

Empowering Children through Co-creation: Writing a Book with and for Children about Their First Steps Towards Urban Independence

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Abstract : Children are largely absent from Polish social discourse, a fact which is mirrored in urban planning processes. Their absence creates a vicious circle – an unfriendly urban space discourages children from going outside on their own, meaning adults do not see a need to make spaces more friendly for a group, not present. The pandemic and lockdown, with their closed schools and temporary ban on unaccompanied minors on the streets, have only reinforced this. The project – co-writing with children a book concerning their first steps into urban independence – aims at empowering children, enabling them to find their voice when it comes to urban space. The foundation for the book was data collected during research and workshops with children from Warsaw primary schools, aged 7-10 – the age they begin independent travel in the city. The project was carried out with the participation and involvement of children at each creative step. Children were (1) models: the narrator is an 7-year-old boy getting ready for urban independence. He shares his experience as well as the experience of his school friends and his 10-year-old sister, who already travels on her own. Children were (2) teachers: the book is based on authentic children's stories and experience, along with the author's findings from research undertaken with children. The material was extended by observations and conclusions made during the pandemic. Children were (3) reviewers: a series of draft chapters from the book underwent review by children during workshops performed in a school. The process demonstrated that all children experience similar pleasures and worries when it comes to interaction with urban space. Furthermore, they also have similar needs that need satisfying. In my article, I will discuss; (1) the advantages of creating together with children; (2) my conclusions on how to work with children in participatory processes; (3) research results: perceptions of urban space by children age 7-10, when they begin their independent travel in the city; the barriers to and pleasures derived from independent urban travel; the influence of the pandemic on children's feelings and their behaviour in urban spaces.

Keywords : children, urban space, co-creation, participation, human rights

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