

**Submission**  
**to the**  
**Committee on Children and Young People**  
**Inquiry into Children, Young People**  
**and the Built Environment**



This submission addresses points 3 and 4 of the terms of references of the Parliamentary Inquiry – Children, Young People and the Built Environment, namely strategies to ensure that built environment issues affecting children and young people are identified and the role of the Commission for Children and Young People.

**Influenced by my social work background this submission advocates for increased and more equitable participation of children (especially under the age of 10) and young people in matters relating to the built environment by proposing a change to the existing school curriculum.**

**The role of the Commission for Children and Young People in such a strategy would comprise co-operating and consulting with the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) in developing and implementing such changes and amendments.**

In the context of this submission the terms ‘participation’ and ‘consultation’ are used interchangeably.

The Issues Papers No 1 – No 3 published by the Committee on Children and Young People reveal a **discrepancy** between the political framework and intentions and the current praxis in regards to participation of children and young people in NSW:

**Appropriate international, national and state-wide guidelines and frameworks exist to promote children’s participation:**

- Australia has committed itself to increase children’s participation by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12).
- The United Nations’ ‘Child Friendly Cities’ movement supplies building blocks for child friendly cities, specifically asking to ‘involve children as active, informed participants’.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2004). *Building child friendly cities: A framework for action*. Florence: UNICEF. Electronic copy of document on attached CD.

- The establishment of the Commission for Children and Young People and its goal to increase the participation of children and young people in decision-making that affects their lives acknowledges the importance of participation.<sup>2</sup>
- The NSW Youth Policy 2002-2006 identifies participation as a key strategy.

**The current praxis of children's participation in NSW however only comprises isolated, exclusive and limited approaches:**

- **Exclusion of children under the age of 10:** Current participation is mainly focused on young people and youth, e.g. the NSW Youth Advisory Council or Youth Councils across local government areas; the research of the inquiry does not mention any participation in NSW involving younger children.
- **Exclusion of marginalised groups of children and young people:** The practice of youth councils lacks representativeness, bearing the risk of not reaching marginalised groups such as children and young people from non-English speaking background or children and young people with a disability. Youth councils could be dominated by children and young people who are already active as school leaders and/or might have hidden agendas.

**Viewed from a social work perspective the current praxis is in contrast to basic professional values and principles:<sup>3</sup>**

- **Children and young people just like all members of society have a right to self-determination,** allowing them to influence issues affecting their well-being. In regards to the built environment, their voices are still not heard often enough.
- **Any access to participation and consultation should be fair and equitable, reducing barriers for disadvantaged groups and individuals.** The current practice of youth councils excludes not only younger children but establishes barriers for children and young people from marginalised groups.

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<sup>2</sup> Commission for Children and Young People (2006). *What we are doing*. <http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/ourwork/>. Accessed: 5 April 2006.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of social work values refer to Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) (1999). *AASW Code of Ethics*. Canberra: Australian Association of Social Workers. Electronic copy of document on attached CD.

**Integrating consultation in regards to the built environment into the existing school system could increase the range of participation:**

- **Integrating consultation about the built environment to the school curriculum would establish equal and regular participation.** By involving children and young people in the school context feedback about children's ideas of their expectation and needs from their environment can be gained.
- **Built environment issues could be incorporated into various classes, such as arts, natural science and social science.** This could cover current development applications in the local neighbourhood, plans to change playgrounds and parks, general exploration of what children would need to feel safer in their environment, e.g. walks through the neighbourhood and identifying issues.
- **A wide range of techniques could be applied to elicit children's views and expectations of their environment,** such as visits and assessment of local parks and playgrounds, discussion of school and playground design in class or art projects.<sup>4</sup>
- **A link between schools and local politicians could become an integral part of any school projects and consultation processes.** Learning from the approach taken in London, meetings with local mayors presenting the ideas of the children and young people could be part of the school curriculum.

**One current example in NSW** for a one off consultation process with children under the age of 10 in a school context is Waverley Council. For the re-development of a local playground consultation with children in local primary schools was undertaken

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<sup>4</sup> Clark, A. McQuail, S. & Moss, P. (2003). *Exploring the field of listening to and consulting with young children*. Research Report No 445. London: Department for Education and Skills, give an overview of international studies undertaken to consult with children. Even though these consultations do not necessarily focus on the built environment, the approaches indicate the feasibility of consultation with young children. Electronic copy of document on attached CD.

to get their views and ideas.<sup>5</sup> This example not only shows that consultation with children is feasible in a school context but also that valuable feedback can be received.

**Benefits of consultation as an integrated part of the education system are:**

- **Inclusion of all groups of (marginalised) children and young people**, in an equal and regular manner. Marginalised groups, such as children from non-English speaking background or children with disabilities will be included in consultation (provided they are part of the school system).
- **Inclusion of children under the age of 10.** Consultation will not be limited to youth and young people, different techniques can be used to elicit views of children of all age groups.
- **Empowering children to understand the scope and impact of community participation in a wider political framework** (outside issues of the built environment) by gaining an understanding of how politics works and building self-esteem.<sup>6</sup>
- **Appropriate skills are already available** due to reliance on school teachers and their expertise in working with children and young people.
- **An integrative approach to implement participation within existing education framework avoids confrontation** and introduction of regulations and other enforcement.

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<sup>5</sup> Waverley Council (2006). *New design: Bondi Park playground and picnic area at Bondi Beach*. Waverley: Waverley Council. Electronic copy of document on attached CD. The Interviews with children in public school took place in March 2006, and the data is currently being analysed.

<sup>6</sup> Degreeef, A. & Vanderstede, W. (2004). Children's participation in local urban planning networks: exploring the literature review on international experiences. English Abstract. Downloaded from [www.childfriendlycities.org/cgi-bin/cfc/main.sql?file=include\\_pdf.sql&ListaFile=Yes&ProductID=662](http://www.childfriendlycities.org/cgi-bin/cfc/main.sql?file=include_pdf.sql&ListaFile=Yes&ProductID=662). In their literature the authors identified the goal of empowering children, i.e. learning competencies such as understanding the physical environment, understanding policy making processes and negotiations, building self-esteem and awareness, learning design and communication skills as of utmost importance.

**The Commission for Children and Young People can play a key role in developing and implementing these changes by co-operating with the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET).**

Based on their mission to increase children's participation and their relationship with the DET, the Commission for Children and Young People and the DET could work together to determine the scope and intensity of built environment participation projects, make suggestions for methods and techniques and decide on appropriate timing in relation to the entire school curriculum. The Commission for Children and Young People could use its expertise in consultation with children,<sup>7</sup> whilst the DET would bring in knowledge and resources regarding education and school curriculum.

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<sup>7</sup> The Commission for Children and Young People lists several studies and books on their webpage, [http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/ourwork/resources\\_research.html](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/ourwork/resources_research.html). Accessed 5. April 2006. Also, the 'Child Friendly Cities' movement has a broad database with resources about consultation with children and young people <http://www.childfriendlycities.org/database/index.html>. Accessed 5. April 2006.

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