Child Friendly Cities: Research with children in Aktau

“The sea is one of the heritages of our city Aktau” from Yesenszhan aged 14 years, male Aktau city.

Final Aktau Report 2015
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Summary of results

Aktau City
Aktau is the smallest of the four cities in the study. Located on the Caspian Sea in a geographically and historically unique area in the west of Kazakhstan. The city itself is quite young, set up predominantly to support uranium prospectors and oil workers in the 1960s, the apartment blocks are very soviet style with the city having very few planned or landscaped parks and play spaces. Overwhelming the children spoke of the sea front as the main feature of the town. A boulevard sweeps the coastline throughout the city and contains a significant paved area with lights, playground equipment, seats and small café’s scattered along it which children included in their drawings and discussions. While the apartment blocks themselves are quite run down and courtyards are often just dirt and dust, the young children particularly spoke mostly positively of their local environment. Many of the young children said they loved where they lived, were happy, and Amir aged 8 told us: "When I get back from school I help my mom. My mom sends me to the shop when there is no bread at home. I live a very joyful life. When I finish doing homework I go outside to play with my friends. I love my life". Many children said they especially loved living close to the seafront. Bibizhan, aged 14 told us: “the seafront which was built recently, there are a lot of playgrounds there. Not only young people walk there, but also children with their parents. One can rent a bike and ride it there. In summer you can swim, the water is clean there” Many children also spoke about their family villages where their grandparents often still lived and where they visited. These villages were important because it is here where children said there was lots of grass and cattle. The main concerns children had though were consistent with living in a smaller regional city that was not close to one of the large modern cities like Astana or Almaty. Children were concerned they did not have educational opportunities they spoke a lot about going to university and having a better education. For the older teenagers there concerns were the lack of things to do, being bored and not having many youth spaces within the city. Having interesting places to enjoy, more greenery, parks and play spaces, amusement parks and shopping malls were all on the list of improvements. One child even mentioned that they wanted the chance to see concerts by famous musicians and another was concerned about young people and drug addiction. There were overall concerns about the quality of the environment due to the dirt, dust and water quality (the water is all desalinated water) and a couple of the older teenagers noted their concerns about the possibility of nuclear radiation from the old nuclear reactor that was on the outskirts of town.

The key changes children wanted to make their neighbourhood and their city more child friendly:

• Children were concerned about helpless animals on the streets and said they wanted a nursery for animals built.
• Children wanted shelters or refuges for homeless people and young people who were in need of support, whether due to drug addiction or having problems at home.
• Children wanted more variety of places to visit. Many said their was a need to build educational and entertainment places for children, especially teenagers who were bored and had nothing to do, which often led to incidents.
• Because the city is on the steppe there is not much vegetation, so children wanted more parks with more greenery, so there were places to walk and to breathe fresh air.
• Children wanted the streets and buildings to be cleaned up. For the council to get rid of the trash and clean the buildings with drawings and swear words on them.
• Children identified the lack of consultation and engagement with children about community projects and issues that are important to them and asked to be included in city planning.
• Children identified that they did not have adults outside their families, in their community who would be able to help them if they needed support.
• Children said they were not properly prepared with the information they needed to be able to respond and be safe in the situation of hazards or emergencies in their community.

The next stage for the city would be to take the data obtained from the studies with these key recommendations combined with the objective quantitative data obtained through city census data, and produce a strategy for the city that is reflective of the needs of children. This strategy should include short and long term goals and focus with a focus on linking these to the core indicators devised by the National committee that will be the focus of ongoing monitoring and reporting. The city would then implement actions to address the issues identified and measure the progress of those actions over time. To evaluate the impact of these actions the city should then seek to re-engage with the children and their communities to ensure the actions have had real benefits in the lives of the children and their families.
Background

What is a child friendly city?

A child friendly city is a place where children’s rights and needs are at the centre of good community planning and policy. It is place where adults listen to children and young people and take what they say seriously. The principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) highlight the responsibility of the States Parties to uphold the child's right to live in a safe, clean and healthy environment and the right to engage in free play, leisure, and recreation. Kazakhstan became a member of the United Nations on the 2nd March in 1992 and signed the convention on the rights of the child in 1994. The UNICEF Child friendly cities initiative started in 2006 in the Republic of Kazakhstan as the means for creating an environment where cities would begin to value the importance of implementing strategies that addressed the rights of the child. The UNICEF country office in Kazakhstan acts as a central technical advisory body to the National government and in the promotion and implementation of the CFCI. The Child Rights Protection Committee was set up in 2006 through the Ministry of Education and reports directly to the Minister. They are the main national advocates for Child Friendly Cities. The Kazakhstan Children in Cities, child friendly cities research project was implemented throughout 2014. Funded by UNICEF Kazakhstan it was a child friendly participatory research program engaging 177 children in research about their lives in the cities where they are living. The study was conducted in four cities of Astana, Semey, Kyrgyzorda and Aktau, with approximately 40 children from each city being involved. The aim of the study was to build capacity in order to create opportunities for children to be involved in collecting data about their lives in many neighbourhoods around the city. These four cities had identified they would like to develop local capacity in order to conduct research with children to compliment their national UNICEF child friendly cities recognition process. This report focuses just on one city Aktau, the final report for the project includes all fur cities. The concept of a child friendly city is not based on an ideal end state or standard model rather it is a framework with the goal of creating a city and community wide commitment to addressing the needs of children, investing in their future and creating policies and strategies to achieve this. Central to achieving this goal is the need to develop baseline data with children about lives in the city, that is, to understand how to best provide for children by identifying the gaps, issues and challenges. The study was conducted in the city with the support of local adult mentors working alongside the children who took on the role as the co-researchers. These mentors, who included local teachers, UNICEF staff, local government staff and university students, were provided with training on the child friendly cities initiative and child focused participatory research. The research methods the children used to collect their city wide data include photography, drawing, guided tours, surveys and interviews. The research was conducted with children as part of their school program with the support of the school Principals and staff.

Theoretical Analysis

In this introduction to some of the contemporary issues for children in cities around the globe I have endeavoured to provide some starting points for considering the theoretical areas for which the data emanating from the participatory study of child friendliness with children in Kazakhstan will be analysed. Framing this analysis is the Circles of Social Life method that begins with four domains of social practice and meaning: ecology, economics, culture and politics. The following table provides a quick sketch of the four domains and how they relate to some of the key articles from the convention on the rights of the child. The CROC is the central platform through which child friendly cities is built and therefore is essential to always use it as the central reference point for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains of Social Practice</th>
<th>Example from Convention Rights of Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecology</strong></td>
<td>Article 6 — ‘right to life’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— from materials and energy to embodiment and food (including physical health)</td>
<td>Article 24 — ‘right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health ... adequate food, clean drinking water, consideration of dangers and risks of environmental pollution’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economics</strong></td>
<td>Article 23 — ‘right of the disabled child to participate equally in community life ... ’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— from production and resourcing to wealth and distribution</td>
<td>Article 26 — ‘the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance ... ’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Article 27 — ‘right ... to a standard of living adequate for the child ... ’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Urban Sustainability: Domains of Social Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Article 7</th>
<th>‘right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>— from identity and engagement to enquiry and learning (including mental health)</td>
<td>Article 28</td>
<td>‘right of the child to education ‥: ’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Article 29</td>
<td>‘education directed to develop respect for nature’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Article 31</td>
<td>‘right of the child to rest and leisure; to engage in play and recreational activities ‥: ’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Article 13</td>
<td>‘right to freedom of expression.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— from organization and governance to ethics and accountability</td>
<td>Article 14</td>
<td>‘right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Article 15</td>
<td>‘right to freedom of association’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Article 16</td>
<td>‘right to the protection of the law”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These domains align easily with the key CFC Index dimensions provided in the Kazakhstan Child Friendly Cities Index. The CFC index dimensions include Children’s good start to life; Children protection from harm; Children’s education and knowledge; Children’s decent standard of living; Children’s play and cultural activities; and children’s civic participation. This index will in time become the framework for a set of nationally identified indicators that cities in Kazakhstan will monitor progress of child friendliness in the process of being recognised as child friendly cities. The following box illustrates how the theoretical domains of urban sustainability connect with the National CFC Index dimensions. This will be discussed in more detail within the report.

Domains of Social Practice alignment with Kazakh Child Friendly Cities Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban Sustainability Domains of Social Practice</th>
<th>Kazakh National CFC Index Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecology — from materials and energy to embodiment and food (including physical health)</td>
<td>Children Good Start to Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics — from production and resourcing to wealth and distribution</td>
<td>Children’s Decent Standard of Living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture — from identity and engagement to enquiry and learning (including mental health)</td>
<td>Children’s Education and Knowledge Children’s Play and Cultural Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics — from organization and governance to ethics and accountability</td>
<td>Children’s Protection from Harm Children’s Civic Participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participatory Research Methods Overview**

The aim of child focused participatory research workshops is to provide the opportunity for children using a variety of methods, collect data about their experiences of their neighbourhood and to evaluate the quality of the life in their cities for children. The four cities included in the study provide a diversity of city sizes and contexts, with a variety of different age group children and different language groups. The idea was to provide an opportunity to illustrate the flexibility of the workshop methods in these alternative settings to see how flexible they would be to be incorporated in many diverse cities found in Kazakhstan. All the cities involved have been interested in the opportunities to be involved in the national CFC recognition program and by participating in the children’s research workshop were hoping to build capacity in the city in order to be able to replicate the methodology in the future as part of their ongoing monitoring of child friendliness. There are a number methods available to incorporate into the design of the participatory research workshops the follow provides a summary of some of the key methods often used in child friendly cities research projects.

**Surveys**

Surveys are a valuable tool for acquiring large scale data sets on children’s lives that can quantified for use by policy makers and government departments locally, and for comparisons nationally, or internationally. The adult researchers filled in the surveys for young children through a dialogue technique, and with the older children they filled them in themselves either with the support of an adult or if they were confident they often filled them in by themselves. The surveys can be designed by children or by outsiders. In this case we used predesigned surveys. One was a modified UNICEF CFC survey and the other a global CIM survey. The different surveys may be for children, child carers, community members, or government officials whose role it is to support children’s needs.
Comparing differences between the different groups within a community or even other cities or countries can often be very illuminating for children. Surveys can be paper based or online. All children in this study were given paper-based surveys in either Russian or Kazakh language depending on their preference. The data coming from our community surveys is about providing key trends or themes that can then be followed up in other aspects of the research. There is no intention to provide reliable quantitative data that is generalizable for a city. The survey data was entered on to excel spread sheets and then graphed for each city and then all cities combined.

**Interviews and storytelling**

Interviews and stories can help to bring our attention the way we come to know places through the lives of significant people, significant places or events. The stories we can tell about the local area can include ourselves or be about others. They may be the recounting of an experience we have had personally or they may be a story that has been passed down to us from their experience or passed down over many years through many others peoples retelling. Interviews are the basis for most storytelling and children display great skills in recording the stories of themselves, their friends and peers and other community members. The interviews and storytelling can be audio recorded or videoed for later reference and use. In this study children were interviewed while they participated in the drawing activities and when they shared their photographs. Interview notes were written by the research mentors on to the drawings and photograph transcript sheets and were entered and translated into visual data templates for each individual child alongside the images. The templates were combined to create visual reports combining all children in each city. Additionally, in some cases children were interviewed on video and asked to provide short concise video entry-addressing adults about their concerns to improve the city.

**Drawings and mental maps**

Participants drawings of their urban environment, which can be called a mental map or cognitive map, provide a useful tool for discussing and exploring: what children know and how they experience the urban landscape; their range of movement around the spaces; their favourite or least favourite places and why. When asking children to draw their neighbourhood or their place it is important not to give them too much context. A mental map is image of a place that all animals create in their mind. It is our mental GPS system and for survival is an essential capability allowing us to find our way home, know where safe or unsafe places are, what to expect when we turn a corner in the street. By not describing in detail what children are to include, it means we can have a better sense of how the child comes to imagine themselves as a ‘body’ located with the physicality of the place. Conceptually, it is believed that the more animals physically experience an environment the more detailed the mental map will be, so it provides insights into the way a child constructs their place knowing, their attachment to a place or the significance of objects in a place (home, park), the social networks and connections may be obvious, mobility and accessibility how they move through the place; and what they constitute as ‘my place’. A short interview or debriefing discussion where the key aspects of the map/drawing are discussed and unpacked with an adult is conducted with the child. Or alternatively, especially with older children, they might write about the drawing or mental map themselves. For the dream drawing children are asked to draw a place with all the qualities in it that are important for children. They can draw on experiences of places they have been before in their city or other cities, or it can be an imaginary place. The interview or notes children write about this drawing help us to imagine what are children’s priorities for designing a child friendly and sustainable city. It is important again to allow children to feel free to express the selves in a way that is creative and inspiring and not limiting. Some children say I can’t draw, but this shouldn’t be a barrier. The dream drawing therefore might be modelled from clay, a digital collage on their IPAD, a collection of photographs. All children in the study completed a cognitive map (neighbourhood drawing) and a dream child friendly city drawing on to an A4 sheet of paper. These drawings were then scanned and inserted in the visual templates and also saved in folders for later reference.

**Photography and Photovoice**

Photographs taken by young people are valuable tools for gathering information on their urban environment. It is important that the participants have a chance to experiment using the equipment so a number of focused tasks to give them experience is important. The use of interviews to support an analysis of the photographs is critical. Just having photographs and making adult judgements based on there content does little to provide the valuable insights that children data can provide? Photographic methods are often used to compliment or support other methods, for example interviews and stories, behaviour mapping and guided tours. Not all children in the study had the
opportunity to participate in the Photovoice activity. Children were given the opportunity to use a disposable camera, take photographs using a camera or use an IPAD or smartphone. Some children also selected photographs from their own family collection to bring along. Children were interviewed about their photographs and had the chance to share photographs with other children if they wanted to speak in groups about shared experiences. Photographic techniques were used only in the study sites of Semey and Astana.

Spatial and behaviour mapping
Participants spatial maps provide a valuable resource for understanding children’s independent mobility and why. That is, where children are allowed to go unaccompanied by adults in their neighbourhood. Behaviour mapping is a research technique that can be carried out in a locale and involves looking at the way children and/or adults move through or locate themselves in certain areas of the environment. It is especially useful to see how certain constructed environments (i.e. playgrounds, school yards, shopping malls) are being used by children and adults. This is helpful for improving the value of spaces to children’s lives. Spatial mapping wasn’t utilised in this project with children, although the researchers did go out into the community in each of the study sites and conduct their behaviour mapping activities using photographs and observations notes.

Guided tours and walking interviews
Guided tours and walking interviews of the urban environment by young people are a valuable method for understanding their perspectives on, and use of, the environment. Viewing places first hand elicits new information and serves as a catalyst for working and provoking new ways of thinking about their place. Guided tours can act as a starting point for exploring the environment or can be utilized in partnership with some of the other activities (i.e. photography, drawings). Using the scenario that you are a tour guide taking some one new to your community around the locality is an easy way to set up the method. Guided tours were utilised in both Semey and Astana. The guided tours were conducted in two different ways. Firstly, for the younger grade the tours was taken in whole group as part of an extension of the classroom research activity. The area close to the school was the main focus of the tours and children were able to use the physical environment as a stimulus to share experiences and show us examples of things they were concerned about. The group discussions were videotaped and also photographs and notes were taken during the tour. With the older children we asked them to take us on their journeys home so we could see the way they would walk to and form school. Along these routes they highlighted places where they played, places they might go shopping or play sports, they also introduced us to neighbours or shopkeepers and other people in their community who they felt contributed to their well being. On these walking home tours they also took us to busy road junctions that worried them, and took us along busy dirt roads and showed us key places of concerns, including their courtyards of their homes. Some parents and occasionally teachers accompanied the researchers on these tours.

Focus groups
Focus groups at the start of a research project can provide the opportunity for children to be partners in the research design, for them to select what most appropriate data collection techniques suit them or their community and to get them thinking about the purpose and potential of the research. Focus groups after the initial data collection provide the opportunity to explore evidence and data and analyse data, work together to consider solutions and design actions of the future. In this study, if there was any time available a short debriefing focus group was held with the group of young people so they could share with each their concerns.

From these potential methods in Aktau children engaged in drawings, (neighbourhood and dream), interviews, and child friendliness surveys as the main data collection methods.
Conducting workshops in Aktau

For children in Aktau the workshop session was run on one full day with only three of the methods used. All children and parents involved in the project completed an UWS ethics consent form before being able to participate and ethics approval was obtained from the university ethics committee.

Number and age of child researchers in Aktau

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>6-9 years</th>
<th>10-12 years</th>
<th>13-16 years</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aktau</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To support the research with the children a number of teachers and university students engaged in training workshops before the participatory workshops in order to learn about how to support the children in their data collection. Central to these training sessions was to learn about strategies to support children’s participation in authentic and ethical ways that are congruent with children’s rights. Also the role of the adult mentor was to create an environment that stimulated independence but was not patronizing about the child’s capacity, as this can be offensive to children. It was about allowing children to identify their own strengths, so by using a multi-method approach and allowing flexibility in children’s involvement it meant children could decide for themselves the type and level of participation that would be right for them.

Local university students worked as research mentors in the classrooms in Aktau.
Aktau Children’s Research Workshop Methods Overview

Session 1: How child-friendly is my community?
a. Drawing ‘My neighbourhood’ – Children are asked to draw a picture of their neighbourhood including all things important to them on it. Each individual child then had an interview where they shared information about their drawings. Alternatively some of the older children wrote their own notes.
b. Survey – Child friendliness survey was conducted in class and filled in by children or for the younger children research mentors helped to fill in the survey.

Session 2: My dreams for a child-friendly community
e. Drawing ‘My dream place’ – Children are asked to draw a picture of their dream child friendly place - putting all the things on it that would make it a place great for children.

This box provides an overview of the final workshop design.

### Aktau, Number of Child Researchers Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Neighbourhood Drawing</th>
<th>Dream Drawing</th>
<th>CFC Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aktau</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of child researchers engaged in research methods

Children’s Research Results

The following research results combine the many modes of data that was received through the multi-method approach used in the research data collection process. Therefore the results are a collection of graphs, drawings and children’s interview text and photographs. The central and most significant survey data provided was collected using the child friendliness survey. The data has been organised around the four domains of social practice supporting a child friendly and sustainable city. These include the ecological domain, the cultural domain, the economic domain and the political domain. In Aktau there were the two different age groups (8-12 years and 13-18 years) therefore the graphed survey data provides both of these cohort separately.

**Ecological domain – a clean and healthy child friendly city**

Having a clean and accessible urban environment is fundamental to children health and well-being. Especially for children living in high rise apartments, as many do in Kazakh cities, the outdoor spaces close to the buildings where children live act as central spaces for play and social engagement. Through the survey we asked the children a number of questions about the quality of the outdoor environment. These questions directly relate to many of the Children’s good start to life Kazakhstan National CFC Index indicators. The research results reveal for Aktau that the younger children were more positive about the quality of their environment then the older children. Especially we can see with the question of public toilets nearly 80% of 8-12 year olds felt they could use public toilets easily, which is around 40% more than the
older age group. Also with the quality of air the younger children were at least 10% more likely to say the air is smoke free and clean.

I drew my house. I drew it big and a tree near it. Because trees help to clean air, also apples grow on them.

Bakhytzhan, aged 8 years, male, Aktau

Similar to children from the other cities Bakhytzhan who is aged only 8 years tells us about the importance of trees in the neighbourhood to help keep the air clean.

Broadly speaking most children in Aktau felt they have enough safe drinking water at home, and the issue of air quality was quite specific to certain neighbourhoods in cities, often correlating with industries or other elements in the environment that were causing concerns about emissions of contaminants. We can see this by the spread of responses especially by the older children which shows either the issues of pollutants, unclear air may be periodic, that is it changes maybe according to different local factors possibly connected to such things as the day in the week when garbage gets connected or if it is missed, the weather that may cause changes in things such as stagnant water laying around or dirt or oil being washed into the drain systems, or where it may be specific to the geography of where children live.
Alena, a girl aged 15 years from Aktau provided a drawing of her neighbourhood and when interviewed spoke about the rubbish around the city, in particular her concerns about the graffiti on the buildings, her fear of the nuclear radiation from the nuclear reactor out of town and lack of clean air.

“Our city is a rubbish dump!! Because of the radiation there is no clean air, nothing to breathe, plants don't survive. Wherever you go, everywhere are spits, trash, buildings with drawings, swear words.

Alena, aged 15 years Aktau

In her interview about her neighbourhood drawing Yana aged 14 from Aktau was also concerned about the dusty air. This was a common complaint by children in all the cities where the study was conducted, except for Astana.

“My neighbourhood. Rubbish dump! No sightseeing places. Dusty air. Two different groups of society. A lot of incidents. Lack of educational and entertainment places. Bad people”.

Yana, aged 14 years, female Aktau

Even though the dirt, the dust, the rubbish and other issues were pertinent in children's evaluation of the ecological aspects of their neighbourhoods in most cases, there were also children spoke positively about their environment.
I drew a sea because I have good memories associated with sea. I like the sea and to spend time by the sea. I also drew a small house in the fall. I was born in the fall, that is why I like fall. I also like to walk in the rain. I like to listen to the sound of rain. After rain there is clean air, I like to watch a rainbow.

Mziya, aged 15 years, female, Aktau

This seemed to age specific. Depending on their age group children living in Aktau were more or less likely to believe there were places in the community where they could be in contact with nature. 76% of the young children believed there were places in their community to contact nature while in contrast only 29% felt this way with close to half saying it was never true. Compared to only 4% of the young children saying it was never true.

Many children in Aktau for example, spoke about the beauty of the Caspian Sea and the boulevard that has been built along its foreshore to allow the community to enjoy its beauty. Many of the young children also drew their neighbourhood and showed they had added nature to improve its qualities.

It's my house in the picture. My house, tree and flowers are in this picture as well. We have planted flowers together with my friends. I like my courtyard.

Gulnaz, aged 8 years female
Cultural domain - a learning and playful child friendly city

Culture is the emans through which we express and share our common understandings about the world we live in. For children there are key sites where culture is produced through their activities with other children and often also in partnership with adults. Schooling is the primarily means through which children are educated about the social world and through language acquisition knowledge, creative enquiry and learning they come to understand themselves and their place in the world. For this reason schooling and education is a powerful space for contestation and engagement and inclusion in school can have significant impacts on a child’s capacity to participate fully in their social world. In this the cultural domain we also discuss the role of play and leisure opportunities for children within the community.

Education

Children in the Aktau were asked to comment on their access to school and their experiences of learning when in schools. The data clearly identified that children attended school regularly in both age groups but maybe slightly higher in the younger age groups. The second question was whether children felt they were treated equally in school regardless of their gender. For the young children over 80% this was true for the older age group it was lower, and came in just under 60%.

So what happens when children are actually in school? When compared to the other cities in the research it seemed other than Semey, Aktau children were less likely to feel listened to by teachers than for example children in Astana and Kyzylorda.
Children from Aktau are almost 80% of the time stating that they learnt about protecting the environment in school. But education as Guldana age 8 years from Aktau identifies is not just about the now but also about the future in her dreams she wants to study hard and go to university.

My dream is to enter Nazarbayev University, that is why I drew it. I need to study hard to get into it.

Guldana, aged 8 years, female, Akatu

**Play and recreation**

Cities are often evaluated on their child friendliness by the number and quality of ‘child specific places’ (such as playgrounds) that are accessible to children. By doing a city services and facilities audit many city officials may list the quantity of playgrounds this number does little to really provide insights into how these playgrounds may impact on children’s quality of life. There are two elements that need to be considered with evaluating play opportunities for children. Firstly whether they exist at all and the affordances the play spaces provide. The second issue to consider is play spaces accessibility. Where is the play space in relation to a child’s house, school and can they travel to and from the play space safely alone or with friends or only with adults?

The survey results also reveal that the younger children were more likely to say there were places to play in their community compared to the older children. The younger children were also more likely to say their were places to connect with nature and that they have enough time to play and do the things that help them rest and enjoy themselves.
In terms of accessing the opportunities for children with disabilities to have places to play also, around 70% of both age groups equally said this was never true or only sometimes true.

As Sergey told us in his interview around the neighbourhood drawing there can be conflicts of space use within the recreation areas. He talks from experience when he states that some of the young children in the playground get hurt from the soccer balls coming from the field. He believes the playground and the fields shouldn’t be so close together.

This is my home. I live on the fifth floor. This is the window of my room. Below is a soccer field and a kids playground. Why? It is very dangerous for kids. The playground should be further away from the soccer field.

Sergey, aged 15 years, male, Aktau.
The following dream drawing from Bibizhan illustrates her desire for there to more variety and interesting places where she can have fun and engage in play and recreation with her friends. She also wants more trees and natural places so she can have picnics.

I wish my city has more interesting places to enjoy. I wish there were amusement parks, an aquatic park, waterslide, good roads, a park to organize a picnic on the grass; I also want trees and flowerbeds; concerts by famous people, and more malls.

Bibizhan, aged 14 years, female, Akatu

**Economical domain - an equitable child friendly city**

Within the economic domain the focus is on how resources and services are managed and distributed. For children in cities this can be related directly to the capacity for children to have equitable access to such things as social and community services, parks, playgrounds. The focus would be on ensuring children don’t experience discrimination based on their gender, age, location, financial status, religious beliefs, abilities or special needs. Accessibility to facilities as discussed in the cultural domain is also an important factor when considering equity issues and the realities of poverty and discrimination in children’s lives.

While equitable access to services was not a question directly asked of the children we are able to determine how children are viewing such things as discrimination and inequitable treatment of diverse groups of children through a number of the CFC survey questions. For example, we asked children if they believed children were treated equally in school, in particular was gender an issue. For all cities most children did say that adults in schools treated children the same no matter what their gender. Overall, across all cities 78% of children reported that boys and girls are treated equally in their school. Aktau was the only city where a significant number of children (15%) stated children of different genders were never treated equally.

Similarly, around 82% of all children surveyed in Kazakh cities also reported that children with disabilities were respected and given equal treatment in their school. However 28% of Aktau children felt that this was either never or only sometimes the case in their school. This response from Aktau could be because in the majority of schools in Aktau there are not inclusive policies to allow children with special needs to attend public school. Going from the formal arena of schools, there is a sudden decrease in the investment of funds for equality for children with special needs in the community domain.
When we asked children if there were places for children with disabilities to play in their local neighborhood, only 27% (one third) of children reported that play places in their community could be used by children with physical disabilities. The likelihood of there being more inclusive playground facilities for children of all abilities is much higher in Astana. As a new city it is clear that the type of infrastructure being provided is now adhering to inclusive policies and practices around children with different abilities. For an older regional city like Aktau much of the infrastructure is old and designed before concerns around providing for disabilities was considered, therefore it will take quite extensive auditing and retrofitting to transform the physical environment to be more inclusive and user friendly.

When walking around Aktau there are often places where basic infrastructure such as footpaths in main streets is often not adequate for children or adults wheelchair users or even mothers with prams. The photo below on the left shows an example of the dusty unpaved streets often found beyond the main roads. Yet as we can see from the second picture in places such as down on the foreshore of the Caspian sea quite there are extensive footpath and bike paths systems have been created. So it is clear there is an inequitable distribution of infrastructure and depending on where you live can change the perception of how easy or inclusive it is to be able move around.
An essential component of working towards more equitable distribution of health, safety, care, support, infrastructure within a city for children, is their ability to exercise their rights.

Therefore, one of the questions on the CFC survey asks children directly if they have heard of children rights. Overall 60% of children have heard about children’s rights. While 83% of Kyzylorda children had been informed of children’s rights on public television or radio only 60% of children from Aktau had heard about children’s rights. This issue of rights and how children take up their rights within the public domain also falls under the broader heading of the political domain of the city and will be discussed in the following section.

**Political Domain - a secure and participatory child friendly city**

The politics of a city, who is welcome or is not, who is included, who is excluded in the physical environment is often defined as the ‘geographies of power’. The public and private life of children is often very much regulated and embedded within adult's ways of being and engaging in the world. Children are often spoken about, spoken for and although present in the social domain, they needs are often decided by someone else. They legitimately have little power to transform or pertain to the organisation and practices of their social life. To be recognised as a child friendly city, that is a city operationalizing in a very practical sense the convention on the rights of the child, it is not enough to provide for the needs of children according to an adults perception or specific objective data, it is a responsibility for city officials to engage directly with children. To create a secure and participatory child friendly city is to first consider the importance of children being able to participate in the public domain in a very real embodied sense, actually being present. To be able to do this children need to feel safe and secure, they need to feel the public domain is a place absent of abuse of and violence and they need to know should they need help or support there are other adults who they can approach. Much of the data in this study around children’s freedom and safety came from the CIM survey which was only used in Astana and Semey but provides a useful model for the types of questions that could be included in eh CFC survey to explore this issue further. The second component to the political domain is the opportunity, once children are visible and present in the community that children and young people are encouraged and supported to make authentic contributions to discussions, planning and transformations of the city to ensure it provides specifically for the needs of children. The data around participation comes directly from the CFC survey where a number of questions around participation were elicited. To complete this section on the political domain I have included some of the comments and dream drawings from the children who were asked if they did have the opportunity to speak to mayor or other council officials about how to create and change the city so it was more child friendly city what they say.

**Security**

Feeling safe is a critical aspect of child friendly city. For many children especially in cities such as Aktau where children are expected to walk to and from school and spend lengthy times outside playing in local playground without adult supervision, feeling secure is important to children’s daily life experiences. When asked children if they felt safe in their homes, almost all (92%) of the children surveyed unanimously stated they felt safe at home, the city with the lowest rating though was Aktau.
with only 80% of children feeling safe, which leaves around 20% or only sometimes or never feel safe. While this may seem like a small percentage it is still 1 in 5 children.

For the children of Aktau we can see that the young children express feelings of being safe to walk and cycle around the neighbourhood and feel safe to use public transport. For the older youth though there is a lot more spread of the responses between feeling safe to only sometimes or never.

This could be due to a number of different things. Possibly it is because older children are often more exposed to conflicts around public space use between themselves and adults or with other young people. They are probably more aware of the dangers and identify them, they may also travel more alone or further distances then the younger children who are more likely to stay close to their apartment blocks or only walk further afield with parents or older siblings. Older children are also more likely to be moving around at night time where it is more likely to feel less safe.

Whilst 66% of all children in the four cities said they could talk to adults outside of their family about abuse or violence if they needed to, almost two thirds of children from Aktau did not feel this was true for them, the highest concern of all cities. The results are significant and show that close to 20% of children in Aktau sometimes feel like they have an adult to speak to if they felt threatened or likely to suffer from violence of
abuse and 20% feel they never do. Of critical importance to a child’s safety and feeling of personal security is their capacity to envisage there are adults who should they need help are available to support them. This can mean adults coming to their aid in an emergency situation and or having an adult (such as a counsellor or even a friendly neighbourhood) who they can talk to if they need support. Having this social trust is important for children’s safety but it has also been shown to be significant in the way parents feel about their children having independence in the neighbourhood. If parents feel there is social trust, they are more likely to feel comfortable to let children play outside the home without their supervision.

When discussing children’s safety in the neighbourhood, fear of strangers is often identified as one of the main issues for children and definitely one of the greatest concerns of their parents. The survey results show that of the four cities Aktau is one of the cities where stranger danger is a slightly less significant issue. Although again like the social trust and having adults available, there is still 40% of children who only sometimes or never feel protected from being taken away by strangers.

Feeling protected from gangs/armed groups was reported by 73% of children overall, yet this still left almost one third of children from Aktau expressing they never or only sometimes felt safe from these dangerous groups or gangs. There would need to be more details attach to this to find out exactly which of the groups (young or youth) felt this way and what concerns they had, but like the stranger issue it is still significant when one third of children feel unprotected from these dangers.
So if children in Aktau are feeling like they are unprotected from strangers and gangs or groups they may present dangers to the in the public domain, do they know what to do to find help? This was covered more openly in the previous question around talking to adults outside of the family but I believe in many ways this graph and the next one on hazards is more reflective of how children react in terms of their emergency preparedness as well. For this we see again the younger feel more confident, maybe that again is because they do not move as far from their local neighbourhood or are less likely to be alone then the older neighbourhood children.

Knowing what to do if there is a hazard, this question reveals that children in Astana and Kyzylorda feel far more prepared in an emergency then children in Semey and Aktau. We find in Aktau 33% or one third of children from Aktau responded that they may not know what to do if there is a hazard in their community. This is very significant and if dangers do exist as some of the children have noted (ie. radiation from the nuclear reactor) then it is imperative that children are taught about how to respond in emergency situations. Emergency Preparedness training not only is a practical tool for supporting children it also helps to alleviate stress and anxiety often associated with children who feel nervous about the likelihood of hazard or emergencies where they will need to respond to. Even if the risks are low and the likelihood of children needing this training, it is clear that the perception of risks has just as much impact on children’s fears as does the reality of risk. An example of the types of hazards children spoke about in our city research in Kazakhstan include radiation, leaking gas from pipes, contaminated water and pollution from factories.
This drawing and interview text from Marta, aged 14 years, from Aktau about how it feels to live in her micro-district are very positive and she acknowledge that she has friendly people around.

I like everything. Well, microdistrict 15 is in the center, the sea is nearby there, the seafront is very beautiful. The sea is the main sightseeing place of Aktau, we have a very beautiful sunset; especially everything is beautiful at night. The only downside is there are lots of cars. The people are kind and friendly.

Marta, aged 14 years, female Aktau

Participation

An important right for children in a child friendly city is the right and freedom to express their own point of view and to be involved in activities to help transform and change their community.

When asked about their involvement in projects to change things in their community children responses were varied across the four cities, with children in Aktau responding that they have had the least amount of opportunities. The response by children of Aktau is significant and definitely out of step with the other cities where children were interviewed with 60% of children saying they never helped with projects, this twice as high as the average across the four cities. Less than 10% of children were involved in projects compared to the other cities where at least one third or in the case of Kyzylorda 40% were positive. This is significant result for Aktau city to consider. As while it may have been thought that this was a small town issue, the fact that Semey and Kyzylorda who are similar size to Aktau had opposite response shows this is very town specific. It is important to explore this in more detail to find out why there is such as unusual result.
Close to half of the children surveyed across all the cities expressed the view that the government never asked their opinion about their life or community. It was the highest in Astana with 63% of children reporting the government never consulted them about their life or their community. In Aktau the results were not as drastic as the previous question on their participation in projects, but still we see that 50% of children state they have never been asked their opinion about their life or community by the government. The child friendly cities project in cities provides an important opportunity for this engagement with children and through this research we have already changed this statistic.

On an even less positive note only 18% of all children surveyed expressed that they had participated in planning or decisions for their community. Children from Aktau are the least likely to have experienced involvement in a community participatory project.

Although unlikely to have participated in project as a child, Yerdos, who is eight years old from Aktau has a dream is to be successful by building a hotel and many shops to contribute to his city.
In my dream there is a hotel and I will be successful and will build many houses and shops. If I succeed with my goal, I would contribute to my city. I would like to visit different cities and travel a lot.

Yerdos, aged 8 years old, Aktau

Dreams for Change
When the children dream about a child friendly city what to do they imagine? The following drawings and interview text from children all four cities provides some insights into what children told us they would tell adults if they had chance to engage with them about their views for improving cities. Many children from Aktau dreamed about a life that was akin to living in the steppes or villages. They even often dreamed they would move from the city back to the village where their Grandparents lived so they could once again connect with the natural environment, trees, mountains, horses, as seen by this drawing and text from Yana.

“Fresh, clean, mountain air, horses, blue sky, mountains, steppes: my DREAM place!”

Yana aged 14 years, Aktau

Diana and Gukhar both dream of living in the village in the future. The village represents a place where there is clean air, fresh fruit and vegetables and animals.

“I would like to live in a village because I can have a cat and a dog there. Also, the air there is clean, and there are big and beautiful mountains. And I like to walk in the fields”.

Diana, female, aged 8 years, Aktau
I want to live in a village in the future. My grandparents bought a piece of land in the village called Akshoukyr. So we are going to build a house there. The air in the village is very clean, and we are going to plant trees, fruits and vegetables. And I will have a puppy.

Gaukhar, aged 8 years, female, Aktau.

Conclusions

In this research study and in the subsequent report there has been a focus on acknowledging the capacity and important role children have to be partners in evaluating the quality of city to fulfil children’s needs and operationalize the convention of the rights of the child at a very practical level. The study has modelled how the city can obtain this data through methods that are not difficult or time consuming and where local capacity building with university students, local teachers, and local municipal officers can be important for supporting their participation acts as research mentors. This data provides important insights into the particular nuances found in neighbourhoods and seeks to acknowledge that while city based objective data provides useful evidence of how a city is functioning overall for children around key indicators it does not provide the richer understandings about the individual child’s experiences and the great disparity of experiences individual children may have within one neighbourhood and across a number of neighbourhoods. This disparity can be due to differences in the social-economic status of families often directly related to income; maybe due to generational health issues or particular neighbourhood based issues connected to the quality of the physical environment and historical infrastructure provision. For all these reasons city planners should endeavour to provide the whole of a city view of children’s lives and when devising their children’s strategy and short and long term action plans. Finally, when considering ways to respond to the diversity of children’s needs it is imperative that city planners understand the demographics of the city and through their research design endeavour to ensure representation of all the groups within the child population as possible.

Final Recommendations from Aktau Children

The key changes children wanted to make their neighbourhood and their city more child friendly:

• Children were concerned about helpless animals on the streets and said they wanted a nursery for animals built.
• Children wanted shelters or refuges for homeless people and young people who were in need of support, whether due to drug addiction or having problems at home.
• Children wanted more variety of places to visit. Many said their was a need to build educational and entertainment places for children, especially teenagers who were bored and had nothing to do, which often led to incidents.
• Because the city is on the steppe there is not much vegetation, so children wanted more parks with more greenery, so there were places to walk and to breathe fresh air.
• Children wanted the streets and buildings to be cleaned up. For the council to get rid of the trash and clean the buildings with drawings and swear words on them.
• Children identified the lack of consultation and engagement with children about community projects and issues that are important to them and asked to be included in city planning.
• Children identified that they did not have adults outside their families, in their community who would be able to help them if they needed support.
• Children said they were not properly prepared with the information they needed to be able to respond and be safe in the situation of hazards or emergencies in their community.