Planning and Designing Close to Nature Open Spaces with and for Children

Carlo Fabian
Key insights

• **Planning and designing** open spaces close to nature **with and for children** is more than just having nice open spaces.

• The **participatory process is at least as valuable as the utilization** of these spaces.
Overview

1. Impressions

2. Background

3. Child-friendly / close to nature - participation

4. Results and insights

5. Conclusions
1. Impressions: Child-friendly and close to nature?
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2. Background:

- Child-friendly open spaces which are close to nature are becoming increasingly rare

- **Specialization and functionalization** of public open spaces -> **fragmentation**, **domestication** and **mediatisation** of children's living environments

- Different reasons why it is worthwhile investing in **participatory processes**, to design and implement open spaces close to nature for and with children
Background:

- **3-year program** including three community based pilot projects

- External evaluation:
  -> contributions of these participatory processes for **democracy**

---> Practice-oriented **guideline** (in German: Fabian et al., 2016 -> [www.quaktiv.ch](http://www.quaktiv.ch))
3. Child-friendly & close to nature

Criteria “child-friendly”
• accessibility
• focus on specific needs of children
• high potential for identification
• ...

Criteria “close to nature”
• local & natural materials
• native & site-typical plants and animals
• habitat for domestic animals
• promotion of biodiversity
• unsealed floor
• ...

Child-friendly - Participation

Reasons why it is worth investing in participatory processes to design and implement open spaces close to nature for and with children.

Participatory processes ...

... support the healthy development of children.

... strengthen the competencies and resources of children.

... enable encounters and collaboration.

... support the identification with a space or place.

... encourage people to tune in to nature and landscaping.

... allow to experience democracy.
Child-friendly – Participation in each project phase

I. Analysis of the initial situation

II. Plan, design & concept

III. Realization / implementation

IV. Operation & maintenance

V. Evaluation & permanent adoption

Fabian et al., 2016
4. Results and lessons learned

- The **participatory process** is at least as valuable as the utilization of these spaces.

- Two main benefits are related to **health** and to **democracy**.
Results and insights: Participation and health

Participative processes can stimulate several health-related effects factors on an individual level:

- empowerment & autonomy
- self-efficacy
- attribution & locus of control
- sense of coherence
Results and insights: Participation and democracy

-> Criteria for democracy

- Inclusion
- Justice
- Quality
- Transparency
- Socialization
- Anchoring
5. Conclusions

The requirements for a successful participatory process in planning and implementing child-friendly open spaces are

• The authorities have to be ready to support the process.

• The appropriate values have to be present or developed within the administration and with the various stakeholders.

• Such processes need time, human resources an competences (participation, planning, implementation, communication, ...)

• Participatory methods have to be locally adapted and tailored to the capabilities of children and other stakeholders.

--> Participatory processes: investment for today's generation, future generations and in the community!
1. **attractive stock of trees**

2. **sealed flor**

3. **no loose material**

4. **stone blocks: good structure**

5. **no possibility for experience of nature**

6. **design close to nature: plants and materials**

7. **changes and transformations are possible**

8. **climbing and balancing**

9. **partially unsealed flor**
1. attractive stock of trees

• swing in the background

classic play equipment

strong redesign considering the initial situation

stock of trees complemented

new swing from wood

varied design of the landscape

bushes separate from the street

natural materials: stones, bushes, sand, wood

extensive unsealed floor
Many thanks for your attention!

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