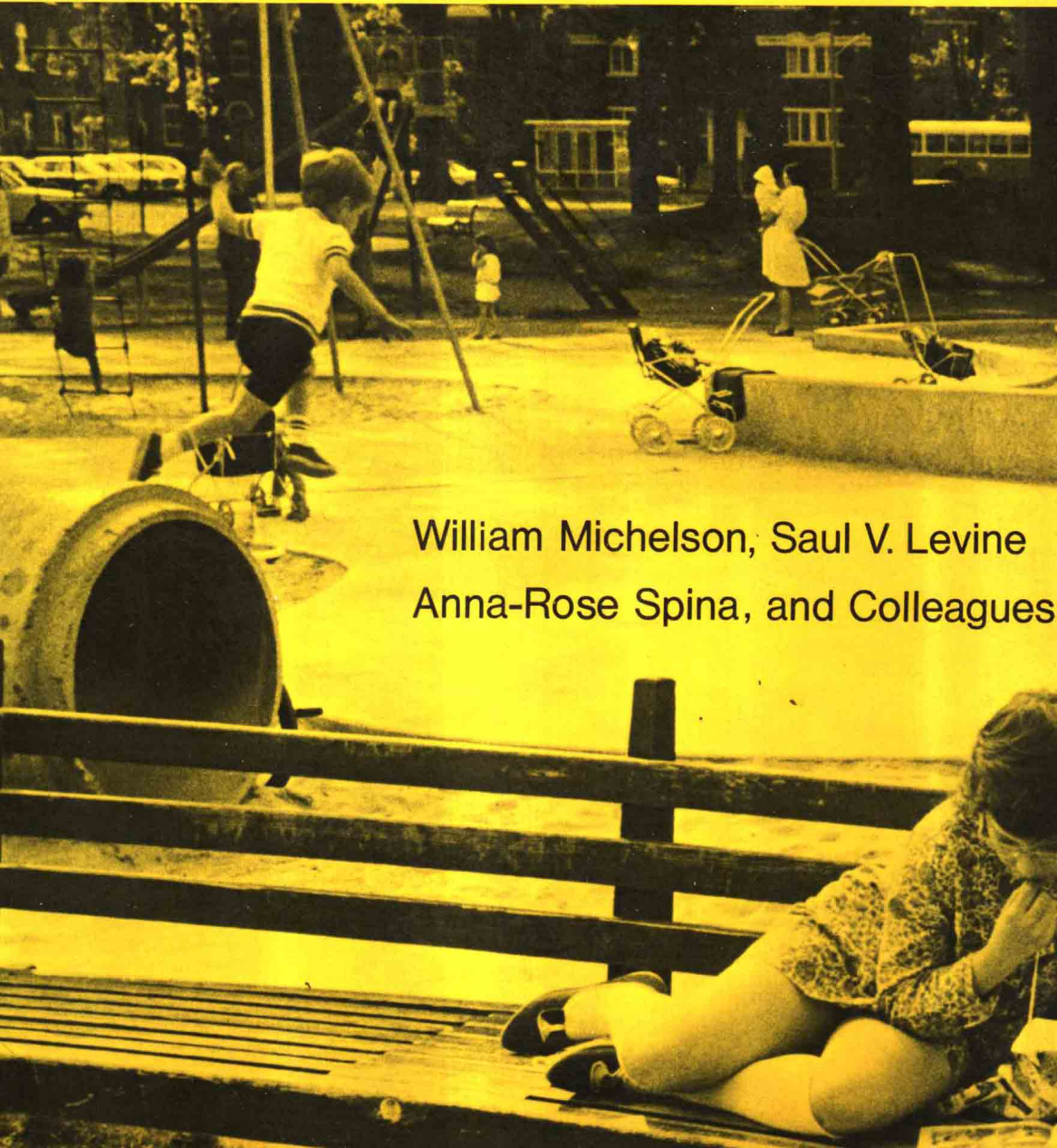


changes and challenges



William Michelson, Saul V. Levine
Anna-Rose Spina, and Colleagues

The Child in the City: changes and challenges

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The Child in the City Programme is a Canadian contribution to the UNESCO Programme on Man and the Biosphere.

WILLIAM MICHELSON is a member of the Department of Sociology and Director of The Child in the City Programme at the University of Toronto. He is author of *Man and his Urban Environment*, and *Environmental Choice, Human Behavior, and Residential Satisfaction*.

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What do we know about the implications of the major changing forces in urban life for children? What should be our priorities for new policies and practices for children in cities? The traditional view of children as 'dependants' obscures the complexity of the urban experience children face. Their social environment is not limited strictly to institutions such as the family and the church. But neither do children have access to the full range of societal offerings.

This volume evaluates the basis of current issues of public concern and debate and constructs an agenda for future research, policy, and practice concerning children and families. The perspectives of many disciplines are brought together and integrated in the consideration of such factors as family structure and child care arrangements, urban dilemmas for adolescents, legal structures and practices, urban social organization and service delivery systems, housing and neighbourhood contexts, and ethnic diversity.

The book as a whole identifies the fundamentals of a broad issue of concern and offers guidelines for shaping a humane future.

THE CHILD IN THE CITY PROGRAMME

University of Toronto

- 1 The Child in the City: today and tomorrow
- 2 The Child in the City: changes and challenges

Dedicated to the Memory of John Law,
who worked to improve the condition of
the child in the city.

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Introduction

WILLIAM MICHELSON AND
SAUL V. LEVINE

Our interest is 'The Child in The City.' In this volume, we shall explore the physical and social context of health, welfare, and opportunities explicitly and systematically.

Concern about children in cities is not new. It goes back at least to the industrial revolution, when great numbers of persons of all ages flocked to cities for the first time in history. Although big cities had been known previously, increasingly large *proportions* of the population of nations began to reside in cities.

People continued to *move to cities in recognition of indisputable benefits associated with urban life* (particularly in comparison to the disadvantages of remaining where they were), but they discovered new kinds of problems as well, which caused them worry and eventually led to a variety of new legislative and administrative practices (particularly in the areas of work and welfare). Inasmuch as adults typically view children as physically and intellectually incomplete, dependent beings, considerably more susceptible to harmful forces at any time or place, it is no wonder that so many of the new practices focused on the perceived good of the child. Even as large cities became part of the established fabric of society, reformers like Jane Addams continued to refer to the 'abnormal fabric of city life for children.'²

While now a significant force in society, cities are no longer new. The great shifts from rural to urban societies have long since been carried out, and approximately *80 per cent of the residents of Western, industrialized nations now live in urban areas*. Nonetheless, people are still uncertain about the situation of the child in the city: the nature and extent of the positive and negative aspects and the balance between the two.

We might regard such a continued concern with the child in the city, a concern which is continually fueled by media references to 'the concrete jungle' and other aspersions of 'inhumanity,' as anachronistic and even romantic were there

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not definite components of the child-city relationship to which one can point as the potential basis for uncertainty. Since these components serve as the conceptual basis for the work reported in this volume, let us turn to them now.

SOME CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS FOR LOOKING AT THE CHILD IN THE CITY

We do not regard the city as a rigid, physical entity. The focus is not only on the centre of established cities, often the locus of problems related to poverty and/or race. Nor do we place the city in a position of opposition to the characteristics of any other place (e.g. the small town or the countryside). Our concern is with the general implications for children of all the areas and aspects making up the modern metropolitan area, for reasons and with implications that are not irrelevant to other types of settlement. Specifically, aspects of (1) *social change*, (2) *scale*, and (3) *organization* convey implications for the situation of children. The impact of the foregoing aspects is magnified by (4) the particular *transition* children make from dependency to relative autonomy.

Social Change

Most changes and innovations now *first* appear in the city. Diffusion – whether referring to labour-saving devices, life-styles, alterations in social structure, or coiffures – occurs in a non-random geographic pattern. Redfield introduced a theory of an ‘urban-rural continuum’³ by showing that crucial differences among various sizes and forms of community were related to the way in which innovations are introduced and communicated. They appear first in the largest, most easily accessible urban centre and then, depending on ease of internal communication, wend their way to the smallest settlements.

In our view, cities are not unique entities, but they are the ‘cutting edge’ of society. Most of what is new is found there in its most highly developed form, though not necessarily absent elsewhere. All-reaching forms of communication surely do not restrict knowledge of innovations to urban areas for long, but it may take longer for changes to be as fully incorporated into the fabric of outlying areas. Figure 1 shows one view of cities and change.⁴

The meaning of social change is accentuated in the city by the second of our central aspects of the city – scale.

Scale

A critical mass is the minimum number of participants necessary for an activity to develop to its logical extent. Many new activities – innovative industrial work, ethnic food, a drug culture, modern music, specialized medical practices, Hare