

# **Children's use of Urban Open Spaces;**

## **Three Case studies in Sheffield, England, UK**

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## **1. Abstract**

This study investigates values of urban open spaces for children's use in urbanized cities which almost half of the world's population live. Most of the cities' open spaces have been destroyed for building new plazas, shopping malls, residences and apartment blocks. Only small numbers of spaces left behind. The importance of these urban open spaces should be understood correctly. This particular research investigates values of our urban open spaces whether they are still useful and suits the need of our children.

## **2. Introduction**

Nowadays almost half of the world's human population lives in cities. Urbanization becomes more obvious than it was all around the world and emigration from small towns to big cities become more popular. Big cities always fascinate people with their big shopping malls, city centres, high streets, big market stores and most importantly with new job opportunities. These opportunities magnetize people to big cities.

Being in a city affects everyone to some extent; however, children are the most affected group. Children need open spaces more than anyone. Dymont and Bell (2008) state that natural environment is substantial for children's play and physical activity. They need to walk, run, and play. In the cities lack of urban open spaces such as neighbourhood parks, play grounds, school gardens etc., means that children are generally kept inside the houses. Children spend most of their time indoors playing computer and video games or watching television. Being inside all the time and lack of movement causes health problems as well as social behaviour problems and psychological problems. Biggest concerns of scientist and

doctors are shortage of physical activity and obesity in last few decades. Childhood obesity is increasing (Kaur et. al., 2003; Krassas and Tzotzas, 2004; Ogden et al., 2006; Rigby and Baillie, 2006). Increased childhood obesity makes our children less physically active which means that they are becoming overweight or obese adolescents and adults. This is the one of negative effects of lack of urban open spaces.

To keep the children physically active, accessibility of urban open spaces and public green spaces is crucial. Easy accessible urban open spaces can be used more and also improve the physical activity level of children as well as their parents.

In urbanized areas of the world small numbers of urban open spaces which exist are precious for children and therefore they should be designed and maintained correctly and they should be advertised and encourage children to use them correctly.

The work of this project aims to identify children`s use of urban open spaces in Sheffield example as well as accessibility to them and give urban designers, planners and policy maker good implications to use their future projects.

### **3. Literature Review**

Children probably live in better conditions than past; however, in an urbanized areas in order to natural habitats and open spaces being disrupted, their chance to settle down in a nature is becoming to vanish. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2008), global population exceeded 6 billion in 2000, and is expected to reach 9 billion by 2050 (cited in Lovell and Johnstone, 2009). It was estimated that more than fifty per cent of world`s population and almost ninety per cent of European population (United nations (2001); cited in Pickett and

Cadenasso, 2008) live in big cities such as London, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Beijing, Bangkok, Cairo, Istanbul, Paris, Rome, Amsterdam and so on. These cities and so many others become more popular because of their life and work opportunities. Emigration to urban areas increased last few decades. Some small cities became big cities.

Urbanized areas bring good opportunities for people along with some unwanted affects on their lives. For instance keep them concreted buildings rather than being in nature. In order to increased emigration levels are needed to be accommodate, our precious green areas and landscapes in the big cities are converted to accommodation to growing population. Bengtsson, (1972) states it can be found out that average housing area in almost any country makes field poor for children. Lockwood adds that some play equipments or sand boxes might be found but exclusively nothing more to explore for children in our cities.

People who live in urbanized areas need urban open spaces for relaxing, being in the nature -if it is a green area-, meeting with their friends, having fun and learning. City residents feel recovered after being in the natural areas ( Korpela, 2001 cited in Neuvonen et. al. 2007). In the light of this view, public open spaces have been described as substantial areas for people, specifically for children (Bedimo-Rung et al., 2005; Krenichyn, 2005 cited in Crawford et. al., 2008). Open spaces are extremely valuable for children because children need places to play, run, socialize and learn by the way of excerpt keep them physically active. Cleland et. al. (2010) state that children's and adolescents' physical activity level is decreasing in developing countries. This is fairly related to urbanization as a result of conversion of open spaces to buildings. Also they discovered that in last five years, time spending outdoor was decreased significantly. Many reasons can be drawn up for this decline such as; improvement of technology, computer and video games, television, pollution, traffic

exhaust (Wendel et. al., 2008), accessibility (Hart, 1982), lack of open space, potential perceived risks from adults (Woolley, *et. al.*, 1999).

Declining of physical activity level causes health problems and most important one is the childhood obesity. Irish National Survey in 1990 showed that adolescents being at risk group was 1.9 per cent and recent studies show that this level went up three times since 1990 (Griffin et. al., 2004). Mainly overweight children or adolescents mean that overweight or obese adults, which causes public health crises.

Urban open spaces are not only areas which keep children active but also spaces for relaxing, socializing and more importantly learning. Cele (2004) states that, while being able to examine, challenge, understand the city and the adult world that fascinates children, they also need places for relaxing and green places are mostly preferred. It can be seen that, children like learning by discovering and in the open spaces they can learn their best. Hart (1982) supports this idea that everything is learnt best by children, when it is discovered by them. Discovering is very important for improving their learning skills. Lawson (2001) mentions that any type of landscape can be used and can be played in by children. This supports the idea of children needing green space. Children should be able to reach urban open spaces which are most accessible for them and they should play with valuable and educational things for them rather than being kept inside like houses or schools all the time.

Adolescents' use of open space is completely different from their younger brothers or sisters. They generally prefer open spaces to meet with their friends, relax, have fun and play ball games like soccer. For meetings they prefer to go to city centres and for the other activities green spaces are widely preferred. Teenagers are normally independent from their parents as children. They are able to go wherever they want; however, their use of urban

open space is also decreasing. This is mainly associated with accessibility issues. Most of the adolescents do not live very close the urban open spaces or city centre and also most of them are not able to take bus to go to city centre to have with friend. They only can do this once or few times a week. Access issues effect their use of city centres or other urban open space where they fell themselves relax.

### ***3.1 Accessibility to Urban Open Spaces***

As was mentioned above children's access to open space is very important for their health and growing. Nearby open spaces to residential areas are places for physical activity and they allow children to engage with nature (Hansen-Møller and Oustrup, 2004). Dymont and bell (2008) mentioned that appearance of open spaces in the nearby landscape is the most important factor for children's physical activity level. Accessibility is identified by Pouta and Sievanen (2001) that distance from person's house to open space together with how safe and how easy journey from home to open areas (cited in Neuvonen et. al. 2007). It can be seen that easy access related to distance.

Distance is studied by several researchers. Studies show that there is a relationship between distance and use of open space. Distance and use of open space are completely inversely proportional. It was seen that when distance is increased, number of visits decreased in the research (Roovers et al., 2002). Weekly three or four visits are done by locals who live within 50 metres to the urban open spaces, when the distance increased to 300 metres, number of visits fell down to approximately 2.7 level and when distance set 1000 metres to open space visit declined to once a week level (Grahn and Stigsdotter, 2003). These

clearly show that people do not want to go far away to open spaces and also because of life stress and some external factors they do not have energy or desire to go to green spaces, which is 1000 metre away from their homes.

Second issue which affects the access to urban open spaces is safety. In urbanized cities safety is everyone's biggest concern to some extent; however, some potential perceived risks from adults affect open space use of children the most. Newly-raised worries about "stranger danger" or parents' fear of their child being abused by some others are the most important reasons for keeping children inside (Blakely, 1994; Valentine, 1996; Woolley, *et al.*, 1999). To be concerned about their children is parents' rights; however, most of the worries come from sortable problems, which can be sorted easy associated with government and police. Dymont and bell (2008) found in their study about use of school gardens and design that thirty six per cent of participants refer to safety concerns. As well as stranger danger parents are concerned about road safety (Cleland, *et al.*, 2010), traffic exhaust, pollution (Wendel *et al.*, 2008). Hence destination to open spaces is important for all these concerns. As was mentioned above increase of distance from home to urban open space decrease the level of use and also increase the stranger danger fear. When children and adolescents walk more to reach open spaces, exposure to traffic exhaust and pollution are also increasing. As was underlined formerly these concerns can be decreased or completely removed with association of government and police such as; changing school roads to reduce exposure to exhaust and pollution, improving the safety around schools and urban open spaces and so on. However, Fyhri and Hjorthol, (2009) find out in their studies that children's use of road related to their parent's experience of traffic around them. They add that any road safety improvement to make children more active only be affective if their parents experience the roads and find it safe.

Parental concerns about safety not only about their child being harmed by strangers or criminals but also they fear of their children injured when they play outdoors. However, in many occasions green spaces decrease numbers of injuries by supplying soft surfaces, by building up more civil behaviours (Dyment and bell, 2008) and by calming children down. Herrington and Nicholls (2007) mention that making environment safer is easier than changing aggressive children's attitude. Making their environment more natural will calm them down and reduce the risk of injuries in playgrounds. Hence supplying more natural environment give children a chance to discovery things on their own, which is called learn by doing by some researchers, while reducing the levels of injuries (Herrington and Nicholls, 2007). Because of every child keeping themselves busy by discovering objects, they will not have a time to fight each other.

Research has been done by Woolley and Amin, (1999) show that children come from different ethnic backgrounds do not want to use urban open spaces because of fear of being bullied by English children. This clearly shows that ethnic origin is another factor which affects children's access to urban open spaces.

Importance of accessibility was mentioned; however, how many times in a week or how many hours children should use urban open spaces. Timperio *et al.* (2008) suggests at least 1 hour engagement with nature every day for children. Also they cited that physical activity also benefits from social environment, including access or availability of nearby parks or open spaces (Davison and Lawson, 2006). It can be seen that accessibility to open spaces every day is crucial for children. Even if access to open spaces seems like a big issue, the solution is simple and it is supplying close to home open spaces. Close to home open spaces will decrease to concerns about stranger danger because children will be in the short distance to their homes, parents can check their children regularly. Nonetheless exposure to

traffic exhaust can be reduced by these close open spaces. As was mentioned in former parts of study, open spaces which are distance between 50 and 300 metres will get highest number of visit in average between 2.7 to 4 times a week. These rates will not be ideal because ideal should be at least one hour engagement with natural areas every day as was suggested by Timperio *et al.* (2008) but close to home urban open spaces will increase the use of open spaces in neighbourhoods.

Freestone and Nicholls (2004) state that every kind of urban open space change life style of public. Easy accessible urban open spaces would increase the open space use habits by changing people's life style. When this kind of open spaces supplied, it must not be forgotten that every age group need different play and relaxation spaces. Herrington and Nickholls (2007) mention that sand, mud, clay and any type of material which can be shaped by children are very important for their play in early ages. They add that infants are sensitive to sounds and movements, and middle age group require perfectly designed play equipment and older children need some places to meet their friends. These requirements should not be forgotten when open spaces designed.

### ***3.2 Children's use of Play Grounds***

Play grounds are one of the important elements of the urban open space system. They correspondent to children's play requirements and give them a chance to stretch their muscles and also they help children to learn their environment. Playgrounds are the part of our culture for hundreds of years.

Children's view is very different from adults. Nowadays all over the world really poorly designed playgrounds can be seen easily. They are generally fenced to keep children in and this limits children's movements and their imagination about play. Nonetheless poorly fixed play equipment and inorganic play surfaces play important role of children injuries in play grounds. These kinds of injuries cause parents to keep their children with them inside of the houses. Quality and type of the playgrounds are as important as accessibility to them.

As was underlined above, children like learning by discovering which they cannot find in only playgrounds or school gardens. Hart (1982) mentioned that children use the total landscape which is accessible and most valued places for children are places which are forgotten by planners and designers: Dirt, water, muddy areas, sand, trees, and bushes and so on. These are the most important places for children because they can discover everything on their own and learn their best. This kind of places can be found almost any unstructured urban open space such as neighbourhood parks.

Children should be able to reach landscape which is most accessible for them and they should play with valuable and educational things for them rather than being kept in traditional play grounds which are generally poorly equipped. Cele (2004) explains that, total environment is always scanned by children. Objects which are not seen by adults are detected and picked up, if they have a value in play. Children's perspective is completely different from adults'. Bengtsson, (1972) mentions that world around children is explored by children continually., they can make impressive thing to find out the world around them. Also being in some space alone and achieving, discovering something give them a personal confidence. Every children will need self confidence in their following ages, while becoming adults and their adulthoods. Hart (1982) states that everything is learnt best by children, when it is discovered by them. Discovering is very important for improving their learning skills. In the

traditional play grounds they can play with equipment; however, the question is whether they have a value for learning and improving skills. Children should be supplied self-structured based play areas. Nonetheless, Wendel *et al.* (2008) mention that unstructured play grounds give children an opportunity to create their own rules, structures and projects, and spend time by learning in self-directed manner. It can be said that unstructured parks and urban open space give children opportunity to grow healthy as well as supporting their brain and muscle development, while they are playing.

### ***3.3 School Journey and use of School Gardens***

#### ***3.3.1 School Journey***

Pooley *et al.* (2010) explain that journey to and from school has become general part of the pupils' life cycle. This action has consequential social, environmental and economic effects on public life. Nowadays journey to and from school has become more problematic in urbanized cities all around the world. Parents always want to save their children from the danger of traffic, exhaust gasses and pollution. In order to save their children from these dangers, parents take children to school and pick them up after school by car. As an alternative to car in some cities children travel by school service buses.

Fyhri and Hjorthol, (2009) state several studies show that car use for school journey significantly increased within last ten to fifteen years in European countries ((Bradshaw, 2001; Gilhooly and Low, 2005; Jensen *et al.*, 2004; Mackett, 2002; Mackett *et al.*, 2005; Prezza *et al.*, 2001 cited in). They add that in the UK this trend growing faster than rest of population's car use.

In urbanized cities every weekday children between age 5 to 16 travel to or from school by vehicles which means significant movement in total. Department of Transport declared in 2006 six per cent of the total travel which is made every day for education in Britain. Twenty seven per cent of this travel is made by pupil age under seventeen (Department of transport, 2006 cited in Pooley *et. al.*, 2010). Such a movement, as big as it is, creates traffic congestions, exhaust and pollution. These congestions and pollutions not only affect the children but also affect everybody living in big cities. In addition traffic congestions ending up with being late to schools and work. Especially for children travelling with vehicles keep them away from physical activity, which is necessary for their health and growing procedure. However, effective physical activity can be created for millions of children under seventeen years old with just taking off the buses and cars from their school journeys.

Furthermore, going to school and coming back as an activity can be made sustainable with simply walking and cycling for our world. It would help to solve traffic congestions and definitely it would reduce the traffic exhaust and air pollution (Black *et. al.*, 2001). It would have some impact not only for our environment but also our children. Such activities like walking and cycling to school engage children with their local environment, give them a chance to learn how being alone in locality feels. It improves their confidence level. Nonetheless walking and cycling to school improve the opportunities to meet their friends after school and settle down for a while in their neighbourhood parks and open spaces (Cooper *et. al.*, 2005). Without any doubt these activities would improve their social communication skills and give them confidence, while increasing use of urban open spaces.

Nevertheless keeping children active help them use up calories which they take while eating high nutrient foods. Simple step like walking to school could make big difference in

children daily calorie burning. Walking to school can decrease the level of childhood obesity and public concerns about overweight children (Frank & Niece, 2005).

It is believed that when they walk or cycle, children's exposure to traffic exhaust and pollutant will increase. However, this exposure can be declined to normal levels by adjusting and separating vehicle and pedestrian road in urban areas (Pooley *et al.*, 2010) and engaging children's walking routes to school with urban open spaces.

### **3.3.2. School Gardens**

School gardens are important open spaces for children. They spend most of their day in schools and generally they do not have any chance to use any other open space after school. If you count just break times, children spend at least one hour or more in the school gardens daily. Poorly designed school gardens and asphalt ground may cause many injuries and this rise the parental concerns about their children's use of school gardens. However, conversion of school gardens to natural green areas, would decrease the chance of being injured as well as give children the opportunity to climb, jump, dig, rake and so on (Dyment & Bell, 2008). Moreover, conversion of the school gardens give us a chance to design new open spaces in the middle of the housing estates without touching accommodations.

Avoidance of overweight and obesity should start in early ages at school and supported with good level of physical activity (World Health Organization, 1998). Effective use of school gardens not only supply children good quality of urban open spaces but also can keep them fit with increasing physical activity level.

Green school grounds improve the quality of play and learning. This was documented in the study of Dymont & Bell (2008). They found out in their study forty nine per cent of participants believe that there was an improved play opportunities after greening the school garden. Forty per cent reported no change and two per cent believed that there was a decline in play quality. Seventy one per cent of study participants reported that green environment supplied more activity. Nevertheless participants reported that green school environment countenanced more cooperative play and civil behaviour on children. Another research showed that motor fitness, balance and coordination functions rose while control groups level remained stable (Fjortoft, 2004). Effectively designed school gardens may increase the concentration, attention, functioning and self-discipline (Grahn *et al.*, 1997 cited in Dymont and Bell, 2008; Faber-Taylor *et. al.*, 2001; Wells, 2000; Faber-Taylor *et. al.*, 2002).

### ***3.4 Children's use of City and town Centres***

Adolescent years are difficult times for most of the young people. At this stage young people are generally more independent from their families and they create their individualities. This is completely allocated with their choices (Woolley & Johns, 2001) and most of them prefer city centres to spend their free time with their friends.

However, Freestone & Nichols (2004) mention that changes in social behaviours of public. Newly-risen safety concerns, new leisure opportunities such as out of town shopping malls, finding less money to maintenance of urban parks, city centres and improvement to facilities made the public use of urban open spaces less. Newly-risen safety concerns were identified as drug addict, drunken strangers, traffic, darker worries and dangerous group of

people (Woolley & Spencer, 2000; Woolley *et al.*, 1999). Also Woolley *et al.* (1999) mentioned that children have some dislikes to not to use city centres, especially some parts of it, such as graffiti, litter, night clubs and underground crossings. Most of the adolescents want their environment clean, tidy and good looking.

On the other hand, some group of young people persistently want to use city centres whether they are not wanted there. In Woolley & Johns (2001)'s study about skateboarders in the UK, they found that they are unwanted group of young people in the city centres because they are hanging around the shops and some people and city council think they damage the facilities when skateboarding in the city centres and main squares of the cities. These young people need hard surfaces for their recreation activity or sport. However, Woolley & Johns (2001) found that city councils, shops and building owners try to change places where skateboarders hanging around. Handrails, steps to squares, chains and undesirable surfaces such as gravel and sand were added just to keep skateboarders away. Skateboarders are the not only unwanted group of teenagers, especially in the shops all teenagers are not welcomed. Shop owners think and blame teenagers as they are shoplifters. In order to small percentage of teenagers may do graffiti or break some thing in the public areas, people blame teenagers and decelerated them unwanted group in the city centres.

Nonetheless, young people have an impact of the economy of the cities. They buy CDs and DVDs, posters, books, mobile phones, top-ups and presents to their friends. Whenever they come to city centres, mostly they spend money. Apparently, in these days due to out of town shopping malls and retail parks, high street shops lost their attractiveness from adults and desperately need children.

On the other hand, the number in city residential areas such as over shop flats, apartments of flats in or close to the city centre are increasing. Such accommodations offer living spaces which are very close to people's work. Living close to work decreases the time spent on the journey to work and people can spare much more time to themselves and also living close the city centre gives them an opportunity to go high streets for shopping after work or at the weekend without wasting time. This kind of accommodations is more likely to be built just with in ten minute walk to city centre. The number of people who prefer to live very close to city is increasing. This means that the number of children living in or very close to the city centre is also increasing. This may not be the case in the UK because recent studies showed that the number of children living close to city amenities still at the very low level but it is the case in big cities most of the European and USA cities.

As was mentioned above millions of children from different ages live in a big cities and they desperately need open spaces for playing, socializing and their healthy growing. Some cities do have urban open spaces; however, not every time having urban open spaces means that they are useful for children as well as adult. They might be useful for adults but might not be useful for children. Literature has been giving advices to us to make our urban open spaces useful for children for years. Scientists find our new ways of teaching to children, self learning methods for children and identifies new type of spaces, which could be useful for children. Our decision makers, city councils, town planners, landscape designers are not generally influenced by these scientific outcomes, when they plan or design urban open spaces. Moreover, some urban open spaces has been laying in our cities for decades with out any improvements. As can be understood that most of our current urban open spaces may not fit those criteria, underlined by academics. In a reality, finding out real values of real cases may have direct implementations on our planner, designers or decision makers. This

may help them to understand importance of urban open space for children and take this issue seriously. Moreover, this enlightenment may help to change urban open spaces at the same direction drawn by literature. This research aims to find out real values of real spaces in Sheffield. To test the values in a special example this study will take case studies from different areas of city and different use.

#### **4. Research Aims and Objectives**

As public and academic provision of urban open space use is changed and new approaches are developed, it is necessary to evaluate and find the real values of our current urban open spaces and it is also important to find out how well current open space use suits the use and need of children. The research will focus on different kind of open spaces and their usage by children to analyse how effectively urban landscapes are used by children to create new design approaches for urban open spaces. However, as a consequence of different type of places, which are mentioned above, should be investigated, schedule of the project must be more than a year.

Following methodology aims to investigate young children's play habits and adolescent's leisure activities in order to answer the following questions.

- How accessible are the open spaces?
- Do children from any age use urban open spaces?
- What kind of urban open spaces more valuable for children more than others?
- Why are they valuable?

- Are children happy with current urban open spaces?
- Could current open spaces be improved?

## **5. Methodology**

It is widely believed that methodology is the most important part of the studies. Choosing the right method for the study is crucial, in order to get relevant results. This research will be carried out by using qualitative research methods. Observations, interviews and focus-groups, visual methods such as; picture interviews, photographs and so on, were chosen as the main methods, to be used. In the following methodological chapters, logical explanations of choice are given.

### **5.1. Observations**

Flick, (2009) states that;

*" If you have a look to history of qualitative research, you will find that methodological discussions about the role of observations as a sociological research method have been central to it" (p. 222).*

Although, observations can be perceived as a useless method by positivist academics because situations cannot be proved sometimes, it is widely used by market researchers and social scientists. Bell, (1993) states that although, observation is not an easy technique to be

undertaken, it needs careful planning and managing and it takes time. Once it is undertaken correctly you could get results, you would not have reached by other techniques.

Observations will be the most important part of the future research because it is the only chance for researcher to watch and investigate children's play habits. Watching and understanding by observations more likely to be better than any other methods. Nisbet and Watt (1980) underline that important data can be held by interviews; however, they cannot show what actually happens, can only show people's perception of what happens (cited in Bell, 1993). Meth, (2010) adds that observations allow us to witness event on the first hand. For this future study, observations will be as helpful children might not be able express themselves fully; however, with observations they can be watched and understood correctly.

Flick (2009) explains non-participant observations that the complete observer maintains distance from the observed events in order to avoid influencing them. He adds that it is a way to observe event as they happen. In order not to disturb children while they are playing, non-participant (direct) observations will be chosen rather than participant observations for further study. There are numbers of other reasons for this choice. First of all in the participant observations researcher should take part in a context. This further study will investigate children's use of urban open space; therefore would be very hard to become a participant. Secondly, participant observations take longer time because researcher should be accepted by other participants. Researcher watches the participants form a distance in the direct observations. Thirdly, direct observations can be more useful in that it tends to be more focused rather than trying to take part in a context in the participant observations (Social research methods [online] Available from; [http:// www. socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualmeth.php](http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualmeth.php) [Accessed 14 September 2010]). Flick, (2009)

advises that non-participant observations should be applied for public open spaces where, number of members cannot be limited or defined.

Non-participant observations are generally structured observations. As was mentioned above by Bell, (1993) observations should be planned and piloted carefully. For these purposes, predicted calendar of the study prepared as an example in Table 1 below. Certainly longer observations are better observation in order to give us the opportunity to see the things in more detail. As already argued, time scale of the field work will be at least a year. As a result, urban open space use will be observed in different seasons and whether conditions. Observation calendar will include morning, noon and afternoon sessions and each observation will be undertaken for approximately two hours. Every week at least three days of observation will be done and each case study area will be observed morning, noon and afternoon equally.

	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
<b>Morning</b>	Peace gardens	Crooks Valley Park	Ponderosa
<b>Noon</b>	Ponderosa	Peace gardens	Crooks Valley Park
<b>Afternoon</b>	Crooks Valley Park	Ponderosa	Peace gardens

**Table 1:** Example of observation Calendar for weekdays.

To get the best results from observations and for more accurate research, most weeks weekend observations will be also needed. For weekend observations priority will be given to peace gardens and the city centre because of increasing number of visitors at the weekend times; however it will be split on weekends equally for each case study area.

During the observations notes and photographs will be taken. Notes will be gathered together for analysis them. They will be categorized and analysed depending on weather

conditions such as rainy, sunny and warm, cloudy and cold or seasons. Therefore they also will be analysed depending on time and day of observation such as morning, noon, afternoon, weekday or weekend.

The main points that will be observed are: How many children use the area?; What kind of activities children are doing?; Are there any boundaries?; How safe sites are for children?; How happy children are in there?; Are parents happy for their children to be there?; Are there anything nearby which can affect site usage, such as busy roads, polluted areas and so on? For older children, how often do they visit the area?; What kind of activities are they doing?; Do they visit area after school?; What are the strengths and weaknesses of area?; What kind of improvements could be done?.

## ***5.2. Interviews and Focus Groups***

### ***5.2.1. Interviews***

Interviews and focus groups are the most used methods in a qualitative research. Silverman (2005) states that participant are treated with interviews in order to get external realities or internal - values such as feelings or meanings. To compare what they say and what they do, and understand the gap, whether there is any, between their word and action interviews are necessary. Moreover, especially in this particular research, observations are precious to understand children and their open space use; however, to complete understanding children's and their parent's opinion on our urban open space use interviews also should be done. Interviews will give us opportunity to understand children's world with their words or their parents' words.



**Picture 1:** Interview (interview [online] Available from: [http:// www. elancolibrary.org](http://www.elancolibrary.org) [Accessed 14 September 2010]).

Normally interviewees, interview times and venues can be arranged in advance. Interviewees are chosen based on their experience and knowledge of study area in qualitative interviews (Cameron, 2000; cited in Longhurst, 2003). It is explained that; choosing random sample is used in the case of quantitative methods but this is not the case in qualitative research methods. Project aims of the further research will be to measure the value of open urban space for children's use and the project will be connected to Sheffield in such manner as is explained by Longhurst, (2003). Interviewees should related with area. In this case they should be from Sheffield and should be the users of the urban open spaces, which are being investigated.

Interviews will be done simply by approaching and asking them whether or not they could spare few minutes for this interview. Before starting to the interviews research and its aims will be explained because May (1997) mentions that this way, interviewees can understand what is expected from them as well as knowing responses that are required. They can feel uncomfortable, if interview is started without setting the expectations. This situation always affects the data that are collected. Thereafter if they want to take part than interviews will start. If they want to participate but do not have time, some other time can be arranged.

Cook (2009) defined every step of interviewing process as a 'chain of translations' (Latour (1995); cited in). If the whole process was a chain, transcription of recoding data would be the strongest and important circle of the chain. If the strongest circle of the chain is broken, the whole chain will be broken. Similarly at this stage any wrong transcription or missed words from responses can cause completely non-accurate results. In addition Longhurst (2003) advises that listening and transcribing data when it is still fresh in your mind makes this process easier and improve the quality of results. In order that interviews should be recorded and transcribed as soon as interview is undertaken. Interpretation of transcribed data will include the subjectivity related to nature of the method. At the same time transcribed data can be analysed by using basic statistical methods. However, but the quantitative data, which will be handled may not be mentioned in the final report.

#### ***5.2.1.1. Design of Interview questions***

The interview questions will be designed to be attractive and cover the area which was drawn with literature. May (1997), states that for preventing embarrassment and hostility, indirect questions can be used rather than direct ones. Questions of interviews will be prepared using indirect phrases. Dunn, (2000) and Valentine, (1997) mention that every research need its own preparation (Cited in Longhurst, (2003)). Longhurst (2003) adds that there is no possibility to set up strict guide and rules for questions, they should be in their unique way. For further study basically two groups of interview questions can be prepared for different type of interviews. The one group will be designed to be asked to young children's parents and other will be designed to be asked to adolescents.

As is mentioned by Roovers *et. al.*, (2002); Davison and Lawson, (2006); Timperio *et al.* (2008) and Neuvonen *et. al.*, (2007) accessibility is strongly related with distance from user's home to urban open spaces and it affects the number of times of weekly use and period of time it is used. With regard to the literature the first group of questions that will be asked to the parents, in the beginning will cover the area of visits (How often?, how long? and accessibility). Secondly, Griffin *et. al.*, (2004)'s research supports the relationship between activity level and health problems. The risk of being obese increased almost two percent since 1990. This should be investigated in the Sheffield example in which few questions will be designed to cover the area of health and daily exercise levels. The third part of questions will cover the area of worries and dangers of urban open spaces. In fact, values of urban spaces are strongly related with people's especially parents' safety concerns. Cele (2004); Hart (1982); Wendel *et. al.*, (2008) and Bengtsson (1972) support the idea of playing in the nature, discovering themselves improve children's skills and it is better than traditional playgrounds. Therefore, last group of questions will be designed to understand children's preferences of space such as playgrounds, unstructured areas, grasslands and so on.

The second type of interview will be designed for the teenagers. In principle questions will be at the same direction with the first type of interview questions, which will be asked to parents; however, because it is designed for the teenagers, some more details will be added to the interview questions. First of all, questions about city centre use will be added. Secondly, as a result adolescents can discover city centre themselves, questions about city centre, its dangers and their worries about it will be added. Lastly, some questions that covered their childhood will be added to understand their real preferences.

### **5.2.2. Focus Groups**

Focus groups are one of the most widely used techniques by qualitative researchers. Jupp, (2006) explains that as a method focus groups are important to get experiences and thoughts of others. Researcher's questions always open to discussion and this gives researchers a chance to discover issues more deeply. Focus groups have several advantages over individual interviews.

Meth, (2010) explains these advantages: First of all, focus groups creates interactional situation that is a little more similar to everyday life. Secondly, they are low cost and less time consuming over individual interviews. Flick, (2002) states that focus groups lead beyond the answers of single interviewee. For the further study focus groups will be used for reasons were mentioned above. Moreover, in the open spaces even individual interviews can become focus groups as a result of interest from interviewee's friend. In fact adolescents can be shy when they are being interviewed individually. May, (1997) mentions that being together rather than interviewed individually can improve the level of confidence and can help to get honest and clear answers from interviewees (cited in Woolley and Johns, [2001]). To break their shyness and collect accurate information from them using focus groups seem more logical. Flick, (2002) mentions to break their shyness and encourage the non-speakers to participate, some additional material such as photographs, pictures and so on can be used.



**Picture 2:** Focus Groups (Guidelines for preparing your focus Group [online] available from: [www.qdatraining.eu/focus-group](http://www.qdatraining.eu/focus-group) [Accessed 14 September 2010])

On the other hand usefulness of focus groups or group interviews is limited to its management. The Management of focus groups is always important and very hard as a result there can be some problems. Meth, (2010) explains that firstly, the co-ordinating all the interviewees and organizing time; secondly, the number of questions actually asked will be less than individual interviews and lastly, recording responses (both notes and audio record) is more difficult. As was mentioned in the previously, the most important part of the interview process the is analysis of audio records. In the group interviews and focus groups audio records can be tricky in order because of the possibility to record some people's voices more than other. Considering this, audio recorders should be placed carefully. Furthermore, for easy management Meth, (2010) advises maximum number of four to six people in every session of focus groups, while Jupp, (2006) advises six to eight people at a session, Bryman (2001) mentions at least four people. When adolescents behaviours and children's language ability is thought, four or five children in every focus group should be fine for this study.

Moreover age selections will also be important for focus groups in this study. Children from different ages cannot be involved focus-group in the same session as interests of different ages unlikely to be same. Content of the focus-groups will be set in advance

according to age and interest differences. For instance, age groups five to eight, eight to ten, eleven to thirteen and thirteen to seventeen will be undertaken at different sessions of focus-groups. It is expected that this separation may help the concentration in the group in order to get detailed and helpful responses. For the children under the age of five visual methods will be used rather than interviews or focus groups.

### ***5.3. Visual methods***

Visual methods are one of the most useful methods, which could be used in the qualitative base research. Jupp, (2006) states that using visual methods the knowledge, experience or ideas can be detected which cannot be caught by any writing or speaking. Furthermore, rather than interpreting data and telling people some things, with visual methods everything can be shown to people to support the ideas. Visual methods give researcher the opportunity to explain situations easily. On the other hand visual methods give researcher chance to communicate to people, who are not able to talk, or speak that particular language. Furthermore visual methods are one of the best ways to involve illiterate people or children in to research.

#### ***5.3.1. Picture Interviews***

It was thought that handling interviews would be hard with young children due to their language ability. Therefore, the use of visual methods can be more suitable. Generally pictures and photographs are used as part of visual methods. Flick, (2002) mentions to break

the silence and encourage the non-speakers to participate, some additional material such as photographs, pictures can be used. Flick, (2002) refers this phrase to people do not talk in a focus groups or group interviews. However, using photographs or drawings children, especially the young ones, can be interviewed easily as well. Rather than force them to speak with asking questions, showing them pictures of urban open spaces and talking about picture will be more useful. White *et. al.*, (2010) state that pictures can help non-written or non-verbal engagements and language of children. Due to fact that young children are illiterate and their ability to speak is a lot less, it is expected that more correct and reliable answers can be extracted from young children with this technique.

After asking questions to young children, they will be asked to choose one of the photographs, which will have been shown to them by the time questions are being asked. With this technique their happiness about their urban open spaces can be measured. Young children use playgrounds much more than other children, their ideas about playgrounds will be very important for the results of the study. On the other hand their preferences of urban open spaces such as traditional playgrounds, unstructured grounds, adventure parks and so on, can be measured by picture interviews.

### **5.3.2. Drawings**

Drawings are another visual method used by social researchers. White *et. al.*, (2010) state that researchers can use combination of writing (or talk) with drawings as a communication tool. Moreover, they add researchers have been using draw-write (or talk) method for children-based research to find out different subjects. Jupp, (2006) mentions,

using drawings produced by participants, help researchers understand or see the world participants' 'point of view' or 'ways of seeing'. Adding drawings in conversations seems to be a good method to encourage children to give more response or get the answers they can not talk about. At this point, the role of conversations is very important to gain understanding about their drawings (Van Blerk and Ansell, 2006; cited in White *et. al.*, 2010). Moreover, they advise to take children's comments seriously, when they are drawing instead of talks or tell me sessions after drawings. Because children generally say what they think when they are drawing and this thoughts can be change afterwards, their words should be listened carefully as they draw. This would allow for a lot more information to be extracted from this type of method.

In this particular research children will be asked to draw pictures describing their urban open spaces. Especially for young children this could help to understand their feeling about their environment, which they cannot describe with just words. Secondly children will be asked to draw pictures about their dream of urban open spaces. This will give us a chance to see what the difference between their feelings about their current open spaces and how they want it to be is. This difference will have enlightening role on understanding values of our current urban open spaces from the eye of children.

### ***5.3.3. Photographs and Videos***

Sometimes photographs can tell the story better than words because they are the mirror images of the reality. They show what happened at the time of photographs were taken. They cannot tell lies and only show the truth. Their values of being true make

photographs a useful method in qualitative research. Photographs can be used in the qualitative research in different ways. Flick, (2009) suggests following four ways for using photographs in qualitative research.

*"...four types of relation can be distinguished between the researcher and the researched. The researcher can show photos (as demonstrator) to persons under study (as spectators) and ask them about the material (type I). The operator (who takes the photographs) can use the researched individual as a model (type II). The researchers (as spectators) may ask the subjects to show them photos concerning a certain topic or period (as demonstrator) (type III). Finally, the researchers (as spectator) may observe the subjects (as operators) while they take a picture and conduct an analysis of the choice of subject matter being photographed (type IV)" (p.241).*

In the further research first suggestion will be used for doing photo-interviews. Apart from that in this type qualitative research Flick (2009)'s second suggestion using participants as a model and taking their photographs can be used. However, due to ethical issues during the observations face shot can not be taken. Instead only general scene shots about case study area can be taken and used.

In this research Flick (2009)'s forth suggestion will also be used. Some cameras will be provided to children and they will be asked to take some pictures in the urban open spaces. Photographs will be printed out from the returning cameras and will be analysed. White *et. al.*, 2010 states;

*"Asking children to take photographs encourages them to make meaningful choices about what to photograph and what not to photograph" (p. 148).*

Taking photographs of the objects, scene, their friend as they play and their favourite areas will absolutely be their choice. In this way their secret world will be discovered from their eyes. Their favourite points in the open spaces, their play rationales and play elements may be understood correctly.

With using photographs results and findings can be supported and enhanced. Taken photographs from each site can be compared to understand their value for children and also recorded videos can be watched for the same purpose. Recorded videos help the researcher in case they miss something during observations and also photographs and videos help researcher to refresh their memories after some time from observations. Especially during the long term observations it is necessary not to miss any points which could effect results. Furthermore video recorders can be set and later on they can be watched and analysed. This could save time for the researcher as more than one observation can be done at a time.

Photographs will also be used for explaining how unstructured playgrounds work, how children play in them, how happy and active they can be in them. Rather than only telling the observations, showing them may be better to understand more and filling the gaps.

Nonetheless, due to ethical concerns, all these video recordings and photograph shots should be done under the enlightenment role of ethic approval. Ethical approvals and other permission will be gained before field work start.

#### ***5.4. Case Study Selections***

Three different kinds of urban open spaces were chosen as case studies for the research in Sheffield. These are important open spaces for Sheffield, which could have high

usage rates; with each having different usage potentials. The aim of choosing different type of areas is basically find out the differences and compare them under the enlightenment of literature to show their real values for children in Sheffield.

The first case study are will be the city centre and mainly The Peace Gardens. The Peace Gardens is located in the Sheffield city centre, which is surrounded by high street shops and cafés, winter gardens, Sheffield town hall, less than a hundred yard to orchard square shopping centre and less than two hundred and fifty yards to the Moor Street. It is perfectly located in the Sheffield city centre. Since it was renovated, it became one of the land marks of the Sheffield city as well as being an attraction point of the city centre, it is widely used by teenagers and families.



**Picture 3:** The Peace Gardens

(The Peace Gardens and Egg Boxes [Online] Available from; [bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/content/articles/2008 / 11/18/peace\\_gardens\\_2008\\_feature.shtml](http://bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/content/articles/2008/11/18/peace_gardens_2008_feature.shtml) [Accessed 30.09.2010]).

The Peace Gardens give us an opportunity to understand and evaluate children's and essentially adolescents city centre use. It is known that mainly teenagers come and sit here, meet their friends in the Peace Gardens. Adolescents are different from other age groups of children because they will become adults within few years time. Because they are different, their attitudes and behaviours are different as well. As result their use of urban open spaces is different and should be investigated where they use mostly and relax. Nonetheless, an other opportunity about this are is that younger children use The Peace Gardens with their parents as well. In order to since The Peace Gardens used by adolescents and young children with their parents, it is one of the most important places to observe children's city centre usage for younger and older age groups.

The second area will be Crooks Valley Park and traditional play ground in the park. The Crooks Valley Park is the only urban park with small lake in it in Sheffield. Nonetheless, it is one of the continuous park series with very close distance to city centre. Weston Park, which is another attractive park divided by Mushroom Lane from Crook Valley Park and located on the south of the Crooks Valley Park. Across the road Woodlands connect Crooks Valley Park to Crookesmoor East Recreation ground, also known as Ponderosa Park. Children's playground was opened about 30 years ago In Crooks Valley park (Friends of Crooksmoor Parks [Online] Available from; [Crooksmoorparks.wordpress.com/about-the-parks/crooks-valley-park](http://Crooksmoorparks.wordpress.com/about-the-parks/crooks-valley-park) [Accessed 30.09.2010]). Playground benefits from constructed slides, four swings, some sitting areas and some see-saws. Ground of the play area is covered by plastic material and almost half of the total area is covered with grass. The playground is a traditional playground with the way it is designed and constructed. It is surrounded by a fence as it is very common for traditional play areas. Hence, it is estimated that Crook Valley Park could have high usage potential and this potential could give us the opportunity to observe

different types of parents and children and also research could show us value of the such a old children's playground in a big continues park series. Furthermore, it is a good chance to test values of the playgrounds against natural play areas.

The third and last site will be neighbourhood Park on St. Philip's road called East Crooksmoor Recreation Ground or also known as Ponderosa Park. The area contains woodland, walking paths, children's playground, two football pitches and a large area of natural grass surface. It is chosen as one of the cases for further study due to its location being in the highly populated residential area, which surrounded by old and new council houses, big residential estate and a big supermarket. It is estimated that use of all kind of attractions may be at a high level for this case study because the area is in highly populated. The number of children, who live in encircling estates, is higher than anywhere in the west part of Sheffield city which is populated by mainly student and young professionals due to its proximity yo the Sheffield University buildings. It could potentially be used by all children who live in the surrounding estates and council houses from different nationalities. One of the importances' of the park is having a structured playground, unstructured grass land, grass football pitch and small artificial surfaced football pitch. It is thought that this could be a good chance to observe and test the values of structured and unstructured playground at the same time and different children's play habits, which prefer different type of playground, while they are playing.



**Picture 4:** Map of Crooks Valley Parks

(Friends of Crooksmoor Parks [Online] Available from; [Crooksmoorparks.wordpress.com/2008/11/map.jpg](http://Crooksmoorparks.wordpress.com/2008/11/map.jpg) [Accessed 30.09.2010]).

### ***5.5. Selection of Age Groups***

In this research children's use of urban parks will be investigated; therefore all the age groups one to seventeen will be included in this study. Since children can start to play on their own after they started to walk and it is around one year old for any child. Inclusion of all ages is necessary to get accurate information of children's use of space. Experiences and attitudes of all age groups will be observed and studied in each case study area. Woolley *et. al.* (1999)

suggests that children's use of city centres and urban areas are adult controlled before the age of ten. Hence over the age of ten is admitted as adolescents in this study. Age group between seven to ten will be interviewed with regular interview techniques with age of ten or over children because they are able to speak, write, read and express themselves freely. Under the age of seven some other techniques will be used as they are explained in the previous parts.

## **6. Ethical issues**

Ethically researchers have to pay attention to their interviewees even if they have strong opinions or judgements towards certain people. Longhurst(2003) mentions that attention should be paid by researchers and everything ought to be listened carefully. They should not judge them. Longhurst(2003) states that confidentiality and anonymity are the most important ethical issues in the interviewing process. He adds that confidentiality is a big problem in discussion/focus groups.

Using interviewees' name, general profile or descriptions about them is not ethical behaviour. Lain (2003) states that; it is important to be an ethical researcher. He adds that in this way those people, organizations and places will be protected. For being ethical researcher, pseudonym names will be used instead of their real names. Moreover, face photographs will never be taken and children's photographs will not be published, unless their face is censored with frosting glass effect in further research.

Furthermore, before doing this research research ethic forms will be submitted to department and ethical approval by research ethics committee will be gained before starting field work.

## 7. Conclusions

As was underlined in the literature, most of our urbanized cities suffer from lack of urban open spaces. It affects everybody to some extent; however, children are the most affected. This research will investigate three different types of urban open spaces each has different use types. As was explained use of different age groups, different use types and different type of spaces will be investigated to find out values of current urban open spaces for children's use in Sheffield.

First aim of this research will be to find out that whether or not our current urban open spaces suits use and need of children.

Secondly, the correct way of planning or designing open spaces, pointed out by researchers, is not used every time by decision makers, city councils, city managers, planners and designers because generally they are not influenced by academic research findings when they are planning or designing. Stephenson (2000), states that data plays a part in decision making process which comes from researchers. Kinsella (2006) improves the idea that research has a significant role to give information to decision makers by involving community ideas. Weiss (1991) mentions that, researchers generate the knowledge, generalize the issues and address the problems. In this way data which is collected and issued by researcher will be helpful for decision makers, planners and designers to design new spaces for public gain. At the same time it is one of the main aims of researchers to implement findings for public gain. Sometimes showing realities of town rather than giving decision maker full of academic literature, may be more helpful. At this point this research aims to investigate and find out the real value of children's use of urban open spaces in Sheffield and identify the requirements of the spaces.

This research may have major implications for city council, planners and designers of Sheffield. It may show the angle between new provisions and approaches of designing our urban open spaces and current designs and use. Changing current open spaces under the enlightening role of new approaches underlined in the literature may be decision makers, planners and designers choice; however, in fact it is researchers responsibility to show them realities, current use and new approach of design.



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