



PRE-MASTER THESIS

*CHILD FRIENDLY CITY'S FOR ALL? FROM BOOKSHELF TO REALITY:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY ABOUT THE RESULTS OF GUIDELINES FOR
CHILD PARTICIPATION*

Bachelor's Project SPD
Group 02 - Creating Inclusive and Sustainable Cities with/for Children

Tabea Ebel (S5707331)

Supervised by Ö. Ataoğ
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ABSTRACT

CP is part of children's right to the city, a right to be implemented by all UN member states. CP is a challenge to implement. Different theories on how to create meaningful CP have led to similar interpretations with different checklists.

Member cities of UNICEF's CFCI have committed to creating CFC's with children. This study analyses whether the criteria for meaningful CP and, more broadly, for fostering a PC are being realised. This study's checklist is based on two popular concepts of CP, Hart's ladder of CP and the Lundy model, and applied to the cases.

The case study areas include a non-European, Central European, Western European, Schengen, American and Asian perspective of outstanding city identities to highlight differences between approaches based on international and national guidelines.

This case study highlights lack of available information, trends in communication and measures as well as a gap between identity and ambitions of cities and their efforts to realize those. It concludes the ongoing efforts do not create PC and recommends cooperation, revising checklists and evaluation tools and research regarding the abilities of children in response.

Key words: CFC's, PC, Meaningful CP, CFC's and communities initiative, International case study analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

Children have the right to participation and being treated as citizens (1), unfortunately children are dependent on adults and must be enabled to participate. Which is a challenge on many levels. Guiding literature has been available for decades (2; 3), yet the goals and criticisms remained (4).

Urban planning strives to create the most liveable places. Over the past decades the field shifted from top-down planning to more bottom-up approaches, starting from movements which demanded the right to the city (RTC). This right prioritizes people over profit and has implications for the profession of planners, as it implies participation of citizens in the city's development. Nowadays participation is seen as a requirement for healthy democracies (5). The children's RTC followed and created a challenge that remains: There is a lack of impact of child participation, which requires rethinking active citizenship and what children are capable of (6). Often based on an underestimation of children's capacities and procedures that ended in tokenism, both have led to the prime example of the criticism "planning beyond the playground", referring to the lack of impact of children's participation in general urban settings (6; 7). Since it is legally required, formal participation only asks for a minimum standard and often falls short in meeting expectations regarding transparency, dialogue on eye level and learnings of higher levels of participation (8).

Despite ongoing efforts, there is a noticeable gap in the realisation of CP and limited information on outcomes, both short and long term (4). Therefore, this research project focuses on analysing the state of the available guiding literature on CP and how it is realised in efforts to create a culture of participation to support urban planners and city governments to engage children in urban decision-making.

Meaningful CP is an important base element in creating a Participatory culture (PC) and active democracy, which is why it is so important (8; 9). Other scholars have focused on enabling CP from governmental and urban planning perspective as interest is rising, and many cities have committed to guidelines (10; 11). Meaningful CP, refers to CP that treats children as citizens, based on the power share between children and adults, participation activity, way of involvement and impact (12).

The children's RTC resulted in the CFC (child friendly city) concept, which was developed to ensure decisions are made in the best interests of children, hence the children's RTC must be guaranteed (13; 14). This includes influencing decisions about the city, expressing their opinions, participating in social life, access to basic services, protection, safety, independent walkability, green spaces, and being treated as an equal citizen (14). Realizing this falls into different fields, which need to cooperate, including urban planners (14).

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) started the CFC's initiative (CFCI) in 1996, a global network providing guidelines on how to create CFC's and recognizing applicant cities under strict criteria. These include commitment to the goals and themes, and evaluating results. CFC's aim to create liveable cities for children and focus on inclusive environments (15).

Resources, such as guidelines, handbooks (16), and online courses (17) regarding CP and also CFC are accessible. Additionally, UNICEF provides support and titles (12; 13; 15), yet criticisms about lack of impact, tokenistic approaches and lack of schooling of practitioners remain and even CFC's have been criticized for the lack of results and non-meaningful participation practices (4; 18; 19). Illustrating a gap between theory and practice, which this research is focusing on.

Therefore, the aim of this research is twofold: 1. to understand how CP needs to be realised in order to be meaningful and 2. to promote a culture of participation in the long term, and how this can be approached effectively. Through this research, insights can be gained to improve the effectiveness of existing resources and increase their usefulness in promoting the realisation of CP in placemaking.

Hence, the main research question of this project is:

What does it need, beyond guidelines, to enable to enable participatory culture for children's participation?

Which is supported by sub research questions regarding the theoretical foundation of creating a culture of participation with meaningful CP. And an analysis investigating the gap between theory and practice of CFC's in regards of CP.

1. How can a culture of participation be established in theory?
2. How are the guidelines of CFC's implemented and do they contribute to or hinder a culture of participation?
3. What strategies can support planners in promoting a culture of participation, based on identified gaps in existing literature and successful projects?

2. THEORETIC FRAMEWORK OF PARTICIPATORY CULTURE AND CHILD PARTICIPATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

“a culture in which large numbers of people from all walks of life have the capacity to produce and share media with each other, often responding critically to the products of mass media, and often circulating what they create fluidly across a range of different niche publics.” (20)

A PC is characterized by low barriers to participation, strong support for sharing, informal mentorship, members who feel that their contributions matter, and who care about others’ participation, according to Jenkins and his research team. PCs reward participation. ‘Not everyone must participate, but everyone must believe that if they participate it will be valued.’ (9). Fischer defines a “culture of participation” as a culture where “people are provided with the means to participate actively in personally meaningful activities” (21).

In the PCs handbook by Delwiche and Henderson, PCs are cultures of collective knowledge. Extending Jenkins definition PC over the civic it calls for global citizens, transnational activism and moral citizenship. Using cultural change to create a PC therefore needs to include the criteria listed in Table 1 (22).

TABLE 1 CULTURAL CHANGE CRITERIA (22)

Cultural change criteria	
1. Invention and discovery	successful examples in similar places, interpretation of participation as valuable
2. Structural change	legislative changes
3. Diffusion	globalization and competition

2.1.1 BUILDING A PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Several authors mention meaningful CP specifically creates benefits in developing a culture of empowered, active young citizen (23). As culture changes over time, generational or birth cohort differences can thus be thought of as a function of cultural change. Meaning if a birth cohort is introduced to a new system of for example participation their ideology will have a different view on the system than earlier generations (24).

Fostering PCs and civic engagement requires conversation catalysts, to increase audience group and interest (25).

Creating a PC requires an individual and holistic approach, common attributes in success stories are:

- 1) There is need for the action
- 2) The concept is easy and understandable
- 3) Participating is easy and doesn't necessarily require commitment for a long time
- 4) Participating is rewarding
- 5) There's room for people's own creativity (26).

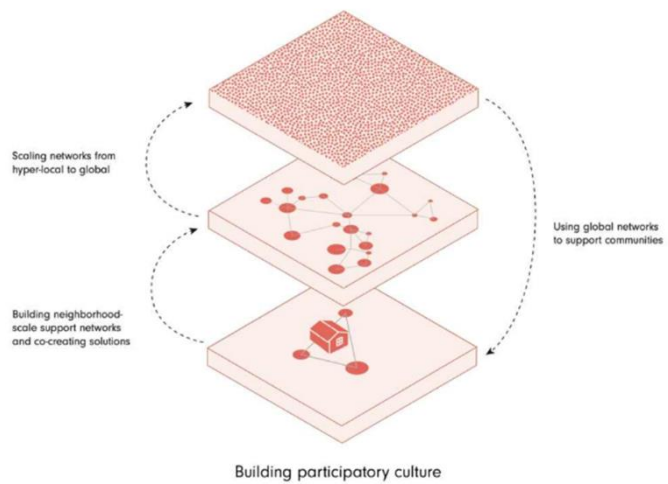


FIGURE 1 BUILDING PC BY REINVENTING SPACES (26)

The main motivation mentioned, is that people will act, when they feel like they can change something. Starting with neighbourhood activism can lead to bigger projects, and successful examples can trigger new initiatives (26).

2.1.2 CHECKLIST AND CHALLENGES OF PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

To create a PC the circumstances must be right for cultural change through legislative changes, successful examples and influence of globalization. The projects need to be relevant, participation needs to be meaningful and barriers must be low (21; 22; 26).

Hence this project's checklist as seen in Table 2.

TABLE 2 CHECKLIST PC BY AUTHOR

Checklist Participatory culture	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Meaningful CP
<input type="checkbox"/>	Low barriers to participation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Participation is seen as valuable (trust)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Holistic approach (no cherry picking)

Challenges of PC are the pillars of what defines it (21). Trust, level of participation and results. Trust is needed to get people interested in participating. The participants need to trust that their input is seen as valuable and has impact (27).

2.2 INTRODUCTION TO CHILD PARTICIPATION – A BRIEF RECAP OF CHILD PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING

2.2.1 PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING

Participation in urban planning is a term for citizen power. The change from top down to bottom-up planning is a consequence of experiences in the 20th century, mainly reasoned in resistance, opposition and unacceptance of top-down planning by the population. It opts to shift power to “the have-not citizens” and give them voice and choice in developments (28). The term popularized in the 1990s and has gained a status of orthodoxy, the ubiquity of the mainstream tool is seen as “tyranny” by some (28; 29).

2.2.2 THE RIGHT TO CHILD PARTICIPATION

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by the United Nations, serves as the foundational document, underscoring the importance of involving children in decision-making processes (30). However, the implementation of CP often falls prey to tokenism, where children are superficially engaged without substantial influence on urban planning decisions (7). Discussions about the impacts of making participation a requirement are both positive and negative. On the one hand making it a requirement means all people are supposed to be enabled to participate, on the other hand participation should be seen as a goal, not a means and realizing it as a requirement oftentimes leads to projects which are not relevant because the resources are lacking (31). Further criticisms include the challenge of defining the scope and boundaries of what CP is (32), risking “consultation fatigue” by giving the opportunity to participate without change, practical barriers such as lack of time, information and resources (33) and potential for exploitation of children for political purposes (13).

The UNICEF plays a prominent role in advancing the cause of CFC’s through its dedicated initiative. This initiative advocates for urban environments that prioritize the needs and rights of children, fostering inclusivity, safety, and support for their development (2; 13). These rights of children require a nuanced understanding of the “Right to the City,” recognizing children as active citizens and stakeholders in the urban landscape (34). The RTC emphasizes equitable access and usage of urban spaces for all residents, including children, aligning with the principles of the UNICEF CFCI.

A multitude of literature about participation, child-participation and meaningful child- participation is publicly accessible and their impact is often valued and connected to grand hopes for participation and democratic citizenship (6-8; 10). Including children in placemaking processes can improve liveability for a variety of target groups, including elderly and people with disabilities, as CFC’s are meant to be inclusive cities and vice versa (35).

2.2.3 MEANINGFUL CHILD PARTICIPATION
 While there is consensus over the importance of meaningful participation, there are different definitions of meaningful CP (36).

2.2.3.1 HART'S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

This ladder of participation (Figure 2) has been used and adapted by many researchers and a comparison of over 1000 publications highlights its relevance to this day, as most scholars remain close to the ladder's content. The slight differences include use of terms such as nominal, instrumental, representative, collaborative, transformative and child-led, which's definitions and explanations correlate to the ladder (36).

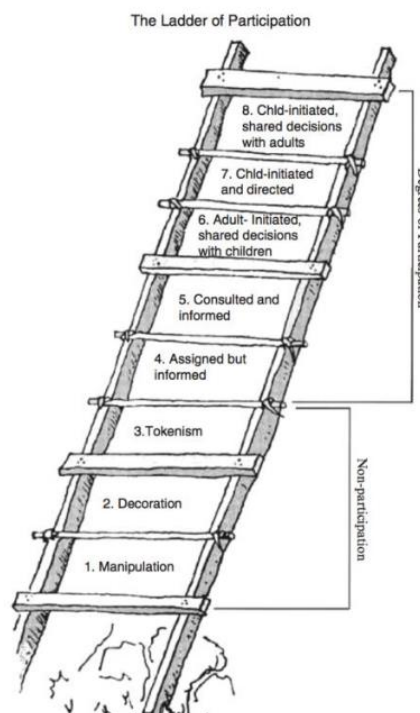


FIGURE 2 HART'S LADDER OF CHILD PARTICIPATION (36)

Hart himself defines, what he calls "true participation", as the highest levels of participation (6-8) and defined four key factors as the basis of CP as seen in Table 3. Examples for each level as explained by Hart are not urban planning related, but they illustrate the core meaning (37).

TABLE 3 KEY FACTORS OF TRUE PARTICIPATION BASED ON (36)

True Participation – four key factors		Levels of true participation explained	
1	The children understand the intentions of the project	6. Adult initiated, shared decisions with children	For example, if an actor group of professionals invites a group of children for a project, where the children are taught necessary skills to create a newspaper, which is then published by the children with help from the professionals.
2	They know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why	7. Child-initiated and directed	For example, if children conceive and carry out complex projects in their play.
3	They have a meaningful role	8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	For example, if a group of children recreate a project they observed out of their own interest.
4	They volunteer for the project after it was made clear for them		

TABLE 4 LEVELS OF TRUE PARTICIPATION WITH EXAMPLES, BASED ON (36)

In "stepping back from the ladder" Hart wrote a critical reflection on his ladder. In his interpretation the ladder drew so much attention because when it was first published in Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship by UNICEF in 1992, there was very little written of a conceptual nature on the theme of children's participation in their programmes, projects, or

organisations. He states, that it is misinterpreted as a comprehensive tool for measuring work with children rather than a starting point of dialogue and reflection (38).

2.2.3.2 LUNDY MODEL

The Lundy model (Figure 3) was created by Laura Lundy for Edinburgh. The model conceptualizes four dimensions of CP: Space, voice, audience and influence. Lundy provides a detailed explanation for all of the dimensions. Summarized they mean that CP must be facilitated in a safe and inclusive environment, children must be informed appropriately, they need to be listened to and understood and their input must bring results (39).



FIGURE 3 LUNDY MODEL (39)

Criticisms of this model include that it does not consider emotional components of children’s involvement which is an important aspect in creating a safe space for children (39).

2.2.3.3 OTHER APPROACHES

Other scholars use similar definitions. Horelli adapted Arnstein’s ladder in other words. Here the lowest level is adapting children in the planning, then children taking part in adult’s planning, cooperation between children and adults and at the top children’s real participation, adults as assistants (40). This adaptation of Arnstein’s ladder is less popular eventhough it is self-explanatory and was published after Hart’s ladder.

And Francis and Lorenzo defined the 7 realms of children’s participation in city design and planning, which can be seen in Table 5. This approach is particularly interesting for urban planners, as it is clearly define and easy to communicate to participants. 1-4 could be interpreted as levels of participation, while 5 and 6 define the role of the children and 7 as impact and control system. 1 could corelate to the highest levels of participation however naming it romantic suggests association with a certain utopia (41).

The explanation of these realms includes the concept behind each realm, the target audience, participants, objective, limitations and status within the case study conducted by the researchers. This makes the realms applicable.

TABLE 5 7 REALMS OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION (41)

7 realms of children’s participation in city design and planning	
1. Romantic	Children as planners
2. Advocacy	Planners for children
3. Needs	Social science for children
4. Learnings	children as learners
5. Rights	Children as citizens
6. Institutionalization	Children as adults
7. Proactive	Participation with vision

Earlier research aimed to solve the research problem of an evident gap between the theory and practice of CP, the theory has been advanced for decades, yet practitioners are behind. Key critiques of CP are based on poorly realized projects and forms of non-participation. Additionally, children are often only involved in child specific spaces, such as playgrounds.

Children are often underestimated, even though literature emphasizes the importance of meaningful CP. Past approaches need to be rethought and modified to the changed childhood experience to make children advocates for their needs in planning (41).

2.3 SYNTHESIS AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The children's RTC was passed by the UN to ensure children are treated as citizens, this includes the right to participate in decisions regarding the development of their city (1). UNICEF created CFCI to support the realization of this right, which can bring great opportunities for the built and social environment of cities (15).

The goals of both these global institutions aim for long-term results of CP (1; 15). To allow this child participation must be meaningful. The differentiation of meaningful CP was introduced in response to tokenistic approaches (36).

There are various perspectives on what meaningful child participation is and how it can be achieved. The approaches of Hart and Lundy are legitimized by the high volume of citations and utilization by global organizations (39). Later approaches are contributing to the ease of understanding of the concept, Horelli's adaptation of Arnstein's ladder is less popular than Hart's yet it is the same content as Hart's levels of true participation (41). Considering the lower levels of CP can be seen as a "what not to do" participatory planning should focus more on Horelli's definitions.

The 7 realms of CP in urban design and planning are an interesting approach for practitioners in the field, as they are a combination of embedding levels of true participation in different urban concepts. Furthermore, they are made applicable on different levels.

Only meaningful CP can create PC, as impact, trust and low barriers are the foundation of PC. Everyone needs to be able to participate in matters that are relevant for them, and the results of participation must have impact, this cannot be realized when a whole group of the population is excluded (21; 22; 26). The criteria for cultural change towards PC (PC Handbook) are given, as meaningful CP and methods are defined, CP is legally required and there are best practice examples.

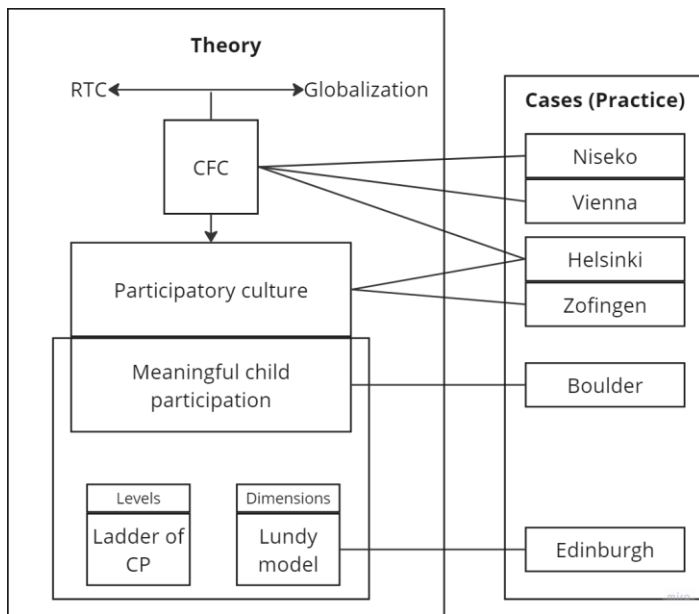


FIGURE 4 CONCEPTUAL MODEL BY AUTHOR

This conceptual model highlights the interdependence of participatory culture and meaningful child participation as central relation of this project. RTC is the foundation and globalization a driver. The ladder of CP and the Lundy model define meaningful CP and how it can be realized, the gap between the requirements defined in these concepts and the current situation of cities is analysed in this study.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION TOOL

On the basis of previous experiences, research trajectories and approaches of similar research projects, the following data was collected in order to answer the research questions of this project. The approach to answering each research question is illustrated in Figure 1 below and more detail is provided on [page 22](#).

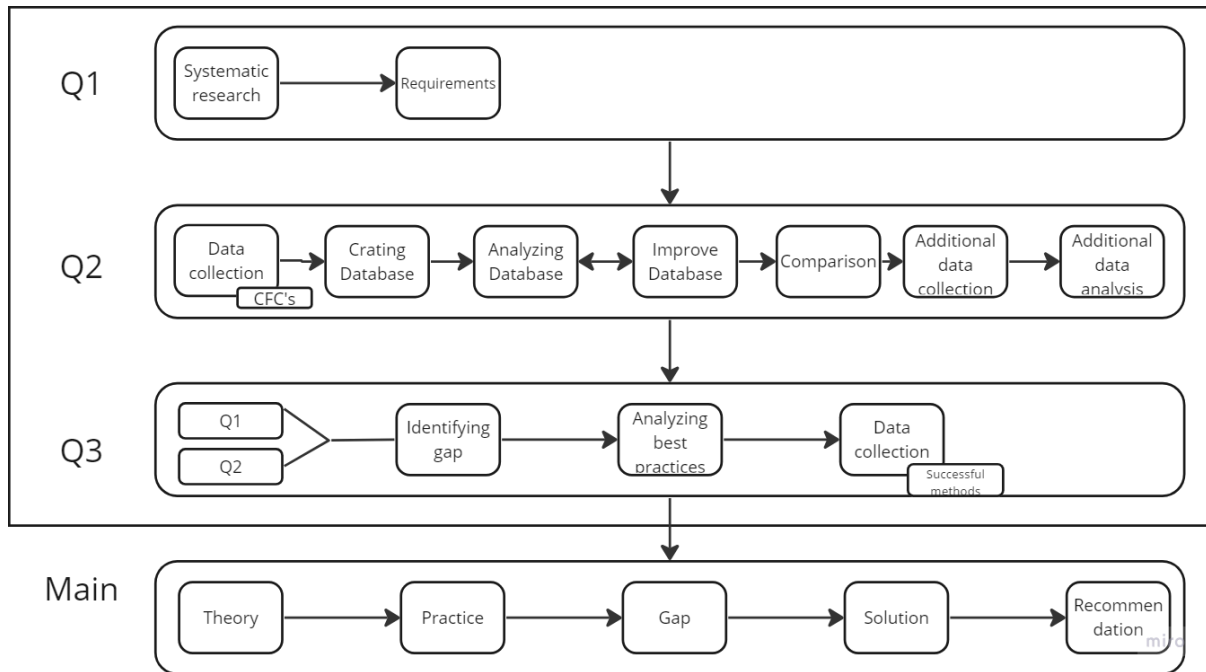


FIGURE 5 DATA ANALYSIS SCHEME BY AUTHOR

3.1 BACKGROUND OF THE DATASET

This is a comparative study based on a literature review and a case study, therefore the data collection was focused on qualitative data. The data set for this project consists of secondary data on guidelines for creating a culture of participation, realising meaningful CP and creating CFC's.

Data on the theory behind creating a culture of participation and achieving meaningful CP was collected from academic journals, books and reports. An analysis of existing guidelines and their evaluation, and the extent to which they fulfil requirements outlined by the theory and international guidelines by the UN, UNICEF and save the children lead to the results of the case study, which was the basis for identifying gaps between real approaches and the ideal described in the literature collected for theoretical background. Data quality was ensured through popularity of sources (high level of citations), utilization by international large-scale organizations, official municipal websites, non-profit organizations and articles about publications or events. The share on grey sources is justified through the nature of this project and lack of scientific analysis as there is a research gap. The main theories are utilized by CFC's frameworks, which is why they are the foundation of this project's checklist.

3.2 Case selection

Member cities of UNICEF's CFCI have committed themselves to the goals of the initiative, starting with the participation of children. The number of member cities is not available. CFCI is currently active in 39 countries and the number of member cities and municipalities varies widely, with countries having over 200 certified CFC's (42).

It was not feasible to compare all of them. Previous studies have compared around 2-4 cities or projects in depth (10; 19). In order to define which cities show great differences, six cities of different locality, affiliation and identity were selected, based on an overview of commitment to CFC goals and European or UN goals. This was because the CFC title requires Enabling meaningful and inclusive CP and Demonstrated dedication to eliminating discrimination; additionally the action plan, implementation and evaluation need to be submitted within 3 years, as a minimum (13).

Membership with the UN equals accepting the children's RTC and since these goals are the highest on a hierarchy from international to local these goals should be implemented in an adaptive manner in the local plans and guidelines, which have a direct influence on the realisation of children's participation in urban planning and are therefore key elements in the aim to improve it.

An overview of the selected cities and their commitment can be seen in table 6, Vienna is aiming to incorporate CP into being the most liveable city (61). Looking further into the identity and commitment to CFC Boulder is known as successful CFC (64) and Zofingen is known for having a high PC (54). Extending beyond the CFCI commitment, Helsinki is known for its PC (58) and Edinburgh is the origin of the Lundy model (39) and Niseko has recently been CFC status after 6 years of preparations (52).

TABLE 6 COMPARISON CASES BY AUTHOR 2024

City	Vienna	Helsinki	Boulder	Edinburgh	Zofingen	Niseko
Identity	Most liveable city	City of participation	Successful child friendly city	Origin of the Lundy model	Strong participatory culture	One of the most recent CFC
Inter/national commitment	EU, UN	EU, UN	UN	UN	UN	UN
CFC status	Candidate city	Candidate city	Pilot community	-	CFC	CFC
Guiding literature	Wiener Kinder und Jugendstrategie Leitfaden Masterplan Partizipation Kija	Ruuti participation framework	-	Child services plan Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)	UNICEF actionplan	CFCI checklist
Projects	Youth parliament	Helsinki youth Budget; Youth council	Growing Up Boulder 5 goal areas; Be heard boulder; Youth opportunities program; Lifelong Boulder	Childrens parliament; Youth action Champions board	Open child and youth work Website family centre Long term projects	Children's assembly Children's community development committee
Results	Ambitious goals, addressing critiques of children not feeling taken seriously	Holistic approach, not voluntary	Growing projects, targeting specific groups of children, based on location/school	-	Open child and youth work	CFC recognition, rolemodel status in Japan
highest level of CP (meaningful CP)	Children have a say in child budgeting 6-7	Children are encouraged to participate and propose their own ideas 8	Adult initiated Collaboration 6	Children have a say in child budgeting 6-7	Consulting 6	Children can propose their own project ideas 7

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

For the case study analysis a checklist was developed as tool to evaluate to which extent the cases facilitate meaningful CP and foster PC (bold). This checklist (Table 7) combined the checklists and requirements of Hart, Lundy, Shier, UNICEF (Lundy), save the children, the European commission (Tusla) and UN (Lundy). The checklists was used as assessment form of this project and the full version is in the appendix. Based on other assessment tools such as the CP assessment tool (43), which uses the checklist by save the children the evaluations of CFC's, including all aspects the selected from the CFC goals. The aspect Participation consists of Forms of participation, Tools and Level of participation and Mapptionnaire's recommendations of measuring effectiveness of participation with: Key Performance indicators, levels of participation opportunities, impact of continuous engagement, effectiveness of public participation and assessing neighbourhood planning (44).

TABLE 7 CHECKLIST MEANINGFUL CP BY AUTHOR

<p>Space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Save environment ○ Parental consent ○ Risk assessment and safeguarding plan
<p>Voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appropriate information and learning opportunities ○ Various methods ○ Respect children's views and respond appropriately ○ Engage diverse groups of children
<p>Audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide appropriate information to children about the intention of the project ○ Participation is voluntary and children can withdraw anytime ○ Children's inputs are listened to and understood ○ Staff has skills to facilitate child participation processes
<p>Influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children must have a meaningful role and be treated as citizens (level 6-8 and topics beyond child centred issues) ○ Children's views are taken seriously and are considered in decision making processes ○ Monitoring and evaluation strategies are required and children must be able to see the results of their participation
<p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Holistic approach ○ Are informal offers supporting formal participation ○ Low barriers ○ Participation is seen as valuable (Trust)

4. CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

This case study compared cases of different cities with strong identities regarding CP in terms of their international context and agenda and analyzed whether their own guidelines match the checklist defined in this research project by applying the previously created checklist.

It finds that most cities' guidelines are similar (45-51), rooted in CFCI principles (13), but require holistic CP approaches to enable a PC, with cities achieving the highest participation levels focusing on such approaches (46; 52). None of the case studies perfectly realize a Child-Friendly City (CFC) or PC; even the most empowering projects only achieve true participation in part (37; 47). Helsinki would fully meet the requirements if participation weren't legally mandated (46). Most cities fall short in the "space" dimension due to lacking parental consent and safeguarding plans in publications, while "voice" and "audience" criteria are mostly met, and "influence" is achieved only by Helsinki and GUB. Ambition levels differ, with only Helsinki aiming for a holistic approach, and cities like Vienna, Zofingen, and Edinburgh needing to elevate children's roles in participatory projects (47; 53-55). The ranking of table 8 illustrates significant differences in checklist fulfilment, indicating that a commitment to meaningful CP does not equate to a commitment to a PC.

TABLE 8 CASE STUDY FULFILMENT OF CHECKLISTS RANKING BY AUTHOR (FULL TABLE IN [APPENDIX](#))

City	Guidelines match this project's CP guidelines	Guidelines and projects match this project's checklist of creating participatory culture
Helsinki	1.	1.
Boulder	2.	4.
Niseko	3.	2.
Zofingen	4.	3.
Vienna	5.	6.
Edinburgh	6.	5.

Zofingen has a high PC?

Zofingen is known for a high PC (54), a title that leads to questions about ranking of PC, which could not be answered. The final report of an evaluation about new forms of participation for child- and youth friendly development in an area of Zofingen. Within the project QuAKTIV creating a participatory planning culture through a holistic approach was included in the 5 goals (56).

Vienna and Helsinki aim to be the best in global competition.

Vienna for aims to be the most CFC and has a competitive mindset in being the most livable city, and Austria has much experience with around 250 CFC, and its own handbook for CP, created in collaboration with UNICEF (57).

Similarly Helsinki is known for high rankings in quality of life and furthermore happiness and participation. CFC has been active in Finland since 2012, 14 municipalities are recognized and 38 are candidate cities. Helsinki aims to become a cfc as it has a strong profile as city of youth and is one of the Finnish cities with rising numbers of young people (58).

Vienna and Helsinki could support each other, as Vienna is very transparent over projects, goals and results and shared that Viennese children reported they did not feel taken seriously (59), meaning the staff needs better training like the participation game in Helsinki (68). In return Vienna has multiple informal initiatives accessible online, which are attractively presented (61; 62), while Helsinki has a platform for participation, it is not made for children under 13 (63). Helsinki's children also reported they felt more comfortable in informal settings, which are supported through informal participation.

Bottom-up initiative leading a whole country

Boulder inspires informal initiatives as Growing Up Boulder (GUB) shows that much can be achieved without initial government plans. Despite the late national support, the project, now government-backed, is one of the most successful CFC and a pilot in the CFCI (64). For 15 years, GUB has driven youth engagement as unofficial CFC, leading to city measures like a youth board and a CFC action plan. Featured in scientific papers, GUB aims to lead a global movement for equitable, sustainable communities (64-67).

Holistic approaches?

Speaking of holistic approaches Helsinki has the most holistic approach in this study and is advanced in educating practitioners through gamification and an app, which are both part of future goals of Vienna. Helsinki's participation and interaction model is listed as SDG good practice by the UN. The model was designed with the citizens and combines digital and in-person offers to create co-creation. Another highlight is that a participation game was developed to educate city employees about participation and make plans on how to realize it (68).

Finland has made participation an obligation, which raises questions about its voluntary nature and parental consent (69). Based on the literature about projects it seems children learn how to participate and have the choice to do so. This approach aims to be skill specific, however there is limited information about opportunities for children under 13 (58).

Also Niseko is aiming at a holistic approach and CP starting at a young age. Niseko is a particularly interesting new member as it was part of the Japanese CFC model and checklist development and has been selected as SDG city for the future by the Japanese government (50; 52).

Niseko's children learn about participation in school too and are encouraged to present their own proposals and interests at different events (50). Children are seen as more independent than in western cultures, which is why they are given more choice at early ages (70). Over the past decade CP has been growing in Japanese communities. The main factors behind this are changes in municipal policies and citizen demand for greater public participation in general (71).

This implies children being treated as citizens, however, the reviews showed projects that were mostly focused on very child centred themes like school lunch (72). The children should be encouraged to change bigger issues like it is the case in Vienna, Helsinki and Boulder.

Information and transparency

In Boulder, the information flow started with social media, newsletter and collaborations and is nowadays supported through the city's online platform "be heard boulder" (65).

Opposite to this the town Niseko communicates projects through municipal websites and schools, without mentioning informal participation (72). Also Edinburgh's youth needs to keep a close eye on government websites and the NGO children in Scotland.org.uk, where they can find information on participatory projects and applications (73).

Helsinki goes a step beyond the trend of participation websites and created an app for youth participation as well as an online service (Nuortenideat.fi) for dialogue between young people and various organizations (75). This can be used for formal and informal participation projects by anyone, it is unclear which informal offers exist.

This is clearly communicated in Austria. Since there are many cfc there is an online platform that informs about participatory projects, results and best practices. And Viennese can look for upcoming participatory projects in their district, school, city and nation on the webpage wienextra (75) or find a map with projects under designing Vienna (Wien gestalten) (76). Also informal initiatives like the local agenda 21, is an association aiming to reclaim Vienna's urban space for all inhabitants in a sustainable and inclusive way (52). One of their most successful projects "Grätzloase" allows applicants to actively shape the environment and connect SDG 11 and 13. All Viennese are invited to propose their ideas to repurpose parking spots throughout the city (61).

Zofingen has a different approach. Targeting children directly and indirectly through their guardians to give equal opportunities (77). Zofingen's youth is informed through a family website, youth centre, open child and youth work. Informal participation in Zofingen is facilitated through Kiwanis, an association for social projects regarding Quality of life, Violence, Education, Culture and more (78). Parental consent is rarely talked about and this approach is quite unique within the cases.

Level of participation

The highest levels of participation of the cities reach from level 6 to 8 according to Hart's ladder of CP. Giving children a say in budgeting seems to be a trend, used four of the six cities. It is not included in Boulder, as this is a city government responsibility, why it isn't applied in Zofingen is unclear.

The holism of the cities approaches, or lack thereof, also plays into the level of participation, their foundation and the impact on society. Other scholars have criticised cherry picking (10; 19), this could be connected to the trends of information websites and the measure of giving children a say in budgeting. The foundation for the highest level of participation is strongest in Helsinki, followed by Niseko, the other cities are lacking.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The intention of this project is to investigate how PC, as a goal of CFC's can be enabled and to analyse whether meaningful CP and a PC are fostered through the commitment of being or becoming a CFC. Efforts of creating meaningful CP are evident in most of the cities' own guidelines and evaluations, however there are still gaps in both guidelines and realization.

5.1 CASE STUDY RESULTS IN CONTEXT

The inherent conflict between globalization and social movements (79) is challenged by CFC and CP. Globalization is supporting the CFCI and drives CP and PC, as explained in the theoretic framework. Globalization changed to role of cities, as these are primary nodes of global networks and created cities as global hubs of development, innovation and influence, that are competing with each other. This competition drives innovation and creates a hierarchy of cities (80).

This analysis leads to the conclusion that the RTC is not fulfilled in any of the cases besides Helsinki. RTC is a human right (1), if it is not realized that is challenging the definition of democracy as human rights and their fulfilment are fundamental to having a democracy, which is the form of government in all cases (partly in Japan).

CP must be evaluated differently. The evaluation tools used by the cases, from Coe and UNICEF, are a starting point, but not sophisticated evaluation tools. The evaluation tool from Coe is basically the checklist of CP by UNICEF (43) and the evaluation form from UNICEF is not giving much insight, as they are articulated very broadly. As Hart highlighted in his criticism of the ladder of participation, critical reflections on participatory processes are needed to improve CP (38). Further research should be allocated to creating and applying such evaluation tool.

CFC are lacking results, is a claim made by other case studies (4; 18; 19). This research project did not focus on many CFC's, yet it became clear that the CFC status does not define a CFC, as some of the candidate cities (Helsinki, Vienna) have advanced approaches of CP compared to cities with CFCI status (Zofingen). However, the candidate cities are achieving this in order to become CFC's and the initiative inspired movements such as GUB, which can be seen as success of the initiative.

Also, the CFC's are of very different qualities, which makes it difficult to find inspiration apart from UNICEF's best practices. Not a ranking, but categories on different levels or with different aims would present a nice overview and could connect cities with similar ambitions to collaborate.

Generally, CFC's should collaborate instead of compete. Labelling, as part of a city's identity is a strong tool, and global competition can bring many benefits including fast progress (80). However, on the topic of CP it seems overrushed. Every city aims to realize trends such as a website for CP and a youth council, while that works for some, it is showing cherry-picking ambitions as criticized by other scholars, when the foundation is missing (4,6,10). Running after these trends takes up many resources, which could be used in a more beneficial way if these trends were shared between cities and not everyone was re-inventing the wheel.

The focus needs to shift from "impressive examples" to a stable approach (21). A holistic approach starting to engage children based on their abilities (41), from simpler projects at a young age to complex/ self-initiated projects shortly before adulthood should be prioritized over big headlines. As this is what is needed to unlock many benefits of meaningful CP.

Children need to learn what it means to be a citizen, what it means to be an active citizen and what meaningful participation is (22). There are challenges in the realization, yet our cases show there

already is progress and with some changes in the approach, especially educating staff and transparency (37; 39), meaningful CP is possible anywhere. All children have the right to this, but those don't mean anything if they are not realized, and if children don't learn to utilize their rights what value is it to live in a democracy?

5.2 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How can a culture of participation be established in theory?

The first part concluded that PC is created through cultural change and requires legislative changes, successful examples and influence of globalization. At its core PC relies on meaningful CP and societies perception of participation itself as relevant, meaningful and achievable. Therefore the barriers to participation must be low, process transparent and results impactful.

Meaningful CP requires the aspects of this project's checklist and the assessment, commonly the same as the provided checklists from other authors need a different approach to be relevant. Children need to be given the opportunity to be heard, they need to be listened to and understood. Then their inputs need to be included in plans or they need to be part of the realization and finally, they need to be informed about the results. This is still a challenge, even though the theory has been available for decades. Which is why this gap should further be researched.

1. How are the guidelines of CFC's implemented and do they contribute to or hinder a culture of participation?

After looking at the theoretical requirements for creating CP, the CFC guidelines and the city's publications, it is evident, that all of the cities follow the same goals, yet only two of the cases have ambitions to foster PC. Transparency about consent and safety measures is lacking in all cases. Holistic approaches, voluntary nature, a meaningful role of children and low barriers are partially fulfilled.

If the guidelines were fulfilled they would create meaningful CP, yet there are many points on each checklist, which could be condensed to simplify the matter. Additionally, the competitiveness between cities could be utilized in a more beneficial way, if a holistic approach and low barriers to participation were included in the checklist. As this would reduce cherry-picking and increase efforts to involve more children. The checklist created for this project is a start in that direction, yet it is merely a summary of existing requirements.

The lack of fulfilment of the checklist and transparency about it is the main issue for most cases.

2. What strategies can support planners in promoting a PC, based on identified gaps in existing literature and successful projects?

Planners, employed by cities, can draw inspiration from other places and find their own approach, which works for their city based on combining theory and practice. The transparency and design of information by the city of Vienna could be adopted by many. And the holism of Helsinki's approach is recommendable as long as the voluntary nature of participation is not limited.

Collaboration with schools, like in Helsinki or Niseko and creating spaces for youth, like it is done in Zofingen are good examples of approaching children in a CF environment.

Generally speaking, barriers to participation need to be avoided by facilitating relevant projects in child friendly environments. Informing about the intention and results and treating the children as

equal. Trust within the community needs to be strengthened towards the city/ facilitators through honesty, reliability and impact.

It is important that the practitioners are educated or educate themselves about how to work with children before planning and realizing a project.

Also, independent planners can facilitate participation. Informal participation is seen as beneficial to cp and formal participation and can support cities. Examples for this are found in Vienna and Boulder.

What does it need, beyond guidelines, to enable PC?

Inspiration, collaboration and a holistic approach are what is needed beyond guidelines to enable PCs and CFC for all.

5.3 FINAL WORDS

The conclusions of these projects are that CP needs to shift from meeting needs to assessing the current situation and drawing inspiration from other places to get where we want to go, without ignoring valid theories or blindly following trends. This requires resources, which can be replaced by cooperation with other cities, children's institutions and independent organisations. Existing checklists and evaluation tools should be reconsidered to maximize their impact. This project is not an additional guideline with a checklist and should not be treated as such. It aims to link CP theory and practice examples from different backgrounds to examine the gap between theory and practice. This gap varies from case to case, and the selected areas have strong identities in relation to CP and are Europe-centred, which does not give a broad or average perspective.

CP is a sensitive issue and there are some dominant approaches to it. This researcher is not in a position to evaluate the quality of publications to find less popular but more relevant theories that could have supported this project. There were also time constraints and language barriers.

This researcher recommends that anyone considering developing guidelines for a city or facilitating children's participation should use existing resources to educate themselves on the subject and enable meaningful children's participation.

6. APPENDICES

Summary of the approach

RESEARCH QUESTION	1	2	3	MAIN
AIM	Literature review	Case Study Analysis	Best practice examples	Identifying strategies for planners
OBJECTIVE	To establish a theoretical framework for creating a culture of participation and meaningful child participation	To analyze the approaches of child-friendly cities and their impact on participation culture.	To analyze how the outlined gaps between theory and practice have been overcome in the case cities.	Bridging the gap between theory and practice
SOURCES	Academic journals, books, policy documents, reports	UNICEF Child-friendly cities (Handbooks & reports) Other Initiatives (Handbooks, articles)	Evaluations by the cities, UNICEF, case studies	Literature review, Case Study Analysis, Academic journals, case studies
DATA COLLECTION PROCESS	Systematic search of relevant literature. Selection of literature based on relevance to research question 1. Summarization and synthesis of key concepts and theories related to participation culture and child participation.	Collection of data on guidelines, policies, and initiatives related to child participation. Qualitative analysis of implementation strategies and their effects on participation culture. Documentation of challenges and successes in promoting participation.	Identification of gaps in literature review and case study analysis. Exploration of successful projects addressing identified gaps. Data collection on strategies and methodologies used in successful projects.	Connecting the findings of the literature review, case study analysis and best practice examples to give recommendations.
DATA ANALYSIS	Descriptive and Diagnostic	Descriptive and diagnostic	Prescriptive	Inferential

Guidelines and checklists

Authors Title	Laura Lundy Lundy model	Hart Ladder of child participation	Shier Pathways to participation model	UNICEF Checklist: Are you conducting your activities in a way that meaningful enable child participation?	Save the children THE NINE BASIC REQUIREMENTS For Meaningful and Ethical Children's Participation	Tusia Child and Youth Participation Toolkit
Model Domains	Lundy model 1.Space 2.Voice 3.Audience Influence	Ladder of child participation Levels of participation 1. Assigned but informed 2. Consulted and informed Levels of true participation 3. Adult initiated, shared decisions with children 4. Child-initiated and directed 5. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Levels of participation 1.Children are listened to 2.Children are supported in expressing their views 3.Children's views are taken into account 4.Children are involved in decision making processes Children share power and responsibility for decision making	Lundy model 1.Space 2.Voice 3.Audience 4.Influence	1.TRANSPARENT AND INFORMATIVE 2.VOLUNTARY 3.RESPECTFUL 4.RELEVANT 5.CHILD FRIENDLY 6.INCLUSIVE 7.SUPPORTED BY TRAINING 8.SAFE AND SENSITIVE TO RISK 9.ACCOUNTABLE	Lundy + Shier 1.no age limit 2.no discrimination 3.efforts to include seldom heard children 4.parents and carers have primary responsibility 5.relevant information and adequate support 6.participation needs to be understood as a process 7.protected from harm 8.fully informed of the scope All processes in which children and young people are heard should be transparent and informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant to children's lives, in child-friendly environments, inclusive (non-discriminatory), supported by training, safe and sensitive to risk, and accountable.
Explanation	1.Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views 2.Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views 3.Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen 4.Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon where appropriate	1.The children understand the intentions of the project; 2. They know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why; 3. They have a meaningful (rather than 'decorative') role; 4. They volunteer for the project after the project was made clear to them. 2.Young people work as consultants for adults 3.though the projects at this level are initiated by adults, the decision-making is shared with the young people (not only for child-specific spaces) 4.Adults must respond well to children's initiatives, children carry out complex projects in a group "Animator" is the term used in some countries to describe the kind of professional who knows how to give life to the potential in young people		1.Children should be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views. 2.Children should be facilitated to express their view. 3.The view should be listened to 4.The view should be acted upon, as appropriate.		There is no age limit on the right of the child or young person to express her or his views freely. • The right of children and young people to participate applies without discrimination on any grounds; • Particular efforts should be made to enable participation of children and young people with fewer opportunities or seldom heard children; • Parents and carers have the primary responsibility; • In order to be able to participate meaningfully and genuinely, children and young people should be provided with all relevant information and need adequate support for self-advocacy appropriate to their age and circumstances; • If participation is to be effective, meaningful and sustainable, it needs to be understood as a process and not a one-off event and requires ongoing commitment in terms of time and resources; • Children and young people who exercise their right to freely express their views must be protected from harm; • Children and young people should always be fully informed of the scope of their participation; • All processes in which children and young people are heard should be transparent and informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant to children's lives, in child-friendly environments, inclusive (non-discriminatory), supported by training, safe and sensitive to risk, and accountable.
Checkpoints				1. Were children consulted in choosing the space and did you consider their preferences? Can children and their families get to the venue, and fully participate at the venue? Is the space safe both in terms of environmental and in atmosphere and do you have enough adult: child ratio? Is the space child-friendly? Have you looked at the room from a child's perspective? Does it have furniture and supplies that allow for dynamic use of the space? Does it allow for noise, movement and creativity? Have you considered the effect that group size will have on the conversation and adapted accordingly? Did parents/caregivers give permissions/approval and sign indemnity for their child to be at this space? 2. Have children been given all the information they need to form a view? Have different options been provided to them? Have different ways of communicating been offered to them? Drawing, writing letters, singing songs, putting comments in anonymous comment boxes, etc. Do the children know that this process is voluntary and that they can opt out at any time? Is the language being used age appropriate, jargon free and aligned to references appropriate to children's ages and interests? Have you created an atmosphere that encourages asking questions and seeking clarifications? Are you frequently checking that your understanding of children's inputs are correct? 3. Is there a process/system for communicating children views and meaningfully embedding them into decision making? Have children been informed about the chain of communication and who will be privy to their views? Are your facilitators experienced and trained in conducting child participation activities? Have stakeholders been mapped together with children to identify who needs to know what? Have children been informed about the whole decision-making process and understand their role in the process in a way that manages expectations? 4. Were children's views considered by decision makers? Was preparatory work done to ensure children's voices are taken seriously? Was feedback provided to participants about decisions taken and how their views were used or not used? Have you laid foundations with decision makers, NGOs, partners around the importance of child, young person and parent participation and are they willing and ready to listen? Can you demonstrate that the views of children have influenced your services or how you do business?	1. provide child-friendly information in appropriate and accessible language/format, define roles and responsibilities, opportunities and limitations 2. ensure children have time to make an informed decision about their involvement + ensure children can withdraw at any time + address adult/child power imbalances to ensure a truly voluntary process 3. take into account children's other commitments/rights (e.g. school/work/play) + ensure ways of working are culture and gender sensitive + key adults (parents, teachers, etc.) are supportive and informed 4. ensure the issues are of real relevance to the children + support child defined initiatives and topics + ensure adults have not pressured children 5. use child friendly methods and approaches + ensure meeting places are child friendly and accessible 6. engage children of different genders, ages, backgrounds and abilities + provide safe space for different groups of children to explore issues relevant to them (e.g. girls working separately from boys, if needed) + ensure the process is non-discriminatory and inclusive + ensure those most impacted by discrimination and inequality have equal access + ensure methods and tools are accessible and promote equal access 7. ensure staff and partners have the confidence and skills to facilitate CHP processes 8. undertake conflict sensitivity and risk assessments + develop a child safeguarding plan + ensure all children know where to go for help if needed + develop a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy + engage children in M&E processes + define communication and follow up mechanisms with children + ensure children see the results of their participation	

Checklist fulfilment

Evalua	Niseko	Zofingen (54)	Edinburgh
yes	Kid's park and suitable spaces (50)		
partly			
no		A safeguarding plan is planned	
na	Learning about participation in school (84)		
		Mainly through schools and workshops, children wish for more participation	Children's parliament, Young Edinburgh action, pilot events (48)
		Follow up plans after projects and evaluations	
	Mainly students, events are planned to suit their schedules (84)	Voluntary approach	
		Children's rights are presented to children from age 3	
		open youth work	The events were too long for the children to stay focused (48)
			The children liked that adults and other children were interested in what they had to say (48)
	All adults prepare answers in an easy-to-understand manner so that children can understand them (83)		
	Children can bring forward their ideas for different fields (84)	Dependent on age	Children and young people are supported to actively participate and engage (55) in the decisions which affect them*
		Student parliament	
	Minutes and Evaluations of certain projects are available online (83)	Periodic evaluations	Periodic reporting (55)
	Children's assembly, children's community development committee, young people and children are defined as age >20 (29)		Edinburgh's promise (55)
	Mainly students are targeted (84)	Online tool	Online tool (48)
	The town needs you, but at the same time it is communicated that not everything can be realized (84)		

Boulder	Helsinki	Vienna	City / Checklist	
		Child-friendly and accessible places are selected ie schools (45)	Save environment	Space
Parents and caregivers are involved in the projects (6)	School attendance is a right and obligation - participation starts here (46)		Parental consent	
			Risk assessment + safeguarding plan	
While many projects are adult initiated, co-learning (6) between children and adults is a primary goal in GUB uses established and original methods and combines media methods with curricular activities (6)	Starting in pre-school (81) Skidialogi method, city walks, pilot activities (47)		Appropriate information + learning opportunities	Voice
			Various methods	
GUB gives special focus to increasing the voices of Boulder's least heard youth (6)	Especially the most vulnerable children are poorly aware of their rights (81)	easy language, barrier free spaces, diverse methods (45) In 2022, 3000 children voted for future projects (45)	Respect children's views + respond appropriately	
		App for youth participation (53)	Engage diverse groups of children	Audience
		Non-participation is accepted (45)	appropriate information to children about the intention of the project	
	Identifying and listening to feedback from children and young people is part of everyday inclusion, interaction between adults and children (47)		Voluntary + children can withdraw anytime	
. Teachers, students, researchers, and facilitators adopt a co-learning PAR framework (6) needs and timelines, . While many projects are adult initiated, co-learning between children and adults is a primary goal in GUB's approach	Online training package (47)	Education via Wien Akademie, Workshop digital participation (53)	children's inputs are listened to and understood	Influence
Many adults are involved, so it is unclear how much impact the childrn's voices have per project (51)	Diverse Themes including mental health, urban planning, cultural a=and leisure activities (47)	City budget is reserved for ideas from Vienna's youth (53)	Staff has skills to facilitate child participation processes	
	child impact assessment model (47)		Children must have a meaningful role and be treated as citizens (level 6-8 + topics beyond child centred issues)	
The number of projects and participants is growing (51)	Children learn how to participate in school, from the age of 15 they can create initiatives for the city council, one third of eligible children	Schoolparliament (SMG), Voting for budgeting (45)	Children's views are taken seriously and are considered in decision making processes	Other
			monitoring and evaluation strategies and ensure children see the results of their participation	
Project groups (51)			Informal participation	
			Low barriers	
			Participation is seen as valuable	

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