



## **Participatory Planning; Providing Conceptual Model of Factors Affecting Children's Participation in Urban Planning**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to present a conceptual model for analyzing the factors affecting the participation of children in urban planning. One of the effective ways to implement urban development projects is to increase citizens' participation in the preparation and implementation of such schemes. Due to the age and awareness of children from the city, their participation is associated with a particular sensibility in the city. Therefore, the accompaniment of children in urban affairs requires a comprehensive and holistic view. Although urban planning research has emphasized the need for the participation of all segments of society, including children, so far, but few has comprehensively provided a conceptual framework for the participation of children in urban planning. The participation of children is influenced by many factors; however, most research has focused on limited aspects. This paper discusses the history of children's participation in the widespread expression of theorists in this field. The methodology is based on documentary research methodology, which mainly contains information and results provided by previous authors and researchers in the respective field discussed. Documentary research method has been considered as a comprehensive and technical way to strengthen other qualitative methods. Finally, the conceptual model is presented. The proposed model covers the field of software including rules and education, and hardware domain, including planning institutions and urban management institutions.

**Keyword:** *Conceptual Model, Children, Participation, Urban Planning.*

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### **Introduction**

Children have a deep understanding of urban spaces, buildings and neighborhoods and are well-informed and knowledgeable about their needs in the city. They are the designers and decision makers of the cities in the future; hence, the participation of children in the urban planning process requires more attention of planners. Today, urban planning for children and young people still means planning for a largely unimportant part of society. But there is a growing desire for children to engage with adults in planning and implementing development projects in their cities and neighborhoods. Children Participation is to create an environment for children to express their views as they affect and change decision-making. This participation is possible for children of different ages and abilities. It can be generalized in all areas and levels ranging from local to international [18]. On this basis, every child gets the right to participate in the development process [12]. However, the gap in studies in this area deals with the lack of a comprehensive understanding of the elements, requirements and methods of child participation in urban planning. Cities today are faced with organizational, economic and social challenges. Creating cities and neighborhoods that are friendly to

the children involve a complex and difficult negotiation process [4]. Despite the growing importance of public participation in urban planning and governance, and the allocation of an important part of the planning background in recent years, many planners, managers and citizens are often disappointed with public participation. Although there is a general perception that people should be more involved in public decision-making, there are many efforts in this direction, but many managers are still at the best of the hesitation about the general intervention, and in the worst case, it is considered problematic. An important basis for this is a broad and inclusive decision-making pattern, which engages stakeholders with different backgrounds, motivations, opinions and resources and also makes the voices of young people heard [23]. An effective way of creating inclusive participation in the city and ensuring its success in the future is to create the necessary framework for the participation of children [2]. Therefore, identifying the components that affect children's participation will allow planners to provide children with the opportunity to participate in the planning process, taking into account the constraints and capacities of the environment. According to the presented explanations, in order to take advantage of the important role of planners in realizing the participation of children in difficult planning environments, the accurate recognition of the components of the planning

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environment regarding the participation of children is necessary. Therefore, in this paper, on the one hand, efforts have been made to explore the children participation history by looking at the definitions and existing experiences of the components of children participation. Then, considering the existing theories in the field of children participation and the requirements and obstacles to its realization, the components of this environment are detected and their relationship is identified. Finally, by analyzing the main components, the children participation environment was developed and a conceptual model presented.

## **2. Literature Review**

Several theories of participatory planning and participatory urban planning have been presented since the second half of the 1960s. Meanwhile, James Midgley (1986), Sherry Arnstein (1996), Scott Davidson (1998) David Driskell (2002) and theory of Mediation (2004) are the most influential theories can be pointed out. Public participation in the last decades of the twentieth century has become one of the most important principles of planning dialogue and an essential element of civil rights and democratic decision-making in the world. Researchers such as Gaventa & Valderrama (1999); Williams (2004); Laurian & Shaw (2009); Brownill (2009); Conrad, Christie & Fazey (2011); Gordon et al (2011); Michels (2011); Connelly (2010); Agger (2012) and Khan & Swapan (2013), and other scholars, emphasized the need for participatory planning based on needs and socially acceptable choices rather than a top-down approach and expertise-based customized [9]. And in late 90's and the last years in the form of communicative planning, an interactive plan has been proposed with a bottom-up approach in the urban planning system [26]. Accordingly, a lot of research was done on the methods and target groups for participation in the urban planning process, including research on children's participation in the city and urban planning. The beginning of research was about the participation of children in the 70's, including Ward (1977, 1991) and Moore (1978, 1986), which state that cities are for adults only and do not work well for children. Since 1990, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children has further investigated the role of children in the city and their participation in urban planning. Including: Hart (1997); Horelli (1997); Matthews et al (1999, 2003); Alparone and Rissotto (2001); Chawla (2002); Berglund and Nordin (2007); Percy-Smith (2010). In the new millennium, the issue of children participation has become a dominant and executing policy in planning and in connection with physical planning processes in many international circles. The research has confirmed that children are qualified to plan. It is also emphasized that children's participation in the acceleration of their conversion into active citizens, the promotion of democracy and the strengthening of the situation of

children in the adult's community and the neighborhood is very effective (Matthews 2003, Thomas 2007; Tisdall 2008). Therefore, the education of children and students is essential for participation. Since participation can be done in varying degrees to children, education can be considered as one of the essential components of participatory processes [1], [19]. There is evidently a general agreement on research that participation involves the educational processes automatically [7], [28]. In this way, studies show a strong link between education and participation, which means raising the level of education, increasing trust in social institutions and participation in urban organizations [24]. In this regard, initiatives in the educational system have so far emphasized that participation is as an experience to promote democracy and awareness of civil and citizenship rights [18].

### **2.1 Children Participation in Urban Planning**

Children's participation is to provide an opportunity for children to express their views as they influence decisions and change them. The participation of children is possible for children of different ages and abilities. This partnership can be generalized in all areas and levels ranging from local to international [17]. Based on the above definition, there are two different perspectives on dealing with children and their relationship with urban planning. On the one hand, children can be considered as independent and autonomous groups, so that they can decide without adult intervention. Accordingly, children are so empowered to participate independently in the design and use of urban space. But another look at the child, says the child is vulnerable and needs care and support. This recognition of the child has created a supportive law that has made adult commitments to protect children from harm. This concept provides little support for children's ability to make decisions for themselves and instead emphasizes the role of adults in acting and defining what is best for children [27]. The first view that considers the child as a future citizen believes their active participation in urban affairs. In this perspective, it is believed that children have interesting ideas about the world in which they live and they can collaborate in the development processes that shape the urban environment [8]. Through experiential learning in participatory processes, children create self-confidence, communicate with others, and become self-centered with their own creative potential [22]. This effect undoubtedly needs to change the perspective of planning in the city [14]. The change involves a complicated and difficult negotiation process [4]. To create a widespread and inclusive decision pattern in which different stakeholders interact with different backgrounds, motives, opinions and resources, and, certainly, children's voices are heard. The feature of the participation of children is that they act as stakeholders in the field of performance, not in an educational environment [18]. In such a partnership,

from the beginning of the analysis process, the child's place in strategic planning, annual planning, and program design are considered. Children identify problems, they analyze causes and resources to solve these problems, mobilize other stakeholders, they design their goals and plans, execute programs and evaluate their results [22]. Children and young people can engage in establishing relevant goals and indicators that change the daily lives and realization of their rights, additionally, when children are familiar with the goals and indicators of the project and have participated actively in the planning process, it also contributes to the social progress of children, increases their strength and motivation, and leads to improved decision making and planning efficiency [25].

## 2.2 The participation of adults and children

As children expand their participation in planning, researchers found that children had a limited understanding of social policy and did not know how they could play a role. Therefore, there was a distinction between children, adolescents and adults [13]. Local and urban programs are almost always political because they are tied to commercial interests, and working actively with adults is a prerequisite for any effective partnership with children, therefore, it is unlikely that a project can be considered that does not conflict with the interests of children and adults [5]. Hence, collaboration between children and adults may be pressured at some levels. This certainly does not mean unsuccessful participation and can represent a meaningful partnership. In fact, they are negotiating for location planning for both groups [3]. This topic has been repeated by other scholars, for example: Horelli, 2010 and Percy-Smith 2006. And argue that the attitude of children's views to others in society creates opportunities for "social learning", which is a necessary part of the participatory process. In this regard, another look is that participation is assessed not only by the level of interaction between the various stakeholders, but also by the extent to which decision-making influence is in place. For example, a collaborative activity may achieve a high level of interaction between children and adults, but it may fail to be effective in those who have the power to make decisions.

## 3. Research Method

The methodology used in this research is based on documentary research methodology. The documents used in documentary research mainly include the information and results provided by previous authors and researchers in the subject area discussed. Documentary research method has been considered as a comprehensive and technical way to strengthen other qualitative methods. In this way, the researcher collects his research data about actors, events and social phenomena from sources and documents. In this methodology, Research is related to existing phenomena

and the researcher seeks to identify previous researches on that subject. In this study, after extensive review of the sources related to the topic of research in books and valid articles, the analysis of the findings is presented in the form of a categorization of methods and approaches.

### 3.1 Approaches and methods to participation with children

In each participatory program, there are different methods to interact with children and adolescents that influence the impact of children on collaborative activities, the nature of the action and the stages of the program. All methods of children participation are valid and may vary. Depending on the program's objectives or how it is carried out, the amount of their use at different times may be low or high (Table1).

### 3.2 Levels of child participation

Based on different participatory methods, participation levels can be graded based on the amount of responsibility given to children. The degree of responsibility of children in partnership usually depends on the motivation of adults in planning. Some of the main studies are as follows:

#### 3.2.1. Educational system and participation of children in the city

Because citizenship is a lifelong process, all people need appropriate citizenship education at different stages of their lives. Students also need to participate in community development in their entire home and school decisions and in society, and actively participate in social relationships appropriate to their own circumstances. The school is the second home after the house where children and teenagers spend most of their time, and play an important role in the development of personality and the transfer of knowledge and life skills to them. As a result, familiarity with citizens and citizenship is also one of the skills to be taught at school, and students from different levels of education must have rights, responsibilities, and citizenship responsibilities at school. In other words, including important and essential content on citizenship rights based on the principles and rules in the curriculum and the application of them by the education system governing any country will promote dedicated and responsible people. For this reason, educating good citizens today is one of the most important tasks of official education systems of countries. In many countries, education officials have given priority to citizenship among other activities by developing a variety of training programs. One can say that today all countries are concerned about how to prepare their new generation for life as a useful citizen and to learn how to participate actively in social life. By expanding the concept of partnership, it is hoped that urban planning is not only within the exclusive boundaries of specialists and authorities, but also for anyone, even children,

young people in society. Before any other factor, the lack of education may be an important reason for the lack of participation of different classes of people, especially children. These changes create challenges for the children and young people to learn in schools and teach new skills [11]. The defect in many educational programs does not allow children to play the role of a future planner, because these training programs provide poor simulation of the actual urban planning conditions for children [2]. The training process is known as the first step in developing well-developed development strategies and in establishing a basis for understanding participation in each development and meaningful action [16]. Therefore, as to the analysis of the factors influencing citizen participation in urban planning, many experts express an analytical domain to the subject of citizens' skills, knowledge and experience, which includes formal education through schools and informal education through community and family: Ebdon & Franklin (2006); Brownill & Parker (2010); Yang & Pandey (2011); Beierle (1999); Abelsona, et al (2007); Conrad, et al (2011) [6]. Therefore, accepting the position of children as urban planners or citizens is strongly dependent on the cultural and educational context of the city. Principal officials in local institutions such as schools, cultural centers and municipalities play an important role in creating favorable conditions for the participation of children. These school roles include changes in organizational methods, new teaching methods and environmental planning, and as much as is the will to promote and discuss among different groups [11].

### 3.2.2. Educational Approaches for Children's Participation in the City

As outlined in the child participation approaches, one of the most important approaches is the approach to educate, which examines the ways and means of

teaching children. This approach involves the teaching of children about planning. Educational approach allows free dreaming without fear of real dangers. In these approaches, children learn what limitations and as much facilities are available in the planning process for the city and the neighborhood. In an educational approach, bringing children together with the development and education of children is the teaching of built environment subjects in the curriculum of schools. Innovative ways of playing, such as playing as a structure builder or licensed applicant, as well as expressing opinions to the municipality or building a model of cities, are educational subjects [20]. Education should link the subject with the places where students live, and the issues that affect us all. To a large extent, general education, followed by higher education, has failed to recognize the benefits of student interaction with cities and neighborhoods in acquiring knowledge. To participate in the new millennium, acquiring new skills in the context of establishing a link between learning and the real world is essential for student's success. Regarding the partnership, the education system once has an effective impact that will bridge the gap between the way students live and how to learn them. The new partnership teaches that literacy is not only reading, writing, and computational skills, but it is also learning how to use knowledge and skills in context of modern life is necessary for participation [21]. Community-based learning in the curriculum helps students acquire knowledge and subject skills and practice and experience them. Simultaneously, students develop effective citizenship skills and features by identifying and addressing issues and concerns that affect their neighborhoods. In this way, students can strengthen their communication with their neighborhoods, and the gap between knowledge and practice and between what students need to learn and what can help them disappears [21] (Table2).

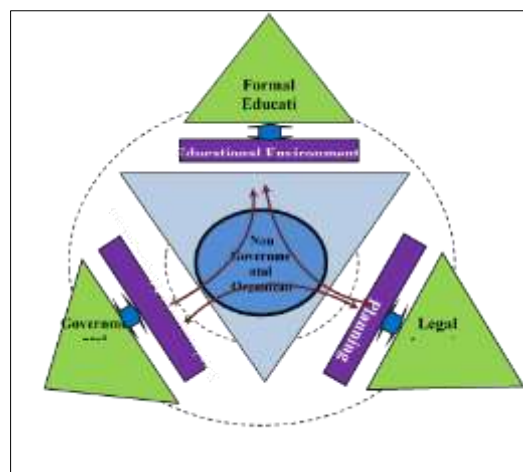


Figure 1: Conceptual Model for children's Participation

#### 4. Conclusion

In developing a conceptual model, the theories and approaches of children participation have been used. Especially in the approaches that consider children to play an important role in the participatory process. Thus, by integrating existing theories and explaining the relationships between them, it is possible to formulate a conceptual model and can help identify the characteristics of the participatory planning environment of children. Based on this model, various conditions that create opportunities or limitations in planning with children are recognized. The feature of this model is simultaneous emphasis and equal to all components. Accordingly, in a macro perspective, by examining theories, methods and approaches in children's participation, the components of effective planning can generally be defined in the following three categories: 1. Educational environment 2. Urban management environment 3. Urban planning environment.

1. The urban management environment: The existence of political will and willingness to participate with children is one of the main elements in the urban management environment, which is a function of the structure of the political system. The amount that urban management accepts for participation, and has developed relevant organizations and laws and regulations has a significant impact on the realization of the participation of children. To the extent that urban management serves as a representative of the government in relation to non-governmental or public sectors, the rate and quality of children's participation will increase.

2. Educational environment: Due to the young age and little experience of children in urban affairs, it is essential for them to have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience in urban affairs. The formal education environment plays an important role in this. This knowledge contributes to the organization and coherence of other sections of society and children. Educational environment with proper communication with the planning environment can help to build citizens' trust and incorporate participatory mechanisms.

3. Urban planning environment: Urban planners and designers should be sensitive to professional ethics and commitment to children in their activities. A successful planner must be accountable to all sectors of society, including children. Strengthening the skills, knowledge and experiences of participating of planners should be considered and more active in new urban planning techniques, for example communicative planning. Designing a proper mechanism for the participation of children and their suitability with urban plans is one of the tasks of the planners.

In addition to the three main areas of the proposed model, there are three sub-areas which help to function the core areas of the model:

- The formal education environment of each country, along with the three areas above, has a great influence on the success of the participation. The level of knowledge acquired by children or students is also important in developing participations.
- Other government agencies associated with the country's social and cultural development programs are also effective in stimulating, equipping and accompanying urban managers and can directly or indirectly benefit from the children's participation.
- Governmental agencies and official institutions which are effective in drafting and approving legal requirements can direct urban planners and urban development projects to focus on children's participation.

Another important point in the proposed conceptual model is how the three domains are interconnected.

Among the success factors and effectiveness of the proposed model is that the three areas of management, education and planning are not separate and interact with each other's internal changes. One of the most important elements in communicating between these three areas is the existence of NGOs that can establish associations to represent children in these relationships. By contributing to the transparency and providing the necessary information, they will help to realize the participation of children. We can summarize these three areas in two fields. The first field of software includes rules and education, and the second field of hardware includes municipal institutions, urban planning and non-governmental organizations.

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