each has a degree of effectiveness in achieving the goals. Based on the good verbal ability of the majority of vulnerable children, interview provides deep relationships with them especially those with unruly behaviors. Further, this method prepares children for the application of other methods by gaining their trust. The preparation of survey documents individually such as writing can be considered effective participation method for vulnerable children in the least duration of time Although drawing is a common method for participation of children, It is not preferable in relation to vulnerable children unless it is used together with another technique as a complimentary method. Based on the aims of the rehabilitation project, time requirements, and different outcomes of each method, a suitable method or a combination of methods can be used for the participation of vulnerable children in their living environment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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