

**Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik
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Occasional Paper

Heidrun Kunert-Schroth

**Planning Cities for Children and Youth
Current Efforts in Germany**

Report

**23rd International Conference on Making Cities Livable: The Fragmented City –
Strategies for Saving our Cities
Santa Barbara, California, November 16 - 20, 1998**

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1. Introduction

There are many important strategies focused on healing the "fragmented city" - such as mixed use, sustainable communities, new neighborhoods around public places, and vitalizing the public realm. These provide more options for citizen participation in and commitment to the reconstruction of a livable city.

Although there are differences in German and American planning culture and planning tradition, urban planning departments in Germany face similar problems. In general, public urban planning departments can still be said to dominate the planning process, though private investors increasingly have to bear public responsibility and, for example, to meet the cost of technical or social infrastructure. In the long run, economic interests will exercise more and more political influence on the shape of the city.

It is difficult to identify benchmarks for the development of a livable city as an entity, in particular for an environment appropriate for children and young people. Last year the German Institute of Urban Affairs had an opportunity to do this in organizing the nationwide competition "Child and Family Friendly Cities and Towns."

First I want to give a short outline of the fields our institute is engaged in. The German Institute of Urban Affairs was founded in 1973 in Berlin by the German Association of Towns and Cities with the aim of identifying long-term prospects for urban development and providing expert advice to municipal authorities. The institute has a close connection to its member cities, this allows us to work near to the urban problems.

2. Children and Family Friendly Cities and Towns

Planning cities for children and young people means planning for a largely neglected section of society. The need for free and safe outdoor space for play and activities has been neglected in favor of providing parking lots. Although the German Building Code does take cognizance of the needs of the young, it provides no more than a technical framework. It proposes playgrounds for small children near their homes and defines the planning standards for public playgrounds in urban districts. But these regulations are hardly ever implemented, especially, in the older parts of cities, where there are few private playgrounds. Municipal planning authorities do not take enough interest in the needs and requirements of the young. They are accustomed to operating at a more generalized level. More specific ideas and visions come from child and youth authorities and the associated commissions, offering children and their parents opportunities to participate in developing their housing environment and district.

3. The Legal Background and the Financial Situation of German Municipalities

The legal background to the federal competition was the 1991 Municipal Child and Youth Services Act, which played a special role in this event. In the first section, local youth services were asked to suggest ways of improving living conditions for young people and their families, as well as securing or creating a child and family friendly urban environment. This is why the competition was initiated by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth rather than the Federal Ministry for Traffic, Regional Planning, Building and Urban Development. Later in the paper I will discuss differences between the schools of thought associated with urban planning and social planning.

The so-called Kindergarten Act of 1992 has also been very important. Since 1994 all cities have been required to build enough preschools and kindergartens to give every child between the ages of three and six the opportunity to attend as of right. This Kindergarten Act has been a major challenge for municipalities, whose financial situation has become very difficult in recent years.

The financial crisis has been the result of several factors, one being the reunification of Germany in 1990. The federal government has had to reduce public spending at all levels of government. The Federal Republic of Germany was obliged to assume the debts incurred by the defunct German Democratic Republic.

Another factor has been the growing rate of unemployment (about 10 per cent in average in western regions and over 20 % in some eastern ones). The cost of supporting the unemployed has increased dramatically while public revenue income have decreased.

This has lessened cities' ability to finance new programs. Since no money has been forthcoming from the federal government, cities have increasingly been obliged to canvass private sponsors, the public, social movements, and private foundations for funds.

Although cities have hardly been able to afford to support these programs, the federal competition has encouraged them to continue their endeavors to make cities livable.

4. The Situation of Children in Germany

In the sociological and political discussion about childhood in Germany, two positions are represented.

On the one hand, we find the dominant opinion that children are very well cared for nowadays (asserted, for example, by this year's 10th government Report on Children)¹. In support of this view it is pointed out that there are many institutions that specialize in the children's needs, and that many parents now center their lives on their children as never before.

On the other hand, there are a growing number of people who regard children as a neglected group, who suffer rather than benefit from developments in society. It is believed that children are excluded from ordinary social life, limited to specialized surroundings, and disregarded in an adult society. This line of argumentation often employs terms such as "a hostile environment for children" or "structural violence against children."

The tendency to exclude young people from public and private places has increased - not through legislation but as a result of their own poverty. In Germany three million children and young people (out of 12.3 million) live in relative poverty. This engenders problems. Young people cannot participate in our consumer society as the majority of the population does, and therefore feel neglected. The outcome has been a negative reaction, apparent in higher delinquency rates (shoplifting, for example) and juvenile crime. If young people are to be included in local society they must first of all be given financial support and understanding for their social and mental needs. One way to put this into practice is for them to participate in local decision making processes. Two different strategies are possible. They could be invited to participate in community or school district organizations, for example in child and youth parliaments. The other strategy is to obtain more influence in local politics through the vote.

The development of local youth policy shows clearly that children and young people alone do not wield enough social and political power because they cannot vote and have no lobby apart from their parents. If teenagers had the vote their interests would receive more attention. Four of the sixteen states in Germany have accordingly decided to reduce the voting age for local elections to sixteen.

1 Zehnter Kinder- und Jugendbericht. Bericht über die Lebenssituation von Kindern und die Leistungen der Kinderhilfen in Deutschland. Hrsg.: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, Bonn 1998.

(Tenth Report on Children and Young People. Report on the life situation of children and the achievements of child services in Germany, published by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.)

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5. The Federal Competition "Child and Family Friendly Cities and Towns" (1997)²

In 1997 the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, asked our institute to prepare and organize the competition Child and Family Friendly Cities and Towns . In Germany, municipal authorities are responsible for urban planning as well as for the well-being of the young, so the Federal Ministry can only encourage, inform or give awards. Decision making and financial responsibility are located at the local level.

In Germany we have about 14 000 local authorities, of which 364 participated last year, far more than in earlier competitions on this topic.

The municipalities that participated can be classified in three categories:

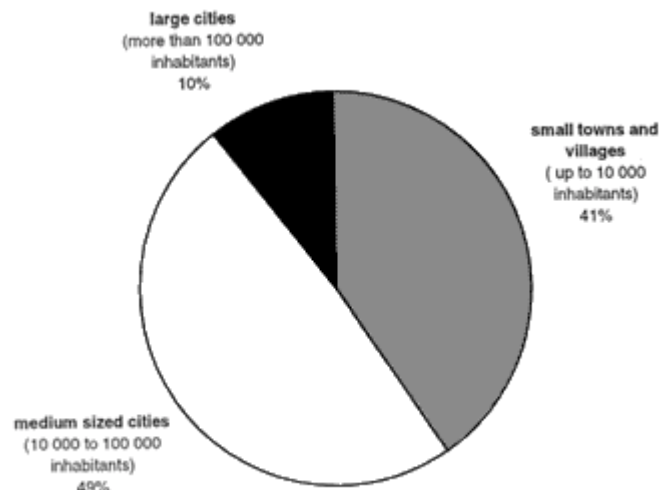


Figure 1: Competitions Participants

Small towns and large cities face different problems in developing an environment appropriate for children and families. For this reason, the jury decided to differentiate between cities on the one hand and towns and villages on the other, awarding prizes to both groups on all aspects of the competition.

Tackling the idea of a child and family friendly environment at the local level means solving a cross-sectional problem. Not only social and educational authorities have to be involved, but also those responsible for housing, urban planning, public transport and traffic, recreation and culture, the labor market, and local economic policy - in short, all aspects of local government should be involved.

The participating cities and towns were asked to select projects that

were concerned with the well-being of young people and their families. The solutions had to address the concept of a child and family friendly environment in its entirety and be innovative and sustainable. It was hoped that the results of the competition would inform the Federal Government about the areas in which political support was still necessary.

The jury divided the total prize sum of nearly 200 000 dollars among fifteen winners, who were asked to invest it in new development projects.

Besides the benefits for the winners, the main issue of the competition was to disseminate information about innovative urban policy strategies in family and youth affairs, and to encourage other cities and towns to imitate or even improve the selected examples.

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- 2 Bundeswettbewerb "Kinder- und familienfreundliche Gemeinde", Dokumentation; Hrsg.: Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik (Difu), Berlin und Agrarsozialer Gesellschaft e.V. (ASG), Göttingen - im Auftrag des Bundesministeriums für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, Bonn-Berlin 1997.
(Federal Competition "Child and Family Friendly Cities and Towns". Documentation published by the German Institute of Urban Affairs and the Association of Agrarian Social Affairs, Berlin 1997.)
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6. The Results of the Competition

The competition brought together a lot of local-level experience from throughout Germany. The contributions were astonishingly complex.

The following main areas were observed:

- The first can be described as the concept of social policy for children and families in the city, including urban social institutions of child services, kindergartens, other day-care services for children and young people, family services, youth clubs, education services for children and young people at risk and other services. Cities and towns are required to implement the Child and Youth Services Act, so it is not surprising that nearly all competitors presented one or more examples of innovative projects in this area.
- The second conceptual trend can be headed "the integrated development of housing areas" including housing affairs, housing environment, and traffic and transportation. Authorities have been trying to reduce traffic and limit speed in inner cities for more than ten years now.
- The third was participation in family policy and in community agencies, creating a lively community at the district level. Children's parliaments are often named in this context, as well as child city maps.
- And, lastly, family policy as an current issue for municipal authorities, at both the administrative and political levels.

Of course, these different concepts and strategies are complementary, but they vary in options, goals and conditions.

7. Different Schools of Thought

Social services are oriented towards their particular beneficiary, but projects for housing development, housing structure, or the housing environment concentrate on all inhabitants of a given housing area. This may lead to conflict, to differences and to problems if the diverse groups have different needs and user interests. For example, all motorists have to respect the 30 km speed zone in residential areas, regardless of whether they have children or ever venture out as pedestrians. They might thus feel impeded even if they profit from the speed limit, which prevents accidents and noise.

Such conflicts and differences are due mainly to structural measures, which tend to be double-edged. On the one hand they are a source of financial or other contributions, but they often involve impose restrictions on sections of the population.

The result is frequently conflict between - on the one hand - representatives of certain economic interests, such as property owners, housing developers, shop owners, and business people (as well as political parties espousing the interests of these groups) and - on the other - non-economic groups and interests. Ecological groups (such as Greenpeace, B.U.N.D. in Germany) frequently also pursue exclusionary goals. For instance, they may refuse permission for children and young people to use renatured areas for fear of damage. Inclusiveness and exclusiveness are thus due not only to economic interests but also to other special land-use interests. It is a general problem in urban areas that few share the public interest. A large number of special interests makes planning for the city difficult. How can the concept of community needs be revived? This is currently being debated in Germany.

These conflicts will increase because integrative housing development must deal with very different demands made on urban space and has to react to different planning methods. Family policy demands have hitherto not been given priority in these technical planning procedures.

Nevertheless, the competition has shown that many cities and towns are striving to achieve progress. They support the struggle to regain more and more urban space for the use of children and their families, which is normally allotted to many different functions. In no other field of urban policy the "structural disregard" of children's and families' needs has been greater in the past than in the structuring of urban space and communities. The competition has shown just how difficult it is to change this situation.

If cities fail to support the development of an environment more suitable for children and families, families will desert the cities for the suburbs and surrounding communities. Segregation in inner cities has become a severe problem and will still continue if nothing is done.

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8. Statistical Distribution of Competition Contributions

As the rate of measures shows, an urban concept usually offers three or more aspects. With their contributions, the participating municipalities demonstrate not only that they have understood the aims of the competition but also that they approved them. The competition met the high priority demands of many cities. Participation in the competition gave youth services departments an opportunity to work with other authorities and to learn how many different sides there are to family policy in their communities.

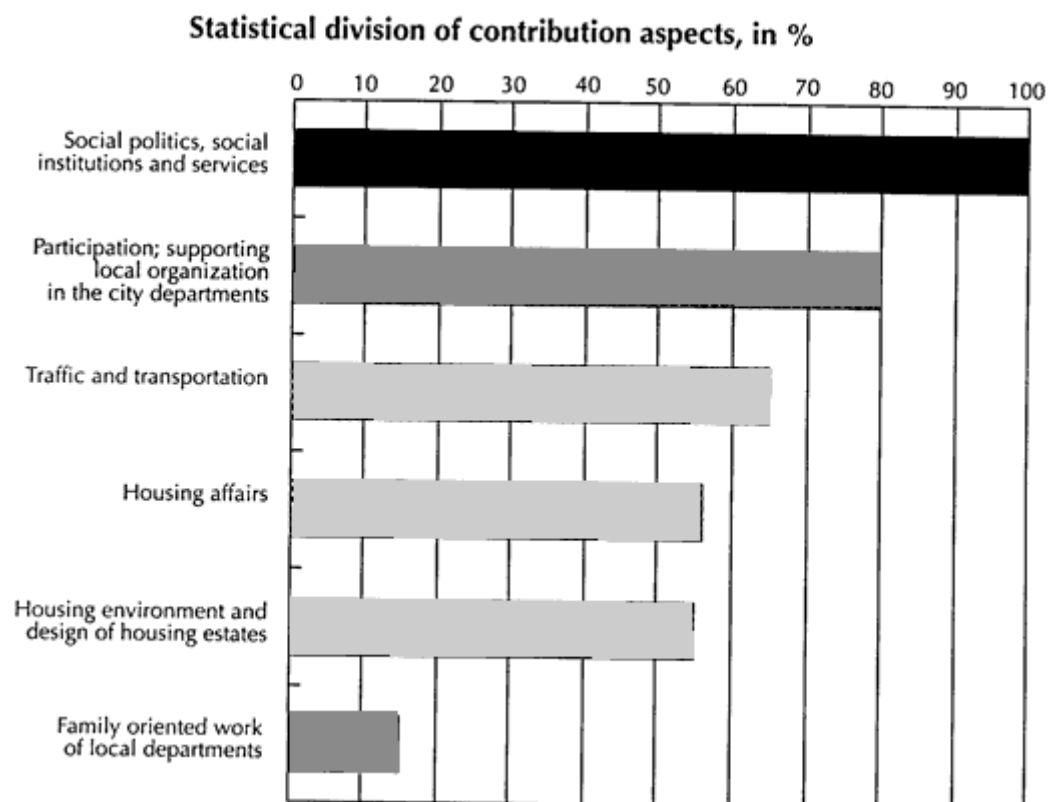


Figure 2: Contribution Aspects

The aspects "social policy" and "social infrastructure" as well as "participation" are the responsibility of local youth services departments. "Traffic and transportation," "housing environment," and "housing affairs" are within the purview of urban planning authorities.

Let us have a look at the figures for the various measures of social infrastructure, social services, urban planning, housing affairs, participation and local cooperation in the diverse local concepts.

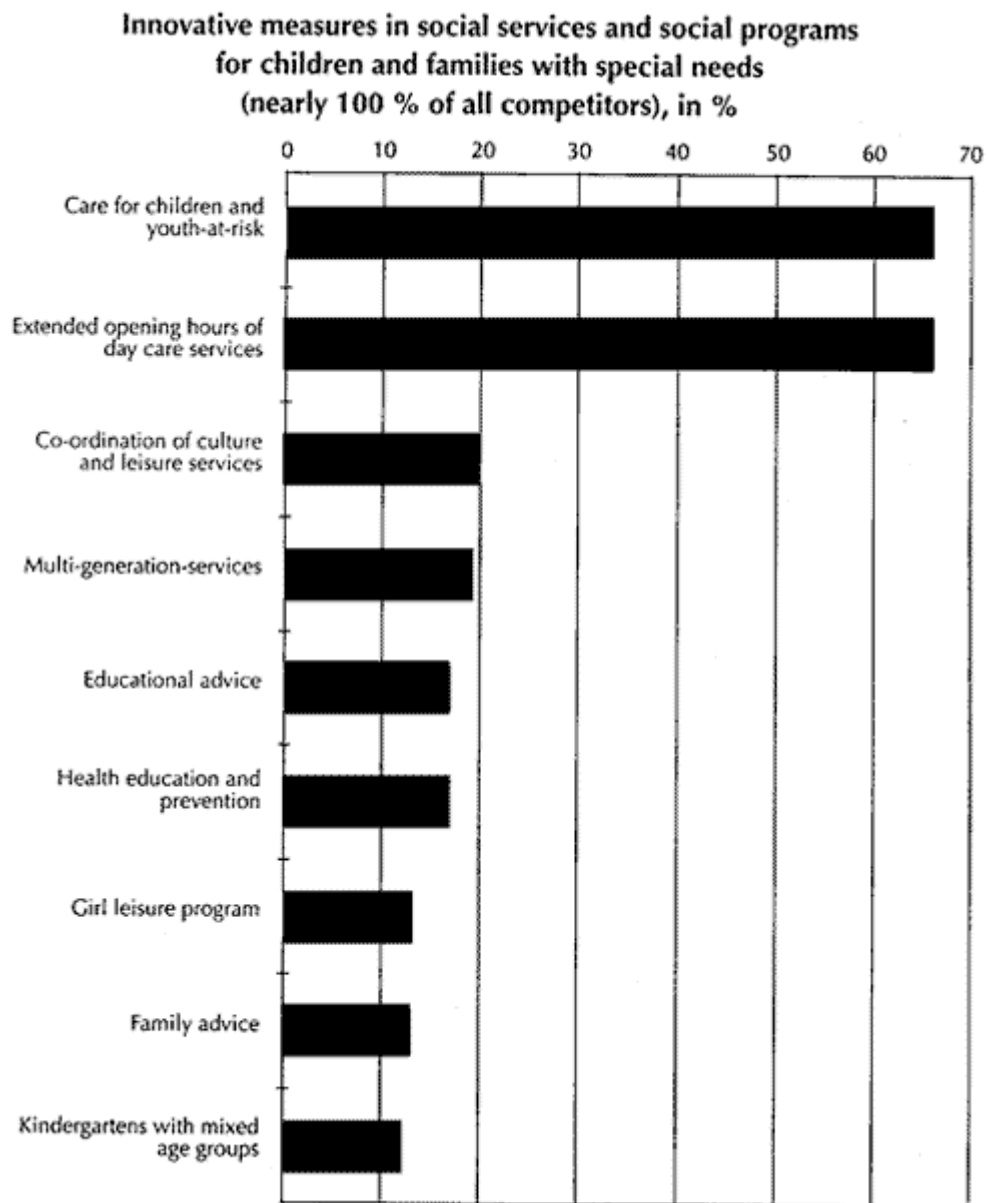


Figure 3: Social Services

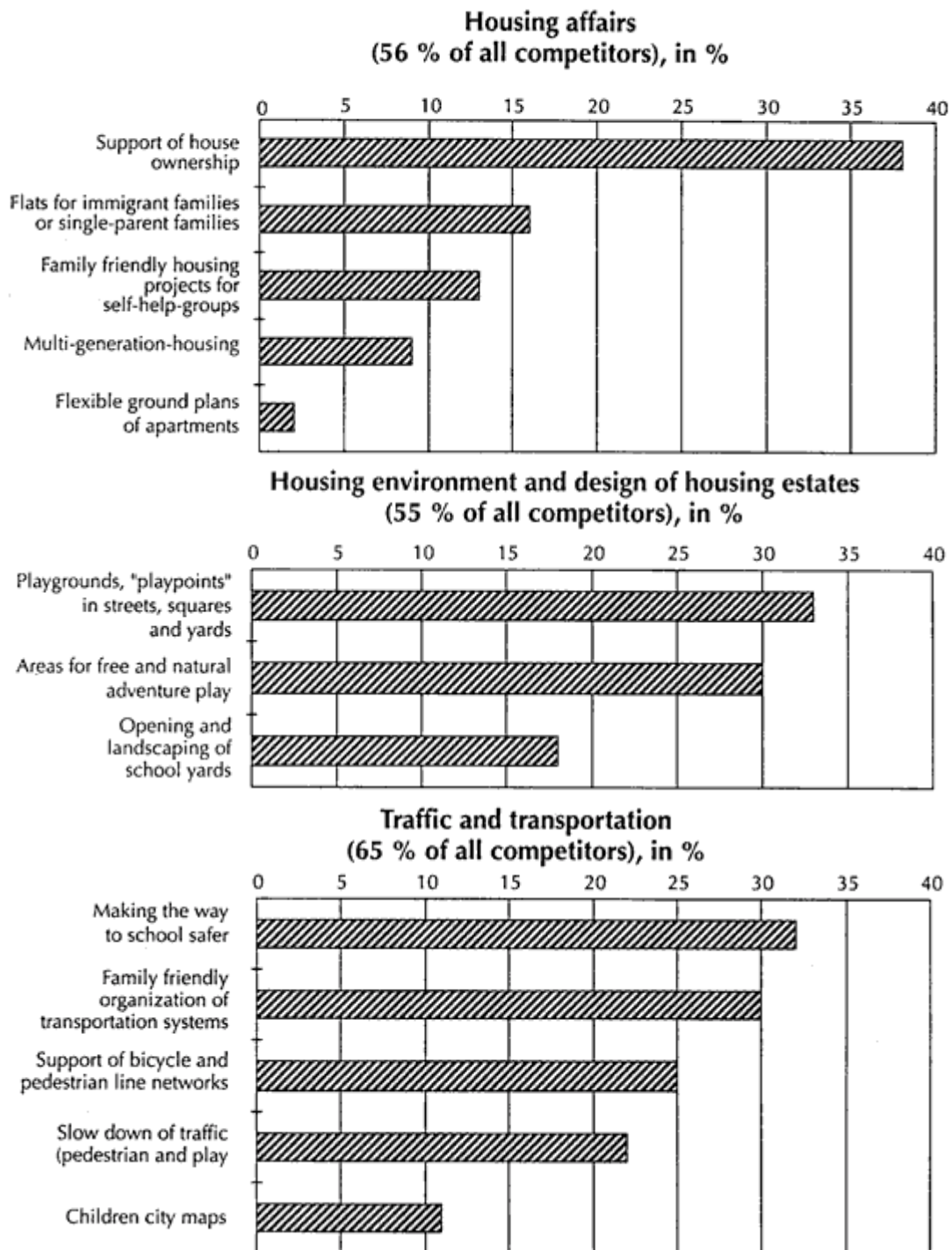


Figure 4: Housing and Traffic

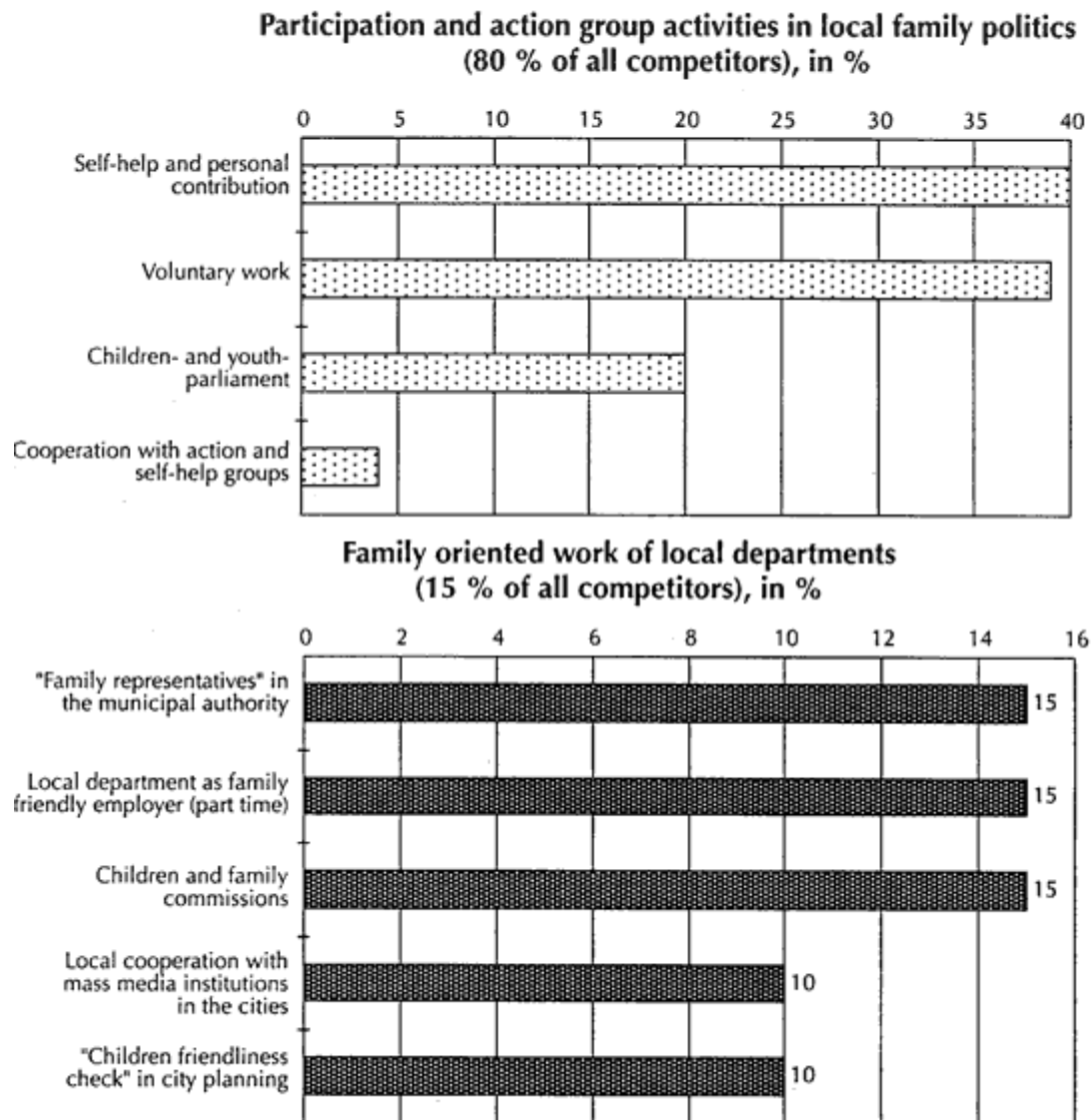


Figure 5: Participation and Local Government

9. Example: The City of Aachen

In the integrated housing development measures group, two cities are particularly interesting. The first is Freiburg, with its special "Rieselfeld" project, an ecological housing project, to be built for 10 000 people over the coming 4 years. This project was the topic of a 1995 IMCL Conference in Freiburg, published by IMCL in 1995.

The other is Aachen, a large city with 253 000 inhabitants. The Aachen concept to revitalize existing housing areas and the inner city.

I want to give you an overview of the measures to improve living conditions for children and young people in Aachen.



Figure 6: The Region of Aachen
Source: Press Office, City of Aachen.

Aachen is close to the Dutch and Belgian borders. The local authorities present innovative projects for the design of the housing environment and housing and traffic policy. Aachen has been in a difficult economic situation for a long time after losing most of its coal and textile industries, so it has preferred non-conventional measures to improve living conditions for children and their families.

Since 1989 traffic and speed have been reduced in the inner city, a lot of pedestrian zones as well as 30 km speed zones have been built, and the process of regaining more public space for pedestrians continues. Three ring roads collect through traffic and reduce the flow through the inner city. In 1989 the Aachen Traffic Commission issued this statement on traffic policy: "The vitality of the city should not be suppressed by the force of motorisation. Car traffic has put a heavy strain on people and the environment. Fundamental rethinking is needed if these traffic problems are to be solved."³ Nine years later the inner city has become not only a shopping area

12 000 daily regional consumers but a residential area for 40 000 people, welcome a large number of visitors and providing 40 000 workplaces. Many families still live in the inner city and have not moved to the suburbs. The reason is the revitalization of the Aachen medieval core. As a result, half the inner city is in 30 km speed zones (370 km); parking on sidewalks is no longer allowed; a nearly 110 km network of cycle tracks has been established; pedestrians now enjoy the use of 10 hectares of pedestrian precincts and reduced traffic zones.

- In eight streets or squares the local authority has built so called "playpoints" where streets and squares are too small to accommodate a normal playground. These playpoints have only one play device and are not fenced off like conventional playgrounds.
- To provide greater safety for pedestrians or cyclists crossing inner city streets, special traffic light phases have been installed. Normally, the green phase for cars turning right is also the signal for pedestrians to cross. This could lead to accidents involving children, who can be seriously injured if truck drivers fail to notice them.

These green phases are now separated in Aachen, one phase for pedestrians and another for motor vehicles. Pedestrians thus have a round-about green phase. This idea was put forward by a citizens' round table on "street safety".

- To provide more safety in the surroundings of elementary schools, adults have been employed as traffic wardens in 16 schools.

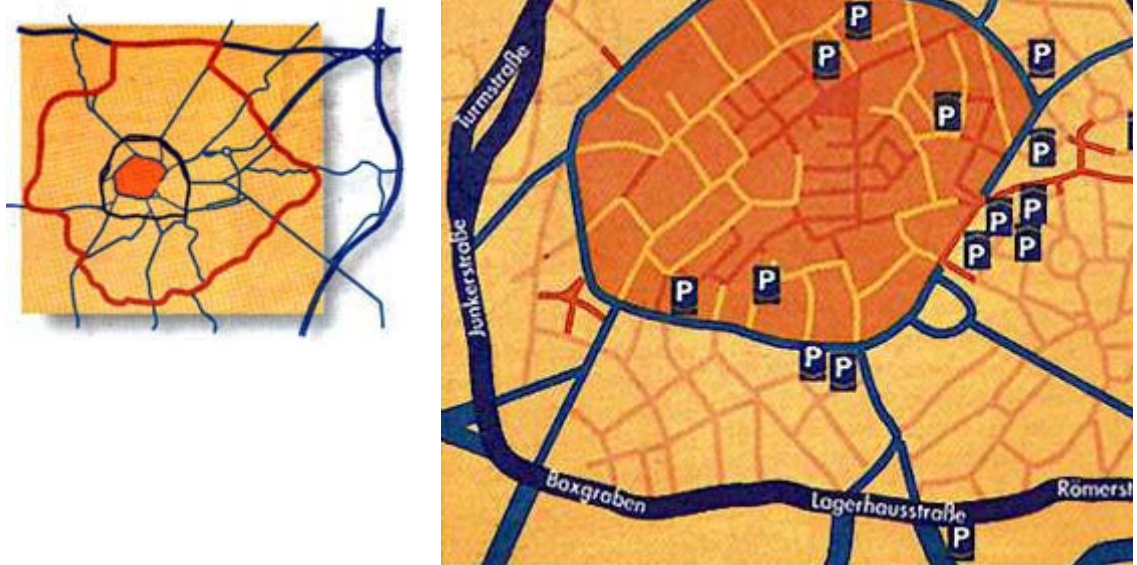


Figure 7: Traffic System and Traffic Calming Concept in the Inner City



Figure 8: Downtown-Conception Aachen



Figure 9: Playpoint in the City of Aachen

- To create a network of cycle tracks, Aachen defined cycle streets. Here bicycles are free to use the entire street and can cycle side by side. Cars may pass very slowly. These cycle streets must be selected carefully if the concept is a success.

This project seems very courageous, but with good public relations work a lot of support from private organizations in the city it has mostly been successful. Other cities like Erlangen or Münster have become cycling cities, too. So it is possible to change conventional traffic policies for the benefit of children and young people, even if topography does not allow easy riding.

- Aachen decided to exclude cars from several housing areas despite the high costs, so courtyard parking lots were replaced by underground car parks. In the area there are playgrounds, fountains and sculptures and the residents, children and their families, can use the green areas without noise and pollution from cars.
- Aachen has supported efforts to improve conditions for children and families by creating new city department structures as committed interlocutors in the dialogue between citizens and youth groups and with other city departments. They are:
 - the women's representative, who works not only for the needs of women but also for families and children in planning procedures and projects
 - the youth commission is working steadily to attain the goal of a "child-oriented Aachen."

- the contact bureau "Children in the City of Aachen", the children's representative, and
- the working groups "Children's Safety" and "Girls."

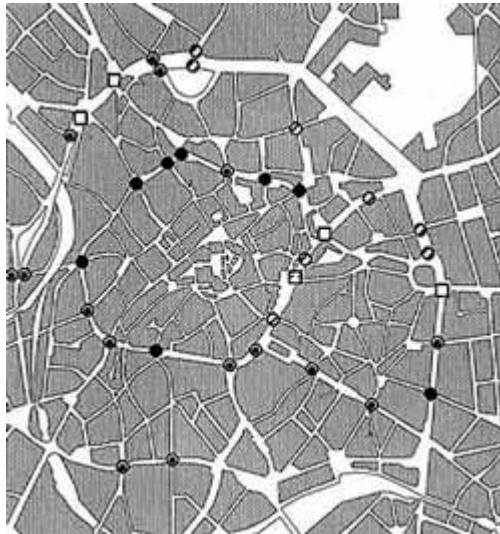


Figure 10: Pedestrian Traffic Lights



Figure 11: Puppet Fountain in the City of Aachen

All these and other measures are helping to attain the goal of regaining the city as a comfortable living space for children and young people. This is what we want, not only for the people of Aachen, but for all other cities as well.

3 The City of Aachen contribution to the competition, shortened version. Aachen 1997.

10. Summary

A number of factors have to come together to create a supportive political climate. A change in attitudes in favor of children and young people must be demanded and supported by both grass-roots organizations and the authorities. (Aachen has a faculty of architecture in the local technical university with many committed professionals, teachers and students, which has certainly been an important factor for the success of these endeavors.) Another important factor is cooperation between social planners and urban planners in making cities more livable.

In the aftermath of this competition, a number of planning goals can be outlined:

- Enough open space for children and youths must exist, must be always available, and easily accessible.
- Traffic must be reduced in many areas, not only in residential areas.
- A cycle track system and a broad pedestrian network should connect housing areas with schools and kindergartens, parks, gardens, playgrounds and sport facilities as well as with shopping streets and market places.
- The transportation system must allow safe and comfortable use by unaccompanied children. (In some cities students can use the citybus system free of charge.)
- Social and cultural institutions and services must be committed in community problems and needs, in the sense of a community agency, even if the city is not responsible or does not pay for these institutions.
- Children and young people should be given more and more opportunities to create their living space together with adults, similar to the Children-City Project in Wiesbaden and elsewhere.
- Participating in long and short-term planning projects should become standard procedure in all cities and towns.

The example of Aachen shows that what is needed to make our cities better places for children and families to live in is not so much money as courage, organization and good will.