



Center for Research and Policy Making

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IS SKOPJE A CHILD-FRIENDLY CITY?



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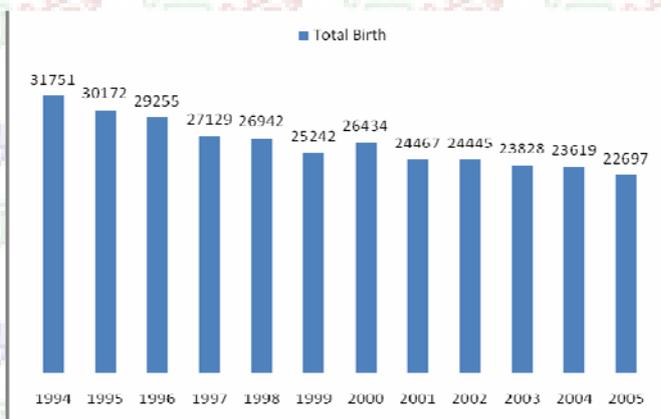
Executive Summary

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child promotes the participation of children in decision making processes that affect their lives. The 'child friendly cities' (hereinafter: CFC) movement originated in Italy, and is committed to implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The 'child friendly cities movement' has promoted practical methods for improving the built environment to recognize and reflect the needs of children and young people. (UNICEF International Secretariat 2007) Macedonia lags behind both in terms of legislature and realities on the ground. It needs to learn from good practices from around the world and improve the friendliness of its cities in particular the capital Skopje. The two institutions that deal with the rights of children, the Ministry for Labor and Social Policy (Department for Child Protection) and the National Ombudsman (Department for the Protection of the Rights of Children) are insufficient and not well equipped to deal with the issue. Moreover, except the informal consultations of the Department for the Protection of the Rights of Children with a ten member children's committee, there is not a single institution within the public administration that includes the children's participation principle in the decision-making process. There are not enough children facilities in the neighborhoods of Skopje, neither there are adequate facilities provided in shopping malls, supermarkets, and restaurants and bars. Based on our own research and overview of international best practices the Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM) recommends that a new Ombudsman for Children is founded to take the leading position in the protecting the rights of children with a full set of competencies. The current Law for the Catering Industry has to be amended so that restaurant owners are obliged to provide child-friendly services. Each municipality has to promote its own practical child-friendly strategy and

action plan according to their capabilities while working closely with parents, children and young people. The current Law for Urban Planning has to be amended to define the constructing of children's playgrounds in residential complexes as mandatory. These measures will make the lives of children and parents easier. More children will be born. People will be happier.

Introduction

There are few children born in Macedonia. The birth rate has been constantly decreasing since 1994. According to the World Bank classification Macedonia is among countries with low birth rate (13.7 per mill in 2006). In recent years the



decrease is dramatic. If in 2005, 22.697 children were born, last year (2006) that number was 12 percent less. Many young people emigrate. Those who stay feel the economic stagnation since the beginning of the transformation in

1991. The social decay affects the surroundings and circumstances under which children are grown. Young couples have a difficult decision to make if they want their children to be Source (Deutsche Welle n.d.) born and grown in Macedonia.

The child-friendly framework

Research shows that investments at an early stage of a child's life ensure cumulative developmental benefits that would otherwise be irretrievably lost.

Alderman and King (2006) summarize evidence from several studies that also show that investing in health and nutrition as early as possible in a child's life has significant long-term human capital and economic returns. The 2006 World Development Report (World Bank 2005) also highlights the high returns to investment in early childhood development. Macedonia needs policies that will stimulate birth rates, financial support for families, improvement of mother and child health care and a child-friendly environment.

Throughout the world the importance of the built environment to children and young people is seen as part of the ever-growing international interest in child-friendly cities. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child—upon which the child-friendly framework is based—passed on 2nd September, 1990, is a “comprehensive listing of the obligations the States are prepared to recognize towards the child”. The rights covered by the framework are grouped under three clusters:

- 1. Provision – child-friendly legal framework; city-wide children's rights strategy; child impact assessment and evaluation; children's budget; regular state of the city's children report; making children's rights known; independent advocacy for children”.*

2. **Protection** – children’s rights unit or coordinating mechanism – developing permanent structures in local government to ensure priority consideration of children’s perspectives; and
3. **Participation** – promoting children’s active involvement in issues that affect them; listening to their views and taking them into consideration in decision-making processes.” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1989)

Macedonia has ratified the Convention on 2nd of December, 1993 and is since building a policy and institutional framework in compliance with the three clusters ensuring that children and young people freely participate in adopting critical decisions.

Provision

The protection of children is an institutional task based on children rights, as well as on the rights and obligations of their parents and the State in planning a family, providing conditions and a standard of living [...] organizing and securing the development of institutions and offices for protecting of the rights of the child. Macedonia has a Law for Protection of the Rights of Children since November 2000. Until today, the Law underwent two principle modifications. However, there are still certain deficiencies such as creating schools according to the needs of the children, or protecting the rights of the children without parental support, to be fixed with the National Action Plan for protection of the Rights of Children for the period 2006-2015 prepared by the National Commission¹ under guidance of the Ministry for Education.

This document is of exceptional importance since all future laws concerning the protection of the rights of children have to be in accordance to the Action Plan. Its primary aim is to strengthen the role of the children and to give their rights and interests top priority. The Action Plan is to promulgate a new Law for the Rights of Children which will define the children as active citizens and promote children's active involvement in the decision-making processes for issues that affect them directly. This document is thorough, realistic and precise. It corresponds to the essential needs of children. Its strategic aims correspond to international best practices.

Crafting a similar action plan on a municipal level is of great importance for achieving a child friendly future. A positive international example from which Macedonian municipalities can draw lessons is the Children and Young People's

¹ The Commission was created with the purpose to craft the abovementioned Action Plan and to observe in continuity its implementation process. (Official Gazette no. 31/2005)

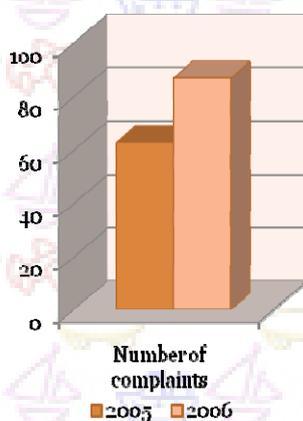
Strategy for London. This Strategy is recognized by the Child Friendly Cities Secretariat² as a best practice because of its innovative (adopted with active participation of young Londoners) and very practical nature (oriented towards the real financial capabilities of the City of London) of extensive addressing of child friendly issues, that it is to say, an inter-sectoral way that incorporates all aspects affecting children's lives in London. (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2004)

² CFC Secretariat collects, documents, distils and disseminates experience on local strategies to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and pursue the Millennium Development Goals.

Protection

The protection of children is a complex cross-ministerial and sectoral responsibility. Yet according to the current institutional framework the most responsible institutions for protection of the rights of children are the Ministry for Labor and Social Policy (Department for Child Protection) and the National Ombudsman (Department for the Protection of the Rights of Children). While the Department within the Ministry is helpful the Department within the National Ombudsman is inefficient. The Department for the Protection of the Rights of Children was founded in 1999 with an internal decision of the National Ombudsman. This means that this institution was not created with a law or other legally binding document that sets its rights and responsibilities.

Worse even, the department is composed of two employees, one of which being



the deputy ombudsman at the same time. In theory, this person simultaneously works on cases where children's rights are violated and cases of family and school violence, participation of the children with special needs in educational programs and so on. With such a workload the cases where children rights are violated are typically delegated to the assistant- not a best quality assurance

knowing that during 2006 the number of complaints submitted to the Department has increased.³

Different, better set-up exists in countries around the world. According to the CFC Secretariat, the best practice in the area of protection of the rights of children is the Ombudsman for Children in Ireland. (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

³ CRPM interview with the deputy ombudsman 3rd March 2007.

2004) Carefully selecting such an institutional model led to positive results for the Irish children, their parents as well as the public institutions. The institution of the Ombudsman became visible and was recognized as the biggest promoter and protector of the rights of children.

CRPM recommends the creation of Ombudsman for Children integrating the activities, rights and responsibilities for the protection of the rights of children and other child oriented issues in the framework of one single institution. Such an institution would be active initiating policy reforms and laws concerning children issues, as well as giving recommendations on a regular basis for the relevant institution and policy-makers. It would act as a catalyst within the public administrative system through inter-departmental cooperation.

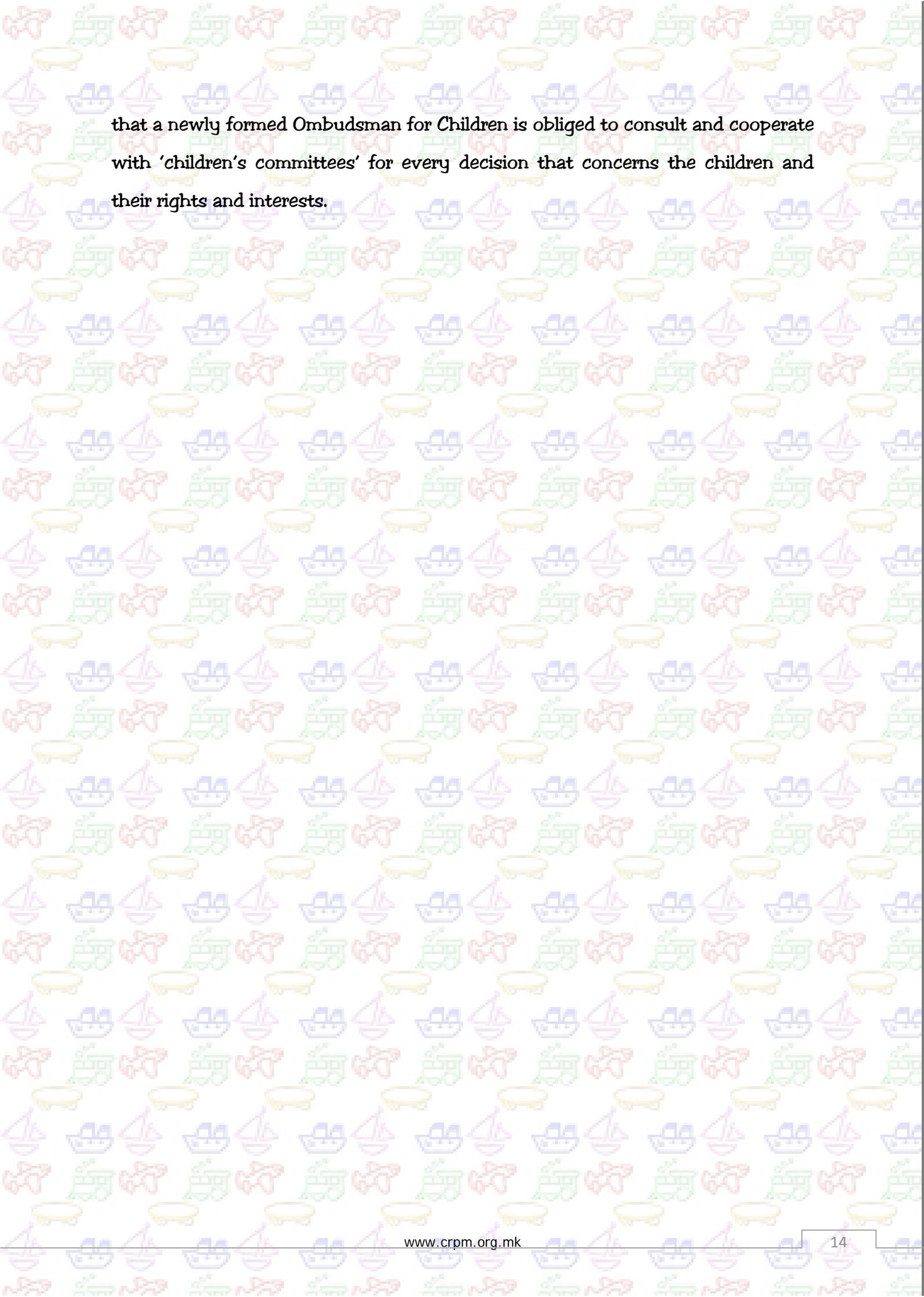
Participation

The UN Convention on the Rights of Children insists on listening to the opinions of children and taking them into consideration in the decision-making processes.

This is seen as a tool for promoting children's active involvement in issues that affect them. The Convention encourages parents, social workers and all those who feel responsible for the children to seriously take into consideration their views. Macedonia has not yet conceptualized the principle of children's participation. Except the informal consultations of the Department for the Protection of the Rights of Children with a ten member children's committee, there is not a single institution within the public administration that includes the children's participation principle in the decision-making process.⁴

Other countries have done better. The CFC Secretariat for example has identified the City of Munich and its programme Kinderbüro (Children's Office) as a best practice how to develop and promote activities designing a more child-friendly city. Within, two important tools (Child-Action-Suitcase and the Child-Plan-and-Build-Mobile-Unit) have been developed to enable children's direct participation in all kinds of infrastructural projects of their concern, planning of playgrounds, restructuring of neighborhoods or development of new residential areas. Munich children are given opportunities for a creative participatory planning process: tools and materials to build scale models, materials for drawing and painting, a camera for taking photographs and a sound-recorder, tables and chairs, an exhibition set. The suitcase and the mobile unit can be borrowed by anyone who is planning to design or build a playing facility for children, community organizations, schools, and housing corporations. (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2004) Drawing conclusions from this best practice, CRPM recommends

⁴ CRPM interview with the deputy ombudsman 3rd March 2007.



that a newly formed Ombudsman for Children is obliged to consult and cooperate with 'children's committees' for every decision that concerns the children and their rights and interests.

What are the Macedonian Realities? - Field Notes

The theory and the international conventions describe a child-friendly city as being committed fulfilling children's rights. It is a city where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public policies, programmes and decisions. It is, as a result, a city that is fit for all. (UNICEF International Secretariat n.d.) The concept of a child friendly city is not based on an ideal end state or a standard model. It is a process of gradual improvement of the local community to respond to the needs and rights of its young citizens and a framework to assist any city to become more child-friendly in all aspects of its environment, governance and services. It means a commitment by everyone to embrace the vision of children and strive to achieve a sustainable urban future for the cities. What are the Macedonian realities? CRPM carried out field research on micro (naselba) level in the city of Skopje. A subject of our observation were the Debar Maalo settlement, part of the Centar municipality and Aerodrom settlement, part of the corresponded municipality. We looked at a single issue, opportunities for children to entertain themselves using the local facilities and infrastructure.

Case Study: Municipality of Aerodrom

Aerodrom is a new local government unit founded in August 2004. The municipality is composed of 7 settlements: Aerodrom, Micurin, Jane Sandanski, Lisice, Novo Lisice, Regionalen Centar, Gorno Lisice, and Dolno Lisice. As one enters Aerodrom coming from the municipality of Kisela Voda walking on the “Franjo Kluz” street (which interconnects with Blvd. “Jane Sandanski”) s/he also enters the settlement of Aerodrom. Walking down the street, one can observe a modern settlement with plenty of tall apartment buildings. Do children living in this settlement have the basic conditions to entertain themselves? There are a number of children playgrounds in between the buildings with the following characteristics:

- Asphalted entrance for baby carriage/bicycles
- Iron benches and green areas
- Most of them have swings with two seats and seesaws with four seats each
- It is visible that all playgrounds are repaired (the broken parts of the equipment are being fixed and colored in different colors); the hygienic standards are kept

Yet the two basketball and mini-football fields⁵ in this settlement, are not fully equipped. There are no hoops; the goals are without nets. Thanks to the provided electric lighting at night and the strong will of the children to play and have fun, the attendance is high. A positive counter example is the mini football field in the courtyard of the “Ljuben Lape” school. This is one of 41 mini playground fields

⁵ Mini football pitches are highly popular meeting places for young people. The fenced-off facilities with special multi-purpose athletic flooring can be used for various kinds of ball games (volleyball, football, basketball, etc.). Size: 24 x 15 m.

that are planned to be constructed all over the country co-financed by the World Bank program for municipality development and the Union of European Football Associations implemented by the Macedonian Football Federation. This mini football field is open to the public, free of charge. The only remark is that it is not illuminated, so children cannot use it during the late evening hours. One should mention that nearby, on the interconnection of the Blvd. “ Jane Sandanski” , and “ Vasko Karangeleski” street there is the privately owned sport centre ‘Sunset’. People, young and old pay to play at this playground. This restricts access to poorer youth and children.

There are a number of playgrounds in the Aerodrom settlements. This provides for some entertainment opportunities for children there. Yet the local government has to continue working to improve the quality of life of the children especially if we take into consideration the ongoing process of creating the new detailed urban plans. The Mayor has a vision of Aerodrom becoming the most modern municipality in Skopje. In order to develop a child-friendly environment, the Municipality plans to build more and reconstruct the old sporting facilities, as well as to continue asphaltting the small sports playgrounds, build small children’s playgrounds, parks and a mini theatre for children. Yet Aerodrom also plans to create new industrial zones within the Municipality. (Municipality of Aerodrom n.d.) How will these two plans combine is yet to be seen.

Case Study: the Neighborhood of Debar Maalo

The Municipality of Centar is positioned in the heart of the city of Skopje. It covers the central and southern part of the city. It is composed of several settlements such as: Debar Maalo, Centar, Kapistec, Prolet, Bunjakovec, Madjar Maalo, Novo Maalo, Vodno, Krnjevo, Park Maalo and Tasino Chesmiche. The Debar Maalo settlement covers the area between the boulevards “Partizanski Odredi” and “Ilindenska” and from ‘Soborna Crkva’ until the locality called ‘Simpò’ (including the buildings around the City Park). In the last 10 years the Debar Maalo neighborhood became one of the most exploited areas for real estate development. The elder generations complain that changes are so drastic that nowadays they barely recognize the neighborhood. Many old houses with small backyards are being demolished and replaced with new tall apartment buildings (up to 5 floors).

A starting point of our analysis was the residential complex in Debar Maalo, which is located between the street “Franklin Roosevelt” from the west, the street “29 Noemvri” from the east, the boulevards ‘Partizanski Odredi’ from the south and “Orce Nikolov” from north. This area covers approximately 675 apartments, 45 houses, and 9 buildings (CRPM field research) in process of development (each of them with 50 apartments). However, there is no single playground or school in this area.

The second part of the Debar Maalo settlement is located between the street ‘29 Noemvri’ from the west, “Teodosij Glavinov” from the east, part of the boulevards ‘Partizanski Odredi’ from south, and part of ‘Ilindenska’ from the north. In this area there are several public institutions such as: the library ‘Braka Miladinovci’, Faculty for Engineering and Architectural Design, Ministry of

Culture, one part of the Ministry of Defense, the primary school 'Kole Nedelkovski' and the kinder garden '13 Noemvri'.

The only playground for mini-football in this community is located in the backyard of the primary school 'Kole Nedelkovski.' It has an open access to all interested to play after school finishes. As it was renovated in the spring of 2006, it is well equipped school playground. The entire area is surrounded by green colored fence. In the center of the playground there is a small park surrounded by a green area. However, more can be done in a sense of modernization of the equipment and adding new one to increase the activities for the children, as well as street illumination.

In the Debar Maalo settlement there is only one more playground located in the backyard of the kindergarten '13 Noemvri'. However, this one is closed for external users as it is only used for the needs of the kindergarten. Consequently, the absence of public playgrounds for children in a settlement which has a total of 1014 apartments, 26 houses and 10 buildings (in process of construction) is a significant evidence that during the urban planning conducted by the Municipality of Centar, the interests of the children were not taken in consideration at all.

Children as Customers?

CRPM assessed how well the basic needs of children are satisfied by restaurants, shopping malls, and supermarkets in terms of baby carriage accessibility, availability of baby seats, special rooms for children, special toilets (for babies/children)

	Super Markets	Shopping Malls	Restaurants	Coffee bars
Baby carriage accessibility	Tineks, Vero, Maksi-D	Ramstor, Beverly Hills, City Mall	Dalmetfu, Plava Laguna, Piacca del Toros, Irish pub, Vittoria	Blue Cafe (ground floor)
Special room for children	/	Ramstor	/	/
Possession of baby seats	/	/	Irish pub, Puccini, Gino, Dalmetfu, McDonalds	Blue Cafe
Board for changing dippers	/	/	Dalmetfu, McDonalds	/
Special toilet (for babies) adapters	/	/	Dalmetfu; Piacca del Toros	/

adapters, and boards for changing dippers. The analysis was made taking into consideration the biggest chains of supermarkets, the shopping malls in the city center, as well as

the restaurants and café bars in the central area of the city around the main square. From the table it can be noticed that none of the mentioned facilities fulfill all the five requirements. There are several possible explanations. One obvious reason for not having a variety of children friendly facilities might be the choice of the owners or the intention of the owners to attract only a certain type of clients or customers.

In spite of that an important issue is if the Macedonian legal framework proscribes basic criteria that need to be met by supermarkets and restaurant/bar owners in relation to the rights of children according to the Convention on the Rights of the Children. Carefully reviewing the Law for Restaurant and Catering Industry, especially the Statute for Nominal-technical Conditions for Working in the Catering industry (Official Gazette no. 62/2004) which describes what type

of activities and services have to be offered by the restaurant and catering industry, it can be concluded that the basic interests and the needs of the children are not taken into consideration within this law. In fact, the fulfillment of the basic needs of the children as potential visitors, as well as the five criteria mentioned above, is not mentioned in the Statute at all.

Child Friendly future for Skopje- Recommendations

The brief analysis of the realities in two neighborhoods, as well as the CRPM investigation of the legislation confirm that in Skopje the UNICEF definition of a child friendly city—a city that is fit for all—is far from fulfilled. For Macedonia legal changes in the protection of the rights of children; promoting children's active involvement in decision-making processes for issues that affect them; promoting children's best interests, are an urgent necessity.

CRPM recommends the following policy measures to be taken:

1. On a national level

- Establishment of the institution Ombudsman for Children through a promulgation of a new law where all rights and responsibilities of the Ombudsman will be clearly defined. The redefined Ombudsman for Children would be a:
 - Leading institution in protection of the rights of the child according to authorization given by the new law;
 - Initiator of child-friendly policy reforms within the administration
 - Providing recommendations on a regular basis for every law or article in a law that addresses children rights and interests to concerned institutions and policy-makers;
 - Establishing regular (formal) children's committee within the framework of the institution with participation rights in the decision-making processes

- Incorporating children's best interest in the process of urban planning
 - The current Law for Urban Planning has to be a subject to amendments that will define the constructing of children's playgrounds in residential complexes as mandatory;
 - Consulting (on obligatory basis) with children in the process of urban planning.
- Child-friendly oriented service in the catering industry
 - The current Law for the Catering industry, particularly the Statute for Nominal-technical Conditions for Working in the Catering Industry, has to be a subject to amendments that will provide the basis for child-friendly service, like:
 - baby carriage accessibility;
 - possession of baby seats;
 - special room for children (where is possible);
 - special toilet (for babies) adapters;
 - board for changing dippers

2. On a local (municipal) level

- Promulgating a municipal child-friendly strategies and action plans in accordance to the child-friendly framework
 - Every municipality has to promote its own practical child-friendly strategy and action plan according to their capabilities while working closely with parents, children and young people.

- Creating local children offices where children and youth can freely express themselves; local resource centers' from which the local governments can draw fresh and creative ideas for new municipal urban planning.

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