🏆 *reviewed paper*

Smart Kids Make Cities Smarter

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1 ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to highlight the potential of the involvement of children and kids in planning activities by understanding and giving voice to their distinctive language, in order to construct a non authoritarian concept of smart contemporary citizenship.

2 KIDS' RIGHT TO THE CITY

Even though children and kids are citizens to all intents and purposes (and with their own needs and rights), on the one hand, their mobility across the city – as non-drivers – is strongly reduced, so that their «right to the city» (Lefebvre, 1968) is denied in practice (see: Bozzo, 1998; Dolto, 2000; Moro, 1991); on the other hand, they usually are substantially excluded from decisions concerning the urban spaces of their daily life since they are considered as non-adults, "still-in-progress entities" having no voice. But its worth remembering that, after all, the well-known definition of sustainable development esplicitly refers to «future generations» (WCED, 1987). The exclusion of children from decision-making reveals the vagueness of such definition – «starting from how needs are to be defined and anticipated, and by whom» (Pellizzoni, 2012) – and, more generally speaking, the problematic character of sustainability itself.

Recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in planning processes based on the involvement of children in design activities (e.g.: within partecipatory workshops). Such involvement could be utilised as a sort of "litmus test" to evaluate the sustainable perspective of the project, as it gives voice to weak actors. Children's technical contribution (see: Tonucci, 1996; Paba, 1997) to planning and design activities can be particularly fruitful as not only they «bear specific needs» (Paba, 2001), but they are also provided with a "different sight", which means a specific "experienced knowledge" of urban spaces. Furthermore, they are also involved within the network of «weak ties» (Granowetter, 1983) of the neighbourhood level, where people are «within sights» (Mumford, 1968. p.35) and a «democracy of proximity» (Bracqué & Sintomer, 2002) may be possible. Finally, children's distinctive spatial behaviour tends to be subversive since it is able to resist the usual «production of urban space» (Lefebvre, 1974) of late capitalism, and this fits well with a different and more political claim for sustainability. Thus, children' sight "from below" can help planners in anchoring sustainable alternative visions to the local dimension of daily practices.

Especially if framed within and sustained by a learning path (e.g.: through workshops strictly inter-related with school programs, with particular reference to subjects such as geography, drawing and natuural science), their skilled involvement in planning activities can fruitfully contribute in re-imagining the city as an inter-active cognitive potential (see, e.g.: Sandercock, 2003) that lies within the daily social practices structuring urban spaces (De Certeau, 1990). In this sense, not only children's participation can force planners towards a more responsible approach to the resources and commons to be preserved for the future generations: their different sight can effectively help planners in placing «diversity as the cornerstone of their prescription for urban reform» (Talen, 2006a; see also: 2006b), i.e.: enabling diversity through planning and design.

The paper reports findings from a still on-going action-research concerning the involvement of children in planning and design activity.

3 THE SHIFTING MEANING OF PARTICIPATION

The broader "participative turn" of the recent decades has resulted in a wide range of very different practices aimed at involving the inhabitants in planning processes: «collaborative planning» (Healey, 1997; and many others), «deliberative democracy» (Forester, 1999; Elster, 1998; Friedmann, 1987; etc.), «communicative planning» (Sager, 1994; but also: Yftachel & Huxley, 2000), «community planning» (Wates, 1998), «community architecture» (Wates & Knevitt, 1987), and so on. Such a multiplicity of interpretation perhaps derives from the different meaning of the term. "Participation", in fact, is used to indicate two different behaviours: the first one concerns communication (i.e.: to make something known, to inform someone about something); the second refers to sharing interests, opinions, situations or experiences. Being «the action or

fact of partaking, having or forming a part of», it could be «either transitive or intransitive; either moral, amoral or immoral; either forced or free; either manipulative or spontaneous. Transitive forms of participation are [...] oriented towards a specific goal or target. [...] in its intransitive forms, the subject lives the partking process without any predefined purpose» (Rahnema, 1992).

In Italy, the more recent decades witness an evolution of the meaning of the concept of "participation". Different phases can be distinguished (Giusti, 2000): the first one is political and ideological, wherein participation is a tool for social conflicts involving planners' politically-oriented "expert knowledge". This phase is strictly associated with the claims emerged during the '68's struggles and consists of the experiences of the "consigli di quartiere" ("neighbourhood councils") within the frame of both the crisis of traditional mass parties and the process of administrative decentralisation of the early 70s (see: Elia *et al*., 1977). A second phase (only apparently interrupted during the 80s) concerns the '77 movement, involving both the feminist (Friedmann, 1992b; Maggio, 1996; Massey, 1994; Sandercock & Forsyth, 1990) and the environmentalist movement and generating a multiplicity (Paba, 1996; 1998) of different self-organised and locally focused pathways – «thousands of tiny empowerments», as Sanderkock (1998) would say – aimed at occupying the empty space due to the loss of traditional mass parties in order to answer the emerging social demand.

The third phase of the 80s and 90s is characterised by the development of participatory techniques and methodologies aimed at the effectiveness of governance in order to face the complexity of the contemporary society by reducing ideological and social conflicts through a re-framing process, in which conflicting images are de-constructed and then re-constructed by highlighting possible shared visions, in order to prevent or at least to mitigate the inhabitants' resistence against public projects. Planners' role, therefore, changes, as they are intended as "facilitators" that are substantially not interested in substantive issues, being them mainly focused on procedures. From a theoretical point of view, such an approach can be intended as influenced by the Habermasian (1984) view of deliberative democracy that tends to overlook differences and to replace them with an idea of a rational actor following the principle of reasoned argumentation.

Not surprisingly, during this phase, participation often becomes a useful rethoric, a sort of «new tiranny» (Cooke & Kothari, 2001) and an «essentially contested concept» (Day, 1997). Not surprisingly, in fact, the comforting recipe of standardised and self-referential participatory "best practices" is often seen by spontaneous (and mistrustful) social movements (Scoppetta, 2013a) as corresponding to the first five – «manipulation», «therapy», «informing», «consultation», «placation» – of Arnstein's (1969) «ladder of citizens participation» since it supposes mainly cooperative interactive networks and denies the existence of conflicts. Thus, it is consequently interpreted as embedded in a «system maintaining» and not in a «system transforming» (Chawla & Heft, 2002) approach, revealing the «suspicious intentions» (De Carlo, 1980) of the rhetoric on civic engagement in planning processes. In this sense, it is worth highlighting that, despite the pervasive spread of participatory planning practices, in advanced countries exclusionary processes are more and more widening (Thomas, 1997; see also: Madanipour *et al*., 2000), as interactive forms of planning and governance can develop also through an exclusionary mechanism aimed at overcoming weak and not formally represented actors, while including a limited set of institutional or quasi-institutionals acknowledged interest groups, with a clear reduction of collective control on decision making (see: Forester, 1989).

The current phase is related to neo-liberal globalisation and the consequent need to a different and less contradictory development model (see: Sullo, 2002; Gerso & de Souza, 2002). Thus, on the background of the current crisis of representative democracy and the need of renewing it (Gross & Singh, 1986; see also: De Micheli *et al*., 2010; Magnaghi, 2002), the term "participation" tends more and more to coincide with "self-government" (see: Magnaghi, 2000; Ferraresi, 2002), by progressively shifting from conflicts to sustainable proposals, i.e.: by enlarging the content of participatory processes from specific local problems (such as the quality of life and common goods) to wider issues that involve a radical rethinking of the current pruduction processes, way of living and power relationships (see: Paba, 2002; see also: Harvey, 1999), by focusing on the empowerment of the inhabitants towards the construction of an active citizenship (see, e.g.: Paba & Perrone, 2003; Paba & Paloscia, 1999; Crosta, 2002; see also: Friedmann, 1987; 1992; 1999). Within such a frame, planners' distinctive "expert knowledge" consists of Forester's «critical listening» (Forester, 1989; see also: Giusti, 1995; Sclavi, 2000). On such a background, participation does not focus on rationality, but rather on building relationships (i.e.: face-to-face, body-to-body relationships) and, consequently, on truth,

sharing, feelings and emotions, by including them into decision-making interaction (see: Forester, 1999). In short, participation implies «the intelligence of emotions» (Nussbaum, 2001).

4 INVOLVING KIDS IN PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES

On the background of the "participatory turn", recent years witness a multiplying of planning practices based on the involvement of children and kids (see: Hart, 1997), but too often such experiences are to be framed within top-down processes where children and kids play an "ornamental" role, as they cannot really modify the already established projects and interventions.

By contrast, the most interesting Italian experience are included in bottom-up practices that have been carried out in regions such as Tuscany or Emilia Romagna (see, e.g.: Paba, 2000), where the involvement of children and kids is not aimed at designing "bordered zones" for children only, but public urban spaces that are accesible for all, as kids' condition represent diversity, which is to be placed «as cornerstone» of planners' «prescription for urban reform» (Talen, 2006a; see also: 2006b; Forester, 2009; Young, 1990; Low *et al*., 2005; Watson, 2006; Perrone, 2010a). In this sense, the aim of such projects goes beyond a mere physical transformation of places, being the major goal to construct a process in which children and kids are no longer seen by administrators as a "niche" sector, but rather as a relevant crossing issue, as it can methodologically turn useful for the involvement of further weak actors.

It is not a coincidence, however, that the most interesting experiences are carried out by public administrations that adhere to the "Charter for a new municipium"[1], where "new municipium" means the outcome of a process aimed at transforming local municipalities from bureaucratic administration offices towards self-government social workshops, as its first target consists of establishing a new relationship betwwen elected and voters, which are more and more dispossessed of any decision-making by the overriding power of economic reasons. This implies introducing alongside elective democracy institutes new decision-making "spaces" that are designed to include – going beyond the notion of long-term representatives, only elected every four or five years – the largest number of actors representing the local social-economic context, in order to build in plain and everyday language shared future scenarios and rules, thus enabling participation and extending it to actors that usually have no voice in institutional decisions through intermediate forms between representative (i.e.: through vote) and direct (i.e.: popular assembly, referendum, etc.) democracy. A theoretical reference in this sense can be individuated in Mouffe's view of agonistic political action (2000), implying the domestication of antagonistic political processes into an agonistic one where the different stakeholders are acknowledged as legitimate adversaries. Structured participation paths (such as the Aalborg charter and the Agenda 21 engagements) are integrated into decision-making processes (i.e.: plans, designs and policies) in all the different phases without pre-defined bureaucratic limits and become ordinary instruments for territorial, environmental and economic government and the basis for future "local constitutions" ispired by medieval European municipal statutes, adapted to the empowerment of the different voices of today's society.

Within such a frame, participatory experiences with children and kids have been carried out as a part of ordinary educational programs (see, e.g.: Mortari, 2001), in order to interrelate the learning and design dimension, by making more autonomous teachers in both organising labs and workshops and interrelating with public administrators through the construction of common languages and innovative procedures. In fact, the major goal (also from an "educational" point of view) concerns the improvement of ordinary administrative routines due to the interaction with so unusual social actors.

In this sense, many critical aspects may emerge: first of all, the difficult for public administrators (that need immediate and visible results) in accepting the uncertainty of outcomes characterising this kind of experiences where, despite pre-established patterns, unexpected feedbacks to be further implemented can derive from practice. Time to be spent is another crucial factor, since not only children's and adults' view of time is very different, but also public administrations and schools have different but well-established

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[1] Among the several workshops held in the Porto Alegre World Social Forum (2001), LaPEI has promoted the workshop "Self-sustainable local development: new municipalities' roles and tasks, and the valorization of local actors' social networks for a bottom-up globalization". Within it (merged with the one held by the Association "Démocratiser Radicalement la Démocratie"), the idea of a "Charter for a new municipium" has been proposed, discussed and submitted to the Forum for approval.

routines, needs and time horizons. Schools, however, are an important resource (Scoppetta & Scoppetta, 2013), as they can act as means of contact and dialogue between parallel networks that could never interact otherwise: not only teachers and public administrators or different administrative sectors, but also children's families and neighbours.

Difficulties clearly emerges even when the adopted methodology implies a playful dimension (see: Pecoriello, 2000). This is especially the case of workshops based on role games aimed at highlighting conflicts – between administrators and teachers, children's desires on public spaces and real feasibility of the proposed projects – in order to overcome them. Administrators, in fact, are forced to use their emotional sphere and their imaginative emphaty by overcoming their ansieties and fears: a municipal office, in fact, is really a "safer" context than a classroom in a primary school! By contrast, administrators seem to feel more at ease in the case of participatory games in public spaces, in which they can play the role of not directly and emotionally involved promoters (i.e.: spectators). This is the case of games (e.g.: drawing from Monopoly or similar) that can be intended as explorative devices for non-expert audience aimed at exemplifying what is really at stake in certain urban projects, by stimulating public debate and giving voice to alternative scenarios to be used as for long-term objectives (e.g.: developing design guidelines).

A further "educational" goal, however, regards planners, who are necessarily forced – following Schön (1993) – to a self-reflective work that could imply the need of modify the initially defined methods and objectives and, more generally, to widely rethink well-rooted ideas on what a project is, being them asked to design a project that «enables diversity» (Talen, 2006a) by constructing relationships rather than mere urban spaces. However, as underlined by Ferraro (1995) in his article on Patrick Geddes in India, planning itself is nothing but «the great game of city life» where the planner is just one player among many others and the final result depends on their interactions…

5 UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S DISTINCTIVE LANGUAGE

A real and effective involvement of children in participatory practices requires an understanding of their own distinctive language. In fact, as Poli (2006) underlines, space is usually thought as a real, objective and external construction, as a mere container of objects that exists in everyone's mind. By contrast, space actually is the result of a slow cognitive development that derives from perceptions, experiences, culture, individual and collective history.

In this sense, the geographical Euclidean space, where objects are placed following an exact metric relationship, does not exist: it is nothing but a whole of logic calculations which are elaborated by our mind in order to organise our perceptions about the territory, where objects independently exist (Dematteis, 1985). The ontological security of a map as a map cannot be automatically presumed, as its "truth" mirrors the ideological frame of its creator, so that a place has a different meaning that depends on its uses and users: a non-cultivated field, in fact, has a different meaning for a developer who want to built or for a group of kids who want to play football. Spatial concepts such as "distance" and "proximity" clearly show the ways in which space is a highly subjective social costruct, as the former is related to notions of strangerness and the latter rather concerns familiarity: the distance from a place which is known as enjoyable will therefore be perceived as shorter than that from a sad place (e.g.: a cemetery). In the same way, the physical experience plays a relevant role, as a distance will be differently perceived if the street slopes downwards or upwards. Furthermore, although time plays a relevant role in the perception of space (a distance, in fact, can be measured by the time needed to cover it), geometrical maps usually ignore it as well as they cannot capture the complexity of real space, as what is represented of an object is nothing but its measure.

Historical maps were different: subjective perceptions, symbols and narrations were part of the representation of space. Ancient maps represented a «hodological space» deriving from the Greek "*hodòs*" ("path") (Janni, 1984), wherein the perception of spaces follows a line according to a "route perspective", as in the case of the well-known Tabula Peutigeriana. Cadastrial maps required the physical experience of walking across the territory, so that a variety of local measurement systems derived from human pace and eyesight (Farinelli, 1981).
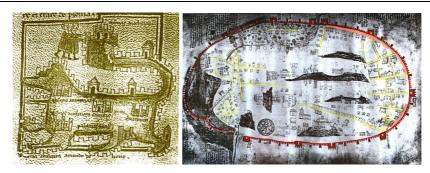
Fig. 1: On the left: "Roma in forma de lione" ("Rome in the form of a lion", rearranged by the Author), a medieval symbolic representation of the city of Rome. On the right: a further medieval representation of the city of Rome (rearranged by the Author), with a never existed oval form of the urban walls. Some of the seven hills, a few buildings (churches and towers) and an ancient aqueduct stand in the empty space inside the urban wall, witnessing the decline of the city after the fall of the Roman Empire. A more detailed representation of cultivated areas close to urban walls highlights the abandonment of the countryside during the Middle Age.

A "genealogical" inquire can clearly show how geometrical cartography has been progressively naturalised and institutionalised across space and time as a particular form of scientific knowledge and practice following the emerging of modern national states: maps, as Harley (1989) suggests, are a tool for the exercise of external power, in which plans and intentions of powerful agents become realised. But maps are also provided with a power internal to cartography consisting of the ability to categorise the world and normalise certain views of it, thereby influencing us at the level of meaning and experience. Many critical theorists from the Frankfurt School onward have echoed Weber's argument that the development of modern capitalism has been tied to that of an instrumental rationality in human relations and communication, with maps as one the most powerful and pervasive tool. Spatial sciences, in Lefebvre's (1974) view, are primary agents in the reproduction of capitalism: as they interfere, through a sort of inner colonisation, with the possibilities in everyday life through the use of space, by pre-judging the subjective world according to rational/bureaucratic typifications. According to Corner (1999), in fact, territory does not precede a map, as space becomes territory through bounding practices that include mapping. Thus, given that places are planned and built on the basis of maps, space itself is nothing but a representation of the map: the «differentiation between the real and the representation is no longer meaningful», as maps and territories are co-constructed, being the former not a reflection of the world, but its re-creation (see also: Baudrillard, 1994).
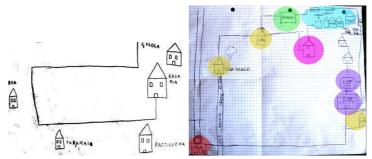

Fig. 2: Gabriele's representation of the neighbourhood (on the left) consists of his home-school daily route, with a small number of landmarks (i.e.: shops where he usually buys his mid-morning snack or football collector cards). Furthermore, the distance between the street and the buildings clearly reveals the urban pattern based on 1 or 2-families-houses, provided with a private garden. It is worth noting how, despite home-school proximity, the route appears surprisingly long. Although more articulated and provided with both 2 and 3-dimensional methods – the latter concerning only her primary and secondary school (dark blue) – Denise's representation (on the right) is quite similar. Differences regard well-known "emotional" landmarks, consisting of her friends' homes (yellow), some shops (blue), a catholic church (violet) and a park (green). Furthermore, two streets are drawn in a different way: one is Denise's address (her home in red); the other one is where her best friend's home is placed. It is worth underlining, however, that Denise (11 years old) usually goes to school by her mum's car.

Analogies exist between historical and children's representations, as the latter do not concern Lefebvre's (1974) «espace conçu» ("conceived space"), i.e.: space as a mental construct, the space of «savoir» ("knowledge", i.e.: expert knowledge), the (abstract, geometrical) «representation of space». Children's representations rather refer to both Lefebvre's «espace perçu» ("perceived space") and «espace vécu» ("lived space"), being the former (real) space as (materially practiceable) physical form and the latter the space of everyday life and social relations, which is produced and modified over time through its use and

whose understanding refers to «*connaissance*», i.e.: informal or local forms of knowledge (involving symbolism and meaning) that is gained though personal experience. In this sense, being it at the same time both real and imagined, such «space of representation» is both the medium and the outcome of human spatial relationships (see particularly: Iori, 1996).
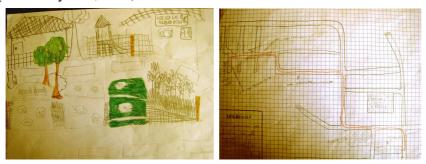

Fig. 3: Federico's view of the neighbourhood (on the left) corresponds to his own home, a familiar "island" around which recognisable "objects" can be grouped: a detailed represented shop, the children garden, which – in the reality – is located elsewhere. Both a dustbin and a tree play the role of landmarks: Federico, in fact, has first drawn them and these are the only coloured "objects". By contrast, the legend and streets' names in Riccardo's representation (on the right) clearly highlight an attempt of scientific description (not by chance he is among the best students in his classroom!), which, however, is framed within a scarcely lived and experienced space without any landmark (with the exception of the children garden as an anonymous rectangle).

Children, in fact, do not draw what they "know", but rather what they daily experience, without a clear distinction between reality and fantasy, as their representations (especially at the level of nursery and primary school) consist of a non-structured non-hierarchical dis-homogeneous whole of objects and events – also including a dream or a nightmare, a desire or a fear, a sketch from a television program or a landscape from a video game – to be organised through a cultural process into their own "mental archives" by using a non-detailed typological and often two-dimension representation, where the aim is to classify rather than to describe the real object (see: Pierantoni, 2001).
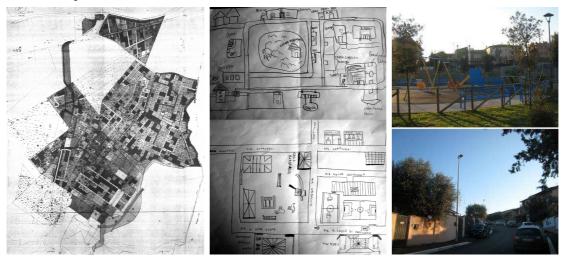

Fig. 4: On the left: recovery plan (1996) of the settlement called "Case Rosse", in the eastern periphery of the city of Rome. The orthogonal grid witnesses the typical original parcellation of sprawled illegal developments that shaped the periphery of Rome since post-WWII. As he would like to become an architect, Marco uses a set square as appropriate tool for drawing his map (in the centre, below) where space is formulated on the basis of extension and thought in Cartesian terms of co-ordinates, lines and planes. But such Euclidean effort finally ends to be contradicted, as Marco's emotional relation with his daily lived space unavoidably tends to re-emerge from his mental "scientific" re-construction of space: the represented playground is larger than the real and it actually is not located close to the football pitch, which is drawn in a more detailed way than the school (*sic!*). Thus, what at a first glance could be intended as an on-going "colonisation" by "expert knowledge" over Lefebvrian *connaissance* seems rather to be the result of Marco's both daily spatial by feet experience and social practice. As he also goes to school by feet, Lorenzo's map (on the right, above) is similar to the previous one. Differences concern the presence of an abandoned and apparently "wild" and dangerous area as well as the names of the different shopkeepers, the latter revealing how his spatial experience is linked to social relationships.

In this sense, drawing is one of their own way for knowing the world by giving a name to each thing as ancient or primitive population did. In fact, as Chatwin (1988) tells us about Australian aboriginals, «each totemic ancestor, while travelling through the country, was thought to have scattered a trail of words and musical notes along the line of his footprints […] these Dreaming-tracks lay over the land as "ways" of

communication between the most far-flung tribes. A song […] was both map and direction-finder. Providing you knew the song, you could always find your way across the country. […] In theory, at least, the whole of Australia could be read as a musical score. […] By singing the world into existence […] the Ancestors had been poets in the original sense of *poiesis*, meaning "creation". […] Aboriginals could not believe the country existed until they could see and sing it – just as, in the Dreamtime, the country had not existed until the Ancestors sang it». Within such a framework, landmarks play a relevant role, as children's space is a sort of "unknown archipelago" wherein some familiar "islands", made by recognisable fragments, emerge.

Fig. 5: At a first glance, Aurora' representation of the neighbourhood seems to be a completely imagined one: there is neither her home nor the school or the orthogonal settlement pattern. Such a "rural idyll" actually represents the landscape surrounding the neighbourhood (i.e.: a fragment of the historical landscape once called "Roman Campagna") as well as the contemporary socially constructed imagery of a peaceful, not congested and green "urban-rural village", whose single-family houses are more affordable (although scarcely connected) than a flat in the city centre.

6   KIDS AND THE CITY

Despite the shift occurred in general planning theories and practices from modernist "rational" approaches based on zoning and functional separation to a more complex view of cities and societies, what concerns children's urban space still remains anchored to the old logic based on separation and aimed at control. Such spaces clearly mirror the ways in which contemporary cities are organised according to a generational order, i.e.: the pattern regulating the relationship between adults and children (see: Harden, 2000; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Valentine, 2004; Zeiher 2003), where childhood is represented in a double Apollonian-Dionysiac perspective, the former to be protected into "safe" fenced areas; the latter to be tamed as they pretends to occupy adults' urban spaces. In this sense, children may be seen as social actors provided with a «pre-determined spatiality» (Satta, 2012b; see also: 2010; 2012a): on the one hand, the general progressive reduction of public open spaces; on the other, detailed designed age-based spaces devoted to children only, which are rhetorically promoted as giving them space, whereas, by contrast, such devoted and often fenced spaces actually subtract their the city's space as a whole.

In fact, the separation of children's playground from the adults' urban spaces as well as the rigid division among different ages not only prevents lively inter-generational relationships, but this also denies the idea of spontaneous, creative and self-organised games in the urban space, being fenced playgrounds the sole place in which the right to play (for adults too) is allowed. Furthermore, mass-produced equipments in children's gardens and playgrounds not only tend to influence their design – which will thus be characterised by horizontality, by avoiding hills or depressions – but they also and particularly imply a passive idea of children's and kids' games as a monotonous unchangeable and mechanical practice and prevent children from experiencing an imaginative self-construction of their own space based on the inventive use of *objects trouvés*. In this way, such kind of fenced and controlled children's gardens, where only pre-determined actions are allowed, keep them from autonomously managing their space and time and seem to be designed in order to construct passive subjectivities.

An example in this sense is given by the (neoliberal and rent-guided) Open Space Strategy of the city of London (see: Scoppetta, 2010), in which children are bordered into separated and hierarchically articulated areas[2] where the interaction among different age is substantially not allowed (more generally, on London's

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[2] Examples are given by: Local Areas for Play or Doorstep Play Space (LAP) for under-6-years-old children (where mothers can interact with other mothers only!); Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAP) for 6-to-8-years-old children; Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAP) for children and kids of primary schools; Multi Use Game Areas (MUGA), i.e.: playgrounds where the colours on the ground indicate the allowed games.

urban strategies as neoliberal urban policies, see: Scoppetta & Scoppetta, 2013). It is to be underlined that the Open Space Strategy is presented as including "partecipatory" processes, but the latter are based on an audit methodology where participation is intended as a mere opinion (or marketing) poll aimed at assessing the satisfaction degree of users (consumers?) and based on predetermined existing audit forms[3], where individual criteria are grouped under a set of pre-established categories in order to obtain cumulative scores for each one and a succint set of headings for the graphic and spatial representation of the result from the audit process[4]. In fact, «the objective is to gain information about the nature and quality of each open space and provide a comparative assessment across the local authority area. It provides a snapshot in time and should form the basis for future monitoring. To ensure consistency it should be carried out by a small team who are properly briefed and trained in the survey methodology. […] The audit should include a qualitative assessment of the features present within the open space, which is generally a score on a 1-5 or 1-10 range, reflecting condition and quality. Scores may, with care, be aggregated to give an overall indication of quality»[5]. In short: what is improperly called "participation" actually is nothing but a step of a typical top-down approach.

By constrast, a different example is given by the so-called "Junk playgrounds" conceptualised in the 30s by the Danish architect C.T Soresen as non-defined spaces to be freely modeled by children's imagination and fantasy through available pieces of equipment and materials. The first Junk playground was realised in 1943 during the Nazi occupation of the city of Copenhagen as a way to contrast and challenge authoritarian educational methods that characterised Nazism's ideology – aimed at constructing passive soldiers rather than active citizens, with a crucial role played by well-organised sport activities of children – and to provide children with a democratic education (see: Gutman & de Coninck, 2007).

As Lefebvre (1974) argues, however, the more and more homogeneous and commodified space of our contemporary society is conceived before it is fully lived and spatial practices, on which our knowledge of the world is based, emerge much more from representations and abstractions than from our daily experience, so that space itself becomes a representation – an overturning that Baudrillard (1994) calls «hyperreality» – by making us more easily manipulable by ideology. But, if space is constituted through mapping practices, this means that constructing maps can "activate" territory, by "remaking" it over and over again. In this sense, understanding children's representational language through their involvement in planning activities could really help us to imagine smarter urban spaces that enable diversity and active citizenship.

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[3] Such as: the Green Flag Award score sheet or the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management checklist to assessing sites in Benchmarking and Performance Indicators for Best Value.

[4] According to the criteria expressed in: "Green Space Strategy. A good practice guide", first published in 2004 and then reprinted in 2006 by CABE. See also: OPDM, "Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Open Space, Sport and Recreation", July 2002; DTLR, "Green Spaces, Better Spaces. The final report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce", 2002; OPDM, Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion Guide to Planning Policy Guidance Note 17, Sept. 2002. All these references can be downloaded at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister website (www.opdm.gov.uk).

[5] In: Greater London Authority, "Open Space Strategy. Best Practice Guidance", Sept. 2008 (www.london.gov.uk).

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8   ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.