Child Friendly Cities
Research with children in Semey

Final Semey Report 2015
Summary of results

Semey City

Semey is a city of 300,000 people on the very north-eastern border of Kazakhstan, in the Siberian region of Kazakhstan bordering with Russia. Semipalatinsk as it was called in times of the USSR was the closest city to the Soviet atomic bomb and nuclear weapons testing site that operated from 1949-1989. Residents of Semey have in the past suffered serious environmental and health effects from the time of its atomic prosperity, with nuclear fallout from the atmospheric tests and uncontrolled exposure being a major concern. Now the city is known as a major university town. The main issues for children in Semey were focused on the quality of the physical environment, in particular the courtyards and playgrounds where they spend a lot of their leisure time and the immediate streets that they use to move around. It is important to understand that without capacity to access resources beyond their neighbourhood, like say in Astana where children’s parents drive them to facilities and services, there is reliable and safe public transport and shared footpaths and bike ways, children’s quality of life in Semey is very much tied into the quality of the immediate environment. The lack of sealed roads, little or no footpaths beyond the main roads means children share the roads with large trucks and cars that use up the whole road, often drive fast and cause lots of dust in the air. There are also the issues of old degraded buildings and garages left to decay in and around apartment blocks. These buildings become places where people or dogs could lurk, children sometimes play in and around being exposed to chemicals, tools, broken glass and pipes left lying around. These can create many hazards and risks to children’s health and well being. Children also complained of having limited access to playgrounds, only some apartment block courtyards have playgrounds and those that are available are more often then not in bad condition, have no fencing or separation form car parks and internal courtyards roads. Many children and their parents were also concerned about these exposed play spaces being likely places where strangers could lurk and be a danger. Other concerns included the gas outlet pipes that often ran along close to the playground, with leaking gas often being detected by children while playing. Stray mang e dogs were also a concern because they were unpredictable and children told us stories of children being bitten while being out in the streets. There were also many dogfights close to the apartment blocks. Dogs also often became victims to the big trucks and fast cars that used the dusty roads. On our short walk around the immediate neighbourhood with the guided tour close to the school, we came across three dead dogs rotting on the side of the road. Children said this was common.

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

• Children want more sealed footpaths and roads to stop the dirt and dust and to create a place to walk off the road for safety.
• Children want more lawn and landscaped areas that had trees and flowers that created a buffer between the playgrounds and the car parks in the courtyards.
• Children requested fences creating a demarcation between the children’s play spaces and the car parks and road.
• Children asked for regular pick up of rubbish and garbage left lying around including dead and rooting dogs carcases.
• Old buildings that are falling a part, open holes to underground piping, overhead piping should all be removed, covered or boarded up so they don’t cause hazards and dangers to children.
• Children in this city were the least likely to feel prepared if a dangerous situation should occur. Emergency preparedness education and talks by police, emergency services so children learn ways to be safe and to deal with dangerous situations is recommended.
• Children in Semey were the least likely of all children to know about child rights – it is important to start to educate the children and the community about the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
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 four cities where children were living included. 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. 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 included 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>Ecology</td>
<td>Article 6 — ‘right to life’. 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>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Urban Sustainability: Domains of Social Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economics</th>
<th>Kazakhstan 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>
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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 workshops 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 someone 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 from 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 Semey children engaged in drawings, (neighbourhood and dream), interviews, child friendliness and children’s independent surveys, photo-voice and guided tours as the main data collection methods.
Conducting workshops in Semey

For children in Semey data began to be collected with support of school teachers and UNICEF staff prior to the UWS research team arriving in the city. The CIM survey was sent out to be completed by children and parents and photographs were collected. The workshop sessions were then run on two separate a few days apart. 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.

![Bar chart showing age of child researchers in Semey City.](image)

To support the research with the children a number of teachers 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 teachers worked as research mentors in the classrooms in Semey.

**Semey 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.
  c. Survey - Children independent mobility survey was filled in by the child researcher & then at home and brought into the first workshop. This was only conducted in Semey and Astana
  d. Guided tour – This activity was child directed and children had the opportunity to take the adult researchers around their neighbourhood showing an explaining the issues, challenges and also the positives that the place represented for them. The guided tours were only conducted in Semey and Astana.

**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.
  f. Photographs – children were asked to bring along photographs of their local area and or of places they had been to or seen that represented child friendliness. Children were then interviewed about their photographs using a photovoice technique.

This box provides an overview of the final workshop design.

Based on two session that focus first on children’s sharing their experience of the neighbourhood and their evaluation of it in terms of affordances and accessibility; and the second focusing on their dream of how it could be or what a child friendly city or elements of child friendliness look like in cities. The number of children who participated in each of the methods in Semey is tabulated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbourhood Drawing</th>
<th>Dream Drawing</th>
<th>CFC Survey</th>
<th>CIM Survey</th>
<th>Photovoice</th>
<th>Guided Tour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semey</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overview of methods used by child researchers in Semey City
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, children’s text and photographs. The central and most significant survey data provided was collected using the child friendliness survey but where relevant CIM survey data is also included. There were some small modifications made from the first trial of the survey in Semey and Astana in May, so in some cases there is not data for those cities in all graphs. Some data that was collected for those cities alone were included only in the individual city reports. 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.

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, children’s text and photographs. The central and most significant survey data provided was collected using the child friendliness survey but where relevant CIM survey data is also included. There were some small modifications made from the first trial of the survey in Semey, so in some cases in the country report there is not data from Semey in all graphs. In this report therefore some questions and data is only found in the individual city report of Semey. 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.

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 overall 46% of the children in the study believed that their community is mostly a clean environment, free of garbage and dirty water. Children in Semey illustrated the most concerns about the state of the environment in regards to garbage and water quality of all the cities involved in the research. Results from survey for example revealed that 30% of children from Semey felt their community was never free of garbage and dirty water. Air quality was the biggest concern children in Semey had only 36% the air around their homes was mostly stench or smoke free – whereas 49% is sometimes was and 15% said it was never clean air.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q2. The air in around homes is clean, smoke-free and stench free</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. The area around my house is free from garbage and stagnant water</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7. There are public toilets I can use safely and easily in my community</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never True</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes True</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly True</td>
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</table>

Semey, My health and environment
Additionally when children in Semey were asked the places around their homes were clean and wouldn’t make them sick if they played there only 33% said it was true but 44% said only sometimes and 20% they never felt they could play in a community space that wouldn’t make them sick.

As shown through the survey data children in Semey were very concerned about the cleanliness of their physical environment of their neighbourhoods. When they took researchers on the guided tour of the neighbourhood children showed us the poor condition of the roads and playgrounds close to their apartment blocks and also rubbish and dead animals lying around. The following photographs were taken with the children while we walking around to illustrate the issue they said needed to be addressed in their immediate environment.

![Dead dog rotting near apartment](image1)

![Underground stormwater pipes – with the opening exposed in the middle of the road](image2)

![Dusty open roads with trucks](image3)

![Playgrounds open to traffic, dirt and dust](image4)
Overall less than half (40%) of the children surveyed in all the cities felt their community's air is clean, smoke-free and not smelly. Whilst 60% of Astana children believed the air is mostly clean, smoke-free and not smelly only 50% of children in Semey thought the air in their community was only sometimes clean. Over 15% or 1 in 8 children in Semey believed the air was never smoke free or clean.

In Semey, for example when children took adults on a guided tour of the neighbourhood they commented frequently about the inconsistent quality of the air due to their location close to a cement factory.

"We would like more grass and trees so we can freshen up the air. The neighbourhood has a cement factory very close by that is constantly pumping bad stuff into the air."

- Children’s Guided Tour, Semey City.

Children also on the guided tour of the neighbourhood pointed out these gas outlets that are placed in many courtyards of the buildings, normally next to the playgrounds. Many children said they could smell the gas sometimes when playing and this worried them. Children in the focus group stated:

“This is where I play. It is very dirty here. I wish this place to be cleaner”

Madina, aged 8 years old, female Semey.
“Gas pipes and outlets are a real danger. Many are very close to the playgrounds. They leak gas and can cause accidents. The gas is piped into the buildings from here”

- Children’s Guided Tour, Semey City.

But not all children in different cities or even in the same city have identical experiences of living in their neighbourhood. This is why it is always important to provide a diversity of childhood experiences and realise that sometimes hazards and dangers are specifically located in pockets of a city and children’s lives can be quite dissimilar depending on where in a city they are situated. Anna who also lives in Semey, the city with seemingly the most challenges regarding pollution, acknowledges the cars are not good for the environment but also believes the area can still be beautiful if you have lots of trees.

“There are many cars. But it is beautiful because of some of the trees”.

Anna 11 years old, Semey

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 who lived in the same neighbourhoods who spoke positively about their environment.

Kristina aged 11 years, from Semey drew a picture of her neighbourhood then added a few extra things to make it more child friendly. This included living closer to her school. Having a clean environment and building a hand-made swing.

Children in Semey were less likely then in other cities to have access to natural environments or natural materials only 30% had access most of the time and for 30% of children in Semey they said they never have access to nature.
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 or exclusion from 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. This data is important in many aspects because of the important role play has for children as a means for them to produce children’s culture through their unregulated engagement with other children and also because it is often seen as a marker of how a city is valuing its children. That is, the number of play or child specific facilities and services for children is often used as an indicator of a city’s commitment (in terms of culture and resources) to support its children.

Education

Children in the cities 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 on mostly live close to their school. The first graphs come from the CIM data obtained in Astana and Semey and illustrates that mostly children walk to school; travel to school with parents or alone and spend on average 5 minutes only to get to school.

"I wish to have a datcha (summer house). I wish to grow mushrooms and flowers, different plants.”
Karina, aged 6 years, Semey.
This data provides some interesting insights into the life of children in these cities. We can see that for children in Semey driving to school rarely happens and partly this is due to proximity but also that many families may not own or have access to a car in order to drive a child to school. We also noticed that parents often accompany children on their travel to school, but when talking to children we found out that walking home from school was a totally different matter with children mainly walking with friends or alone. Many children also told us they often go home to an empty apartment and will once they have dropped off their school bag go back into the community to connect up with friends to play in the many courtyard areas between apartments.

Children when they took us on the guided tours as a walking trip home showed us the way to their homes. For many their houses were within only a few streets of the school. Keeping in mind particularly in Semey that children in cement city all live in high rise apartment blocks then we can see that high density neighbourhoods do allow for this close proximity to happen. Even though children are close to school we
did encounter children both in Semey and Astana negotiating very busy main roads with heavy traffic. It was clear from the way that many children moved around the traffic with ease, that they had been taught from an early age how to be safe around heavy traffic.

So what happens when children are actually in school? The research study was conducted within schools so it provides the researchers an opportunity to view children within the school environment. The diversity of quality of school buildings and facilities was very diverse, with schools in Astana having much better quality classrooms and technology. Having said that though it was clear from our discussions with children and the survey results that many children really valued their schools and thought their teachers were providing a good education. This graph shows the results from asking children if they felt teachers listened to them in the classroom. On the whole it shows across all four cities most children (except for in Semey) feel their ideas are valued and listened to by their teacher. Only 42% of children from Semey felt their ideas were ‘mostly listened to by their teachers’ as compared to 73% of children from Astana.

Results from two questions around respect for diversity in the classroom revealed most children felt in the school most children were respected no matter what religion, culture or clothes they wore.

In keeping with a strong focus on the importance of children engaging with natural environments, most children in the Kazakhstan study sites (89%) including Semey reported learning about how to protect the environment in their school curriculum.
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. For example, the affordances might be evaluated in terms of what age, gender and abilities of the child does the play space accommodate; whether children can play at different times of the day or weather; are their hazards such as cars, pollution, dogs that might be a danger to the child’s safety. Often this issue of play provision can also be mapped in terms of equity, are play spaces more readily available or better quality in some neighbourhoods compared to others. 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? Are their footpaths, signs, traffic lights across main roads, all these issues of accessibility influence a child’s capacity to utilise these spaces. This first graph starts this evaluation of play provision as a critical part of children’s culture production and it’s associated issues by identifying broadly whether place spaces exist in the community.

The results revealed only 67% of children from Semey responded positively to having places for play, games and sports in their community. Outside of Kyzyorda that showed the worse response in terms of community places for play, games and sport, a number of Semey children who didn’t or only sometimes had play spaces. This one result reveals a lot about the inequity between the large new urban environments of cities like Astana and the smaller, regional cities such as Semey.

Artur wishes the local play space didn’t have big holes and felt safer. This type of very dusty open courtyard with very limited play equipment was very commonplace in many of the courtyards we were taken to by children while in Semey city.
“I do not like holes. It is good that there is no garage. I will play here, but I look at this picture and feel scary”

Artur, aged 9 years, male, Semey.

The second question on the CFC Survey about play included asking children about having enough time to play. The results show only 60 – 70% of all children said it was mostly true that they have enough time to play, rest and enjoy themselves. This left a third of children who felt they only sometimes or never had enough time to play, rest and enjoy themselves. Semey had the highest number of children who sometimes or never felt they had enough time to play and or rest. The results of this question are much for consistent across all the sites, which reveals the strong influence of consistent national policies around such things school attendance hours, school holiday times.

“I always play and swing here. Sometimes I can come here alone. I can stay here for 2-3 hours. Sometimes I come and play here with my doll”.

Kristina, aged 7 years, female, Semey city.
And unfortunately for some children maybe they have too much time to fill in and play on their own. This photograph above came from Kristina who told us this is the closest playground to her apartment block in Semey. She told us there is a road next to her house so she must walk to get to this playground. Her dream was to live in a Castle where she would have her own room and where there would be flowers and someone would sing her to sleep with a lullaby.

“I wish to live in the Castle where I have my own room. There are some flowers at the castle walls, so that they sing a lullaby for me, I will fall asleep listening to it.”

Kristina, aged 7 years, Semey.

There is evidence in the central part of Semey city that these issues of poor quality play environments identified by children in the cement factory neighbourhood have been considered and parks and playgrounds and surrounding areas have been upgraded. This better quality playgrounds act as models of good practice and their attributes should be extended into the poorer neighbourhoods.

This is an example where setting the play space away from the road, constructing a fence, concrete blocks and some landscaping has improved the quality and safety of a playground space in Semey City.

An example of creating safety by erecting a fence to the back, concrete pathways as buffers and sealing the car park and constructing segregated car spaces with concrete blocks.
“This is our central park. I like this place, it is very beautiful. We can walk and play there. But I do not like swing and slides in my neighborhood, they are too old.”

Anastasiya, aged 10 years, female, Semey.

The other important question is children’s independence and freedom to access a variety of places within their community. With the CIM survey we asked children to nominate activities they had accessed alone or with friends their own age over the weekend just passed. From this list of possibilities it was clear for children in Astana and Semey the activities they engaged in the most included going to a playground or park, playing sport, walking or cycling around (Astana children more so than Semey children) or visiting friend’s homes. And did they believe they should have more freedom to be by themselves in the neighbourhood? The majority of children in both cities (60%) believed they had adequate freedom but around 40% said they would like more. What would they like to do? Responses included: I would like to spend all day with my friends; be outside for a long time, and that I am not told what to do; to walk near school; to play away from the house; to play at another neighbourhood, to stay longer outside; to walk with friends, to talk and have fun.

**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, this was also true for Semey city.
Similarly, around 80% of all children surveyed in Semey reported that children with disabilities were respected and given equal treatment in their school. Going from the formal arena of schools, there is a sudden decrease in considerations of equality for children with special needs in the community domain.

When we asked children in Semey if there were places for children with disabilities to play in their local neighborhood, less than 20% of children believed the local play places could be used by children with physical disabilities. Semey city showed the lowest capacity in this regard.

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. Although this is appositive and welcome change, it also highlights in the inequalities when over 50% of children in the three other cities say it is never true that playgrounds will support children with different needs. For a city like Semey much of the infrastructure is old and designed before concerns around providing for disabilities was considered. On a quick evaluation of local playgrounds it is clear it will take quite extensive auditing and retrofitting to transform the physical environment to be more disability friendly. Even basic infrastructure such as footpaths in main streets is often not adequate for wheelchair users.
or even mothers with prams. The following dream drawing from Sultan, aged 6 years from Semey reveals many very young children are also aware of the limitations that the physical environment has for children who may be in a wheelchairs or in others ways restricted in their mobility. 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. Sultan considers the needs of children in wheelchairs and how they might also be able to get around using the bridges.

“I wish there will be a bridge. So that children will be able to walk. I wish to have there a special path for children with disabilities, for those who are on the wheelchairs”

Sultan, aged 6 years, male, Semey City.

Rights are essential in an equitable city. Over all the cities on average 60% of children have heard about children’s rights except for Semey city. In Semey 30% of the children surveyed had heard of children’s rights on public television or radio.

Questions of rights are also focused around access to information technology and communication. In the most recent changes to the CIM survey a question was included about mobile phone access. We asked parents in Astana and Semey if children owned a mobile phone and to our surprise the results showed very high mobile phone ownership by primary age children, with 78% of children in Semey 93% owning a mobile. 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 would they say.

Security

Feeling safe is a critical aspect of child friendly city. For many children especially in cities such as Semey and 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 if they felt safe in their homes, almost all (92%) of Semey children surveyed stated they felt safe at home.

Over 60% of children across all the cities including Semey identified that they had an adult that they felt comfortable to talk to about any issues they had concerning their own personal safety. This is important and while this amounts to around two thirds of children feeling that have this safety net, this still leaves one
third of children who only sometimes or never felt like they had an adult to speak to if they felt threatened or likely to suffer from violence of abuse.

When discussing children's safety in neighbourhood fear of strangers is often identified as one of the main issues for children and one of the greatest concerns of their parents. Results from the CIM survey given to children from Astana and Semey we can see, when asked what worried children when in their neighbourhood, children from both cities were concerned about strangers, particularly the children from Semey whose response was 10% higher than for Astana children. Children in Semey are also worried about getting lost and traffic. They were less concerned about being bullied and feeling old enough or deal with the things being the neighbourhood alone might bring up for them. For all these issues, children from Astana where overall worried much more than children from Semey. This is possibly due to it being a larger city, with wider roads, more traffic, more people meaning children in Astana have more to contend with when moving around the streets alone.

![Children worry when alone or with friends](image)

I have a playground in my neighbourhood. But I don't like it when I see many strangers and cars here.

Alinur, aged 7 Years, Semey City

This photograph was taken by Alinur, aged 7 from Semey city, and when interviewed he told us this was a photograph of his apartment block and the playground where he often played, he told us he was worried when he saw strangers or cars around his playground. When we asked parents if they were fearful for their children's safety in regard to strangers in the neighbourhood, a similar number of parents as children also agreed strangers were a concern.
Whilst 70% of all children surveyed believed walking and/or cycling in their community was safe, one third of children from Astana, Semey, Aktau and Kyzylorda either felt it was never or only sometimes safe to do these activities. Children on the CIM survey supported this when they also stated they mostly felt very safe or fairly safe in their neighbourhood.

Finally, when considering security within the environment it is important to take into account children's preparedness for dangers or hazards that might be in their environment and whether they feel able to respond safely. From the results of the child friendliness survey it was found only 50% of children believed they would know what to do if there was a hazard in their community and 43% said they it was never true they knew what to do. An example of the types of hazards children in Semey might face include dangers from people but all hazards such as leaking gas pipes. It is important that they are prepared and educated on how to respond to hazards in the community because they do have lots of potential hazards and they spend a considerable amount of time outside without adults supervising.
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 children responses were varied with children in Aktau responding that they have had the least amount of opportunities. Overall only 33% of all children across the four cities expressed positively that they helped with projects to change their community. Children from Semey city had similar results as other cities. Close to half of the children in Semey expressed the view that the government also never asked their opinion about their life or community. The child friendly cities project in the city has provided an important opportunity for this engagement with children and through this research we have already changed this statistic.

Most children surveyed also had never participated in planning or decisions for their community.
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.

“I want to see more trees”.
Minissa, female, aged 10 years, Aktau

“I dream to help people. If I had money, I would help kind people.”
Nurzhan, aged 11 years, male, Semey,

This is a backyard of my dream place. The pavement is everywhere to contain the dust. I wish to look after apple trees. I want to see tents and deck chairs so that people can lay on it and have a rest. I want to have a swimming pool. I would clean it myself. I am drawing mountains in order to show that there is a life behind this fence.

Artym, aged 11 years, male, Semey city.

“There are some people in my house, who throws a rubbish from their balcony. It will be better to paint swings with bright colors”

Alina, aged 10 years, female, Semey.
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 Semey Children

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

• Children want more sealed footpaths and roads to stop the dirt and dust and to create a place to walk off the road for safety.
• Children want more lawn and landscaped areas that had trees and flowers that created a buffer between the playgrounds and the car parks in the courtyards.
• Children requested fences creating a demarcation between the children’s play spaces and the car parks and road.
• Children asked for regular pick up of rubbish and garbage left lying around including dead and rooting dogs carcasses.
• Old buildings that are falling a part, open holes to underground piping, overhead piping should all be removed, covered or boarded up so they don’t cause hazards and dangers to children.
• Children in this city were the least likely to feel prepared if a dangerous situation should occur. Emergency preparedness education and talks by police, emergency services so children learn ways to be safe and to deal with dangerous situations is recommended.
• Children in Semey were the least likely of all children to know about child rights – it is important to start to educate the children and the community about the Convention on the Rights of the Child.