



ABSTRACT

Future of the planet and the rights of the child

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A child's right to life, development, health, a healthy and safe environment, and influence is recognised in the UN's Convention of the Rights of the Child. In recent years, the condition of the environment has become a concern for us all, particularly through activities of children and young people. At the same time, children and young people's fear and insecurity over the consequences of human-induced climate change have increased drastically. This anxiety and concern have resulted in an increasing call for help in the service system, too. However, the questions regarding the state of the planet have seldom been discussed from the perspective of children's rights.

This book is a response by over 40 experts in different fields to an open invitation to discuss the future of the planet and children's rights. The book poses several questions: What are children and young people's experiences like regarding the climate change and changes in the environment? How do children and young people see the future of the planet? How do environmental questions concern children? Do children have genuine opportunities to influence environmental policies, and what are their experiences of having influence like? In addition, the book offers solutions. Sustainability can be promoted in collaboration with children and young people without taking the ethical responsibility for the environment away from adults.

The book consists of five parts, the first of which invites you to consider the topic from judicial, ethical and philosophical point of view. It is difficult, if not downright impossible, to make the right decisions for future generations in the present. In the end, we must promote humane conditions for future generations and strengthen trust through sustainable solutions.

The second part examines children and young people's thoughts on and experiences of our planet. The articles in this part not only propose methods for studying this topic, they also illustrate what children's relationship with nature will be like and why. The condition of the planet is felt emotionally and bodily, and while many experiences are shared, they are also individual. These articles highlight the importance of interaction with children in promoting mutual understanding.

The third part of the book discusses factors that encourage and hinder influence, on the basis of both questionnaire studies and experience. Influence is promoted by awareness of the environment and an encouraging operating environment. The opportunities for participation among young people are not equal. Besides, some children and young people find influencing an alien concept, while some are not interested in it; and for some, the burden of participation has become excessively high. Young people cannot be saddled with the responsibility for making climate policies; today's decision-makers must take action. In the end, what matters is faith in the future, and adults play an important role in strengthening that faith.

In the fourth part of the book, focus is on finding solutions for promoting sustainability. The ability of guardians and educators to discuss sustainability questions with children is critical. Climate communications and climate education provide solutions for the management and prevention of climate-related anxiety. Early childhood education institutes and schools provide a natural environment for discussing topics related to the environment and opportunities for making a difference with children. If an adult spending time with a child does not have the ability or will to discuss the child's questions, fear and concern may reach an undue level. Hope-based and action-based pedagogical methods are important because they promote adults' abilities to discuss difficult topics.

The last article in the book provides tools for creating a more sustainable future and forging a stronger relationship with nature, together. Bodily experiences and processes, time spent outdoors, and food play a key role in this.

What all the above articles have in common is the observation that children and young people are aware of the condition of the planet and the factors threatening it. This awareness has brought with it concern, but also motivation to make a difference. At the same time, the book indicates that children are not unanimous and that each child is differently inclined to make a difference. That is why we need different channels and methods for expressing one's views of the world, as well as different ways for interacting with it. The future of the planet and children's rights are questions of inter-generation fairness, with many ethical dimensions. Participation in work that affects the future of the planet is a child's right – but not an obligation – and it is always adults that should bear the responsibility for making decisions that affect the environment.

Key words: Earth, planet, climate change, future, children's rights, child, young people influence, sustainability