

Children's Experience of the Built Environment in the Initial Stages of a Settlement Formation: Case Study of Shahid-Keshvari New Settlement, Isfahan, Iran

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Abstract : Many conventional town planning processes do little to give children and young people a voice on what is important about the urban environment. As a result of paying little attention to the children, their physical, social and mental needs are hardly met in urban environments. Therefore, urban spaces are impotent to attract children, while their recreational space has been confined to home or virtual spaces. Since children are just taking the first steps to learn the world beyond house borders, their living environment will profoundly influence almost all aspects of their lives. This puts a great deal of responsibility on the shoulders of planners, who need to balance a number of different issues in urban design to make places more child-friendly. The main purpose of present research is to analyze and plan a child-friendly environment in an on-going urban settlement development for the benefit of all residents. Assessing children's needs and regard them in development strategies and policies will help to "plan for children". Following this purpose, based on child-friendly environment studies, indicators of child-friendly environments were collected. Then three distinct characteristics of case study, which are being under-construction, lack of social ties between dwellers and high-rise building, determined seven indicators included basic services, Urban and environmental qualities, Family, kin, peers and community, Sense of belonging and continuity, participation, Safety, security and freedom of movement and human scale. With the survey, Informal observation and participation in small communities, essential data has been collected and analyzed by SPSS software. The field study is Shahid-Keshvari town in Isfahan, Iran. Eighty-six middle childhood, children (ages 8-13) participated. The results show Children's satisfaction is correlated with basic services and the quality of the environment, social environment and the safety and security. The considerable number of children and youth (55%) like to live somewhere other than the town. Satisfaction and sense of belonging and continuity have a strong inverse correlation with age. In other words, as age increases, satisfaction and consequently a sense of belonging will be reduced; thus children and youth consider their future somewhere out of the town. The main reason for dissatisfaction was the basic services and social environment. More than half of children (55%) expressed their wish to develop basic services in terms of availability, hierarchy, and quality. Among all recreational places, children showed more interest to the parks. About three-quarters (76%) considered building a park as a crucial item for residents. The significant number of children (54%) want to have a relationship with more friends. This could be due to the serious shortage of the leisure spaces such as parks or playgrounds. Also, the space around the house or space between the apartments has not been designed for play or children's activities. Moreover, the presence of strangers and construction workers have a negative impact on children's sense of peace and security; 60% of children are afraid of theft and 36% of children found strangers as a menace. The analysis of children's issues and suggestions provides an insight to plan and design of child-friendly environment in new towns.

Keywords : child-friendly city (CFC), child-friendly environment, child participation, under-construction environment, Isfahan Shahid-Keshvari Town

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