

CURRICULUM

Through Upcycling to the Design of Eco Cities



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Project Partners:

Fondazione Hallgarten-Franchetti Centro Studi Villa Montesca (FCSVM), Italy

Eco Logic, North Macedonia

OOU Petar Pop Arsov, North Macedonia

BALKAN URBAN MOVEMENT (Udruzenje Gradjana Bum), Serbia

Wisamar non-profit educational institute, Germany



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Module 3

CITY FOR ALL

“

As an artificial world, the city should be so in the best sense: made by art, shaped for human purposes.

(Kevin Lynch)

”

3. INTRODUCTION

A person living in a city is naturally part of a larger collective. Sharing interests and values is indispensable for a community that thrives through active citizenship. The purpose of this module and the corresponding activities in the handbook is to inspire how to create a city, community and school that reflects all perspectives, understanding the public as a space that enables connection and interaction.

Communities that aim to increase their inclusiveness, well-being and resilience must commit to ensuring that all residents' benefits and opportunities are available regardless of their background, abilities, or socioeconomic status. The city for all seeks to break down barriers and promote social cohesion. Furthermore, it should celebrate and preserve its cultural diversity, fostering an environment where different cultures can coexist and contribute to the city's vibrant tapestry.

Seen through the lens of children, this is a city where everyone has a fair chance to enjoy all that urban life has to offer without barriers and discrimination. It's a city where its residents, ideally, actively contribute to making their urban environment better, deciding how it should look, how it should operate, and ensuring that it reflects its inhabitants' diverse perspectives and identities.

Consider the idea of participation and engagement as a skill or ability, much like a muscle that requires exercise and training to grow stronger. By integrating the principles of participatory thinking into the educational curriculum, schools provide a structured platform where students can learn about their rights and responsibilities as citizens and how to voice their thoughts and opinions effectively. This approach instils knowledge and confidence in students, empowering them to contribute to their communities actively.



*Transformed street in the superblock of the Poblenou-neighbourhood in Barcelona.
Credit: Ajuntament de Barcelona*



3.1 MEET YOUR NEIGHBOURS

"The city is more than just a conglomeration of individuals and social services, such as roads, buildings, streetlamps, tram lines, telephones and so on; it is also more than just a constellation of institutions and administrative instruments, such as courts, hospitals, schools, police stations and civil servants of various kinds. Rather, the city is a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, of attitudes and feelings organized within these customs and transmitted through this tradition. In other words, the city is not simply a physical mechanism and an artificial construction: it is involved in the life processes of the people who make it up; it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature."

(Park et al., 1968, 5).

The Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th century brought about significant changes in the structure of cities. Rapid urbanisation resulted in large numbers of people moving from rural areas to cities in search of employment in factories and industries. This influx of people often led to overcrowded and poorly planned urban areas, making establishing strong social bonds and a sense of community difficult.

The design of cities can either foster or hinder community-building. Historically and still today, some urban planning decisions prioritise efficiency and infrastructure over community-building aspects like public spaces, walkability, and mixed land uses. These decisions contributed to a lack of community cohesion.

In an intact neighbourhood community, residents often interact with each other, share common concerns about their local environment, and collaborate on various activities or projects that benefit the neighbourhood. These communities are often characterised by a sense of familiarity and shared identity among neighbours.

However, there are several factors that make it challenging to build a sense of community in a neighbourhood:

- Many people are always on the go, and their busy lives leave little time to connect with neighbours.
- Noise, pollution and fast-moving traffic in the city can make it hard for people, especially children, to feel safe and comfortable outside their homes.
- Some people might feel like they have nothing in common with the people who live nearby. They might assume that their neighbours are very different from them in terms of interests, values, or backgrounds.

In fact, all those factors are interconnected and research like Donald Appleyard's book "Livable Streets" showed that improving one of those conditions can have a positive impact on the others (StreetfilmsVlog, 2010). Where walkability is increased, people's chances of connecting in their neighbourhood are higher. Where there is more direct connection, there is more trust between neighbours, which brings people to the streets and makes the neighbourhood feel safer. For children, those measures expand the space they consider home and give them the confidence to explore their direct environment independently. They can experience the city as a healthy, safe and caring place and inspire active citizenship.

CONNECTED TOPICS IN CURRICULUM

SUBJECT: Ethics, Learning Area "Togetherness"

- Coexistence of the generations
- Traditions of togetherness

SUBJECT: Science lessons / STEM, Learning Area "Living and learning together"

- Getting to know the learning and the local environment
- Public facilities in the school and residential environment
- Traffic routes in the school and residential environment
- Encountering cultural diversity

SUBJECT: Languages

- Working with written texts: comprehension and reproduction of meaning (use of texts about these topics)
-



3.2 MOVE THROUGH THE CITY

Everyone can contribute to building a network of accessibility. It is important to understand the value of starting a process that, from the single intervention of overcoming spatial barriers, succeeds in improving the overall quality of cities and territories. We get to this, for example, by seeing the city through other people's eyes (a child, a blind person, a person using a wheelchair, an elderly, etc....) and imagining a truly accessible city where everyone benefits from accessibility.

Let's think about how little autonomy children have in going to school and playing. Today, very few children move independently on the home-school route, and certainly not in the big cities. Francesco Tonucci's books and the experiences of "The city of children" (Tonucci, 1999) and the "We go to school on our own" (Tonucci, 2019) have been ringing the alarm for many years, reminding us how damaging the loss of autonomy in movement and free play is in this age of development and inviting city administrations, families and schools to deal with it.

The decrease in children's autonomy of movement is closely correlated with the increase in traffic. This negatively influences the conditions of the urban environment and reduces the possibility for children to carry out regular physical exercise, also influencing the parents' habits. What effect does this have on the indispensable knowledge of the environment? Research carried out in the 1970s had already shown that the decrease in children's autonomy has important consequences on the development of their spatial abilities (Hart, 1979).

Walking independently means, for children, acquiring a more detailed and integrated knowledge of the context in which they move. This context often coincides with one's own neighbourhood and, more specifically, with the home-school route (link to Further Exploration #1). The degree of autonomy to be achieved by the child can be deduced from the fact that "during the journey, the child is called upon to solve problems, make decisions and implement choices" (Rissotto & Tonucci, 2002).

Children are not protected by restricting their freedom of movement and underestimating their abilities and knowledge but by being allowed to interact with their surroundings because knowledge of an environment produces a sense of security (Spencer & Blades, 1986).

Their way to school is a great entry point for talking with young people about the equal distribution of public space for all. Consider children the experts on how to redesign streets in order for them to get to school actively and safely. Tactical Urbanism (link to Further Exploration#3) is a worldwide movement with interventions to make the streets safer but also more fun and, foremost, give urban space back to the people (Ikiz, 2023). This kind of participative, grassroots approach to creating a more socially and ecologically sustainable city can empower children to express themselves, their wishes and needs in the public space.

Attention Slow Down. In this village children still play in the street



Source: Alessandra Grasso, Sant'Agata di Puglia

CONNECTED TOPICS IN CURRICULUM



SUBJECT: Science lessons / STEM, learning area "Life in Community":

- Similarities and differences between people / between children and adults
- Passions, talents, dealing with disabilities
- Reflection on own strengths and weaknesses

SUBJECT: Ethics, Learning Area "Togetherness"

- Coexistence of the generations

SUBJECT: Science lessons / STEM, Learning Area "Living and learning together"

- Getting to know the local/regional environment (school and school grounds, public facilities around the school and residential environment, traffic routes)
- Assessment/evaluation of local conditions
- Assessment/evaluation of own and other mobility concepts (transport-oriented, social, ecological)

SUBJECT: Languages

- Working with written texts: comprehension and reproduction of meaning (use of texts about these topics)
-

3.3 CITY OF DIVERSITY

The public space is not experienced by everyone in the same way. Different factors like ethnical and socioeconomic background, religion, gender, abilities and age affect how we interact with our urban surroundings. When it comes to mobility in the city, this becomes obvious: Moving safely can be highly dependent on the city's infrastructure, like lighting or wheelchair accessibility, but also on public transport costs or how lively (or deserted) a place is ([link to Further exploration #4](#)).

This is why the first step in building a strong community is to recognise our different challenges and not diminish them. In order to do so, we have to listen to one another so that, eventually, through dialogue, we embrace our differences and work together on taking down barriers and making our neighbourhoods and public spaces great for everyone.

When diverse types of food, art, music, traditions and cultures are represented in the public space, it comes alive for the better. A transcultural city is based on managing diversity as a resource. Being exposed to diverse experiences or ideas helps us develop what neuroscientists call "cognitive flexibility". Developing and maintaining cognitive flexibility benefits individuals by supporting learning and growth, enhancing interpersonal relationships and facilitating adaptation to change.

Besides those individual benefits, embracing diversity is our indispensable obligation in a democratic pluralistic society. It ensures fair representation, inclusion, social cohesion, and the protection of human rights. It strengthens the democratic system by reflecting the complexity and richness of the society it serves.

School communities are predestined to train those democratic competencies within young people ([link to Further exploration #5](#)). By fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding where all students feel valued and respected, schools can address potential challenges that may arise from diversity and set an example for wider communities.

CONNECTED TOPICS IN CURRICULUM



SUBJECT: Science lessons / STEM, learning area "Life in Community":

- Similarities and differences between people / between children and adults
- Passions, talents, dealing with disabilities
- Reflection on own strengths and weaknesses
- Encountering cultural diversity

SUBJECT: Ethics, Learning Area "Togetherness"

- Coexistence of the generations
- Coexistence of cultures

SUBJECT: Science lessons / STEM, Learning Area "Living and learning together"

- Getting to know the learning and the local environment
-



Credit: Street Lab, <https://www.streetlab.org/>

3.4 CREATE YOUR CITY

There is an international movement of people who share the belief that the citizens who live in a neighbourhood are actually the experts on how it should be shaped. This movement is called placemaking and is a participative concept of urban planning. Expressing the diversity of a community, creating inclusivity for everyone to thrive and challenging the common sight of urban spaces are the objectives of the placemaking movement.

In strengthening the tie between people and the places they share, the placemaking methodology focuses on the collaborative process between public and private actors in both the design and management phases. This approach reveals the power that a shared vision can have in creating quality spaces that contribute to people's well-being, exploiting their potential, be they parks, city centres, squares, streets, neighbourhoods, markets, campuses or public buildings.

If children are involved in placemaking, it provides them with a new and exciting way of confronting the world they live in, studying it, entering into a profound relationship with it and trying to improve it. This involvement of young people not only improves urban planning outcomes towards more sustainable ways but it equips children with competencies of ownership and self-efficacy that are indispensable if we want to raise active citizens. In recent years, city planning professionals have taken children extremely seriously as agents of change and allow for participatory processes that involve children in shaping urban spaces (See further explorations #5). With their drive to explore, out-of-the-box thinking and creative abundance, children can become the designers of their own future.

Placemaking strategies can be implemented with little or no budget and take very different shapes: From installing places to sit in the urban space and therefore encouraging interpersonal exchange to creating playable spaces that give opportunities for children to play outside, even in dense neighbourhoods. From bringing back natural spaces into the city by guerrilla gardening to artistic interventions that give a wall, a fence, a bumper or the asphalt a make-over. From making music on the street to public dance classes, all of those strategies can bring diversity to the streets, make cities more sustainable and most importantly, more liveable for their inhabitants.

CONNECTED TOPICS IN CURRICULUM



SUBJECT: Art, Learning Area "Physical-Spatial Design"

- Experimenting with found materials or objects
- Exploring outdoor spaces and their function
- Designing exterior spaces
- Form and function of the built environment: architecture

SUBJECT: Science lessons / STEM, learning area "Encountering space and time"

- Getting to know the local/regional environment (school and school grounds, public facilities in the school and residential environment, traffic routes)
- Assessment/evaluation of local conditions
- Assessment/evaluation of own and other mobility concepts (transport-oriented, social, ecological)

SUBJECT: various (Ethics; Languages; Science), "Democracy & society"

- Citizenship and the constitution
 - Possibilities of participation in society
-

Progetto Piedibus – The Walking School Bus Project in the Municipality of Cremona

The Piedibus in Cremona was born in 2006 and since then has given young school children the opportunity to walk to school together with an adult along several routes with fixed pick-up times.

The project started, when at the end of a workshop involving two primary schools, parents reflected on the problems related to children's mobility to and from school. A working group was formed that carried out an analysis of safe and dangerous spots in the neighbourhood regarding the traffic. With the organisational support from the municipality, parents took the lead in the conception and design of potential routes.

From the educational point, the benefits of the Walking School Bus are obvious:

- increase of cognitive skills
- socialisation
- daily physical exercise
- preparation future autonomy
- awareness of doing something useful for the environment (as opposed to driving by car)

The Piedibus is also a tool that facilitates collaboration between the school and the neighbourhood surrounding it and can activate resources available in the local community: grandparents, the elderly, neighbourhood committees, secondary school children, all of whom can accompany and collaborate. The Piedibus is an opportunity for community and integration between parents and children with different backgrounds. A significant experience of Piedibus as a tool for integration was realised at Boschetto primary school, where a group of young refugees from sub-Saharan countries were involved in the Piedibus and connected activities in the neighbourhood, activating a welcoming atmosphere and mutual exchange.

Website: <https://www.comune.cremona.it/node/421583>



Piedibus Cremona Municipality



FURTHER EXPLORATION

The walking school bus is a creative solution for bringing kids to school safely without using cars. It has been adopted by schools and communities world-wide (see also Visionary Box) and can be implemented relatively easily. Check out those resources, that guide you from the first idea to actually starting one:

North Carolina University. (n.d.). The basics. Walking School Bus.

<http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/>



The ultimate guide to involving children in placemaking is Victoria Derr's and Louise Chawla's book *Placemaking with Children and Youth*. It provides a framework for how to implement participatory practices with children and provides inspirational case studies from all over the world. Derr, V. and Chawla, L. (2018). *Placemaking with Children and Youth: Participatory Practices for Planning Sustainable Communities*. New Village Press, New York.

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC) is a placemaking concept that encourages simple community-driven urban interventions to transform public spaces. The website samples case studies from all over the world, where little measures help build community and inclusivity:

Lighter quicker cheaper - project for Public Spaces. Home - Project for Public Spaces. (n.d.).

<https://www.pps.org/gps/lqc>

The Green Urbanist is a podcast for everyone interested in how cities can participate in fighting climate change, but also how this process would make cities more inclusive. The episode recommended here, deals with the intersection of mobility, sustainability, social justice and disability rights:

#40: Disability mobility with Anna Zivarts, Abby Griffith and Micah Lusignan (disability rights washington). Green Urbanist Podcast. (2022, February 14).

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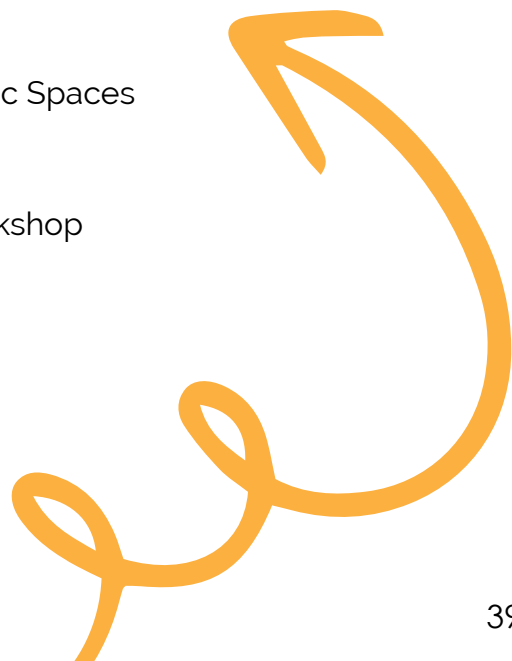
Anti-Bias Leaders is a platform from educators in the USA who teach parents, educators and teachers about anti-bias education from an early age on. The platform provides a guidebook and further free resources on classroom strategies and a 48-min highly worth-seeing documentary on teachers' experiences in implementing anti-bias education:

Reflecting on anti-bias education in action: The early years. Anti. (2023, April 12).

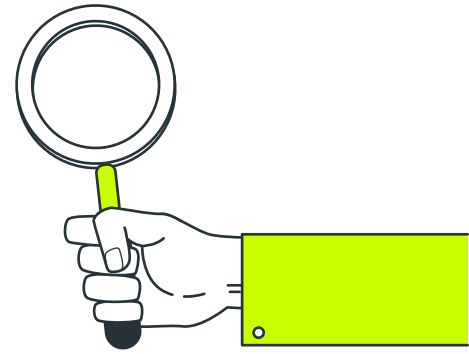
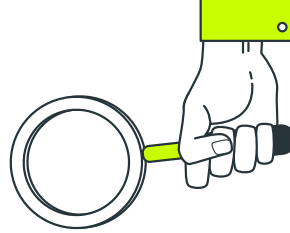
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CONNECTED ACTIVITIES

- 3.1 All around town
- 3.2 A playful Community Scavenger Hunt
- 3.3 Tell me a story
- 3.4 The Web of Friendship
- 3.5 Kindness Letters Days
- 3.6 Riddle Race
- 3.7 Get the Tree
- 3.8 My City
- 3.9 Let's discover the City
- 3.10 Inclusion and Movement
- 3.11 Move through the City
- 3.12 The story of My Name
- 3.13 Personal Heroes
- 3.14 Take a step forward
- 3.15 Playing with Pictures
- 3.16 The zoo
- 3.17 A multicolored world
- 3.18 My City
- 3.19 The ideal town
- 3.20 Open-air art gallery
- 3.21 The school I'd like
- 3.23 The city I'd like
- 3.23 Creative Community Builders: Designing Our Ideal Public Spaces
- 3.24 Urban Nature Exploration and Placemaking Workshop
- 3.25 Virtual Urban Nature Exploration and Placemaking Workshop
- 3.26 Create your City



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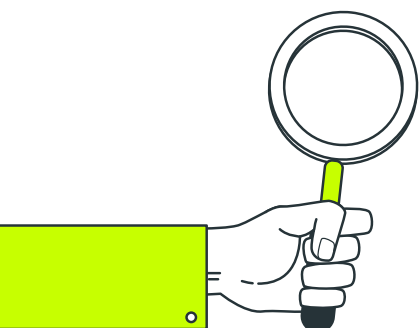
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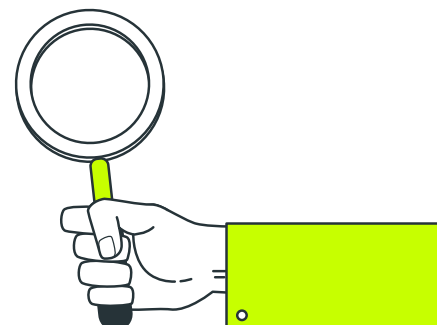
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