



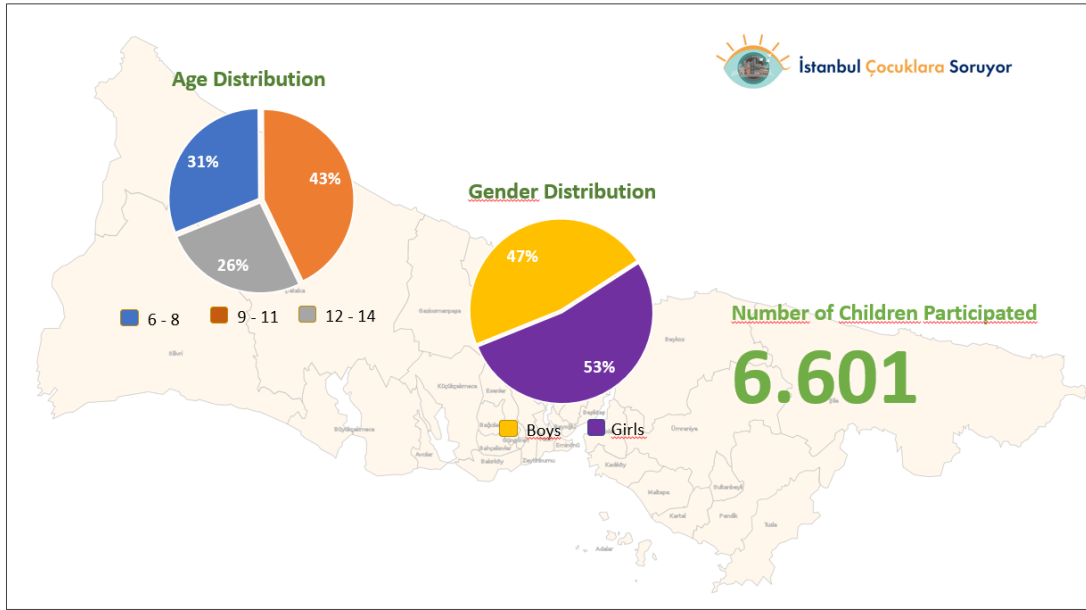
“İstanbul is Asking Children” Executive Summary

“İstanbul is Asking Children” is a large scale “participatory democracy” project to ensure active participation of children to the decision and policy making process regarding the development of the city they live in. The idea, content and implication method were developed by **Informal Education-cocukistanbul** based on İstanbul City Assembly’s approach that *“Every child living in İstanbul is a natural member of the Children’s Assembly”* and implemented in cooperation with the **İstanbul City Assembly**.

The aim of the project is to hear and discuss the problems and opportunities in the city with the children by putting them in the center based on the principle that participation is a “child’s right”. The distinctive feature of the project is that it is not based on the general practice where adults take the opinions of a certain group of children on predetermined issues but it’s being structured such that children are set free to voice out and determine their own agendas themselves. This underlines the basic approach of the project as being a “bottom-up” **with children** approach in contrast to a “top-down” **for children** approach.

The project also intends to contribute to the active involvement of local government in the process and thus being a model for future local government practices.

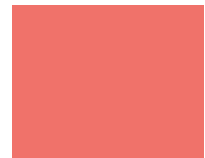
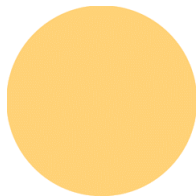
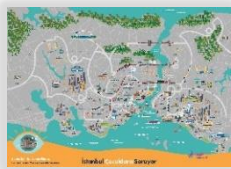
Including the preparation period that covers the concept and content development, preparation of all materials, creation of the project stakeholder network, educator trainings, workshop organizations and then the implication phase, the project was carried out between **November 2021 and March 2022** with the participation of a total of **6,601 children within the 6-14 age range**. A total of **52 stakeholders** including the İstanbul Municipality departments, units and subsidiaries, district municipalities and city councils, educational institutions, NGOs, museums, libraries and informal education actors working with children in different fields. It has been possible to reach children with different social backgrounds from all districts of İstanbul thanks to the rich and widespread stakeholder network formed and their active involvement.



The project implementation was carried out based on 3 different models that support each other; Structured 2 hour "**Workshop**" applications in which children participate as a group of maximum 25 participants, "**Wandering/Mobile**" Station applications that they can access individually in various public spaces and "**On-line**" participation through the project website. Workshops and drop-in station implications represented 99% of total children participation with nearly same share.



The project was shaped around a metaphor. Starting from the "**metaphor of care**", with the approach that "*Everything requires care, care is a must, we improve and develop ourselves and our city by care*", children assumed the role of "**Master of Care**". First, they took a photograph of Istanbul through their own "mind visors" with its color, sound, smell and evocations, then rewarded the well-functioning aspects of Istanbul with their "medals". They then put Istanbul on the table and "took care of it" by reviewing it in detail as an "Istanbul expert". Identified the aspects and issues they saw as disruptive, problematic and or to be improved. They finally created solution proposals and "maintenance instructions" for its development.



The photograph of Istanbul, which is reflected and evaluated under the title "**Istanbul for Me**" in the report, shows that children's perception of Istanbul is quite contradictory and complex. On the one hand, children emphasize the proud nature of the city they live in with its color, sound, smell and beauty, and on the other hand they point to the crowds, noise, piles of buildings that surround them, the traffic, exhaust and the smell of smoke.

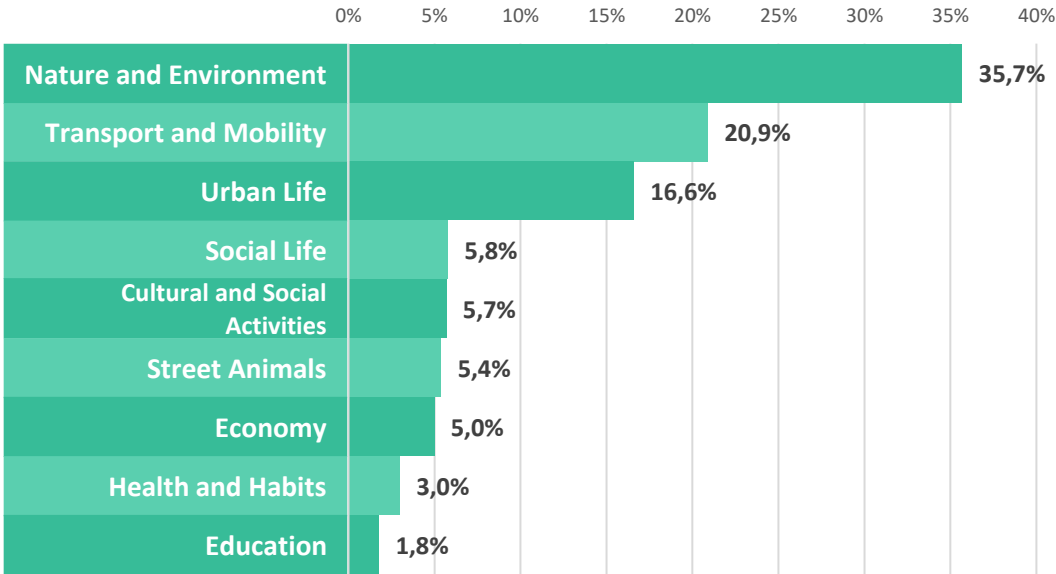
A blue and green Istanbul competes with a "gray" Istanbul, sounds of birds with traffic and horns, and smell of sea, plants, flowers with smell of exhaust and gasoline that spreads throughout the city. It is clearly visible that positive perception and impressions turn out to be considerably negative as the age increase.

While awarding medals to the features of Istanbul that they like, they are proud of and attach importance to, they award the historical and architectural monuments of the city, the sea and its beaches, the Maiden's Tower-Galata Tower and the green areas. With their medals, they also send a strong message to the city's rulers and adults;

"These are valuable to us. Watch, protect and enrich Istanbul's medals..."

As a result of the analysis and evaluation of the data obtained at the end of the project, nine "Subject Headings" and related "**Sub-Headings**" emerged from the freely expressed statements of children about the aspects of the city that need to be taken into care, that need to be improved, that they see as deficient and insufficient. The Headings are listed according to the frequency of expression stated by the children, thus represent directly the children's own agenda.

Subject Headings



NATURE and ENVIRONMENT appeared to be a top concern with a 35,7% share. The related sub-headings that emerged under the topic were: "*Environmental Pollution – Air Pollution – Marine Pollution – Green Areas – Global Warming – Forest Fires*"

It is seen that children are highly worried and sensitive about this issue. At least one out of every three children points to problems related to this topic and they worked hard to get around with creative solutions and clear instructions.





The second priority of children appeared to be the **TRANSPORTATION and MOBILITY** with a 20,9% share. Sub-headings that emerged under the topic were: *"Cars and Traffic – Pedestrians – Bicycle Use – Public Transport"*

Among the problems they point out the sub-heading "Cars and Traffic" stands out remarkably and reflects the way children perceive transportation, streets and alleys in İstanbul focused on cars and traffic and how they try to cope with it.



Their third priority seems to be **URBAN LIFE**, which closely follows the topic **TRANSPORT and MOBILITY** with a 16,6% share. Sub-headings that emerged under the topic were: *"Construction – Safety – Noise – Population Density – Infrastructure – Earthquake – Agriculture and Industry"*

In this regard, it is seen that children emphasize excessive and distorted urbanization and define İstanbul as a city surrounded by buildings, crowded, noisy and where they do not feel safe.

Social Life, Cultural and Social Activities, Street Animals and Economy follow the above first three main topics with almost equal concentration between 5% to 6%



The sub-headings that emerged under the heading **SOCIAL LIFE** were: *"Living Together – Women's Rights – Children's Rights – Disabilities"*.

"Living Together" with the credits given to hospitality, helpfulness and multiculturalism appeared to be the most rewarded and on the contrary the most problem area in the city they lived. It is also noteworthy that children see "women's rights" as a priority over "children's rights" under this topic.



The sub-headings that emerged under the heading **CULTURAL and SOCIAL ACTIVITIES** were: *"Children's Parks and Playgrounds – Socialization – Culture and Art – Sports"*.

Cultural and Social Activities as a main topic was awarded by children with most medals placing it as the second after the Nature and Environment heading. On the other hand, it is seen that "Play" and "Socialization" remain to be among fundamental problem areas for them.



The sub-headings that emerged within the scope of the topic **STREET ANIMALS** were: *"Care – Violence"*.

Children reflect their sensitivity about street animals, which are one of the symbols of İstanbul, by focusing on non-violence, care and protection of street animals with a lot of concrete solution ideas.



The concerns and issues collected under the headings Economy and Education were the less frequently stated ones. This does not conclude that these topics were not important and that children had less to say. They were asked to voice out “the most important one or two” issues that effect their lives in the city. And there were so many!



The sub-headings that emerged within the scope of the topic **ECONOMY** were: "*Economic Situation and Costliness – Contribution to the Economy and Labor Force*".

The economic problems that they often face and are affected in their daily lives and living conditions have taken their place in the agendas of children as expensiveness and unemployment.



The sub-headings that emerged within the scope of the topic **HEALTH and HABITS** were: "*Health – Smoking and Alcohol*".

An important part of the problems under this topic appeared to be the COVID 19 "pandemic" that intensively affected their lives in various ways.



The sub-headings that emerged within the scope of the topic **EDUCATION** were: "*Education – Schools – School Needs*".

Under this heading, children mainly point to the problems arising from inequalities in the education system and education, school needs and the high cost of food in school.

Children in summary are clearly and strongly demonstrating their desire to live in such an Istanbul;

- Where they don't feel stuck between tall and numerous buildings
- Where they have plenty of green space with more clean air, sea and surroundings
- Which is less crowded, less noisy,
- Which is not occupied by cars, where there is more widespread public transport and where they can walk safely
- That there are parks they can easily access and enjoy playing in
- Where they can find enough public spaces to spend time with peers and also environments in which they can find opportunities to develop their skills and interests
- Where they feel safer, which is more egalitarian, fairer and more democratic

It probably wouldn't be surprising if a similar study with adults would reveal similar Headings. However, when the priority order, the Sub-Headings, the identified problems and solution proposals are examined closely, their "uniqueness" can clearly be seen. Children are aware of "everything" and know and reflect on "what and how they want"...

This is the translation of the “Executive Summary” of the “İstanbul Çocuklara Soruyor” Project Report prepared by Informal Education – cocukistanbul.

