

# CHILDREN'S SOCIAL AND SPATIAL EXCLUSION IN THE CITY: THE NEED FOR AN INTERNAL LOOK

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## *Abstract*

This paper deals with the social and spatial exclusion of children in the city from an alternative point of view. There is a sizable literature on the objective factors that lead to children's exclusion in the city, including all the disadvantages of technocratic and child-unfriendly urban planning and the social and economic consequences of the urban crisis. The research presents the creation of an internal image of oppression that makes children reproduce the conditions of their exclusion in the city. The research took place at a primary school in Athens, with the participation of 60 children, aged from 9 to 12 years old.

*Keywords:* exclusion, internalisation, image of oppression, environmental education, participation, liberal learning.

## INTRODUCTION

The current paper presents an alternative view on children's exclusion in the city by drawing attention to an internal look. It attempts to explain how children internalize the external, objective factors and experience an internal form of oppression. By investigating children's ideas, feelings, and experiences from the urban environment in a primary school of Athens, I attempt to create a theoretical framework that describes the process of internalization of the external factors that exclude children from the space and community of the city, factors that also alienate and oppress them.

There is already a sizeable literature which proves children's spatial and social exclusion in the urban environments. The technocratic approach to urban planning has marginalized children in the city. By focusing on the promotion of economic growth, urban planning has contributed to the development of cities that cannot respond to the needs of children (Cunningham, 2002, p. 7).

Children are invisible in the urban environments and do not take part in decision-making procedures of urban and environmental planning (Matthews, 1995). They are isolated in special spaces, separated from the adult community, and they do not have the ability or means of contributing to the development of their environment (Sutton, 1996, p. 155). Children are invisible in the landscape. They are forced to fit into the unfriendly environments of the adults, or, at best, are provided with spaces that are specially designed for children, such as playgrounds (Matthews, 1995, p. 457).

Research worldwide has indicated the presence of a number of objective factors that contribute to children's exclusion in the city. For example, children no longer have a free and independent access to public space because of the increased use of cars (Rissotto & Giuliani, 2006; Lynch, 1977). Furthermore, public spaces for play have decreased as a consequence of the domination of built environment in the new forms of urban planning (Cunningham, 2002).

Children spend their days in their homes, in front of a computer screen or television, experiencing feelings of loneliness and boredom (Karsten, 1998; Lynch, 1977; Percy-Smith, 2002). They are faced with two important dangers: traffic and loneliness, though loneliness may be the more serious of the two since it can have a negative effect on children's psyches (Allen, 1968).

The extended use of cars is not the only reason for children's inability to move freely and independently in the city. Parental fears have excluded children from public space, too (Valentine, 1997). There are also social policies that keep children away from public space regarded as too dangerous for them (Gough & Franch, 2005). The domination of fear and danger prevents the free use of public space and contributes to keeping children within the confines of family and residence (Salvadori, 2001, p. 199).

Children are excluded from the physical space and the social networks of their neighborhood. This reality deprives children from establishing a sense of belonging (Cosco & Moore, 2002, p. 55). The local environment contributes to children's cognitive development, social skills, and personal identity (Tranter & Pawson, 2001, p. 27). The social networks and physical spaces of the neighborhood help children obtain social and communication skills, to try out social roles, and to become familiar with various cultures, lifestyles, and belief systems (Sutton & Kemp, 2002, p. 171). The sense of belonging to a place contributes also to the ability of participating in social networks as adults (Corbishley, 1995).

Finally, children are excluded from the decision-making procedures of urban and environmental planning because they do not participate in their environment and community (Hart, 1992, 1997; Mathews, 2001; Sutton, 1996). Children's participation in decision-making is fundamental for social justice (Bojer, 2000). The exclusion of children from the city affects their access to the freedoms of a democratic society, since they lose their rights of citizenship and the ability to acquire the self-perceptions and competencies of adult citizenship (Sutton & Kemp, 2002, p. 172). Children, unlike other marginalized groups, do not participate in public dialogue about their community and environment, and in this sense, they experience a special dimension of social and spatial exclusion (Mathews, 2001, p. 16).

### THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH: THE NEED FOR AN INTERNAL LOOK

According to Paulo Freire (1992), the struggle against the external factors that lead to oppression is not the only requirement for liberation from oppression. The oppressed social groups have internalised the image of the oppressor and the struggle for liberation would be possible only if they rejected this image.

Research about children's exclusion has generally focused on external factors, such as urban planning, the built environment, car use, absence of space to play, and so on. The present research approaches children's exclusion through an alternative, "Freirean" point of view. The research explores the mechanisms through which children internalize the image of oppression and contribute to the reproduction of their exclusion. This internal look at the exclusion of children aims at contributing to the development of new liberatory research and pedagogical procedures where children are educated 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" (Hart, 1995, p. 1).

Since the goal of liberatory learning is the development of a consciousness, there is a need to investigate the obstacles for the development of critical awareness. Liberatory teachers must study the shape of disempowering forces and they need a working knowledge of the anti-critical field from which a critical pedagogy will emerge (Shor, 1980, p. 47). Critical learning aids students to become aware of what holds them back and prepares them to be their own agents of social change (Shor, 1980, p. 48). When children become conscious of their exclusion they take their first step towards emancipation (Tsevreni, 2011). Liberal pedagogy and children's participation in their environment and community presupposes that children will have become aware of their exclusion and they will have confronted their internal image of oppression.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### *Research design*

The research took place in the framework of an environmental education programme which was implemented in a primary school in Athens, during the 2004-2005 school-year. It was conducted with 60 children: 29 junior (aged 9 to 10) and 31 senior children (aged 11 to 12). The researcher was also the environmental education teacher in the primary school. The environmental education programme focused on children's action and emancipation, following the critical pedagogy paradigm (Tsevreni, 2008, p. 2011). Throughout the research I paid close attention to ethical issues (such as confidentiality, children's safety, including their physical, emotional and mental safety, respect for their opinion, etc.) following the guidelines of Matthews (1998) and Hart (1997).

The chosen methods included a combination of action research and participatory planning methods especially designed for children: storytelling, photography, and environmental drama (Tsevreni, 2008). Storytelling is a method which is based on creative writing and has been implemented by Cunningham et al. (2003). Photography has been implemented in relevant educational programmes such as Cosco and Moore's (2001). Educational drama helps to explore the issues, to develop communication and decision-making skills, and to increase children's sensitivity to others (McNaughton, 2004).

In the first stage of the educational programme, children participated in a storytelling contest. They were asked to express their ideas about the urban environment and to formulate their vision for the future of the city. In the second stage, children were asked to photograph their favourite places, the places they dislike, and the places where they play in their neighbourhood. In the third stage, groups of children dramatised the good and bad aspects of the city (Tsevreni, 2008). After the end of each activity, children were encouraged to write down their ideas expressing their perceptions, feelings, and experiences about their environment and to interpret and reflect on their actions and choices during the activities of the educational programme.

The data that I analysed and present in this paper are part of a broader environmental education programme that was based on a simple idea: to encourage children to face aspects of their community and environment not through an external stimulus but through the expression and communication of their ideas. This procedure was intended as a motivation for children's reflection and activation with the goal of reinforcing children's activism as the only way to achieve their participation.

Children decided to create a book with their ideas, which was sent to the Municipality of Athens. In addition, they prepared a performance for pupils,

teachers, parents, and representatives from the Municipality of Athens and the Ministry of Education. The performance was created by children themselves and it was inspired by their work during the educational programme. The children created a synthesis of storytelling, photography, and environmental drama from their texts in order to present and communicate their ideas about their environment (Tsevreni, 2008).

Children followed an emancipatory pedagogical path aimed at their empowerment and the creation of knowledge geared towards action. This educational procedure helped children proceed from their passiveness and apathy to empowerment and the ability to act, following the interdependent stages of action model. Children were able to communicate their ideas, to form a vision for the future, and to act against their oppression. (For this educational path to empowerment, not analysed in the present paper, see Tsevreni, 2011).

### *Data analysis*

The analysed data included children's stories from the storytelling contest and children's texts from photography and environmental drama, where children described their ideas, feelings, and experiences in the city.

The methodology of data analysis was based on grounded theory. Data analysis included the three stages of coding procedure of grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In the first stage of open coding, data were placed in three categories with their sub-categories. The second stage of axial coding contributed to the development of the basic theoretical categories with their sub-categories. The aim of the third stage of selective coding was the development of a central category with which all the others are connected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In the first stage of open coding, I classified the data in five categories with their sub-categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998):

1. The positive side of the city
2. The negative side of the city
3. Spaces for play
4. Athens in the future
5. The vision for the future of the city

In the axial coding stage, I developed four basic theoretical categories with their sub-categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998):

1. Exclusion
2. Psychogeography<sup>1</sup>
3. Community identity
4. Children's perceptions about the urban environment

The data analysis procedure is described in Table 1.

Table 1. Data analysis procedure: open and axial coding

Open coding	Axial Coding
<p>1. The positive side of the city</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• nature in the city</li> <li>• spaces for play</li> <li>• human relationships</li> <li>• entertainment</li> <li>• facilities and consumption</li> <li>• aesthetics</li> <li>• culture</li> <li>• green transportation</li> <li>• my home</li> <li>• shops</li> <li>• special places</li> <li>• human-nature relationship</li> <li>• monuments</li> <li>• the active citizen</li> </ul> <p>2. The negative side of the city</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• environmental problems</li> <li>• cars</li> <li>• sound pollution</li> <li>• built environment</li> <li>• low quality of human relationships and communication</li> <li>• violence</li> <li>• racism</li> <li>• low aesthetic quality</li> <li>• social inequalities</li> <li>• minorities</li> </ul> <p>3. Spaces for play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• home</li> <li>• neighborhood</li> <li>• school</li> </ul>	<p>1. Exclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the exclusion from public space and loneliness</li> <li>• spare time and access to public space</li> </ul> <p>2. Psychogeography</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children’s disappointment with their environment</li> <li>• children’s pessimism about the future of the city</li> </ul> <p>3. Community identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the absence of a sense of belonging</li> <li>• the absence of community identity</li> <li>• the lack of participation in decision-making procedures</li> <li>• Children’s perceptions of the urban environment</li> <li>• emphasis on human-nature relationship</li> <li>• emphasis on environmental problems</li> <li>• children’s anxiety about the problems of the city</li> <li>• the ideas of the minority</li> </ul>

Open coding	Axial Coding
<p>4. Athens in the future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• optimism</li> <li>• pessimism</li> <li>• neutrality</li> <li>• inability to envisage a future</li> </ul> <p>5. the vision for the future of the city</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• confrontation of environmental problems</li> <li>• nature in the city</li> <li>• reduction of cars</li> <li>• improvement of built environment</li> <li>• spaces for play</li> <li>• less violence</li> <li>• consumption</li> <li>• culture</li> <li>• improvement of human relationships</li> <li>• confrontation of poverty</li> <li>• active citizens</li> </ul>	

The central category to which all others are connected emerged at the selective coding stage (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process of data analysis, using the grounded theory, revealed children's exclusion in the city as a repeated pattern. The relationships of the central category with the other categories formed the central theoretical scheme: Children's internalisation of objective factors and the mechanisms of production and reproduction of their exclusion in the city (Table 2).

This central category emerges, interprets, and connects children's exclusion in the city with the image of objective factors that produce and reproduce the exclusion. These objective factors have been internalised by children. They include children's negative feelings about their environment, the absence of community

identity, and the dominance of shallow environmentalism regarding their perceptions of their environment (Table 2).

Table 2. The internalisation of objective factors of children’s exclusion in the city.

Absence of community identity	Children’s perceptions of the urban environment	Children’s psychogeography
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability of free and independent movement in the neighborhood</li> <li>• Absence of a connection with the environment</li> <li>• Alienation from the community</li> <li>• Absence of participation in the environment and the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on human-nature relationship Emphasis on environmental problems</li> <li>• Absence of a social and political dimension of the environment</li> <li>• Absence of a critical stance towards the political and social structures that are responsible for the urban crisis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disappointment about the environment</li> <li>• Emphasis on the negative elements of the urban environment</li> <li>• Pessimism about the future of the city</li> <li>• Inability to hope for a better future</li> </ul>

## RESULTS

### *Community Identity*

**Inability to move freely and independently in the neighborhood and loneliness.** The research confirmed that children face exclusion in the city. They are mostly confined to their houses and they do not move freely and independently in their neighborhoods. Children described the difficulties regarding their movement in the city. Traffic, the built environment, and the absence of spaces for children create an overall unfriendly context for children. Many children stated that they are alienated in their home because of the danger posed by cars. For example:

“My room. Unfortunately, I can’t play on the road because there are many “dangers” like cars and motorbikes.” (Erato, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, describing one of her photographs about the place that she dislikes).

“I play at my desk. I have no other place to play. In the city, I can’t go out to play, because cars might hit me.” (Persefoni, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, describing one of her photographs about the place that she dislikes).



“An injured man in a car accident. There are a lot of cars which are not careful and hit people.” (Group of children, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Children dramatised a scene of the negative side of the city).

Many children play in their bedroom because they do not have any other place to play. Children who stay at home spend their time in front of a television, a computer screen, or an electronic game. Some of these children said that they engage in these activities out of boredom:

“I play in my room because that is where I have my computer. Nowadays children usually play with computers, GameBoy and electronic games.” (Chloe, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, describing one of her photographs about the place that she dislikes).

“I like playing video games in my room, since I can't go to the park by myself to play.” (Alexis, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, describing one of his photographs about the place that he dislikes).

Children expressed the loneliness they feel. It seems that they do not have the opportunity to experience the sense of action, exploration, imagination, communication, and friendship. This lonely existence turns children into adults who will not be familiar with their environment and their community.

**Absence of connection with the environment and alienation from the community.** Children do not have the ability of free and independent movement in their neighborhood. They move in their neighborhoods accompanied by adults from one space of exclusion to another. Children visit specific outdoor spaces, such as playgrounds, parks, and squares, but they do not have access to the rest of the social space. Consequently, they are not familiar with their neighborhood and they have not developed a connection with it. Only a minority of the children mentioned a particular favourite place in their neighborhood. Most of the children wrote some general comments about green spaces, playgrounds, and parks which they said were their favourite places. That indicates children's alienation from their community and environment.

**Absence of participation in the environment and the community.** Participation is essential for the development of a bond between children and their environment. When children are not involved in their environment and their community they cannot become familiar with their environment and cannot form a community identity.

The older children seemed to be aware of the fact that they do not participate in their environment and community:

“It is fair when all opinions are heard in city planning. Only in this way everyone will like the city. I believe in this idea, and everybody, children and adults, must participate in city planning.” (Erato, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

“City planning is decided by the mayor, the city council and the architects of the municipality. No one else can participate in decisions. However, children should have the right to express their opinion and to transform the city as they

like, because they are going to live in this city and it is important to feel good where we live.” (Artemis, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

“In my opinion, people’s participation, and especially children’s participation is necessary if we want to create the city of our dreams”. (Eleni, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

Older children believe that participation is important and they have the right to contribute to issues affecting their environment:

“Children’s participation in urban planning is important because we and not the adults are going to live in this world in some years. We have to express our opinion, because it is more important than the opinion of a mayor, a chairman or an expert. Besides, we are living in this world and we are going to make it according to our needs.” (Athina, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

“Why can children not participate in city planning? This is the question. Children, like all people, participate indirectly in city planning because they vote their representatives and the city council. Nevertheless, their ideas will rarely be accomplished. Everybody acts as he likes, concerning city planning, without being interested in the opinion of adults and children.” (Ektoras, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

### *Children’s Perceptions of the Environment*

**Emphasis on human-nature relationship.** Children emphasized particularly the human-nature relationship in the city. They painted a dark picture of the human impact on nature. They also expressed their dissatisfaction in the absence of nature from the city. Children focused on the catastrophic effects of pollution and built environment on nature. According to children, the environmental problems are the basic reasons for the urban crisis.

“A chaotic city. Two blocks of flats and a lady holding an iguana. A taxi driver and next to her a maniac on a motorcycle.” (Group of children, 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Children dramatised a scene from the negative side of the city).

Children also emphasized the absence of nature in the city. For example:

“There are not many flowers and trees in the city.” (Alexis, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

“This neighborhood is not beautiful, full of cement, and without plants. The only animals that exist here are birds, dogs and cats.” (Athina, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

“This city is full of cement, exhaust-gas and dust. People do not enjoy nature. I wish this city could change.” (Ektoras, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

Children said that nature in the city is constrained in specific spaces, where they cannot have direct access on daily basis. Children’s need for contact with nature comes through clearly in the research. Children ask for nature in the city, in spaces where they can have direct access.

“There are many plants and trees. I chose this place because I like a green place. I wanted to show how I would like the city to be.” (Elektra, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, describing one of her photographs).

Furthermore, children expressed their need for a harmonious human-nature relationship.

“This is a park with trees. We wanted to show the beauty of the city. A city full of trees and oxygen.” (Group of children, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Children dramatized a scene from the positive side of the city).

“This is a place with green and flowers. There is plenty of space. I chose it because it was very beautiful.” (Alexandra, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, describing one of her photographs).

Children focused on environmental problems in their texts. However, they did not mention the social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of the environment, revealing the predominance of shallow environmentalism in their way of thinking. “Environmentalism” concerns a technocratic approach where nature is a stock of natural resources (Bookchin, 1980). Shallow environmentalism in environmental education concerns a tension that is observed in environmental educational programmes where mostly scientific and technocratic solutions are proposed as solutions for the ecological crisis.

Most of the children did not mention the political and social dimension of the environment:

“A place with garbage. I wanted to show that I hate this place.” (Amalia, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, describing one of her photographs).

“This is a corner in a block of flats, two trash cans and rubbish. I chose this place because it was very dirty and I wanted to show that we do not deserve to live in such a place.” (Afroditi, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, describing one of her photographs about the place that she dislikes).

The dominant political and social structures are not questioned in children's texts. Children believe that “man” in general is responsible for the urban crisis.

“The only thing that people know how to do is to quarrel and to destroy nature, which means themselves.” (Eleni, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

The emphasis on environmental issues and the absence of references to the city's political, social, cultural, and other dimensions indicates the predominance of shallow environmentalism. Only a minority of children envisage a city without inequalities, equal access and use of public space, with harmonious human relationships.

### *Children's Psychogeography*

Emphasis on the negative side of the urban environment. The negative side of the city was dominant in children's texts. Children placed themselves in a chaotic

urban environment, with tall, asphyxiating blocks of flats, traffic and the absence of nature:

“Houses are huge buildings, close one to the other that you think that people who live inside them are going to explode.” (Artemis, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

“People live in old, tall block of flats, and children have no place to play.” (Aggeliki, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

Children feel that the urban pattern is “cement” and “blocks of flats”, huge buildings that are impersonal and unfriendly to the environment, and block communication and a connection between people and spaces:

“I took a photo of the tall block of flats. Because of them you cannot see the sky.” (Myrto, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, describing one of her photographs about the place that she dislikes).

Children also mentioned the issue of traffic:

“It is a place with many cars and motorbikes. It is very ugly.” (Magda, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, describing one of her photographs of the place that she dislikes).

“It is a place full of cars and everyday when I go to school I cannot pass through. I chose to shoot this place because I want to complain...” (Alexandros, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, describing one of his photographs of the place that he dislikes).

“I photographed the central road. There are cars which produce exhaust-gases.” (Thodoris, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, describing one of his photographs of the place that he dislikes).

In environmental drama a group of children presented an inhospitable and alienated urban environment:

“Omiros and Dimitris are violence which exists in the city. Afroditi and Elektra are an industry with its polluted gases. Alexis is a thief, Chrisanthi and Maria are the dead animals. We want to show this situation of the city, for example: people who struggle, thieves in the city, an industry which pollutes the environment and dead animals.” (Group of children, 5<sup>th</sup> grade).

Children’s disappointment for their environment and their pessimism for the future of Athens. The research revealed children’s deep disappointment. It is remarkable that many children could not mention a single positive element of their city. Most of the children painted a dark picture of the city: pollution, absence of nature, traffic, cement, blocks of flats, and a lack of spaces for play. A minority of children mentioned other issues too: antagonistic human relationships, lack of communication, poverty, social inequalities, and inability to participate in cultural procedures.

Some children mentioned that the adults in the city feel bored, uncreative, morose, lonely, and alienated and that they are greedy and have a negative relationship with nature and a tendency towards self-destruction. Many children feel anxious, disappointed and close to despair:

“This is the most melancholic city of the world. All dressed in black and cement. And the people too. You can't see the smile on their faces. Life for them is an everyday routine, not a celebration!” (Eleni, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

“This city is polluted by industries and people are willing to do anything to find money. People are very unhappy.” (Konstantinos 5<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

“In the city there are exhaust-gases everywhere and people see this situation and do nothing. If we continue this way we are going to commit suicide through our own creations. Man wants to die.” (Aggelos, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

Children are pessimistic about the future of the city. Most of the children believe that their quality of life will become worse in the next years and it will also be difficult to survive in Athens. Some children are hesitant to hope for a better future and they could not form a vision for the future of the city.

The children did not propose any specific solutions for the urban crisis. They are passive receivers of an inhuman urban environment, without a way of transforming their disappointment and pessimism into initiative:

“If Athens is as I described it now, after 20 years will be worse. Cars will have increased, and the exhaust-gases too. Rubbish will pollute the city more and the blocks of flats will cover the small, uncomfortable neighbourhoods with the houses. Trees will disappear and the oxygen will no longer exist.” (Eleni, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

“This city in twenty years will have become a hell full of millions of cars and people who wear masks in order to breathe.” (Aggelos, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, storytelling).

## THE INTERNALIZATION OF THE OBJECTIVE FACTORS OF EXCLUSION

The research revealed the internalization of children's oppression as one of the mechanisms of their exclusion. Most of the children who participated in the research stated in the beginning of the environmental education programme that their ideas and their participation in the community and environment are not important and that they are incapable of taking action.

As Freire (1992) has said, the struggle against oppression presupposes a critical analysis of human existence. In a culture of silence, oppressed social groups are not heard by the dominant members of society. Oppressed people, who have internalized an image of themselves as incapable, experience the fear and the silence that have been imposed by the oppressors.

The image of oppression which has been internalized by the children is the result of three basic factors: lack of community identity, the prevalence of shallow environmentalism, and feelings of dissatisfaction and pessimism about the future of the city.

First, the absence of children's community identity is based, according to the research findings, on the inability of free and independent movement in their neighborhood, the lack of connection with their neighborhood, their alienation from the community and the inability to participate in the decision-making procedures in their environment and community.

The second factor that contributes to the mechanism of internalisation of children's exclusion is the prevalence of shallow environmentalism regarding children's perceptions of their environment. This factor is based, according to the research, on an exclusive emphasis on environmental issues, the inability to comprehend the social and political dimension of the environment and the urban crisis, and the absence of critical thinking on the political and social structures behind the urban crisis.

Finally, the image of oppression is based also on children's psychogeography. Children's negative feelings for their environment are based, according to the research, on their emphasis on the negative aspects of the urban environment, their disappointment, and their pessimism and inability to hope for a better future.

The negative feelings for the environment where children live, the lack of community identity, and the domination of shallow environmentalism are at the foundations of the formation of the image of oppression. When children internalize the objective factors of their exclusion, it is obvious that they create a negative image of themselves as incapable social factors. Children seemed to experience a passive role of acceptance and silence.

## **THE NEED FOR A RADICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION AND EMANCIPATION IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT**

The research brings to light an alternative mechanism that produces and reproduces children's exclusion in the city. The struggle against children's oppression requires the development of an alternative community and educational framework that aims at confronting children's image of oppression and its particular characteristics: lack of local identity, shallow environmentalism, and psychogeography of despair.

Community identity is extremely important for children as they should be living in places they can understand and take pride in. Children should participate in their community through particular functions which they could perform and particular places for which they could be partly responsible. The locality should be also open to changes which children could bring about (Lynch, 1977, p. 57). Communities should provide opportunities for children to develop their community identity as a necessary component of their healthy and integrated development and citizenship. Children's participation in their community should be

a fundamental factor in spatial and social planning that aims at the development of democratic, solidarist, and creative communities.

On the other hand, environmental education has been, until now, the only way for children to become involved in their community and environment through the school curriculum in Greece. Shallow environmentalism in children's perception is a crucial issue and the dominant model of environmental education in Greece is partly responsible for it (Tsevreni, 2008). Critical pedagogy could strengthen children's critical thought, critical conscience, self-confidence (Tsevreni, 2011), and action-competence (Jensen, 2004; Jensen & arsten, 2006).

There is no need anymore for knowledge-centred environmental education that focuses on scientific and technological solutions for the ecological crisis, but does not examine the social, economic, political, and cultural sides of the environment and development (Tsevreni, 2011). Critical environmental education paradigm (e.g. Fien, 1993; Hart, 2003; Huckle, 1993; Jensen, 1997; Jensen, & Schnack, 2006; Robotom, 1987) represents a liberal path for environmental education that aims at children's participation and emancipation, their active and experiential learning, and critical reflection. Pupils develop their own abilities to shape their lives; to comprehend the sources of their beliefs, values, and the interests these support; and to reflect on the forces that restrict their lives with a view to examining democratic alternatives (Huckle, 1991, p. 54)

Furthermore, the research presented children's feelings concerning the environment in which they live and grow up. Children's psychogeography is based on the absence of self-confidence, pessimism, and the inability to hope for a better future. The struggle against children's exclusion and oppression is a necessary factor in the inclusion of a pedagogical and community framework against children's psychogeography of despair.

For example, the dominant model of environmental education that is based mainly on transfer of scientific knowledge is not helpful for children. When children confront complicated and burgeoning environmental problems they feel anxious and worried but lack the courage to act (Jensen & Schnack, 2006). Faced with environmental problems children feel cynicism, frustration, and powerlessness even though education and awareness have increased (Hillcoat et al., 1995).

Children's exclusion in the city could be challenged through a critical education which focuses on children's participation and empowerment. Liberation, according to Freire (1992), is a result of the action of people as beings of praxis—of reflection and action. Children could overcome the internalized image of oppression through an educational and community framework that aims at to empower them and allow them to participate. There is a need for educational institutions, spatial planning, and research to cooperate so that they can focus on children's empowerment, participation, and emancipation.

The dominant educational and community mechanisms produce and reproduce alienation, anxiety, pessimism, and shallow environmentalism. However, liberatory learning geared towards the development of critical consciousness and action competence could be used as a basis for the creation of emancipated and liberal communities. Children's empowerment and liberation from the image of oppression is the first step for the creation of a more socially just and participatory urban environment.

## NOTES

1. The word psychogeography belongs to Guy Debord. It was suggested by an illiterate Kabyle. "Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals" (Debord 2006).
2. For reasons of confidentiality, the names of pupils have been changed.



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