

people, men and women are living in the project; they are dependent on a very small old age pension, and if something goes wrong, on what the officers of the Casa de la Misericordia deem necessary to provide them with.

There is no school on the project, no kindergarten, no doctor, no first aid station, not even a shop where you can buy your food or other essential household articles. Still it is a rather modern high-rise flat, with many families, social housing, quite expensive, and according to the political documents, it is developed to alleviate the housing problems of the poor.

3 Divided city

The majority of people in Europe live in cities and express themselves in an urban way of living. It is in these urban areas, that social problems such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, marginalisation, dependence and racism are first and most intensely felt. It is also in cities, that the most innovative social, cultural and economic initiatives can be found, aimed at alleviating hardship, where ever possible, and promoting social and democratic rights for all citizens. While offering many new opportunities the economic and social unification of Europe will create new problems, which are likely to exacerbate existing inequalities. The quality of life in the "new Europe" will depend to a large extent, on the abilities of cities and their citizens, to meet the new social challenges.

Urban society in Europe becomes increasingly characterised by a growing divide between a dynamic segment of the population, that participates in the new economic activities and social development, and a stagnant part of the population, that is being excluded from the distribution of the benefits of the new prosperity, and becoming socially and culturally alienated. The urban crisis of the nineties will be socially in character, endangering not only the quality of individual lives but also the European function of cities as agents of change and engines of progress.

Europe's major cities seem to be increasingly divided between a dynamic segment of the population, which takes part in the new economy and is the bearer of a new urban culture, works and lives comfortably and has a perspective on an even better future, and a segment of the population, trapped in stagnation, if not outright decline, in ever more marginalizing conditions. I wonder, where this urban process leaves the children, how they view their physical, social and cultural surroundings, and what they expect from their governments -- these urban citizens of the future?

Children as the makers of a new Geography

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It was appropriate to open the conference with a talk from Anna Vasconcelos. Her "Passage House" program is a superb example of the change from an entirely "protectionist" approach to a more "empowering" approach to working with children living in difficult circumstances. I have been asked in this conference to provide a link in my talk between those who are talking about the ecology of children in cities and those, who like Anna, are trying to improve the lives of children. I believe that much of what people in this conference find disturbing about the quality of children's lives in cities today will need to be changed by those same children. We cannot rely upon the traditional approach of social science which observes children's lives and reports it to policy makers in the hope that they will improve children's conditions. We need now a more radical social science research with children in which children themselves learn to reflect upon their own conditions, so that they can gradually begin to take greater responsibility in creating communities different from the ones they inherited.

The Changing Urban Geography of Girls and Boys

We have heard from numerous speakers in this conference about the changing nature of children's lives in the cities of the industrialized world: their diminished freedom in space and time, the growth of mass media as an acculturating force at the expense of peer culture and local culture, a reduced contact with the natural world, the private and more exclusive provision of spaces for play and recreation at the expense of more inclusive public space, an erosion of community in the geographic sense of the word, an increase in social class segregation, the loss of meaningful work opportunities, and a growth of violence. I believe that central to the solution of these problems should be a more people-centered approach to development which could create the kind of safe, productive and caring communities children, and in fact, all of us need. Such communities would also have a more sustainable relationship with the natural resources from which they draw. Children could be the makers of this more community-based development but before describing this let me say a few words about the changing ecology of children in the cities of the "South" or the "Third World".

Rapid urbanization has brought serious disruptions to the processes by which children are acculturated in large parts of the Third World (Ennew and Milne, 1989; Boyden and Holden, 1991; Blanc, 1994). Child work is being replaced by child labor. Child work, which is common from an early age in the non-industrialized countries was usually understood by the family and the child as necessary for the family and somehow relevant to the child's future. Much of children's labor is now in highly exploitative and abusive settings -- factories, mines and in the streets. While there has been great media exposure to the problem of street children, most of this has concerned boys working on the streets. Their life is certainly difficult but many of them have better opportunities for growth than those children who are hidden from view. A particular

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concern is for girls, for they are not only hidden in factory work, but many millions of them are hidden inside homes, carrying the burden of continuous domestic work for their own families or the families of strangers. We are only just beginning to understand the scope of exploitation, violence and sexual abuse of so many of these children.

It is a great irony of the contemporary world that while children of the Third World have far too much work and very little time to play, those of the industrialized countries lack opportunities for meaningful work. Also ironic is that while middle-class children of the cities of the Southern Hemisphere do have time to play, increasingly their parents dare not let them. The growing violence of these cities, a natural response to the enormous social inequities, leads parents to lock their children inside housing complexes, denying them freedom of interaction with other children and with a diverse, safe, physical environment. Their world looks very much like the world of most children in the Northern Hemisphere. In a similar blurring of the North-South boundary, a growing proportion of children in the United States and in some European cities struggle to support their families in poverty, often working as substitute parents with their younger brothers and sisters -- the children of the "Fourth World". Again the question is how to create safe, economically viable and sustainable communities for these families and their children.

Children as the Makers of a New Geography

There are two ways of thinking about economic development. The one in great favor right now is "structural adjustment" or privatization, whereby economic growth is spurred by reducing taxation, that is reducing the power of the state. Alternatively, we may think of improving economic development by redistributing capital and political power in order to enable more people to participate in a development process which is more locally and regionally based.

The concept of sustainable development is that regions and localities should use their resources in ways which guarantee a livelihood for all residents, and through production processes that do not destroy the ecological integrity of the region. The local empowerment of people would not mean a return to the naiveté of the 60's and 70's where certain groups of people in the industrialized world opted out of the larger economy. It would rather require a local resistance to the first model of economic development and the forces of global economy, all over the world. People would come to understand the damaging impact of global economics and democratically resist by forming links with other communities concerned with people-centered development in other cultures and in different social classes. One might ask why would the middle classes ever be involved in such a widespread resistance? The answer is that they too are losing out through a fear of crime and violence and an observation of increasing elitism. With poverty and inequity, crime grows, costs grow, and fears grow. This year the state of California spent more on prisons than on schools. With statistics like that it is surely just a matter of time before large numbers of people conclude that we need to radically readdress democracy.

There are two important new tools for those who wish to begin to enable children to take part in a people-centered movement for the sustainable development of communities. The first is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, now signed by 170 nations, which clearly lays out the importance of children taking part in shaping their own futures and the futures of their communities. The second is the international movement for sustainable development of the environment backed up by the official documents of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The "Agenda 21" from this conference is a blueprint for environmental planning well into the next century, which stresses the need for locally-based sustainable development and a very central role for children and youth.

In the countries of the industrialized world, many people are impressed by the extent to which children seem to have become the most vocal environmentalists. Many of my colleagues draw great comfort in observing the fervor with which children argue with adults for change in attitudes and behavior in our relationship to the use of natural resources. I worry however that too little of this concern of children is based in any direct experience of the environments in which they live. Their understanding and concern seems to largely have grown from the mass media and school texts, and is in danger of being superficial and short-lived. Furthermore, if children are to grow into competent and responsible participating citizens in their own communities, they need to learn how to look critically at these communities. Much of the environmental movement and the mass media has led children to be concerned with distant issues. As a result they know more about the Amazon rainforest than they know about the management of their own street and neighborhood park. All schools in all communities should see their own community as the most important laboratory for transformation and investigation. The dictum to "act locally, think globally" is not enough. We need children to think locally as well as globally; environmental action on agendas created by others will not create the kind of critical consciousness we need. As children learn to evaluate and transform their local environment, they do of course need think globally. One of the ways I have found to be most effective for achieving this is to have children who are investigating their local environment to regularly communicate their findings to children living in a dramatically different environment (See the Environmental Exchange section of Hart, forthcoming).

Equally important is the need to look at social injustices closer to home. When children observe their environment and ask questions why things are the way they are they may be quickly elevated to a higher level of social and political consciousness. "Action research" of the kind proposed here is of course a radical departure from most of what currently takes place as environmental education in our schools. There are however, many excellent examples around the world, particularly in "non-formal schools" and in programs established outside of the school systems (Hart, forthcoming). To help children evaluate critically the quality of the environment, it helps greatly for them to make comparisons with the perspectives of other members of their communities. One particularly effective strategy is for children to team up with senior citizens living in the same area, to compare notes on the problems which concern them and investigate their neighborhoods collaboratively with a view to discovering possible avenues for improvement (Kaplan, 1992).

Even with the same community or region, children from very different backgrounds of experience in the environment educate one another. It was this which led El Programa Muchacho Trabajador (The Program of Working Children) in Ecuador to recently bring together child representatives from local environmental action groups made up of working children in "alternative spaces" in cities and towns of the Ecuadorian Amazon for the First Amazon Children's Conference (Espinosa, 1994). Even within their own group in a public school there are likely to be important social class, cultural and gender differences in the way children relate to the environment. When children compare and contrast their views of the environment as well as the views of their family members it can quickly lead them into an awareness of values and to a deeper analysis of the environment and of how decisions are made in their community. In these various ways children begin to face the geography of development. They learn that their environment is not just god-given, but is socially constructed. This is why it is so important for children to be involved in problem identification in all environmental action projects.

I have discovered in my research for a UNICEF handbook on methods for involving children in sustainable development, that there are very few programs which include the critical phase of problem identification (Hart, forthcoming). Problems are almost always discussed by the adults who work with children as though it were clear to all what they are. Not surprisingly, many of the environmental action projects children engage in fall under the same set of priorities which the environmental movement has outlined for them: anti-pollution, solid waste clean up, recycling and gardening. These are important for children to do, but it is even more important that children learn to look critically at all aspects of their local communities. When they are allowed to do so, the children of the urban poor will include housing conditions, the quality of their parks and playgrounds and the safety of their streets as equally important issues for research and action by them.

Institutional Supports for Children's Role in Development

I have argued in this talk that as social scientists concerned with children we should learn to work more with children rather than just writing about them. There is certainly a place for analysis of the many forces leading to deterioration in the quality of children's lives, but if they are being investigated by social scientists alone they are not likely to lead to much change. Policy makers and politicians do not generally turn to social science papers for guidance, but they do listen to the public. One solution then is for research to be done in various ways directly with children or, ideally, alongside those who work with children on a continuing basis. By working with schoolteachers for example, social scientists can provide a valuable support role. Teachers have not usually been trained to step out into their community with their children and to have children asking lots of questions which they feel incompetent to answer. Social scientists can help to forge a collaboration between schoolteachers and environmental professionals from government agencies and technical assistance groups. In many local governments in the United Kingdom for example, urban planners who are required by law to carry out public education have chosen to interpret their job in a most progressive way. Some of them inform schools when new developments are being considered for the neighborhood surrounding the school so that the children can

be invited to investigate the possible environmental and social impacts of the proposals.

Ideally, such collaborations between schools and their communities would be a more ongoing component of the curriculum. I have been particularly impressed by the "Escuelas Nuevas", or new schools of Colombia. In these schools, children of all ages are required to design and execute community projects. The social and physical environment of their community is considered to be a fundamental part of their education at all ages, rather than just an interesting option. Furthermore, the classes and all projects at these schools are democratically organized through continuous elections by the children. While this kind of representative democratic system is just one way of thinking of children's participation, it is likely to result in an increased sense of belonging to their communities and a deeper caring for their environment.

Of the many factors which made the new school movement possible in Colombia, the most important was undoubtedly the training of teachers. For schools to be made more democratic and for children to play a more active role in investigation and take greater responsibility for their learning in general there will be resistance because this kind of education can be very threatening to teachers. A most dramatic example of the effect teacher training can have in transforming the way children look at their communities and environments is in the Amazon region of Peru. In the city of Iquitos a bilingual teacher training program has been established which breaks the long tradition for the Amazon schools of teaching children in the Spanish language about information completely divorced from their daily lives in their indian-speaking communities. In place of texts prepared in distant urban locations, student teachers now go through a long program of teacher training to develop new materials based on the local environment and the knowledge of people from the particular cultures of the village about the use of the environment. This is a radical departure from the school as a missionary center of values from the urban culture. The school now invites adult members of the community to join with the teachers in sharing their local knowledge of the environment and its management. Using both the local language and the Spanish language, teachers and students are able to select relevant knowledge from both cultures. Again, this enables children to face development and to be involved from an early age in the immensely important task of being participants in a new type of geography.

It is unfortunate that with all of the millions of dollars that have been spent on environmental conservation projects in the Amazon, most teacher training still continues to be of the traditional single-language missionary type, for surely the greatest hope in developing sustainable approaches to forest use lies in building upon the centuries of experience of those who have lived in the forest and managed it sustainably. Such a radical transformation of school curricula not only has a great impact on what children learn but also on the larger community of adults for it revalorizes their own knowledge and recognizes them as the center of their own development efforts. So radical is this transformation for the villagers that they initially resist it and the teacher trainers find it necessary to travel to the villages to directly support their student teachers when they go to introduce this new concept of schooling. One student teacher described to me an embarrassing incident in his own village. He returned with his college professor to the village as part of his annual six-month internship. Walking back from a field to the school the student caught sight

of relatives through the trees and dropped a basket of manioc he was carrying. He begged his teacher to do the same, explaining that his relatives would never understand why he should be carrying manioc after being in college for four years. We have much work to do all over the world to convince parents and educators that it is essential that schools should be centers for teaching not only the distant and abstract but also the local and fundamental.

It would not be good to end with an example from a part of the world seen by most as an exotic, distant setting for their environmental concerns. I would rather pick an example which is closer to home for most of the listeners to this talk. The Nottingdale Urban Studies Center, located in a multicultural area of West London, is a model of the kind of local environmental action research centers which ought to exist in all communities (Ward and Fyson, 1973). Groups of children visit the Nottingdale Center from surrounding schools in order to conduct investigations about the local environment. Armed with tape recorders, cameras, pencil and paper from the center, the children set out into the urban environment to make observations or to interview residents, local officials and people who work in the neighborhood on such problems as noise or housing quality. Back at the center they transcribe their recordings, print photographs and type up reports. Some of this may go into the production of the local newspaper, or may lead to direct meetings with residents or local planners and politicians to report their findings. Over the course of many years, much material has been collected by groups using the center, so that the archives become a valuable resource for the community at large, adults as well as children. Local school children remain the greatest users of the center but it is also used by college students, nurses, youth workers, housing and environmental health offices for their continued professional development. Inevitably such centers become important places for adult decision-making as well as for research by children. Inevitably, research by children in settings like this leads to new kinds of collaborations which rarely happen in schools. One of the early examples from the Nottingdale Urban Studies Center was a study by fourth year comprehensive school students (16 years old). They chose to work on the conditions of a high rise housing project. As a result of their presentation to the community the local tenants association was so impressed that they decided to join with the students on a major questionnaire. This led to a proposal for a multi-use community hall for the estate. We need more such local environmental centers in all of the places that lie between the villages of the Peruvian Amazon and Nottingdale, London.

I have argued in this essay that children need to see themselves as the makers of a new geography. While many children are already seen by adults as fervent environmentalists the tendency is towards a naïve and superficial awareness of distant places, carried to them by the mass media, rather than a deep and intimate caring for the local environment based in direct experiences. By learning to look critically at their own environment and the many different forces, both local and global, which impact upon it, they are more likely to become the kind of lasting protagonists we need for the environment in the 21st century: a world with greater equity in the use of natural resources and with democratically managed, sustainable, communities.

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