Children are Citizens Too: Consulting with Children on the Redevelopment of a Central City Square in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand

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A major challenge of the twenty-first century is ensuring the social sustainability of our cities. This requires 'child-friendly' cities, which take into account the rights and needs of the children who live in them to play and explore to ensure their present-day wellbeing and longer-term healthy development; and their rights, as citizens, to feel safe and welcome in public spaces and to participate in urban planning decisions affecting their use of the public realm. While there has been increasing acknowledgement of these rights following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the subsequent UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative, children continue to lose out in the urban justice stakes. They are largely confined (by design or decree) to child-specific settings within adult-centric cities; and while their views may be sought on the provision of child-specific facilities and programmes, their meaningful participation in urban design and planning is rare. This paper reports on a 'first' for Auckland Council in Aotearoa/New Zealand: children's participation (co-facilitated by the authors and council staff in 2015) in the design and redevelopment of a central city square. We reflect on its significance in terms of children's 'right to the city' and their meaningful participation in urban design and planning – part of a progression towards greater urban justice for children and socially sustainable cities.

Introduction

… children's voices, choices and participation are critical for the sustainable futures we want.
                    Malone, 2015, p. 416.

Sustainable cities require facilitative planning which recognizes children's 'right to the city' and their right to participate in decisions affecting their access to the public realm (Freeman and Tranter, 2011; Carroll *et al*., 2015; Malone, 2015). Tensions are apparent between the adult-centric and auto-centric character of New World cities like Auckland and children's rights and needs to play and explore; between children's (albeit barely visible) presence in the city (Carroll *et al*., 2015) and 'child-blind' urban planning (Randolph, 2006). Cities are generally not designed or managed with children in mind (Churchman, 2003; Karsten, 2005; Freeman and Tranter, 2011). In fact Fincher and Iveson (2008, p. 108) note contemporary Western societies 'are fundamentally structured by

a form of inequality based on age which marginalizes children and young people'.

A century ago there was little difference in child and adult presence in the public spaces of the city (Simpson, 1997; Whitzman *et al*., 2010). But as auto-centric suburbs became the norm for family life in New World cities, children were increasingly seen as out of place in the public spaces of the city (Hillman *et al*., 1990; Simpson, 1997; Kearns and Collins, 2006), including its streets. Formerly sites for play, streets have largely been transformed into 'adult-only' spaces (Karsten, 2005; Carroll *et al*., 2015).

Soja (2010, p. 4), in his exploration of 'spatial justice', notes increasing urbanization has intensified 'struggles over geography'. In the spatial justice stakes, children have been the losers. The built form and social dynamics of most cities restrict children's play, mobility and social interaction opportunities, with implications for their wellbeing and cognitive, emotional and physical development (Spencer and Wooley, 2000). Children may have as much 'right' to the public spaces of the city as adult citizens (Hayward, 2012), yet they have been marginalized in the 'struggle over geography' and increasingly confined to child-specific settings – segregated into homes, schools and playgrounds, and largely excluded from other public spaces by design or decree (Matthews, 1995; Freeman and Tranter 2011). Playgrounds and parks are important for children, but so too are streets, alleyways, city squares and other public spaces, which all offer opportunities for play and socializing (Carroll *et al*., 2015). Amin (2008, p. 8) notes the social significance of 'the entanglement between people and the material and visual culture of public space'. Not only do children learn from this 'entanglement', but in addition, the public presence of children can also contribute to the sense of place and social cohesion experienced by adults (Weller and Bruegel, 2008).

Engelen *et al*. (2014) argue urban justice demands 'changing the imaginary' from 'the competitive city', with its emphasis on 'city branding, high-rise buildings, iconic architecture' etc., to 'the grounded city' which prioritizes the equitable distribution of 'mundane goods and services … that provide the material basis for social life' (including the provision and upkeep of public spaces). Urban justice for children requires a 'grounded city' which is also 'child friendly': a city where children can feel safe and welcome, meet friends, play, explore and enjoy themselves; have a say about the city/community they want and participate in urban planning decisions.

When children, including Auckland children, have been asked what makes a city good for children, places to meet and play with friends are universal responses (Chawla 2002; O'Brien, 2003; Freeman and Tranter 2011; Carroll *et al*., 2015; Auckland University of Technology and Auckland Council, 2008, cited Auckland Council, 2012*b*). Children need safe and welcoming public spaces to 'live their childhoods, alongside the more private domain of the home' (Moss and Petrie, 2002, p. 9) As residential intensification policies in cities such as Auckland contract private space, children's access to public space becomes ever-more important, and more so for already socio-economically disadvantaged children (Elsey, 2004; Carroll *et al*., 2015).

Public spaces can be seen as 'a window into the city's soul … framing a vision of social life in the city' (Zukin 1995, p. 295); they are also 'important site[s] of civic becoming' (Amin, 2008, p. 22). How can the quality of public spaces be enhanced to promote children's civic and social life? Urban justice for children requires a 'shifting of the boundaries' (Roche, 1999, p. 486), with actual, as well as theoretical, acceptance of children's rights to their city, and changes in planning practices to allow space, time and adult facilitation for children's participation (Freeman *et al*., 2003).

Since the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) guaranteed children's right to express their views and have them considered 'in all

matters affecting them', children's right to participate in international, national and local governance has received considerable political acknowledgement and academic attention (Kallio and Hakli, 2011). Challenges to urban planners to include children and young people in decision-making have ensued (Chawla, 2002; Driskell, 2002; Freeman and Tranter, 2011) along with efforts to facilitate children's meaningful (as opposed to token) participation in local government decision-making (Shier, 2001; Freeman and Tranter, 2011).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, as in many countries, children's rights to participate are set out in legislation (national and local); youth councils are a common feature of local government, and children's views are often sought on the provision of child-specific services, recreation facilities and programmes. However their participation in 'adult' domains such as urban design and planning remains rare (Whitzman *et al.*, 2010; Freeman and Tranter, 2011; Wilks and Rudner, 2013).

The number of cities across the world investigating Child Friendly City (CFC) accreditation suggests a willingness to engage with children in local government planning (Corsi, 2002; Whitzman *et al.*, 2010; Malone, 2015), as accreditation includes recognition of children 'as an interest group with specific needs that can only be expressed by themselves' (Whitzman *et al.*, 2010, p. 477). Accreditation also requires 'ensuring children are integral to planning, with their experiences and opinions helping shape city and community plans' (unicef.org.nz).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, CFC accreditation is being sought in five cities including Auckland, where the Waitemata Local Board (responsible for the central city area) began the process in January 2015. An important stimulus has been Auckland's aim to accommodate another million inhabitants (current population 1.4 million, 300,000 of them children) in a more compact city over the next 30 years (Auckland City Unitary Plan, 2016). As private open space diminishes

children's daily lives and, in particular their play opportunities, will be curtailed unless affordances in public spaces are correspondingly enhanced. How can the public realm be 'differently envisioned' so that children do not feel excluded? How can existing public spaces be enhanced so they are 'child-friendly' (safe and welcoming places which provide children with spaces to meet and hang out and affordances for play and exploration)?

This paper reports on a local government initiative in Auckland which sought children's input on the redevelopment of an inner-city square and adjacent community building in 2015 to achieve this. Freyberg Square children's consultation, co-designed and facilitated by the authors and council staff, was a 'first' for the Council. Wilks and Rudner (2013, p. 6) note a lack of empirical research related to children 'participating in urban design and assisting in the design of their urban environments'. Reflecting on the process and outcomes of the Freyberg Square children's consultation addresses this gap.

The paper is organized as follows: arguments for urban justice for children, including inclusion in urban design and planning, are examined. The Freyberg Square consultation is placed within the context of Aotearoa/ New Zealand/Auckland, and our previous research with children. Methods and results are described, and we evaluate the extent to which this initiative met Shier's (2001) and Whitzman *et al.*'s (2010) criteria for children's meaningful and effective participation in local government decision-making. We then reflect on the significance of the Freyberg Square consultation in terms of urban justice for children.

Children's Inclusion in Urban design and Planning

Rights and Competencies

Reasons for involving children in the design of their urban environments include their rights, as citizens, to participate in decisions

about their environment; grounding adult understanding in the reality of children's experiences; and recognition of the contributions they can make (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009). Evidence suggests children can be competent informants, and planning outcomes significantly influenced by their contributions (Malone, 1999; Freeman and Tranter, 2011; Wilks and Rudner, 2013). There is also evidence that when children are involved in the design of child-oriented services and facilities, these better meet their needs (Tisdall and Bell, 2006). However, urban planners largely continue to act 'on the basis of a construction of childhood and youth which works to privilege adult concerns and marginalize the concerns of children and young people' (Frank, 2006, p. 352). Urban justice demands that this changes.

Until recently children were viewed as lacking agency and competence, with no 'legitimate role in deciding how urban spaces should be designed to accommodate their needs and concerns' (Simpson, 1997, pp. 919–922; Lansdown, 2010). Their interests were represented by adult proxies. In addition, their independent access to the public realm was 'assumed to require the capacities associated with adulthood' (Fincher and Iveson, 2008, pp.110, 109). However, there is now acceptance that children, like adults, have agency (James and Prout, 2008); are citizens who identify with, belong to, and participate in communities (Haywood, 2012); and are both competent enough, and should be, consulted on policy matters (Freeman and Aitken-Rose, 2005; Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010; Wilks and Rudner, 2013). Assertions of agency are at the intersection of citizenship and participation discourses, underpinning children's rights to be consulted (Malone, 2013).

Citizenship and Participation

Citizenship is conceptualized variously as 'identity', as a 'state' (with specific rights and responsibilities), and as a 'dynamic process'

of participation (Jans, 2004). As citizens, children, like adults, have 'a legitimate and valuable voice and perspective' (Roche, 1999, p. 479). Their rights are recognized through the 'identity' and 'state' of citizenship; and through the 'dynamic process' of participation they can benefit 'their own lives and their communities, and create a better future' (Thomas and Percy-Smith, 2010, p. 3). However, this requires adult citizens recognizing children's rights as citizens and facilitating their meaningful participation (Shier, 2001; Fincher and Iveson, 2008; Wyness, 2012: Wilks & Rudner, 2013). As Fincher and Iveson (2008, p. 109) note, all too often children's citizenship is couched in terms of their need for protection from 'threats which may impede their transition to adulthood' and preparing them 'for their future as adult citizens'.

Just as concepts of children's citizenship vary, depending on political and cultural contexts, so too do concepts of participation. In their exploration of understandings and implementation of 'children's participation' in five politically disparate Asia-Pacific countries, for instance, Mason and Bolzan (2007) found understandings ranged from the collective to the individual, with participation expressed variously as community obligation, educating children for their future as adults, and the individual right of the 'citizen child'. While children's participation is understood in all of the above ways in Aotearoa/New Zealand in different cultural contexts, in policy documents 'children's participation' is used to mean taking part generally in an activity, or specifically taking part in decision-making. Here our focus is on the latter: the 'citizen child' meaningfully participating in local government decision-making.

Levels of participation also vary, as 'ladders' such as those proposed by Arnstein, Hart, Shier and others to measure adult 'participation' have highlighted (Whitzman *et al.*, 2010). Children's participation in local government can fluctuate from having an opportunity to express a perspective, being helped to have a say or being heard, through to their

perspectives feeding into decisions (Lundy, 2007). Just 'having a say' is not meaningful participation, especially given the complex interplay of values and interests in local government decision-making (Clark and Percy-Smith, 2006). Meaningful participation requires commitment and facilitation from adults. It also requires care and respect. Mannion (2007, p. 407) warns of the dangers of children's voices being 'distorted', or 'scripted' by adults with their own agendas.

Urban justice requires children's meaningful participation in decision-making. Shier (2001) suggests there are four stages to this process: children have to be given an opening to participate; they must be appropriately supported to do so; they must be able to contribute to proposals/decisions; and how their views have impacted on a proposal/plan must be reported back to them. The Freyberg Square children's consultation will be discussed in light of the above. We will also examine the extent to which the consultation met or contributed to the six 'ideal participation criteria' developed by Whitzman *et al.* (2010) to evaluate the effectiveness of local government programmes promoting children's participation. These criteria are: recognition of children as an interest group; recognition of children's rights to the public realm; whole-of-council policies with achievable targets; integration of children's participation into all areas of council; training for local government elected representatives and staff on a rights-based approach to planning for children; and skills to effectively engage with children.

Participation since UNCROC

Governmental and non-governmental initiatives to engage with children have grown worldwide (see for instance, Simpson, 1997; Fotel, 2009; Corsi, 2002; Whitzman *et al.*, 2010; Kallio and Hakli, 2011; Thomas, 2012; Shier, 2001; Malone, 2015). While the growing range of initiatives is heartening, children's participation in urban design and planning practice

remains uncommon, suggesting significant institutional barriers (Frank, 2006). Apart from 'hierarchical power structures' and 'established ways of working', other barriers identified in Aotearoa/New Zealand by Freeman and colleagues (2003) include targets and performance standards which have to be met; time and budgetary constraints; and lack of training and experience to engage with children. Where participation does occur, staff often face demands to get a job done without disrupting 'predetermined institutional systems and policy contexts', and this can mean 'the primary aim is to be *seen* to do the appropriate consultation so that one can get on with the *real* job' (Freeman *et al.*, 2003, p. 66). Consistent with this observation, Thomas and Percy-Smith (2010, p. 2) highlight critiques of participation 'providing a masquerade of political accountability' and adults continuing to disregard children's views. Children's concerns also continue to be relegated to specific spaces and their competence to specific issues (Whitzman *et al.*, 2010, p. 483). These tend not to include 'adult' domains such as urban design and planning (Freeman and Tranter, 2011; Wilks and Rudner, 2013; Alderson, 2013).

In both Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, even where appropriate consultation with children is required by legislation, the gap between policy and practice is marked (Stevenson, 2007; Freeman & Tranter, 2011; Whitzman *et al.*, 2010; Malone, 2013). In their 2003 review of local government planning for and with children, Freeman and Aitken-Rose (2005, p. 397) found 'vast numbers of initiatives of all types being undertaken by authorities and planners' but lack of 'meaningful' participation or changes in local government practices. CFC accreditation, now being sought in five New Zealand cities, requires children and young people's meaningful participation (Whitzman *et al.*, 2010; unicef.org.nz).

Auckland Context

Residential intensification policies to combat

suburban sprawl have led to the construction of many inner-city apartment blocks since 1991, with a sharp differentiation between elite, gentrified developments and more down-market, poor quality developments. The latter include 16,000 apartments, built between 1991–2006 during a period of *laissez-faire* urban planning, which provide cheaper accommodation for low-income households, including families (Murphy, 2008; Carroll and Witten, 2009). Despite the increased presence of children in the inner city, Kearns and Collins (2006) note the erosion of opportunities for outdoor play and active travel for children which has accompanied intensification.

Auckland Council has a stated aim to 'put children and young people first and consider their wellbeing in everything that we do' (Auckland Council, 2012*a*); and children's right to 'participate in civic life', and to 'have a voice' in matters which concern them are acknowledged in strategic documents. The Auckland Council (2012*b*) in its city centre master plan – the blueprint for the development/redevelopment of the central business district – lists 'inclusiveness and child-friendly' as guiding principles, and Auckland Council's strategic action plan for children and young people, *I am Auckland* (released in 2014, and updated in 2016), states 'intentional co-design or robust engagement with young people' are 'critical success factors' (p. 7).

In keeping with the current global imaginary of the 'competitive city (Engelen *et al.*, 2015), the initial project design brief for Freyberg Square was to create 'a world class … distinctive, safe and popular destination, where locals and visitors choose to frequent and linger' (Auckland Council, 2015). City workers were mentioned, but not children or families. The potential of incorporating affordances for children and young people in the redevelopment was not part of the brief. With the Waitemata Local Board seeking CFC accreditation, the Freyberg Square redevelopment was seen by council staff as an opportunity to involve children in the design process and provide evidence of participation required for CFC accreditation (council key informant interviews, 9 September 2015; 23 September 2015).

Placing Freyberg Square within the *Kids in the City* Context

The first two authors' involvement in the Freyberg Square consultation grew out of previous research with Auckland children. Wanting to ensure children's 'right to the city' in an intensifying Auckland was the impetus for *Kids in the City* (a study investigating children's use and experiences of urban neighbourhoods) and ensuing projects (see kidsinthecity.ac.nz). Our research has highlighted a lack of public outdoor spaces in the inner city for children to safely play and interact (Carroll *et al.*, 2015). With increasing numbers of families with children living in inner-city apartments, Freyberg Square is a vitally important public open space not just for city workers and other adults, but for children as well.

In mid-2015 we were approached by the council's community development team to conduct some form of engagement with children to provide 'child-friendly' input for the redevelopment of Freyberg Square. Drawing on relevant literature and understandings from earlier research, we were able to facilitate a 'children's consultation', providing a structure and scaffolding to enable children's engagement and input into the redesign of the square and the adjacent community building. Relationships built up with children and their families through our previous research allowed us to identify a reference group of inner-city children.

The children's consultation, like our previous research, has been conducted within a rights-based paradigm, recognizing children's 'right' to their city and rights, as citizens, to participate in decisions about their urban environment. In addition, we consider incorporating their ideas in urban design projects is likely to lead to better outcomes and ensure a more

'child-friendly' city. In the Freyberg Square consultation we aimed, in collaboration with Auckland Council, to facilitate feedback from a reference group of children on the quality of Freyberg Square as a public space and to help them formulate and communicate their ideas for making the square a more child-oriented, playful space; to disseminate these ideas to the council design team working on the redevelopment of the square; and to facilitate children's feedback on the draft re-development plan. We also wanted to evaluate the 'child-friendly' nature of the process; and, in addition, to provide evidence that such a consultation was both doable and worthwhile.

Methods

The consultation consisted of two phases of data collection: the first comprised three workshops with the children's reference group; in the second, four key informant inter-views (three with council staff and one with a Waitemata Local Board member) were con-ducted and council documents reviewed.

The Children's Reference Group

We approached six children who had participated in our previous studies and an additional five younger children (living in the inner city or environs) to take part in this consultation. The children and their parents all consented to their participation. The refer-ence group comprised six girls and five boys aged between 7 and 13 years.

Data Collection

Phase One: The 'child-friendly audit' involved the reference group participating in three half-day workshops facilitated by the authors. The aim was to elicit children's perspectives and ideas to inform the work of the council design team working on the Freyberg Square redevelopment.

Workshop One: Children were briefed on-site by the third author about the redesign project and their role as consultants. They then carried out a 'child-friendly' audit of the space, considering what they liked/disliked

Figure 1. Photograph of Freyberg Square and the adjacent community centre. (*Photo*: The authors)

and why, as they explored and photographed the square; where and what they would play; and how they might engage with specific features. Children gave responses orally during a group discussion and later in written form in an individual mapping exercise. Their feedback was recorded, analysed, and incorporated by the lead author into an interim report for the project design team.

Figures 2–6. Children carry out their 'child-friendly' audit Freyberg Square during the first work-shop. (*Photos*: The authors)

Workshop Two: In this follow-up, off-site workshop, the authors crosschecked their reporting of the children's ideas and perceptions with the reference group. They then worked with the children and photographs they had taken during the first workshop in a photo-voice exercise, assisting them to voice their affective responses to the space and create a group montage. Ideas for the utilization of the community building were also elicited and recorded. In a group discussion with children we investigated the 'child-friendliness' of the consultation process itself, assessing agency, sense of safety and self-image (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009).

Figure 7. Children caption photographs taken during the audit process and make a montage of them in the second workshop.

Workshop Three: In the second on-site workshop co-facilitated by the authors and the urban design project leader, children were shown the proposed design for the square, where their ideas had been incorporated into the plan (released for public consultation) and

In the second workshop children chose three of the photographs they had taken during their audit of the square and captioned them. Nine of the children chose photographs of the water feature.

The water feature was the first thing I saw and the first thing I went to. It was an interactive feature – it wasn't just taking up a chunk of space. It was fun climbing to the top.

Aira

I liked the shape of the fountain and the area at the top was good because you could climb. Having different levels was creative and I liked how you could jump around the fountain.

Angeline

You can jump across the water and it's quite fun even though they're quite close together.

Dustin

The platform underneath the water should be coloured and there could be a giant slide and a mini staircase (just in case you're stuck). The water could be cleaned, the blocks moved much more closer and it shouldn't be slippery material.

Elizabeth

If someone in a wheelchair wants to touch the water they have to lean over. They should replace the concrete so it's nicer.

Jaden (mobility impaired)

The fountains splash out water which causes a safety hazard to kids. You would have to watch your step and have to be careful.

Jennifer

It is nice having a water feature right next to the hill. I think they should patch up the wobbly bits so it is safer for people to climb across. It is a cool feature to climb over. They could have it deeper in one place, like a wishing pond.

Julian

This water looks and smells like urine. It's just gross. It should be the colour of a summery ocean and smell as good as cup-cakes.

Scarlett

Figure 8. The fountain was a popular feature with the children and most photographed it. Here is a photo taken by Scarlett together with the children's reflections about the fountain.

"The water feature was the first thing I saw and the first thing I went to. It was an interactive feature – it wasn't just taking up a chunk of space. It was fun climbing to the top."

"A group of kids could have like a scavenger hunt around the statue and it could be like an adventure."

"I like the water, how it comes down, the noise it makes."

"A drinking fountain."

"No cars should be allowed to drive in."

"I'd come on a warm day with one of my friends, scooter around, go up into the tree, play on a playground – and I'd probably feed the birds."
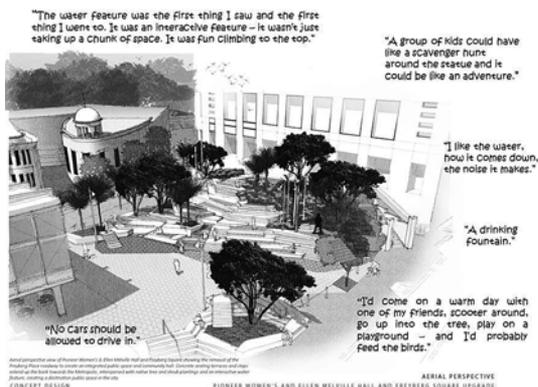
Figure 9. Council's draft concept for Freyberg Square with children's input.

why some ideas had not been incorporated. Their comments were sought on the proposed design and they were also asked what activities they would like to see happening in the square and the community building. Again, responses were obtained orally and in written form, and recorded.

Phase Two: A scan of relevant council documents and interviews with four Auckland Council staff and a Waitemata Local Board member completed data collection.

Thematic analyses of the children's data from the three workshops (discussion transcripts, annotated maps of the square, photographs and captions) and of the key informant interviews were carried out and a final report was prepared for Auckland Council (Carroll and Witten, 2015; http://kidsinthecity.ac.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Freyberg-Square-report.pdf). Children later presented their photo-voice montage (created at the second workshop) at a public meeting of Waitemata Local Board.

Results

This project aimed, firstly, to facilitate children's input into the redevelopment of Freyberg Square as a 'child-friendly' public space; secondly, to ensure the process itself was 'child-friendly'; thirdly, to provide evidence for Council that such children's consultations were both 'doable' and worthwhile in the urban design and planning arena; and lastly, to explore possibilities for increasing children's participation. This section presents findings in each of these areas sequentially.

Figures 10, 11 and 12. Children evaluate the draft concept in the third workshop.

Child-Friendly Audit and Consultation

As they checked out surfaces, seating, the water feature, the tree and the statue of Lord Freyberg in the square during the first workshop, jumping, climbing, sliding, hiding, and cartwheeling, the children formulated their ideas for making the square more 'child-friendly'. Ground surfaces were judged '*not safe*' for skate-boarding, scootering, or wheel-chairs; seating needed to cater for '*doing gymnastics*' and '*being up high*', not just sitting; the water feature was good for leaping, climbing and touching, as well as looking at: '*I liked how you could jump around the fountain*'; and the tree was assessed for its climb-ability as well as its attractiveness and shade. Children wanted information so they knew who Lord Freyberg was – and suggested '*scavenger hunts*' in the plantings around the statue: '*It would be like an adventure…*'. It is clear from the children's comments and our own observations that Freyberg Square, while only a small public open space sur-rounded by city buildings, offers a variety of opportunities for children to play, explore and have adventures. A unique characteristic of this space is the different levels from the square to the Metropolis terrace above, which enable activities such as jumping, climbing, sliding and scrambling. From the children's perspective, the plantings on the bank above the water feature also offered an enticing 'wild place'. All these and other ideas (includ-ing a '*No Smoking sign*', '*a drinking fountain*' and '*some art work*') were taken on board by the designers and incorporated in some form in the draft concept plan.

Not all of the children's ideas prevailed: *a playground for 'little kids'*, *a slide down the hillside*, *a climbing wall*, *a basketball/netball hoop*, *handball*, *hopscotch* and *a giant snakes and ladders painted on the ground* and *a brightly-coloured mural* were not incorporated into the plan. Nor was one child's idea of making the central tree in the square more accessible and 'playable': '*You could have a ladder so kids can easily get up … and you could have a platform with a railing a bit higher up with a little tire swing coming down, or a fireman's pole*'. Children also suggested an existing vehicle access dividing the square off from the adjacent community centre be closed. While this idea, which also reflected the desires of the design team, was part of the draft plan, local businesses who wanted a vehicle access retained ultimately prevailed over the children's (and council) wishes. There was a considerable backlash from local traders who felt children's perspectives had been specifically considered and theirs had not (key informant interview, 23 September 2015).

The Process

Involving children in the redevelopment of Freyberg Square has not only facilitated a more 'child-friendly' space with affordances for play and exploration, but the process of the consultation itself was 'child-friendly' (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009). Children reported experiencing the consultation as enjoyable and meaningful – and being willing to engage again in a similar project.

'*It was super fun.*'

'*I like that our ideas were brought into considera-tion and placed in the final design.*'

Several children commented that, having opportunities to both speak about their ideas and write them down allowed them to express what was significant for them in a way that was comfortable.

'*Everyone got time to speak.*'

'*We didn't need to talk about our ideas if we weren't confident or comfortable enough … we could write our ideas and thoughts.*'

Interacting with the site in the first workshop helped them formulate their ideas.

'[It] made it easier to come up with ideas of what to do with the area.'

So did the photo-voice exercise in the second workshop.

'Taking photos and writing down what we liked and didn't like was a good part of the process.'

They all felt children had both a right to be involved in city design and planning and had worthwhile contributions to make.

'Children need to have a say.'

They also felt that children and adults had different views, different needs and different desires – and that young people's input could make public spaces more attractive to a range of people.

'Kids' ideas of how they like things to be are different to how adults think. Kids usually have more creative ideas…'

Interviews with council staff showed those involved with the consultation agreed. Several of the children's ideas (such as information about Lord Freyberg, a drinking fountain, closing the vehicle access) were seen as improving the square for adult users as well as children:

'It's actually been extremely useful. Like I think the design is much stronger having the children's feed-back, their thoughts around what they like about the space, how they'd use it … the whole concept is stronger because it's had input in from children.'

The interim and final reports prepared by the authors were seen by staff as a critical part of the process: the interim report provided time-sensitive input for the design team, with the final report providing 'status' and 'legitimacy' to the children's participation.

'It's been able to show, you know, the collective response from the children in a succinct way … to feed back to the Local Board that this was the feedback from the children, this was the process we went through, and this is why the design looks like this now ... it gives it a lot more status. It seems more legitimate…'

The consultation was also seen as providing evidence that such a process was both a good thing and 'doable' – providing evidence for further participation by children in the urban planning process.

'I would definitely be an advocate for … following this process again … this one is a great pilot we can roll out for other projects around the city.'

Effective and Meaningful Participation?

The structure and process of the Freyberg Square consultation fulfilled Shier's (2001) four-stage criteria for effective participation in a local government planning process.

Stage One – 'children have to be given an opening to participate': In the case of the Freyberg Square redevelopment children were not only 'given an opening to participate', their participation was actively sought by Auckland Council.

Stage Two – 'they must be appropriately supported to do so': The structure and process of the workshops 'appropriately supported' children to participate. They audited the 'child-friendliness' of Freyberg Square, reflected on affordances for play, exploration and 'hanging-out', and came up with suggestions for the re-design and redevelopment of the space.

Stage Three – 'they must be able to contribute to proposals/decisions': Children's own feedback was that they felt supported to share their perceptions and present their ideas. The children were 'able to contribute' to the design of the square through the collation of their ideas in an interim report prepared for the design team by the first two authors.

Stage Four – 'how their views/input have impacted on a proposal/plan must be shown': The draft concept plan for the redevelopment of the square was presented in the third workshop and the children were shown where and how their ideas had been incorporated, and why other ideas had not been, largely due to spatial constraints (e.g. an enormous slide).

Whitzman *et al.* (2010) suggest seven criteria to consider not only the effectiveness of participation in a specific project, but also the overall effectiveness of local government promotion of children's participation. The Freyberg Square consultation met the first two criteria – 'recognition of children as an interest group' and 'children's rights to all public spaces'. However, while the review of council documents and interviews with staff suggest some progress towards meeting the remaining five criteria – whole-of-council policies with realizable targets, children's participation in all areas, training for planners, local councillors and senior managers on a rights-based approach to planning for children, and local government staff with skills to effectively engage with children – there is still a large gap between rhetoric and practice.

Increasing Children's Participation

The Freyberg Square consultation was seen by council staff as evidence of 'successful' children's participation, and a process which could and should be replicated.

'We need to be able to benchmark our successes and build on the Freyberg Square audit, providing compelling reasons for doing it elsewhere.'
(Council Design and Delivery Manager, 23 September 2015)

It was suggested more case studies along the lines of the Freyberg Square consultation were required so that elected members and staff could be persuaded of their value, a necessary precursor to consulting with children becoming mandatory in the urban design and planning arena. 'Child-friendly champions' within both the bureaucratic and political arms of the Council were also seen as important to achieve this, along with further development of best practice guidelines for child-friendly design in the *Auckland Design Manual* (Auckland Council, 2017), which presently only covers open space.

Other changes suggested to increase children's participation were a shift in institutional practices to allow time and budget for children's participation, and an upskilling of staff on a 'child-friendly' approach to planning and expertise to facilitate participation.

Interestingly, one result of the Freyberg Square consultation appears to be a new understanding of 'child-friendly' amongst council staff: the leader of the design team had been 'nervous' about children being involved in the design brief because she and her team understood 'child-friendly' to be about safety, not providing affordances:

'I thought that it was meaning, "we need to put guard rails everywhere and stop kids from accessing things or making it so that they wouldn't try climb the tree" … and then when I actually heard, "oh, it's all about giving kids a voice and having them help shape, you know, their own city", I sort of thought, oh, okay that's interesting…'

Discussion

The Freyberg Square children's consultation shows that, given opportunities to participate and appropriate support (Shier, 2001; Whitzman *et al.*, 2010), children can make valuable contributions to urban design. It also provides an example of children's participation in urban design, where 'empirical research' is lacking (Wilks and Rudner, 2013).

The children's participation emerged from a combination of council and research influences. On the council side influences included policy commitments to 'give children and young people a voice'; political pressure from children's champions amongst elected mem-

bers and staff to acknowledge children as citizens with rights to participate in urban design and planning decisions; and, specifically, wanting a suitable 'demonstration project' to support the Waitemata Local Board application for UNICEF Child Friendly City accreditation (key informant interview, 9 September 2015). On the research side, influences included previous engagement with children in research, a group of children already 'primed' through their involvement in previous studies, and our commitment to children's participation in the urban planning arena. The relationship built up with key council staff through our *Kids in the City* research, provided the pathway for the children's participation.

Was the Freyberg Square consultation effective participation or 'a masquerade of political accountability'? (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). We argue that it is an example of children's 'meaningful participation' in a local government planning process. While undeniably a demonstration project to provide proof of 'political accountability', the consultation process allowed children to express their views and these views were taken into account (Shier, 2001). In addition, the consultation resulted in many of the children's ideas being incorporated into the redevelopment design for Freyberg Square, and can be seen as a step towards Auckland City becoming more 'child-friendly'. It supports Driskell's (2002) contention that involving children and young people in planning and design can mean 'better and more informed planning' and 'more child-friendly' urban environments, as planners better understand the needs and aspirations of children – alongside the needs and aspirations of other (adult) stakeholders.

All Shier's (2001) preconditions for effective participation were met. Auckland Council wanted input from children for their redevelopment of Freyberg Square; the authors supported them through the consultation process, ensuring children had opportunities to express their views and these were communicated to the design team in an acceptable format (a report); and the design team them reported back to the children, showing them how their suggestions had been incorporated into the draft concept.

The consultation has been showcased in Auckland Council's 2016 *I am Auckland* status report (Auckland Council, 2017) as an example of children's effective participation. What is now needed is a shift beyond such one-off initiatives (which rely on a particular constellation of influences), to child-friendly consultations becoming a mandatory part of planning; and institutional changes which meet Whitzman *et al.*'s aspirational criteria (2010) for the promotion of children's meaningful participation in local government. Such a shift will need flexibility and institutional responsiveness. It will also require a wide range of 'legislative, policy and practice provisions' (Lansdown, 2010, p. 14).

Two decades ago Simpson (1997) was arguing for 'fundamental rethinking' about city design and planning and children's right to participate. One could argue that 'fundamental rethinking' has taken place: there is now widespread acknowledgement of children as citizens with 'a right to the city' and their right to participate in decisions regarding the design and use of public spaces of the city. However, apart from one-off examples of children's participation such as Freyberg Square, their voices remain largely absent in urban design and planning (Whitzman *et al.*, 2010; Freeman and Tranter, 2011); and such participation as does occur is all too often dependent upon the intervention of individual 'champions' within local government. Interviews with council staff echoed findings from Freeman and Aitken-Rose's (2005) survey of New Zealand local government planning staff more than a decade ago: a desire to 'do something', but no clear picture of 'what' or 'how' – and a continuing lack of protocols including children and young people in public realm planning. Until these are put in place, urban justice for Auckland children will remain elusive.

An outcome of children's participation seldom considered in the literature is the benefits for the adults involved. The focus tends to be on the benefits of participation for children's learning and empowerment – notwithstanding participation is a relational two-way child-adult process, with learning opportunities for planning professionals and participants alike (Driskell, 2002; Mannion, 2007). In the case of the Freyberg Square consultation, children indeed reported benefits of a sense of agency and of being 'heard', both through the process of the consultation and the outcome of seeing their suggestions incorporated into the draft plan; of gaining knowledge and confidence about how to engage in the urban planning arena; and a belief in their rights as citizens to have access to and influence the development of public spaces (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009). Equally, however, the interviews with council staff confirmed benefits for the adults involved. Engaging with the children encouraged lateral thinking (rather than 'business as usual'), an opening out of design possibilities – and a specific 'learning' that a 'child-friendly' environment was more about providing sensory, play and socializing opportunities than restraining and constraining behaviours. The children's participation convinced them that involving children in the design process was worthwhile, and 'doable'. It spurred the urban design team to advocate for similar procedures to become an integral part of urban design processes. Such learning for adults is essential for a 'shifting of boundaries' (Roche, 1999), and a move towards spatial justice for children in the city.

Apart from the continuing constraints of institutional barriers identified by Freeman and colleagues (2003), children's levels and areas of participation in Aotearoa/New Zealand and elsewhere depend on how citizenship is conceptualized – as identity, state or dynamic participation (Jans, 2004) – and whether children are considered citizens in their own right, or 'becoming citizens' (Haywood, 2012). If children are seen as 'becoming citizens', then participation is couched in terms of educating children about their future responsibilities and rights and likely to be confined to 'non-adult' areas (Alderson, 2013); if on the other hand, they are acknowledged as already citizens in their own right then *a priori* rights to participation in 'adult' areas such as urban design and planning (Wilks and Rudner, 2013) are at least acknowledged.

As Thomas (2012, p. 463) suggests, children's participation in decision-making 'poses fundamental questions about children's place in society, and about intergenerational relations'. It also highlights different notions of democracy: whether 'representative' (with decisions made by a small number of informed people on behalf of citizens) and/or 'participatory' (with groups of citizens actively involved in decision-making) (Kallio and Hakli, 2013; Simpson, 1997). In Aotearoa/New Zealand and other liberal democracies there is an impetus towards the latter in local government, with tensions highly visible in the urban planning arena over the use of public space (Cockburn, 2005). These tensions, and competing discourses for the 'branding' of the square, were highlighted in the Freyberg Square consultation: children were only one group of stakeholder, and 'child-friendly' competed with 'something smart, cool, urban and urbane' (McKay, 2015) amongst other discourses.

Urban design and planning is thus, on the one hand, a political process of balancing competing interests, with children one of many stakeholder groups, and on the other, a professional practice bound by highly structured institutional procedures, mitigating against children's participation in particular. For the rhetoric of the 'citizen child's right to participate in local government to translate into practice – as in the case of the Freyberg Square children's consultation – requires the enabling participation of adults: an acknowledgement that children's participation is in large part about adult-child relations (Wyness, 2012).

Conclusion

In our arguments about children's citizenship and rights to participate in the urban planning arena, 'we are arguing about ourselves and our place in the world: it is an argument about politics and how we want to be and live our lives' (Roche, 1999, p. 484). It is also an argument about urban justice. Support for children's participation in local government decision-making is about valuing all members of our communities and ensuring the social sustainability of our cities. While there is progress, children's citizenship rights – and rights of engagement in urban planning processes – are yet to be embedded in city practices.

Auckland Council's draft strategic *I am Auckland* status report (Auckland Council, 2017, p. 58) declares that through 'engaging with children and youth, they become equal partners in crafting their present and their future' and that 'better outcomes are achieved…'. Not only are children affected by urban design and planning decisions in the present, as children; they are the citizens who are likely to be most affected by these decisions as adults, in the future.

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