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THE CHILD IN THE CITY: A RESEARCH AGENDA*

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Children are an important part of urban life. Although the birthrate is declining, there are still a large number of children living in cities. But we have devoted little effort to designing our cities to take children's needs into account. This paper presents a four-part research agenda. This agenda would provide the sort of information that decisionmakers need to create urban environments that foster the growth of children.

We have just completed the International Year of the Child. It was supposed to be a time for renewing our resolve to make this a better world in which children could grow. But our national agenda is dominated by concern for economic stability and military strength. At the local level, city managers and planners are being warned that they should prepare for getting by on less, and prepare to provide for the needs of a *greying society*. The International Year of the Child seems to have had little effect on the priorities of Americans.

THE NEED

Nonetheless, planning to meet the needs of children is important for urban policymakers. While the birthrate has declined in this century from 32.3 in 1900 to a low of 14.8 in 1975, the number of births has increased from 2.7 million to 3.1 million in that same time (Figure 1). The increase in the number of children (ages 0-14) has been even more dramatic, going from 26.1 million in 1900 to 49.3 million in 1975 (Figure 2). While there has been a decline in the number of births from 1960 to 1975 (from a high of 4.2 million to a low of 3.1 million), the 1978 estimates indicate that the trend may be reversing. In other words, even though there is a decline in the birthrate, children continue to be a sizable portion of the population and a group whose numbers continue to swell. While each woman may be bearing fewer children, there are more women of child-bearing age.

Besides considering the number of children, policymakers must also pay attention to the distribution of children in urban space. Household size has been declining, from an average of 4.7 people per household in 1900 to 2.8 in 1978. Along with this decline, the average number of children per household has declined from 1.6 in 1900 to 0.6 in 1978 (Figure 3). But children are not evenly distributed among all the households in a city. For an increasing number, smaller household size occurs because there is one less adult (i.e. single-parent households) rather than fewer children. And many households have no children (e.g. the elderly, some professional people) or fewer children. Even though families may have fewer children, providing the best possible environment for those children is often a crucial factor when the adults decide where to live. When a city is trying to attract new businesses, the desirability of the residential environment is often as important as the economic climate of the area. As the built environment increasingly becomes the product of deliberate choice and design, failure to consider the needs of children becomes all the more critical since there will be fewer unplanned ("informal") places left for the children to claim.

Figure 1

BIRTHS IN U.S., 1900-1978
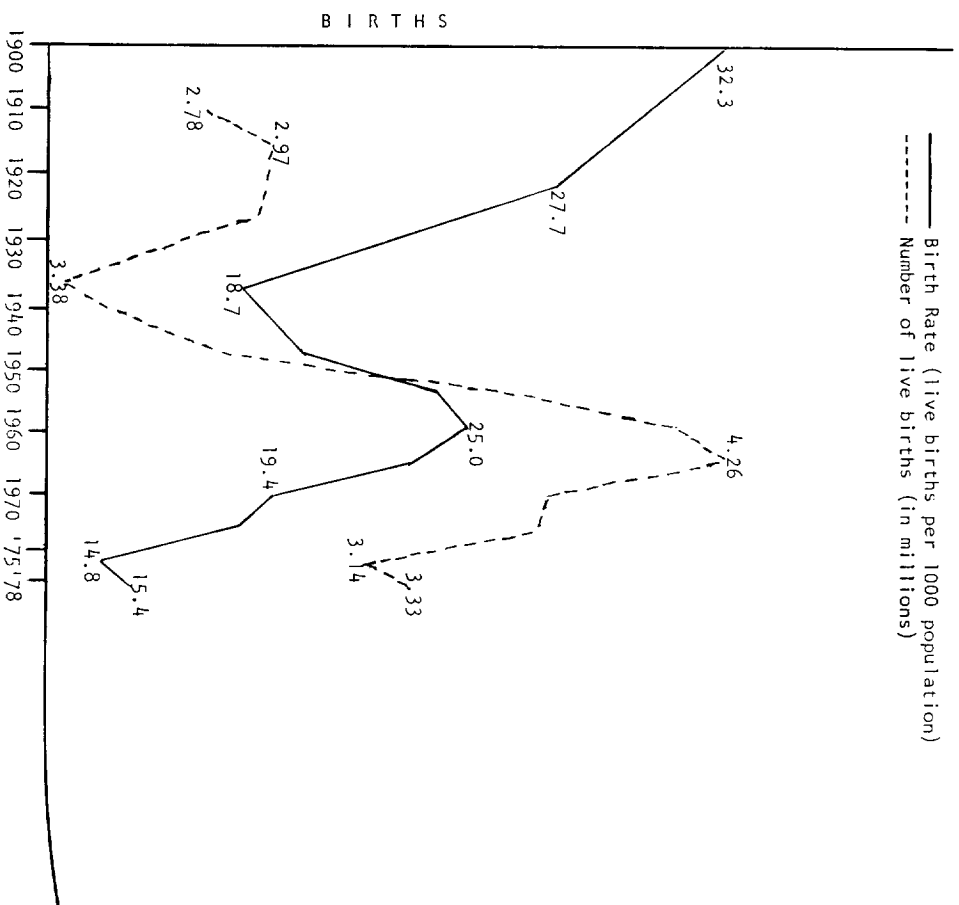
BIRTHS

——— Birth Rate (live births per 1000 population)
--------- Number of live births (in millions)

Birth Rate: 32.3, 27.7, 18.7, 25.0, 19.4, 14.8, 15.4

Number of live births: 2.78, 2.97, 3.38, 4.26, 3.14, 3.33

1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 '75 '78

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970
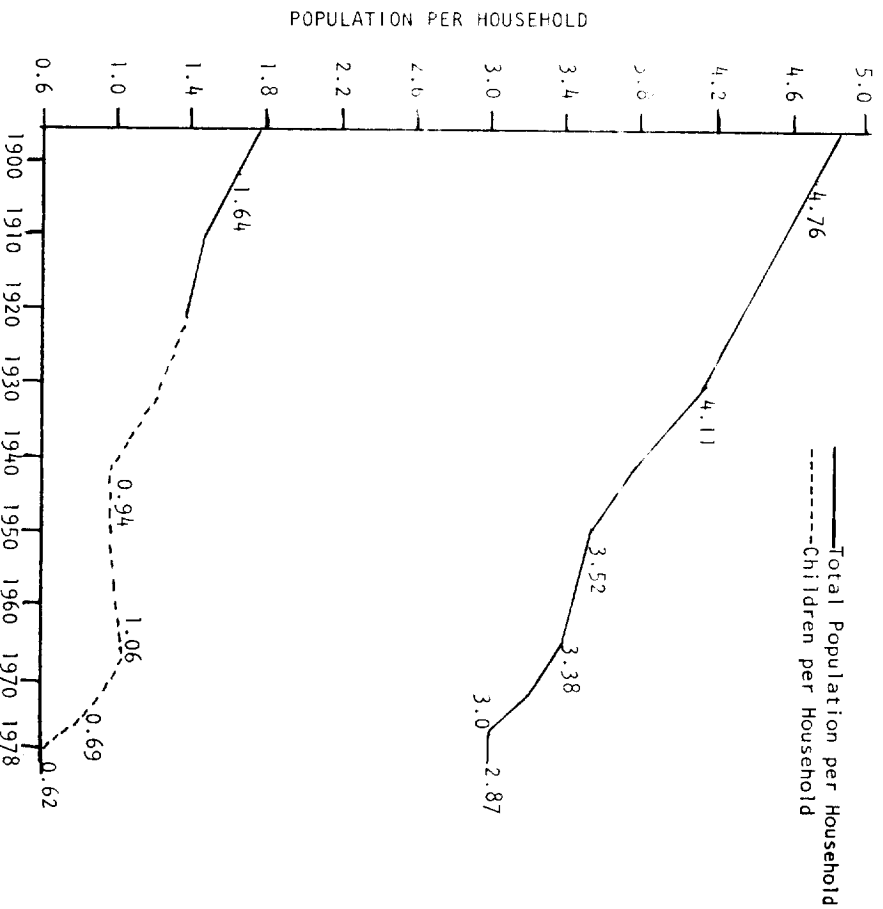Statistical Abstracts of the United States: 1979

Figure 2

U.S. POPULATION OF CHILDREN, 1900-1978
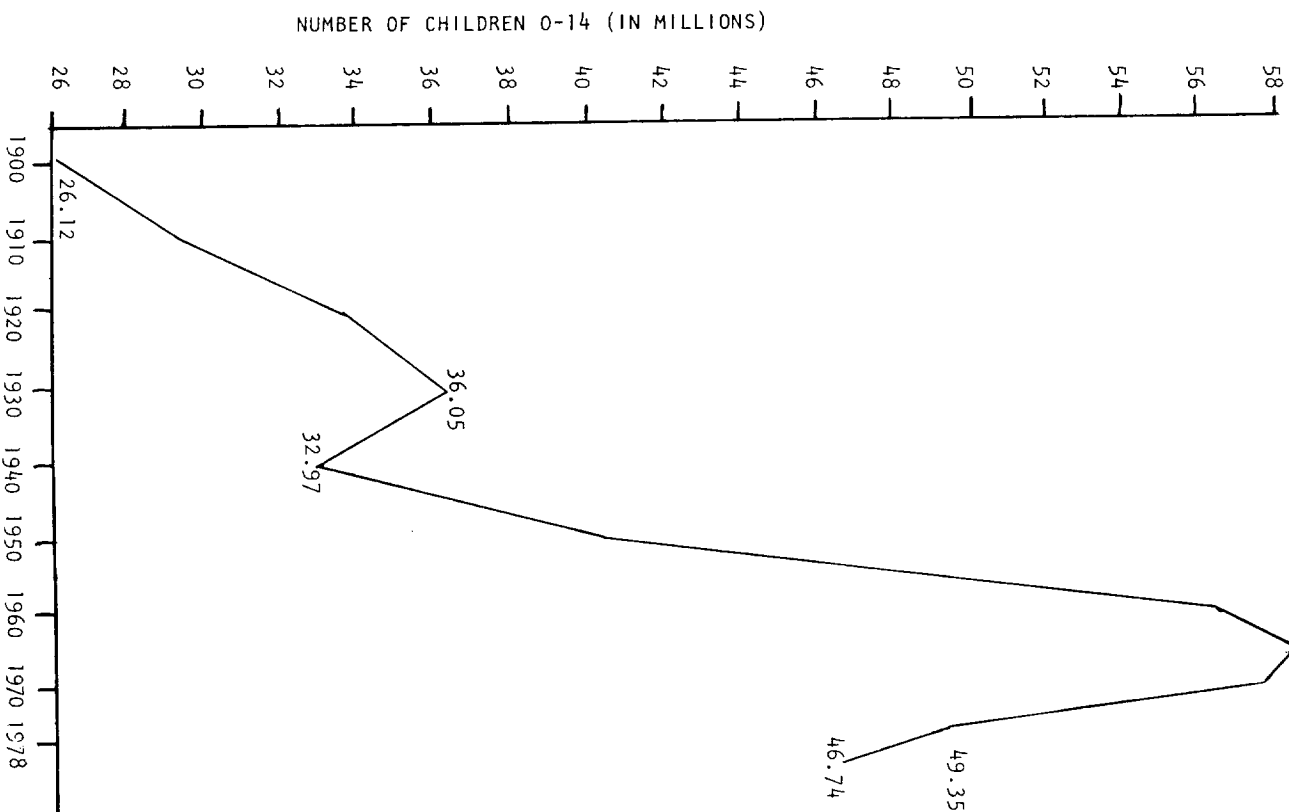
NUMBER OF CHILDREN 0-14 (IN MILLIONS)

26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40 42 44 46 48 50 52 54 56 58

1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1978

26.12, 36.05, 32.97, 59.25, 49.35, 46.74

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970
Statistical Abstracts of the United States: 1979

Figure 3

POPULATION PER HOUSEHOLD: TOTAL AND CHILDREN

POPULATION PER HOUSEHOLD

——— Total Population per Household
------- Children per Household

4.76

4.11

3.52

3.38

3.0—2.87

1.64

0.94

1.06

0.69

0.62

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970
Statistical Abstracts of the United States: 1979

We have designed some environments with children in mind. Many of the suburbs were designed around the primary school. These designs are as notable for their failures as their successes, but there has been no systematic attempt to improve on Clarence Perry's 1929 design for new housing developments. Nor have we developed guidelines for the rebuilding and revitalizing—the gentrification—of the older core cities so they take greater account of children's needs.

THE RECORD OF RESEARCH

There has been little research on children in the city, and much of the research that has been done is not in a form that is useful to urban policymakers. We need to develop a research agenda for studying children in the city, an agenda that is responsive to the needs of planners and managers, an agenda that marries the skills of the social scientist to needs of urban policymakers. There are several bodies of research which already point the way to such a marriage.

Urie Bronfenbrenner is working at Cornell on the ecology of human development. His research program specifically calls for studying the child as interacting with the "natural" environment (for the majority of children, this will be an urban—or suburban or small city—environment). Although a psychologist himself, in his work:

...The emphasis is not on the traditional psychological processes of perception, motivation, thinking, and learning, but on their content... and how the nature of this psychological material changes as a function of a person's exposure to and interaction with the environment.

Bronfenbrenner pays particular attention to the issue of significance, arguing that research must establish both "ecological validity" (congruence between the experience of the environment and the researcher's assumptions about that environment) and "developmental validity" (establishing that a change carried over time or to other settings). He also establishes a framework (in his four systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem) which could provide policy makers with useful information about the social level at which policy could appropriately intervene.

Bronfenbrenner attaches great value to the role of public policy in social science research:

...basic science needs public policy even more than public policy needs basic science.... Knowledge and analysis of social policy are essential for progress in developmental research because they alert the investigator to those aspects of the environment both immediate and remote, that are most critical...

Bronfenbrenner's work is likely to become a hallmark for the kind of research suggested here, although he does not himself pay particular attention to the urban environment nor does he appear to be familiar with the research that has been done on children in the city.

On the other hand, William Michelson's group, the "Child in the City" project in Toronto, is devoted specifically to policy-relevant research on children in the city. While perhaps lacking the unified theoretical grounding of Bronfenbrenner's work, their two-volume review is the best single source on

children in the city that is available today. Limited as they are by time, money, and manpower, their focus has been primarily on the social and institutional structure of the city, although they are not unaware of the effect on children of the physical structure of the city. They also tend to focus on problem areas, sources of dysfunction that need to be changed, with somewhat less emphasis on functional relations that should be maintained. More of urban policymaking, however, is (or should be) devoted to maintenance, rather than crisis intervention.

There are also a few other, less comprehensive, attempts to study the relationship between children and their urban environment. Sidney Brower's work at Baltimore City Planning is outstanding in its emphasis on the places where children really do play, rather than on the places where they are supposed to be playing.[9] There is also a group at Berkeley who regularly publish policy-relevant work on children in the city.[10]

But these few are not enough. The researchers from Berkeley are the only group that focuses on the policy issues of key interest to urban planners. Michelson's group in Toronto deals primarily with "social problems," a focus that is very useful for urban policy, but a focus that is weakened by insufficient resources to study maintenance rather than crisis issues. And Bronfenbrenner's group is not focusing on specifically urban issues at all. It takes nothing from the fine work that these groups have already done to say that we are only at the beginning of an adequate research agenda, an agenda that will require more activity of a similar sort if it is to achieve critical mass.

A RESEARCH AGENDA

Such an agenda must have at least four components. It must be based on observation of children's use of the city, and not just presumptions about their use of the city. The research agenda must also determine the significance to the children of the observed behavior. Third, the research should identify at what level in the social structure change in behavior can be achieved. This is very important for policymakers whose authority is frequently limited to fairly circumscribed levels of intervention. Finally, the researcher should attempt to identify the possible influence that the research might have on policymaking.

Use of the City: The first step in a program of research on children is to develop more information about the way children really use the city. Most of the research on children's use of the city has focused on their use of playgrounds, schools, and the space in and around their dwelling.[11] Little attention has been devoted to their use of shopping centers and neighborhood stores, alleys and "found spaces." There are few studies of children's transportation systems or the forces that shape children's uses of streets. Because we have focused on the behavior of children in discrete, stereotyped settings, our research has failed to appreciate the *context* of children's behavior. We do not understand what the city does to children because (with a few exceptions) we have not studied the city in which children live. For example, most research on children's play in the city studies children on playgrounds. In Brower's work, we find that children play much more frequently on stoops, streetfronts, in backyards and alleys.[12] There is no comparative study of backyard versus alley play.

There is a corollary to this position: children transform the environment in which they live, as the environment transforms those who act within it.[13] For

example. Pollow: describes city children playing in the corner of the stoop and in a fashion entirely analogous to rural children playing in the bushes in their yard as described by Hart.[15] Each has transformed the environment to meet his/her needs. Neither the environmental setting nor children's behavior are independent, but each transforms the other.

Significance of uses: We must also discover what is the significance *to the children* of the settings and the behaviors that we observe. Lady Marjorie Allen, a major proponent for adventure playgrounds, used to say that "It is too often forgotten in our brash, practical modern world that twilight, shadow, and beauty are as important to a growing child as food and air."[16] What is important to children--painted wings and giant rings, and how a bird can fly--is often missed by an adult. And we may misinterpret behavior that we observe. "Hanging out," for example, may seem a waste of time to adults, but be perceived as an essential social activity by children. But significance goes beyond an understanding of children's perceptions of their own behavior and of their own environment. We must also understand which transformations--by children of their environment and by the urban environment of children--will have a lasting effect. It is not that significant changes are insignificant (if they are important to children, they are significant), but their *relative* significance should be appreciated and could, in fact, serve as a basis for setting priorities in policymaking. A policymaker would be more inclined to undertake long-term planning to deal with an issue of lasting effect. No policymaker would ignore an issue that is significant for part of her his constituency, but a short-lived effect may call for simpler ameliorative strategies.

Level of Intervention: As researchers studying children's behavior and perceptions, determining causes and relationships, we need to keep an eye on the various levels of society at which intervention can occur. Policymakers are limited in their authority. For example, what is allowed at one level of government may be prohibited at another, or the public sector may intervene where the private sector may not. And even if an action is within the authority of a policymaker, taking the action may not be the most effective way to achieve a desirable goal. For example, a day-care system provided by the workplace may be more effective (and no more expensive) than one operated by the public school system. Some behavior, such as teen-age employment, may be grounded in a social structure that is beyond the influence of merely local policymakers. Other behaviors, such as school vandalism, may be imbedded in very limited social structures that hardly need a city-wide approach to achieve one's goals. Policymakers need to know not only what must be done, but at what level it is best done. This issue is not as self-evident as it first seems. As the recent work on "appropriate technology" has demonstrated, many goods that were assumed to require large-scale production and delivery can in fact be supplied efficiently (and more effectively) at the local or even individual level. We have yet to examine the extent to which this applies to the needs of children and the services which are provided for them.

Policy Influence: Finally, the choice of research projects and the choice of independent variables for study should be informed by the needs of policymakers. Much research is devoted to studying variables that cannot be influenced by public (or even private) policy choices. Such research, while valuable in its own

right, will not provide the sort of information that public officials and business leaders need as they make the decisions that will shape the urban environment. And yet the fact remains that it is these officials and business leaders who will be creating the environment in which our children will grow. Further, it is one of the hallmarks of childhood that it is a time of rapid growth and development—cognitively, physically, and emotionally. If we can work with those who shape the cities to create an environment that fosters the growth of children, we may find ourselves living in an environment that fosters our own growth and meets our own needs as well. This is not a call for all research to submit to a saliva-test for relevancy; it is called for researchers to keep a judicious eye on the killer question, "So what?"

In summary, this is a call for research programs that go beyond methodological significance to provide information that can also be significant for decisionmakers in the large society. Such programs would pay attention to behavior-in-context, teasing out the significance of the behavior to the participants, and delineating the points of intervention for those who are responsible for providing or maintaining the context in which the behavior occurs. Both the researcher and the policy-maker would benefit: the policy-maker would gain both efficiency and effectiveness in using research results; the researcher would gain research direction from societal needs, and more immediate feedback on the soundness of the conclusion he/she has drawn. The agenda is a simple one: the additional effort should be slight: the benefit to the public good makes the effort worthwhile.

NOTES

1 Laurence Rutter, ed., *The Essential Community* (Washington, D.C.: ICMA, 1980).

2 Clarence Perry. *Housing for the Machine Age* (New York: Russell Sage, 1939).

3 Edward A. Wynne. *Growing Up Suburban* (Austin: University of Texas, 1977).

4 Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

5 Bronfenbrenner, p. 9.

6 Bronfenbrenner, pp. 28-36.

7 Bronfenbrenner, p. 8

8 William Michelson, et al., *The Child in the City: Volume 1: Today and Tomorrow* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

9 Sidney Brower. "Streetfront and Sidewalk." in *Landscape Architecture*, 63 (1973), pp. 364-369.

10 Clare Cooper Marcus. "Children in Residential Areas: Guidelines for Designers." *Landscape Architecture Quarterly*, 64 (1974), p. 376; Clare Cooper, *Easter Hill Village* (New York: The Free Press, 1976); Kevin Lynch, *Growing Up in Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977); Donald Appleyard and Mark Lintell, "The Environmental Quality of City Streets: The Residents' Viewpoint," in *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 38 (1972), pp. 84-101.

11 Anne-Marie Pollowy, *The Urban Nest* (Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, 1977) and Michelson, et al., *The Child in the City, Volume 1*.

12 Brower, "Streetfront and Sidewalk."

13 Pollowy, *The Urban Nest*.

14 George Simmel. "The Metropolis and Mental Life" in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1950); Stanley Milgram, "The Experience of Living in Cities" in *Science*, 167 (1970), pp. 1761-68.

15 Roger Hart. *Children's Experience of Place* (New York: Irvington Press, 1978).

16 Marjorie Allen. *Planning for Play* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968).

CITIZEN COPRODUCTION AS A MODE OF PARTICIPATION: CONJECTURES AND MODELS*

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With cutbacks in local service delivery budgets, attention has focused on how best to maintain current levels of services without increases in taxation. One alternative focuses on the concept of coproduction—where citizens provide factor inputs to the production of services. This paper analyzes the concept of coproduction, arguing it has a valuable role not only as an alternative production mode, but as a participatory behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Like traditional theories of political participation, descriptive-empirical work on participation has focused on a narrow range of citizen activities. Voting, public participation and service delivery examines citizen involvement with the campaign mobilization and financing, and office-seeking behaviors fall under this rubric. On the other hand, political scientists have increasingly turned their attention to the dynamics of local service delivery and the involvement of citizen-consumers in this process. A recent approach to bridging traditional accounts of public participation and service delivery examines citizen involvement with the state in the production of local services (coproduction). Given that the state increasingly occupies a production role (especially at the local levels), this paper argues that citizen coproduction is an additional, important facet of participation.

PARTICIPATION: ITS ROLE

Before extending the concept of participation, we must understand those fundamental elements which comprise it. A primary disagreement among political theorists focuses on the political role of participation. Theorists such as Rousseau and G. D. H. Cole argue that participation is an end, valued in itself. Others, such as Mill and Schumpeter, representing a liberal-democratic tradition, view participation as a means. These views conflict, resulting in significantly different aims for the value of participation, and the role it occupies in the study of politics (see Pateman, 1970; Macpherson, 1977; Pennock, 1979). Although this conflict occupies a primary place in political theory, the dominant focus by political scientists has been to regard participation as a means to some end. This is primarily derived from the liberal values which are pervasive in American society.[1]

Typical of this liberal conceptualization are the definitions offered by Milbrath and Goel and Verba and Nie. Milbrath indicates:

Political participation may be defined as those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics.[2]