



Book review

Placemaking with Children and Youth: Participatory Practices for Planning Sustainable Communities Victoria Derr, Louise Chawla Mara Mintzer. New York, NY: New Village Press, 2018. Paper ISBN: 9781613321003; Cloth ISBN: 9781613321010; eBook editions <https://newvillagepress.nyupress.org/books/9781613321003/>.

Hanging Editor: Wendy Chen

In August 2018, *Placemaking with Children and Youth* was published in order to disseminate years of experiences in participatory design practice by three authors who are leaders in the youth and environment field. The publication of this book fits well with the scholars undefined discussion of participatory research in recent years. In 2017, *Designing Cities with Children and Young People: Beyond Playgrounds and Skate Parks* (Bishop and Corkery, 2017) gives a well-rounded overview of the significance to cultivate championships for children and young people in urban development processes. *Placemaking with Children and Youth*, following the recipe style in *Design as Democracy: Techniques for Collective Creativity* (de le Pena et al., 2017), offers a hands-on manual for community leaders, space designers, and any people who would like to seek participatory opportunities with children¹. It can be used as a guidebook and can be started from anywhere. It has actively adjusted the traditional participatory approach to become a pioneer in the participation of children, and truly bring the views of young people into urban shaping and transformation.

One aspect of appreciation is the extensive use of graphics and illustration (survey forms, pictures in the process, final drawings, etc.) and the extensive adoption of case studies from six continents. Each time the description of each topic is introduced, the reader can immediately find out how to develop these basic methods through a precedent in the real world. For instance, in Chapter Four, the authors introduce secondary data sources (demographic data, historical documents, and maps) to understand communities, case study boxes “10 Walks of Burke Park” and “Treasure Map” followed to further explain oral history and information gathering through collaborative mapping. When the authors write in the same chapter about art-based methods to engage with youth, drawings from children in Pachuca de Soto, Mexico documented children’s issue-identifications in their community right after the text. Those real-world examples are the result of the three authors’ decades of experiences engaging with communities. They will serve as valuable models for participatory advocates to refer to in planning activities involving children.

Another strength of the book is the manipulation of traditional qualitative and participatory methods (such as interviews, photovoice, etc.) to specifically engage children. For example, the authors introduce

interview methods using standard tips for a successful interview and immediately follow the information with a breakout box containing “tips for interviewing children.” In the box, there are meticulous details that are non-traditional but can really change the power dynamics fundamentally during the interview with a child, such as “always sit at the same level as the child,” or “pair children with interviewers with whom they feel comfortable.” In every detail of this book, you find the authors’ intention to treasure children’s opinions, encourage them to share their genuine thoughts, and empower them to play a role in determining their built environments.

This book has a good structure and a wealth of information and process details, and each of the technologies introduced has a detailed method of participation. It is easy to read and most of the content is available to the general educated public. It is also a good academic reference book, including a chapter on participation ethics. In addition, the book also has a global perspective. The eleven chapters of the book provide case studies in Boulder, Colorado, Montreal, California and Ontario, Canada; as well as Mumbai, India, San Juan, Puerto Rican and several South African provinces.

Similar to other participatory methods books, this book misses explicit parts on how exactly children’s ideas are incorporated into a final planning report, and how these participatory methods move beyond the places that matter to children (playgrounds, schoolyards, local communities). The book is available in both digital and printed formats. One weakness relates to production is that all picture content are in black-and-white, which is a pity since the color dynamic is a key in children’s crafts and drawings.

On balance, this 12-chapter book is very successful in addressing its primary goal, which is to persuade community leaders and decision makers that putting children into city building process is a necessity, not a luxury or farce. Engaging children not only changes the ways we think about our cities but also improves the mindsets on how children and youth interact with their surrounding environments in the future.

Yiwei Huang
University of California, Davis, United States

¹ According to the United Nations’ definition, children refer to all people under 18 years.