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Editorial

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Mine, your and all of our futures belong to the children of today. Developing the children of today is the best investment we can make for our future and for the future generations to come.

More children than ever are growing up in an urbanising world. Many of them live in high population-density areas and many of these children are more vulnerable to physical, psychological, sociological and political threats. A small change in conditions of the high density cities has a big impact on children's lives.

Engineering the city for children, for example by providing leisure facilities, playgrounds, parks, and open spaces, should do the following.

- (a) Guarantee that children and young people have opportunities to engage in cultural, leisure, learning, community and recreational activities.
- (b) Maximise the enjoyment of children and young people through their school and college life, and through sport, leisure and cultural activities.
- (c) Increase children's physical, mental, and emotional well being.
- (d) Improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people such as those with learning/or physical disabilities.
- (e) Enable young people to raise their aspirations and develop self confidence.
- (f) Ensure that children and young people are ready for school, employment and training.
- (g) Enable children and young people to be law-abiding.
- (h) Ensure that children and young people are safe from neglect, accidental injury, bullying and crime.

This issue contains papers that address most of the subjects listed above and is our first attempt to understand the interaction between children's actual needs, their perceived needs and municipal engineering theory and practice. This could well be the beginning of a new discipline of 'engineering for children'.

In their paper 'Community design with children in Montreal and Guadalajara', Torres and Lessard examine two community design projects that were carried out in 2004–2006 in Montreal, Canada, and Guadalajara, Mexico, as part of UNESCO's 'Growing Up in Cities' programme. In both cases, children from 8 to 16 years old, in collaboration with students in architecture, landscape

architecture and urban planning, evaluated their neighbourhoods and proposed physical transformations to improve outdoor spaces. The authors look at this participatory process, describe the characteristics of places that children perceive as meaningful, and determine what lessons in neighbourhood planning can be drawn from these experiences.

Schulze and Moneti's paper 'The Child Friendly Cities Initiative' reviews the numerous local, regional and national initiatives to make cities more 'child friendly'. Experience has shown that the implementation of children's rights at local level goes hand in hand with improved living conditions for all age groups within society. The first part of this paper focuses on the development and background of the 'Child Friendly Cities Initiative'. The second part addresses the key elements of a child-friendly city as elaborated by the secretariat in consultation with a wide range of partners. In conclusion the authors present the efforts of the Swiss Committee for UNICEF to implement the initiative in Switzerland.

Haider provides a review of research on spatial mobility in the past two decades in the paper entitled 'Inclusive design: planning public urban spaces for children'. Children's mobility is about freedom of movement and free discovery of the environment; it includes gathering and outdoor play in neighbourhoods or public spaces. The question that arises is how can environments become more responsive to children and their mobility in contemporary cities? The answer to this seemingly simple question resides in developing a conceptual framework conducive to the design and planning of democratic space and inclusion of all participants, particularly children and youth.¹

Woolley's paper 'Where do the children play? How policies can influence practice' seeks to remind the reader about the importance of play, both for individual children and society as a whole. Woolley discusses the types of spaces—playgrounds—which society currently usually provides for children to play in, in the outdoor environment in England, and then moves on to address some of the places that children like to play in. There follows a discussion of policies which can provide opportunities for children to experience different spaces for playing and experiencing the external environment. In conclusion Woolley reflects on whether society will be able to provide spaces for play with a different character than we have been providing for the last 50 years.

In their paper on 'Creating child-friendly cities: the case of Denver, USA', Kingston, Wridt, Chawla, van Vliet and Brink discuss the emergence and characteristics of child-friendly cities. They review the development of an initiative in Denver, Colorado, to become the number one child-friendly city in the USA, and describe 'learning landscapes' and 'safe routes to school' as examples of community-based efforts currently underway. In conclusion they discuss lessons from the experience to date.

Nelson and Woods, in their paper 'Engineering children's physical activity: making active choices easy', propose that physical activity has been engineered out of the daily lives of children through transportation systems, land-use patterns and neighbourhood designs that inhibit play and walking/cycling to school. The authors highlight the importance of regular physical activity to young peoples' health and well-being; however there is increasing concern that large numbers of children and

adolescents are doing insufficient physical activity to obtain health benefits. The authors suggest that changing the built environment is a promising strategy in fighting youth inactivity. This will be best achieved through the identification of features of the engineered environment that support or inhibit physical activity.

This issue seeks to start a debate about how engineers, particularly municipal engineers, could be more responsive to the requirements of the child in the city. Please do join in.

REFERENCES

1. ATAÖV A. and HAIDER J. From participation to empowerment: critical reflections on a participatory action research project with street children in Turkey. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 2006, 16, No. 2, 131–156.