

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child *in Relation to Planning*

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The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Relation to Planning

Towards freedom and inclusion of children in an urbanized society



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MSc in Architecture and Planning Beyond Sustainability

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ARTICLE 1: A CHILD IS ANY PERSON UNDER THE AGE OF 18

ARTICLE 2: ALL CHILDREN ARE EQUALLY VALUABLE AND HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS

ARTICLE 3: IN ALL DECISIONS CONCERNING CHILDREN, WHAT IS CONSIDERED TO BE THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN THE FIRST PLACE

ARTICLE 6: CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIFE, SURVIVAL, AND DEVELOPMENT

ARTICLE 12:

CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS THEIR OPINION AND BE HEARD IN ALL MATTERS CONCERNING THE CHILD

ARTICLE 31: CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO PLAY, REST AND LEISURE

ABSTRACT

In January 2020, the UNCRC was implemented in Swedish legislation. Sweden ratified the Convention in 1990, however the legislation gives the Convention a stronger legal position. In architecture and planning children are often not seen as adequate inhabitants able to contribute to, for example, planning processes. People living in cities have in general less access to nature than those in smaller cities or rural areas, at the same time the regions surrounding large cities are expected to increase the most. This causes a risk that children will continue to have less space for nature experiences and spaces for play. The aim of this master's thesis is to, based on five articles from the UNCRC, examine and discuss how to work with and strengthen child perspective in planning.

The main method is literature studies and studies of reference projects and examples of child perspective in planning. Initially the work was focused on gathering material and searching broadly for perspectives within the discourse regarding the child and the city and relations in-between, as well as fundamentals of the UNCRC. Further, the search became more focused and the framework of dividing into the five articles from the Convention was decided. Based on

this, reference projects and examples were selected and analyzed with the intention of demonstrating contemporary projects that illustrate approaches in working with child perspective in planning. Each article is followed by a reflection. At last, a discussion with analyses and conclusions, as well as learnings made and proposals for future development.

Five articles from the UNCRC were chosen, such as Article 12 stating that children do have the right to express their views in questions regarding them, and Article 6 indicating that children have the right to life, survival, and development. The legislation itself has shown to have little impact on existing planning regulations in Sweden today, however it could lead to a shift in perspectives with possible changes in the discourse. Learnings made and proposed future development are, for example, to educate decision-makers, to include children early in the processes, to increase the status of research, and to prioritize space for children before space for cars.

Keywords: child perspective, densification, human-nature relation, environmental psychology

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The subject of this master's thesis has emerged over the past five years. From the first years at architecture school, being curious and searching for answers in this new field of infinite knowledge, to a master's program where things more and more fell into place. During my studies at Chalmers my interest in architecture and how it relates to other disciplines has grown, resulting in supplementary courses in environmental science and environmental psychology. In this thesis I have tried to capture this, somehow gathered this knowledge and experience, applied on a subject I consider to be very important. And meaningful. During the autumn preparation course, we were asked to reflect over our own, personal, position within architecture. Finding my position has, during the development of this thesis, been about daring to do what I consider to be interesting and valuable

I would like to thank my supervisor Julia Fredriksson for being a constant support during this semester, answering questions, challenging ideas, and helping to sort my thoughts.

Further, I would like to thank my colleagues at the city planning office in Gothenburg, and Mie Svennberg in particular, for being inspiring, supportive, and contributing with knowledge. Also, my grandmother who taught me about the importance of fighting for human rights, for the climate, and for all children on earth, who has influenced me more than I thought. My father, who early in my childhood cultivated the interest in architecture by taking me (a little reluctantly) with him studying buildings and filling the family camera with pictures of roof angles and façade details. I may not have understood it then, but today I am very grateful. And Rasmus, always so enthusiastic, supportive, and understanding.



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READING INSTRUCTIONS

1 This master's thesis consists of four major chapters where the introduction part frames the questions, defines the aim, distinguishes the problem setting and explains delimitations made as well as methods used.

2 In the second chapter theory regarding child perspective in planning is presented with historically and contemporary perspectives, an introduction to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a discussion regarding densification of cities, and different perspectives on child friendly planning.

3 The third chapter focuses on the UNCRC with five subsections, each representing an article in the Convention. These sections capture different aspects of child perspective in planning in relation to the UNCRC, illustrated by theory, examples, and references. After each article a reflection follows.

4 The fourth and concluding chapter is a part for discussing and analyzing the material based on aim and research questions. A conclusion summarizes the work and presents learnings and thoughts on future work with child perspective in planning. This chapter is then followed by a reference list.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A CHILDHOOD MEMORY

PROBLEM SETTING

BACKGROUND

AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

METHOD

DELIMITATIONS

RELEVANCE TO THE RURBAN QUESTION

A CHILDHOOD MEMORY

I remember the 'large stone', a boulder close by my childhood home. We passed by every day on our way to pre-school, sometimes we stayed for some minutes of mountaineering on what appeared to be the largest mountain in the world. Sometimes we just passed by, still noticing the existence of the place. As me and my siblings grew, we managed to climb further and further up. Felt proud when we succeeded, sad when we fell, happy when friends were around to play. And as we grew older, the 'large stone' was a natural meeting place for children in the neighborhood. Here we met to play during summer evenings, built snowmen during winter days, played with the berries from the nearby rowanberry tree. A place where we were allowed to be... just kids.

Our cities are full of places seen as disheveled, rough, challenging, unplanned. Places often appreciated by children. What is more thrilling than a fallen tree, transforming into an airplane travelling around the world. The puddles in the street becoming large oceans for boats created by leaves and a piece of plastic as a sail. No programmed playground in the world could replace these important 'non-places.' But when cities grow, these disheveled, rough, challenging, unplanned places risk disappearing. Forgotten places and natural parts without a clear purpose are often seen as potential exploitable land. Transformed into arranged places, often with good intention but with little or no reflection on the original value.

As I return to the 'large stone' today, the place is different. As I asked my siblings what they thought about when I said 'the large stone' my brother, five years younger than me, responded immediately, without thinking; 'I remember that it was both perfectly difficult and perfectly easy to climb the stone. Not too easy but difficult enough so it felt good to succeed'. And he continued; 'I also remember it being a little thrilling to be outside the safe boundaries of the garden'.

The stone is obviously not that large anymore, but it is still there, and the place is full of memories. Important memories somehow captured in the place, an inherent feeling of 'the child inside'. Such places must be allowed to exist.



What places do you remember from your childhood and what do they mean to you, today?

PROBLEM SETTING

In January 2020, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was implemented in Swedish legislation. Sweden ratified the Convention already in 1990, however the legislation gives it a stronger legal position, the same status as other Swedish laws. Generally, Sweden has a tradition of following the Convention and adjust regulations and guidelines along it, yet many consider it not to be enough.

One fifth of Sweden's population is not included in decision making and influence in urban development today: the children. And in architecture and spatial planning children are often not seen as adequate inhabitants being able to contribute to, for example, planning processes. There are many reasons to this, as unawareness of suitable methods, that research on the subject is not raised and included in the discourse or economic aspects. Still, everyone seems to agree on the importance of children growing up in healthy and safe places.

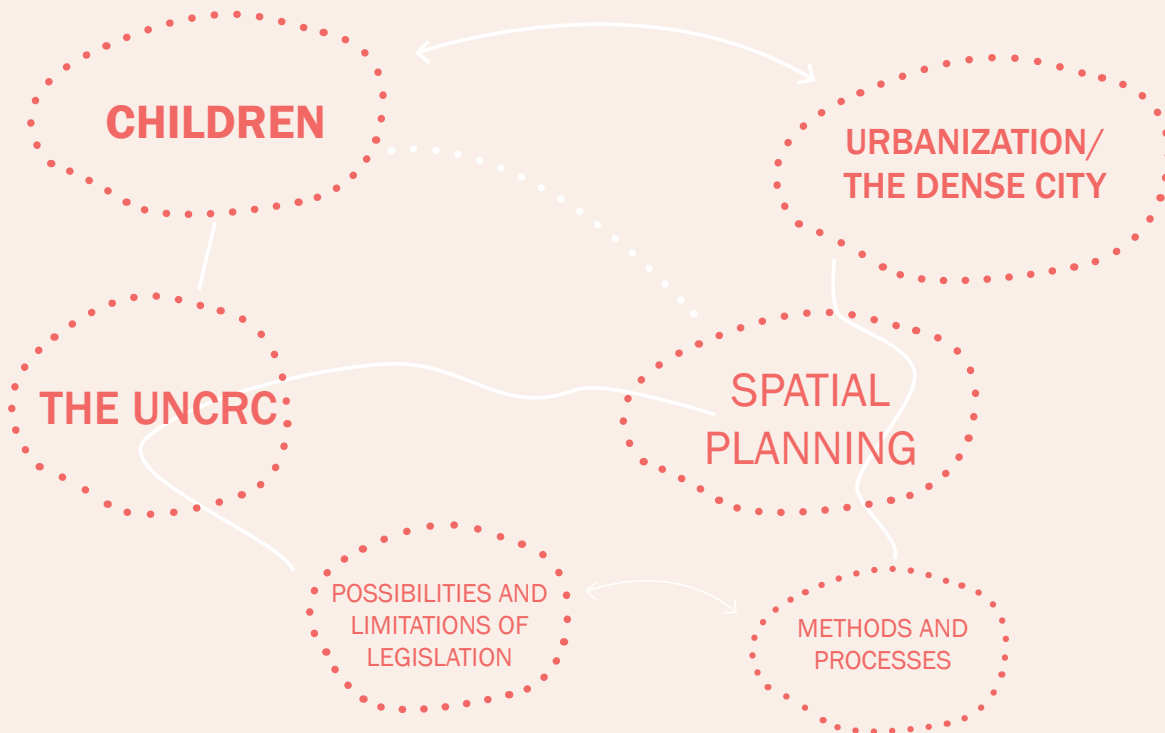
BACKGROUND

Spatial planning and urban development affect children, their health and well-being. The access to, and quality of, the outdoor environment is an important part of a child's development. "For the first time in human history today more of us live in cities than in the countryside. By 2050, it is estimated that 70 percent of the earth's population will live in cities and according to forecasts, the majority will be under 18 years of age. Applying a child perspective on urban planning, which extends beyond the creation of playgrounds and green spaces, thus feels, to say the least, important." (Hejdelind, 2018, my translation).

A change affecting children is the ongoing densification of our cities in Sweden. People living in cities have in general less access to nature and green areas than those living in smaller cities or more rural areas, at the same time the regions surrounding large cities are those expected to increase the most. This causes a risk that children will continue to have less space for nature experiences and spaces for play (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021). Research tells us that children benefit from being in nature, that children who understands nature also protects it (Giusti, 2019). In research bringing together environmental psychology and sustainable urban design, Giusti (2019) means that cities today are designed exclusively for humans. To spend time in urban environments, often without the possibility to be outside in non-sterile environments, results in far too many children with a lack of nature-experience. Giusti (2019) implies, as a result in research made, that the design of cities is crucial. "The more children identify with the city, the less likely they are to work for nature and protect it." (Giusti, M., 2019, my translation). The number of children that spend time in nature daily has decreased significantly during the latest years, children are also more sedentary today than ever before which has major health risks (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021).

Children rely on adults to have their perspectives and needs included in the discourse and decision making. Here, architects and planners play an important role in relation to planning, for example by including the perspectives in the discourse. The present time, with climate change and its impacts that are global in scope and unprecedented in scale, is described as a defining moment (UN, 2020). "The well-being of children and their participation could serve as both a *maker* and a *marker* of the progress of city or country to meet the challenge of sustainable development." (Malone, 2015, p 422). The Sustainable Development Goals are related to this, mainly goal number 11 'Sustainable Cities and Communities', but also number 3 'Good Health and Well-Being', number 10 'Reduced Inequalities' and number 15 'Life on Land' (Globala målen, 2021).

IN THIS THESIS



AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this master's thesis is to, based on five articles from the UNCRC, examine and discuss how to work with and strengthen child perspective in planning. Intended recipients of the material are architects, planners, urban developers, politicians, decision makers and others included in the development of our environments.

Above aim is concretized into two main research questions:

What methods and processes are there in Sweden today, when working with a child perspective in planning?

How could the work and discourse regarding a child perspective in planning be developed further, referring to the UNCRC being implemented in Swedish law in 2020?

METHOD

In this master's thesis the main method is literature studies and studies of reference projects and examples. The literature study started already during the autumn through a master course in environmental psychology at the University of Gothenburg resulting in an assignment with the title *Contact With Nature in Early Childhood and its Impact on Well-being and Environmental Concern* (Palmberg Ingelstam, 2021) which was a starting point and important for further development of the work within the thesis semester. This perspective follows through the semester as it is strongly connected to spatial planning and aspects of well-being in human-nature connection.

Initially the work was focused on gathering material and searching broadly for different perspectives within the discourse regarding the child and the city and relations in-between, as well as fundamentals of the UNCRC. This search was made mainly in research articles, publications, and books as well as different media and fiction. In this phase, the interviews were conducted, as a part of a broader search. Further the search became more focused and the framework of dividing into the different articles from the Convention were decided. Some articles from the UNCRC were considered to have a strong connection to planning; Article 1 as a point of departure, the basic principles Article 2, 3, 6 and 12, and Article 31 which content relates to the planning context. Based on the framework of the articles, the reference projects and examples were selected and analyzed with the intention of demonstrating contemporary projects that somehow illustrate approaches, good and bad, in working with a child perspective in planning. In addition to this, different studies and theories are presented. Each article presented from the Convention is followed by a reflection based on literature, theory, and references. At last, a discussion with further analysis and conclusions, as well as learnings made and proposals for future development.

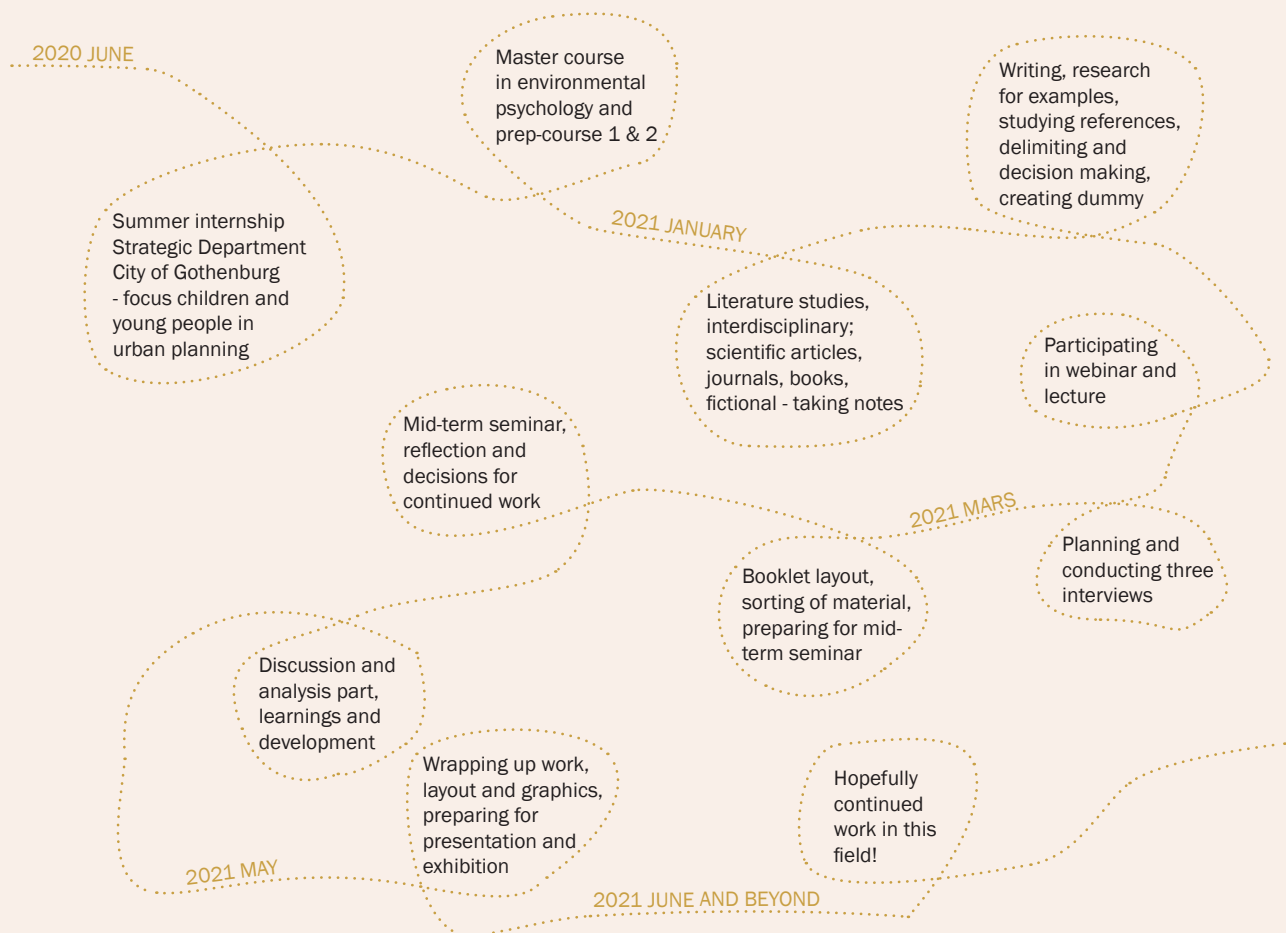
RESEARCH APPROACH

The interdisciplinary perspective is important in this thesis, as the question of child perspective in planning touches also the field of landscape architecture, human ecology, pedagogy, and psychology, among others. Most of the literature and studies applied to this thesis are in Swedish which means that, for example, quotes have been translated from Swedish to English. This is clarified in the text. In the search for how the child perspective in planning has been expressed, historically and contemporary, the work of landscape architects Stina Bodelius and Maria Kylin, and environmental psychologists Maria Nordström and Fredrika Mårtensson, have been particularly important. Several reports from the National Board of Housing, Building, and Planning have contributed with aspects of child perspective in planning, both in a historical perspective as well as contemporary work and future investments. Further, the National Board of Housing, Building, and Planning's recent report regarding the UNCRC in spatial planning and urban development from 2020 has been a support in the understanding and account of legal aspects.

Aside from scientific studies and articles, the ongoing discussion in media, as in Swedish Radio and newspapers as Svenska Dagbladet with its debate pages, have given this thesis another perspective complementary to research articles. Industry specific magazines have also been a source of knowledge, as Arkitekten, Arkitektur and Stad.

Swedish authorities, as the Public Health Agency, have been a source of statistics and contemporary studies of children's well-being and contact with nature, in particular the study BMHE 19. Documents and tools from the city of Gothenburg have also been helpful in the search for different methods and points of departure in the work with child perspective in planning, in particular the publication from 2017 regarding child impact analysis.

WORK FLOW DIAGRAM



INTERVIEWS

The interviews have contributed with further perspectives and knowledge in this field, conducted in a digital form, semi-structured, held in Swedish and the material has then been translated to English. The interviews have been particularly important from the perspective of Gothenburg, a further understanding of the work during the latest years and what impact it has had on the general discourse.

The 19th of February an interview was conducted with city architect of Gothenburg, Björn Siesjö. The respondent had received the topic and overall theme of the interview beforehand, child perspective in planning with special focus of the city architect's point of view, but no specific questions. The questions were prepared in advance, discussed with the supervisor, and used as a guideline throughout the interview. The interview guide was a help during the conversation, as a guidance document. No material was recorded, instead notes were taken during the interview and a summary made immediately afterwards.

The 22nd of February an interview was conducted with Mie Svennberg, architect at the city planning office in Gothenburg, with an expertise in social sustainability and child perspective. The approach was similar to the first interview, semi-structured and held digitally during approximately one hour.

The third interview was with Ulrika Lundquist, architect at the city planning office in Gothenburg, and one of those responsible for the introduction of child perspective in the City of Gothenburg. This interview, on the 1st of Mars, was also held digitally and with the same structure and approach as the two previous.

PARTICIPATING IN SEMINARS AND MEETINGS

During the semester I have been working part time at the strategic department at the city planning office in Gothenburg, where I have had the possibility to have conversations and participate in meetings with colleagues involved in these fields of work. For example, with Sven Boberg, chief lawyer at the city planning office in Gothenburg, who have supported me in questions regarding legal aspects of the UNCRC in relation to planning. These have not been correct interviews however valuable in my work.

Important to mention is also participation in the Architecture and children's council's (within Architects Sweden) meetings several times during this year. To be around other architects and planners, with great knowledge within this field, has been very valuable for this project, not only for direct knowledge but also for inspiration.

On January 27th I participated in a webinar handling the question regarding the UNCRC and the legislation's impact on planning and design, arranged by Architects Sweden. I also participated in the open lecture held at Chalmers, 'The Child Perspective: Exploring methods of bringing children's perspectives into planning and designing our public spaces' on February 17th. Both inspirational and valuable for the work with this thesis.

DELIMITATIONS

According to the UNCRC a child is someone between 0 and 18 years old, which is a large span with many different aspects. Childhood is a long period in life, going through many different phases, each with different needs, wishes and possibilities to express opinions and be listened to. In this master's thesis, all children are represented when talking about a child perspective. However, different examples, references and theories are processed throughout the project referring to different stages of childhood. The objective is not to capture all aspects of childhood in detail, but to show a selection of perspectives on the subject. This, the reader can have in mind.

Gothenburg is a general backdrop to this master's thesis, going through specific methods and referring to examples. Interviews are done from the perspective of Gothenburg, however examples and reference project from other parts of the country are represented. Delimitations are drawn within the borders of Sweden since the legislation and relation to the UNCRC varies between countries.

Since this project is, partly, about inclusion of children the original idea was to work together with children, in a participatory project. Dialogue and participation are very important, stated within Article 12, however time consuming. With that aspect and the ongoing pandemic in mind the focus has instead been on research and theory in the field together with examples and reference projects.

RELEVANCE TO THE RURBAN QUESTION

This project is done within the direction Rurban Transformations. The aim of this master's thesis direction is to explore and develop the potential of new rurban transformations beyond an urban norm for sustainable futures. This project discusses the question of densification of cities, problematizes norms in urban development, and argues for the importance of including children's rights in planning.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CHILD AND THE CITY

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

CHILDREN TODAY

THE UNCRC, FROM RATIFICATION TO LEGISLATION

DENSIFICATION OF CITIES AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN

THE CHILD AND THE CITY - A SUMMARY



TRANSCRIBED FROM KROPP & SJÄL:

(Swedish Radio, 2021-01-26)

”My nine-month-old baby has found a small piece of dust. Between thumb and index finger he holds it, in a firm grip. Lifting it up towards the light, it is grey and blue-ish with small shiny fibers. Soft as well as volatile. He brings it to his cheek, thinking about tasting it but changes his mind. Throwing it up in the air, and sees it single down to the floor. A piece of dust I would rather just want to disappear, is for him as breathtaking as the first snow of the year.

I pick up my three-year-old from pre-school.

- *Rosehips are nice.*

The paved walkway is slippery with trampled melting snow.

- *Rosehips are nice, are they not? Oh, there, behind the hill!*

She wants to pick flowers.

- *Mum, I climb up with my knees, so that I do not fall.*

We turn off the road, slanting through a small forest grove.

- *Flowers do like water.*

I remember how the police arrested a drug dealer here last year. And under the snow there are cigarette butt-ends, I am sure of that. But my three-year-old knows something else.


- *Oh! There are flowers. There are actually flowers here mum. They are very old.*

Last years’ heathers pink flowers have passed into pale brown. She carefully picks some twigs and gathers in a small bouquet.

- *So beautiful. Hmm what is this? Dad is going to be so happy. We can take these too, they are beautiful and nice.*

The buds fall apart and spread like a powder over the snow.

- *Mum, I like to be in the forest with you. Flowers, floooweers, they are flashing, flooweers they are waving, flooweers they are fashing, they are flashing to us. Flashing, waving, waving hmmm. Oh! I think it is hare tracks! It is hare tracks I think! There are also hare tracks, it has dug down. More hare tracks. There are so many hare tracks! A lot of hare tracks!”*



HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

In the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning's report regarding the UNCRC in spatial planning and urban development it is described how children's part in planning began in late 19th century, when planners started to consider children's needs (Boverket, 2020). One of the first actions to take was to set aside place for children in parks and recreation areas. An early example is Vasaparken in Stockholm, planned in 1897, where large playgrounds were placed in the center of the park (Boverket, 2020).

The next step was the planning of playgrounds nearby housing areas and large residential yards, as well as the expansion of childcare. In the 1970's there were several studies made on preschools, and large yards with variation and nature were planned and built. The Million program areas built during this time often had airy distances between the buildings which enabled large free spaces and often 'left over' nature for children to discover (Boverket, 2020). In 1960, a large investment was made regarding children in planning. Separated walking- and biking routes that made it possible for children to move around by themselves without being in traffic was one of the changes made during that time. This led to a reduction in infant mortality in traffic, where Sweden has the lowest number in the world today (Nordström, 2020).

STANDARD PLANNING

During these times planning in Sweden was based on a standard planning, introduced during the 1960's. This meant that some norms had to be followed to receive a government housing loan, and there were norms regarding children's places in planning. For example, one objective with these standards was to create good places for children in outdoor environment, to protect the needs of children in the built environment and protect children from traffic, which increased in quantity during these times (Boverket, 2020). From 1940 and around 40 years forward, design and planning solutions were built up by norms and developed into a practice that was securing spaces for children that were similar across the country. This is different today, where each municipality is responsible for policies regarding for example public spaces dedicated (or adapted) for children's use (Boverket, 2020). Kylin & Bodelius (2015) underline this, pointing out that the focus in Swedish planning between approximately the 1940's to the 1980s was on the welfare state including emphasis on social aspects in development.

The focus on children's need for outdoor space has shifted particularly during the years. In 1967 the Swedish government ordered a committee to investigate children's outdoor play and how these places could be designed and structured in cities, based on research in developmental psychology. This resulted in the publication *Children's Outdoor Environment* with guidelines and principles for design and dimensions of spaces developed for children. "The intention was, among other things, that the guidelines would be the basis for municipal planning programs, and thus serve as a legal 'protection' of children's outdoor environments." (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015, p 89). Due to the economic downturn in Sweden during the 1970's, publications and guidelines did not make an impact that led to any noticeable changes. However, Kylin and Bodelius (2015) refers to parts of the publication being republished in 1989 as *General advice* from the National Board of Health and Welfare. With the new Planning and Building Act being promulgated in 1987, aiming at clarifying national and municipal authority, a regime change was marked. "... from a time where quality aspects of urban development were regulated in detailed legislation, to a time where general formulations in the PBA were considered to be simply a framework, with responsibility for interpreting qualitative aspects left to the building sector and the municipalities." (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015, p 90).

CONSEQUENCES AND CURRENT SITUATION

The focus on economic values has increased, during above mentioned period with the new PBL, private interests were given a bigger role and somehow became a driving force in planning (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015). Even though the UNCRC was ratified during the same time, private interests were increasing in their role in the context of planning. “As the driving forces in contemporary planning discourse became more oriented toward a market economy, the group ‘children’, like every other group, has to be expressed in terms of economic values.” (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015, p 90). As children do not have any real economic power, nor democratic rights, this became problematic and a possible consequence that the participation of children is not taken seriously. Today, municipalities and national administration boards are responsible for ensuring laws and policies to be implemented, however development of housing areas and public spaces are planned and built based partly on private actors and their economic incentives. These different driving forces in planning affect how children’s places in the city are planned and designed, and not at least, prioritized. Kylin and Bodelius (2015, p 91) reflects; “... an inclusive city where children have a freedom of movement, with rights to use all places and to make their own places, or a city where children only have access to protected allocated places planned by adults for children?”

Mårtensson and Nordström (2017) question this development; what are the consequences for children when each municipality is responsible for the planning of outdoor spaces? Researchers, not only in Sweden but all around the world, specialized on children’s environments, question the strong densifications trends taking place today, will there be place for children in cities? UNICEF and the committee evaluating the UNCRC in different countries acknowledge densification to be the general threat to the welfare of children, especially regarding the access to playing spontaneously and to interacting with the surrounding environment. “Taking children’s perspectives seriously implies involving children in planning processes and using insights and knowledge accumulated in the field of children’s environments studies.” (Mårtensson & Nordström, 2017, p 36).

“The decisions we make today will affect generations of people and our environment for a very long time. We therefore have a responsibility to think long-term when designing the living environments of the future.”

Helena BjarNEGÅRD, ArkDes, 2020, p 48

A FOCUS ON GOTHENBURG

Gothenburg has a long history in working with children in spatial planning, with the project *'With the street as classroom'* at the Centre for building culture at Chalmers in the 1980's as one example. At Chalmers there was a strong engagement for urban development and children, including the aspects in education of architects as well as in development of urban planning in the city. In 2003 the first architecture consultant for children and young was hired at the culture administration department, the first in Gothenburg, and in Sweden (Nordström, 2020). Svennberg (personal contact, 2021) describes the difference today compared with the beginning of the 21st century as 'huge', as both the attitude of planners as well as the view of children and young people and how their experience could contribute to the discourse have changed during the years.

In 2010 the network *Children and young people in planning* initiated the work with BKA (Barnkonsekvensanalys – child impact analysis). With the launch of Gothenburg's BKA model was a series of seminars and a large conference in 2010 where researchers and practitioners participated (Nordström, 2020). The network saw the need for concrete tools and methods for architects and planners responsible for considering and including the child perspective and children's perspective in planning processes. Lundquist (personal contact, 2021) was the project leader in the work with BKA, a work that lasted for 5-6 years, and describes this conference as a 'takeoff', with 350 people participating and with great interest nationally. In an interview she mentions the launch of BKA as a very positive outcome with solid and ambitious education for administrators all over the City of Gothenburg. Today there are still opportunities for education every year, but in a smaller scale. Planners today also have more projects going on simultaneously, resulting in less time for each project and Lundquist (personal contact, 2021) sees this as one reason to why the child perspective in planning is less visible in plan processes today than before.

In an interview with Svennberg (personal contact, 2021) the question of Gothenburg's work in relation to other cities and municipalities was discussed. In her opinion Gothenburg has been at the forefront, a role model for other cities. But other cities and municipalities are starting to improve their work, Svennberg (2021) mentions Malmö as one example where methods have been developed regarding play value factors (more on this theme within Article 31 later in this thesis). And in Nordström's (2020) report evaluating child impact analyzes in Swedish municipalities, no examples from Gothenburg are brought up as illustrations of well-executed processes, which according to Svennberg (personal contact, 2021) also indicate something. "No matter how good we are at describing and assessing the consequences, it is still politics that governs." (Svennberg, personal contact, 2021). The planning process is politically controlled in Sweden and politicians making decisions from administrator's statements as a part of the process. That planning processes often are very long, extending over several years, is another aspect Svennberg implies. Several inventories have been made in Gothenburg during the years since BKA was implemented in guidelines and governing documents, latest during summer 2020. However, it is not easy to see concrete effects and results in the built environment since few of the plan processes including a BKA have been completed. Svennberg (personal contact, 2021) therefore sees a need for further work with development of processes and evaluation of the built environment. In Lundquist's (personal contact, 2021) point of view, Gothenburg would have been different if BKA was not implemented in planning. Today it is a natural part of the planning process which was one of the main objectives when implementing the methods. However, Lundquist also sees a need for further, and continuous, development work (personal contact, 2021).

CHILDREN TODAY

“Urban development is a complex concept and includes, in addition to planning and construction, also other physical measures in development and management of buildings and environment. All these measures depend on each other and they affect the living environments of children and young people.” (Boverket, 2020, s 46, my translation). Children have the right to be independent individuals, to be given the opportunity to participate, and fulfill their needs, in planning. Children have their right to places in the city, however these spaces for children in urban environments are shrinking. The reason to this is often competitions for land, which affect children and young people since their space in the public environment is not prioritized. In urban areas, densification often mean new areas with little or no outdoor areas for children. In areas with a lower level of exploitation, children can instead be affected by the lack of investments and development for them, resulting in a feeling of being deprioritized (Boverket, 2020).

A QUESTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The proposition *Politik för en gestaltad livsmiljö* states this and proposed that planning with a child perspective can fulfill these needs. Sweden’s national architect Helena Bjarnegård says “An object that we build, a building or a facility, lasts for about 100 years. An urban structure we create with buildings, streets, and public spaces – it can look the same 1000 years later. The decisions we make today will affect generations of people and our environment for a very long time. We therefore have a responsibility to think long-term when designing the living environments of the future.” (ArkDes, 2020, p 36, my translation) in a follow-up report on the proposition.

In the same report, the child perspective is discussed. Jungmark (ArkDes, 2020) writes that children’s health and development is a question of public health, that it should not be possible to deprioritize it. It is hard to claim the child perspective and children’s perspective, even though the large benefits it would give for the future to provide children sufficient spaces to develop, physically and cognitively. “When urban environments are densified, the city’s green areas will increasingly function both as a schoolyard and park. At the same time, the size and number of pupils at each school and pre-school are increasing. What are the consequences?” (ArkDes, 2020, p 60, my translation).

PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDHOOD

Childhood is a broad term, including many different perspectives. It can be described in biological terms, but also as something socially constructed, affected by the surroundings and explanations made from historical and cultural contexts. Kylin and Bodelius (2015) discuss the concept of childhood in relation to planning, how the approach to childhood affects and influences children’s place in cities and urban environments. A place that Kylin and Bodelius (2015) mean that children do not have. In relation to this, the discussion continues with the right to ‘take place’, where studies show that this right is in close connection with social justice and power relations. Kylin and Bodelius (2015) indicate that children represent a ‘voiceless group’, however it differs from other groups seen as marginalized since everyone has been a child. “If children’s right to ‘take place’ can be said to mirror spatial planning’s capacity to ‘give children place’ then it is interesting to study the changes of allocated spaces for children in relation to how childhood has been interpreted in different planning contexts.” (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015, p 4). In the UNCRC children are both “empowered agents with the right of participation” as well as “carriers of the right to protection”. This mix between ‘rights’ and ‘protection’, Kylin and Bodelius (2015) mean could create tensions in contexts where the concept of childhood is used.

“The experiences of childhood have a strong influence on our later lives. From the beginning of life, we carry with us not only memories, but also fundamental ways of relating to and understanding the world around us. By attentively making use of and exploring our surroundings we develop ways to use the physical environment for both nourishment and the formation of identity.” (Mårtensson & Nordström, 2017, p 37). These thoughts on childhood lean on environmental and developmental psychology research when relating the concept of childhood to the question of sustainability. A child who gets the right opportunities to be involved in developing his or her environment will build a strong relationship to the place, which will have impact on future concern and interest for the surroundings and society at large (Mårtensson & Nordström, 2017).

CHILDREN AS BEINGS AND BECOMINGS

“Children do not always know their own best, but neither do adults. Yet adults are allowed to express their views while children have significantly poorer opportunities to do so in many contexts.” (Göteborgs Stad, 2017, p 11, my translation). In planning, the perspectives on children and childhood affect the discourse and the decisions made. One aspect is the mission and purpose one has in their professional role. In a politically controlled organization, for example, the strategies and objectives established affect the vision of the child. Everyone also has their own, personal view of childhood, based on experiences from oneself being a child. “We carry with us our different life experiences and use them in different ways, sometimes without us being aware of it.” (SKR, 2018, p 7, my translation). This could be problematic, if relying too much on personal experiences without taking others into account. The child perspective is a ‘fresh product’, changing over time. What was considered to be good for children, for their best, when adults themselves were children, might not be for their best today, as times are changing (SKR, 2018).

The child is often seen as imperfect and immature, and the adult as mature and somehow completed. In the end of the 20th century the discourse regarding children and childhood went from talking about children as *becomings* to see children as *beings*, that childhood itself is something valuable. The child started to be seen more as a competent and social human being than someone on their way to being fully compliant. “We often say that ‘children are the future’, as if children are not children now.” (Göteborgs Stad, 2017, p 12). In research today, many see everyone as humans being under development, that we all change and grow constantly. In that point of view, adults as well as children are both beings and becomings. “Notions of children and childhood form the basis for the conditions a society creates for children. And society’s perceptions of children are linked to conditions and opportunities for children’s participation.” (Göteborgs Stad, 2017, p 12, my translation).

“We often say that ‘children are the future’,
as if children are not children now.”

Göteborgs Stad, 2017, p 12

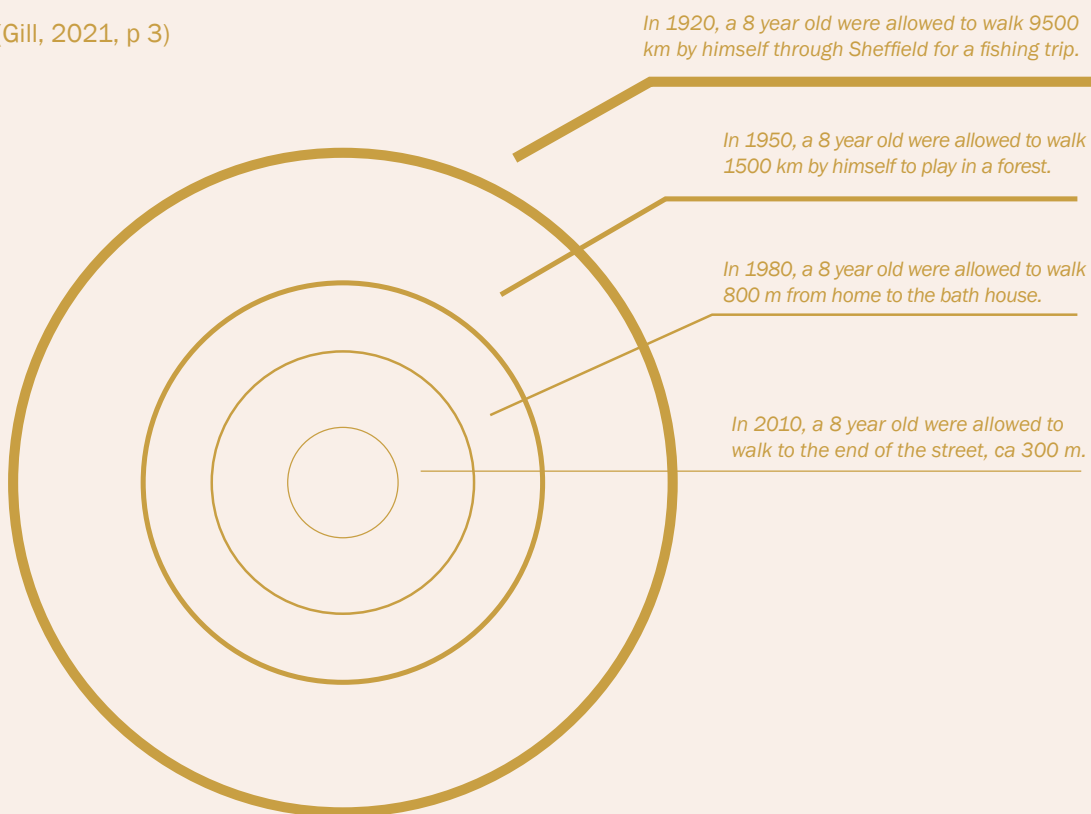
BEING A CHILD IN SWEDEN TODAY

Children today are more dependent on adults than children were before. A study from mid-1980's showed that almost all children between seven and nine years old were allowed to walk or bike by themselves between their homes and schools, playgrounds, parks, stores and similar activities. The study was made again 20 years later, by then almost 70 percent of the children involved in the study could walk or bike to their activities by themselves. In 2012, the number had decreased further, to less than half (Boverket, 2015). This decrease in freedom of movement has several reasons, however strongly connected to traffic and cars, parental concerns and a lack of safe bike and walking paths. "Of the two factors in the assessment model, independent mobility is more critical, because without possibilities for mobility, active perception of environmental affordances through the use of one's body is impossible." (Kyttä, 2003, p 106). Important factors in planning, of communities and traffic, are what promote children's possibilities for moving around independently. For example, that networks of foot traffic in residential areas are separated from car traffic and the importance of places for activities nearby, as spaces for sports, play, and recreation (Kyttä, 2003).

CHILDREN'S 'RIGHT TO ROAM' HAS DECREASED

An illustration based on child rights activist Tim Gill's theory of how children's freedom of movement, 'the right to roam', has changed, based on his own childhood experiences in England.

(Gill, 2021, p 3)



CHILDREN AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change has not affected us to a greater extent (so far) in Sweden, compared to other parts of the world. However, there are research studies showing that many children, in different age groups, have knowledge about climate change and possible effects. Children also have a higher level of both interest and concern than adults. Climate change is described as a stress factor for children, even when the effects are not directly directed. “Many young people feel worried about the effects of climate change on their own future, and they are also worried about how climate change will affect children and families in other parts of the world.” (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021, p 150, my translation).

In a survey made in 2018 and 2019 children between 12-18 years were asked to answer questions regarding the environment, climate, and nature. One question was; “Are you concerned about what will happen with our climate?” 69 percent of the respondents answered “Yes, very concerned” or “Yes, quite concerned”. The degree of anxiety also seems to vary depending on where children live, the highest proportion of children with concerns about climate change live in or near large cities (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021).

In the radio program *Konflikt* at Swedish Radio P1 (2021-04-01) the question regarding children’s rights to be heard was brought up when discussing the voice of children in times of crisis, referring to the pandemic and how the latest year has affected children around the world. “The corona crisis has put its finger on a basic democratic principle, that those who are affected by decisions should also be allowed to participate and decide.” (Sveriges Radio, 2021, my translation). Effects of climate change, as air pollution, elevated water levels and shortage of food affect children the most and children are not able to influence politicians and decision makers through democratic elections. However, there are other alternatives to raising the question, one example of that is Greta Thunberg and the movement Fridays For Future. Every Friday thousands of children and young adults in more than 100 countries strike for their countries to, for example, increase their work with environmental policies and ensure climate justice (Fridays For Future, 2021). Since Greta Thunberg first sat down outside the parliament in Stockholm in August 2018 the group has grown to a global movement. Hundreds of thousands of people have participated in strikes, manifestations, and demonstrations over the world – all started by Thunberg who by then was 15 years old.

THE UNCRC, FROM RATIFICATION TO LEGISLATION

The government of Sweden ratified the Convention in 1990. By then it was legally binding, but it has shown not to be enough according to UNICEF who has strived for making it a Swedish law to ensure children’s rights. From 1st of January 2020 the UNCRC is law in Sweden, which sets higher demands. The Convention now has the same status as other Swedish laws, and a stronger legal position. Most Swedish national laws, already before the incorporation, caters to the best interest for the child, however UNICEF claims that “its provisions form a view of children as individuals with their own, independent rights that the authorities are obliged to take seriously” (UNICEF, 2020). With the UNCRC as Swedish law, the legal certainty for the individual child is strengthened, as well as the child’s best interest being set first is clearer (UNICEF, 2020). “The child rights perspective becomes a real element in every decision-maker’s everyday life” and “The content and views of the UNCRC are taken more seriously and have greater impact in practice at both state and municipal level” UNICEF describes as two examples of advantages with the incorporation (UNICEF, 2020).

IN RELATION TO THE SWEDISH PLANNING AND BUILDING ACT

The UNCRC as law will strengthen children's rights in the application of other laws, where the Swedish Planning and Building Act, PBL, is one of them. The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning was assigned to analyze and map the activities of the authority regarding the practical application of the implementation of the UNCRC in the work with planning and PBL in 2019 (Boverket, 2020). Many had expectations from the result of the report, Jelena Mijanovic at architectural firm Codesign expresses a hope for effects when the UNCRC is enshrined in legislation: "It is an important step towards giving children greater possibilities to influence the design of their spaces. But it is also up to us actors to seize the opportunity." (Gunne, 2019). Mijanovic also points at the importance of a proposal from the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning on how child impact analyses can get a concrete legal effect.

The UNCRC is, unlike PBL, not a 'special law'. "It means that if the rules in PBL collides with a law regulating common questions then the rules in PBL have precedence." (Boverket, 2020, s 20, my translation). However, explained in the report, even if PBL in some cases precedes the UNCRC, a child perspective and children's right perspective should be considered in the application of PBL. There are different methods to work with when incorporating children's rights in the physical environment, however nothing that is regulated in the UNCRC nor in PBL. The UNCRC shall be applied in all ongoing processes, including those started before the 1st of January 2020 as well (Boverket, 2020).

As mentioned before, Swedish laws and regulations were established according to the UNCRC even before the legislation, however the word 'child' is not represented in PBL. There are writings regarding "sustainable environments for humans of today and forthcoming generations" but no specifics on children. According to 2 kap. 1 § PBL shall both the general and individual interest be considered, and the principle of proportionality is used to make sure that there is a reasonable balance between the consequences and benefits of a decision, for both sides. The municipalities safeguard the general interests which means that it is the municipality that secures children's interests, one interest among many to be considered. Examples of children's interests can be placement of pre-schools or playgrounds, general interests that affects a larger group, or individual interests that affect a few or one specific child (Boverket, 2020).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LEGISLATION

As a concluding reflection in the report of the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, it is established that many of the articles in the UNCRC have counterparts in PBL, however the child perspective is not always manifested specifically. Regarding general interests, 2 kap. PBL, children's interests are represented. It is not clarified how a balance between interests should be done, for example that children's interests should stand stronger than others. This aspect is in line with the child's rights committee who says that "the child's best should weigh heavily but not be solely decisive in an examination" (Boverket, 2020, s 28, my translation). Hence, what is considered to be the child's best is up to each single case, which mean that the question of children's right risk being different in different processes and plans, depending on the municipality or even individual administrators' interpretations (Boverket, 2020). "Children, like others, are covered by the provisions of the PBL and the UNCRC as law can strengthen children's rights in building legislation. But there is no guarantee that children's rights will actually be imprinted in spatial planning, as PBL is by its nature a balancing act" (Boverket, 2020, s 28, my translation).

Boberg (personal contact, 2021) also sees a risk in these issues ending up at the individual administrator. So far (in May 2021) there are no clear guidelines for how architects and planners at the City of Gothenburg are handling the legalization of the UNCRC, however Boberg (personal contact, 2021) expresses that he is positive to the question being raised. Rather than making use of the legislation itself he sees it more as an opportunity to strengthening the question and raising awareness of the importance of including children's perspectives in planning. He wants to turn the question around, to see a shift in perspectives, because not raising the question would have been strange. Svennberg (personal contact, 2021) also underlines this, that right now no one seem to know what affects the legislation will have. However, the application is about on what level and how 'good' the City of Gothenburg wants to be. "Should we stay within the framework or be a role model for other cities regarding the implementation of the UNCRC?" (Svennberg, personal contact, 2021).

THE OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT

In Februari 2021 the new Minister for Gender Equality and Housing in Sweden, Märta Stenevi, stated the importance of having children's perspectives in mind when planning cities. Stenevi clarified that the task as Minister for Housing is not exclusively about building new houses, as she made her first statement during a press conference.

THE UNCRC

1. Definition of a child
2. No discrimination
3. Best interests of the child
4. Making rights real
5. Family guidance as children develop
6. Life survival and development
7. Name and nationality
8. Identity
9. Keeping families together
10. Contact with parents across countries
11. Protection from kidnapping
12. Respect for children's views
13. Sharing thoughts freely
14. Freedom of thought and religion
15. Setting up or joining groups
16. Protection of privacy
17. Access to information
18. Responsibility of parents
19. Protection from violence
20. Children without families
21. Children who are adopted
22. Refugee children
23. Children with disabilities
24. Health, water, food, environment
25. Review of a child's placement
26. Social and economic help
27. Food, clothing, a safe home
28. Access to education
29. Aims of education
30. Miority culture, language and religion
31. Rest, play culture, arts
32. Protection from harmful work
33. Protection from harmful drugs
34. Protection from sexual abuse
35. Prevention of sale and trafficking
36. Protection from exploitation
37. Children in detention
38. Protection in war
39. Recovery and reintegration
40. Children who break the law
41. Best law for children applies
42. Everyone must know children's rights
- 43-45 How the Convention works

(UNICEF, 2021)

“It is clear to me that the task as Minister for Housing is not only about housing construction, but about creating good and safe environments. To create habitats for people with space for greenery and wild nature. Place to run, play, and rest. Because when we build for children instead of cars, it will be good for everyone.” (Fastighetstidningen, 2021, my translation). Further, in a press release on April 9th 2021, the Government of Sweden states that more focus and resources will be put on children and children’s needs in planning. Several actions aimed at a greater impact on children’s rights have been taken, referring to the UNCRC. One action is that “The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning is commissioned to produce guidance on how the UNCRC can be applied in spatial planning in accordance with the Planning and Building Act and urban development.” (Regeringskansliet, 2021, my translation). Another action processes a change in legislation within the framework of the Planning and Building Act regarding outdoor environments surrounding schools and pre-schools where municipalities could set binding requirements for quality, size, and planning aspects instead of the recommendations that are used today. Child friendly and sustainable cities are prioritized questions, the Government states, in the press release (Regeringskansliet, 2021).

ACTUAL IMPACT

The UNCRC has had an impact on the understanding and approach on the concept of childhood, even before the legislation. Kylin and Bodelius (2015) argue that it is important to focus on the ‘needs’ and ‘protection’ of children, however it often ends up in an issue of discussing places that adults plan for children, allocated and separated. Places as pre-schools and school yards and playgrounds. If planners and architects instead focused more on children as empowered citizens who have the right to participate, children could be taken more seriously and contribute with experience of the entire city. “An inclusive city should instead reflect a comprehensive understanding that childhood has value here and now, an understanding that includes children as full citizens whose own places and movements in the city should be fully included in urban planning and embraced by planners and architects.” (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015, p 102).

Åkerblom et al (2019) questions this as well, what impact will the UNCRC have on children’s growing conditions? A hope for the implementation is that the child perspective is respected in planning in a broad context, and especially children’s own perspective. However, is another legislation important, is that what is needed to make a change? Rules and regulations today already emphasize the Convention, so the question, according to Åkerblom et al (2019) should rather be; why are we not doing it better today? “What is stated in conventions and governing documents do not automatically lead to a change for the better in the child’s living environment daily. Therefore, it is about going from words to action to be able to fulfill children’s right to a healthy urban childhood.” (Åkerblom et al, 2019, my translation).

“Children are a kind of indicator species. If we can build a successful city for children, we will have a successful city for all people.”

Enrique Penalosa, Arup, 2017, p 4

DENSIFICATION OF CITIES AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Urbanization is a global process affecting the living conditions of humans, and it goes fast. In Sweden today, 87 percent live in cities, where 63 percent live in cities with more than 10 000 inhabitants. Many children grow up in cities, and it is in big city municipalities where the most children are born. According to forecasts made by SCB, this is a development that will continue the nearest ten years. With a growing population, it is important to design cities so that they can contribute to good living environments that are healthy for all people. Here, nature and green areas are important since those can help handling many of the challenges that growing cities entails, as noise from traffic and industries and disposal of stormwater. Green areas also contribute to a strengthened immune system, reduced stress, and increased physical activity, especially for children (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021).

CONTEMPORARY TRENDS

Contemporary trends in Sweden, as well as in other European countries, indicate that families with children stay in the city instead of leaving for more suburban areas (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015). Planning ideals and the growth of urban areas have changed simultaneously; “Instead of expanding the city via suburban growth, the trend is to ‘grow inwards’...” (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015, p 87). There are many consequences of this way of planning, not at least for children. Denser neighborhoods, courtyards shrinking in size, increasing traffic and land costs that arise in central locations are some examples of consequences with denser cities (Kristensson 2003; Björklid and Gummesson 2013). Several studies on this area show that this has negative affects for children’s freedom to move around and their access to inclusive spaces. Also places where children can shape and design their spaces individually, ‘spaces left over from planning’, seem to be fewer (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015).

Kylin and Bodelius (2015) also identify another contemporary trend in Sweden, places that traditionally have been allocated for children, such as pre-school and school yards, are no longer inviolable. Places for children’s play are sometimes claimed by different actors in society which have led to schools and pre-schools being built with no, or very small, outdoor areas. They refer to a conference held in 2013, *Competition for Space*, where it was noted that “... young people’s requirements for outdoor space often are crushed between different land-use needs that are underpinned by economic interests” (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015, p 87). Kylin and Bodelius (2015) refer to the report *Uppföljning av stöd för innovativt byggande* (Boverket, 2017), an investigation regarding innovative urban development. One proposal in the report processed the feasibility of building housing for young adults on existing playgrounds. The application intends to share space, without increasing the space for children’s play. However, the report concludes that “It is possible to motivate a densification of areas for play with temporary youth housing if you at the same time make sure to create meeting places that create social interaction.” (Boverket, 2017, p 34, my translation). Although there are some intentions to ‘save’ space for children, the knowledge regarding what places children use and how they move around is almost non-existent. Worth mentioning here is Björklid’s dissertation (1982) stating that playgrounds are important places for children. Björklid (1982) found that the natural environment surrounding playgrounds are often the most appreciated, where children find the best opportunities to playing.

In today’s eagerness to exploit and densify the cities, and exclude children from the process, valuable possibilities to a better planning and healthier ideals risk being missed and instead unhealthy spaces that inhibit development are planned and built (Saccotelli et al, 2019).

QUANTITY AND QUALITY

”At the same time that both allocated and inclusive spaces for children are diminishing, research and well-established experience shows that children’s access to many different kinds of spaces and places are crucial for sustainable everyday life.” (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015, p 87). Despite the range of knowledge and research, access, and availability to allocated and inclusive spaces do not seem to be prioritized, Kylin and Bodelius (2015) conclude. It is also a question regarding planning for children meaning allocating specific places for children, separated, and fenced off. Kylin and Bodelius (2015) identify a dilemma here, that guidelines for planning in qualitative terms disappear “in the clamor for densification and infill”. Instead, guidelines for more quantifiable measures are easier adapted to but do focus more on children’s separated places.

It is a challenge to create accessible and qualitative green areas as cities become denser. The built environment is important for people’s health and need to support well-being better than today, especially since mental and physical illness are growing problems. The Public Health Agency writes: “Perhaps the ongoing pandemic will also affect how we choose to prioritize and design our urban spaces in the future, for example in terms of transport, access to greenery and the size of green areas.” (2021, p 144, my translation).

In an interview with City Architect in Gothenburg Björn Siesjö (2021) this subject was discussed, what defines a child friendly city? Siesjö puts space for children in the city in perspective to the space cars take, historically as well as in present times, and means that a city that prioritize driving can not be a child friendly city. However, it is not a simple question, especially not in Gothenburg with its strong history within the car industry. In the character of a city the competition of land is high and today large roads with heavy traffic take this valuable place. Lundquist (personal contact, 2021) also emphasizes this, that the dense city always comes with many cars. “Cars are hard, and children are soft.” (Lundquist, personal contact, 2021). Siesjö also questions the focus on quantitative measures when it comes to places for children, with the pre-school yard and its measure recommendation from the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning as an example. In his opinion, it is about encompassing the whole, to have a holistic view on planning and that includes children’s perspectives as well as others. Then, quantitative measures are not a solution, rather the quality of places even though that is harder to put into an excel-sheet and assert the seriousness of. According to Siesjö, specific factors in planning in dense cities contribute to, and increase, the child friendliness. Siesjö argues for lower traffic speed, less barriers and high quality of public spaces as some criteria for a more child friendly city. With Gothenburg as an example, he considers the development to go in the right direction, however it started from a ‘bad place’ with the history of prioritizing car dependency. “We should primarily build on the surfaces that today are paved, hardened surfaces. We should leave the untouched nature untouched, for the next generation. There are no contradictions between a green city and a dense city.” (Siesjö, 2021, personal contact).

PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD FRIENDLY PLANNING

There are many different perspectives on children’s place in the dense city, the debate has during the latest years been active in Swedish media. In October 2019, several landscape architects and researchers in the field wrote a debate article in the Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet with the heading “Growing cities must give space for children” (Åkerblom et al, 2019). They bring up the urban environment as the place where more and more children and young people grow up and that the right to the city is about accessibility, democracy, well-being, and health.

“Today, densification at all costs is a leading trend in urban construction. In the dense city, the availability of durable and sustainable outdoor environments is complicated. The benefits of the dense city become problematic when playgrounds, schoolyards, and places for spontaneous play and movement are questioned, as fundamentals to children’s physical and social development and well-being” (Åkerblom et al, 2019, my translation).

In the article, they argue for it being problematic when politicians, clients and builders question the importance of large enough spaces for play, movement and contact with nature, especially when research show the value of these spaces. In their opinion, a child friendly city should be planned to encourage freedom and joy of movement where Sweden, despite different presumptions on different places in the country, relatively easily could switch to planning strategies that are more child-friendly than today’s. The private interests in planning are one ‘stumbling block’, according to Åkerblom et al (2019). “For them, the child perspective is less interesting since children themselves have neither real economic power nor influence.” (Åkerblom et al, 2019, my translation).

“DENSE CITIES ARE THE FUTURE – ESPECIALLY FOR CHILDREN”

In a reply to Åkerblom et al (2019) architects Casselbrant and Hohenthal wrote a debate article in the same newspaper a few days later, with the heading “Dense cities are the future – especially for children” (Svenska Dagbladet, 2019). In contrast to Åkerblom et al (2019), Casselbrant and Hohenthal (2019) mean that the dense city is better for both adults and children living there, that the special needs of children can, without doubt, be taken care of. They mean that Åkerblom et al (2019) miss several benefits for children in densely populated cities, benefits they describe as basic and probably major. “In a densely populated and well-planned city, the distances become smaller, and walking and cycling are favored. Here, the whole society will move more than today, both adults and children. The opposite is the urban expansion that has emerged during the 20th century and which has built us up in car-dependent sleeping cities, where parents often pick up and drop off children at school by car, and where many spend a long time commuting to workplaces that are often far from home.” (Casselbrant and Hohenthal, 2019, my translation).

Åkerblom et al (2019) indicate that politicians, clients, and builders do not prioritize the sustainability perspective, however Casselbrant and Hohenthal (2019) mean that they do. In their opinion private interests and profit maximization are not the problems, instead protracted bureaucracy and cost-driven processes are the obstacles. “No one questions that places for spontaneous play and movement for children are needed. Contrariwise.” (Casselbrant and Hohenthal, 2019, my translation).

A CLOSING REMARK BUT NOT THE LAST WRITTEN WORDS

This debate continues in a closing remark by Lindberg et al (2019), a group of landscape architects meaning that there is a need for nuancing the concept of densification. “The dense stone city from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century is today saluted as a model and an urban building ideal. If you try to lift your gaze from the beautiful facades, however, you see the historic city structure with large parks and an urban greenery in the form of older trees between the houses. The trend in today’s densification strategies instead shows small public areas with minimal parks and narrow, unfortunate city trees – without sufficient space to spread out.” (Lindberg et al, 2019, my translation). Furthermore, Lindberg et al (2019) agree with Casselbrant and Hohenthal (2019), underlining that planning strategies from the latest centuries have created a car dependency and cities have developed thereafter. Thus, a city with a high population density is not the solution (Lindberg et al, 2019).

Lindberg et al (2019) question Casselbrant and Hohenthal (2019) stating that no one questions children's needs, and that profit maximization is not an obstacle for sustainable development. "Bureaucracy and rule-driven, cost-driving processes', which the authors believe stand in the way of building a sustainable society, are about protecting the values that are not in power themselves – for example children and nature. It is unfortunate that Casselbrant and Hohenthal perceive the child perspective as the cause of cost-driving processes." (Lindberg et al, 2019, my translation). Instead, Lindberg et al (2019) mean that taking children's perspectives into account seriously in spatial planning benefit society, in long-term.

This was the closing remark in this discussion held in Svenska Dagbladet during October 2019, however the last words are not spoken. This is an ongoing discussion with many different aspects and perspectives, often with more questions than answers and concrete solutions. Often quoted in this discourse is Mayor of Bogotá, Enrique Penalosa: "Children are a kind of indicator species. If we can build a successful city for children, we will have a successful city for all people." (Arup, 2017, p 4). With this quote in mind, it is obvious that there are different views on what a successful city for children is and should be.

THE CHILD AND THE CITY - A SUMMARY

- An early example of child friendly planning was in Vasaparken in Stockholm in 1897 where large playgrounds were placed in the center of the park
- In Gothenburg, the work with child impact analyzes, BKA, was initiated in planning processes in 2011
- Today, children are more dependent on adults than before, the decrease of movement has several reasons, strongly connected to traffic and cars
- There are major health risks with children being more sedentary today than ever before
- Children benefit from being in nature, children who understand nature also protects it
- Places that traditionally have been allocated for children, such as pre-school and school yards, are no longer inviolable, instead shrinking in size
- Urbanization is a global process, with a growing population it is important to design cities so that they can contribute to good living environments
- The ongoing discussion regarding densification is important, with different views on what a successful city for children is and should be

CHAPTER THREE: THE ARTICLES

ILLUSTRATED IN FIVE ARTICLES

ARTICLE 02

ARTICLE 03

ARTICLE 06

ARTICLE 12

ARTICLE 31

SUMMARIZING THE ARTICLES



ILLUSTRATED IN FIVE ARTICLES

“For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.” (UNICEF, 2021). Article 1 of the Convention aims to highlight that the UNCRC applies to all people under the age of 18, being a basic guidance for understanding the context. As stated in earlier parts, to apply the UNCRC in planning in Sweden is nothing new, recommendations and regulations are based on the Convention. “The UNCRC emphasizes the right of children to be regarded as independent individuals and that they should be given the opportunity to participate and have their needs met in societal development. Spatial planning affects and is at the same time an expression of societal development.” (Nordström, 2020, p 68, my translation). However, with the legislation in 2020, many hopes for new arguments and a stronger mandate, meaning that the UNCRC states that children do have rights. “Children’s outdoor environments are not a special interest that should be set against others, for example the opportunity to build more densely or make room for traffic, but a question of rights.” (Jungmark et al, 2019, my translation).

IN THE FOLLOWING CHAPTER

Five articles from the UNCRC, Article 2, 3, 6 and 12 as the general principles and Article 31 which content relates to the planning context, will now be described more in-depth, with research, examples, references, and reflections. “The things children want from an urban environment are fundamentally the same as everyone else; safe and clean streets, access to green space, clean air, things to do, the ability to get around, the freedom to see friends, and somewhere to call home.” (Arup, 2017, p 11).

The approach in this following chapter is not to capture every aspect but to gather interesting and important parts relating to the UNCRC in relation to planning, that hopefully will inspire architects, planners, politicians, and others involved in planning and decision making in their work with creating sustainable environments for all people, young and old.

ARTICLE 02

"ALL CHILDREN ARE EQUALLY VALUABLE AND HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS"

1. "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status."

2. "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members."

UNICEF, 2021

A SUMMARY:

- Children living in smaller cities more easily relate to their surroundings, compared to children living in more urban environments
- The number of children spending time in nature everyday decreases, from 78 % in 2003 to 49 % in 2019
- The most economically vulnerable housing areas have the poorest access to urban greenery
- To highlight the legal implementation of the UNCRC, architectural firm Codesign arranged a carnival

ARTICLE 02 IN RELATION TO PLANNING

The following subsection will contain writings on differences in living conditions within Sweden, questions regarding inequality and an example from a carnival arranged to highlight the legislation of the Convention.

Children are not small adults; they are not physical nor mental fully developed and they are more sensitive to their surroundings. Therefore, it is important that rules and regulations in planning take that into account (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021). Regardless of where in the country a child is growing up, the built environment should contribute to a good childhood, where the access to adequate housing is an important presumption. The environment surrounding the housing area is essential, not least for small children, whom should have good access to green areas, good air quality and equal access to pre-school and school (Boverket, 2020). To spend time outdoors and have access to a stimulating nature area are important for all children, regardless of where they live or what their socioeconomic status are. Children's physical, mental, and cognitive development are crucial for the future development of people's health.

DIFFERENCES WITHIN SWEDEN

In a comparative study of children's experiences of physical environments in different locations it was shown that establishing a relationship to an urban environment of a large scale is not easy for a child. The study compared big cities with small towns in the countryside, in Sweden. One interpretation of the differences visible in the study was that children living in smaller cities more easily relate to their surroundings, physical and social, and by that has a richer understanding of

their environmental experiences. For example, children living in urban environments referred to their surroundings in abstract terms, while children living in small communities referred more specific to their experiences, to people and surroundings. Urban children sometimes referred to their 'imaginary places', like the moon. "The immediate everyday environment did not seem to carry any special meaning to them." (Mårtensson & Nordström, 2017, p 37). Children living in smaller communities instead told stories that "clearly manifested feelings of belonging".

A recent study in the community Staffanstorp, in south of Sweden, investigated how children move around independently. The children participating in the study wrote activity diaries showing that many enjoyed traveling around independently by bike, as well as playing with friends in the neighborhood after school. 78 percent of the participating 10-year-olds traveled by bike or foot to school every day and compared with international experience their average levels of physical activity were remarkable. "This confirms what we so far have assumed: that children's independent mobility still thrives in smaller communities, even if it has diminished significantly since the 1970's, when it was common that even toddlers were out on their own in housing areas." (Mårtensson & Nordström, 2017, p 39).

In a research made in Finland, countryside environments appeared to be the most child-friendly, however urban environments were very close to being equally good for children. "The findings should therefore not be interpreted to mean that only countryside environments can be child-friendly." (Kyttä, 2003, p 105). Kyttä (2003) found that facilities in the more rural environments were not specifically designed for children, referring to Astrid Lindgren's Bullerbyn where there was no need for playgrounds or toys. "The child friendliness of the village lay in the fact that the children were an important part of the social community; they were not excluded from any mundane events in the village, and they had important roles and responsibilities." (Kyttä, 2003, p 105).

STOCKHOLM, A FORMER ROLE MODEL

Once, Stockholm played an important part in the development of good outdoor environments for children. "From the 1940's until the early 2000's Stockholm's children were lucky to grow up in a city with an abundance of open space and extensive green surroundings." (Mårtensson & Nordström, 2017, p 40). One reason to this successful work with these perspectives in Stockholm during that time was a group of planners, architects, politicians, and researchers striving for creating access to nature for children with an overall planning approach that for example enabled walkable distances to schools and well-designed residential areas including play spaces nearby homes and outdoor playgrounds. At that time, Stockholm with its child-friendly planning approaches influenced planning standards for other cities in Sweden, called 'the Stockholm style'. Thus, Stockholm played an important part as Mårtensson and Nordström (2017) discuss until the early 2000's, what happened then? An intense economic development the latest years has resulted in a strong interest in building and protecting exploitable land. This has been at the expense of areas for other purposes, as children's outdoor environments for play. An argument for this is the economic aspect and value, that it is too costly to reserve land for nature areas and play spaces (Mårtensson & Nordström, 2017). An example from a pre-school in south of Stockholm is described in Article 06, discussing the lack of space for outdoor environments.

(IN)EQUALITY

In an environmental health report from 2021 the Public Health Agency of Sweden presents the result from a survey made focusing on children's health (BMHE 19). "The report gives information regarding children's environmental health in Sweden today, how it has developed over time and what it looks like among children in different groups in the population." (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021, p 7, my translation). The report points at children being more sensitive to the surrounding environment than adults, for example that children breath more in relation to their body size which gives higher risk to being exposed to different environmental factors. Children can not by themselves change their presumptions and are therefore affected by their families' living habits and living conditions (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021).

The Public Health Agency sees a general trend; children spend less time in nature today than before. The study from 2021 show that only 49 percent of children spend time in nature daily, which is a decrease from the one made in 2011 where the correlative report showed 62 percent. In the correlative study from 2003, the number was 78 percent. The decrease applies to all age groups (8 months, 4 years, 12 years) (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021).

Depending on where in the country children live, there are differences in access to nature. The number of children that spend time in nature everyday are higher among those living in smaller cities or rural areas than in large cities. The result from the surveys made show differences in society. For example, children who have guardians with elementary school as highest education level have less access to nature areas than those having guardians with higher education level. Other groups with distinct differences regarding spending time in nature are children with guardians born abroad, children living crowded or children with a disability. Children with socioeconomic favored guardians tend to participate in organized activities in their spare time, and boys are in general more active than girls (in the age of 11, 13 and 15). International studies show that the proximity to green areas and the quality of them are dependent on the economy of the household, where there is a connection between lower income and less access to green areas. "The trend is thus poorer access to urban greenery in the most economically vulnerable housing areas, and this has also been seen in the suburban municipalities in Stockholm." (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021, p 142, my translation). In areas where overcrowding is widespread, well-functioning places outside the home are particularly important. The effects of green areas tend to be higher in socially and economically vulnerable areas (Göteborgs Stad, 2019).

There are many risks with these inequalities, with playable public places being distributed uneven and a decrease in free activities for children and their families as some examples (Arup, 2019). One risk is that the differences in access to and use of green areas will contribute to an increased inequality in health. Children with socioeconomically stronger guardians might live in cities with less access to nature however the weekends are spent at the family's holiday cottage in nature rich areas. A presumption not all children have (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021).

“The child friendliness of the village lay in the fact that the children were an important part of the social community; they were not excluded from any mundane events in the village, and they had important roles and responsibilities.”

Kyttä, 2003, p 105

EXAMPLE OF A CHILD FRIENDLY PROJECT: BARNEVAL!

As mentioned before in this thesis, in January 2020 the UNCRC became law in Sweden. Architectural firm Codesign, and their research studio, in Stockholm decided to celebrate this by arranging a carnival, or a Barneval (a child-carnival). They invited children, young adults, parents, school classes, different organizations, businesses, architects, artists, teachers, politicians; everyone interested and engaged in children's rights to express their opinions were invited. They described the day as following: "A historical event for children's rights! Because children are not future adults, they are a group of society of their own, own individuals with their own rights!" (Sveriges Arkitekter, 2020, my translation). They started at the City Library in Stockholm, gathering for some speeches, and then walked together towards the Swedish Parliament accompanied by songs and dancing, glitter and balloons and costumes. Outside the parliament Codesign Research Studio (CoRS) held a speech talking about the importance of including children in spatial planning and architecture as they are experts in their own environments and can not be replaced by adults who guess what they need and wish for. "To build a city for them is to build a city for everyone" (Codesign, 2020a, my translation).

The project Barneval was a result of several years' work within this field at CoRS. By balloon activism, furnishing of parking spaces and other projects, the architects have informed children about their rights and given them different tools and methods to affect and design their spaces. "Our driving force is to work with those who are most socially and spatially excluded in society. We want to educate children to express themselves about their spatial needs and give them the power to influence decision-makers" said Jelena Mijanovic, leader of CoRS, in an interview with Architects Sweden (Gunne, 2019). In the work with the Barneval architecture students at KTH in Stockholm were involved. The students participated in a workshop as a part of an introductory course where their assignment was to interpret the articles of the UNCRC and create their own, interactive costumes to use at the Barneval. "During the day incredible creations emerged, we are very impressed and thankful for the student's clever and spotless interpretations of the UNCRC's articles and their amazing creations" (Codesign, 2020b, my translation).



Source: CoDesign Research Studio <https://codesign.se/barneval/>

REFLECTION - ARTICLE 02 IN RELATION TO PLANNING

“All children are equally valuable and have the same rights.” (UNICEF, 2021). This should not be a discussion; it should be a matter of course. As stated in this chapter, children’s living conditions are very different depending on where they live, even different within cities, here highlighted by Mårtensson and Nordström (2017). As the example from Stockholm where the city went from being a former role model to the current situation where economic aspects and high land costs obstruct the development of nature areas and play spaces for children (Mårtensson & Nordström, 2017). That there is a difference within Sweden is one probable effect of today’s planning norms about making the most out of spaces and creating as much rentable space as possible, both commercial and residential. Connected to this is the increased focus on economic growth, as mentioned in above chapters regarding economy as a driving force in planning. Kylin and Bodelius (2015) discuss this, as the driving forces in the planning discourse become more oriented toward economic growth, children as a group must be expressed in terms of economic values. But is it even possible to put a price on everything?

This question regarding urban development should include more, such as a larger focus on creating holistic environments important not only for children but for the whole society. As the Public Health Agency found in the health report from 2021, the differences appear within cities as well, where socially disadvantaged areas in general have poorer conditions for natural resources. It might not be a human right to own a summer house close to a beautiful forest, but at least to have access to decent green areas in daily life. For example, pre-school and school yards with high natural quality are particularly important in more vulnerable suburban areas.

Architects and planners can not move children from one place to another, neither decide where people should move. Though some facts can not be ignored, for example that 63 percent of the inhabitants of Sweden live in cities with more than 10 000 inhabitants (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021). However, one opportunity as an architect is to create environments where people want to live and spend time. Healthy environments contributing to well-being and sustainable development. And one responsibility, as I see it, is to listen and learn from researchers within the field but also in surrounding disciplines. Kytä (2003) found that, in Finland, countryside environments were more child-friendly than urban, however the difference was not that significant where she concluded that not only countryside environments can be child-friendly. A success factor for Stockholm in the end of the 20th century was, according to Mårtensson and Nordström (2017), working together interdisciplinary and including many different perspectives

Thus, children are dependent on adults, where their caregivers choose to live affect their everyday life. And it should be equal regardless of where in the country they live. For architects and planners, a starting point could be to acknowledge the problems, include academia, and by a more research-based design reach equal habitats, equal access to nature and green areas. There is no lack of research in the field of child-friendly architecture and planning, it is rather a matter of reducing the gap between academia and practice.

ARTICLE 03

"IN ALL DECISIONS CONCERNING CHILDREN, WHAT IS CONSIDERED TO BE THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN THE FIRST PLACE"

1. *"In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."*

2. *"States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures."*

3. *"States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision."*

A SUMMARY:

- In a conflict of interest, what is best for the child can be weighted against other interests, as for example economic, adult's, car drivers
- By talking about a child's own perspective instead of child perspective a clear distinction is made, to let children speak and listen to what they have to say
- In Gothenburg, architects and planners have a matrix as a tool for child impact analysis, within the method BKA
- In the project of Grönebacken, what was considered to be the best interest of the child was taken into account

ARTICLE 03 IN RELATION TO PLANNING

The following subsection will contain a problematization of different concepts within child perspective, an introduction to methods in child friendly planning used in Gothenburg, and examples from a detailed development plan regarding a pre-school.

The UNCRC demands that children's best should be analyzed and taken into account in every decision regarding the child (Göteborgs Stad, 2017). However, this part of the Convention is difficult to interpret, who should decide what is best for the child and based on what? The Convention gives an idea on how this should be interpreted, a guidance in what is in the child's best interest. In a conflict of interest, what is best for the child can be weighted against other interests, economic, adult's, car drivers, to mention some. The child committee in the UN gives an account for three main conflicts; one child's interest against other children's best, when the child's best goes against caregivers wishes, and the child's best against a question of interest for the society (Hammarberg, n.d).

As the legislation of the UNCRC is relatively new in Sweden, the question of the child's best has been tried few times legally. One example, not in relation to planning however interesting to mention, is the advisory decision from The Migration Court of Appeal from 2020. A child, 14 years old and born in Sweden, was at risk to being deported, which could be seen to be in counter to the UNCRC. The conclusion in this case was that it would be contrary to Article 3, regarding the best interest of the child, to deport the child and it resulted in the child being granted a temporary residence permit. This indicates that the Convention can weigh heavily in individual matters, which could lead to more clear assessments in the future, according to Save the Children (Rädda Barnen, 2020).

THE CONCEPT OF CHILD PERSPECTIVE

The concept of child perspective is an umbrella concept including a perspective with the child in focus and the child's own perspective. A child perspective can involve highlighting the consequences that different decisions bring for children. It can also be acting for a group in society that can not easily make their voices heard and including their perspectives in the discourse. Furthermore, also about scientific knowledge formation, to see it from several actors' point of view, from more perspectives than only one. "Then it is about both adult's perspectives on children and their own terms, and about children, young and adult's perspectives on the world around them and their terms." (Göteborgs Stad, 2017, p 11, my translation). From a political perspective, child perspective often is connected to child's best. The word perspective can, in this situation, also have different implications. Sometimes meaning position, but also theory or approach.

When working with a child perspective in planning the aim is to develop an activity or a function to meet the needs of the children. By talking about a child's own perspective instead of child perspective a clear distinction is made, to let children speak, and listen to them. With that said, there is no 'easy solution' where children's own perspectives are the only way to go. "It is not always the case that children should be consulted, and a child perspective can mean that one tries to capture children's experiences and conditions in other ways than through direct questions to them." (Göteborgs Stad, 2017, p 11, my translation). The children's right perspective is often mixed with the child perspective and the child's own perspective, but there are differences (Västra Götalandsregionen, n.d).

Children's right perspective

all decision-making and work processes are based on children's rights, through for example child impact analyses, securing that the best interests of the child have been considered

Child perspective

based on experiences and knowledge from their own childhood, work skills, education, family etc, adults by themselves try to determine and assess what is in the best interests of the child

Child's own perspective

children's own stories and interpretations of the situation, communicated to adults through dialogue adapted for the individual child or group of children

(Västra Götalandsregionen, n.d)

BJA AS A METHOD FOR CHILD IMPACT ANALYSIS

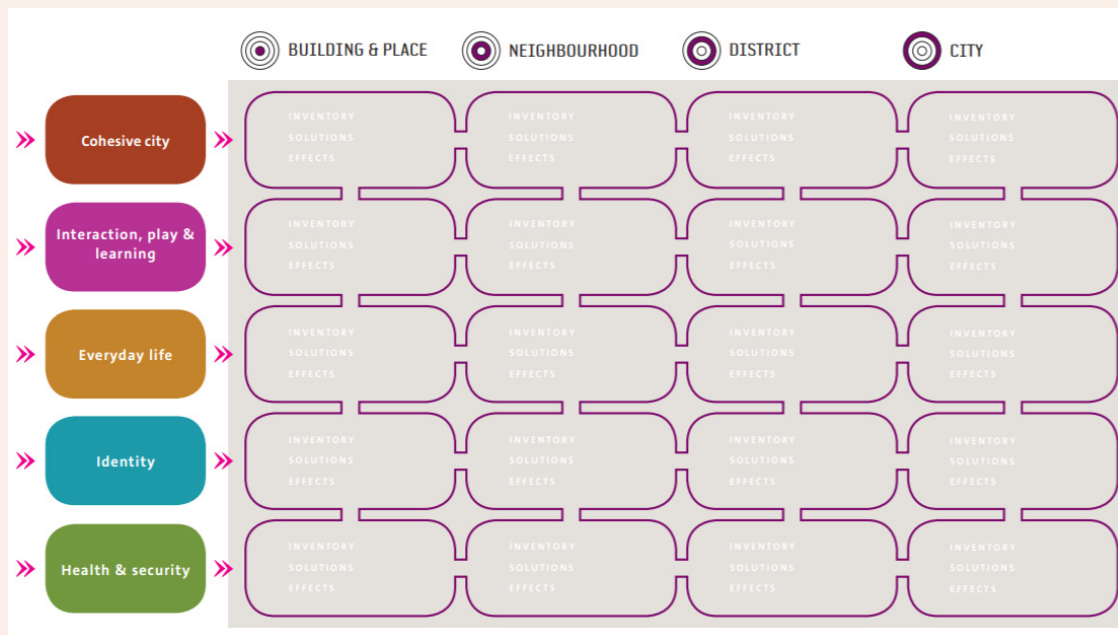
When the UNCRC was ratified in Sweden in 1990, child impact analysis were introduced as a concept to implementing the Convention. Barnombudsmannen was established in 1993 to work with the implementation of the UNCRC. As a part of this work the concept of child impact analysis was created with the purpose to highlight every decision affecting children, and therefore should be considered in all decisions made (Nordström, 2020). Here the concept is presented in terms of architecture and planning, where it can be described as a method to use when changing the physical environment, building new or changing in the already existing. Generally, child impact analysis is implemented in different steps where the first is to describe the physical environment and how it is used today, before the intended change. The architects and planners implementing the analysis should acquire knowledge about how children use the physical environment in a broader perspective. The proposed change of the physical environment is then analyzed from the consequences it might have for children and their use of and connection to, the place. The result is then showed in the detailed development plan and further, in the physical implementation, the built environment, which showcase the value of the child impact analysis, according to Nordström (2020).

Gothenburg's development of BKA, and its adaptation to planning, is one method to work systematically with child perspective in planning. The aim has been to affect the whole planning process, to implement a child perspective in the work of architects and planners, administrators, and officials. In Nordström's (2020) report, administrators at the city planning office in Gothenburg were interviewed. "The city planners who were active from the beginning in the municipality's work with BKA, today expresses satisfaction with the result achieved within the city administrations, i.e. that the developed BKA model in long paragraphs has become routine in ordinary planning processes." (Nordström, 2020, p 42, my translation). Even though the City of Gothenburg have planning administrations that are knowledgeable, well-informed, and cooperative within child perspective and BKA, to make a real difference, a political mandate is needed. And it is the politicians that give the administrations this mandate. In Gothenburg, as well as in other municipalities, planners also indicate that access to municipal land is decided outside the planning process, that land allocations are decisive moments carried out with little or no analysis with a child perspective (Nordström, 2020).

“Children do not always know their own best,
but neither do adults. Yet adults are allowed
to express their views while children have
significantly poorer opportunities to do so in
many contexts.”

Göteborgs Stad, 2017, p 11

CHILD IMPACT ANALYSIS TOOL



Göteborgs Stad, 2017

A MATRIX AS A TOOL IN GOTHENBURG

The model BKA (Barnkonsekvensanalys) in Gothenburg is described as an analysis tool for the physical environment in the planning process. The aim is to give planners support when highlighting needs, assets and shortcomings that need to be emphasized from children's perspective as well as a child perspective, and describe the consequences that proposed measures and approaches may cause (Göteborgs stad, 2017). "BKA should be made to develop the child perspective in the spatial planning process and thereby improve the decision basis in different planning stages." (Göteborgs stad, 2017, p 8, my translation). The challenge described in the City of Gothenburg's material is to change adult's attitudes to children and what impact children's experiences and knowledge should have in the decision-making processes. In a BKA children's specific needs in the development process are highlighted, a perspective that tend to be lost when children are only 'a subset of all people'. By focusing on aspects which really applies to children, from inventory to implementation and evaluation, balances and decisions made along the way can be more easily followed.

Included in the Gothenburg model for BKA is a matrix with two dimensions. One dimension regarding the level for the physical environment; building and place; neighborhood; district; city; region. The other dimension is the municipality's basic principles for urban planning; cohesive city; interaction, play and learning; everyday life; identify; health and security. The matrix is supposed to be a help for architects and planners in the planning process, to help structuring and delimiting their work and clarify the inventory, the measures, and consequences of their proposals (Göteborgs Stad, 2017).

EXAMPLE: CONSIDERING THE CHILD'S BEST AT GRÖNEBACKEN

Studio Goja is a design studio based in Gothenburg focusing on children and children's stories in design projects and planning, they experiment with play as a design tool and develop user inclusive design processes. "Goja's workshops are based on the UNCRC, and work on the basis of the clear goal that children should have the right to information through culture, the right to free expression and the right to have their voices heard." (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2021, my translation). In 2015 Studio Goja was hired as design and architecture pedagogues at the City of Gothenburg for a project at the city planning office with the aim of involving children in the planning process of a new detailed development plan containing new housing and a preschool. The project was carried out within the framework of BKA in the City of Gothenburg (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016). Here, the aspects regarding Article 03, concerning the child's best, is described. For more details about dialogue work and participation in the project of Grönebacken, see Article 12 later in this thesis.

From the participatory processes with children at two pre-schools within the area of development, important aspects were highlighted. Studio Goja gather lessons and conclusions from their work, where the connection between the yard with its specified boundaries and the park with more free space are essential to children's everyday life. "Something that we have noticed in our work is that children state that fences belong to a safe place. It can keep danger out of one's place or confine dangers, so that the danger does not come out." (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016, p 21, my translation). Further, children see fences as something that frame their 'own' place, that this is their yard where they are comfortable and somehow have ownership. In the nearby park, children seem to like places that feel familiar, where they have been before together with an adult they know, during the days at pre-school or spare time. Some children also like places that are a little different and risky. These stories are gathered by Studio Goja and included in their result, since these places are valuable for children. "The park, unlike the yard, is not prepared and childproof. This means that there are places within the park that the children can relate to through their stories and imagination. In this way, they find ways to manage risks." (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016, p 21, my translation).

PRIORITIES

In the work with this detailed development plan, these challenges are nothing new. It is about expensive land and how this land is distributed, whose needs are prioritized. From the perspective of the design pedagogues, after working together with the children, it is recommended to work for sustainable outdoor environments for children. That an insight regarding the outdoor environments for children being as important as the indoor spaces and plays an important role in the pedagogic work. "... the guidelines that exist for outdoor area per child are relevant and that the space that is not sacrificed can be replaced by public spaces, although these are also valuable as excursion destinations." (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016, p 21, my translation). During the work, Studio Goja witness an increased stress and level of anxiety in groups of children that are crowded within small areas and highlights the importance of designing the spaces so that they satisfy different needs for children as well as for pedagogues to have a well-established working environment. They also recommend inviting and working together with children, pedagogues, and other users in the continued work with the final design of their environments.

THE MATERIAL WAS TAKEN CARE OF

The City of Gothenburg has taken the result into account when developing the work in the area. The detailed development plan won legal force in December 2020 (but has been appealed) and determines that; “The proposal meets the city’s guidelines regarding outdoor space at preschools.” (Göteborgs Stad, 2020, p 34, my translation). Further it is described, in the planning description, that outdoor spaces can be created, places that give good preconditions for children’s development, motor as well as cognitive. More space for the pre-school yard, and more space per children, also reduces wear and tear on the yard. However, one consequence of this is that the public park area will be smaller, since parts of it is now allocated to the pre-school. One solution to this, according to the City of Gothenburg, is to make the pre-school yard accessible during evenings and weekends, when the pre-school is closed. However, this can not be ensured within the detailed development plan. The result in this project benefited the children at the pre-school, in other words what was considered to be the best interest of the child was taken into account. Nordström (2020) also brings up this example and writes; “The result was that the city decided on a larger area for the preschool yard, whereby the park area became smaller. It was a result that benefited the pre-school children. It is known from research that in their own space, children’s play becomes more free than in a place they have to share, often with older children and with adults, who more easily assert their need for space towards younger children.” (p 41, my translation).



Source: Studio Goja, 2016

”It became a question about how a conflict of interest between adults and children is handled, how much space do children really need and how do these needs relate to other needs for, for example, housing?”

Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016

REFLECTION - ARTICLE 03 IN RELATION TO PLANNING

“What is considered to be the best interest of the child must be taken into account, in all decisions regarding children.” (UNICEF, 2021). In relation to planning, the example of Grönebacken within a BKA illustrates this, where it was indicated that children’s best were considered since the pre-school yard got the ‘sufficient’ space (Göteborgs Stad, 2020). However, at the expense of a park area where the child impact analysis showed older children used to a large extent. Can it be argued that children’s best are considered when it comes to a small group of children and not meaning all children affected by the decisions?

Many discussions regarding children and child perspective in planning result in a discussion about responsibility, and often no one willing to be responsible. A knowledge deepening for those involved in planning of our environments could benefit children and their best to be considered. In Sweden, with the municipal planning monopoly, the local politicians in relevant committees have the power to make decisions. Decisions that are based on administrator’s knowledge, statements, and recommendations. As an example, Gothenburg has been a forerunner in the work with child perspective in planning, with engaged politicians and decision makers where an aim with the work is to change adult’s attitudes to children and the impact child perspective and children’s perspectives should have in the decision-making processes (Göteborgs Stad, 2017). Svennberg (2021, personal contact) confirms this, and questions the fact that no examples from Gothenburg was brought up as illustrations of well-executed results in the Nordström (2020) report. Architects and planners at the municipal planning offices can implement child impact analyses and describe consequences ideally, however it is the politics that governs (Svennberg, 2021, personal contact). Decisions made that further affect the built environment. With political power on one side and children with no possibility to participate in elections on another, there is a certain discrepancy. Then, are there the legal aspects and legislations that should ‘save’ spaces for children and consider their best?

Mijanovic (2019) points at the importance of the National Board of Housing, Building, and Planning to show how child impact analyses can get a concrete legal effect, which the Swedish government confirmed in the recent press release with several actions presented aiming at guidance in applying the UNCRC in accordance with the Planning and Building Act (Regeringskansliet, 2021). However, are laws and regulations required to create cities based on the best interests of the child? With the knowledge and values of the architect’s profession, together with recent highlighted needs for developing design based on research, actions in education regarding children’s rights in planning for politicians and decision-makers might be a more adequate focus forward. It is more difficult to make unwise decisions with knowledge of the consequences – long and short term.

ARTICLE 06

*"CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT
TO LIFE, SURVIVAL, AND
DEVELOPMENT"*

1. *"States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life."*
2. *"States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child."*

UNICEF, 2021

A SUMMARY:

- The yard at pre-schools and schools as an equal place for children to have access to outdoor environment, however these places tend to be smaller and smaller
- National guidelines for pre-schools states 40 m² per children in outdoor areas, a newly built pre-school in Årstadal offers 3,6 m² for each child
- Children often find the natural environment surrounding the playgrounds as a good place for playing
- As children spend more time in nature, they become more caring of it and by extension more environmentally friendly

ARTICLE 06 IN RELATION TO PLANNING

The following subsection will contain different perspectives on children's access to nature, human-nature relation, environmental psychology aspects, rules and recommendations on spaces for children and examples from two different pre-schools and their yards.

How cities are planned affect children's access to nature and outdoor life. The school and pre-school yard are particularly important for those who do not have access to nature and good outdoor environment otherwise. Outdoor environments in connection to schools and pre-schools tend to be smaller and smaller, a clear trend the latest years showing that children get less space in urban environments. With densification of cities, the number of users of parks increases, and newly built parks are often small and with hardened ground surfaces (Boverket, 2020). Almost all children, 97 percent for the whole country, have a nature area, as in a park, forest, or recreational area, close by their home. However, these statistics do not say anything about the quality of the place, nor the access to it. A child can live close to a forest but physical barriers as traffic can decrease the access to it (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021).

In the Nordic region children have a relatively active lifestyle and high levels of well-being which could be assigned to the previous planning regime with child-friendly planning norms. Play facilities, as playgrounds, are not the only solution to a child friendly city, there are other aspects that affects children's health and well-being. For example, possibilities to explore their surroundings on their own terms. "The UNCRC can help us take children as urban dwellers seriously and acknowledge the responsibility of planning to safeguard children's free mobility and opportunities for independent action in everyday life." (Mårtensson & Nordström, 2017, p 45).

CHILDREN AND NATURE

Nature is valuable, it is of great importance when it comes to play and movement, both mentally and physically. Natural environment is needed as a complement to playgrounds, it stimulates the play differently. Therefore, it is important that green areas are prioritized, that they are kept and extended. Although there is a lot of research and knowledge regarding the benefits of access to nature and its important functions for children, there are indications that green areas are often built up when densifying as well as a shrinking in size in the most common green spaces, the pre-school and school yards (Boverket, 2020).

“Nature can also be described as a part of specific places and landscapes which man attaches to emotionally and makes to a part of ‘the self’, or more popular, ‘the identity’”. (Mårtensson, 2011, p 63, my translation). It is then not a question of accessibility but the meaning of a specific place. Not nature or water in general but a particular grove, a specific watercourse. A place meaningful for the human being. In the field of landscape research, there is an important difference between the concept of ‘place’, something humans attribute meaning to and acquire through use over time, and ‘space’, which is the more objective perspective. “Building a hut is an early expression of children’s interest in making social and physical imprints in their surroundings and can play a significant role, as well as a more secretive place for the individual, or social place for the group of friends.” (Mårtensson, 2011, p 63, my translation).

A RISK FOR ‘NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER’

The time children spend outdoors decreases, explained earlier with statistics from the Public Health Agency (2021). Grahn (2012) mean that contact with green areas and nature are no longer a matter of course as both the time and place for this are decreased. Referring to journalist and writer Richard Louv’s publication *Last child in the woods* (2005) and the concept of ‘nature deficit disorder’ with the implication that children with no regular contact with nature are at risk of mental illness, and symptoms as depression, concentration problems, and even obesity (Grahn, 2012). A Swedish study from the 90’s, made in two pre-schools with focus on their yards, showed that children with access to a ‘nature rich’ yard had better abilities to concentrate and were more healthy than those having access to a ‘nature poor’ yard (Mårtensson, 2011). Further studies have been made in this field, where Mårtensson (2011) argues for including behavior in the discourse, not only to focus on the physical environment, but to research how children use the spaces.

“Children need nature, nature needs children –
cities need both. ”

Arup, 2017, p 39

In Sweden today, many children spend a large part of their time awake in a pre-school or a school. The yards then become the places for where children meet outdoor environments and nature daily, an equal place where all children have the possibility to be outdoors, not being dependent on their caregiver's capability or willingness to spend time in nature. As the access children have to nature close by their homes is less visible today than before, schools and pre-schools are increasing in importance. "The last opportunity to reconnect with nature" according to Dowdell et al (2011, p 4). Grahn (1996) also emphasizes this, as there are cutbacks on both staff and money in Swedish pre-schools, there are rarely possibilities for excursions and similar, which leaves the children with their yards. Giusti et al. (2018) relate this decrease in contact with nature to urbanization and the risks with it, as children today more and more learn about nature through the built environment and thereby create anticipations of what nature should look like and be.

BENEFITS OF SPENDING TIME IN NATURE AS A CHILD

Charles et al (2018) present two essential factors, to have role models of care for nature close to the child and positive experiences during early childhood. Beside from being beneficial for the child in the direct situation, it can also have long-term benefits, as contributing to being caring and acting advantageous concerning the environment later in life. The human-nature relationship can also bring indicators of well-being, as people, regardless of age, that participate in nature-based activities tend to be happier and healthier than those who do not (Charles et al, 2018). Dowdell et al (2011) mean that experiences of fascination in nature as a child are important, especially when supported and encouraged. Then, the opportunity to maintain this fascination into adulthood is greater.

The benefits are not only in short term, however having contact with nature early in life also seem to be a predictor of behavior later, as positive conservation behavior stated by Charles et al (2018) and shown in a study by Giusti (2019). The Public Health Agency also refers to studies made on this subject, that children having an emotional contact with nature become more caring for it, and that a strong connection to nature also increases the rate of recovery when spending time there (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021).

There are several theories regarding the meaning of connection to places in early age, which is important in the search for what emotionally important places in nature can signify for a child in present time but also in the future, how it affects the well-being and health. Mårtensson (2011) argues for childhood as a phase where the individual's ability, as well as habits, regarding the search for emotional support, inspiration, and recreation in nature, are defined. She continues with asking what the consequences will be if children no longer see their 'favorite places' in nature but instead in more urban and social contexts as cafés or sport facilities, due to the lack of nature experiences early in life.

“We, as humans, have lived by and developed together with nature during hundreds of thousands of years. That we and our children should forget everything we have learned in one or two generations, I perceive as a great cultural loss, which also makes our future uncertain.”

Lisberg Jensen, 2011, p 52

A COMPLEX QUESTION

According to Lisberg Jensen (2011) the questions regarding child-nature contact are complex and contain several dimensions. “That children are healthy by contact with nature in everyday life is a value issue that is based on how society and individuals relate to nature.” (Lisberg Jensen, 2011, p 51, my translation). This not meaning that children are not healthier if they spend time in nature, but that it is difficult to argue that everyone should be healthier, happier, increase in learning and become more environmentally friendly by spending time in nature. Lisberg Jensen (2011) means that perhaps researchers need to accept that quantitative studies in this field deal with a material that is hard to control, that material being humans. Thus, Lisberg Jensen (2011) argues for the importance of contact with nature, both for children and adults. It is not only about accessibility to parks and green areas when it comes to children’s possibilities to nature contact, determining factors according to Lisberg Jensen (2011) are how adults live their lives. For example, the attitude towards nature, to be an exclusive destination or seen as everyday environments with its changes and nuances, as well as location meaning possibilities to nature experiences nearby home to avoid being dependent on transport by adults, and to have confidence in children’s ability to experience their nearby areas by themselves (Lisberg Jensen, 2011). “We, as humans, have lived by and developed together with nature during hundreds of thousands of years. That we and our children should forget everything we have learned in one or two generations, I perceive as a great cultural loss, which also makes our future uncertain.” (Lisberg Jensen, 2011, p 52, my translation).

IN ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

To spend time in nature is today a common alternative for recovery, from stressful situations or exhaustion, for example (Steg et al., 2013). Already 150 years ago this strategy seems to have been discussed, referring to Frederick Law Olmsted, a landscape architect, who observed indications of this (Beveridge, 1977).

In the field of environmental psychology, the concept of restoration implies an experience of a recovery process, psychological or physiological, caused by environmental configurations and certain environments, called restorative environments (Steg et al., 2013). In studies made, natural environments seem to be more restorative than environments in an urban setting. And there are health benefits with being exposed to restorative natural environments, as improved well-being, and a reduced risk of disease. In this field there are two main theories, the *Stress Recovery Theory* (SRT) by Ulrich and the *Attention Restoration Theory* (ART) by Kaplan (Steg et al., 2013).

ATTENTION RESTORATION THEORY

ART is a slow process, emphasizing with the significance of "cognitive mechanisms in restoration". Kaplan (Steg et al., 2013) claims that people have a constrained ability to direct attention to what is not interesting 'in itself'. The cognitive mechanism that is essential for blocking out stimuli being competitive, the 'central executive', diminishes when used intensively. This is called *Directed Attentional Fatigue* (DAF) and can be contradicted in humans' interactions with environments, when four significant qualities are included, called *Perceived Restorativeness Scale* (Steg et al., 2013):

- Fascination, "my attention is drawn to many interesting things"
- Extent/coherence, "there is much going on"
- Being away, "spending time here gives me a break from my day- today routine"
- Compatibility, "I can do things I like here"

These significant qualities are often arising in human-nature interactions where this theory claims that natural environments are habitually more effective than built environments to counteract DAF (Steg et al., 2013).

EXAMPLE: A SPACIOUS YARD AT KOMETEN

In Växjö, the pre-school Kometen was finished in 2010. The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning describes this project as a 'learning example', a role model for planning of outdoor environment. Kometen has 135 children divided into seven departments and a total outdoor area of 8 730 m² which gives each child 64 m². In this project the pedagogues at the pre-school were involved early in the process and the principle established the importance of keeping the forest to the greatest possible extent. "A good outdoor environment is needed to be able to work with the curriculum and the principal was keen to save natural land from a pedagogical perspective." (Boverket, 2021, my translation). The design of the pre-school is made from the children's and pedagogues' perspectives, the building is placed in one corner which enables an outdoor environment protected from parking spaces, traffic, and goods deliveries.

The yard is divided in two parts, one for younger and one for older children, whom have different prerequisites and needs. The part for younger children has newly been rebuilt, where the swings were removed and instead play with water and sand was introduced. One of the pedagogues expressed it like this: "It is so nice that there are no swings or bikes here! It only brings competition and waiting. Such play equipment creates passivity and conflicts." (Boverket, 2021, my translation). The fact that the yard is fenced but spacious creates freedom for both adults and children at the pre-school. The yard invites the children to climb, play with water and use tools in a safe, creative, and variable environment, with places that they can affect themselves. "In nature, play and imagination exists in a completely different way. The children occupy themselves all the time and we in the staff can be there to support." says one of the pedagogues at the pre-school (Boverket, 2021, my translation).

The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (2021) lists a few learnings made:

- To take advantage of the qualities of nature gives a high quality in play value and learning environments, it stimulates play and movement.
- The design of the indoor environment is made with the outdoor in mind. A good transition makes it easier to spend time outdoors and conduct outdoor education.
- Even though the focus has been on children's environments, the working environment for the staff has also been prioritized resulting in positive effects on the pre-school.
- The dialogue early in the process between the client and the architects was successful for the outcome, as was continued contact during the management phase where the child perspective continuously is in focus.



Source: Lena Jungmark, Boverket

EXAMPLE: 'RELEASE YARDS' IN ÅRSTADAL

In south of Stockholm the area Årstadal has, during the latest years, been developed with new housing areas. An urban environment more than 2,5 times as dense as the central parts of the capital. Here, some pre-school yards are almost too small to be called yards, instead called 'release yards'. They are too narrow for the children to be able to run around, the smallest one is 180 m² designed for 53 children which give each child 3,6 m² (Asker & Andersson, 2016). The limitations of the yards bring the children and their pedagogues out in the city, however for the youngest children a walk to the nearest park can take very long time and requires large resources. "It does not go so fast when you hold a one-year-old in your hand and it takes time to reach a park. The staff says that on this grey-cold day, they are pleased with a walk in the streets around the neighborhood so that the children can move around and practice walking in groups." (Asker & Andersson, 2016, my translation).

One pre-school in Årstadal is placed on top of a garage. "Since the city planners made sure to give proper space to the cars, there is a garage under the yard – and thus it becomes difficult to get trees and bushes to grow." (Asker & Andersson, 2016, my translation). One parent to a child in a school in Årstadal, where the children get 4,5 m² outdoor area each, establish the difficulties with children being too sedentary and the expectations parents feel to compensate for the poor outdoor environments their children have during daytime. And not every child has adults near that have possibilities to be active and compensate for this. The pre-school director in Årstadal expresses the difficulties with the outdoor environment as following; "The outdoor environment is important. Being outside gives children a sense of freedom. But Stockholm becomes denser. As a family with children, you make a choice. If you as a family with children choose to live here, then the pre-schools look like this." (Asker & Andersson, 2016, my translation).

Årstabergsparken, a neighborhood park in the area, was in 2019 nominated to Architects Sweden's planning prize. The park is described to compensate the lack of play and greenery in the area. A good initiative and important investment, but is it enough? "Årstabergsparken is natural land, which is more sensitive than a landscaped park. And next door is a school with 1200 children. It will be a huge wear and tear. We have put a ten-centimeter base layer of crushed stone, covered with bark, to distribute the loads and protect the roots and vegetation. It is an experiment." says a landscape architect involved in the project (Jensfelt, 2021, my translation).



"It is important that the outdoor environment is fun, so the children are tempted to go out."

Source: Svenska Dagbladet, 2016

NO REGULATIONS BUT RECOMMENDATIONS

Statistics from SCB and the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning show that outdoor areas at Swedish schools and pre-schools decreased during the years 2014-2017 in the whole country (Folhälsomyndigheten, 2021). Mårtensson (2011) underlines the importance of developing research in children's well-being, interdisciplinary, in studies on outdoor environments for children. Here, environmental psychology can contribute to understanding the theory regarding the connection between the physical environment and human beings (Mårtensson, 2011). According to the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning there are only recommendations for the design of the school and pre-school yards, no regulatory guidelines. Described is that the area should be "spacious enough" and the terrain should be varied with possibilities for sun and shading as well as good air and sound qualities. There are neither no regulatory guidelines regarding the size of the yard, however recommendations describing a "reasonable size of 30m² per child in schools and 40m² per child in pre-schools" (Boverket, 2018). In total the area should not be smaller than 3000m². A smaller yard, regardless of the number of children using it, can not meet the needs for a child or a group of children and can counteract the development of play and social interaction. Also described is that children spend more time outside if the outdoor area has a high quality referring to green spaces and places for play (Boverket, 2018).

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM BOVERKET

40 m²

outdoor area per child in pre-schools

30 m²

outdoor area per child in schools

3000 m²

as a minimum limit for total outdoor area

and should be characterized by:

- varying vegetation and terrain
- good sun and shade conditions
- good sound quality
- good air quality

(Boverket, 2018)

GUIDELINES IN GOTHENBURG

35 m²

outdoor area per child in pre-schools

15-20 m²

outdoor area per child in schools

3000 m²

as a minimum limit for total outdoor area

Varying qualities in Gothenburg's schools

Average outdoor area 44m² per child, however unevenly distributed (and including compensation areas)
Only 42% have more than 40m² outdoor area per child
24% of the schools have less than 20 m² outdoor area per child

(Göteborgs Stad, 2019)

REFLECTION - ARTICLE 06 IN RELATION TO PLANNING

“Children have the right to life, survival, and development.” (UNICEF, 2019). Every day children spend most of their time awake at a pre-school or a school. These are the places where children spend time outdoors, where they meet nature and outdoor environments daily. Statistics show that the outdoor areas of pre-schools and schools have decreased the latest years (Folhälsomyndigheten, 2021). According to the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Boverket, 2018) the quality of the outdoor area is crucial for the time children spend there, the higher the quality, the more time outdoors. Reading this, it seems like not even children’s obvious space in the city is good enough, quantitatively, or qualitatively?

When discussing this with Siesjö (personal contact, 2021) he argues for it to be more important to encompass the whole, to have a holistic view on planning which, according to him, includes children’s perspectives as well as others. Siesjö (personal contact, 2021) questions the focus on quantitative measures when planning for pre-school areas, discussing what cities we will have if it was only pre-school yards everywhere? The answer might not lay in regulations on quantitative measures, the quality of the yard appears to be as important. But not to demand quantitative measures could lead to having smaller and smaller yards, as for the example with Årstadal (Asker & Andersson, 2016).

Planning for a pre-school should not be a ‘child issue’ set aside in planning, and here the question of attitudes plays a large role. No one would argue that questions regarding children and their childhood habitat is unimportant, rather the opposite, also highlighted, with different justifications, by Lindberg et al (2019) and Casselbrant and Hohenthal (2019). However, these issues are deprioritized one time after another (Jungmark, 2020; Kylin & Bodelius, 2015). The question of pre-schools seems to be infected, something no one will take responsibility for and therefore ending up with ‘release yards’ as in Årstadal (Asker & Andersson, 2016). The pre-school of Kometen in Växjö seems like something unattainable, if put in the context of, for example Gothenburg. One aspect being brought up often in this discussion is the question of ‘how much space do children really need?’ as it from the beginning were something to be questioned. Although the amount of research and studies made show that children benefit from spending time outside, that these health effects seep out and affect a larger perspective than the individual child, this do not seem to be enough. The discussion falls back at a problem that must be solved rather than a possibility. What if the perspectives shifted, that the pre-school yard could be something beneficial for the whole city, an opportunity for architects and planners to create suitable spaces? Green areas with happy, healthy, and satisfied children really establishing the statement of “a city being successful for children is successful for everyone”.

As the child perspective, or the question of BKA in the context of Gothenburg, is brought up it is often associated with resource-intensive activities. And yes, working together with children needs to take time, but not everything attached to ‘child perspective’ is a question of high cost or time consuming. Here, development and planning must be set in a larger perspective, being able to see the effects made now in long-term perspectives. With the UNCRC as law, there should no longer be a question of attitudes or absent of interest – it is legislative that children have the right to life, survival, and development.

ARTICLE 12

"CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS THEIR OPINION AND BE HEARD IN ALL MATTERS CONCERNING THE CHILD"

1. *"States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."*

2. *"For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law."*

UNICEF, 2021

A SUMMARY:

- Children have unique knowledge about the physical environment that adults, as architects and planners, do not have
- Participation can take different forms, different time and bring different kinds of influence
- In the example with Östersund, the municipality took the children's perspectives into account and revised the plan
- Architects and planners in the example of Grönebacken gained, through the children's stories, a new understanding of the meaning of the place and how children used it

ARTICLE 12 IN RELATION TO PLANNING

The following subsection will contain different methods of children's participation in planning processes, an example from fiction and examples from different projects where children have been involved in processes regarding changes in the physical environment.

The perspectives of children and young people are important in democratic processes, such as planning. Children and young people have knowledge about their environment, the places they like and dislike, where they spend time and what they want to change. Knowledge that adults may not have (Boverket, 2020). In this article of the Convention children's rights to get heard in all questions regarding them are stated. However, children and young people's opinions are seldom considered in architecture, planning and design. One reason to this is a general perception among planners that children do not have important and legitimate opinions and reflections on the subject (Saccotelli et al, 2019). With the right support from adults, they can express their experiences, needs, perspectives, and ideas, and contribute to the planning process. Participation can take different forms and bring different kinds of influence. It is important with feedback to involved children and young people, and it should be continuous and concrete (Boverket, 2020).

Questions on this subject are raised by Kylin and Bodelius (2015, p 89); "Should adults take all responsibility for children's needs and protect them by ensuring safe (allocated) places? Or should the child's right be the focus, requiring that children's participation and own place making are taken seriously?". One challenge is that children's own wishes and opinions for design and place making do not always agree with adults' views on esthetics and safety.

A CHILDREN'S BOOK EXAMPLE

In the Swedish architectural magazine *Arkitektur* (nr 3, 2020) an essay highlights children's conditions and movement patterns in cities, through stories, drawings, and pictures from three children's books. Larberg (2020) means that the design of children's environments in books could learn architects and planners something, when it comes to designing and planning. This is an interesting entrance to the subject, and by Emma Adbåges *Gropen*, published by Rabén och Sjögren in 2018, Larberg (2020) highlights important aspects. Here the schoolyard is in focus, not the planned and coded spaces but a pit in the outskirts. A place that adults consider to be too dangerous for children to play in, also a place that children love to play in. Larberg (2020) means that this story captures many central aspects that are also emphasized in research regarding children's outdoor environments.

THREE ASPECTS

The first aspect is risk-taking, that challenges in the environment are important for development. A place that is not too controlled by the adults gives children more confidence. Larberg (2020) refers to landscape architects Lena Jungmark and Petter Åkerblom meaning that school yards must contain places for children to challenge their capabilities in relation to their maturity. In *Gropen* children are allowed to do exactly this; "They are building an obstacle course on the slopes with logs, branches and stones, and it goes so fast in the track that they get hot in their faces." (Larberg, 2020, p 51, my translation).

The second aspect is the importance of nature for children's play. One advantage of natural environments is all 'loose material', as branches and clay. Here Larberg (2020) refers to environmental psychologist Fredrika Mårtensson's research. Nature releases children's fantasy and creativity, as they do in *Gropen*, with a large root; "You can play anything with it. Bear mother, hut, hiding place, kiosk – everything!" (Adbåge; Larberg, 2020, p 51, my translation).

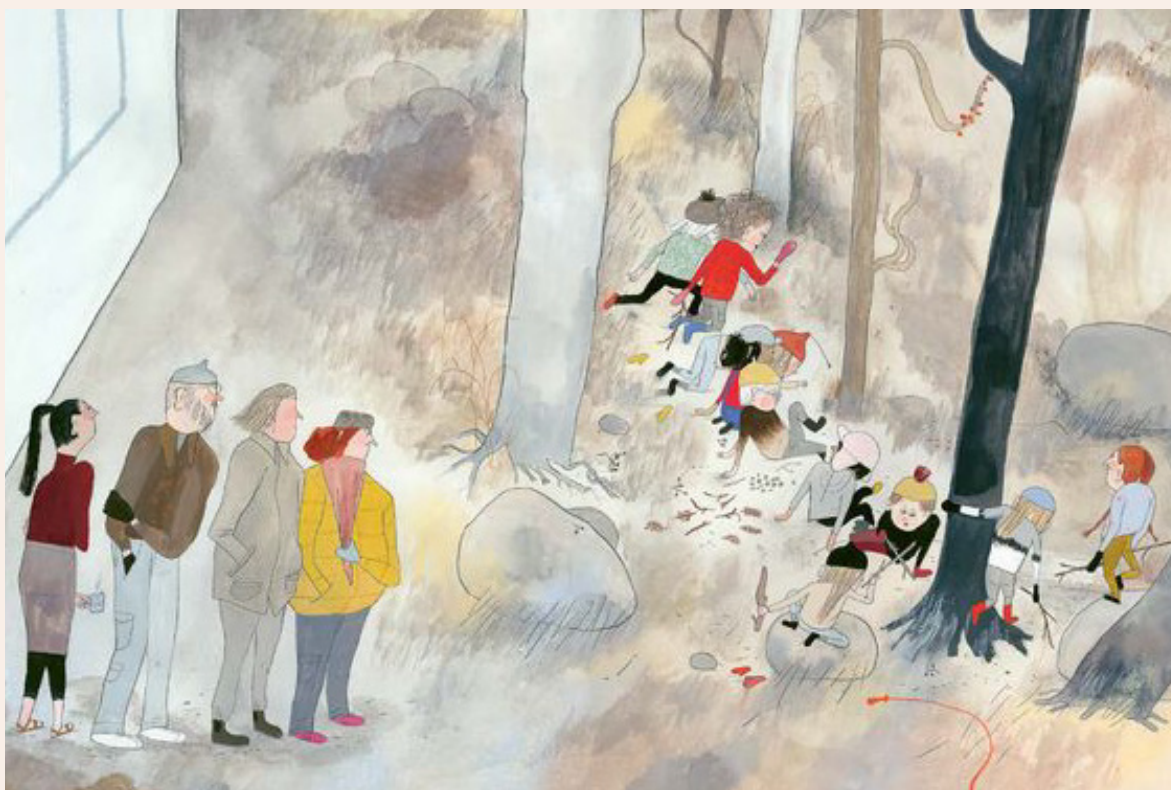
The third aspect is also from Mårtensson's research, that a spacious and green yard contributes to a reduce in conflicts between children. Designed environments, as playgrounds with clear purposes, create hierarchies. In *Gropen*, the children enjoy this; "As soon as we are having a break everyone goes to Gropen. You don't even have to play the same because everyone fits anyway!" (Adbåge; Larberg, 2020, p 51, my translation).



Source: *Arkitekten* (2020, nr 3) illustrations from *Gropen* by Emma Adbåge (Rabén Sjögren, 2018)

“If we want to take the chance to deepen the knowledge about how an environment is being used through dialogue with children and young people using the space – then the time is now.”

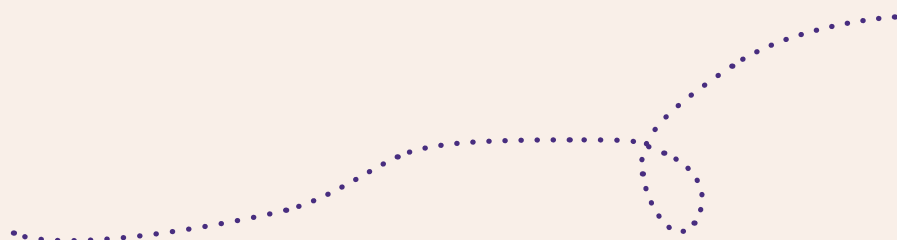
Vanja Larberg, 2020, p 53



Source: Arkitekten (2020, nr 3) illustrations from *Gropen* by Emma Adbåge (Rabén Sjögren, 2018)

"YOU CAN ONLY GO STRAIGHT FORWARD!"

Alongside with these aspects, Larberg (2020) means that *Gropen* highlights the importance of children's right to make their voices heard. "If the children's perspective had prevailed in *Gropen*, and if the adults had been sensitive to what the children actually got out of their place, then the adults might have re-evaluated their view of the outdoor environment and let go of their need for control." (Larberg, 2020, p 51, my translation). Children often express other places and aspects than adults regarding what is important and meaningful in an environment. It is a well-known problem that pre-school and school yards may not even be present in early planning stages and if they do, there is a risk not to fulfill the recommendations. She describes the nightmare as a yard placed on a roof where every single millimeter is planned and controlled, with no possibilities for children to create their own places or move around freely. A planning that might create the same feeling as for the children in *Gropen* when the pit disappears, Larberg (2020) reflects; "Nowhere to hang. Nowhere to go on your knees, drive a track or play a fire cliff. You can only go straight forward!"



TO INVOLVE CHILDREN IN PLANNING

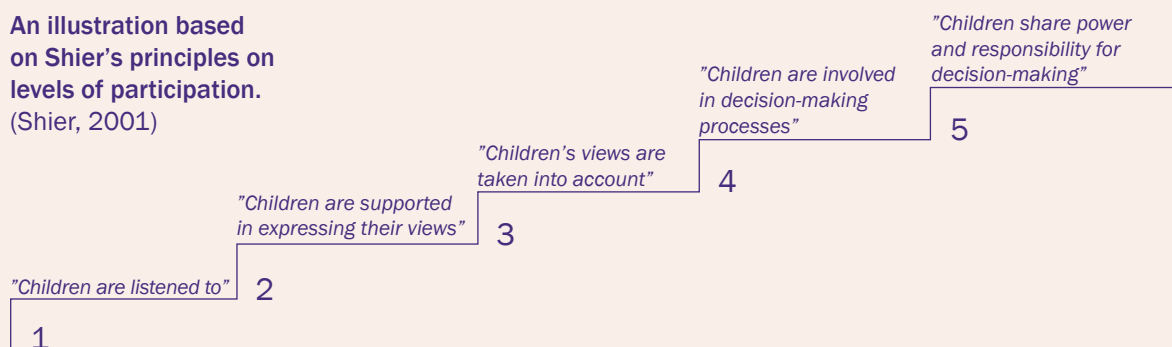
The assessment regarding what is best for the child, or a group of children, should always be made by adults having responsibility for the decision-making. According to the UNCRC, children's right to be heard is subordinated Article 03, the principle regarding what is best for the child. However, children do have the right to participate, to influence decisions affecting them. And as they rely on adults to consider their perspective, adults and professionals have the greatest responsibility for facilitating this (Göteborgs Stad, 2017). "Children convey observations from their local environment that could lead to concrete changes within a, tangible for them, time space. They have knowledge of the physical environment that the planners do not have." (Lenninger, 2008, p 12).

Involvement of children in planning processes is about more than influence and participation regarding the environment. One purpose is to design environments that suits children, and almost as important is influence and participation as these are in themselves health-promoting factors. To be engaged in the development of the physical environment can result in an increased desire to learn new things, to respect human rights, and to take responsibility. "All children are competent in being children and need the chance to talk about their experiences in their own way." (Boverket, 2015, p 26, my translation). The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (2015) believes that adults need to adapt the planning process so that it is possible to take care and highlight children's knowledge and experience. As an example, they describe an approach as following: "In an environment that is already in use, you need to carefully map children's favorite places and try to understand how to build on already established forms of play, togetherness, and creation of space on that specific place." (Boverket, 2015, p 26, my translation)

APPROACH

Influence and participation can take many different forms, which also means different degree of influence. Boverket (2015) describe the two extremes as one situation where children are invited to an information meeting with no possibilities to affect the outcome, and another situation where it is made clear from the start that the ideas the children bring forward will be realized in the project (Boverket, 2015). To what extent children are involved in the process can be described in five steps, built upon Shier's principles.

An illustration based on Shier's principles on levels of participation.
(Shier, 2001)



In participatory processes when working together with children there are important things to have in mind, such as the child, or group of children, feels comfortable and accepted in the context. The City of Gothenburg (2017) has, in their work with BKA, gathered some prerequisites to consider when including children in planning; “the child understands the purpose and objective with the activity, the child knows who made decisions regarding the participation and why, the child has a meaningful role, the child can choose to participate or choose to stand outside – after being presented to the activity” (Göteborgs Stad, 2017, p 12, my translation).

EXAMPLE: PARTICIPATION IN ÖSTERSUND

In the municipality of Östersund the housing area Fjällmon was planned to expand with housing and a new detailed development plan was to be established. In the present detailed development plan, there were proposals for another type of buildings than the municipality now had plans for. There was a school and a pre-school nearby the area and the municipality concluded that this area would be suitable to be analyzed from a child perspective when establishing the new plan. The municipality contacted the schools and worked together with children to examine the qualities of the area and how the physical environment was used by the children (Nordström, 2020). Architects and planners visited the schools and informed the children about their work and a background to spatial planning. Teachers were involved and contributed with their perspective on how the school used the area. Children participated by describing the qualities, created models, and made marks on maps over the area. The architects and planners visited the area together with children and teachers (Nordström, 2020). The result in this case was that the municipality, after taking children’s perspective in account, revised the plan and kept the areas important for children unchanged and instead focused on exploitation of the parts that were less important. In this process an essential observation was made by the municipality, that the children’s point of view on the area was connected to an exact place and the relationship in-between. Children often have a strong relations to their nearby physical environment, stronger than adults. “This means that children can convey detailed and concrete information about the outdoor environment that they use and are familiar with.” (Nordström, 2020, p 21, my translation).

REVALUATION

In this example the architects and planners got a broader perspective and deeper understanding of how children used the area, what parts they appreciated, and parts that were not as important. By observing this and listen to children’s thoughts and experiences within the child impact analysis the planners made children involved in the process. Nordström (2020, p 21, my translation) mean that the starting point of this successful process was that the architects and planners were “... prepared to reconsider their own views and revise their work”.

EXAMPLE: DIALOGUE WORK AT GRÖNEBACKEN

In the subsection regarding Article 03 the project of Grönebacken was discussed from the perspective of children's right and prioritizing children's best. Here the aspects of participation and dialogue will be examined further. The aim with this dialogue work was to make the children involved in the planning process and the design of their local environment, in this project the yard and surrounding park.

FRAMEWORK

The city planning office's questions before the start of the project became a basis for the workshops; "What places do the children like and what places do they avoid?"

"What makes children like the place and what makes children avoid the place?"

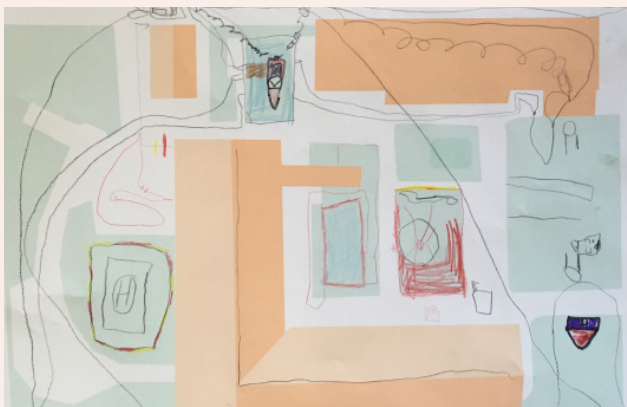
"How do the children use the park today?"

"How do the children use the yard today?"

Added questions during the project were also; "Can a park/green area nearby the pre-school be used as an area of compensation? How much space does a pre-school child really need (as little as possible – as much as necessary)?"

(Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016, p 3, my translation).

From these questions Studio Goja formed their participatory work with the children, within the framework of the City of Gothenburg's work with BKA. Two pre-schools were included in the dialogue work, here one of them will be examined further. The pre-school is placed within the area of development and are therefore in direct affect by the planning process and decisions made. A group of children in the age of 5 participated, together with teachers at the pre-school (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016).



Source: Studio Goja, 2016. Example of a map sketch.

"How should the adults
be able to sit in the office
and guess how the children
should play and live?"

Liffner and Roosenboom, 2016, p 9

FIVE MEETINGS

Studio Goja established a working area at the pre-school so the children could integrate with the material in their everyday life. The first gathering is an inventory of the pre-schoolyard with the aim to get to know the group and introduce the work, where the children's role is to guide, and the design pedagogues listen. "We present ourselves and explain why we are there, talk about the plans to build new houses and explain that they who make decisions need help getting smarter about what children want and need. 'How should the adults be able to sit in the office and guess how the children should play and live?'" (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016, p 9, my translation). They invent the yard together with a map and flags with happy and sad smileys, so that the children can show what places they like and do not like.

The second gathering is an inventory of the park and a story hunting, with the aim of exploring the environment in the surrounding park and examine children's relationship to 'the world outside'. The group walk to the place where the new houses are planned to be built. They build a fantasy house, talk about the new neighbors that will move in and walked around the whole park area gathering stories and anecdotes. "Between every station we run; as horses, elephants, hares or ants. The movement pattern is not only different from how they move in the yard but also how they usually move in the park." (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016, p 10, my translation). When the pre-school visits the park normally, they move from one spot to another, the whole group together, during a predetermined time, they do not have the staff assets enough to let the children run around freely in the park (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016).

Gathering three and four are about visualizing the examinations from the inventories, in sketches and drawings where the children can draw their thoughts and reflections on simple maps. The design pedagogues are there for support, talking freely around how the places are used and trying to interpret the children's thoughts. "Someone finds that there are a lot of danger lurking around the pre-school and that there is a fence surrounding it, which may, among other things, be about boundaries (such as fences) and could mean freedom of movement within the border, protected from external threats. None of the children weaves in the park as a possible part of their environment, even though we highlight the possibility." (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016, p 11, my translation). Visualization is also made through model building. "It is clear that children have a great potential in visualizing and designing their ideas for their outdoor environment and that should be taken into account in planning of new areas and yards." (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016, p 12, my translation).

During the fifth gathering the purpose is to conclude and summarize, by creating a story hunting to show the adults what they have been working with. The children agree to invite adults from the city planning office to show their work. By the story hunting, the children have the possibility to take command and together they choose five places they would like to show the planners, three in the park and two in the yard. "They are not interested in showing their 'boring' places, they want to go straight ahead to where it is thrilling or fun." (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016, p 13, my translation). Among the places chosen by the children, the playground in the park they often visit as an excursion destination is not one of them.



Source: Studio Goja, 2016

LEARNINGS

During the last gathering the children guide the planners from the city planning office on a story hunting. They build fantasy houses together and move around to the different places chosen by the children. “We move as hares and horses to the hill, like monkeys to the Bronze Age and like elephants and crocodiles back to the yard. On our way back, we stop at the hill where the children challenge the adults to lay down in the grass wet from rain and roll down the slope. The children are happy with the adult’s efforts and participation and invite them to visit the pre-school yard” (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016, p 14, my translation).

From Studio Goja’s work with children at the pre-schools in close connection to the area of development, important aspects were highlighted. Questions raised by the city planning office regarding the local environment, the park and its boundaries and the pre-school yard were handled and discussed in participation with children through Studio Goja’s developed methods and processes. Noticed is that children think of fences as something safe, something that belongs to a ‘safe place’. It captures the yard as a place of their own. The park is more foreign and indeterminate with no clear boundaries, yet it allows for more free movement and adventures which could be exiting and thrilling (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016).

What this dialogue work did was to listen to children and take their thoughts and reflections into account, not only by sitting by the desk at a planning office but to take the time to really see what places children appreciate and use, and how they relate to their local environment. It might add new aspects into the process.

A DIGITAL TOOL

The map is described as the planners' most important tool, what is described in the plan map will also be visible in the planning and by extension the built environment (Boverket, 2015c). A method developed by researchers at the University of Agricultural Sciences aiming at making use of the knowledge of children and young people are digital maps in a GIS-application. In this digital tool children can, with the support from adults, draw their movement patterns and write comments regarding for example where they play, how they move between home and school, and places they like to spend time in. However, as important are also places they feel unsafe in, places seen as dangerous, or proposals for changes in the outdoor environment. "The meeting with the children and the information they provide leads to an increase in the supervisor's skills. In the longer term, this provides a more obvious role for children's opinions in urban planning projects." (Boverket, 2015b, my translation).

ARCHITECTURAL PEDAGOGY

"Architectural pedagogy is about giving young people tools to discover their immediate environment and to interpret it so that they can in the long run be involved and influence." (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2021, my translation). Architectural pedagogy is described as a tool enabling conversations regarding planning and urban development as well as methods including democracy aspects. The pedagogue is a designer or an architect with expertise in processes where children and young people are co-creators, often in close collaboration with schools and pre-schools. This co-creation process within architectural pedagogy is described as a link between children and planners in dialogue work in planning processes, leading to 'mutual learning'. (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2021). Projects within architectural pedagogy are often based on schools or pre-schools aiming at improving the physical environment based on experiences from the children. Based on architecture and democracy as well as architecture and learning, the knowledge children get in architecture, planning, and design during a process within architecture pedagogy is as important as the change in the physical environment. Mania Teimouri, architectural consultant, expresses this in an article in Arkitekten: "Architecture pedagogy connects the children's own experiences and knowledge of children's needs with knowledge in architecture and planning. Therefore, it is important that it is professional architects who are architectural educators." (Klingberg, 2016, my translation).

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

"THE ARCHITECTURE BOX"

A toolbox developed by the international network for architectural pedagogy, called PLAYCE. This tool helps to inspire and guide in using senses to experience and interpret the surroundings. This idea comes from the perspective of architecture being more than solely the physical environment, instead the importance of creating feelings in people experiencing them.

(Västra Götalandsregionen, 2020a)

ARCHITECTURAL WALKS

A tool for including children and experience the physical environment, by examine and reflect over the local environment and public spaces within. One example is from a design pedagogue and an architecture pedagogue in Gothenburg, developing this tool where walks were made with different age groups on two different places. Aspects as distance, material, history, planning, accessibility, and function were examined and discussed during the walks.

(Västra Götalandsregionen, 2020b)

EXAMPLE: FINDING PLACES FOR/WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

”We believe that children are experts in their own spaces, but they are often designed based on adults’ conditions and that cities are zoned based on ages and economic purchasing power. Perhaps it is utopian, but we would like to see the whole city accessible to all ages at the same time.” Jelena Mijanovic expressed in an article in Arkitekten (Gunne, 2019) talking about a project the architectural firm CoRS worked with during 2018-2019. Together with students between 13-16 years at a school in the central parts of Stockholm they researched urban spaces. The school has no yard, the urban spaces are instead where the students spend their time during breaks (Gunne, 2019). “The work is completely based on the young people’s own way of observing and experiencing the city by hanging out.” (Saccotelli et al. 2019, my translation). The students were interviewed about where they spend their time, and the answer was shopping malls, fast-food restaurants, clothing stores and cafés. Common for these places were the presence of heating, toilets, good wifi and possibilities to charge their phones. The studio then included the students in the work, creating new spaces and furniture at a chosen place close by their school (Gunne, 2019). During the study it was noticed that the young people’s wish list for urban spaces differs markedly from reality, from what the city has to offer. They wished for places to hang out at, after school, for free. One student, 13 years old, expressed it as: “There are no places to sit down at and just be without having to pay” (Saccotelli et al. 2019).

During the warm seasons of the year the students spend time in parks, but the year with its seasonal changes has its challenges. They bring up several creative ways to spend time indoors without it being too expensive, to share one coffee on four people for some hours at a café or trying out clothes for fun for hours. But often with a feeling of not being wanted there, being a group no one wants to invite. CoRS runs projects where they, together with the students, develop processes for designing the urban space based on the knowledge these students already have, by just being young people in the city. “By, for example, building and using pallets as aids, the young people explored ‘hanging out’ as a method for tackling their public spaces, analyzing and designing them. When we used ‘to hang out’ as a method for site analysis, we elevate the young people’s everyday activity, ‘hanging out’, something they already do, and which gives them expert knowledge of the spaces they are in.” (Saccotelli et al. 2019, my translation). The strategy is to have a design method prepared but to leave the analysis and decision making to the students.

By including and engaging children and young people, CoRS mean that a more innovative, healthier, more varied planning will be created. “Even more important is what is ignited in the children during our cooperation with them, something that may live with them for the rest of their lives. An ownership, ‘my thoughts shaped that park, I contributed to the design of that place’, and an experience of the possibility of making the future their own.” (Saccotelli et al. 2019, my translation).

“The work is completely based on the young people’s own way of observing and experiencing the city by ‘hanging out’.”

Saccotelli et al. 2019

REFLECTION - ARTICLE 12 IN RELATION TO PLANNING

“Children have the right to express their opinions and be heard in all matters concerning them.” (UNICEF, 2021). We have all been children, which means that we know how it is like to be a child. Architects and planners also have been through several years at architectural schools where planning with the human being, young and old, in focus is a matter of course. Many have years of working experience in the field. Does that mean that it is possible to sit at one's desk, drawing and sketching by oneself, relating to own experiences and perspectives maybe accompanied by an internal work group (often with similar background) and create ideas and concepts for others? To some extent, surely. But not completely. As stated earlier, children do not always know their own best, but neither do adults (Göteborgs Stad, 2017).

Children have the right to express their opinion and be heard in all matters concerning the child, this has been stated and described throughout this chapter. However, it might be harder said than done to reevaluate thoughts and opinions as an architect or planner. As Kylin and Bodelius (2015) discuss, involving children in the process can risk leading to results that do not agree with predetermined views on safety and esthetics, for example. But being a child now does not have the same meaning as when I was a child, or when you were. That is why involving children in planning is important, it could result in uncomfortable truths but also in new important perspectives as in the example of Grönebacken (Liffner & Roosenboom, 2016) where preconceived notions were challenged, or in the example from Östersund (Nordström, 2020) where the children contributed with their knowledge and experience which led to changes in the planning.

Shown in the examples above are many different ways of working together with children in planning, with an important aspect of adapting the approach to the situation and, also, the age of the children. In the children's book example this is confirmed, how children and adults can have very different views on the same issue, and how important that discussion is. Larberg (2020) argues for this, how architects and planners can learn from children and re-evaluate their perspectives, as for the adults in Gropen who had to let go of their need for control and be sensitive to the children's needs. One learning made in the project of Kometen (within Article 06) (Boverket, 2021) states the importance of including different aspects, as children's needs and perspectives, early in the processes. This was made successfully in Kometen, where the child perspective continuously was integrated throughout the project. Nordström (2020) mentions land allocations as decisive moments often carried out with little or no child perspective which affects the forthcoming planning process. To raise these questions and include children and their perspectives early in the process reduces the risk of being taken by surprise and being in a position where little or nothing can be affected.

ARTICLE 31

"CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO PLAY, REST AND LEISURE"

1. "States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts."

2. "States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity."

UNICEF, 2021

A SUMMARY:

- During play, children develop fantasy and creativity as well as expressing and processing thoughts and feelings – and it can provide life-long benefits
- Playgrounds are important not only for children but for the society as a whole, as a meeting place
- In many Swedish cities playgrounds and yards are often covered in materials that are not natural however durable, as plastic grass and concrete
- The two general interests of sufficient space for play and outdoor activities as well as parking often come into conflict with each other

ARTICLE 31 IN RELATION TO PLANNING

The following subsection will contain perspectives on play, the importance of playgrounds, different places for playing and an example regarding a playground program.

Play is important for children, it is both self-rewarding and pleasurable. “Play in children’s everyday lives develops both their physique and trains their social skills but can also provide opportunities for mental recovery and increased well-being where the physical environment allows this.” (Boverket, 2015, p 18, my translation). While playing children develop fantasy and creativity as well as express and process thoughts and feelings. Play is important for children during the whole childhood and occurs where children meet. Therefore, it is important to provide spaces for play in environments where many children live and spend time (Boverket, 2015).

There are many advantages for children to play outdoors, both for long term health and development benefits. Provided in a research published in the journal *Evolutionary Psychology* is also that possibilities for free play as a child provide life-long benefits, that experience of play as a child has impact on our adult lives. Results in a study made on adults up to the age of 90 showed that the opportunity for playing freely during childhood “significantly predicts both social success and individual adaptability” stating that children and young people need their childhood with possibilities for unrestricted and free play (Sigman, n.d, p 31). Further the importance of the playground as a place is also asserted, being described as “mini-communities” where families meet on a regular basis. This social interaction, to share a common experience and have the possibility to support each other could develop a safe environment, geographically defined. Playgrounds do have other meanings than ‘merely’ a place for play, also a place for parents to share experiences and feel connected, at the same time as their children have the possibility for outdoor play. As a British research found, more than two-thirds of the asked parents feel isolated and alone since having children (Sigman, n.d).

PLACES FOR PLAYING

“Talk to a layperson about what urban planners should be doing for children, and playgrounds are highly likely to be on top of the list (if not the only item on the list). Yet child-friendly urban planning is about far more than the creation of dedicated play space.” (Gill, 2021, p 18). The idea of the playground was established during the 19th century, and in Sweden ‘free play’ was seen as important for the physical education. Children’s play tend to question boundaries set by the adult world, valuable to have in mind when planning for places for playing. How play has been valued and planned for through history is closely connected to the development of society. During the turn of the last century children played at the streets and backyards and following decades the importance of specific places dedicated for play increased (Form/Design Center, 2019). “Today, the need for space for play is questioned for cost reasons and new highly exploited neighborhoods are built with playgrounds so small that they can only be said to have a symbolic value.” (Form/Design Center, 2019, p 19, my translation). The motives for dedicated spaces for play have been different during the years. The first playgrounds had a connection to outdoor life, aiming at physical activity. Later, playgrounds became a part of a decent housing environment and a possibility for a moment of childcare. Today the health aspect is visible again, focused on children being more and more sedentary and the lack of movement as a risk for public health problems (Form/Design Center, 2019).

“Play is any activity that is freely chosen by the participant for a particular purpose.” (Dowdell et al., 2011, p 25). Children play everywhere. In early childhood, the environment nearby their home is particularly important. “Children do not only want to play at playgrounds, they want and they will play everywhere they can.” (Göteborgs stad, 2017, p 36, my translation). Constructed barriers, as traffic in cities, prevents children from reaching places for play on their own, which make them more and more dependent on adults. Children are highly affected of how traffic environment are planned, designed, and used. For example, walking and bicycle lanes as well as stops and stations for public transport should be designed with children as users. As children grow older, their conditions to cope with traffic situations change, however children need to be in traffic to learn to handle it (Boverket, 2020).

SAFE PLAY?

‘Play value’ is a concept describing how valuable a space is for children’s play. If play value is missing, then children will go play somewhere else, which is why this is important to consider when planning and designing spaces for children (Form/Design Center, 2019). “Children need to develop their judgement and their sense of what their own bodies are capable of. They do this through play with appropriate challenges.” (Form/Design Center, 2019, p 26, my translation). The discussion regarding safety is intense today in terms of children and their environments. New words have been developed, as ‘bubble plastic children’ and ‘helicopter parents’ describing how children are protected from everything by worried caregivers. The authors of the exhibition *Lek!* mean that it is human and natural to worry, however it must not be exaggerated. They discuss that play is basically about other things than only safety, and how the worry might be misdirected; “Maybe our concern should instead target that children in the city today loses the opportunity to develop their physics, their body awareness, their self-confidence and judgement?” (Form/Design Center, 2019, p 26, my translation).

In Stockholm, as well as in other Swedish cities, playgrounds and yards more often are covered in materials that are not natural however durable. Materials such as plastic grass, concrete and ground car tires are considered to withstand the wear and tear that occurs when more and more children must share fewer spaces for play (Wickman, 2018).

“But what are there to discover, to experience and be surprised by? No wildflowers will grow in the plastic grass, no earthworms thrive there, no beetles or other exiting small insects hide there.” (Wickman, 2018, p 16, my translation). These materials are not only harmful for children but also for the environment. Particles loosen from the plastic materials, follow the rainwater, and accumulate in lakes and seas. Animals and insects do not thrive in these environments, wild bees are disappearing, bumblebees decreasing, and this poses a risk of pollination. Wickman (2018) seeks an explanation in high exploitation and densification, here in a Stockholm context, arguing for everything to be connected; children’s play, development, health, and the vigor of nature.

EXAMPLE: PLAYGROUND PROGRAM IN MALMÖ

“Play was long considered as useless occupation. Today there are another awareness that play is just as important for children’s development as traditional learning and education.” (Malmö Stad, 2006, p 5, my translation). The importance of play is stated as a background in the City of Malmö’s playground program, referring to how research show the value of urban planning being adapted to children’s terms and conditions.

In mid-1990 Malmö had approximately 250 playgrounds, and by then a stated ambition from the park administration to offer all children good opportunities for play. An inventory was made which resulted in a playground program aiming at investing and rearming playgrounds all over Malmö, a large investment proceeding over more than ten years. Some strategies were established, for example that nearby playgrounds for the youngest should be arranged in housing areas and larger playgrounds for older children should be arranged no more than 300 meters from each dwelling. Older children were presumed to move around more, which resulted in district playgrounds being placed within 500 meters (Form/Design Center, 2019). While developing the playground program Malmö Stad also launched the idea with theme playgrounds, more unique and lavish space for children. “The first theme playgrounds designed also experimented with boundaries for what a playground could be. The Jungle playground in Bunkeflostrand took hold of that children want to play in the bushes, but often hear that it is forbidden. Could a playground then consist of an area of bushes and trees where children could play, sneak around and create their own worlds and games?” (Form/Design Center, 2019, p 30, my translation). Today, Malmö has 21 theme playgrounds, used by pre-schools daytime and families during weekends as excursion destinations. “For the children themselves, however, are cohesive green areas in their own neighborhoods and in their own districts of greater importance than individual visits to lavish theme playgrounds.” (Form/Design Center, 2019, p 30, my translation).

THE 'JUNGLE PLAYGROUND'



THE 'BIRD PLAYGROUND'

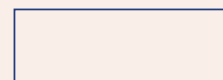
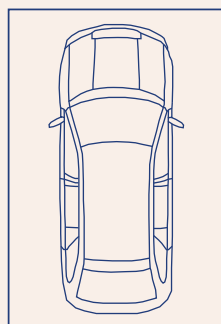
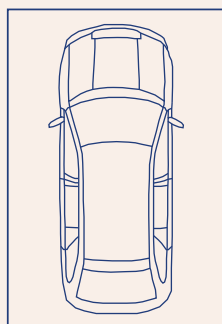
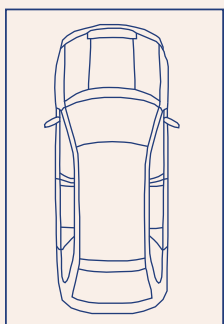


Source: Malmö Stad, 2021

HOW MUCH SPACE DO CHILDREN NEED?

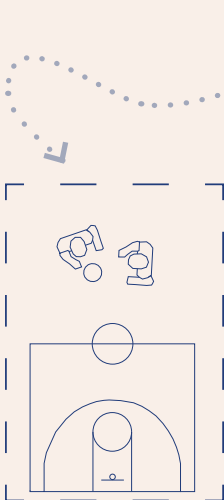
“The best environmental affordances for children are probably not created by designers. Children are experts at play, and at the same time are competent creators of versatile affordances.” (Kyttä, 2003, p 108). However, what children need is space, safe places where they can be, places for play, rest, and leisure – also established in this Article of the Convention. Brought up earlier in this thesis is the discussion regarding the car and the child, in particular what spaces either of them are authorized for in the city. To put the car and its required space in relation to places dedicated for children, the pre-school yard is one example. A recommendation, and a reasonable measure, according to National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, is 40m² per children, corresponding little more than three parking spots (Boverket, 2015). Each municipality has their own rules and regulations for planning, it also applies to children’s outdoor environments in schools and pre-schools. “The assessment of a sufficiently large free space should take into account both the free space per child and the total size of the free surface.” (Boverket, 2015, p 54, my translation). In planning, there are many different requirements to meet, requirements that often are set against each other. “The two general interests of sufficient space for play and outdoor activities as well as parking often come into conflict with each other, as well as the car parking with the general interest in an attractive urban environment.” (Boverket, 2015, p 64, my translation).

THE CHILD VS THE CAR

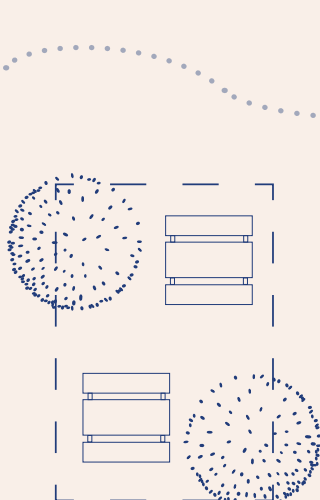


The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning's guidelines for pre-schools, 40m² per child, equal cirka 3 car parking spots.

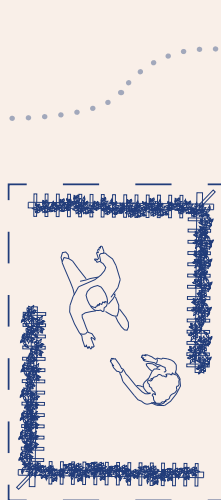
Imagine an alternative?



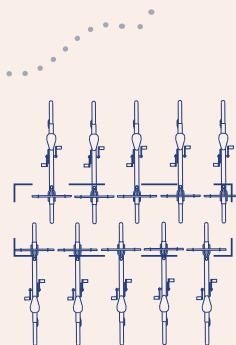
A small basketball court?



Greenery and seating?



Possibilities to grow vegetables?



Encouragement of sustainable travel?

REFLECTION - ARTICLE 31 IN RELATION TO PLANNING

“Children have the right to play, rest, and leisure.” (UNICEF, 2021). Generally, playgrounds are seen as children’s places, and then referring to young children. However, as described in above chapter, playgrounds also play an important role for society, more holistically. The playground as a place where parents meet, where people in the neighborhood get in contact with each other (Sigman, n.d). The design of a playground is important, as well as nature areas often surrounding them. As described, these nature areas are often as essential and joyful for children as the play equipment itself (Björklid, 1982). Therefore, it is important to establish the value of these spaces in development plans where this land, at a quick look, can be seen as exploitable.

This thesis had a point of departure in a personal childhood memory of a place not seen as special or valuable from the outside, however important for the individual child. And these places are everywhere, once again important to establish the importance of including the child perspective in development. As stated in the example from Malmö, exiting and lavish playgrounds are appreciated by children and an important element in the city, however cohesive green areas and play opportunities in their neighborhood are of greater importance in the everyday life (Form/Design Center, 2019). Places for playing are not only beneficial for children, nor adults in their surroundings. Hence animals, plants and the development of our environments are also dependent on these places being kept and maintained. As Wickman (2018) argues for, in plastic grass no wildflowers will grow and still, playgrounds are covered in unnatural materials beneficial for... who? This is also a question of what citizens children will grow up to be. Giusti (2019) and Folkhälsomyndigheten (2021) both indicate that children who spend time in nature, having an emotional contact with it, more likely will become caring and environmental-friendly as adults.

Associated with children’s places are without any doubt playgrounds, but to turn the question around – what is then adult places? Are all places but playgrounds adult-places? However, clarified is that adults also benefit from having proper playgrounds in their neighborhood. The discussion might benefit from not separating into child vs adult places, rather to focus on making the city holistically friendly. And there the car is an aspect worth noticing, where the order of priority should be changed. As Lundquist (personal contact, 2021) clarified, that cars are hard and children soft, and Siesjö (personal contact, 2021) established, a city prioritizing space for cars will not be a child friendly city. Reduced space for the car and lowered speed in traffic in all places where children move would create more possibilities for play in unexpected places. Because children play everywhere, and who are we to stop them?

SUMMARIZING THE ARTICLES

In this chapter different examples, theory, and references have been examined, divided within five chosen articles. In reflections after each subsection the material is discussed and analyzed, however there are some comprehensive subjects important to raise. The connection between sustainable development and child friendly planning, for example. Discussed earlier is this quote by Malone (2015, p 422); “The well-being of children and their participation could serve as both a *maker* and a *marker* of the progress of city or country to meet the challenge of sustainable development”. Important aspects here are both the well-being, established and discussed in Article 06 and 31, and participation, particularly discussed in Article 12. By separating the articles and presenting examples and theory within each, the benefits have been to examine and explore more in-depth. But it has also identified the need for a holistic and cohesive perspective. There are limitations within this, and there is room for interpretation, for questioning and for further work with the UNCRC in relation to planning.

Article 01 establishes that a child is someone between 0-18 years, and it is important to be flexible within the concept. Not to see children as a homogenous group, but to interpret the articles based on different phases of childhood, different groups of children, and children at an individual level as well. From the work with these five articles, and the Convention as a whole, one main learning has been to continue to problematize. To understand the complexity of adapting the articles to planning. However not to settle there, but to keep searching for answers and new questions.

ARTICLE 02 states that all children are equally valuable and have the same rights

SUMMARY

- There are large differences in living conditions within Sweden
- The number of children spending time outdoors everyday decreases
- The most economically vulnerable housing areas have the poorest access to urban greenery
- To highlight the legal implementation of the UNCRC, architectural firm Codesign arranged a carnival

IDENTIFIED FROM PRESENTED MATERIAL

- It is important to...
- ... reduce inequality within Sweden
- ... see beyond economic growth
- ... use urban development as a driving force for change

ARTICLE 03 states that what is considered to be the best interest of the child must be taken into account, in all decisions regarding children

SUMMARY

- What is best for the child is often weighted against other interests
- There is a difference between child perspective and children's own perspective
- In Gothenburg, architects and planners have a matrix as a tool for child impact analysis, within the method BKA
- In the project of Grönebacken, what was considered to be the best interest of the child was taken into account

IDENTIFIED FROM PRESENTED MATERIAL

- It is important to...
- ... take responsibility as a decision-maker
- ... continue to develop methods and processes
- ... learn from research and include knowledge in design and planning processes

ARTICLE 06 states that children have the right to life, survival, and development

SUMMARY

- The yards to schools and pre-schools are generally shrinking in size
- Newly built pre-school yards often do not reach the national guidelines, as in the example of Årstadal
- Children often appreciate the natural environment surrounding playgrounds
- Children benefit from being nature, both long and short term

IDENTIFIED FROM PRESENTED MATERIAL

It is important to...

... establish realistic and appropriate guidelines/ rules for outdoor environments

... prioritize qualitative green spaces

... include long-term profits in the calculations

ARTICLE 12 states that children have the right to express their opinions and be heard in all matters concerning them

SUMMARY

- Children have unique knowledge about the physical environment
- Participation can take different forms, different time and bring different kinds of influence
- In the example with Östersund, the municipality took the children's perspectives into account and revised the plan
- Architects and planners in the example of Grönebacken gained, through children's stories, new knowledge and understandings

IDENTIFIED FROM PRESENTED MATERIAL

It is important to...

... take children's opinions and reflections seriously

... adapt methods to the specific situation

... see participation from a broader perspective, emphasising the extended values for society

ARTICLE 31 states that children have the right to play, rest, and leisure

SUMMARY

- During play, children develop fantasy and creativity – and it can provide life-long benefits
- Playgrounds are important not only for children but for the society as a whole, as a meeting place
- In many Swedish cities playgrounds and yards are often covered in materials that are not natural however durable, as plastic grass and concrete
- The two general interests of sufficient space for play and outdoor activities as well as parking often come into conflict with each other

IDENTIFIED FROM PRESENTED MATERIAL

It is important to...

... highlight the connection between sustainable development and child friendly planning

... create and maintain decent and accessible places for play

... emphasise that children play everywhere, and should be encouraged to do so

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

UNDERSTANDING AND APPROACH
NUANCE THE CONCEPT OF DENSIFICATION
A LEGISLATION WITHOUT LEGAL POWER?
THE ARCHITECT
THE PROCESS
LEARNINGS AND DEVELOPMENT
AT LAST...

UNDERSTANDING AND APPROACH

Everyone under the age of 18 is included in the definition of being a child, this is stated in the UNCRC (UNICEF, 2021) and discussed in this thesis. The Convention has had an impact on the understanding and approach of childhood, Kylin and Bodelius (2015) argue for and continue with the, according to them, straight forward connection to planning and urban development. “An inclusive city should instead reflect a comprehensive understanding that childhood has value here and now, an understanding that includes children as full citizens whose own places and movements in the city should be fully included in urban planning and embraced by planners and architects.” (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015, p 102).

However, is the concept of childhood in relation to planning too broad, that there is a risk of being misleading instead of clarifying? With the example of Gothenburg in mind, the child impact analysis covers children from age 0 to 18. In the matrix, used as a tool in the planning process, the concept of childhood is indicated as a single phase, which it is not. As stated in the material connected to the child impact analysis in the City of Gothenburg, the view of children has shifted from children as becomings to see children as beings, establishing the value of childhood. Further, the notions of children and childhood form the basis of what society creates for children (Göteborgs Stad, 2017). Also, in the example of Grönebacken where children were included in the discourse within the frames of a BKA, however focusing on children in pre-school age, being unaware of how decisions affect older children. To support architects and planners in their work with understanding and adapting the child perspective in planning, a sectioning and problematizing of the concept of childhood could be helpful and lead to an understanding of each phase, and an impact analysis being more adapted.

NUANCE THE CONCEPT OF DENSIFICATION

One theme in this thesis is the conflict between the urban, dense city and children. Children as human beings with rights constituted in the UNCRC. As Sweden legislated the Convention in 2020, this topic felt more relevant than ever, and many interesting aspects have been discovered during the work, through literature, interviews, the public debate, and research. I return to the urban question and the discussions regarding densification, particularly presented in the debate articles in Svenska Dagbladet (Åkerblom et al, 2019; Casselbrant & Hohental, 2019; Lindberg et al, 2019). Lindberg et al (2019) ask for a nuancing of the concept of densification, since public space are shrinking in today’s urban environment, compared with the urban building ideal many see today, the dense stony city. They mean that the ideal from the turn of the last century also included large parks and stately trees between the houses. Spaces beneficial for a life with children in the city, and a life for children in the city, but missing in today’s planning strategies. Casselbrant and Hohental (2019) and Lindberg et al (2019) agree that strategies the latest decades have established, such as a car dependency, are not ideal for neither adults nor children.

It is hard to predict how the ongoing pandemic will affect our way of living and how cities will be ‘used’ in the future. However, 87 percent of Sweden’s inhabitants live in cities with more than 10 000 citizens which not all can be counted as dense, yet structures of the big city are everyday life for many people. Stated in this thesis are the disadvantages and consequences for children having the city as their playground (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015; Nordström, 2020). Although, I agree with Lindberg et al (2019) that there is a need for nuancing the concept of densification, in order to gather the perspectives and somehow speak the same language. On one hand, economic growth and exploitation are driving forces in urban development today, however I get a feeling that the ‘other side’ with well-established researchers and debaters arguing for the importance of green areas, parks, and free public spaces, is expanding. Casselbrant and Hohental (2019) advocates for the dense, populated city however establishing that, in their experience, no one questions that places for play and movement for children are unnecessary, they mean it is the contrary. The question is then, who will pay for it? And who will fight for it?

To integrate these 'soft values' that are not easy to put into an excel-sheet being measurable in that sense is a challenge. However, studies (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021) indicate the health benefits that advantage children individually and society holistically. Not at least now, in 2021, when the UNCRC has been legislated for a year. And I wonder, are we not all talking about the same thing here? A wish for a denser city with its possibilities but with space left for spontaneous play, with less traffic, more parks, inviting public spaces, opportunities for walking and biking, pre-schools, and schools with decent outdoor areas. In my point of view, this does not seem impossible to achieve. As Siesjö (personal contact, 2021) expressed it, aiming at the development of Gothenburg: "We should primarily build on the surfaces that today are paved, hardened surfaces. We should leave the untouched nature untouched, for the next generation. There are no contradictions between a green city and a dense city." With the legislation of the Convention in mind, I think we owe children of today and children in the future to realize this. Further, I reflect upon potential risks with children's rights in relation to planning. Could environments, cities, be planned with too much focus on children? Could a place be too child-friendly?

A LEGISLATION WITHOUT LEGAL POWER?

Raised earlier in this thesis are Åkerblom et al (2019) discussing the importance of another legislation and that the focus should instead be on actions and actual doing. "What is stated in conventions and governing documents does not automatically lead to a change for the better in the child's living environment daily. Therefore, it is about going from words to action to be able to fulfill children's right to a healthy urban childhood." (Åkerblom et al, 2019). Although Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future are doing a great effort in showing how much power a child, or group of children, can have and what impact that could have for a global movement, it is not possible, nor long-term sustainable, to put that responsibility on children. As the Public Health Agency report from 2021 show, many children are worried about climate change. The report also show the impact of cities and urban environment and thus great responsibility, as well as increasing urbanization trends. This, together with the implementation of the UNCRC in Sweden a year ago should be enough for the discourse to change direction, to a more sustainable, caring, and human development. If a legislation is not enough, then what does it take? To start with, architects and planners who understand the importance and the power within their professional roles.

After reading the mapping and analysis of the UNCRC in spatial planning and urban development by the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (2020) and having conversations with the chief lawyer at the city planning office (Boberg, personal contact, 2021) stated is that the legislation itself has little impact on existing planning regulations in Sweden today. The press release presented by the Government of Sweden in April 2021 somehow constituted this, what has been made so far is not enough. However, indications from other fields, as the case brought up by the Migration Court of Appeal (Rädda Barnen, 2020), might show a glimpse of change. The focus in this thesis has not been on actual legal impact and interpretations of legal texts, however a discussion regarding the opportunities and limitations with the UNCRC as law in relation to planning. In the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning report (2020) it is stated that children, as well as adults, are covered by the provisions of the PBL, where the UNCRC can strengthen children's rights. However, there is no guarantee that these rights will be imprinted as PBL is, by its nature, a balancing act.

However, are there any risks? Any problems with these implementations? The UNCRC is not made originally to be adapted to architecture and planning, which can be seen as a risk when adjusting, for example, regulations to it. Since planning and development are part of societal development, there is a risk that the protection of child perspective is seen as everyone's responsibility, and therefore no one's responsibility.

Further, I choose to concentrate on a shift in perspective, what I believe the legislation has contributed thus far. The fact that the implementation of the Convention is discussed broadly, with lectures, seminars, and debate articles, is one part, highlighting the subject and the importance of it. Not enough, however a step in the right direction. As Svennberg (personal contact, 2021) expressed it when discussing the impact of the implementation and what the City of Gothenburg have done so far, was to not stay within the framework, the limitations, of the actual legal impacts but to be a role model and inspire others. And that is a valuable aspect, referring also to Boberg (personal contact, 2021) and the focus of the legislation enabling a shift in perspectives. The intentions from the Government states that the legislation was a first step, moving forward on more practical guidance in planning. No children benefit from this staying at a discussion level, it must be realized and seen in the built environment. By increasing the importance of children and their voices in planning, for example by including them in the discourse as discussed under Article 12, the impact of the legislation can reach results. Further, a year in with the UNCRC as a law, these perspectives are relatively noticed and often brought up, but is there a risk that they will be forgotten, as the focus could shift to other issues?

My hope is that this extended discourse will lead to an increased curiosity and awareness among architects and planners, contributing to an urge for challenging prevailing structures. That the legislation itself, in this moment, have little or no impact should not mean that we can avoid these issues and go back to business as usual. On the contrary: architects, unite!

THE ARCHITECT

Intended recipients of this thesis are architects, planners, urban developers, politicians, and others included in the development of our environments. As an architecture student, the role of the architect is closest at hand. And heart. During this semester I have been reflecting over the architect's role, in relation to how we are educated, also including the master course in environmental psychology which I have supplemented my degree with. Added to this is the part-time employment I have at the city planning office in Gothenburg which surely has influenced me and my work with this thesis. As architects we learn to design and create environments, buildings, and surroundings, for human beings. Places for people to be, for different needs and conditions, different times. Places that create emotions and memories. I would like to emphasize the value of including different perspectives in this design, especially when it comes to planning and development. To design *with* people, instead of *for* people. *With* children, instead of *for* children. Seeking for answers and new perspectives within other fields, as landscape architecture, environmental psychology, and cultural geography. Having the profession and all the knowledge within as a solid ground, however being open to other fields of interests. For our future, the future of children – and the future of the planet. As Wickman (2018) constituted, it is all connected.

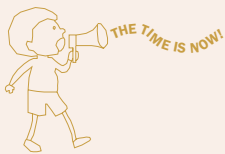
THE PROCESS

Working on this thesis has been very interesting, not only for all new knowledge, but also for a new understanding of the complexity of architecture and planning. How intertwined it is with societal development, as well as new insights regarding the architect's role. It has been a special time, not being able to deepen the practical aspects of participatory methods and working together with children, as for the pandemic situation. Instead, the opportunity to examine theoretical aspects more focused. It has been a challenge shifting between different disciplines, trying to interpret legal texts one day and reading psychological theories the other day, constantly with one foot left in architecture and planning. However, this has truly been the most rewarding part.

LEARNINGS AND DEVELOPMENT

One of the two main research questions in this thesis was established as following: *How could the work and discourse regarding a child perspective in planning be developed further, referring to the UNCRC being implemented in Swedish law in 2020?* I have had an attempt to discuss and answer this question within the framework of presented material, now concluding in this final chapter.

Below follow learnings I have made, and possibilities for development for the future within this field. These proposals move within different phases and aspects of planning, somehow broad interpretations and it is important to clarify that all decisions and methods should be adapted to the specific time, place, and situation. These learnings I present here are not complete answers, rather a beginning of questions for further development.



SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY

RELATED TO ARTICLE 01

With the Convention as Swedish law in 2020, the time for raising awareness on children's rights in planning is now, not letting the significance of this disappearing.



REFINE THE CONCEPT OF CHILDHOOD

RELATED TO ARTICLE 01

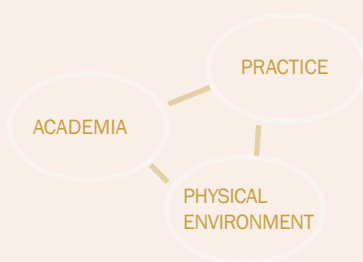
A sectioning and problematizing of the concept of childhood in child impact analyzes aiming at being more helpful for architects and planners, clarifying the importance of each phase of childhood.



EDUCATE DECISION-MAKERS

RELATED TO ARTICLE 02

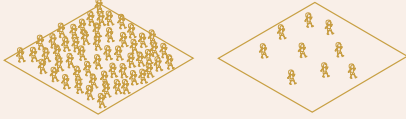
There is a certain discrepancy with political power on one side and children with no possibility to participate in elections on another, in relation to decisions made regarding planning and development, highly effecting children. It is more difficult to make unwise decisions with knowledge of the consequences.



INCREASE THE STATUS OF RESEARCH

RELATED TO ARTICLE 03

There is no lack of research in the field of child-friendly architecture, planning, and development, it is rather a matter of reducing the gap between academia and practice.



REEVALUATE THE YARDS

RELATED TO ARTICLE 06

The perspective of ‘how much space do children really need’ are often brought up in relation to pre-school and school yards. However, it should not be a ‘child issue’, set aside in planning. What if the perspectives shifted, that the pre-school yard could be something beneficial for the whole city, an opportunity for architects and planners to create suitable spaces?



DARE TO CHALLENGE PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS

RELATED TO ARTICLE 12

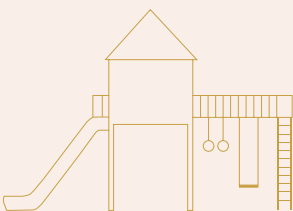
Including children could result in uncomfortable truths but also in new important perspectives which can change the outcome of the design. Architects and planners should be more brave, understanding the benefits of what is described in Article 12 and children’s right to be heard.



INCLUDE CHILDREN EARLY IN THE PROCESS

RELATED TO ARTICLE 12

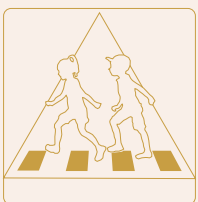
By raising awareness of the importance of including children and their perspectives early in the planning process, the risk of being taken by surprise and ending up in a position where little or nothing can be affected is decreasing.



EMPHASIZE THE VALUE OF PLAYGROUNDS

RELATED TO ARTICLE 31

Playgrounds are places important not only for children themselves, but for adults in their surroundings, a place where people in the neighborhood get in contact with each other. Humans as well as animals and plants are also dependent on these places to be kept in cities.



PRIORITIZE CHILDREN BEFORE CARS

RELATED TO ARTICLE 31

Children play everywhere, and they should be able to. Reduced space for cars and lowered speed in traffic in all places where children move would create more possibilities for play in unexpected places. A city prioritizing space for cars before space for children will not be a child friendly city.



AT LAST...

As an introduction to this thesis, I told a story about a childhood memory with the ‘large stone’ as an illustration of an important place. By studying this field, learning about the different aspects of child perspective in planning, I am even more convinced that what we experience during childhood affect our future lives. Especially when it comes to environments and memories connected to them. Now, as an adult, I enjoy spending time in nature. I have a relation to nature. I care about nature. This might not at all be in correlation to whether I climbed a large stone or not as a child, but I would like to think that it has a connection. And it makes me sad when I read about theories as nature deficit disorder (Louv, 2005), and Lisberg Jensen (2011) expressing a fear of our generations losing the relationship humans have had with nature for hundreds of thousands of years. To build new exiting playgrounds or fill cities with trees are probably not the only way of reaching a sustainable, child-friendly city, maybe not even a solution. However, I think that this perspective is excessively important to be ignored. I might have repeated this too many times by now, but planning with a child perspective, legally bounded or not, is not a special interest but a question of rights. And we do not achieve that without including children in the discourse.

What places do you remember from your childhood and what do they mean to you, today?

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