



PLAYFUL-ED

TOOLKIT | PLAY IT OUT...PLAN IT IN!



Co-funded by
the European Union

About this toolkit

This toolkit is a result of the PLAYFUL-ED project, a strategic collaboration project co-funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ Programme, Key Action 2. Project number: 2024-1-BE02-KA210-ADU-000257987. The project is implemented by the PLAYFUL-ED consortium in partnership with local actors, with Amarante acting as a pilot city. Coordination and content development of the toolkit have been led by Area Europa, in collaboration with consortium partners.

Authorship

This toolkit was developed collaboratively by the PLAYFUL-ED consortium.

Authors: Juliana Carvalho (Ed.), Gianluca Corzani (Ed.), Maria Elisa Zuppiroli, Carina Gomes (Area Europa scarl), Bram Dewolfs, Laura Fernandez De Moya (Urban Foxes), Joana Moreira, Odette Carvalho, Rita Batista, Rui Moutinho, Margarida Cardoso (Município de Amarante).

Suggested citation

PLAYFUL-ED (2025). Play it out... Plan it in! A toolkit for integrating children's perspectives into urban planning through playful and participatory approaches. Carvalho, Juliana (Ed.); Corzani, Gianluca (Ed.); Zuppiroli, Maria Elisa; Gomes, Carina; Dewolfs, Bram; Fernandez De Moya, Laura; Moreira, Joana; Carvalho, Odette; Batista, Rita; Moutinho, Rui; Cardoso, Margarida. Toolkit prepared as part of the PLAYFUL-ED Project (Project n°: 2024-1-BE02-KA210-ADU-000257987), co-funded by the ERASMUS+ Programme, Key Action 2.

Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Copyright and License

© PLAYFUL-ED Consortium, 2026. This work is openly licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–ShareAlike 4.0 International License \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).



**WE
WANT
JOYFUL
CITIES !
LET'S BUILT
THEM**

Coordination, visual assets and editorial design:

This toolkit uses visual resources from Canva Pro, including edited/adapted elements. Whenever an image is adapted from an external source, the original source and credit are indicated next to the image or in its caption. Illustrations generated with Google Gemini (Nano Banana) have this indication in the caption. Photographs of the pilot activities and workshops of the project that are included in this toolkit were taken with prior authorisation. To protect the privacy of participating children, no identifiable faces are shown. When necessary, images were edited to blur or otherwise obscure faces and identifying details. Editorial design coordinated by Juliana Carvalho and Gianluca Corzani, with the support of Carina Gomes (Area Europa).

Welcome to the

PLAYFUL-ED

TOOLKIT

PLAY IT OUT...PLAN IT IN!

Regardless of the path that brought you here, we are glad you are interested in — and ready to contribute to — creating better, more playful, and more inclusive living environments. Whether as a planner, educator, policymaker, parent, or practitioner, your engagement matters.

We hope this toolkit proves useful and inspiring, and that it supports you in exploring new ways of listening to children, learning from their perspectives, and turning those insights into meaningful action.

OPEN LETTER

Welcome to the PLAYFUL-ED Toolkit: Play it out... Plan it in!

Naming our toolkit **“Play it out... Plan it in!”** is more than an attempt to create a catchy phrase.

It reflects the core philosophy that underpins our project. Drawing inspiration from **prefigurative politics**, this toolkit is a **call to action** to enact, in the present, the values of the future society we want to see and live in!

In our case, we envision **living spaces that are not only accessible, but also joyful, for everyone, for all ages.**

We argue that allowing ourselves, as adults, to involve children, to learn from their perspectives, and to recognise them as people with rights is a powerful, though not the only, strategic lever for shaping **more inclusive and diverse urban environments.**

This toolkit is an invitation to **play it out in our streets, in our public spaces, and within our communities.** It encourages experimentation and invites us to denaturalise what we often take for granted, such as car-centric urban mobility systems, in order to co-create pathways towards desirable futures.

Children’s perspectives and insights are a powerful way to **regain critical thinking about how things could be.** They help us develop futures literacy skills by expanding our imagination beyond probable futures and opening space to reflect on preferred ones.

And then, we must **plan it in by translating our learnings into real, impactful decisions,** embracing them in our planning documents, policies, designs, and everyday practice.

We invite you to join us on this journey.

Dive into the modules, test the activities, and become an active **agent of change** in co-creating more liveable, playful, diverse and inclusive communities.

Let us play it out and plan it in, together.

Sincerely,

The PLAYFUL-ED team
Area Europa,
Urban Foxes,
and Município de Amarante



About

PLAYFUL-ED

Urban planners often have the technical knowledge to create child-friendly cities but lack support to foster meaningful political and public engagement.

PLAYFUL-ED addresses this gap by focusing on adults, not only as caregivers but also as voters and active citizens capable of driving change. By educating and empowering adults, the project builds political momentum for child-friendly urban planning and ensures sustainable, inclusive urban environments for all generations.

PLAYFUL-ED is an Erasmus+ Adult Education project designed to empower adults to embrace the perspectives and needs of young children in urban planning. By fostering intergenerational collaboration and civic engagement, the project aims to create inclusive, sustainable, and child-friendly public spaces. Through workshops, city experiments, and a co-created toolkit, PLAYFUL-ED will raise awareness about the importance of urban spaces that are accessible, beautiful, and functional for people of all ages.



Erasmus+ KA210 PLAYFUL-ED [2024-1-BE02-KA210-ADU-000257987]

COLLABORATIVE,
INTERGENERATIONAL,
& INCLUSIVE URBAN
PLANNING

PLACEMAKING
TOOLS

URBAN PILOT
AMARANTE,
PORTUGAL

MODULE 1

COLLABORATIVE,
INTERGENERATIONAL,
& INCLUSIVE URBAN PLANNING



EVERY CITY RECEIVES ITS SHAPE FROM THE DESERT IT OPPOSES.
ITALO CALVINO, INVISIBLE CITIES, 1972

Introduction

From Crisis to Opportunity

Imagine a city where your 5-year-old can walk to school without fear. Where public spaces buzz with intergenerational laughter. Where the built environment doesn't just accommodate children - it celebrates them.

Imagine streets designed from 95 centimetres high - a toddler's eye level - where sightlines are clear, crossings are intuitive, and every corner invites exploration rather than anxiety. Where a grandmother with a walker, a parent with a stroller, and a child on a scooter can all navigate with joy and playfulness.

Imagine neighbourhoods where children don't need to be driven everywhere because the everyday destinations - school, park, library, friend's house - are genuinely reachable on small legs. Where the journey itself becomes an adventure, not a danger to be managed or a risk to be mitigated.

Imagine decision-making processes where your voice as a parent carries the same weight as an engineer's calculations. Where your child's drawing of their dream playground doesn't end up in a drawer but shapes the actual design. Where "community consultation" doesn't mean being shown plans already finalized, but means co-creating the vision from the very first conversation.

This isn't utopian fantasy. It's an achievable reality through collaborative urban planning.

More and more cities around the world are proving it works. Parents, teachers, and community organizers - people just like you - are transforming their streets, schoolyards, and neighborhoods. Not by waiting for permission, but by organizing, advocating, and building coalitions that cities can't ignore.

The question isn't whether change is possible. It's whether you're willing to be part of making it happen.

This module is for you if you are:

- A parent wanting safer streets for your children
- A teacher seeing students arrive stressed from dangerous journeys
- A caregiver struggling to find safe places for children to play
- A community organizer mobilizing for neighborhood change
- A school administrator advocating for your students' wellbeing
- A local government official seeking better engagement approaches
- Anyone who believes children deserve better from our cities

What you'll learn

- PART A (What): Theoretical foundations - why child-friendly planning matters and what frameworks guide it
- PART B (How): Practical process and tools - step-by-step guidance for collaborative action
- PART C (Best Practices): Real-world examples - successful projects you can adapt to your context

How to use this module

- Read sequentially for comprehensive understanding, OR
- Jump to Part B if you need immediate practical guidance, OR
- Browse Part C for inspiration from global examples

This module represents the collective knowledge of the PLAYFUL-ED project consortium, produced, shared and assembled during two local workshops, one held in Bologna (Italy) and focused on intergenerational urban planning, hosted by Area Europa in January 2025; and one held in Brussels focused on placemaking, hosted by Urban Foxes.

Some of the methods, approaches and tools you'll find here displayed have then been used during our city pilot, held in Portugal in November 2025, led by the Municipality of Amarante, where the 3 partners had the possibility to engage with local stakeholder, city departments, parents, associations - but most importantly with 60+ kids from the city centre primary school - and develop a 3-day urban experimentation, designed to test a simple but transformative idea: cities become more inclusive when adults (planners, teachers, parents, and public authorities) learn to listen to and be guided by children's perspectives.

The present module has been largely enriched by a desk research conducted among precious and open access resources from organisations worldwide working to reclaim cities for children, from the Global Alliance - Cities4Children, through the Global Designing Cities Initiative, to the Real Play Coalition and more, and dozens of municipalities and communities that have successfully transformed their streets, schools, and neighbourhoods.

Yours can be next.

Let's begin!



PART A

WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE URBAN PLANNING?

1.1 Cities at the crossroads: What local solutions for global challenges?

Before we explore what collaborative urban planning is and why it matters for children, we need to understand the broader context in which our cities exist today. According to a [UN report](#), as of 2018, 54% of the world's population lived in urban areas - a figure projected to reach 66% by 2050, effectively doubling the numbers from the beginning of the 20th century. This rapid urbanisation, while driving unprecedented social and economic progress, has also generated profound crises: academia estimates that cities produce 70% of global GDP while consuming 60-80% of energy resources and generating 70% of global emissions.

In Europe, the situation mirrors this global trend: [EIB states that over 2/3 of Europeans live in cities](#), centres of economic prosperity, connectivity, creativity, and innovation. Yet this very concentration of people and resources brings mounting pressures - demographic change, climate crisis, and growing social and economic inequalities. This concentration of people, resources, and opportunities has produced vibrant centres of creativity, innovation, and connectivity, but at the same time, it has intensified structural pressures related to demographic change, climate crisis, spatial injustice, and growing social inequalities. This creates a fundamental paradox: cities are both the epicentre of contemporary crises and the primary laboratories where solutions must be imagined, tested, and implemented.

More than half a century ago, the American urbanist and activist Jane Jacobs offered a powerful lens for understanding this complexity. In "The Death and Life of Great American Cities", she challenged dominant top-down planning approaches, emphasising the value of mixed-use neighbourhoods, pedestrian-friendly streets, and the everyday social interactions captured in her notion of "eyes on the street." Crucially, she also argued that cities should be shaped with - and not merely for - their inhabitants, including those whose voices are most often overlooked in planning processes. As Jacobs famously wrote:

“ CITIES HAVE THE CAPABILITY OF PROVIDING SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY, ONLY BECAUSE, AND ONLY WHEN, THEY ARE CREATED BY EVERYBODY.



Jane Jacobs

At the time, these ideas were radical. Today, they are widely recognised as foundational to progressive urban thinking and continue to inspire planners, researchers, policymakers, activists, and the partnership behind the PLAYFUL-ED project. In recent years, academic research and practice have increasingly converged around holistic approaches to urban planning, climate action, place-based learning, and participatory governance. Within this shift, collaborative planning and community-led urban regeneration, such as placemaking, have become a powerful framework for transforming public spaces into vibrant, liveable, and inclusive environments, improving quality of life for those who use them. In the context of PLAYFUL-ED, this means placing toddlers, parents, caregivers, and families at the centre of how public space is imagined, designed, and managed.

Jacobs also reminded us that cities function as complex ecosystems, in which social, economic, spatial, and environmental dimensions are deeply interconnected and cannot be addressed in isolation. Yet urban challenges are still too often tackled through fragmented policies and sectoral interventions, producing limited or unintended results. This is why an ecosystemic and integrated perspective is essential. And this is precisely where children enter the picture.

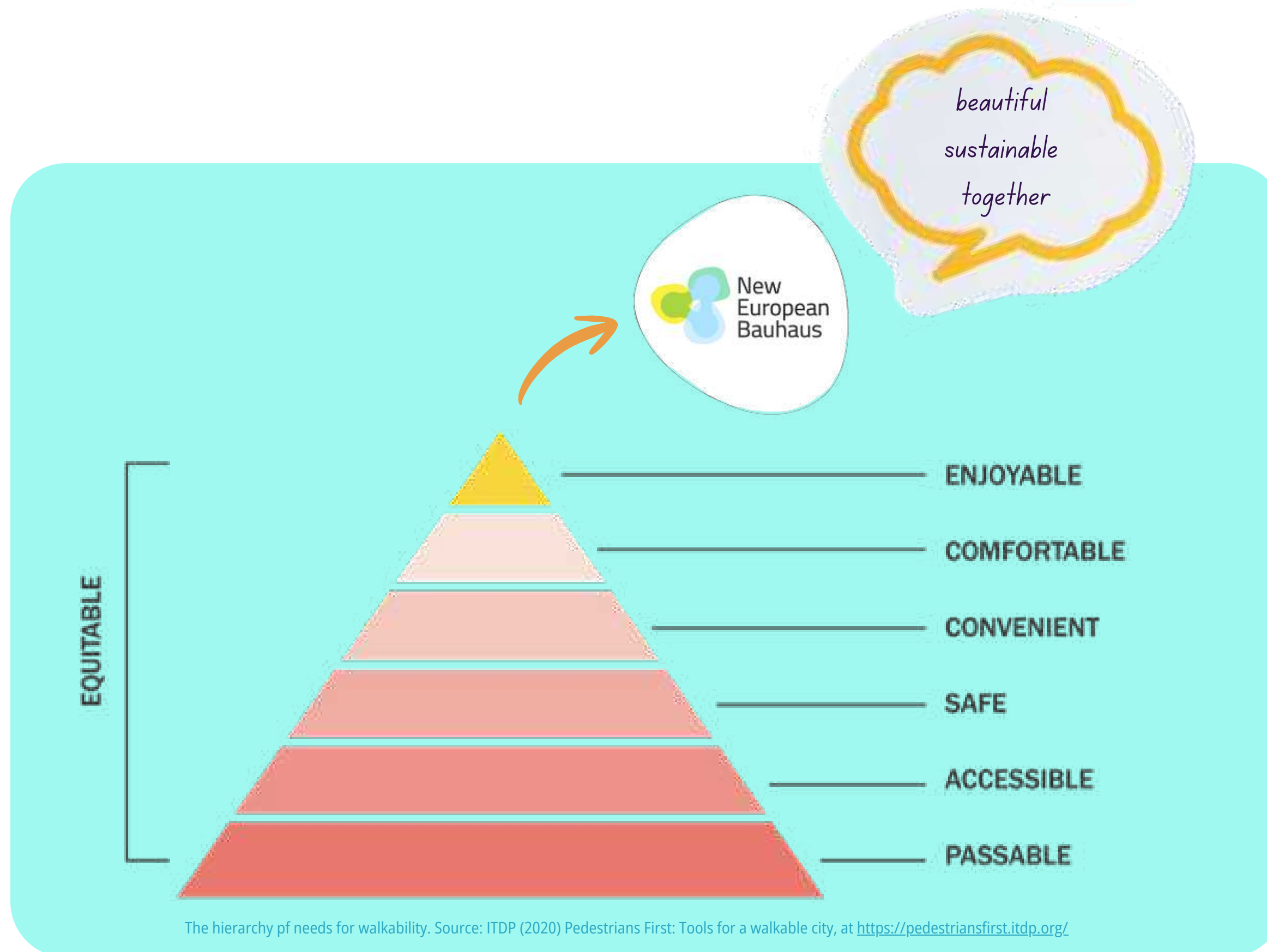
If cities are complex ecosystems requiring holistic, interconnected approaches, then children, as the most vulnerable urban inhabitants and sensitive indicators of urban health, offer a powerful lens through which to understand and transform them. The extent to which children can safely move, play, and interact in their neighbourhoods reveals how well a city works for everyone. Designing streets that a toddler can cross safely also benefits older people, persons with disabilities, and anyone with reduced mobility. In this sense, child-friendly urban planning is not a niche concern, but a strategic approach to equity, wellbeing, and resilience.

This perspective aligns closely with the ambitions of the [UN's Sustainable Development Goal 11](#), which calls for inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities - ambitions that cannot be achieved without prioritising those for whom current urban systems fail most dramatically. Meeting this challenge requires multilevel governance, engaging policymakers, public administrations, researchers, planners, designers, businesses, citizens, and local stakeholder networks. It also demands integrated approaches that simultaneously address social, economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions, alongside the active participation of local communities as a cornerstone of democratic urban transformation. Proximity-based thinking, which builds alliances between institutional, social, educational, and knowledge actors at the neighbourhood level, further strengthens these processes. Furthermore, the social benefits that can result from this are extremely useful for communities: it can be a useful way to bridge intercultural, intergenerational, and social divides, promoting inclusion, equality, and non-discrimination.



Collaborative urban planning for child-friendly cities isn't just about playgrounds and painted crosswalks. It's about fundamentally reimagining how we design, govern, and inhabit urban space in the 21st century - with children's needs and voices as the compass pointing toward more livable, lovable, playful, greener, inclusive and safer cities for everyone.

The vision of PLAYFUL-ED is strongly aligned with the [New European Bauhaus](#), a European Commission initiative that provides an additional framework for collaborative urban planning based on three inseparable values. Beauty calls for urban environments that are aesthetically pleasing and emotionally engaging; Sustainability promotes circularity, zero pollution, and biodiversity as guiding principles for urban development; and Inclusion ensures bottom-up participation, accessibility, and affordability, so that no one is left behind. Together, these values reinforce the idea that child-centred, participatory urban planning is not only desirable, but essential for the future of European cities.



1.1 The case for child-centric urbanism

When children are excluded from their right to the city by design

When children are excluded from their right to the city by design

As said, by 2050, approximately 70% of the world's population will live in cities. Yet children are still being “designed out” of city streets, public spaces, neighbourhoods, and housing estates. Rapid and unplanned urbanisation, growing inequality, climate change impacts, and systematic exclusion of children's needs from urban governance pose urgent challenges to children's wellbeing around EU cities. These challenges are concrete and urgent, as evidence suggests. Among the most pressing:

All of these factors (and others) are structural barriers that undermine children's rights to develop and flourish to their fullest potential.

Traffic Risks

- Every day in the EU, more than 18 children are seriously injured, and one is killed in road traffic collisions, and over 6,000 children have died on European roads in the decade 2012-2022 ([European Transport Safety Council, 2022](#));
- Globally, road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death for children and young adults aged 5-29 ([World Health Organisation, 2023](#)).

Air pollution

- Air pollution causes over 1,200 premature deaths per year in people under age 18 in Europe, and exposure significantly increases the risk of disease later in life ([Clean Cities, 2025](#)).
- Children are particularly vulnerable - they breathe faster, inhale more air per kilogram of body weight, and their organs are still developing ([European Environment Agency, 2023](#)).

Play Poverty

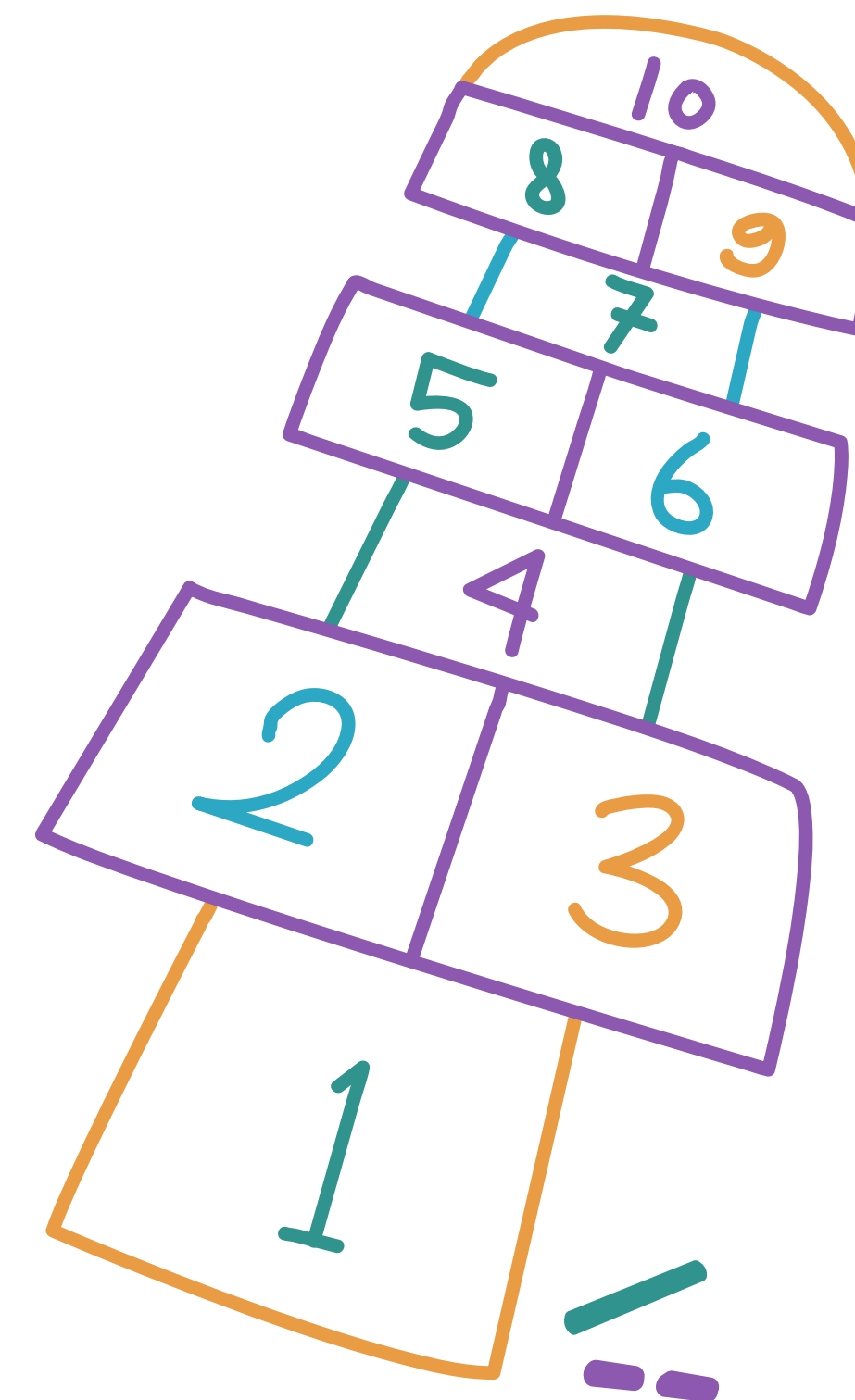
- Play poverty is a concept that describes a particular form of educational poverty, illustrating the lack of essential play opportunities for children, which hinders their development. Due to rapid urbanisation, safety concerns, and the reduction of public spaces dedicated to play, the time and space available for children to play freely are increasingly limited, thus reducing opportunities for physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth, which are fundamental to lifelong learning and well-being. Urban environments that do not prioritise public spaces dedicated to play undermine children's rights. In fact, when cities prioritise built infrastructure over accessible, child-friendly spaces for unstructured play, children's autonomy, creativity, and community engagement are limited ([Real Play Coalition, 2018](#)).
- A widening “play gap” deepens inequalities, since children from less advantaged backgrounds often have significantly fewer chances to engage in diverse play experiences than their wealthier peers, limiting skill development and reinforcing broader social and developmental disparities ([World Economic Forum, 2019](#)).

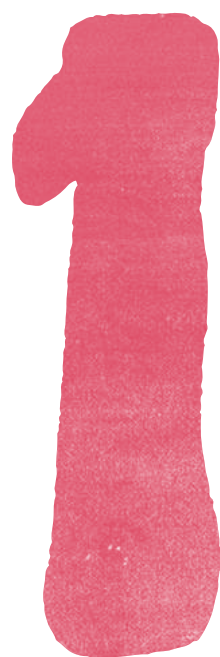
Why Focus on Children?

When we design cities for children, we create environments that work better for everyone. Children are powerful indicators of urban health. The time they spend playing outdoors, their ability to move independently, and their everyday contact with nature and friends all reveal how well a city actually functions. Yet today, most cities fail children. Streets dominated by traffic, shrinking play spaces, noise, pollution, and the absence of nature have quietly eroded the conditions children need to grow well. The consequences are serious. Children who cannot play freely, move safely, or spend time outdoors develop less confidence, less physical resilience, and weaker social bonds. Their health suffers. Their learning suffers. And the effects stay with them long into adult life.

Healthy growing does not happen despite the city. It happens because of it. The quality of a street, a neighbourhood, a park, or a school route shapes children's bodies and minds every single day. When those environments are safe, green, and human in scale, children thrive. When they are hostile, polluted, or simply designed without children in mind, the damage is real and measurable. This is why models, programmes, and planning tools designed specifically around children's needs are not optional extras. They are essential. They give planners and policymakers the means to see cities through children's eyes, to measure what matters, and to make decisions that protect and support healthy development. A city serious about its children will invest in these frameworks. And in doing so, it will become a better city for everyone who lives in it.

The following concepts are explored in depth in a comprehensive [webinar by All Things Urban](#), which provides theoretical grounding, practical examples, and global perspectives on child-centred urban design. The webinar is a valuable resource for municipalities and practitioners wishing to deepen their understanding of why and how children can guide better urban planning, with a universal lens to design public space and to ensure spatial justice for all.





Designing through the most vulnerable means designing for all

A key principle of child-friendly urbanism is that designing through the most vulnerable means is designing for all.

Toddlers need more time to cross streets - but so do elderly residents, people with disabilities, and caregivers with prams.

When streets, public spaces, and services are safe, accessible, and enjoyable for a 3-year-old, they become safer, more inclusive, and more comfortable for all ages and abilities.

In this sense, focusing on children is not a niche approach, but a strategic lens for building equitable, healthy, and resilient cities.

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) includes several rights that relate to life in cities. However, in the context of rapid urbanisation, children's rights are at high risk of not being respected.



2

Long-term investment for a more cooperative society

Children who grow up in walkable and playful neighbourhoods tend to develop stronger social skills and deeper community connections, as public spaces become everyday places for interaction, cooperation, and shared routines. These environments also support better physical and mental health, encouraging movement, outdoor play, and contact with nature from an early age. Over time, children gain greater independence and self-confidence, learning to navigate their surroundings safely, while also developing environmental awareness and civic engagement through daily interaction with shared spaces. This combination fosters lifelong active mobility habits, reducing reliance on cars and reinforcing healthier, more sustainable behaviours. These outcomes are not only individual benefits; they represent long-term investments in social cohesion, public health, and democratic participation.

As highlighted by this [ITDP and Bernard van Leer Foundation 2022 report](#), high-quality open spaces of all sizes (i.e. parks, playgrounds, plazas, and even small areas within the public realm) are fundamental to the healthy development of babies and toddlers. Such spaces should respond to the evolving needs of young children, offering loose elements for free play, nature-based landscaping, and opportunities for exploration. Sensory richness is key: sound, changes in elevation for climbing, and tactile experiences such as sand and water transform open spaces into environments of creative engagement. A truly child-friendly space allows a child to safely practice fundamental movements - tummy time, standing, climbing, running, and jumping - while feeling protected and supported.

One aspect of this child-centric approach that we have not yet highlighted, but which is equally important, is that of the needs of caregivers. Well-designed public spaces include seating near play areas, public toilets, water fountains, adequate lighting, baby-changing facilities, and protection from weather conditions such as heat, rain, or sun. Where parks or playgrounds are lacking, cities can expand access by repurposing underused or vacant land, or by opening schoolyards for public use outside school hours. Finally, programming in open spaces - from informal play to community activities - strengthens civic and social infrastructure, creating opportunities for positive interactions not only among children, but also among parents, grandparents, and caregivers. In this way, child-friendly urban environments become a foundation for healthier, more connected, and more democratic communities.

3

More playful public spaces help cities decarbonise

According to the ARUP and Real Play Coalition [Nature-Based Play report](#), child-friendly interventions also often align with climate goals. Safe walking and cycling routes reduce car dependency, lowering emissions while promoting healthier and more active lifestyles. Green schoolyards and playable streets contribute to urban cooling, helping cities adapt to rising temperatures and mitigate the urban heat island effect.

In addition, nature-rich play spaces support local biodiversity by integrating vegetation, water, and natural materials into everyday environments, strengthening climate resilience while also fostering children's connection to nature in a digital, hyperconnected society. Finally, proximity-based planning, such as the 15-minute neighbourhood model, reduces the need for long trips and car use, contributing to lower emissions and more resilient, sustainable urban systems.



10 principles for child-friendly urban planning

The Global Designing Cities Initiative has synthesised decades of research and practice into 10 actionable principles for transforming streets to serve children - and by extension, everyone.

Their open-access [Designing Streets for Kids](#) guide brings together international best practices, strategies, programs, and policies that cities around the world have used to design spaces that allow children of all ages and abilities to use cities' most abundant resource: streets. The guide includes design recommendations and case studies that highlight safe, fun, and stimulating streets for children and their caregivers.

Among all the projects analysed and mapped, there are 10 common actions and principles that can be implemented to effectively design places and spaces with and for children:

- 1. Think from 95cm:** design from a child's eye level and perspective
- 2. Disincentivise private vehicles:** reduce car dominance through policy and design
- 3. Increase transit reliability:** make public transport safe and accessible for families
- 4. Build wide and accessible:** create generous sidewalks and barrier-free paths
- 5. Add spaces for play and learning:** integrate play into everyday environments
- 6. Provide safe cycling facilities:** enable independent mobility for all ages
- 7. Improve pedestrian crossings:** make crossing streets safe and intuitive
- 8. Lower speeds by design:** use physical design to slow traffic naturally
- 9. Add trees and landscaping:** create green, shaded, beautiful streets
- 10. Prioritise children in policies:** institutionalise child-centric approaches

These ten actions work synergistically and reinforce one another rather than functioning as isolated measures. As said - our consortium's mantra - interconnected problems require eco-systemic solutions. Thinking from 95 cm ensures that urban design starts from the literal perspective of a child, making obstacles, dangers, and opportunities immediately visible. Disincentivising private vehicles together with lowering speeds by design creates a systemic approach to safety, addressing risk at its source rather than relying only on individual behaviour.

At the same time, building wide and accessible spaces and improving pedestrian crossings make independent mobility possible for children and caregivers, supporting everyday walking and reducing reliance on cars. Adding spaces for play and providing safe cycling facilities offer attractive and healthy alternatives to driving, encouraging active mobility and social interaction. Trees and landscaping contribute environmental, health, and aesthetic benefits, improving comfort, air quality, and overall well-being in public spaces. Finally, prioritising children in policies ensures that these principles are not temporary experiments but become embedded in long-term urban governance as authentically innovative public policies.

1.3 Bits of inspirational theory

From citizen consultation to co-creation: Arnstein's Ladder

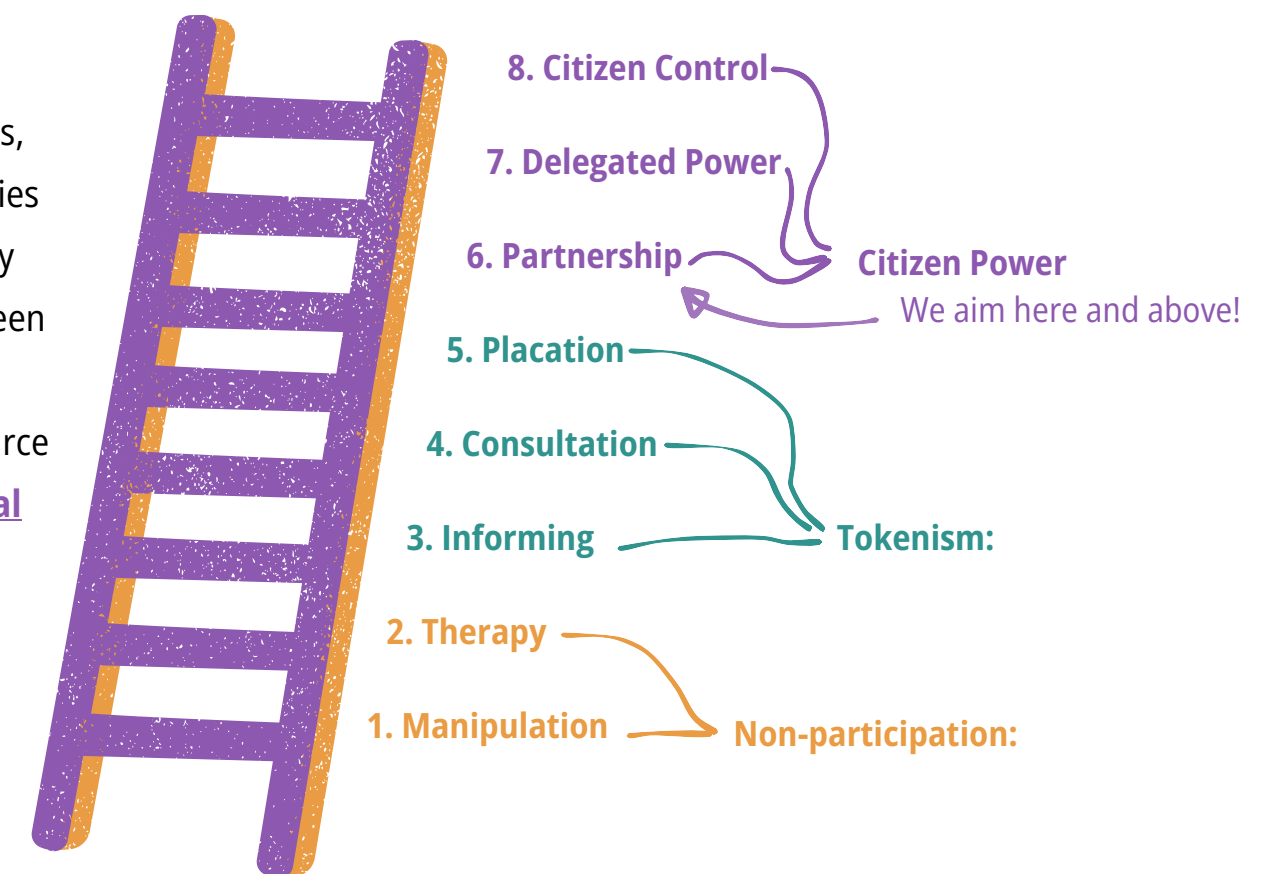
Effective collaborative urban planning rests on several key frameworks. Understanding these foundations helps practitioners navigate the complex terrain of participation, power-sharing, and systemic change, and helps stakeholders - our parents, caregivers and children - understand their role and agency level. Participation is not a neutral concept, but a continuum of practices that define how much power and agency are actually shared. Understanding the different degrees of participation is essential for public administrations in order to design informed collaborative processes, capable of ranging from simple consultation to transformative co-creation, and for participants to understand what role, degree of agency, and responsibility to assume.

Sherry R. Arnstein (1930-1997) was an American public administrator and social activist whose work fundamentally shaped how we understand citizen participation in planning and policy-making. Writing during the turbulent 1960s - an era of civil rights movements, urban renewal controversies, and growing distrust in government institutions - Arnstein worked as a consultant on citizen participation for the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Her seminal 1969 article "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" published in the Journal of the American Institute of Planners, emerged from her direct observation of how federal anti-poverty and urban renewal programs engaged (or failed to engage) communities. Arnstein witnessed firsthand how authorities often used the language of "participation" to legitimise decisions already made, while systematically excluding the very people most affected - particularly low-income communities and racialised communities.

Her ladder metaphor became famous because it did something radical for its time: it named and categorised the difference between genuine power-sharing and manipulative public relations. By distinguishing "tokenism" from true "citizen power," Arnstein gave communities a vocabulary to identify when they were being placated rather than empowered. Her work remains foundational precisely because the dynamics she identified over 50 years ago persist today, making her framework as relevant for understanding child and family participation in urban planning as it was for understanding community participation in 1960s urban renewal.

Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation" has eight rungs, organized into three categories that represent fundamentally different relationships between power-holders and citizens. You can access the full resource via [People Powered - Global Hub for Participatory Democracy](#).



Traditional urban planning typically operates at rungs 3-5 (informing, consultation, placation) - showing communities plans already developed and asking for feedback that may or may not be incorporated.

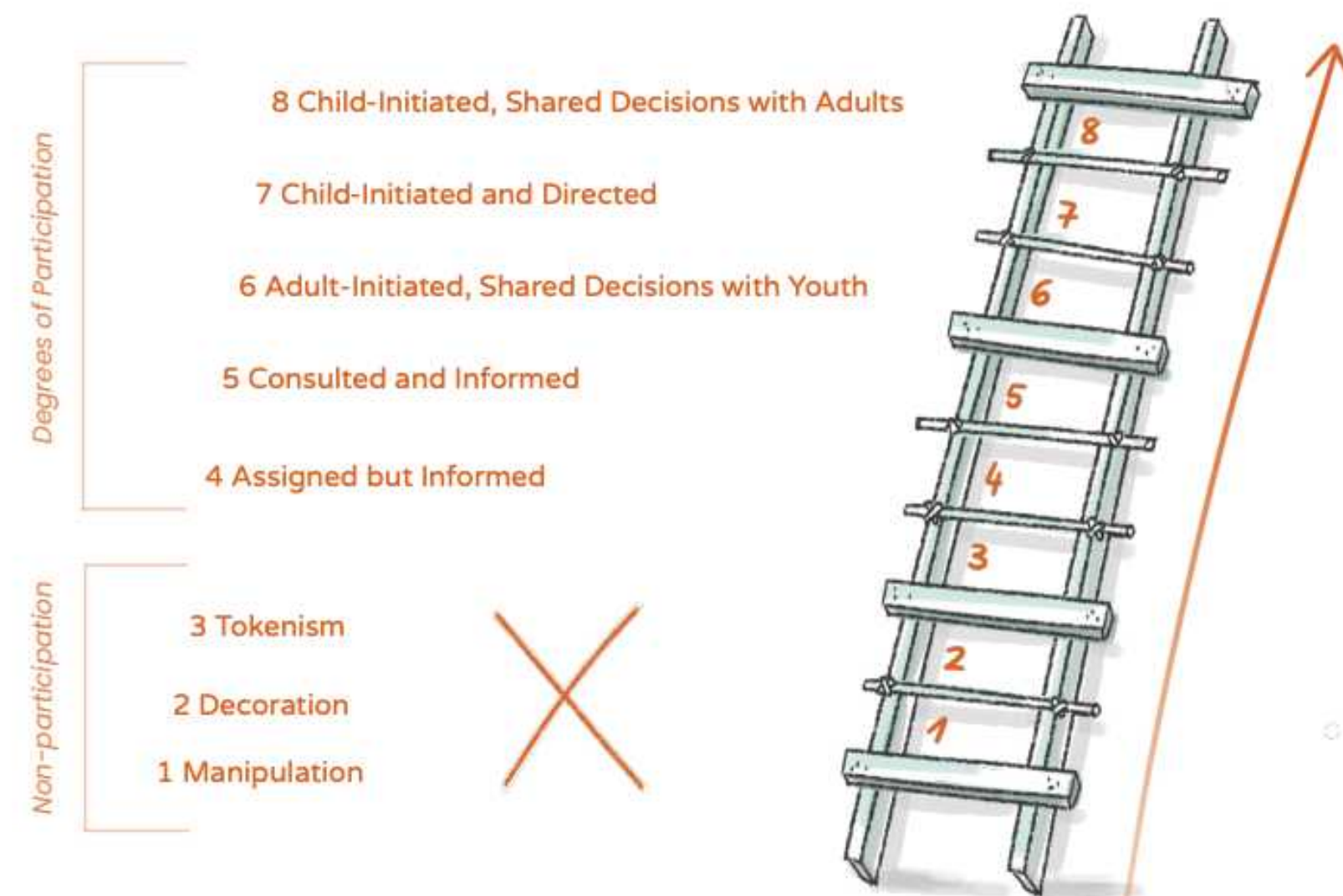
True collaborative planning for child-friendly cities aims for rungs 6-8, where children, parents, and caregivers genuinely envision problems, map needs, co-create visions, negotiate priorities, and shape fundamental decisions.

For child-friendly cities, genuine participation requires aspiring to rung 6 and above, by:

- Recognising children as experts in their own experiences;
- Creating accessible participation methods suitable for different ages, abilities, and literacy levels;
- Giving children and their caregivers real decision-making power, not just opportunities to voice opinions;
- Demonstrating how children's input shapes outcomes (closing the feedback loop).

The Ladder of Children's Participation

The model features eight "rungs" that describe the characteristics associated with different levels of decision-making agency, control, or power that can be given to children and youth by adults.



Source: [Placemaking for Inclusion Cookbook \(PM4I\) © 2023](#)

Where do you stand on the ladder?

Arnstein's ladder isn't just an analytical tool: it's a mirror that forces us to confront uncomfortable truths about power and participation. Whether you're organising a planning process or participating in one, regularly assessing your position on the ladder is essential for authentic collaboration and striving for a more genuine process of co-creation.

For public administrations and practitioners:

As you design and implement collaborative planning processes, continually interrogate your own practice:

- What rung of the ladder are we actually on? Be brutally honest. Are you genuinely sharing power, or simply seeking endorsement for decisions already made?
- Who holds veto power? If community input can be overridden without explanation, you're likely on the tokenism rungs (3-5), not in the citizen power zone (6-8);
- At what stage are communities involved? If they enter after fundamental decisions about location, budget, or program design have been made, you're consulting, not co-creating.
- How are trade-offs negotiated? In a genuine partnership, communities participate in difficult conversations about constraints and compromises - they're not simply presented with "impossible" barriers to their ideas;
- Can you show concrete examples of how community input changed your plans? If not, you may be stuck on rung 4 (consultation) or 5 (placation);



An uncomfortable truth:
Co-creation is extremely challenging work.

That's one of the reasons why most planning processes operate at rungs 3-5, even when practitioners genuinely believe they're doing "participation." The gap between intention and reality is where tokenism thrives. Honest assessment of where you currently operate is the first step toward climbing higher - and the first step toward rebuilding trust with communities who have learned to be sceptical of participation processes. Interested citizens are used to recognising hard work and political, institutional and bureaucratic obstacles in these kinds of processes. And most of all value intellectual honesty, enabling negotiations towards realistic solutions.

For caregivers, parents, and community organisers:

As you participate in planning processes that claim to value your voice, develop your own critical literacy:

- What rung of the ladder is this process actually on? Don't accept the label authorities give it and assess the actual power dynamics on your own: Am I being informed, consulted, or genuinely empowered to co-create?
- What decisions can I actually influence? If your input only affects minor aesthetic details (paint colours, plant species, bench styles) while fundamental decisions (location, budget, function, timing) remain predetermined, you're experiencing placation (rung 5) or consultation (rung 4), not partnership.
- Is my children's input shaping fundamental decisions or just decorating predetermined plans? Children's drawings shouldn't just end up on display walls. They should inform core design directions.
- Are there mechanisms for genuine negotiation? In true partnership, you can challenge proposals, suggest alternatives, and negotiate trade-offs with real authority.
- Am I being told "no" with clear explanations, or "yes" with vague promises? Genuine collaboration includes transparent conversations about constraints, but also genuine flexibility when community priorities differ from initial assumptions.



Understanding where you stand on the ladder helps you recognise tokenism, demand genuine power-sharing, and know when to push for more meaningful participation.

If you're stuck on the lower rungs, you have every right to challenge the process and advocate for climbing higher. Remember: your lived experience navigating the city with children - knowing which routes feel safe, which crossings are risky, where children actually want to play, how kids benefit or not from public space design and usage, how weather affects mobility - is legitimate expertise that deserves to shape core decisions, not just paint colours. When authorities treat your knowledge as less valid than engineering calculations or design precedents, they're operating on the tokenism rungs.

True collaboration recognises multiple forms of expertise as equally necessary for creating spaces that actually work.

But please, try to always maintain a proactive stand: people are probably working hard to keep this all together, and it's quite a hard job to do.

Lefebvre's Right to the City, for kids

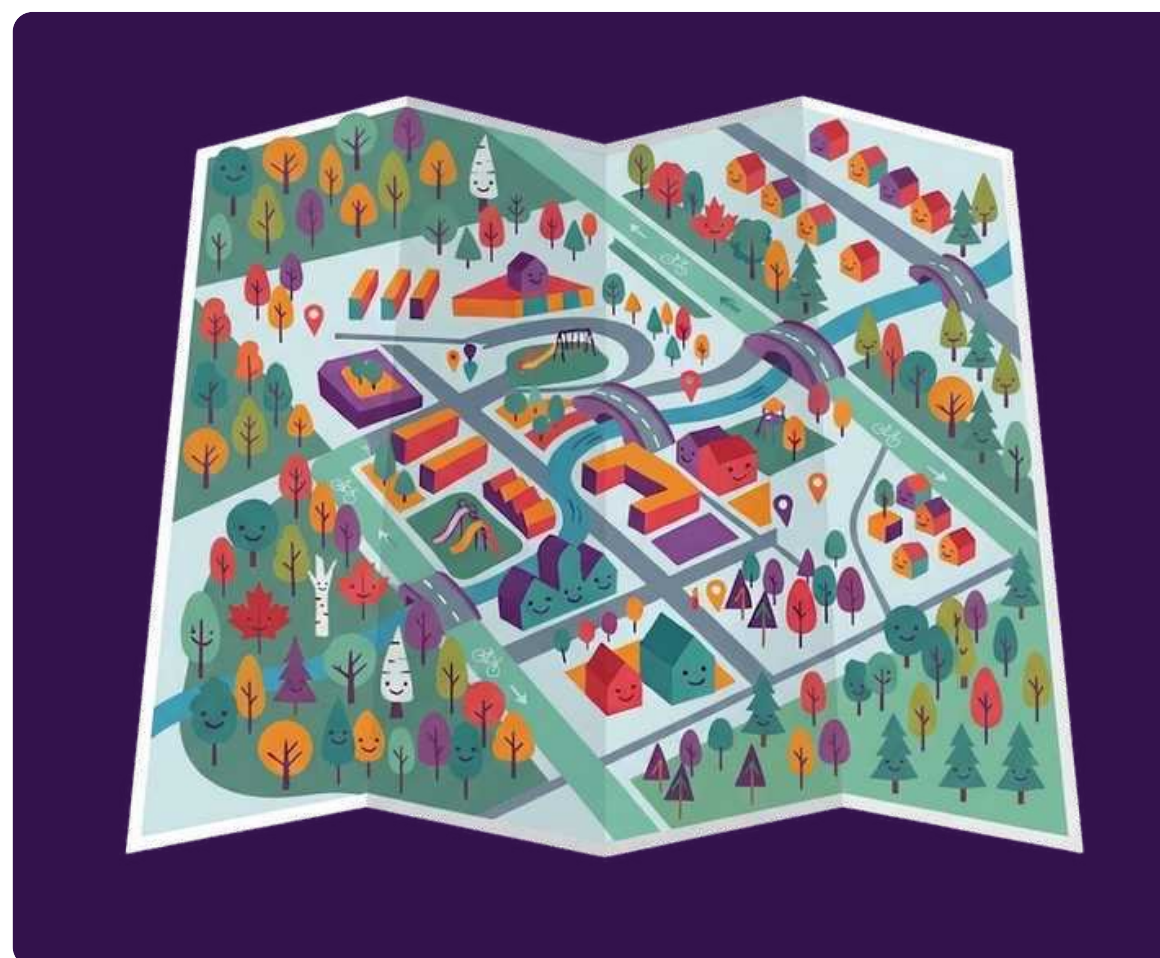
Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) was a French philosopher and sociologist whose work profoundly shaped how we understand urban space and social justice. Writing in 1968 - the year of global student uprisings and workers' movements - Lefebvre witnessed the transformation of Paris and other cities through massive urban renewal projects that displaced working-class communities and prioritised economic development over human needs. After all, what could be more economically unproductive but more meaningful, in the human experience, than play?

His concept of "the right to the city" emerged as a radical critique of how capitalism had turned cities into commodities - spaces designed for profit and consumption rather than for living and collective flourishing. Lefebvre argued that urban space is not neutral: it reflects and reinforces power relations, and those who lack power over how space is produced inevitably lack power over their own lives. Lefebvre's provocation was simple but revolutionary: urban inhabitants - not investors, not technocrats, not distant planners - should have the central role in shaping their environments. The right to the city isn't a legal claim you can take to court: it's a political demand for collective self-determination over urban life and political choices associated with public space.

Lefebvre's concept not only demands better access to urban resources - more parks, affordable housing, public transportation - it goes beyond it by revindicating citizen power in bringing their needs and desires to the table where political decisions are taken:

“

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY IS MUCH MORE THAN AN INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP'S RIGHT OF ACCESS TO URBAN RESOURCES. IT IS A RIGHT TO CHANGE AND REINVENT THE CITY ACCORDING TO OUR NEEDS. IT IS ONE OF THE MOST PRECIOUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND YET ONE OF THE MOST NEGLECTED



JJacobs, Arnstein, Lefebvre — among the many researchers and activists who form our common constellation of references — share a vision where active citizens can make a real difference, and claim the right to do so.

Just a constant reminder for anyone out there willing to give their contributions for better cities.

Proximity-based planning: Moreno's 15 mins city (well, maybe a little more for toddlers!)

At the heart of contemporary urban innovation is a vision that places people and daily life at the centre of city design. One of the most influential voices behind this shift is Carlos Moreno, a Franco-Colombian urbanist and professor at the Sorbonne, recognised internationally as the originator of the **15-Minute City concept**. Moreno's work re-imagines the city not as a machine for cars, but as a network of accessible, human-scaled neighbourhoods where essential needs can be met within a short walk or bike ride from home.

Moreno's 15-Minute City stems from a deep critique of the modern, car-dependent urban form - a structure that often fragments daily life, isolates families, and forces even short trips into long journeys - not to mention the carbon emissions that make the air in our cities unbreathable and contribute dramatically to the climate crisis. His approach shifts urban planning from prioritising distance and speed to valuing proximity and quality of experience, emphasising that "mobility must be a service" rather than an obligation - a perspective that has resonated with planners, policymakers, and climate advocates not only in Europe, but worldwide.

In a 15-Minute City, six essential functions (living, working, shopping, healthcare, education, and leisure) are distributed across multifunctional neighbourhoods so that they are reachable on foot or by bicycle within about 15 minutes. For children and caregivers, such a proximity-based urban model has profound implications for well-being, development, and daily experience:

- Shorter distances between home and daily needs mean that children can walk or cycle safely with minimal exposure to traffic risks;
- Neighbourhoods rich in services and social infrastructure (parks, schools, preschools, play spaces, libraries, and community centres within easy reach) create diverse opportunities for exploration, learning, and play in everyday life;
- A proximity-based city fosters social cohesion and community belonging, enabling parents and children to interact regularly with neighbours and caregivers, strengthening social support networks.
- Reduced travel times free up valuable hours for play, rest, social interaction, and family time, which have direct benefits for both physical and mental health.

Because children, especially toddlers and young school-age kids, are among the most sensitive to unsafe streets, scarce public space, and fragmented services, designing urban environments that work for them naturally improves conditions for all residents. Slower streets, plentiful green space, local schools and clinics, and accessible public transport benefit elderly citizens, people with mobility challenges, caregivers, and working adults alike.

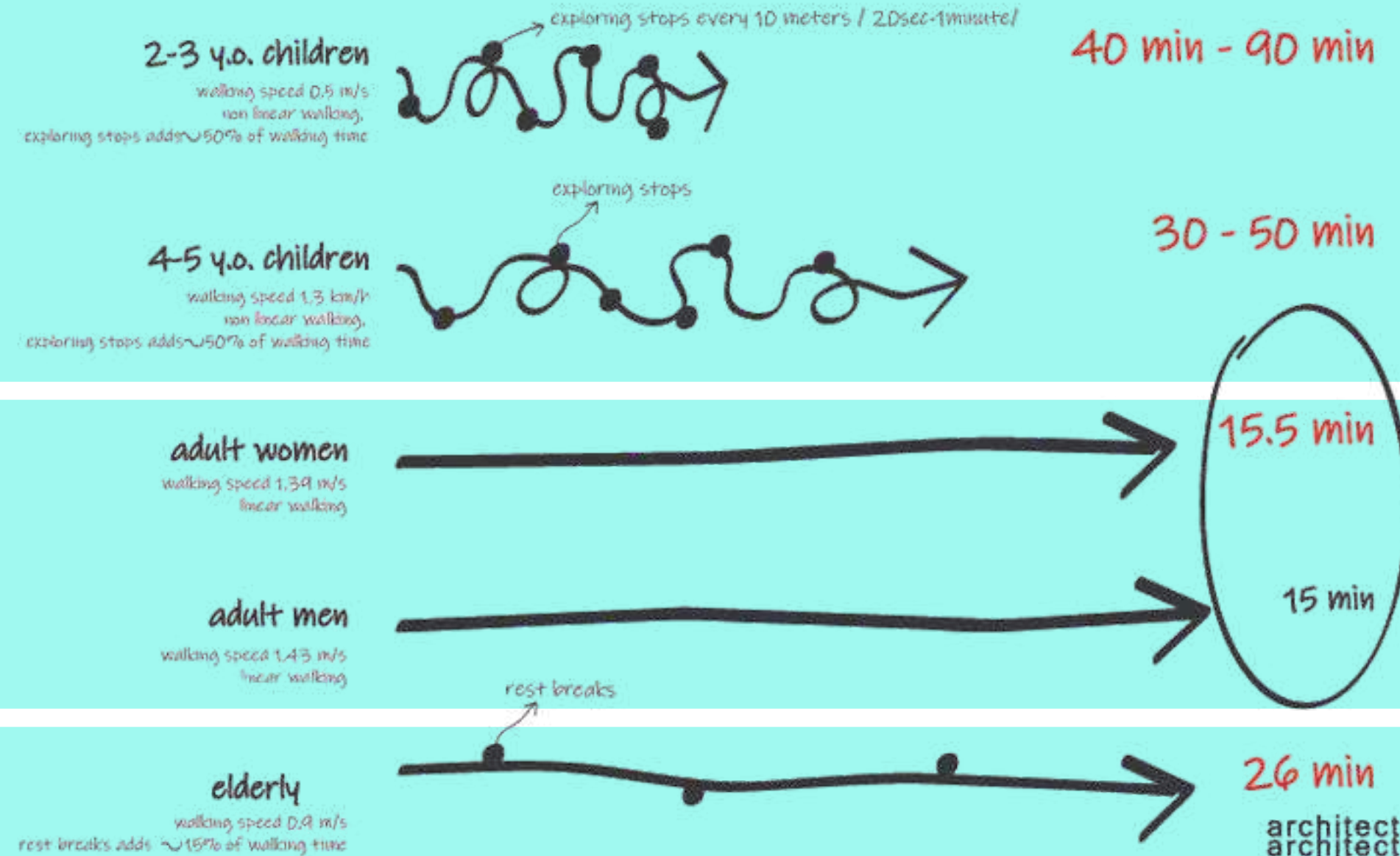
The 15-Minute City concept has been taken up by cities around the world as part of broader climate, health, and community well-being agendas. By re-orienting planning around walkability, mixed activities, local economies, and neighbourhood vitality, Moreno's framework aligns closely with the vision of child-friendly urbanism as explored in this module.

In the context of collaborative urban planning, a proximity-based approach invites communities to co-design neighbourhoods where children can thrive, not only socially and physically, but as active participants whose needs help define what a just and vibrant city must be.

On the following page, a diagram by Architectresses illustrates how people of different ages and abilities experience the same distance in very different ways and times — a powerful visual reminder that a truly inclusive city of proximity must embrace the full diversity of its residents' needs and rhythms.

15 min, for who?

→ 15 min:



This diagram by Architectresses reminds us that the same physical distance is experienced in very different ways and times depending on who is walking it, which is why intergenerational planning and thinking about mobilities of care are essential to ensure truly inclusive cities of proximity.



source: Architectresses |
Architektoniczki, Ewelina Jaskulska
and Honorata Grzesikowska

1.4 Core principles of collaborative planning

Every participatory process that aims to become part of the shared governance between institutions, civil society organisations, and citizens is based on several fundamental principles. Here are some of them identified by our consortium's experience.

1. Inclusivity and Diversity

Collaborative processes must actively seek out diverse voices, particularly those traditionally at risk of marginalisation, such as children, elderly residents, people with disabilities, minority communities, and low-income families. In practice:

- Don't just announce a public meeting and wait: actively recruit participants through schools, community centres, and local shops;
- Hold activities at different times and locations, according to your community's needs and schedules;
- Provide childcare during participation events or look for community centres where to hold the meetings that provide free childcare during the afternoon, for example;
- Offer translation and interpretation services, if needed;
- Use multiple non-formal engagement formats beyond traditional meetings (walks, games, arts-based methods).

Why this matters for parents and caregivers: your lived experience navigating the city with children is legitimate expertise. Planners need your knowledge to design effectively.

2. Equity

It's not enough to invite diverse participants; their input must carry genuine weight. This requires shifting power dynamics and creating structures where community knowledge is valued equally with technical expertise. In practice:

- Use decision-making frameworks that give community members voting power;
- Allocate budget directly to community-chosen priorities (see [participatory budgeting](#));
- Make technical information accessible through visualisations and plain language;
- Weight children's votes equally with adults' in decisions affecting them.

Red flag: If community feedback only influences minor aesthetic details while fundamental decisions (location, scale, function) remain predetermined - as mentioned, that's tokenism, not collaboration.

3. Transparency and Accountability

Participants need to understand how decisions are made and how their input influences outcomes. When communities see their contributions reflected in final plans, trust builds, and engagement deepens. In practice:

- Create "You said... We did..." feedback loops showing how input shaped outcomes
- Document decisions openly with clear rationales;
- If community suggestions can't be implemented, explain why clearly and respectfully - budget constraints, technical limitations, regulatory barriers;
- Share decision-making criteria upfront so participants understand trade-offs.

For parents: Demand this transparency. If you invest time participating, you deserve to know how your input was used.

4. Long-term Engagement

Collaborative planning isn't a one-off consultation. Building trust and genuine participation requires sustained engagement over time, from initial visioning through implementation and beyond.

In practice:

- Establish ongoing forums like neighbourhood councils, school-municipality working groups or dedicated digital platforms where creating the space to keep discussion alive;
- Return to communities after implementation to assess outcomes and identify needed adjustments;
- Celebrate milestones and recognise contributors publicly, sharing ownership of the projects;
- Create pathways for participants to remain involved in stewardship.

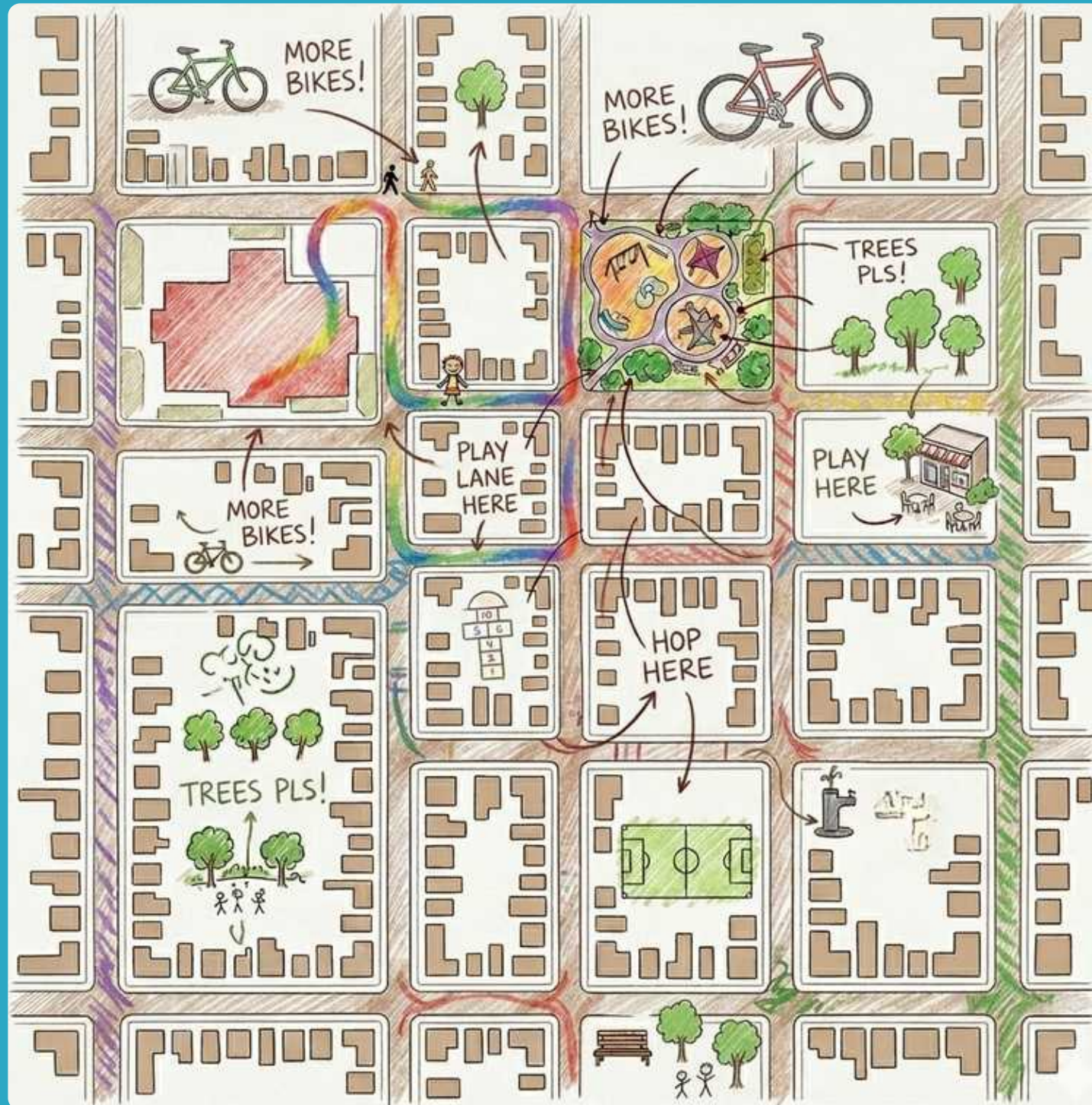
Timeline reality: Meaningful transformation takes 1-3 years minimum. Quick wins (agile and cheap interventions of **tactical urbanism**) build momentum for long-term systemic change and long-term goals.

5. Systems Thinking

Better cities don't emerge from isolated interventions. They require systems-level thinking that considers how physical infrastructure, social networks, governance structures, and cultural attitudes intersect. For example, a beautiful new playground has limited impact if:

- Routes to reach it are dangerous;
- Opening hours don't match family schedules;
- Cultural norms discourage children's independent mobility;
- Families can't afford admission or transportation.

The systems approach aims to address multiple factors simultaneously, working at the intersection of infrastructure, planning, policy innovation and culture change. In order to be effective, collaborative planning needs engagement from stakeholders across different sectors (education, health, transportation, parks, housing, and economic development) to create integrated and ecosystemic solutions.



PART B

HOW TO DO COLLABORATIVE URBAN PLANNING

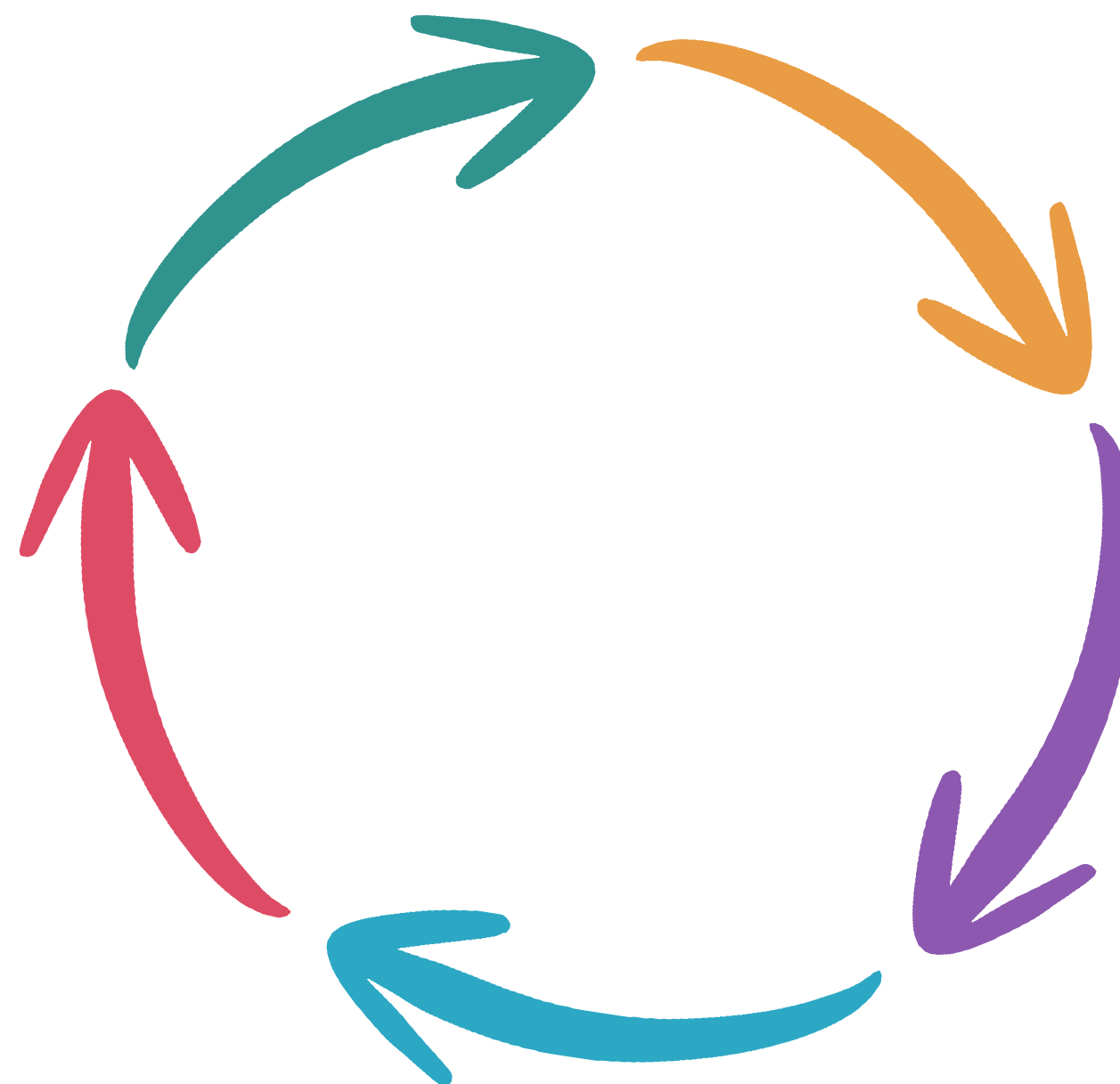
2.1 A way to do it

A flexible pathway, not a rigid prescription!

Collaborative planning isn't a single method, it's an approach adaptable to different contexts, scales, and resources. Successful processes tend to follow a similar arc, which we outline here as a flexible pathway.

We propose a 5-phase process:

- 1: PREPARATION** → Building your coalition
- 2: ANALYSIS** → Mapping community needs
- 3: CO-DESIGN** → Translating needs into designs
- 4: IMPLEMENTATION** → Prototyping, testing and making transformations happen
- 5: EVALUATION** → Monitoring impacts, learning and improving



Do keep in mind that these type of processes are cyclical! The “work” is not “done” after evaluation.

Phase 1: PREPARATION & COALITION BUILDING

Before engaging the broader community, invest time in building a strong foundation, as the Municipality of Amarante tested before, during and after the urban pilot in their city centre.

Assembling Your Core Team

Who should be involved?

- Parents and caregiver representatives from diverse backgrounds;
- School administrators and teachers from affected schools;
- Community organisations: parents associations, youth groups, senior centres, faith communities, neighbourhood associations;
- Local government representatives: planning and public works, green spaces, health, transportation, education departments;
- Technical experts: urban designers, traffic engineers, health professionals;
- Facilitators: skilled in participatory methods and working with diverse groups, including children.

Key activities:

- Hold initial meetings to align on visions, needs, goals, scope, and timeline;
- Clarify roles, responsibilities, and governance (who has final say on what?);
- Identify potential challenges and mitigation strategies;
- Establish communication protocols and meeting schedules.

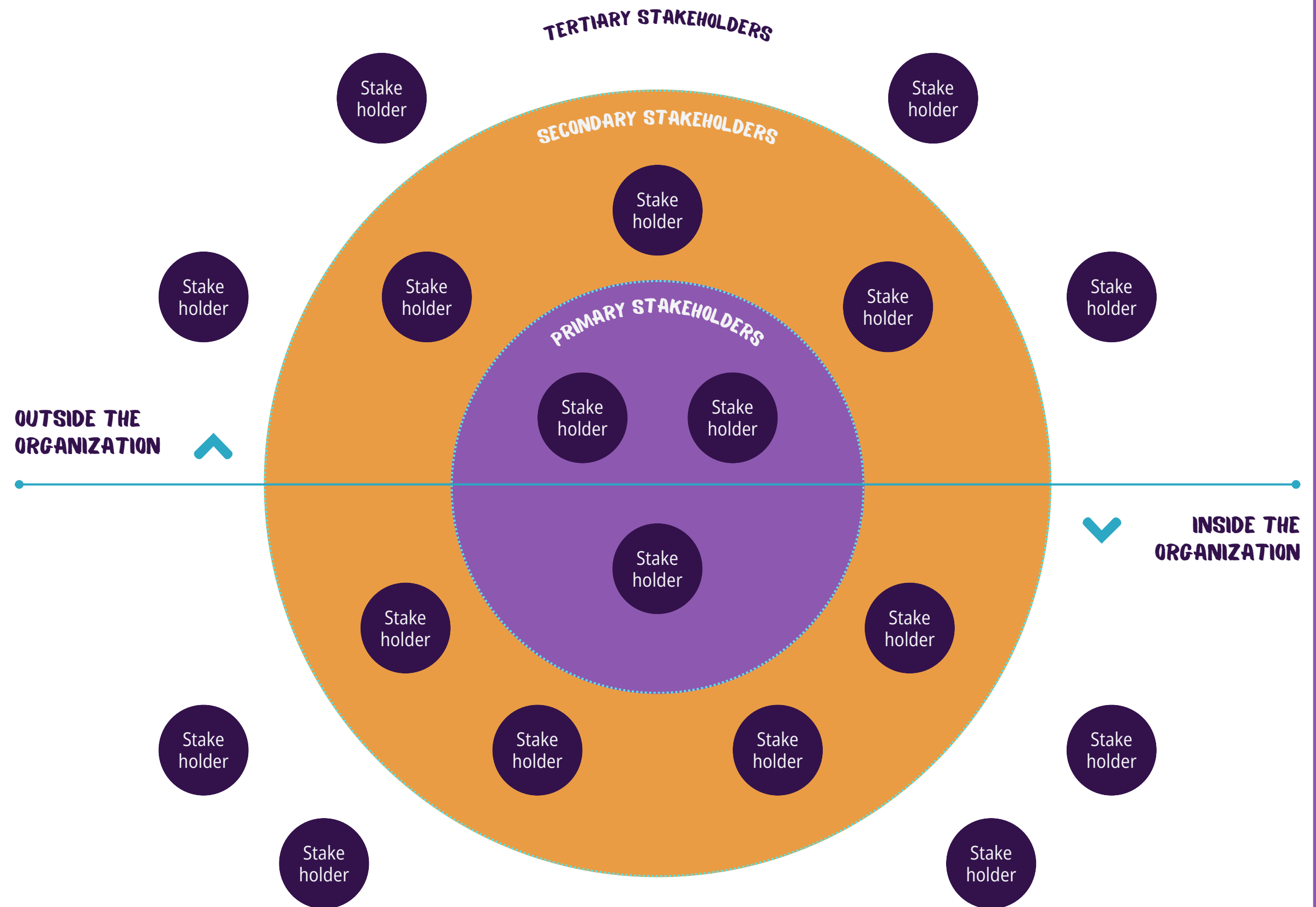
Critical question: How much power is genuinely being shared?
Be honest about constraints upfront: nothing undermines trust faster than raising expectations that can't be met.

Mapping Community Assets, Stakeholders and Allies

Understand your community:

- Demographics: Who lives here? Ages, languages, socio-economic diversity, and household types
- Community assets: Schools, parks, gathering places, active organisations, local businesses
- Existing networks: Where do people already connect? Parent groups, PTAs, sports clubs, faith communities
- Barriers to participation: Transportation access, work schedules, childcare needs, language barriers, historical exclusion, distrust of authorities
- Suggested tools: [Problem Tree](#), [Stakeholder Mapping](#).
(see an example on the next page!)

Stakeholder Mapping



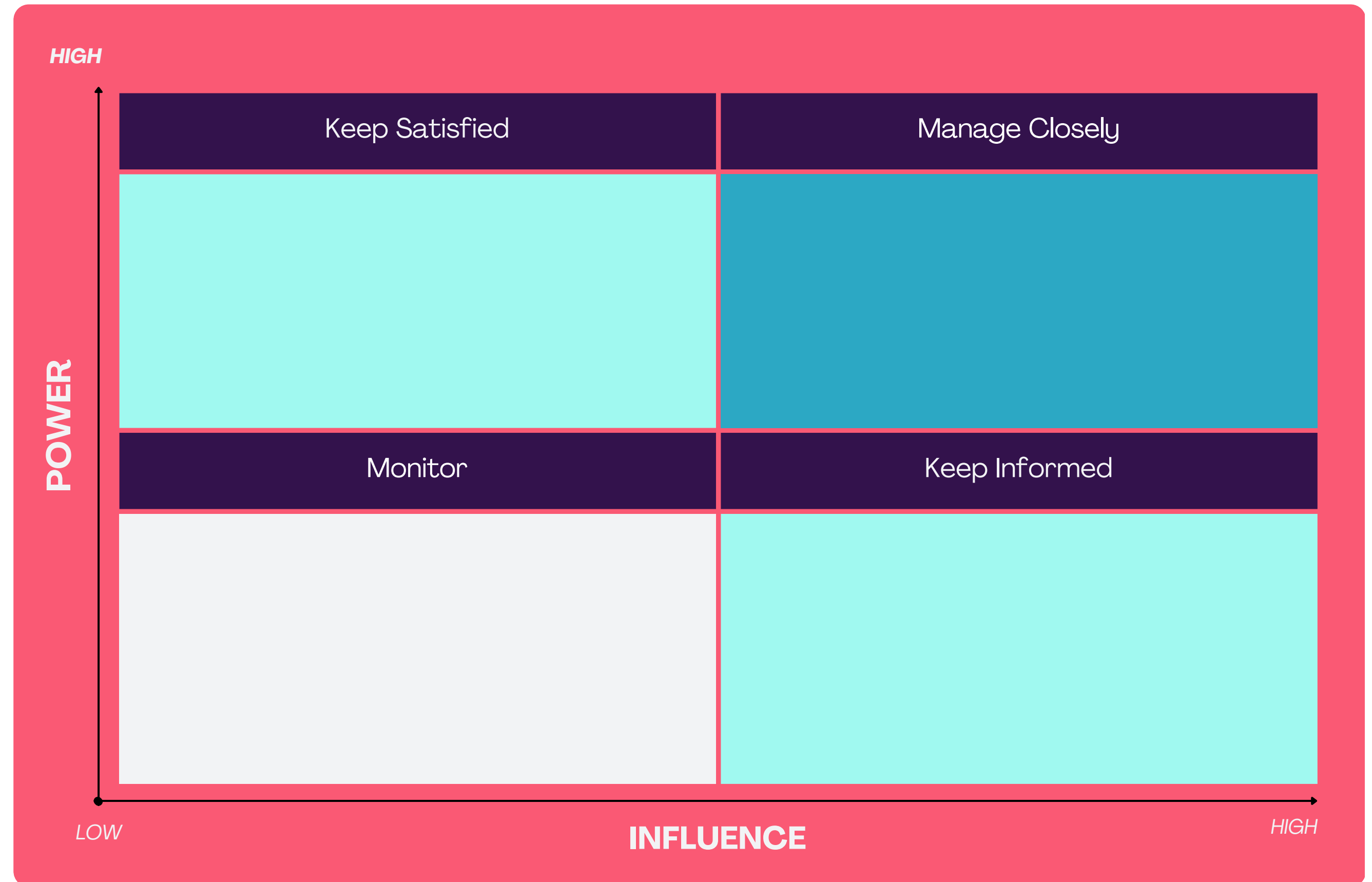
Tip:
Organize stakeholders in groups to clarify a project's priorities

Stakeholder Mapping

Thanks to these tools, it is possible to visualise responses to several questions, such as:

- Who is affected by this planning process?
- Who has been historically excluded?
- Who has informal power and influence?
- What are the best channels to reach different groups?

For parent groups: You likely know your community better than officials do. Your mapping of informal networks, trusted leaders, and communication channels is invaluable.



Defining Scope Realistically

Be clear and honest about:

- Geographic scope: A single street? A school area? Entire neighborhood? City-wide policy?
- Timeline: How long will the process take? (realistic timelines build trust!)
- Budget: What resources are available? What can community input directly influence?

Decision-making structure:

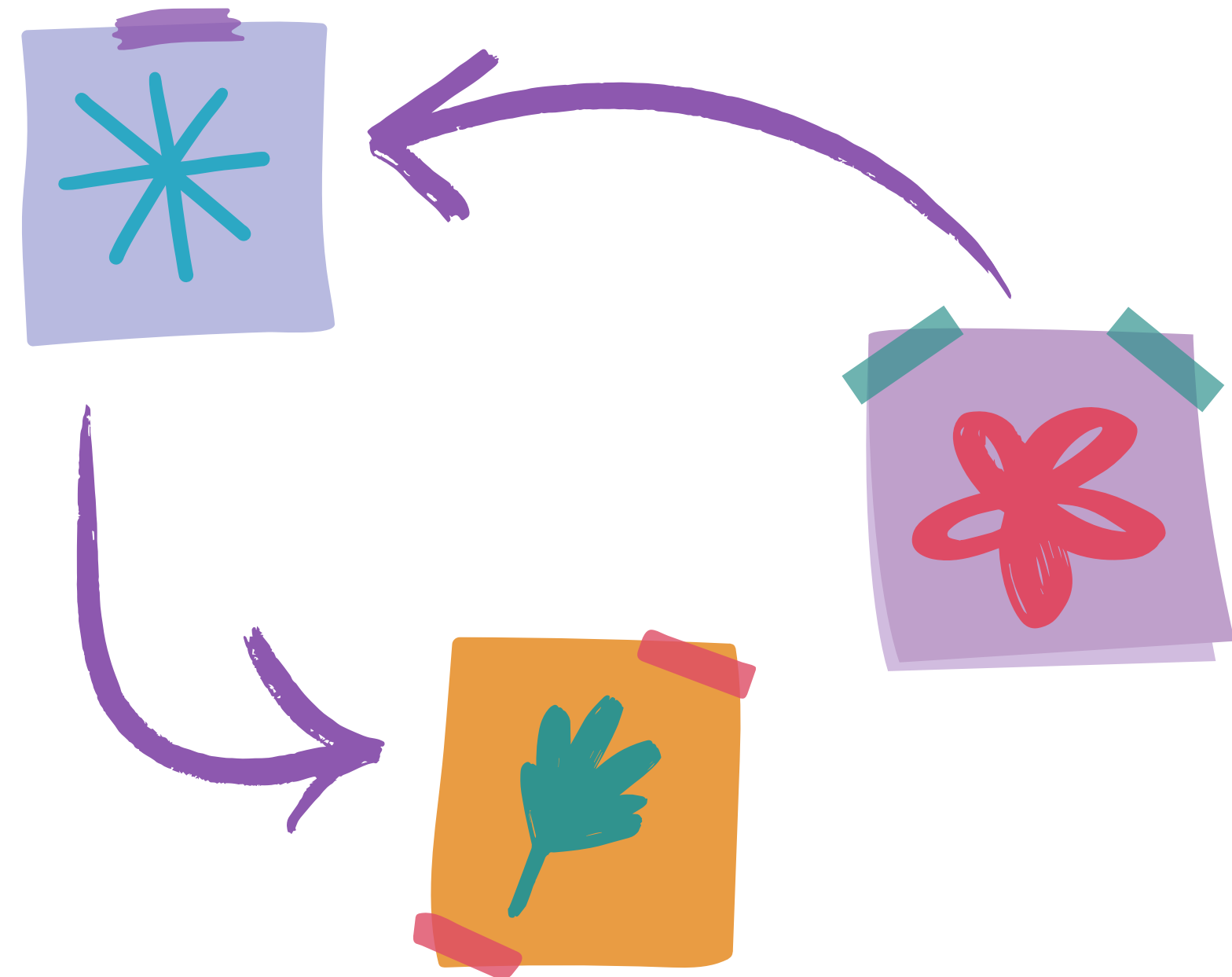
- Who has final authority?
- Who has veto power?
- How much power is genuinely shared?
- What's negotiable vs. predetermined?

Expected outcomes:

Physical changes? Policy recommendations?
Future engagement mechanisms? Cultural shift?

Red flags to avoid by public administrators and practitioners:

- Asking for input on decisions already made;
- Raising expectations for changes that aren't feasible;
- Vague promises about "considering" community input without a clear process.



Phase 2: ANALYSIS

This phase focuses on field research, deep listening of communities and collaborative analysis of current conditions and future aspirations of territories.

Activity 1: Walkshops

What is a **Walkshop**? A workshop-style walking and learning experience to explore urban spaces together. It's an immersive experience that promotes reflection, observation, and discussion about design, accessibility, and functionality.

Objective: to experience the built environment from multiple perspectives, especially children's.

Timing: 1.5/2 hours, including walking and discussion

Materials needed (or good to have!):

- Printed maps with the route marked;
- Cameras or tablets for children;
- Clipboards and observation sheets for adults;
- Stickers or markers for marking maps;
- Water and snacks.

Tip: Walk at children's pace. Adults might want to rush - resist this. The slower pace reveals details you'd otherwise miss.

Method

1. **Select the route:** we suggest, for example, you follow routes children actually use to school, parks, friends' homes, and local shops.
2. **Assemble a group of diverse participants:** Mixed groups including children of various ages, parents, elderly residents, people with mobility challenges and accessibility needs;
3. **Structured observation - pause at key points to observe and openly discuss:**
 - Where do children naturally play and gather?
 - What obstacles or dangers exist?
 - Where do different generations interact?
 - What spaces feel welcoming vs. inhospitable?
 - What works well that should be preserved?
4. **Document:** combine adult observations with children's perspectives
 - Give children cameras to photograph what they like and don't like;
 - Have them draw mental maps of their neighbourhood or provide them with drawings of potential urban transformations they would like to see;
 - Record audio observations;
 - Note specific locations and features.
5. **Wrap-up:** once got back to the meeting point (Municipality/Community Centre/School), collect all feedback and facilitate the final discussion. Close to launching the next steps of the process.



SPOTLIGHT TOOL

The Inverted Periscope

A simple way to give your workshop a “special touch” with a different perspective!

During our first PLAYFUL-ED workshop in Bologna, we spent an afternoon walking around the city to immerse ourselves in a change of perspective thanks to a very simple tool, which we built ourselves: the inverted periscope. You can easily do it by yourself, following the instructions provided by this [Global Designing Cities guide](#). Oh, we almost forgot: don't underestimate the power of creating these tools together with your communities — it can be a fun team-building experience!

Well, for a few hours, the PLAYFUL-ED partners strolled through the city of Bologna, walking around and experiencing public spaces from the perspective of a small child. This shift in perspective is as simple as it is fundamental to understanding the challenges that children face every day in the built environment, in traffic, or on their way to and from school. It is a powerful educational tool for adults who want to try to see the world through the eyes of a child in order to understand what changes in the urban environment are needed to make the lives of children safer, fairer, freer, and more playful.



What is a “inverted periscope”?

It is a DIY optical tool using mirrors that allows adults to see streets from approximately 95cm height - a toddler's eye level. Users look down through the periscope, which uses mirrors to reflect the view from child height.

Why it's powerful: the reverse periscope transforms abstract empathy into embodied experience. Adults don't just imagine what children see: they actually see it. This immersive experience reveals:

- Visual monotony (predominantly legs, wheels, building bases);
- Intimidating scale of vehicles and infrastructure;
- Blocked sightlines by parked cars and street furniture;
- Exposure to vehicle exhaust at breathing height;
- Which street elements become exciting or frightening at this height?

Possible workshop format 2 hours + 1 hour periscopes crafting

Part 1 - Adult perspective (30 min):

- Walk the route experiencing it at normal adult height;
- Document observations using activity cards (provided by The Reverse Periscope Companion Guide provided by Global Designing Cities linked above):
 - What do you see?
 - What feels safe or unsafe?
 - What elements invite interaction?
 - Rate: enjoyment (0-5), safety (0-5), comfort (0-5)

Part 2 - Child perspective (45 min):

- Retake the same route using the periscope;
- Document using parallel activity cards:
 - What changed in what you observe?
 - What new elements become significant?
 - How does movement feel different?
 - Rate: enjoyment, safety, comfort (compare with Part 1)

Part 3 - Reflection (45 min):

- Compare observations and ratings
- Discuss:
 - What most surprised you?
 - What would you change about this space?
 - How does this inform your advocacy or work?



Key insight: The periscope's power lies not in perfect simulation; it obviously doesn't capture everything about being a child. Rather, it disrupts adult assumptions enough to create openness to actively listen to children's actual voices and experiences. Use it as a conversation starter, not a replacement for genuine child participation.

Activity 2: Kids-led neighbourhood tours

Objective: Understand space from children's perspective by letting them lead the way and trying to sense the place as they do, with empathy and an observational spirit.

Method

1. Recruit children of various ages (with parental consent);
2. Ask them to show you their neighbourhood - they choose where to go;
3. Let them lead - stop where they choose, linger as long as they want;
4. Ask open-ended questions:
 - "Why do you like this place?"
 - "What happens here?"
 - "What would make this better?"
 - "Where do you wish you could go but can't?"
5. Document with photos and notes - let children photograph too!

Key insight: Children often value different spaces than adults expect (back alleys, edges, small nooks, "messy" natural areas). They notice details adults miss, such as interesting textures, small creatures, hiding spots, good climbing features etc.



Activity 3: Participatory Mapping

Participatory mapping is a set of approaches and techniques that combine modern cartography tools with traditional participatory methods to represent the spatial knowledge of local communities. It is based on the assumption that the local population knows their environment and current conditions well. Therefore, they must actively participate in community mapping activities. Participatory maps created by local communities represent the place where they live, showing the elements they consider important. In our case, for example, we can work with parents and caregivers on the school environment, the route between home and school, playgrounds, etc. This activity is a way to encourage and empower communities to take informed action based on data collected during mapping activities. The information obtained from community mapping, together with focus groups, can be used in the assessment and planning of interventions in public spaces, identifying problems and opportunities in relation to children's use of public spaces.

Objective: Collectively document community spatial knowledge as a basis for concrete interventions.

Objective: Collectively document community spatial knowledge as a basis for concrete interventions.

Physical mapping:

- Large printed maps on tables or walls
- Colored markers, stickers, and post-its
- Icons representing different elements:
 - Favourite places (green dots)
 - Dangerous/uncomfortable areas (red dots)
 - Desired destinations (stars)
 - Routes taken regularly (lines)

Invite all community members to contribute simultaneously.

Themed maps you might create, for example:

Digital option: Platforms like [Maptionnaire](#) allow online participation, but always provide physical alternatives for those less comfortable with technology.

Analysis: Look for patterns. Which areas are well-loved? Which are avoided? Where are the gaps in services? What opportunities emerge?

Safety mapping:

- Green: "I feel safe here"
- Yellow: "I'm not sure about here"
- Red: "I feel unsafe here"
- Blue: "I wish I could go here"

Routes to school mapping:

- Have children draw their route from home to school
- Use emoji stickers to mark how they feel at different points
- Identify places they like vs. places that scare them

Play hotspots:

- Where do children currently play (formal and informal)?
- Where do they wish they could play?
- What play opportunities are missing?

Activity 4: Visioning the future

Objective: Dream big about what the neighborhood could become.

Method: "The Dream City Workshop"

Provide diverse creative materials (Lego, modeling clay, drawing supplies, collage materials). Ask participants:

- If you could change anything about this neighborhood, what would it be?
- What would make this the best place for children to grow up?
- What would help people of all ages connect and play together?

Emphasize that all ideas are welcome, feasibility comes later.

This is about imagination and aspiration.

Method: "Future Memory Exercise"

Ask participants to imagine it's 10 years in the future and the neighborhood has transformed beautifully. Write a postcard to yourself today describing:

- What changed?
- How do you feel using these spaces?
- What activities happen there now?
- What made the transformation possible?

Outcome: A shared vision that transcends current constraints and inspires action.



Phase 3: CO-DESIGN & PROTOTYPING

With priorities identified, now collaboratively develop detailed designs and test ideas.

Activity 5: Co-Design Workshops

Objective: Transform community priorities into concrete design proposals.

Preparation:

- Have technical experts prepare initial concepts based on Phase 2 input;
- Gather precedent images from similar projects and best practices elsewhere;
- Prepare base maps, models, and drawing materials.

Workshop structure:

Round 1 - Critique and refinement: present initial concepts. Ask participants:

- What do you like?
- What concerns you?
- What's missing?
- How could this better serve children's needs?

Document all feedback carefully.

Round 2 - Alternative Generation: break into small mixed groups (technical experts + community members). Each group develops an alternative design responding to feedback.

Round 3 - Integration and Selection: share all alternatives. Identify the strongest elements from each. Develop integrated proposals combining the best ideas.

Iteration: Hold multiple workshops, refining designs progressively based on community feedback.

Activity 5: Tactical Urbanism

Objective: Test ideas quickly and inexpensively before permanent investment.

Approach: Use temporary, low-cost materials to prototype proposed changes.

Example. Temporary Play Street: Close a street to traffic for one day using cones and barriers. Provide simple play materials (chalk, balls, jump ropes). Observe:

- How do children and families use the space?
- What activities emerge?
- What works and what doesn't?
- How do neighbours and city-users respond?

Example: Pop-Up Park: Transform an underused space temporarily with:

- Pallets and cushions for seating
- Planters with greenery
- Chalk for ground decoration
- Games and loose parts for play

Run for a weekend or a week. Gather feedback continuously.

Example: Mock-Ups: Build 1:1 scale mock-ups of proposed elements (playground equipment, seating, etc.) using cardboard or wood. Let children interact with them before committing to permanent installation.



Benefits of prototyping:

- Tests assumptions against reality
- Reveals unforeseen issues
- Builds community excitement and buy-in
- Provides evidence to support permanent investment
- Allows iterative improvement

Phase 4: IMPLEMENTATION

This phase focuses on field research, deep listening of communities and collaborative analysis of current conditions and future aspirations of territories.

Community-Involved Implementation

Options for participation:

- Build days: community members and participants assist with construction or installation (especially suitable for landscape projects, painting, planting)
- Art integration: local artists and community members create murals, mosaics, or sculptures
- Documentation: community members photograph and document the transformation

Benefits:

- Builds ownership and stewardship
- Reduces costs
- Strengthens community bonds
- Creates educational opportunities

Activation and Programming

Physical improvements alone don't guarantee use.

Program spaces to jumpstart activity and establish new patterns:

Launch events:

- Opening celebration with performances, games, and food
- Design recognition event honouring community contributors
- Intergenerational activities introducing neighbours to new spaces

Ongoing programming:

- Regular play streets or play sessions
- Seasonal events (winter festivals, sports tournaments, summer movie nights, etc.)
- Community gardening or maintenance days
- Skill-sharing workshops (art, games, sports)



Phase 5: EVALUATION

Monitoring Use and Impact

Quantitative measures:

- Usage counts at different times (especially children's independent use)
- Diversity of users (age, background)
- Duration of visits
- Types of activities observed

Qualitative measures:

- Interviews and surveys with users and non-users
- Children's drawings and stories about the space
- Photo documentation of how spaces are actually used
- Community feedback sessions

Learning and Adaptation

Questions to explore:

- What's working better than expected? Why?
- What's not working as intended? Why?
- What unexpected uses have emerged?
- How has the intervention affected different groups differently?
- What adjustments would improve outcomes?

Iteration process:

- Share evaluation findings with community
- Collectively identify needed adjustments
- Implement changes (using rapid prototyping when possible)
- Re-evaluate



PART C

BEST PRACTICES & CASE STUDIES

Overview of case studies by thematic Cluster

1. Safe Route to School

Children's everyday journeys between home and school are the focus here, showing how targeted interventions can improve safety, accessibility, and independent mobility.

- **Bologna & Reggio Emilia, Italy**
- **Pune, India**
- **Recife, Brazil**

2. Reclaiming Streets for Play

Streets are the most abundant public space in any city, and among the least available to children. The cases gathered here explore how they can be reclaimed from car dominance and transformed into spaces for play, social life, and active mobility through temporary or permanent interventions.

- **Bristol, UK**
- **Cape Town, South Africa**
- **Barcelona, Spain**
- **Milan, Italy**

3. Participatory Budgeting

Participatory governance tools can give citizens, including children and families, a direct say in urban priorities and the allocation of public resources. The cases here show what that looks like when it works.

- **Paris, France**

4. Holistic Neighbourhood Approach

Some of the most ambitious child-friendly city initiatives work not on a single street or school route, but on the neighbourhood as a whole. Tirana offers one of the most instructive examples of what that ambition looks like in practice.

- **Tirana, Albania**

1. Safe Route to School

School-Streets

School streets are streets near schools that are closed to motor vehicle traffic during pick-up and drop-off times, creating safe spaces for children to walk, cycle, scoot, and play. The concept originated in Italy in the 1970s, in Bolzano, and has since spread globally, with particularly strong adoption in the UK, Belgium, Spain, and increasingly in other EU cities.

That growth and success resulted from responses to several pressing issues, including air pollution, the need for healthier cities, social inequalities, and mobility challenges. Because school streets address these concerns in a tangible, community-centred way, they have become a powerful tool for addressing multiple urban problems simultaneously.

Crucially, one of the reasons for their success is the lack of significant opposition, as it is hard to argue against measures that protect and benefit children. Another key factor is the strong collaboration between municipalities, schools, parents, and the wider community, which ensures that these initiatives are embraced and sustained at a local level.



On the following pages, we will show you some examples from the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy, but if you are curious to learn more about experiences of this kind, you can explore [this valuable atlas with a collection of experiments and school streets projects around Europe collected by Clean Cities](https://www.saferoutestoschools.org/about/).

Illustration generated with AI, inspired by a photo available here: <https://www.saferoutestoschools.org/about/>

1. Safe Route to School

School-Streets

IMPACT

- **Safety:** dramatic reduction in traffic collisions near schools
- **Air quality:** reduced exposure to vehicle emissions at critical times
- **Active mobility:** more children walking and cycling to school
- **Social connection:** parents and children interact more freely
- **Independence:** children develop confidence navigating streets
- **Community cohesion:** streets become neighbourhood gathering spaces



<https://thefuturedesignofstreets.eu/carrer-de-figols-barcelona-spain/>



<https://thefuturedesignofstreets.eu/tove-ditlevsens-plads-copenhagen-denmark/>



<https://thefuturedesignofstreets.eu/rruga-frosina-plaku-tirana-albania/>



<https://mairie18.paris.fr/pages/fete-des-rues-aux-enfants-28426>

Case Study

Bologna Città 30 - Bologna, Italy



<https://bolognacitta30.it/>

CONTEXT

In the late 2010s, the City of Bologna began experimenting with school streets (strade scolastiche) as part of a broader effort to improve road safety, air quality, and public space around schools.

The initiative emerged in response to growing concerns from parents, teachers, and local communities about traffic congestion, air pollution, and unsafe conditions during school drop-off and pick-up times.

These early experiments later became strongly connected to Bologna's wider mobility and safety strategy, culminating in the launch of Bologna Città 30, which established a citywide speed limit of 30 km/h on most city centre streets.

Case Study

Bologna Città 30 - Bologna, Italy

FASE 1

Tactical Urbanism Experiments The first school streets in Bologna were implemented as temporary, low-cost interventions, often using tactical urbanism tools such as removable bollards, painted surfaces, planters, and temporary signage. Streets in front of schools were closed to through-traffic during specific times of the day, particularly at the beginning and end of the school day. These pilots allowed the municipality to test solutions quickly, observe behavioural changes, and gather data without permanent infrastructural changes. Children gained safer access to school entrances, while streets temporarily transformed into calmer, more social spaces.

FASE 2

Community Involvement and Co-Design Parents, teachers, school staff, and residents were actively involved in shaping and supporting the interventions. Schools became key intermediaries, helping communicate changes and encouraging families to adopt active mobility practices such as walking or cycling. The temporary nature of the interventions made participation easier: residents could experience the change before judging it. This hands-on approach helped reduce resistance and build trust, while opening opportunities for dialogue between citizens and the municipality.

FASE 3

Evaluation and Scaling Up Bologna systematically evaluated the school street experiments, measuring impacts on traffic volume, speed reduction, air quality, noise, and perceptions of safety. The results demonstrated clear benefits: reduced car traffic near schools, improved safety conditions, and greater use of public space by children and caregivers. These findings supported the decision to scale up the approach and integrate school streets into a broader urban policy framework, rather than treating them as isolated projects.

FASE 4

Evaluation and Scaling Up Bologna systematically evaluated the school street experiments, measuring impacts on traffic volume, speed reduction, air quality, noise, and perceptions of safety. The results demonstrated clear benefits: reduced car traffic near schools, improved safety conditions, and greater use of public space by children and caregivers. These findings supported the decision to scale up the approach and integrate school streets into a broader urban policy framework, rather than treating them as isolated projects.

Case Study

Bologna Città 30 - Bologna, Italy

IMPACT

- Increased safety for children during school arrival and departure times
- Measurable reductions in traffic speed and volume near schools
- Improved air quality and noise conditions in school environments
- Greater use of streets as social and relational spaces
- Strong alignment between local experiments and citywide mobility policy.

Bologna shows how temporary, participatory actions can grow into lasting structural change when backed by data, community engagement, and political commitment. In 2025, the city gained international recognition by joining the global “La Città dei Bambini” network, highlighting its commitment to child-friendly urban planning and governance.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Started with temporary and reversible interventions, lowering barriers to experimentation
- Combined child-centred design with evidence-based evaluation. Actively involved schools, families, and local communities
- Linked local pilots to a systemic citywide vision (Bologna Città 30). Used tactical urbanism as a bridge between experimentation and permanent policy



STRADE SCOLASTICHE
VIA PROCACCINI, BOLOGNA

<https://owgf.org/2024/08/02/should-we-follow-bolognas-model-for-participatory-urbanism/>

BONUS* Case Study

"Fantastic Streets" in medium-sized cities - Reggio Emilia

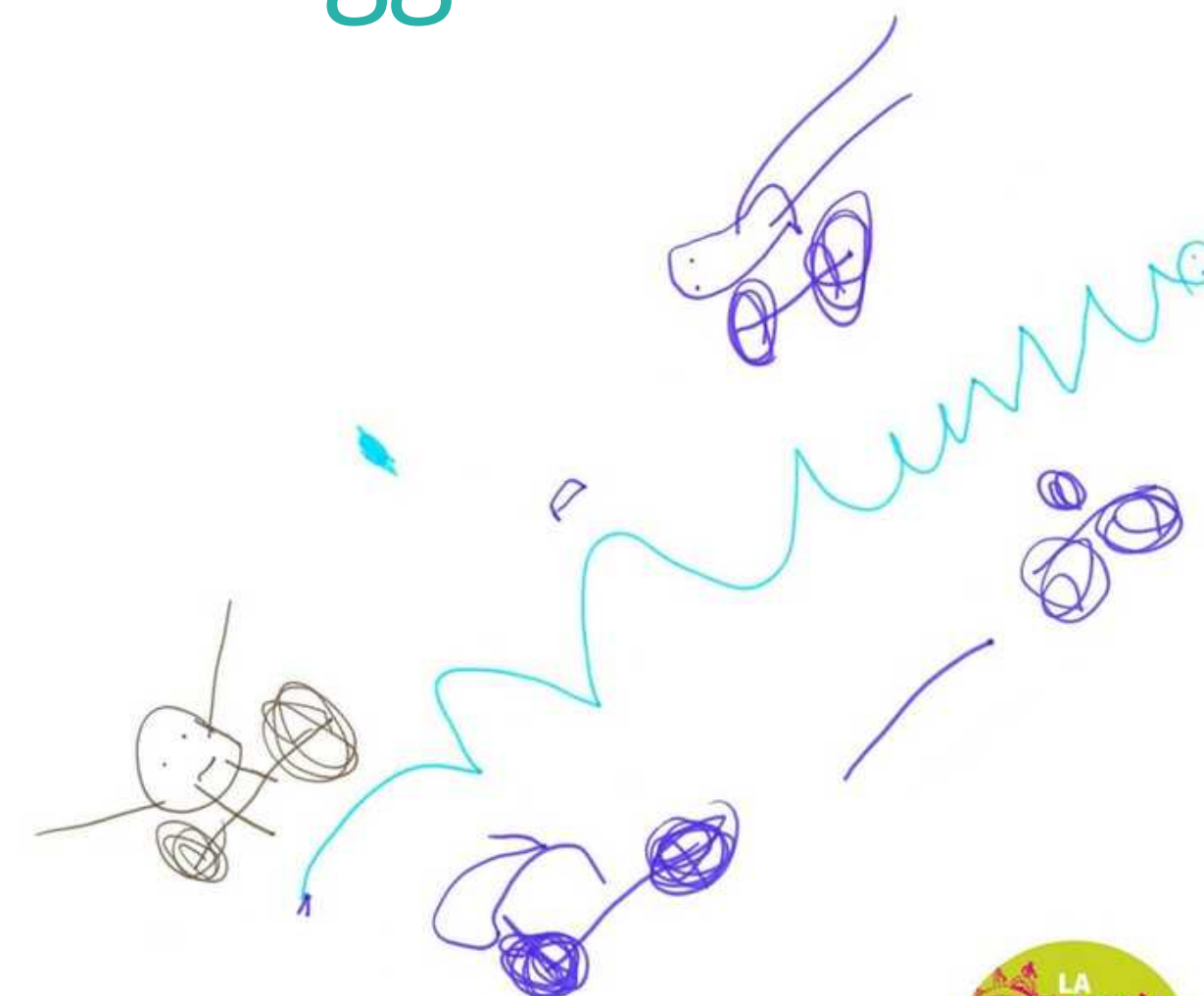
ABOUT

While large cities like Bologna, Barcelona, and Paris often capture international attention, small and medium-sized municipalities across Europe are demonstrating that child-friendly urban transformation is achievable at any scale - often with greater agility and stronger community connection.

Reggio Emilia, Italy, exemplifies this through its "Strade Fantastiche" (Fantastic Streets) project, launched in 2024 to create safe, livable home-to-school routes. Building on the city's world-renowned Reggio Emilia Approach to early childhood education - which emphasises children as competent, curious learners whose voices shape their educational environments - Reggio Emilia aims to apply these same principles to urban space.

The Reggio Children organisation has long pioneered participatory methods that recognise children as active citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to decisions affecting their lives. "Strade Fantastiche" extends this philosophy from the classroom to the street, engaging children directly in reimagining their daily journeys to school as safe, joyful, and stimulating experiences rather than risks to be managed.

This demonstrates that smaller cities often possess advantages for child-friendly transformation: stronger community networks, more direct relationships between citizens and local government, greater flexibility to experiment, and deep cultural traditions (like Reggio's educational philosophy) that can be mobilised for urban innovation. The challenge isn't scale - it's political will and genuine commitment to centring children's needs.



*Se c'è la strada
non sei più perso*

<https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/rc/education/>



Case Study

Safe routes to school - Pune, India

CONTEXT

Pune is one of India's fastest-growing cities, facing intense traffic, air pollution, road safety challenges, and limited walkability - conditions that disproportionately affect children.

Recognising that urban environments designed around cars undermine children's wellbeing, Pune joined the Urban95 initiative, supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, to place children's needs at the heart of urban planning and mobility.



Illustration generated with AI, inspired by a photo available here:
<https://vanleerfoundation.org/news/pune-launches-phase-ii-of-urban95/>

Case Study

Safe routes to school - Pune, India

FASE 1

Understanding Children's Everyday Journeys

The city focused on children's daily routes between home, school, and neighbourhood services. These routes were analysed through observations, community engagement, and child-centred design principles, highlighting unsafe crossings, missing sidewalks, excessive traffic speeds, and a lack of shade or resting spaces.

FASE 2

Redesigning Safe Routes to School

Interventions included wider and continuous sidewalks, safer pedestrian crossings, traffic calming measures, improved signage, and shaded areas. The aim was not only to improve safety but also to make walking a positive and dignified experience for children and caregivers.

FASE 3

Integrating Child-Centred Design into Urban Management

Safe Routes to School became part of a broader strategy to embed child-centred thinking into street design, public space management, and service delivery. By focusing on the youngest users, Pune improved accessibility and safety for all pedestrians.

Case Study

Safe routes to school - Pune, India

IMPACT

- Safer and more walkable routes for children and caregivers
- Increased active mobility and reduced reliance on private vehicles
- Improved public health and everyday wellbeing
- Strong alignment between child-friendly design and climate goals

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Clear focus on everyday life rather than flagship projects
- Viewing children as indicators of urban quality
- Integration of mobility, health, and public space planning
- Scalable interventions adaptable to other dense urban contexts



Case Study

Co-designing streets for kids - Recife, Brazil

CONTEXT

Recife, a coastal city in northeastern Brazil with 1.6 million inhabitants, faces complex urban challenges common to rapidly growing cities in the Global South: informal settlements, inadequate infrastructure, high traffic danger, flooding vulnerability due to climate change, and profound social inequalities.

Children from low-income neighbourhoods bear the highest burden - navigating dangerous streets, lacking safe play spaces, and experiencing the worst impacts of urban heat and flooding.

THE CHALLENGE

Recife recognised that addressing children's safety and mobility requires integrated approaches linking traffic calming, climate resilience, social equity, and community participation. Traditional infrastructure investments often bypassed the neighbourhoods where children faced the greatest risk.

THE APPROACH

Working with the Global Designing Cities Initiative (GDCI), Recife developed comprehensive street redesigns in priority neighbourhoods identified through data analysis of child pedestrian injuries, school locations, and climate vulnerability.



Case Study

Co-designing streets for kids - Recife, Brazil

FASE 1

Evidence-Based Prioritisation

- Mapped child pedestrian casualties to identify high-risk corridors
- Overlaid data on school locations, informal settlements, and flood-prone areas
- Prioritised streets serving multiple vulnerable populations

FASE 2

Integrated Design: Streets were redesigned to tackle multiple challenges at once

- Safety: Raised crossings, extended curbs, traffic calming measures, and reducing vehicle speeds
- Climate resilience: Permeable surfaces, bioswales, and green infrastructure manage stormwater while reducing urban heat
- Play and mobility: Widened sidewalks with play elements, safe cycling facilities, and shade trees
- Community space: Seating, lighting, public art, transforming streets into social infrastructure

FASE 3

Community Co-Design

- Design workshops with students from nearby schools
- Walking audits led by children and caregivers, identifying specific hazards and opportunities
- Temporary paint and planters tested design concepts before permanent construction
- Community members participated in implementation (planting, painting murals)

FASE 4

Implementation and Expansion

Pilot streets demonstrated measurable impact:

- reduced vehicle speeds,
- increased walking and cycling,
- improved perceptions of safety, and
- greater community use of street space.

Success built political support for expanding the approach citywide

Case Study

Co-designing streets for kids - Recife, Brazil

IMPACT

- Dramatic reduction in vehicle speeds on redesigned streets
- Increased independent mobility for children
- Improved stormwater management, reducing flood risk
- Streets transformed from barriers into community assets
- Model influencing national street design guidelines in Brazil

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Data-driven prioritization ensuring resources reached highest-need areas
- Integrated design addressing safety, climate, and equity simultaneously
- Community participation ensuring designs served local needs
- Quick, visible improvements building momentum for systemic change
- Documentation enabling replication in other Brazilian cities



NEARLY A QUARTER OF
RECIFE'S MUNICIPAL SCHOOLS

<https://globaldesigningcities.org/update/designing-safe-and-resilient-streets-in-recife/>

2. Reclaiming Playful Public Spaces

ABOUT

This group of case studies shows how streets can be temporarily or permanently reclaimed from car dominance to become places for play, social life, and active mobility.

From grassroots initiatives to city-led transformations, these examples demonstrate how reducing traffic can unlock streets' potential as inclusive public spaces. Children act as key indicators of success: when streets work for them, they work for everyone.

On the following pages, we will show you some examples from the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy, but if you are curious to learn more about experiences of this kind, you can explore [this valuable atlas with a collection of experiments and school streets projects around Europe collected by Clean Cities](#).



Illustration generated with AI, inspired by a photo available here
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/parking-days-roadside-attraction-78730864/>

Case Study

Moms reclaiming space for their kids - Bristol, UK

CONTEXT

In 2009, two mothers in Bristol, frustrated by their children's lack of outdoor play opportunities, approached their local council with a simple idea: close their street to through-traffic for a few hours so children could play.



<https://citychangers.org/mums-for-lungs/>



MOMS FOR LUNGS
THE CAMPAIGN FOR SCHOOL STREETS

Case Study

Moms reclaiming space for their kids - Bristol, UK

FASE 1

Grassroots Initiative

The first play street used basic equipment - traffic cones and homemade signs. The response was overwhelming.

Children poured out of houses, neighbors met each other for the first time, and community bonds strengthened instantly.



FASE 2

Movement Building

The parents founded "Playing Out," a community interest company to support other residents. They developed:

- A simple application process for street closure permits
- Template letters for residents to inform neighbors
- Safety guidelines and insurance information
- A toolkit sharing their experience and lessons learned

Within two years, more than 40 streets in Bristol were regularly holding play streets.

FASE 3

Policy Change

Playing Out worked with Bristol City Council to streamline and institutionalize the process. Policy changes included:

- Simplified permit applications
- Reduced or waived fees for play street permits
- Official recognition of play streets in city policy
- Training for council staff on processing applications

Case Study

Moms reclaiming space for their kids - Bristol, UK

IMPACT

The model has since spread to hundreds of communities across the UK and internationally, with Playing Out providing resources, training, and advocacy support.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Started small and simple
- Community-led, not imposed top-down
- Provided practical support for replication
- Worked to change systems, not just individual instances
- Documented benefits to build support



<https://citychangers.org/mums-for-lungs/>



Case Study

A plan for a Playable City - Barcelona, Spain

CONTEXT

Barcelona has implemented over 200 school streets - "[Protegim les Escoles](#)" - as part of its [broader strategy](#) to reclaim public space from cars, create child-friendly neighbourhoods and playable streets, and prepare for climate resilience through urban shelters. In fact, this school streets program emerged within a broader urban transformation strategy that originates from the pioneering Superblocks ([Superilles](#)) initiative.

Launched in 2016, Superblocks restructured traffic flow to prioritise pedestrians, cyclists, and public space over cars. By dramatically reducing through-traffic and vehicle speeds, these interventions create calmer, greener, safer environments where children can move and play more freely. The school streets were built on this momentum, applying Superblock principles specifically to the critical spaces around schools. This strategic alignment demonstrates how child-centred interventions can both benefit from and reinforce citywide mobility transformation.



Illustration generated with AI, inspired by a photo available here:
<https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/ecologiaurbana/ca/que-fem-i-per-que/urbanisme-per-als-barris/protegim-escoles>

Case Study

A plan for a Playable City - Barcelona, Spain

STEP 1

Permanent infrastructure changes

- Raised platforms creating continuous pedestrian zones
- Bollards preventing vehicle access during school hours
- Green infrastructure (trees, planters)
- Play elements integrated into street design
- Seating for caregivers and community members



STEP 2

Participatory design process

- Schools identified as priorities based on air quality, traffic danger, lack of play space
- Design workshops with students, teachers, parents
- Children's drawings and ideas incorporated into final designs
- Temporary pilots tested before permanent investment

Timing: Streets closed to traffic 30 minutes before and after school, creating extended safe zones.

STEP 3

Beyond safety, creating playable spaces

- Hopscotch and games painted on street surface
- Basketball hoops and sports markings
- Seating and shade
- Greenery and natural elements



Case Study

A plan for a Playable City - Barcelona, Spain

IMPACT

- Significant reduction in air pollution during school hours
- Increased walking and cycling to school
- More children playing independently near home
- Stronger school-community connections
- Model being replicated across Spain and beyond

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Political commitment with dedicated budget
- Permanent infrastructure, not just signs
- Integration with broader mobility strategy
- Child participation in design
- Focus on creating quality



POBLENOU, SUPERBLOCKS
BARCELONA, SPAIN



CARRER DE FÍGOLS
BARCELONA, SPAIN



PASSEIG DE SANT JOAN
BARCELONA, SPAIN

<https://fieldnotesofarchitecture.wordpress.com/2020/02/21/precedent-poblenou-superblock-barcelona/>
<https://ellipse.prbb.org/a-dna-methylation-catalogue-to-help-understand-the-biology-of-environmental-exposures-in-children/>
<https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/premsa/2025/04/27/obre-la-nova-area-de-joc-infantil-del-passeig-de-sant-joan/>

Case Study

'Piazze Aperte, back to the people' - Milan, Italy

CONTEXT

The "[Piazze Aperte](#)" (Open Squares) program in Milan is an innovative approach to tactical urbanism and public space regeneration, promoted by the City Council and the Global Designing Cities Initiative. It was created to give people, rather than cars, urban areas where they can meet, walk, play, and experience the city daily - objectives consistent with the Real Play Coalition's principles of considering play as a key element of urban design. Since 2018, the project has already transformed numerous squares in city neighbourhoods, with furnishings, pedestrianisation, and temporary activations that have generated more connected communities and spaces accessible to all.

Subsequently, with the call for proposals 'Piazze Aperte per ogni scuola' (Open Squares for Every School), attention was focused on areas near schools, gathering dozens of proposals from citizens, associations, and institutions to promote safety, accessibility, and active participation. Today, Milan has dozens of open squares, many of which have been transformed into greener, more social, and safer spaces, making the city more livable for children, adults, and the elderly. This process demonstrates how participatory regeneration interventions can translate into concrete benefits for active mobility, socialisation, and urban quality. Also, in 2021, Milan piloted the Playful Cities Toolkit as part of the Real Play Coalition's work to identify barriers to play and design interventions that increase play opportunities.



<https://cities-today.com/the-tactical-urbanism-transforming-milans-streets/>

Case Study

'Piazze Aperte, back to the people' - Milan, Italy

FASE 1

Play Assessment (2020-2021)

Comprehensive assessment using the Urban Play Framework across three dimensions

Desktop study:

- Demographic analysis
- Mapping of existing play facilities, schools, and public spaces
- Review of policies and plans
- Identification of key stakeholders

Field study:

- Systematic neighbourhood observations
- Stakeholder interviews with officials, administrators, parents
- Child engagement through workshops, drawing, and photo contests
- Community surveys (500+ responses)
- Time-lapse documentation of public space use

Key findings:

- Cars dominated public space, limiting safe play areas
- Play facilities concentrated in certain areas, leaving gaps
- Safety fears restricted children's independent mobility
- School yards offered limited play value
- Changing social norms around unsupervised outdoor play
- COVID-19 highlighted the critical importance of nearby play opportunities

FASE 2

Prioritisation (2021): Using the Play Prioritisation Tool, stakeholders identified priority interventions

1. Creating safe play streets in residential neighbourhoods
2. Improving school yard play value and accessibility
3. Enhancing neighbourhood public spaces with play elements
4. Increasing awareness of the importance
5. Influencing municipal policy to prioritise child-friendly planning



Case Study

'Piazze Aperte, back to the people' - Milan, Italy

FASE 3

Play Assessment (2020-2021): Comprehensive assessment using the Urban Play Framework across three dimensions

Play Streets Program:

- Identified pilot streets in underserved neighbourhoods
- Designed a community-led model for regular events
- Developed support materials and training

Playful Public Space Guidelines:

- Drafted guidelines for incorporating play into all public space projects
- Identified retrofit opportunities
- Developed a toolkit of low-cost play interventions

School Yard Transformation:

- Conducted design workshops with students, teachers, and parents
- Developed designs incorporating natural elements and diverse play
- Planned implementation as demonstration projects

FASE 4

Prototyping and Pilots (2021-2022)

Tactical interventions:

1. Six neighbourhoods hosted monthly play streets with municipal support
2. Temporary play elements installed in underused public spaces
3. Two school yards transformed with green, natural play elements
4. Documentation of increased play diversity and duration

FASE 5

Policy Influence (2022-present)

Municipal commitments:

- Formal Play-Friendly Streets program with streamlined permits
- Multi-year School Naturalisation Program citywide
- Child-Friendly Design Standards for all public spaces
- Playful Mobility integration into pedestrian/cycling infrastructure
- Requirements for child engagement in planning processes

Case Study

'Piazze Aperte, back to the people' - Milan, Italy

IMPACT

Using the Play Impact Tool, preliminary findings show:

- Increased children's outdoor play in pilot neighbourhoods
- Greater diversity of play activities observed
- Improved parent perceptions of neighbourhood safety
- Enhanced community social connections
- Positive shifts in municipal prioritisation

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Evidence-based approach with systematic assessment
- Urban Play Framework structured understanding and action
- Strategic partnerships between international organisations, municipalities, and the community
- Pilot-and-scale model
- Multiple intervention levels addressing all scales
- Policy integration for systemic change



<https://cooperativecity.org/reclaiming-public-space-through-tactical-urbanism-milans-piazze-aperite/>

3. Participatory Budgeting

ABOUT

Participatory budgeting empowers citizens to directly decide how public resources are allocated, turning democracy into a lived, hands-on experience. When children and families are involved, participatory budgeting becomes a powerful tool to surface everyday needs often overlooked by traditional planning.

These processes help build civic awareness, shared responsibility, and more equitable urban outcomes.



Case Study

Kids empowered to decide for their playgrounds - Paris, France

CONTEXT

Paris's participatory budgeting program, one of Europe's largest, began in 2014. Over 100 million euros were allocated through resident voting between 2014-2020. A significant portion focused on improving schools and playgrounds.

CHALLENGE

Many Parisian school playgrounds were traditional asphalt yards offering limited play value and no greenery. The city wanted to transform these spaces but recognized parents, teachers, and children should determine priorities and design.

UN WEEKEND
PARTICIPATIF !
& "ATELIER
"JARDINIÈRE"
PARIS



Photos from: <https://sites.google.com/caue75.fr/cours-oasis-keller/accueil>

Case Study

Kids empowered to decide for their playgrounds - Paris, France

FASE 1

Open Ideation

Any Parisian resident can submit project proposals through online platforms, paper forms, or workshops held in all districts. For playground projects, many proposals came from parent associations, teachers, and children themselves.

FASE 2

Feasibility Assessment

Municipal technical teams assess proposals for feasibility, cost, and regulatory compliance. Rather than simply rejecting infeasible proposals, technical teams work with proposers to adapt ideas.

FASE 3

Community Voting

Refined proposals are presented to residents for voting through online platforms, paper ballots, mobile voting stations, and special voting sessions at schools. Residents as young as 9 can vote.

FASE 4

Implementation

Winning projects are implemented with design workshops involving students, parents, and teachers. Students participate in selecting colours, themes, and plant species.

IMPACT

- Over 60 schoolyards transformed (2014-2020)
- Significant increase in green space and play value
- High resident satisfaction with projects
- Increased civic engagement, especially among previously less-involved demographics
- Model replicated in other French cities

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Real resources genuinely allocated based on resident decisions
- Youth inclusion with votes weighted meaningfully
- Technical support helping make ideas feasible
- Transparency about process and implementation
- Celebration and recognition of civic participation

Case Study

Kids empowered to decide for their playgrounds - Paris, France

"Cours Oasis" (Oasis Schoolyards)

Case Study example:

Multiple proposals for greening schoolyards led to this program transforming school playgrounds into green, climate-resilient spaces that are also open to neighbourhoods during non-school hours.

Co-design involved

- Students voting on play equipment priorities
- Teachers integrating learning goals (gardening, ecology)
- Neighbours weighing in on community access arrangements
- Climate experts advising on heat island mitigation



<https://www.paris.fr/pages/les-cours-oasis-7389>



4. A holistic approach to the neighbourhood

ABOUT

Like the Barcelona and Bologna examples narrated above, and many other cities around the world, Tirana went beyond isolated interventions to pursue long-term, citywide transformations centred on people rather than cars.

Systemic approaches can simultaneously reshape mobility, public space, and governance, and children's well-being becomes both a guiding principle and a measurable outcome of broader urban change.

At the neighbourhood level, Tirana sought to address social problems that disproportionately affect children, women, and caregivers, and found in targeted spatial interventions a powerful instrument to do so. Key steps included expanding pedestrian areas, developing a cycling network, and introducing electric public transport, all aimed at shifting residents away from car dependency towards cleaner, healthier modes of movement.

These efforts demonstrate how a city can use urban transformation as a tool for social equity and well-being, not only for efficiency.



Illustration generated with AI, inspired by a photo available here: <https://rethinkingchildhood.com/2019/06/25/tirana-city-child-friendly-revolution-urban-planning/>

Case Study

Kids shape their neighbourhood - Tirana, Albania

CONTEXT

In the 2000's, Tirana experienced rapid urbanisation with informal development creating neighbourhoods with inadequate infrastructure and public space.

Many neighbourhoods lack basic facilities for children.

CHALLENGE

The municipality recognised that children's needs were systematically overlooked in planning processes and wanted to pilot a comprehensive child-friendly neighbourhood planning approach.



Illustration generated with AI, inspired by a photo available here: <https://rethinkingchildhood.com/2019/06/25/tirana-city-child-friendly-revolution-urban-planning/>

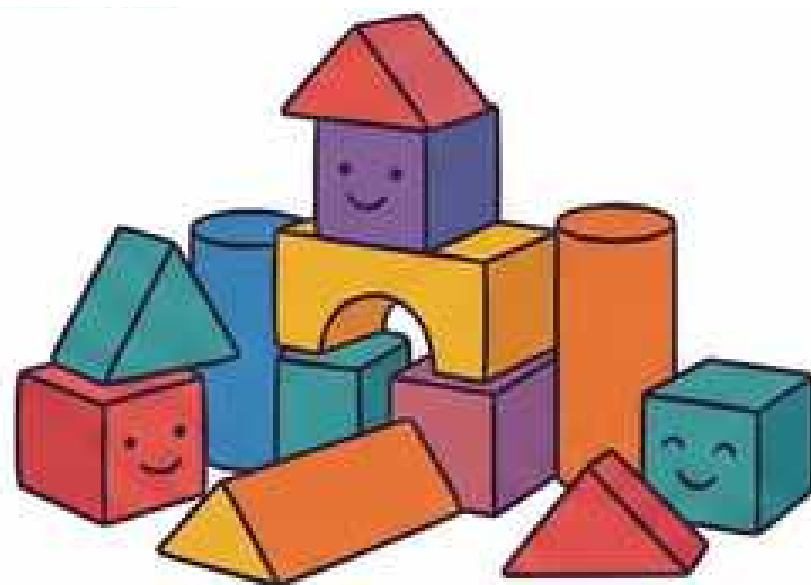
Case Study

Kids shape their neighbourhood - Tirana, Albania

FASE 1

Partnership Building (2011)

The municipality partnered with UNICEF Albania and local NGOs to pilot the approach in "Komuna e Parisit" (Paris Commune), a neighbourhood with significant needs.



FASE 2

Understanding Children's Experiences (2019-2020)

Methods with children (ages 6-14):

- Drawing workshops: "Draw your neighbourhood" and "Draw your dream neighbourhood."
- Photography projects documenting favourite places and places needing improvement
- Guided walks where children led adults on tours
- Safety mapping with emoji stickers
- Model building using recyclables

Methods with caregivers:

- Focus groups about children's daily experiences
- Surveys on access to services and perceived barriers
- Mapping exercises showing where children are and aren't allowed to go independently

Key findings:

- Dangerous traffic and lack of safe crossings severely limited independent mobility
- No adequate playgrounds; children played in streets and parking lots
- Air pollution, lack of greenery, inadequate waste management
- School infrastructure needed significant improvement
- Children and families lacked community gathering spaces
- Children felt unheard in community decisions

Case Study

Kids shape their neighbourhood - Tirana, Albania

FASE 3

Collaborative Visioning (2020)

Multiple community workshops brought together children, parents, teachers, local business owners, and elderly residents. Activities included sharing findings, brainstorming solutions, and prioritising interventions through voting (children's votes were weighted equally).

Priority areas identified:

1. Safe routes to schools
2. Quality public playgrounds
3. Green space development
4. Traffic calming and pedestrian safety
5. School facility improvements
6. Community gathering spaces

FASE 4

Prototyping and Quick Wins (2020-2021)

Tactical urbanism projects:

- Temporary play street on Saturdays
- Pop-up playground using donated materials
- Colourful crosswalks painted by children and volunteers
- Small unused lot transformed into a pocket park

FASE 5

Implementation of Permanent Improvements (2021-present)

Major interventions:

- Two new public playgrounds designed through co-creation with children
- Safe Routes to School program with traffic calming and improved crossings
- School yard improvements with green natural play elements
- Community plaza created from an underused parking area.

FASE 6

Institutionalisation (2022-present)

Policy changes:

- Child Impact Assessments required for major development projects
- Municipal guidelines for child-friendly urban design
- Participatory planning protocols, including child engagement methods
- Dedicated budget line for child-friendly infrastructure

Case Study

Kids shape their neighbourhood - Tirana, Albania

IMPACT

- Significantly improved play and public space access
- Increased children's independent mobility and outdoor play
- Enhanced community social cohesion
- Model established for the Albanian context
- Influenced national policy discussions

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Child-centred approach throughout
- Multiple engagement methods ensuring all children could participate
- Quick wins alongside long-term change
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Policy institutionalisation ensuring lasting change



<https://news.bahai.org/community-news/youth-conferences/tirana.html>



WORKSHOP WITH KIDS
TIRANA, ALBANIA

Cross-cutting: Key Takeaways

The case studies presented in this section illustrate that child-friendly urban transformation can take many forms, scales, and timelines - yet they all share a common foundation: placing children's everyday experiences at the centre of urban decision-making and planning leads to cities that are safer, fairer, and more liveable for everyone.

From temporary street reclamation initiatives to safe routes to school, from participatory budgeting processes to citywide transformations, these examples show how collaborative urban planning can operate as both a cultural shift and a practical methodology. Temporary interventions create space for experimentation and learning; safe mobility projects embed child-centred design into daily routines; participatory governance tools democratise decision-making and share power to decide on commons; and comprehensive approaches align policies, infrastructure, and sustainability over the long term.

Across all four clusters, children emerge not as passive beneficiaries but as powerful indicators of urban quality and catalysts for change. When streets are safe enough for children to walk and play, when routes to school are dignified and enjoyable, when families, caregivers, and educators can shape how public resources are spent, and when cities commit to systemic, human-centred transformation, urban environments become more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable, and more playful.

Ultimately, these case studies reinforce a central message of this module: collaborative urban planning is not about adding isolated child-friendly elements, but about rethinking how cities are designed, governed, and experienced, with children leading the way way - if we have enough courage and resources - toward better cities for all generations.



CONCLUSION: From Learning to Action

Patterns across Theory, Practice, and Experience

This module has taken you on a journey through three interconnected dimensions of collaborative urban planning for child-friendly cities: the theoretical foundations that explain why this work matters, the practical methods that show how to do it, and the real-world examples that prove it works.

These concepts we went through are not abstract academic speculations. They're analytical tools that reveal uncomfortable truths: that most planning systematically excludes children, that participation is often performance, that cities are designed for cars and commerce rather than care and play. But they're also liberating tools: they give communities vocabulary to name what's wrong and frameworks to imagine what's possible.

From methods, we learned that listening must be embodied, creative, and sustained. Walkshops taught us that understanding a neighbourhood requires walking it at children's pace, pausing where they pause, noticing what they notice. The reverse periscope showed us that empathy requires more than imagination: it requires literally seeing the world from children's eye level, experiencing the visual monotony, blocked sightlines, and intimidating scale they navigate daily.

The methods displayed above aren't just techniques, but expressions of values. When you build reverse periscopes together, facilitate participatory mapping sessions, or follow children on neighbourhood tours, you're enacting a different kind of planning: one that recognises multiple forms of expertise, that values embodied knowledge alongside technical data, that treats participation as creative collaboration rather than information extraction.

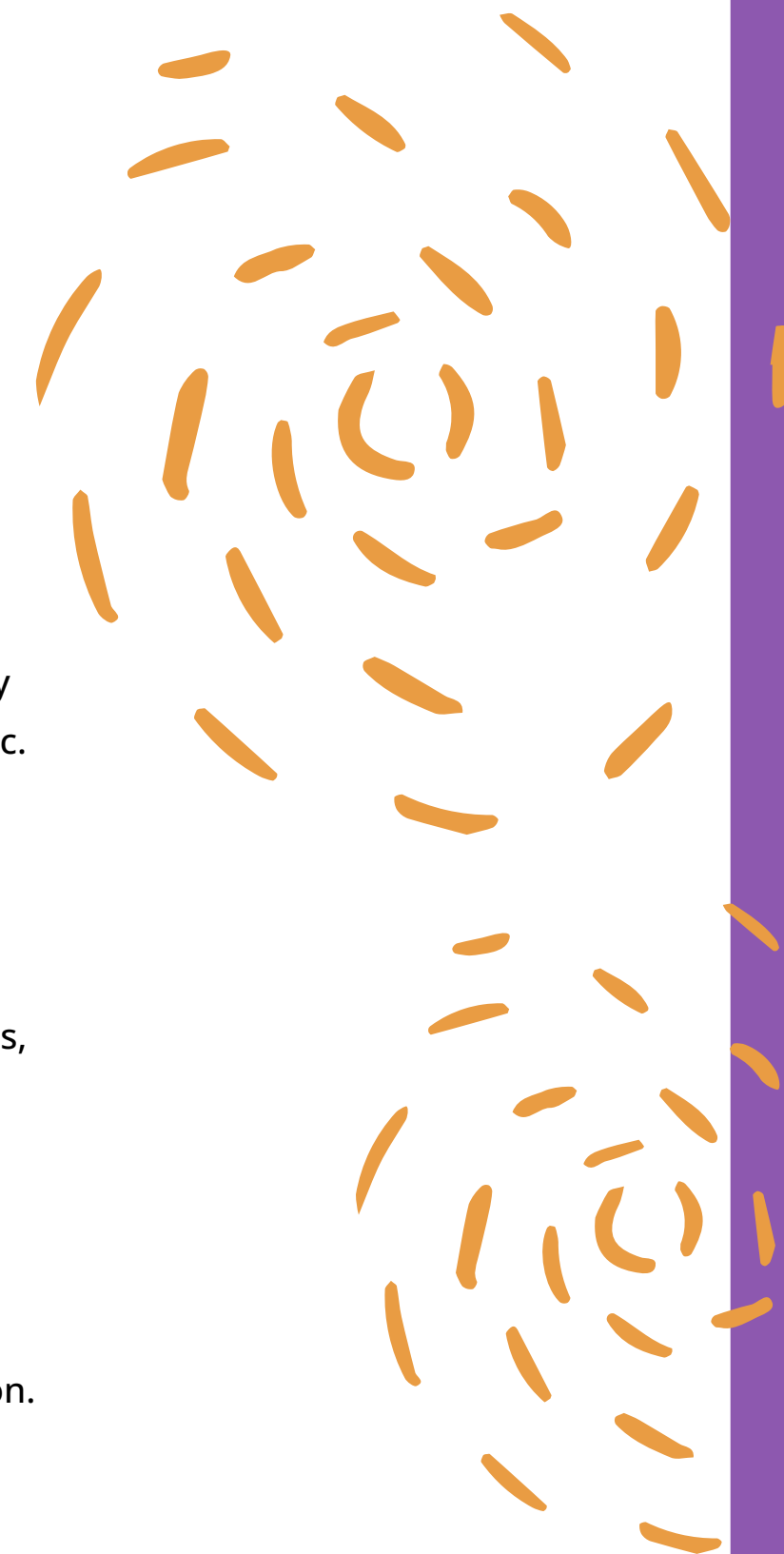
From case studies, we learned what's possible when theory and methods meet political will. Bristol's Playing Out movement showed us that transformation can start with two mothers and traffic cones - that grassroots action, when supported by policy change, can become a global movement. Barcelona's 200+ school streets demonstrated that permanent infrastructure investment is possible when temporary pilots build evidence and political momentum; Paris's participatory budgeting proved that genuine power-sharing - children voting on millions of euros! - generates solutions that actually serve communities because communities designed them; Tirana's transformation revealed that even cities facing severe resource constraints can prioritize children when politics commits to create better neighbourhoods; and Milan's systematic application of a human-centered lens to public space, evidence-based assessment, strategic pilots, and policy integration can move cities from isolated projects to policy innovation and finally to systemic change.

CONCLUSION: From Learning to Action

Patterns across Theory, Practice, and Experience

Across these diverse contexts - different political systems, resource levels, cultural norms, infrastructure conditions - certain patterns emerged consistently:

- Listening comes first, always. Not superficial surveys but deep engagement through multiple methods accessible to diverse participants.
- The time invested in understanding community experiences isn't a delay on a project or a process, but the foundation that makes everything else work.
- Accessibility determines who participates, and therefore whose city gets built. When engagement methods are creative and inclusive, participation becomes possible for those typically excluded, and the solutions that emerge are more equitable by design.
- Trust is built through visible action, not promises. Tactical interventions demonstrate that participation leads to real change, creating momentum for larger transformations.
- Power-sharing is the difference between transformation and tokenism. When community input shapes fundamental decisions - priorities, budgets, core directions - not just aesthetic details, genuine co-creation becomes possible.
- Building on existing strengths multiplies impact.
- Proximity-based approaches that recognise and leverage community networks create sustainable solutions integrated into the social fabric.
- Ownership ensures longevity.
- Projects co-created with communities are defended, programmed, adapted, and cared for in ways imposed projects never are.
- Documentation creates evidence and enables movement-building.
- Careful evaluation supports continued investment, convinces sceptics, and contributes to global knowledge.
- Policy change outlasts individual projects.
- Patience and persistence are non-negotiable.
- Cultural shifts take time; quick wins build momentum, but systemic change requires sustained commitment.
- Context demands adaptation, not replication, but principle translation.



What Comes Next Continuing the Journey

The next module focuses on placemaking through the Urban Foxes methodology, diving deeper into how communities can transform everyday spaces into playable, child-friendly environments using creative, low-cost interventions.

You will explore tactical approaches to activating streets, schoolyards, and neighborhoods, learning from the Portuguese urban pilot in Amarante where these principles were tested and refined in practice.

Together, these modules equip you to move from understanding why child-friendly collaborative planning matters to how you can implement it in your own context, at whatever scale you can influence - a single street, a schoolyard, a neighborhood, or an entire city.



RESOURCES & REFERENCES

Core Toolkits and Frameworks

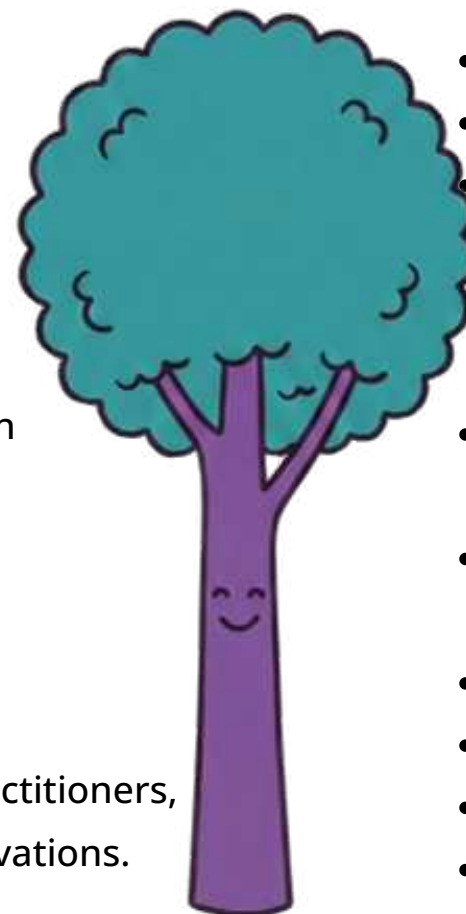
- [Guide to creating Urban Public Spaces for Children \(2025\)](#) WHO, UNICEF, UN-HABITAT
- [How to Engage Kids in Street Design: Designing Streets for Kids by Kids \(2024\)](#) Global Designing Cities Initiative
- [Designing Streets for Kids \(2020\)](#) Global Designing Cities Initiative
- [How Do Kids Experience Streets? The Reverse Periscope Companion Guide](#): Global Designing Cities Initiative
- [How to Evaluate Street Transformations Near Schools](#): Global Designing Cities Initiative
- [Playful Cities Toolkit \(2021\)](#) Real Play Coalition (LEGO Foundation, Arup, UNICEF, IKEA, National Geographic)

Policy and Rights Frameworks

- [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(1989\)](#) Foundational international treaty establishing children's rights, including Article 31 (right to play) and 12 (right to be heard).
- [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#). The 17 SDGs provide a framework for sustainable development, with Goals 3, 4, 10, 11, and 16 particularly relevant to child-friendly cities.
- [New European Bauhaus Initiative](#) emphasising beauty, sustainability, and inclusion in urban development.

Digital Tools and Platforms

- [Maptionnaire](#) Map-based community surveys and engagement
- [Participedia](#): A global network and crowdsourcing platform for researchers, educators, practitioners, policymakers, activists, and anyone interested in public participation and democratic innovations.



Research and Evidence

- [Cities for and with Children and Youth: Ideas to Inspire Action \(2022\)](#) Anupama Nallari, Global Alliance – Cities4Children Research Series
- [Improving Road Safety for Urban Children \(2023\)](#) Global Alliance – Cities4Children
- [The Value of Play Report \(2018\)](#) Real Play Coalition
- [Nature-Based Play: Fostering Children's Wellbeing and Climate Resilience](#) Arup & Real Play Coalition
- [Cities Alive: Designing for Urban Childhoods \(2017\)](#) Arup
- [Access for All: Babies and Toddlers \(2022\)](#) ITDP & Bernard van Leer Foundation
- [World Urbanisation Prospects: The 2018 Revision](#), United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019)
- [The Future of Cities – Opportunities, Challenges and the Way Forward](#), AA.VV., EUR 29752 EN, Publications Office: Luxembourg, 2019
- [Global Trends to 2030: Challenges and Choices for Europe](#) Florence Gaub, ESPAS 2019 Report
- [Reducing Child Deaths on European Roads](#), European Transport Safety Council, 2022
- [Road Traffic Injuries - Fact Sheet](#), World Health Organisation, 2023
- [Streets For Kids, Cities For All Report \(2025\)](#) Clean Cities Campaign
- [Air Pollution and Children's Health](#), European Environment Agency, 2023
- [The Play Gap: Hurting Children's Skills and Futures](#) World Economic Forum, 2019

RESOURCES & REFERENCES

Key Organizations and Networks

- [Real Play Coalition](#): a global coalition promoting children's right to play through urban design and advocacy.
- [Global Alliance – Cities4Children](#) Network supporting municipalities in creating child-friendly cities.
- [Global Designing Cities Initiative](#) Organization advancing people-centred street design worldwide.
- [Bernard van Leer Foundation](#) & [Urban95 Initiative](#) Foundation. Organisation focusing on early childhood development in urban contexts.
- [UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative](#) Global program supporting over 900 cities in becoming child-friendly.
- [Playing Out \(UK\)](#) OrganisationCities: International organisationplay streets with extensive resources.
- [A Playful City](#) Placemaking organisation
- [8-80 Cities](#)International organization promoting cities for all ages and abilities



Participatory Methods Resources

- [People Powered - Global Hub for Participatory Democracy](#).
- [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\)](#).
- [Project for Public Spaces](#)
- [Participatory Budgeting Project](#)
- [URBACT Toolbox](#)
- [New European Bauhaus Toolbox](#)
- [Tactical Urbanism Guide](#)

Case Study Specific Resources

- [Playing Out - Bristol](#) Official website with resources, webinars, toolkits, and guidance.
- [Protegitm les Escoles - Barcelona](#) Video and information on Barcelona's urban YouTube channel.
- [Paris Participatory Budget](#) URBACT Good Practice profile.
- [Reconstructing a City in the Interests of Its Children: Tirana, Albania 2015-2019](#) Bernard van Leer Foundation case study.
- [Bologna Città 30 Project](#) Official website and resources.



MODULE 2

PLACEMAKING TOOLS



"CITIES HAVE THE CAPABILITY OF PROVIDING SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY,
ONLY BECAUSE, AND ONLY WHEN, THEY ARE CREATED BY EVERYBODY."
JANE JACOBS, THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES, 1961

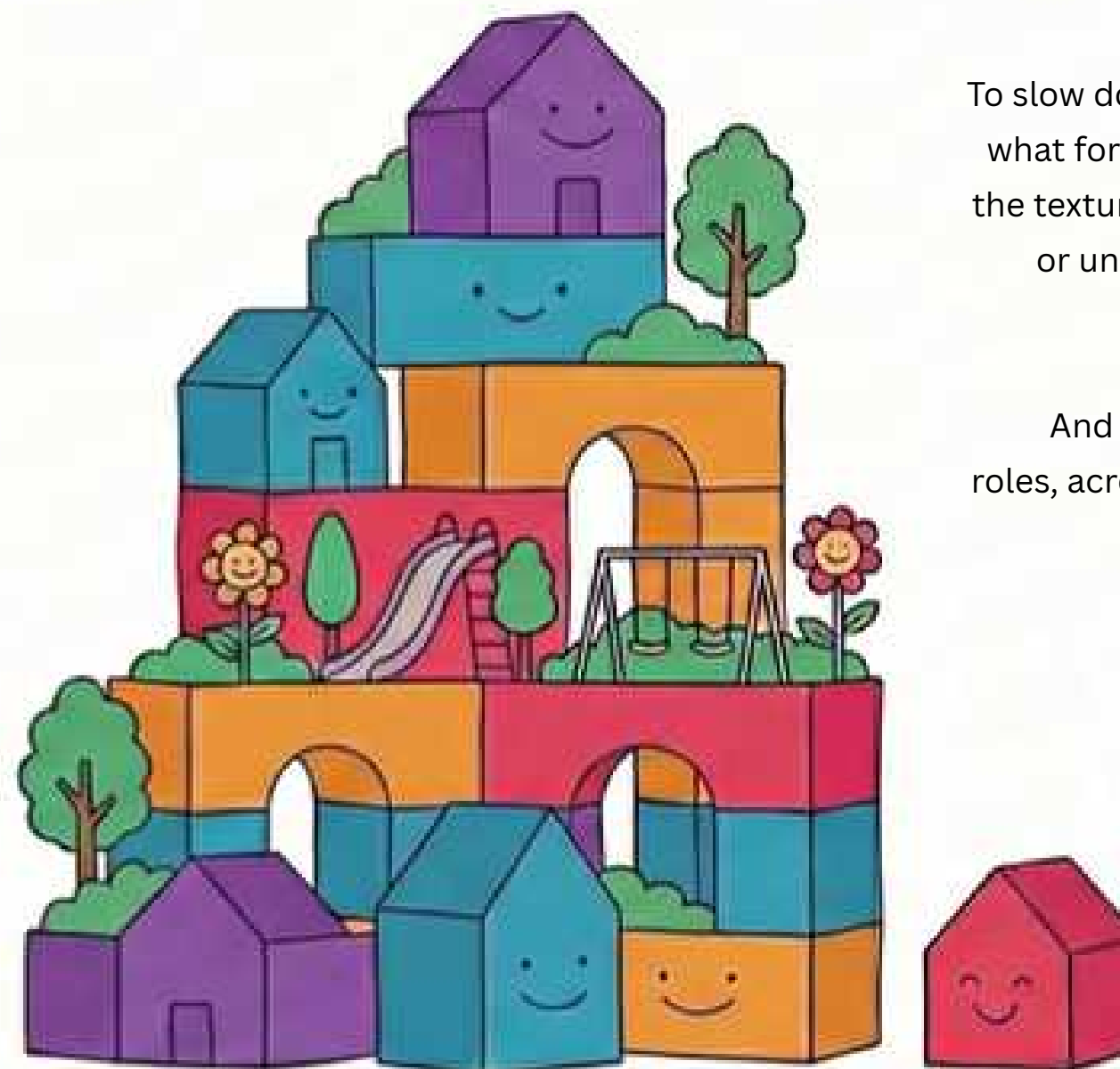
Placemaking tools

FOR READING, REIMAGINING AND RECLAIMING PUBLIC SPACE

Module 1 gave you the why and the what: why child-friendly collaborative planning matters, what frameworks and principles underpin it, and how a structured process from coalition building to evaluation can guide meaningful change. It drew on decades of research and practice to build a case that is both evidence-based and, we hope, persuasive.

This module is about something different. It is about the feel of a place and how to activate that feeling, not just to understand a place better, but, more importantly, to imagine better versions of it. And through that shared imagining, to reclaim it as something that truly belongs to everyone.

At the heart of this module is placemaking: a people-first approach to planning, designing, and managing public spaces so they are useful, welcoming, and meaningful to the communities that use them. It foregrounds people and activities over buildings, traffic flows, or aesthetics. It treats streets, parks, and squares as places with social and cultural life, not merely empty space between structures. The premise is deceptively simple: the people who use a space every day already know what works and what doesn't. The task is not to extract that knowledge through surveys or reports, but to unlock it through direct, embodied, often playful engagement with the built environment itself.



Where Module 1 asked you to think about urban space, Module 2 asks you to sense it.

To slow down, look more carefully, and attend to what formal planning processes routinely miss: the textures, the sounds, the feeling of welcome or unease that a street corner, a square, or a school entrance can produce.

And to do this together, across ages, across roles, across the divide between those who plan and those who inhabit.

From theory to practices

From UNDERSTANDING to FEELING the city

WHO

The development of the placemaking tools and methods in this module was led by Urban Foxes, a Brussels-based organisation working at the intersection of participatory urbanism, non-formal education, and inclusive city-making.

Over more than a decade of practice across European cities, Urban Foxes has built a distinctive approach: gamified, visual, and deliberately low-threshold, designed to make spatial analysis accessible and enjoyable for people with no professional background in urban planning.

WHAT

The challenge is a familiar one: how do you invite people, including those with no planning expertise, to engage with the spaces they use every day meaningfully? And how do you do this across generations, bringing children and adults into a genuinely shared process, rather than consulting one group about the other?

For PLAYFUL-ED, these tools were adapted with a specific focus: the intergenerational encounter between adults and children in urban space.

The tools here are not designed to be used on children or about children, but with them and, in some cases, by them. They invite adults, parents, teachers, and municipal officers, as well as planners, to step out of expert roles and into a shared process of observation and imagination alongside the children whose daily lives are shaped by the spaces in question.



From theory to practices

From UNDERSTANDING to FEELING the city

HOW

Within the PLAYFUL-ED consortium, these tools were shared, tested, and adapted during our second workshop, held in Brussels in May 2025 and hosted by Urban Foxes at their urban lab, TRACK. The workshop immersed consortium partners in a hands-on placemaking experience, moving through the city with diagnostic and creative tools that would later be adapted for the Amarante pilot.

Something important emerged from that process: the tools don't just help participants "read" a place. They change how participants relate to it. Adults who had walked past the same street furniture, the same crossing, the same neglected corner hundreds of times suddenly saw it differently. Structured play opened up conversations that more conventional consultation formats rarely produce.

This kind of productive displacement is one of the less visible but most valuable outcomes of transnational cooperation. When practitioners from different countries and professional cultures come together around a shared set of tools, they bring not only their expertise but also their assumptions: about how streets should look, how children should move through a city, what counts as safe, welcoming, or playful.

These assumptions are culturally shaped and often go unquestioned until someone from a different context points them out. The tools in this module carry the traces of those encounters. They were not simply transferred from one context to another. They were reshaped through cross-cultural dialogue that Erasmus+ cooperation, at its best, makes possible.



BRUSSELS WORKSHOP

Placemaking tools

What you will find in this module

The tools that follow are practical and adaptable. Each is designed to be used with minimal preparation and materials, in real urban settings, with mixed groups of participants. They can be combined, reordered, and modified to suit your context. We encourage this.

When communities adapt a tool to their own needs, they are already practising the kind of creative ownership that makes participatory processes meaningful. You will find tools for diagnosing public space: understanding its current condition, its strengths, and its problems.

Tools for reimagining it, using creative and speculative methods to envision what a place could become. And tools that bridge the two, helping groups move from observation to aspiration in a single, fluid activity.

None of these tools requires technical expertise. What they require is a genuine willingness to be curious, to be surprised, and to take seriously the perspectives of people, including very young people, who experience the city differently from you.

A Note on How This Module Was Built

Module 2 draws on the expertise and tools contributed by Urban Foxes to the PLAYFUL-ED consortium, enriched by the collective experience of the Brussels workshop and the Amarante pilot. The consortium developed the introduction and framing to ensure coherence with the toolkit as a whole, while the tools themselves reflect Urban Foxes' placemaking methodology as adapted for our specific focus on children, caregivers, and intergenerational urban learning.

The best toolkits are living documents: assembled, tested, and refined by the communities and partnerships that use them.

This module is no exception.

Now let's step outside and start *feeling* our living environments.

And acting on them!

Placemaking tools

A note for teachers, parents, and caregivers:
Adapting these tools for younger children

Urban Foxes originally developed the placemaking tools in this module for young people aged 14 and above.

Within PLAYFUL-ED, we adapted and tested some of them with primary school children aged 6 to 10 during our pilot in Amarante, Portugal.

They work.
But they work differently, and a few adjustments make all the difference.

Here is what we learned.

Simplify the language, not (necessarily) the task

There is a persistent tendency, when working with younger children, to simplify what we ask them to do.

This is usually a mistake. Children aged 6 to 10 are entirely capable of observing their environment, identifying what troubles them about it, and imagining something better.

What they need is not simpler thinking but clearer invitations. Instead of "What is missing for young people?", try "What would you like to do here that you can't do now?" Instead of "Rate accessibility from 1 to 10", use stickers with faces or coloured dots: green for "I like it", red for "I don't like it", blue for "I wish it were different."

The task stays demanding.
The language becomes accessible.

Shorten the timings

Where a tool suggests 60 to 120 minutes, plan for 30 to 45 minutes with children under 10. This is not because children lack stamina. It is because their engagement is intense and concentrated, and it deserves to end before it exhausts itself. Build in movement breaks.

And expect children to touch, run, climb, and test things physically. Adults often read this as a distraction. It isn't. It is one of the many ways that children explore and learn!

Placemaking tools

A note for teachers, parents, and caregivers:
Adapting these tools for younger children

Use drawing, stickers, and physical materials over written responses

The tools often ask for notes, written observations, or pitches. With younger children, replace these with drawing on maps, placing stickers, building with loose materials, or simply pointing and talking while an adult records. In Amarante, the children's sticker maps became some of the richest data the project produced, not despite their informality, but because of it.

Pair children with adults, but let children lead

The intergenerational dynamic is not a courtesy or a pedagogical nicety. It is the whole point. An adult can hold the clipboard, take photos, and write down what a child says. But the child should be the one deciding where to stop, what to look at, and what matters. The moment an adult begins to steer, interpret, or gently correct, the child's perspective starts to disappear. Resist that temptation.

Be prepared for literalness, and value it

When the fourth graders in Amarante placed a "no cars" sign in front of their school, they genuinely expected it to work. It would be easy to smile at this. It would also be wrong. What looks like naivety is in fact something more valuable: a direct, unmediated relationship with public space that most adults have long since learned to abandon. Children have not yet been taught that the city is someone else's business. When a child says, "There should be a tree here", they mean exactly that. The least we can do is take it seriously.

Adapt group sizes downward

Where tools suggest groups of up to 25, work with groups of 8 to 12 children accompanied by 2 to 3 adults. Smaller groups are not just safer on busy streets. They are better. Every child gets to contribute. Every observation gets heard. The quality of what emerges is higher precisely because the group is smaller.

Placemaking tools

A note for teachers, parents, and caregivers:
Adapting these tools for younger children

Add a "show and tell" moment

Children want their observations to be seen and valued by the adults in their lives. This is not sentimentality. It is a basic condition of meaningful participation. Built in a moment, ideally at the end of each activity, where children present what they found to parents, teachers, or municipal officers. When a child sees that an adult has genuinely listened, something shifts. That shift is what participation is actually for.

These insights for adaptations were developed by the PLAYFUL-ED consortium out of direct experience in Amarante. They are offered as suggestions, not prescriptions, and certainly not as a checklist to be followed to the letter. Every group of children is different.

Every street, every square, every school entrance carries its own character and its own constraints. The adults who know their children and their context best are the ones best placed to judge what needs adjusting. Trust that knowledge.

The best adaptations will always be the ones you discover by doing.



Tools INDEX

The tools are grouped thematically, but they do not need to be used in groups nor in the sequence they are presented in. There is no correct order. Pick what suits your context, your group, and the time you have. Use one tool on its own or combine several across a morning, a day, or a longer programme. The groupings simply reflect what each tool is mainly good for: getting started, understanding a place, imagining what it could become, or physically testing an idea.

If you want a suggested arc for a full programme, the index reads top to bottom as a natural progression from preparation through to intervention. But treat it as a reading aid, not an itinerary.

Each tool includes its original duration and group size recommendations.

GETTING STARTED

[Tool 0 | Fieldwork Starter Mini-briefing and safety.](#)

OBSERVING AND UNDERSTANDING A PLACE

[Tool 1 | The City Doctors: Diagnosis and Treatment](#)

[Tool 2 | The Micro/Macro Eye Challenge](#)

[Tool 3 | The Invisible Users](#)

[Tool 4 | The 5-Minute Spot Test](#)

[Tool 5 | The 5 Whys Game](#)

IMAGINING WHAT A PLACE COULD BECOME

[Tool 6 | Adopt a Place](#)

[Tool 7 | Time Traveller Mission](#)

[Tool 8 | The Future Journal](#)

TESTING AND MAKING IT REAL

[Tool 9 | The One-Minute City](#)

[Tool 10 | The Placemaking Pop-up Challenge](#)

[Tool 11 | The 1m² Challenge](#)

Tool 0 | Fieldwork Starter Mini-briefing and safety

What is it?

A quick start to making fieldwork safe, inclusive, and fun:

Objective(s)

- Everyone knows what we do, why and how.
- Customizable roles (so everyone can participate).
- Consent, safety and accessibility are arranged before we start.

Duration 10–20 min | **Group** 4–25

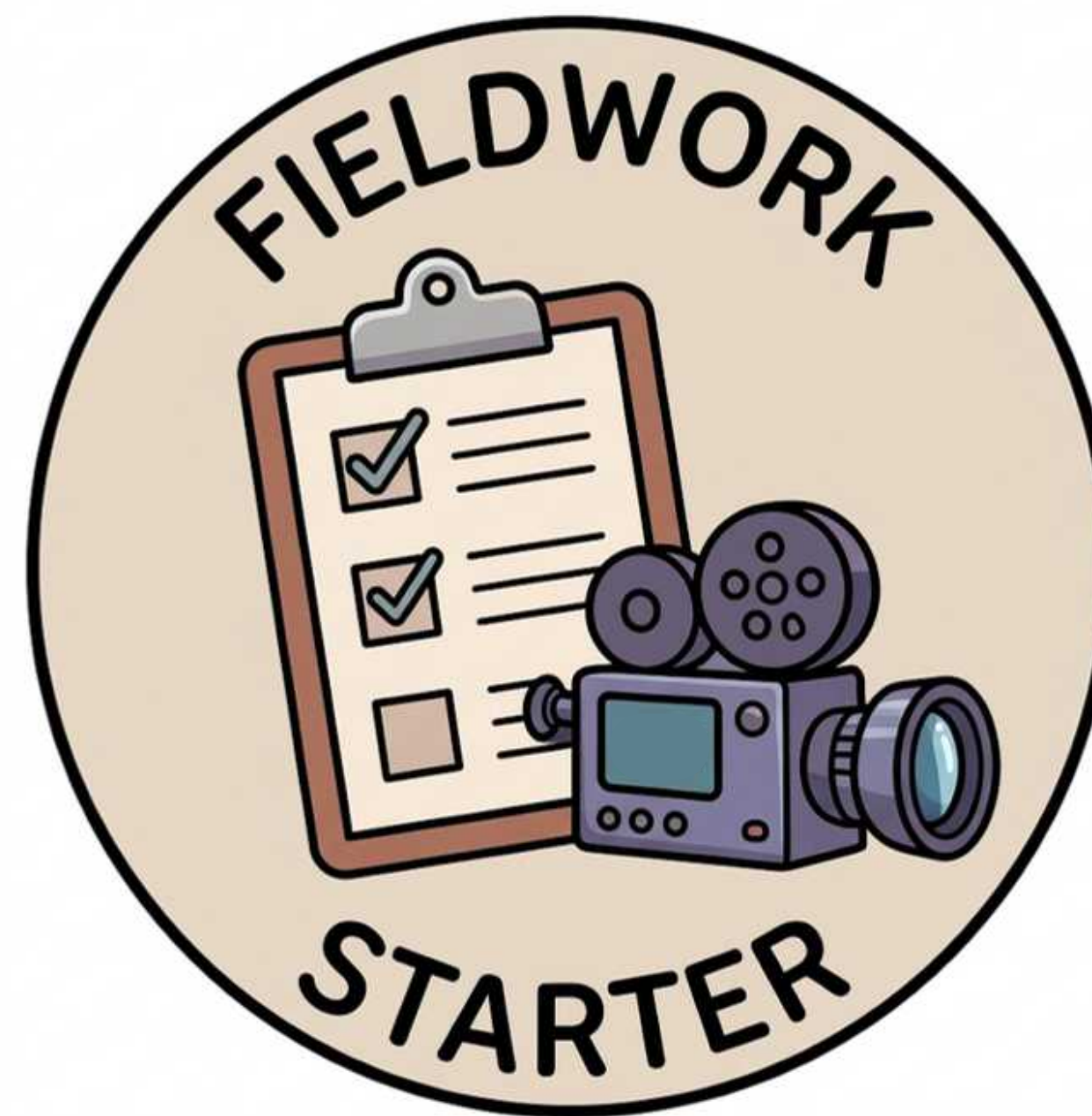
You will need markers + paper/notes, phone (photo/audio), and possibly tape/chalk.

DIY progress

1. Mission in one sentence: "Today we test how this place works for young people."
2. Assign roles (choose 1–2 per team): mapper/interviewer/photographer/timekeeper/safety buddy/storyteller.
3. Consent check: "We only film with permission. No close-ups of people without permission."
4. Safety scan: traffic, lighting, escalation plan ("if it feels strange: regroup").
5. Inclusion check: pace, rest area, clear agreements, limit stimuli where necessary.
6. Starting signal: timer on, teams depart.

Output 1 "mission card": place + team + 1 question we want to answer today.

Reflection question: What do we need to make this feasible for everyone?



Tool 1 | The City Doctors: Diagnosis and Treatment

What is it?

You analyse a place as if it were a patient: healthy, sick, cause, treatment.

Objective

Learn to read a place clearly and formulate concrete improvement actions (quick wins + structural).

Duration 60–120 min | **Group** 4–25 (teams)

DIY progress


1. Diagnosis: Observe and record:
 - Healthy: What works well? (seating, greenery, feeling safe)
 - Sick: What's broken/problematic? (garbage, unsafe crossings)
 - Cause: Why is this so? (maintenance, design, rules)
2. Treatment plan:
 - Quick first aid: what can be improved immediately?
 - Long-term treatment: what makes it structurally better?
3. Presentation: Each team presents patient + plan.
4. Bonus: do a mini-intervention as a "band-aid".

Extra challenge

Emergency Mode: 10 minutes to "save" a spot with one quick intervention.
Output 1 "doctor's sheet" per location (A4).



You will need notes, photos, and possibly post-its or stickers, like the ones we used in the Amarante Pilot! You can check them in the next pages

 During the PLAYFUL-ED pilot in Amarante, this was the first tool we tested with the children.

It proved especially effective as a brief introduction, delivered by their teachers, before heading out of school and stepping into their roles as "city doctors", as young urbanists and architects, just like the Amarante municipality team accompanying us on the day.

Tool 1 | The City Doctors: Diagnosis and Treatment

some stickers!



Tool 2 | The Micro/Macro Eye Challenge

What is it?

Reading the same place on two scales: detail and whole.

Objective

Young people show that “what you feel” often arises from micro-details as well as macro-patterns (flows/use).

Duration 45–90 min | **Group** 2–25

You will need a phone/camera, notes, and possibly some sketching material.

DIY progress

1. Micro-mission (10–15 min): find details (materials, stickers/symbols, how benches are used, hidden rules).
2. Macro mission (10–15 min): zoom out (who uses this, how does one move, does it feel dynamic or dead?).
3. Capture it: photos or sketches (min. 3 micro + 3 macro).
4. Share insights: What's working well? What feels missing?
5. Choose 1 test idea that you can try next.

Variations of sound-walk (only writing down sounds) or “silent observation” (5 min no talking).

Inclusion tips work with icons (/ /), let someone be the timekeeper.

Output 1 A4/slide: 3 micro + 3 macro + 1 verbeteridee.



Tool 3 | The Invisible Users

What is it?

You don't look at who is there, but at who is missing.

Objective

Understanding inclusion: which groups don't feel at home here and how can we change that?

Duration 45–90 min | **Group** 3–25

You will need paper/pens or phone (storytelling).

DIY progress

- Scan the area: which groups do you see here?
- Ask the question in reverse: who is missing and why? (safety, comfort, rules, accessibility, vibe?)
- Create a “welcome proposal”: how will you adapt the place to make it more inclusive?
- Visualize: drawing, comic, story or mini-scenario.
- Share: 1 minute per team.

Variations focus on girls*, young children, people with disabilities, the elderly, newcomers.

Output 1 inclusion poster: "Who's missing? Why? What are we doing about it?"



Tool 4 | The 5-Minute Spot Test

What is it?

Super-fast, intuitive assessment of multiple locations.

Objective

Quick comparison: which places really work for young people (and why)?

Duration 30–90 min (depending on travel) | **Group** 3–25

You need timer, notes, phone.

DIY progress

- Visit 3–5 places.
- Per spot: exactly 5 minutes to score on:
 - First impression: does it feel good or not?
 - Usage: What do people do here? Can you sit/play/hang out?
 - Accessibility: can everyone get there easily (young people/elderly people/wheelchairs)?
- Score out of 10 + write down 1 sentence “why”.
- Make a top 3 of the best places for young people.
- Optional: 2 short interviews with passers-by.

Output 1 ranking + 3 improvement points for the worst place.



Tool 5 | The 5 Whys Game

What is it?

You ask "why?" five times until you get to the root cause.

Objective

Think more deeply about why a place does/doesn't work, and find real solutions.

Duration 30–60 min | **Group** 2–20

You will need notes/post-its, marker.

DIY progress

- Choose one observation: "Why are there so few people here?"
- Ask "why" 5 times (and write down each answer).
- Circle the root cause (often something like shadow, safety, maintenance, design, rules).
- Make 2 solutions:
 - quick fix (tomorrow)
 - structural fix (this year)
- Pitch your root cause + solutions.

Variations revolve around light, greenery, safety, accessibility, sound.

Output 1 problem tree: symptom → cause → solution.



Tool 6 | Adopt a Place

What is it?

A place becomes personal: you “adopt” it temporarily and create a creative proposal around it.

Objective

Feeling ownership and taking responsibility: “If this were my place, what would I change?”

Duration 60–180 min | **Groups** 1–20

You will need paper, markers, a phone, and (optional) collage/model materials.

DIY progress

- Choose your spot: a place that attracts you or frustrates you.
- Explore: walk, sit, look, listen (10 observations).
- Answer 3 questions:
 - What would you like to change here?
 - What will this look like in 10 years if you decide?
 - What is missing here for young people?
- Make a creation: manifesto, collage, model or short video.
- Pitch: 1 minute per person/team.

Inclusion tips allow you to choose between formats (drawing/speaking/filming), buddy system.

Output 1 poster/slide + 1 “first step” that can be done tomorrow.



Tool 7 | Time Traveller Mission

What is it?

You read one place three times: 50 years ago, now, and 50 years from now.

Objectives

Getting young people to think about evolution, history, and the future and to visualise a vision of the future.

Duration 60-120 min | **Group** 3-25

You will need paper, markers, a phone, and (optional) old photos/Street View.

DIY progress

- 50 years ago: Imagine a historical scenario.
- Today: make observations (use, atmosphere, safety, accessibility).
- In 50 years: what should this look like? (dream or dystopia)
- Make it visible: drawing/collage/short video.
- Future step: what needs to happen now to achieve that future?

Variations create 2 scenarios (best case / worst case).

Output 1 timeline poster + 3 concrete choices for change.



Tool 8 | The Future Journal

What is it?

Teams create a news broadcast from the future about a transformed place.

Objectives

Speculative thinking + presenting: what changed, how did it happen, who did it?

Duration 60-120 min | **Group** 4-30

You will need a phone (video), paper/pencils, props (optional).

DIY progress

- Looking back and forward:
 - What was it like 50 years ago? (fictional or historically accurate)
 - What will it be like in 2050? (dream or dystopia)
- Write Breaking News: What's Changed?
- Live report: What made it possible? Who did it?
- Play the news: journalist + eyewitnesses + experts.
- Debrief: What's the first step today?

Additionally, create a positive and negative scenario and compare.

Output 1 short video + 3 "policy headline" sentences.



Tool 9 | The One-Minute City

What is it?

Quick experiments: you get 1 minute to change an unused spot.

Objectives

Unlocking hidden potential with super-small, temporary interventions and gathering responses.

Duration 30-75 min | **Group** 4-20

You will need tape, chalk, loose objects (cardboard, string, pillows), timer.

DIY progress

- Choose an unused corner.
- 1 minute build: "put something down that provides a new function."
- Test: let passers-by respond.
- Round 2 (1 minute): improve based on feedback.
- Show & tell: 3 sentences: what changed? For whom? Why?

Variations "sitting hack", "play zone", "mini route", "mini stage".

Output before/after photo + 3 learnings + 1 next step.



Tool 10 | The Placemaking Pop-up Challenge

What is it?

In one day, a seemingly empty or dull square is revitalised with a mini-intervention that improves its function.

Objectives

Quickly experience how young people can make an impact on space themselves (and provoke reactions from passers-by).

Duration 60–180 min (or 1 day) | **Group** 4–20

You will need chalk, tape, cardboard/wood, markers, rope, (optional) speaker, garbage bag.

DIY progress

- Choosing a location: “boring, empty or unused”.
- What's missing here? Three quick observations (place to sit? Fun? Direction? Shade?).
- Choose 1 intervention per team (30 sec pitch).
- Construction & site (low-tech, safe).
- Activate: invite passers-by (“try this!”).
- Mini-debrief: what worked, what didn't, what would you do differently?

Variations of street drawings with chalk, temporary seating, creative signage, mini-performance (music/theatre/spoken word).

Inclusion tips: dividing roles (maker/talker/filmmaker), clear timeline, low-stimulus task option.

Output: 5 photos + 3 learnings + 1 idea for “version 2”.



Tool 11 | The 1m² Challenge

What is it?

Everyone gets 1 square meter of public space to use more intelligently.

Objective

Learning that small interventions can have a big effect on the whole.

Duration 30–75 min | **Group** 5–25

You will need measuring tape/tape/chalk to mark off 1m², small objects.

DIY progress

- Indicate 1m² per young person/team on the spot.
- Design: How do you make your 1m² more useful/pleasant/safer/more pleasant?
- Perform a micro-intervention (low-tech, temporary).
- Walk the “1m² exhibition”: everyone shows their square.
- Macro question: How does this small difference affect the whole place?

Variations focus on: shade, seating, play, tranquility, accessibility, greenery.

Output photo of each 1m² + 1 joint “top 5 interventions” for the location.



MODULE 3

THE AMARANTE PILOT: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

WHERE THEORY, TOOLS, AND A REAL CITY MEET



É A VIDA NÃO VIVE EM LINHA RETA | AND LIFE IS NOT LIVED IN A STRAIGHT LINE .
SOPHIA DE MELLO BREYNER ANDRESEN, O BÚZIO DE CÓS E OUTROS POEMAS, 1997

Introduction

Module 1 made the case for collaborative, child-friendly urban planning. Module 2 offered creative tools for reading and reimagining public space. This module is about what happens when you take all of that and test it in a real city, with real institutions, real children, and real streets.

In November 2025, the PLAYFUL-ED consortium ran a three-day pilot programme in Amarante, Portugal, the project's pilot city and home to one of the three consortium partners, the Municipality of Amarante. Over three days, we brought together municipal departments, school leaders, teachers, parent associations, parish councils, more than 60 primary school children, and their families to test a simple but transformative idea: that cities become more inclusive when adults learn to listen to and be guided by children's perspectives.

This module tells the story of that pilot, reflects critically on what we learned, and distils the experience into a practical framework that other cities, schools, and communities can adapt. But first, a word about how we got here, because the journey matters as much as the destination.

Fifteen minutes for whom?

Throughout our preparatory workshops, in Bologna in January 2025 and in Brussels in May 2025, a recurring question kept sharpening the project's focus. It started with concepts we explored in Module 1: Carlos Moreno's 15-minute city, Jane Jacobs's insistence that everyone must create cities, and the principle of designing at 95 centimetres. These are powerful frameworks. But as we worked through them together, as a transnational team with diverse professional backgrounds, urban realities, and relationships to care, a critical question kept surfacing.

The 15-minute city is typically measured in adult walking time: roughly 1.4 metres per second, linear movement, no stops. But a toddler aged 2 to 3 moves at 0.5 metres per second, in non-linear patterns, with exploratory stops every 10 metres that account for 60% of total walking time. The same journey that takes an adult 15 minutes takes a small child 40 to 90 minutes. A 4- to 5-year-old covers the ground in 30 to 50 minutes, with frequent stops for exploration. Elderly people, walking at 0.8 metres per second with rest breaks adding 15% to their journey, need about 26 minutes. And adult women, on average, walk slightly slower than adult men, a difference that compounds when they are navigating with children, prams, shopping, or the invisible weight of managing a household's logistics in public space.

These are not just numbers. They reveal a fundamental bias in how we plan and measure urban life. The "15-minute city" is calibrated, often unconsciously, to the movement patterns of able-bodied adults, and within that category, to people who are walking alone, unburdened, and in a straight line. The moment you add a child to the picture, the entire calculus changes. Not just because children are slower, but because they move differently: they stop, they explore, they zigzag, they crouch to look at things adults step over. Their movement is not inefficient transit; it is a different way of being in space.

This insight, which emerged gradually through our consortium's cross-cultural conversations, became central to how we designed the Amarante pilot. It also connects to a broader reframing that runs through the PLAYFUL-ED project: the shift from thinking of mobility as merely getting from A to B to understanding it as a lived experience.

Beyond passable: towards enjoyable cities

Is "getting from A to B" all we aspire to with our mobility?

The question sounds almost rhetorical, but urban planning practice often answers it with a quiet "yes." Streets are designed to be passable, then accessible, then safe, then convenient, then comfortable, and only at the very top of the hierarchy, if at all, enjoyable. Most urban interventions stop somewhere around "safe" or "convenient" and call it a success.

The PLAYFUL-ED project argues for something more ambitious. Drawing on the New European Bauhaus values of beauty, sustainability, and inclusion (or, as we prefer to say: beautiful, sustainable, and together), we believe that public spaces should not merely function; they should be places where people of all ages actually want to spend time. Where a grandmother with a walker, a parent with a pram, and a child on a scooter can all navigate not just safely but joyfully. Where the journey to school is not a risk to be managed but an adventure to be savoured.

Children help us see this because they have not yet learned to lower their expectations. Adults have been trained to accept that streets are for cars, that pavements are narrow, that crossings are stressful, and that public space is something you pass through rather than inhabit. Children have not accepted this. When the 4th graders in Amarante placed a "no cars" sign in front of their school and were visibly frustrated when a car drove past a minute later, they were not being naive. They were expressing an unmediated expectation that the city should respond to their needs. That expectation is not childish; it is what good urban planning should aspire to restore in all of us.

What transnational cooperation made visible

There is one more dimension of this project's genesis that deserves attention, because it shaped the pilot in ways we did not fully anticipate.

PLAYFUL-ED is a small-scale Erasmus+ project, and like all such projects, it brings together partners from different countries.

In our case: Area Europa (Italy/Belgium), Urban Foxes (Belgium), and the Municipality of Amarante (Portugal). On paper, this is a consortium of three organisations. In practice, it is a meeting of people with different professional cultures, different urban environments, different languages, and, crucially, different embodied relationships with the city.

An Italian urbanist who has spent years working on European policy does not instinctively see the same street as a Belgian placemaker who has spent a decade running participatory workshops with teenagers. Neither of them sees it the same way as a Portuguese architect who walks her children through Amarante's historic centre every day. These differences are not obstacles to collaboration; they are the raw material of insight.

Researchers working on what has been called "third cultures" describe this productive displacement well. The concept points to the new perspectives that emerge when people who have grown up moving between different cultural contexts develop an unusual capacity to question norms that others take for granted. In the context of urban planning and mobility, such perspectives can open up what scholars call "alternative imaginaries": different ways of thinking about how fast we should move, how much space cars deserve, whose comfort is prioritised, and what counts as a "good" street.

Within our consortium, this displacement was not theoretical. It happened in Bologna, when we walked through the city with reverse periscopes and debated what "child-friendly" meant in a city that had just introduced a 30 km/h speed limit. It happened in Brussels, when we tested placemaking tools in a neighbourhood that one partner knew intimately and the others were encountering for the first time. And it happened most powerfully in Amarante, where the Portuguese team's deep familiarity with the place was both an asset and, at times, a blind spot that the outsiders' fresh eyes helped to reveal.

The gender and caring dimension of this displacement was particularly striking.

Consortium members who are parents, and especially those who are primary caregivers, brought a different kind of attention to the pilot design. They noticed things that non-parents missed: the absence of seating near play areas, the difficulty of pushing a pram on cobblestones, and how school drop-off routines shape an entire neighbourhood's rhythms.

These are not marginal observations; they are central to understanding how public space actually works for the people who use it most intensively.

And they are observations that typically come from women, because in most societies, the labour of navigating cities with small children still falls disproportionately on mothers and female caregivers.

What this module covers

The rest of this module unfolds in three parts.

Part 1: The story of the pilot

A narrative account of what happened across the three days in Amarante, from the stakeholder meeting on Day 1 through the children's workshops on Day 2 to the parents' periscope walk on Day 3. This is not a repetition of the project website; it goes deeper into the moments that mattered, the choices we made, and the things we did not expect.

Part 2: Critical reflections

An honest assessment of what worked, what surprised us, and what we would do differently. This section includes testimonials from local stakeholders, municipal officers, and the project's expert consultant, offering multiple perspectives on the same experience.

Part 3: A replicable framework

A practical, step-by-step guide drawn from the Amarante experience, designed for other municipalities, schools, or community organisations that want to run a similar programme in their own city. Not a rigid recipe, but a set of steps, considerations, and decision points that we wish we had had when we started.

Let's begin with the story.



PART 1

THE STORY OF THE PILOT

Before the pilot: building the coalition

The Amarante pilot did not begin on 27 November. It began weeks earlier, with the kind of work that rarely makes it into project reports but without which nothing else would have been possible: institutional preparation.

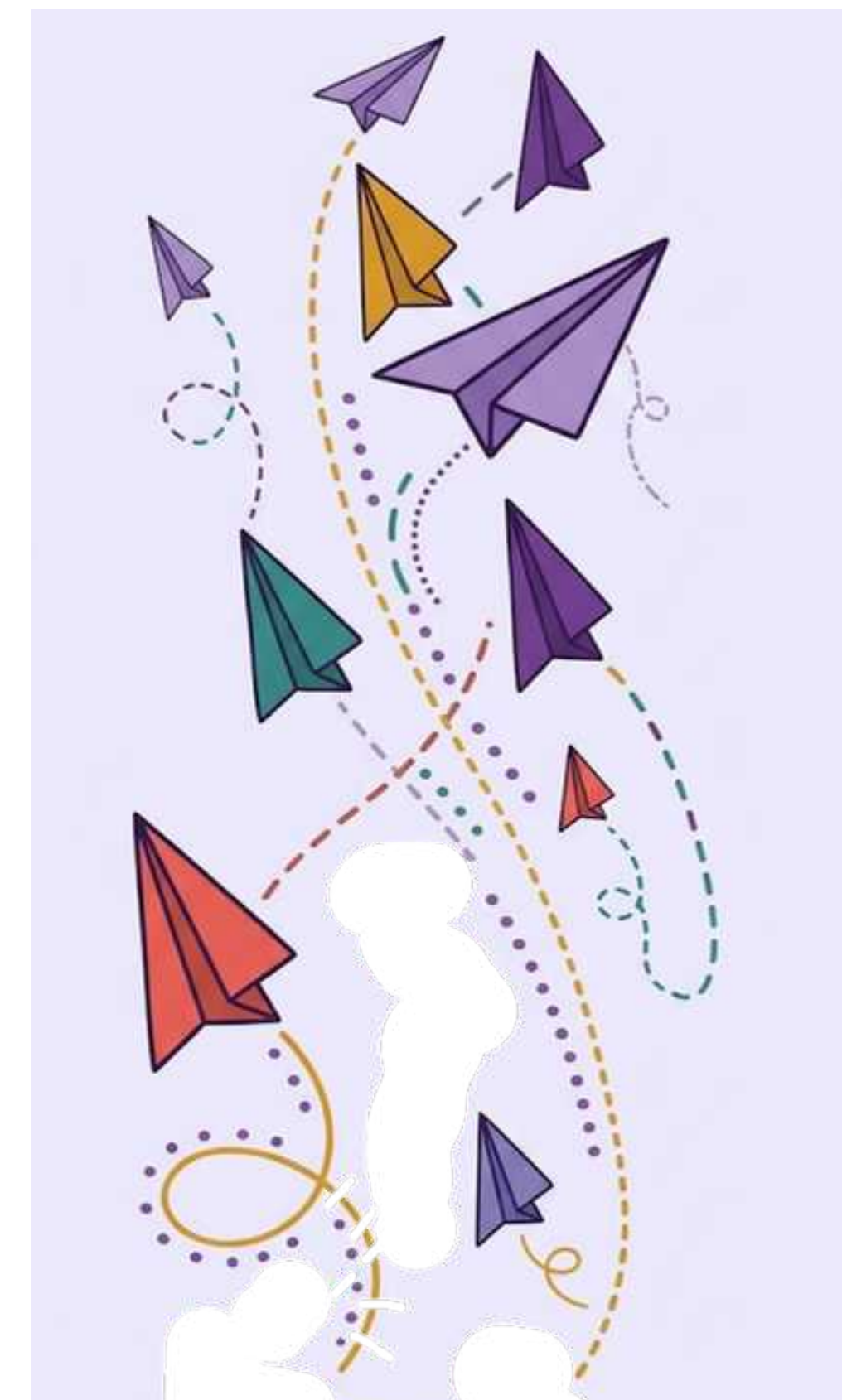
The Municipality of Amarante, as a consortium partner, took the lead in identifying and convening the stakeholders whose engagement would determine whether the pilot could happen at all. This meant reaching across municipal departments (urbanism, mobility, public space, education, culture, environment, youth, green spaces), as well as outward to school leaders, parent associations, and parish councils. In a small to medium-sized city like Amarante, these are often the same people wearing different hats, which turned out to be both a challenge and an advantage.

The challenge was familiar to anyone who has worked in local government: breaking silos. Municipal departments that deal with mobility, green spaces, education, and urban planning do not always talk to each other, even when they are working on the same streets. Bringing them into the same room required a deliberate effort from the Municipality, supported by the consortium's external credibility as a European project.

The advantage, however, was unexpected and became one of the pilot's most important lessons. Many of the professionals invited to the stakeholder session were not only technicians, architects, engineers, or policy officers; they were also parents.

When the conversation shifted from abstract urban planning to the concrete experience of walking a child to school, negotiating a pram over cobblestones, or worrying about traffic on the route home, the institutional barriers softened. People who might have been cautious about a "participatory planning exercise" became animated when they could speak from their own lived experience as caregivers. The playful framing of the project and its focus on children's voices turned out to be a powerful entry point for cross-departmental dialogue. It also opened the door to a wider conversation about elderly residents, people with reduced mobility, and the broader principle that planning for the most vulnerable means planning for everyone.

(For guidance on stakeholder mapping, see [Module 1: Phase 1](#))



Day 1 | Setting the groundwork: Institutions come together

Thursday, 27 November 2025

The programme began with a morning consortium meeting at the Salão Nobre, bringing together the Amarante City Councillor for Urban Planning, Ricardo Vieira, alongside municipal officers, the consortium partners from Area Europa and Urban Foxes, and key local figures including architects, technical staff, and representatives from the education department.

In the afternoon, the circle widened to a full stakeholder session. Directors of local schools, parent association representatives, landscape architects, engineers, and officers from the divisions of mobility, environment, youth, education, and green spaces joined what became the pilot's foundational conversation.

The session opened with a presentation of the PLAYFUL-ED project and toolkit by the consortium, followed by an open discussion structured around a deceptively simple question: *"What would you like to see in shared public spaces here? Why? Would it make the space more pleasant?"*

What made this day effective was not the question itself but the room it was asked in. Cross-sector alignment of this kind, where education professionals sit alongside traffic engineers and parents sit alongside urban planners, is rare in municipal practice.

PLAYFUL-ED's "full-circle approach" depends on it: creating spaces for children to express their perspectives only works if the adults who hold decision-making power are already primed to listen, value, and act on what children say.

By the end of Day 1, the institutional ground was set. The people who would later receive the children's insights were not hearing about the project second-hand; They had been part of shaping its purpose from the start.



Day 2 | Children explore the city as experts

Friday, 28 November 2025

On Friday, pupils from the 1st and 4th grades of EB1/JI n.º 2 de Amarante took to the streets of the historic centre with their teachers and consortium team members.

The morning group (1st grade, aged 6 to 7) walked from the school to the Cineteatro de Amarante, observing, discussing, and marking their route with stickers, post-its, and drawings. One of the 1st grade teachers proposed that the children see themselves as "the architects of urban space," a framing the children embraced immediately and with visible pride. They were not being taken on a walk; they were conducting an inspection.

The afternoon group (4th grade, aged 9 to 10) followed the same route but engaged with it differently. Older, more articulate, and more aware of how the city works (and fails to work), they produced observations that were both precise and politically charged.



Students listening intently as a city architect; Odette Carvalho, briefs them on their mission: to walk through their city as urban planners and designers, assessing the space and proposing changes, just like the professionals standing alongside them.

Day 2 | Children explore the city as experts

Friday, 28 November 2025

Preparing the route: wayfinding and stickers

The workshop did not begin when the children stepped outside. It began with the consortium and teachers jointly planning a route from the school (EB1/JI n.º 2) to the Cineteatro de Amarante, through the historic centre. The route was chosen because it is a path children actually walk or could walk in their daily lives, not a showcase corridor, but a familiar area of the city.

To guide the groups along the route, the team placed stickers on the ground, creating a playful wayfinding trail that children could follow.

But the stickers were not just a wayfinding instrument. They were also an invitation: children were given their own stickers to add to the streets as they walked, marking places they liked, places that worried them, things they wanted to see changed, and elements of urban furniture, trees, or features they wanted to draw attention to. The route became, in effect, a canvas that the children annotated as they moved through it.



Day 2 | Children explore the city as experts

Friday, 28 November 2025

What the children noticed

The children proved remarkably attentive to things adults had normalised. They identified locations where pedestrian crossings were missing and explained exactly why they were needed: to connect a path they used daily, to cross safely at a point where cars accelerated.

They commented on lighting, noting specific stretches where streetlamps were absent or insufficient, with observations like "here we need a light so that we can pass by at the end of the day." These are not vague wishes; they are spatial diagnoses grounded in daily experience.



What the teachers brought

The role of teachers during the pilot deserves special attention. The 1st and 4th grade teachers were not passive chaperones; they were active allies who shaped how the children engaged with the activity. Their instinct for framing ("you are the architects"), their ability to manage group dynamics in a street setting, and their genuine curiosity about what the children would notice made them indispensable intermediaries. Any city planning to replicate this approach should invest significant time in building relationships with teachers, not as gatekeepers who grant access to children, but as pedagogical partners who co-design the experience.



Day 2 | Children explore the city as experts

Friday, 28 November 2025

The "impossible" ideas

Not everything the children proposed was immediately feasible, and this too was instructive. Some asked for a climbing wall on the wall of a heritage church. Others wanted a football pitch in the square beside it. These suggestions could easily be dismissed as childish fantasy. But that would miss the point.

The challenge for facilitators is not to say "no" but to honour the underlying need (for climbing, for sport, for physical play in the centre of the city) while opening a conversation about where and how those needs might be met. "That church wall is protected because it is hundreds of years old, but where else in the neighbourhood could a climbing wall go?" is a question that takes children seriously without pretending there are no constraints. Learning to navigate this tension, between imagination and feasibility, without shutting down either, is one of the core skills this kind of work develops in adults.



The "no cars" sign

One of the pilot's most revealing moments came when the 4th graders placed a "no cars" sign in front of their school. Seeing a vehicle drive past barely a minute later left them visibly frustrated. They had genuinely believed their sign would have an immediate effect.

This simple episode revealed something profound: children naturally expect the city to respond to their actions. They have not yet learned the adult habit of accepting that streets belong to cars and that change requires years of bureaucratic process. That expectation is not naivety; it is a form of civic imagination that adult planning should aspire to recover.



Day 2 | Children explore the city as experts

Friday, 28 November 2025

The sticker maps

At the end of each walk, children transferred their stickers onto large printed maps, creating a collective visual record of their observations. These maps, combining drawings, symbols, and spatial markings, became some of the richest data the pilot produced.

They were legible to planners, meaningful to children, and, crucially, they could be placed side by side with professional spatial analyses to reveal what formal mapping misses.



It was interesting to notice how the kids could recreate the route we did together and place their stickers and drawings following this path they had just assessed and explored

Day 3 | Adults learn to see through a child's perspective

Saturday, 29 November 2025

On Saturday morning, parents and guardians were invited to walk the same route their children had walked the day before, but this time equipped with inverted periscopes: simple DIY optical tools that allow adults to see the city from approximately 95 centimetres, a toddler's eye level.

The periscope walk

The walk itself produced the kind of embodied understanding that no presentation or report can replicate. Adults who thought they knew Amarante's historic centre discovered, through their own shifted sightlines, how the city looks and feels from below: the visual monotony of legs and wheels, the intimidating scale of vehicles, the blocked sightlines caused by parked cars, and the exposure to exhaust fumes at children's breathing height.



But the most unexpected moments were not about urban design at all.

They were about play.

Children who had come along with their parents delighted in seeing their mums and dads "being silly" in public space, peering through periscopes and bumping into things. Small children approached the low mirror to look their parents in the eyes.

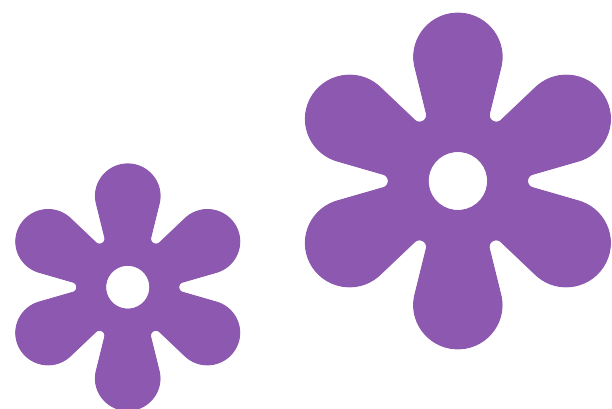
The periscope, designed as an empathy tool, became, briefly, a toy, and that playfulness was itself a form of data: it showed what happens when adults allow themselves to inhabit public space differently, with curiosity and lightness rather than efficiency and haste.

Day 3 | Adults learn to see through a child's perspective

Saturday, 29 November 2025

The reflection session

After the walk, participants gathered at the Cineteatro de Amarante for a joint reflection. The format was deliberately family-friendly: the session took place on a Saturday morning so families could have lunch together afterwards, and the meeting space included parallel activity areas where children could draw, play with post-its, and use a large drawing board, supported by consortium team members, while their parents and grandparents talked. One mother attended with her baby. This logistical detail matters: participation formats that require parents to arrange childcare to discuss children's needs contain an obvious contradiction that too many participatory processes fail to notice.



What parents said

The discussion surfaced several themes that formal consultation rarely captures. Parents spoke about their **own childhoods** and the freedom they had enjoyed: playing unsupervised in streets and fields, exploring neighbourhoods without adult accompaniment, being in contact with nature as a matter of course rather than a scheduled activity. Many expressed frustration at how much of that freedom had been lost and connected it explicitly to the "attractive power of screens" on younger generations. The desire for open spaces that could compete with digital entertainment was strong and emotionally charged.

Parents raised the **problem of age-segregated play spaces**. If a playground caters to 3-year-olds, a 10-year-old sibling has nothing to do. Families with children of different ages need play spaces that are designed for multiple age groups in proximity, so that younger and older children can play near each other, within sight and earshot, without one being bored while the other is engaged.

The needs of grandparents and elderly caregivers came up repeatedly. A grandmother taking a grandchild to the park needs resting spaces, not just at the destination, but along the route. She needs shade, seating, and nearby toilets. If these are absent, the outing becomes exhausting rather than enjoyable, and it simply does not happen. This is connected directly to the broader argument running through the project: planning for children's needs simultaneously addresses the needs of elderly residents, people with reduced mobility, and anyone whose relationship with public space depends on comfort and accessibility rather than speed.

Parents also suggested **pop-up structures** as a way to activate underused spaces without permanent investment, echoing the tactical urbanism approaches explored in placemaking approaches.

Day 3 | Adults learn to see through a child's perspective

Saturday, 29 November 2025

A key insight

One of the session's most striking outcomes was the visible gap between how adults thought children experienced the city and how children actually experienced it, as evidenced by the sticker maps, the "no cars" sign, and the specific, precise observations about missing crossings and inadequate lighting.

Adults were confronted with the fact that their assumptions about children's urban experience were often wrong, not because they were bad parents or inattentive caregivers, but because the adult perspective is structurally different from the child's. The periscope had shown them this physically. The reflection session showed it to them intellectually.

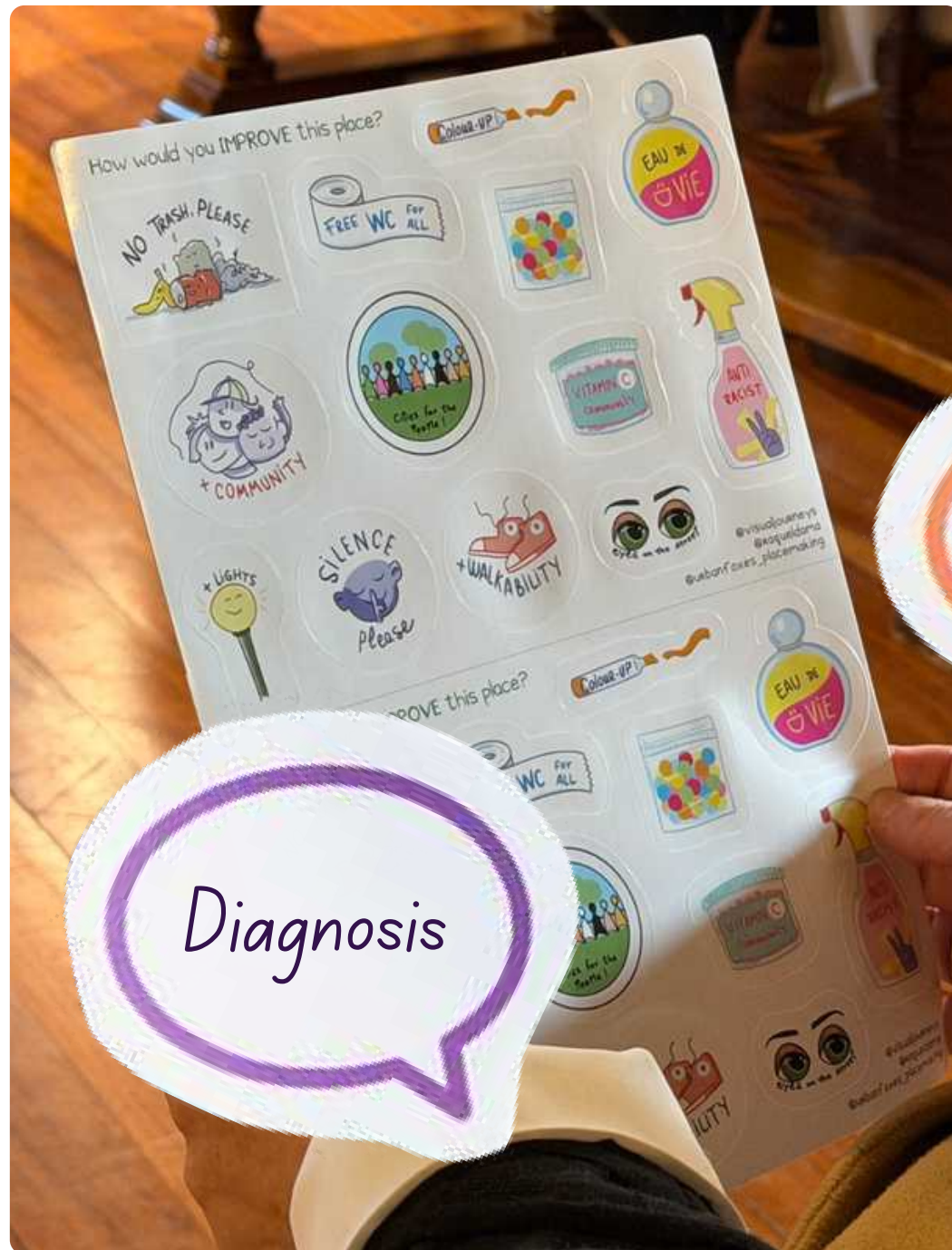


NEXT, WE PRESENT SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE
MOMENTS AS A VISUAL RECOLECTION

Inverted periscopes → Changing perspectives



Stickers → "who doesn't like stickers?"



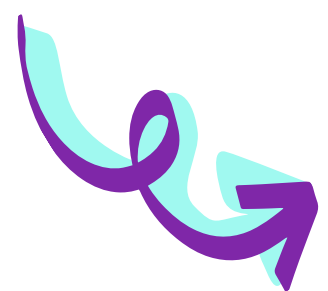
Stickers & maps Tell me more!



Assessing and
planning



Scheduling & simultaneous dynamics



so that families can join !



Some look at the map, while others talk about key issues



"my turn!"

Find the right allies!



of many
ages!

And school
staff!



PART 2

CRITICAL

REFLECTIONS

What worked



The three-day structure

Sequencing the programme as institutions first, then children, then parents, created a "full-circle" dynamic. By the time parents arrived on Saturday, the children had already generated rich insights, and the municipal stakeholders who would eventually need to act on those insights had already committed to listening. Each day is built on the previous one.



The playful framing as an institutional door-opener

Advocating for children's voices in urban planning could easily sound abstract or idealistic in a municipal meeting room. The playful approach, the periscopes, the stickers, the walking, and the "architects of urban space" framing made the project tangible and engaging for professionals who might have been sceptical of yet another participatory exercise.



The "more than one hat" dynamic

Appealing to stakeholders simultaneously as professionals *and* as parents, caregivers, or grandparents broke through institutional silos in a way that purely technical arguments did not. It also widened the conversation to include elderly residents and people with reduced mobility, reinforcing the principle that child-friendly planning benefits everyone.



Teachers as allies

The quality of the children's engagement on Day 2 was inseparable from the quality of the teachers' involvement. Their pedagogical instincts, their relationships with the children, and their genuine enthusiasm for the project made them the pilot's most important intermediaries.

What worked



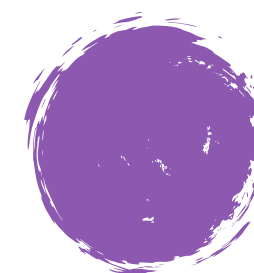
Family-friendly logistics

Holding the parents' session on a Saturday morning, providing parallel activity spaces for children, and welcoming babies and toddlers were not minor logistical details. They were design choices that communicated respect for families' time and realities, and they directly increased participation.



The sticker on maps as legible data

The children's maps bridged two worlds: they were meaningful to the children who made them and legible to the planners who would use them. This dual legibility is rare in participatory processes and worth replicating.



The stickers on the streets as urban activism

The sticker maps were produced indoors, after the walk, as a way of consolidating what children had observed. But something different happened outdoors, in real time, when children placed their own stickers directly onto the streets. A sticker on a map is data. A sticker on a pavement is a statement. It says: I was here, I noticed this, and I want it to change.

For the children, the act of marking a real street, not a representation of it, carried a weight and a pleasure that classroom-based activities cannot replicate. It was, in a small but meaningful way, a form of urban activism: children claiming the right to annotate the city they inhabit. And because the stickers were visible to anyone walking past, they turned private observation into public expression. Passers-by who stopped to ask what the stickers meant found themselves in conversation with six-year-olds about pedestrian crossings and streetlights.

These moments were unplanned, unrepeatable, and among the most genuinely participatory things the pilot produced.

What surprised us



The emotional power of the periscope

We knew the reverse periscope was a good empathy tool.

We did not anticipate the playful interactions it would generate between parents and children, with small children looking up at their parents through the low mirror, or the way it would shift the atmosphere of the entire Saturday session from "consultation" to something closer to shared discovery.



How much parents wanted to talk about their own childhoods

The Saturday reflection session was supposed to focus on the children's experience. Instead, it became equally about the parents' grief for the freedoms they had enjoyed as children and no longer felt able to offer their own. This intergenerational dimension of the conversation, adults reflecting on what has been lost, was powerful and a bit unexpected



Urban planners being surprised

Several municipal professionals reported genuine "aha" moments when seeing children's observations. Comments like "I did not think they would notice that" suggest that even well-intentioned urban planners carry assumptions about children's competence that the pilot helped to dismantle.



The "impossible ideas" as a pedagogical opportunity

We had not fully anticipated how to handle requests like a climbing wall on a heritage church. The pilot taught us that these moments are not problems to be managed but opportunities to model a different kind of dialogue: one that honours the need behind the request while opening up alternative possibilities.



The precision of children's observations

We expected children to notice broad things: "this is scary," "this is boring." Instead, they identified specific missing crossings, named exactly where streetlights were needed, and articulated why. Their spatial awareness was far more developed than most adults assumed.

What we would do differently



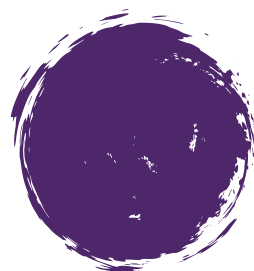
More time to reach parents

The parent engagement on Day 3 was good, but it could have been broader. Several families did not participate because the invitation did not reach them early enough or because Saturday mornings are already full. In a future iteration, we would begin parent outreach much earlier, use multiple channels (school networks, parish councils, social media, word of mouth), and consider offering more than one session to accommodate different schedules.



Involve more children

The pilot engaged over 60 children from one school. A larger programme could include multiple schools, different age groups, and children from different neighbourhoods, generating richer comparative data and wider community ownership.



Stronger follow-up mechanisms

The pilot generated powerful insights, but the pathway from insight to institutional action could be more explicit. In a future iteration, we would design a formal "feedback loop" moment: a session where children's findings are presented directly to decision-makers, with a clear commitment to respond (even if the response is "we cannot do this, and here is why").



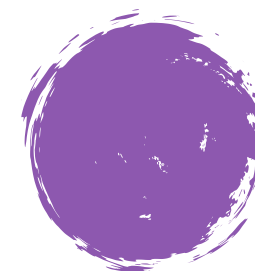
More attention to fathers and male caregivers

The Saturday session was attended primarily by mothers. This reflects broader social patterns, but a future programme could make deliberate efforts to engage fathers and male caregivers, whose relationship to navigating cities with children is often different and less frequently heard.



Documentation from the start

We documented the pilot well, but a dedicated documentation strategy from Day 1, capturing audio, video, and children's outputs systematically, would have made the post-pilot analysis richer and the toolkit writing easier.



Exploring sustainability beyond the project

The pilot was a three-day programme within a funded project. The question of what happens after the funding ends, how the participatory dynamic is sustained, and how children's voices continue to inform municipal planning remains open. This is not a failure of the pilot but an honest acknowledgement that one-off interventions, however powerful, need institutional embedding to create lasting change.

Testimonies

The testimonies gathered here offer a window into what PLAYFUL-ED has meant to the people who shaped it, tested it, and lived it.

From the politicians and architects who reimagined public space in Amarante, to the researchers and facilitators who brought playful methods to the streets, to the parents who found in this project an unexpected invitation to see their city through fresh eyes.

These are not evaluation reports. They are personal reflections. Honest, sometimes surprising, from people who came to this project with different roles, different expertise, and different relationships with the city.

What connects them is a shared experience: that when you create the conditions for genuine participation, something shifts. Children turn out to be remarkably clear about what they need. Adults turn out to be more open to change than we might expect. And the process itself, with good doses of playfulness and hands-on activities, turns out to matter as much as the outcomes.

Carina Gomes, architect and urban planner and advocate for child-friendly cities, opens this collection with a sweeping reflection on what it means to put play at the heart of urban life and why that is not a soft ambition, but an urgent one.

The voices that follow are those of municipal officers, elected representatives, designers, researchers, and facilitators from Belgium, Italy, and Portugal. This Erasmus+ partnership has been, for all of us, a genuine learning journey: one that challenged assumptions, sparked new questions, and reminded us that the best ideas often come from the most unexpected places.

We hope these reflections inspire others to embark on similar journeys, to listen more carefully, to plan more playfully, and to trust that small experiments in shared spaces can be the beginning of something much larger.



Where do children play in the city?

Carina Gomes

Architect & Urban Planner Advocating for Play and Child-Friendly Cities | Member of *the Future Design of Streets Association*



From childhood, play has held a central place in my personal experience and in the way I perceive the world.

I spent countless hours playing outdoors, in direct contact with the neighbourhood, other children, and public spaces, developing autonomy, creativity, and friendships.

Over time, however, I witnessed a dramatic transformation: playgrounds became standardised plastic structures, many spaces for play disappeared entirely, and the use of video games grew. Children began to vanish from public spaces, which made me ask a fundamental question: **where do children play in the city today?**

This experience profoundly shaped my academic and professional journey, naturally leading me to architecture and urban planning, and, in particular, to the study and design of urban spaces from a child's perspective. Recognising play as a fundamental dimension of urban life has guided both my professional practice and my research, seeking to understand how the design and management of public space can promote more inclusive, safe, and child-friendly environments. Creating public spaces that are colourful, playful, and imaginative is, for me, a way of returning to children the space that belongs to them, transforming every square, park, or plaza into a place of encounters, discoveries, and laughter, where the city becomes more vibrant, dynamic, and full of experiences.

In the 20th century, the obsession with the car transformed streets from spaces of encounter into mere thoroughfares. Routes that could have been walked or cycled became journeys by car, not just because of distance, but because of fear. Fear of public spaces dominated by traffic and pollution.

The result? Less social interaction, less autonomy, less spontaneous play. Children confined to enclosed, controlled spaces lose invaluable developmental opportunities and the ability to claim ownership of the city.

Fortunately, the 21st century has brought a new vision. Many European cities are creating Child-Friendly Cities by integrating school-streets, traffic-calming measures, active mobility, and play spaces into the urban fabric. Here, children are not merely users of the city, but active agents of urban transformation, whose ideas and experiences shape the city in tangible ways. In Portugal, these practices are still limited. Play is often confined to isolated playgrounds, reflecting a narrow vision of childhood.

Projects such as PLAYFUL-ED, developed in Amarante, demonstrate that change is possible. By involving children, parents, municipal staff, and policy-makers, the project places play at the heart of public space design and management. Every street and square becomes an opportunity for co-creation, inclusion, and sustainability.

My direct experience with the project has been particularly revealing: all participants — policy-makers, municipal officers, and the adult community — showed a strong motivation to promote change, test new approaches, and rethink the role of public space in children's lives. Direct participation of children reveals a simple truth: they know exactly what they need to live and play in the city. They want public spaces where they can run, talk, dance, socialise and feel safe, with play elements that are imaginative, diverse and connected to nature. They also expressed a clear desire for play elements that are integrated, creative and varied, not isolated, fenced or reduced to standardised plastic equipment.

Children want play spaces that are part of the city, that interact with daily urban life and that allow multiple forms of use, appropriation and imagination, a reminder that children are experts in their own right when it comes to urban life. A key moment was the walk from school to the city centre, where children placed stickers along their route to mark the features they wished to see in their city. At the end, they transferred the stickers onto a map, creating a clear, visual guide for adults and planners. In this simple yet powerful exercise, children explained their choices, debated ideas and helped shape the conversation about how public spaces can genuinely support play, safety and social connection. In the workshop, I observed that boys and girls often needed different types of play and spaces, and that children of different ages wanted to use spaces in different ways.

This is a crucial point and is currently a topic of much discussion in cities: inclusivity, gender, and mixed-age. They also expressed a desire for inclusive spaces that welcome everyone, with areas for urban art, exhibitions and school or cultural projects. They imagined places where adults could see their work and children could share it and feel proud, showing that play can also be about creativity, learning, collaboration and belonging. This experience makes one point unmistakably clear: children are not passive users of the city; they are active co-creators. As a consultant on play in the city, I help ensure their voices are heard and translated into practical guidance, supporting adults and planners to create streets, squares, and parks that foster autonomy, creativity, and community life.

As an architect and urban planner, I can assert with conviction: integrating play, active mobility, and child autonomy as structural elements of urban planning is not optional; it is urgent. Cities that place children at the centre of their policies produce safer, more inclusive, and more vibrant spaces, strengthening social cohesion, environmental quality, and a sense of belonging. Play is an urban right. It is a tool for transformation. It is a way of returning humanity to the city. Projects such as PLAYFUL-ED show that it is possible to link research, professional practice, and public policy, creating replicable methodologies that listen to children, empower adults, and foster structural change. Investing in play is investing in democratic, resilient, and sustainable cities — cities that do not merely function, but are truly lived, shared, and claimed by all.

Rui Moutinho

Direção Municipal de Planeamento, Projeto e Gestão do Território na Câmara Municipal de Amarante



When I first got involved in this project, I thought it made sense to look at the spaces we move through every day and ask how to make them pleasant for children. I assumed it would be enough to think the way they think.

It was only later that I realised that what adults think children think is quite different from what children actually think. And that is precisely why politicians, architects, engineers, designers, and ultimately parents need to hear it directly from them: how they experience and perceive space.

In public policy decisions, we often look at a space and say: a playground would work well here, let's draw it up and get it built. But only later do we realise that what was really needed was to understand what all potential users of that space actually think, including children, and especially children, when it is a shared community space where a small obstacle can become a major barrier and a reason not to use it at all.

Genuinely listening to the community is not easy, and too often it is little more than a formality, the kind of tick-box exercise that public consultations tend to be. But when we truly involve parents, schools, teachers, and children, the results are significantly better.

Consider how overprotective we have become: if it is raining, children cannot go out and play in public space. But why not? All it takes is a space designed for all weather, and the right clothes to wear. Life, after all, is not only lived in spring and summer.

Life with children is meant to be lived every day, and our public spaces must be enjoyable for them.

“Quando iniciei a minha participação no projeto, pensei que fazia sentido olhar o espaço que percorremos todos os dias de forma a que fosse aprazível para as crianças, mas pensei que seria suficiente pensarmos como é que elas pensam.

Só depois me apercebi que o que os adultos pensam que as crianças pensam é diferente do que elas pensam mesmo, razão pela qual, os políticos, os arquitetos, os engenheiros, os designers e, no fundo, os pais e mães procuram ouvir deles próprios o que e como pensam o espaço.

Às vezes, na decisão sobre as políticas públicas, olhamos para um espaço e dizemos, aqui ficaria bem um parque infantil e siga, faz-se o projeto e avança-se com a obra, mas, só mais tarde, é que nos apercebemos que o que seria necessário mesmo era perceber o que pensam todos os potenciais utilizadores do espaço, incluindo as crianças e sobretudo estas quando é um espaço comunitário e em que um pequeno obstáculo pode ser uma enorme barreira e um desincentivo ao seu uso.

De facto não é fácil, por regra, ouvir a comunidade, e, muitas vezes, é apenas um pró-forma, como as denominadas consultas públicas, mas depois vemos que, quando de facto envolvemos, os pais, as escolas, os professores e as crianças, o resultado é bem melhor.

Basta pensar que somos uma sociedade extremamente protetora com as crianças e, por exemplo, está a chover, não podemos sair e ir brincar para o espaço público. Mas porque não podemos? Basta que o espaço esteja preparado para todos os tempos meteorológicos e a roupa que vamos usar seja a adequada. Afinal, não se vide e convive apenas na primavera e no verão.

A Vida, e sobretudo com os filhos, é para ser vivida todos os dias e os espaços públicos têm de ser aprazíveis para eles.”

(in the author's own words, in Portuguese)

Odette Carvalho

Arquiteta | Câmara Municipal de Amarante



Taking part in the PLAYFUL-ED project was a fantastic and deeply enriching experience, both personally and professionally.

The project made clear that intergenerational planning goes far beyond simply including children. It means thinking about the city across all stages of life, and genuinely listening to people with very different perspectives.

The use of exploratory and creative methodologies helped surface needs that traditional planning processes often overlook, particularly in public spaces where small obstacles can become significant barriers to use. Throughout the process, it became evident that children's priorities and needs do not always match what adults imagine for a given space or place, which only reinforced how important it is to involve them directly.

The experience also showed that, despite the inherent challenges of meaningfully mobilising a community, when local stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and children are truly involved, as happened in this project, the results are significantly richer.

This process helped promote civic awareness, deepen participant engagement, and strengthen a sense of belonging to shared spaces. It also highlighted how essential interdepartmental cooperation is if ideas are to translate into real action.

"A participação no projeto PLAYFUL-ED foi uma experiência fantástica e muito enriquecedora, tanto a nível pessoal como profissional.

O projeto evidenciou que o planeamento intergeracional vai muito além da simples inclusão das crianças, implicando pensar a cidade para todas as fases da vida e ouvir atores com perspetivas distintas.

O recurso a metodologias exploratórias e criativas permitiu revelar necessidades que muitas vezes passam despercebidas no planeamento tradicional, sobretudo em espaços públicos onde pequenos obstáculos podem constituir grandes barreiras à sua utilização. Ao longo do processo tornou-se evidente que as prioridades e as necessidades das crianças nem sempre coincidem com aquelas que os adultos idealizam para um determinado espaço ou lugar, o que reforçou a importância do seu envolvimento direto.

A experiência demonstrou ainda que, apesar das dificuldades inerentes à mobilização efetiva da comunidade, quando os atores locais (como os pais, os professores e as crianças, etc...) são verdadeiramente envolvidos, como aconteceu neste projeto, os resultados são significativamente mais qualificados.

Este processo contribuiu para promover a educação cívica, para um maior envolvimento dos participantes e para o reforço do sentimento de pertença aos espaços comuns, ao mesmo tempo que evidenciou a importância da cooperação interdepartamental para que as ideias se traduzam efetivamente em ação."

(in the author's own words, in Portuguese)

Margarida Cardoso

Design Gráfico e Conteúdos | Câmara Municipal de Amarante



"The Playful-ED project turned out to be a genuine surprise, particularly for the innovative way it approaches mobility and urban furniture from a playful, educational, and inclusive perspective.

It also demonstrated how small changes can transform public space into somewhere more accessible, stimulating, and thoughtfully designed for people of all ages, encouraging more active community participation.

Being part of a European programme like this is always an asset for the Municipality and its residents, as it reinforces the importance of knowledge-sharing and cooperation between territories, contributing to more conscious and innovative solutions for our cities.

I would also highlight the community's involvement: people showed up with real enthusiasm and a constructive critical spirit, helping the project team to reflect and grow in the way we think about public space.

" O projeto Playful-ED revelou-se uma verdadeira surpresa, sobretudo pela forma inovadora como aborda a mobilidade e o mobiliário urbano a partir de uma perspetiva lúdica, educativa e inclusiva.

Este projeto demonstrou também como pequenas alterações podem transformar o espaço público num lugar mais acessível, estimulante e pensado para diferentes idades, promovendo uma participação mais ativa da comunidade.

A integração num programa europeu como este é sempre uma mais-valia para o Município e para os seus munícipes, pois reforça a importância da partilha de conhecimento e da cooperação entre territórios, contribuindo para soluções mais conscientes e inovadoras para as cidades.

Destaco ainda o envolvimento da comunidade, que se mostrou muito participativa e com um espírito crítico positivo, ajudando a equipa do projeto a refletir e a evoluir na forma como se pensa o espaço público."

(in the author's own words, in Portuguese)



Rita Batista
Former councilwoman



I believe that locally elected representatives should see their mandates as an opportunity to bring new energy and new ways of doing things to their territories.

Amarante is my home. For a number of years I held responsibilities covering urban planning, transport, mobility, road safety, consumer affairs, and youth, and I quickly came to understand that change is not built through desk work or regulation alone, but above all through relationships with the people who experience our territory every day.

It is built by listening, by researching what works well elsewhere, and by testing things, always accepting the risk of getting it wrong. I learned that we reduce that risk when we bring in local stakeholders and the very people our interventions are meant to serve. Amarante holds my memories from childhood, and that became an added sense of responsibility in every decision I made.

I have had the opportunity to be part of several European projects, and when the invitation to join Playful-ED came, we accepted the challenge with great enthusiasm. It was an excellent opportunity to work with outstanding partners, to witness and experience interventions in Bologna and Brussels alongside our technical team, and to step outside our comfort zone. The greatest challenge was learning to look at our territory through the eyes of children, to put myself in their place, and to understand that it is only through co-creation that we find not just problems but also solutions that adults have, so often, lost the ability to see. We debated, without preconceptions and with complete openness, how to make public space a safe and welcoming place for children. Political engagement demands active listening and continuous learning, and being part of this project allowed me to strengthen both. It was a deeply enriching experience.

"Acredito que os eleitos locais devem encarar os seus mandatos como a possibilidade imprimirem novas dinâmicas nos seus territórios.

Amarante é a minha terra e assumi, durante alguns anos competências no âmbito do urbanismo, transportes, mobilidade, segurança rodoviária, defesa do consumidor e juventude tendo percebido, desde logo, que a mudança não se constrói apenas com trabalho de gabinete ou elaboração de regulamentos mas sobretudo na relação com as pessoas que experienciam o nosso território todos os dias.

Constrói-se ouvindo, pesquisando o que de bom se faz em outros locais e testando, correndo sempre o risco de errar. Aprendi que reduzimos a margem de erro se integrarmos os agentes locais e o público-alvo das intervenções. Amarante guarda as minhas memórias desde a infância o que se tornou uma responsabilidade acrescida na tomada de decisões.

Tive a oportunidade de integrar vários projetos europeus e foi com grande entusiasmo que quando nos foi proposto integrar o Playful-Ed aceitamos desafio. Esta foi uma excelente oportunidade para trabalhar com parceiros de excelência, experienciar e testemunhar, juntamente com os elementos técnicos, intervenções tanto em Bolonha como em Bruxelas e sair da zona de conforto. O maior desafio foi olhar para o território pelos olhos das crianças, pondo-me no lugar delas e perceber que só em co-criação se encontram problemas mas também soluções que os adultos foram, tantas vezes, perdendo a capacidade de ver. Debates, sem pré-conceitos e com total transparência como tornar o espaço público um local seguro para as crianças. A participação política exige um processo de escuta activa e aprendizagem constante e a participação neste projeto permitiu-me reforçar ambas as componentes tendo sido profundamente enriquecedor."

(in the author's own words, in Portuguese)

Joana Moreira
Architect

“*My involvement in PLAYFUL-ED began before the project formally existed. I took part in conceiving and preparing the Erasmus+ application, and from that very early stage what excited me most was the possibility of exploring concrete ways to involve children in urban planning. Not as a symbolic exercise, but as a genuine component of the decision-making process around public space.*

As an architect, I work daily with public space, urban regeneration, and decisions that directly affect people's lives. But the truth is that training in architecture and urban planning, however technically thorough, rarely prepares us to truly listen to communities, let alone to children. We know we should plan for people, we genuinely care about inclusion, but we often lack the tools and methods to do so in a participatory and meaningful way. It was precisely that gap that motivated us to write this application and to seek partners who could help us address it.

The response we received when we began preparing the project and inviting people to participate was surprising and enormously encouraging. There was genuine, widespread enthusiasm, from municipal technicians to teachers, from parents to local parish councils. We realised there was a latent desire to do things differently, and that the focus on children and the playful approach of PLAYFUL-ED served as a way into conversations that would otherwise have been unlikely to happen across departments and institutions.

The inspiring examples we studied throughout the project, from Bologna to Barcelona, from Bristol to Tirana, gave us the confidence that something small, like a pilot with a few elements of tactical urbanism, could have a real impact. And it did.

“O meu envolvimento no PLAYFUL-ED começou antes do projeto existir formalmente. Participei na conceção e na preparação da candidatura ao programa Erasmus+, e desde essa fase inicial o que mais me entusiasmou foi a possibilidade de explorar formas concretas de envolver as crianças no planeamento urbano. Não como um exercício simbólico, mas como uma componente real do processo de decisão sobre o espaço público.

Enquanto arquiteta, trabalho diariamente com espaço público, com reabilitação urbana, com decisões que afetam diretamente a vida das pessoas. Mas a verdade é que a formação em arquitetura e urbanismo, por muito completa que seja do ponto de vista técnico, raramente nos prepara para ouvir efetivamente as comunidades, e muito menos as crianças. Sabemos que devemos planear para as pessoas, preocupamo-nos genuinamente com a inclusão, mas faltam-nos muitas vezes as ferramentas e os métodos para o fazer de forma participada e significativa. Foi precisamente essa lacuna que nos motivou a escrever esta candidatura e a procurar parceiros que nos pudessem ajudar a colmatá-la.

A resposta que recebemos quando começámos a preparar o projeto e a convidar pessoas a participar foi surpreendente e muito motivadora. Houve um entusiasmo genuíno, transversal, desde os técnicos municipais aos professores, dos pais às juntas de freguesia. Percebemos que existia uma vontade latente de fazer as coisas de forma diferente, e que o foco nas crianças e na abordagem lúdica do PLAYFUL-ED funcionou como uma porta de entrada para conversas que, de outra forma, dificilmente teriam acontecido entre departamentos e entre instituições.

Os casos inspiradores que estudámos ao longo do projeto, de Bolonha a Barcelona, de Bristol a Tirana, deram-nos a confiança de que algo pequeno, como um projeto-piloto com alguns elementos de urbanismo tático, podia ter um impacto real. E teve.

(in the author's own words, in Portuguese - continues in the next page)

Joana Moreira (continuation)

Architect



When we placed stickers on the ground to mark the route and let children intervene in the space with their own stickers, their visual requests and observations, we understood that experimentation is, in itself, a learning process, rewarding for everyone involved, including for us as professionals. Sometimes all it takes is a first step, however small, to realise that change is possible.

Although my work is not directly linked to mobility, this experience showed me how planning for accessibility naturally brings together the various dimensions of shared urban space: how we arrive at places, how we stay in them, how we live alongside one another in them. That conviviality is precious, and children remind us of it constantly. At the same time, we realised that we can also explain certain things to children, help them understand why things are the way they are: why the pedestrian crossings in the historic part of the city look slightly different, or why certain buildings cannot be altered. That is civic participation in its most authentic form: not simply asking children what they want, but building with them a shared understanding of what is possible, what is desirable, and what it means to protect what already exists.

I carry the lessons and inspirations of this project into future interventions. And I carry with me a reinforced conviction that the values of the New European Bauhaus, which inspired us so much throughout this journey, are not abstractions: they are principles that can be lived in practice. Ensuring beauty and protecting architectural heritage. Thinking about sustainability, through school routes that are more active and less car-dependent. And committing to genuinely participatory processes, so that solutions are co-created with communities. Beauty, sustainability, and inclusion, together. That is what PLAYFUL-ED showed us is possible, even in a small project, even in a three-day pilot, even in a small city like Amarante.

Quando colocámos autocolantes no chão para marcar o percurso e deixámos as crianças intervir no espaço com os seus próprios autocolantes, com os seus pedidos visuais e as suas observações, percebemos que a experimentação é, em si mesma, um processo de aprendizagem, gratificante para todos os envolvidos, incluindo para nós, profissionais. Por vezes, basta dar o primeiro passo, mesmo que pequeno, para perceber que a mudança é possível.

Embora o meu trabalho não esteja diretamente ligado à mobilidade, esta experiência mostrou-me como o planeamento para a acessibilidade une naturalmente as várias dimensões do espaço urbano partilhado: a forma como chegamos aos lugares, como permanecemos neles, como convivemos neles. Esta convivialidade é preciosa, e muitas vezes somos lembrados dela pelas crianças. Ao mesmo tempo, percebemos que também podemos explicar certas coisas às crianças, ajudá-las a compreender por que é que as coisas são como são. Por exemplo, por que é que as passadeiras na zona histórica da cidade são um pouco diferentes, ou por que é que certos edifícios não podem ser alterados. Isso é participação cívica na sua forma mais autêntica: não apenas perguntar às crianças o que querem, mas construir com elas uma compreensão partilhada do que é possível, do que é desejável e do que implica proteger o que já existe.

Levo comigo as lições e as inspirações deste projeto para intervenções futuras. E levo também uma convicção reforçada de que os valores da Nova Bauhaus Europeia, que tanto nos inspiraram ao longo deste percurso, não são abstrações: são princípios que se podem viver na prática. Garantir a estética e proteger o património arquitetónico. Pensar na sustentabilidade, como percursos escolares mais ativos e menos dependentes do automóvel. E apostar em processos verdadeiramente participativos, para que as soluções sejam co-criadas com as comunidades. Beleza, sustentabilidade e inclusão, juntas. É isso que o PLAYFUL-ED nos mostrou ser possível, mesmo num projeto pequeno, mesmo num piloto de três dias, mesmo numa cidade de pequena dimensão como Amarante."

(in the author's own words, in Portuguese)

Juliette Riglet

Urban Foxes



Playful-Ed serves as a powerful reminder of how much we, as adults, can learn from children. Too often, planning processes overlook children's perspectives or rely on assumptions about their needs.

The pilot demonstrated that giving children a meaningful voice does not have to be complicated. Through simple, creative, and playful methods, children were able to reflect on their surroundings and contribute as active stakeholders in city-making.

This made the process enjoyable not only for the children but also for parents and other adults, fostering a shared intergenerational experience.

By valuing children's creativity and perspectives as a source of learning, Playful-Ed encourages us to reconnect with our inner child and inspires the creation of more inclusive, community-focused urban spaces.

Loua Moens

Urban Foxes



We had the opportunity to present our Urban Foxes tools (Public Space Doctor, etc) during the Playful-Ed pilot. Despite the language barrier (the sessions were in Portuguese and required translation), the audience responded with great enthusiasm. It became clear that concepts such as participation and co-creation are still relatively new in this context, yet there was a strong curiosity and openness to explore them further. People seemed positively surprised by the use of creative, colourful, and simple tools as a way to make thinking about public space more accessible, inclusive, and engaging.

The pilot strongly highlighted the value of involving different age groups—especially young children and their parents—in urban planning processes. While this is not always an obvious or easy approach, Playful-Ed demonstrated that there are effective and playful methods to make this possible. Walking through the streets with children and giving them a sense of agency over what they liked or would change in their environment was particularly powerful. The use of photos and stickers made participation very approachable and intuitive for them.

At the same time, the experience raised some interesting reflections. For instance, the content of the stickers was pre-defined by adults, which may have limited the children's opportunity to fully express their own ideas. A potential next step could be to involve children more directly in creating these tools themselves.

At the end of the walk, a large map displaying the route allowed children, and later their parents, to add stickers and notes. This worked well, as children engaged enthusiastically. However, the bird's-eye perspective of the map made it somewhat difficult for them to recognize specific locations. A more child-friendly perspective could improve this aspect.

The final session with parents added an important intergenerational dimension. It was striking to see how children took ownership of "their" route and proudly shared their contributions, suggesting a strong sense of agency. The discussion with parents, however, was initially somewhat hesitant, as expressing ideas in a group setting is not always easy. Using the Urban Foxes "Kiss, Marry, Die" tool helped to facilitate the conversation, making it more playful and accessible, and enabling participants to articulate their thoughts about the city and its needs in a more creative way.

Overall, the pilot demonstrated how participatory, playful approaches can foster civic engagement across generations, making urban planning more inclusive, tangible, and meaningful for all involved.

Juliana Carvalho
Area Europa



One of the most powerful things I've witnessed through this project is how creating genuine spaces for children to participate, and truly valuing what they bring to the table, becomes an unexpected sort of mirror for adults. As children haven't yet learned to accept things "the way they are", they question things we have grown accustomed to: why are there so many cars here? Why are there so few trees? Why do we always walk in a hurry? And in doing so, they invite us to question it too.

This matters more than it might seem. Many of the things we've normalised, like car-centric urban design, shrinking green spaces, and the gradual disappearance of community life, feel natural because we have normalised them. But they are the results of our doing. These norms are constructs, and therefore can be deconstructed. They are often the results of choices that make certain things easier in the short term, like parking our cars close to our destination, while quietly eroding our health, our sense of community, our relationship with nature. Children, unburdened by that habituation, can see the cracks. When we allow their perspectives to count, we give ourselves permission to see them too. We allow ourselves to embark on their proposals and imagine different ways of living, more playful ways of being.

And then there's something that guided us from the very early stages of drafting this project. As a mother and researcher in sustainable urban mobility, I was keen on making this bet: that being playful together is a powerful way to promote citizen engagement committed with sustainability transitions and to foster reciprocal learning opportunities. And that parents of young children represent a perfect target group: they are, almost by definition, already in a mode of change. Their world has just shifted... their routines, their priorities, their relationship with public space. They are more open, more receptive, and perhaps more motivated than ever to think differently about the kind of city their children will grow up in.

*We often treat playfulness as something we outgrow... like a luxury, or worse, a sign of not being serious. But as Cas Holman argues in *Playful: How Play Shifts Our Thinking, Inspires Connection, and Sparks Creativity* (2025), suppressing our playful instinct as adults is hazardous — to our wellbeing, to our ability to connect, and to our capacity to imagine new solutions. Allowing ourselves to be silly, curious, and open is one of the most honest forms of lifelong learning. It lowers our defences. It makes civic participation feel less like a duty and more like an invitation. When an adult walks in a street looking silly with a handcrafted, full of stickers artefact that poses as an inverted periscope to lower their perspective to that of a child, that person feels a bit silly, smiles, and then something shifts.*

And this is something at the centre of the Playful-Ed approach, although it is something deceptively simple, it is profoundly powerful: fostering smiles.

This is not fluff, although yes... it is, obviously, not serious! Smiling is hardwired into our biology. It can be contagious. It lowers stranger anxiety and opens people up within seconds. When an adult looks "a little silly" using a periscope, they're not losing authority (at least not entirely and not for long!) they're practicing what I'd call tactical vulnerability. It dissolves the hierarchy. Kids feel empowered to approach. And other adults feel permitted to play too.

So I would argue that the Playful-ED approach is strategic for promoting higher levels of participation, promoting engaging and welcoming co-creation environments, that puts people and community first, aiming for more than accessibility and proximity, aiming for enjoyability!

In a time of increasing polarisation, screen dependance, and anxiety, these moments of shared laughter in public space are quietly radical. As nicely put by Victor Borge, "a smile is the shortest distance between two people". So let us smile more in the process of learning from each other, with each other, and as a way to imagine better futures together. That's what Playful-ED makes possible. And that's why it matters.

Gianluca Corzani

Area Europa



On the second day of the Amarante pilot, a group of 4th graders placed a large "no cars" sticker in front of their school. Thirty seconds later, a car drove past. They erupted - shouting, gesturing, genuinely outraged. For me, it was one of the funniest and most clarifying moments of the entire project.

I'll bring that moment with me as a constant reminder of at least three things. First, that civic participation must be accountable: when communities are invited into a process, the outcomes must feed back into real decisions - otherwise participation is performance. Second, that we all should have a role that can be transformative as citizens - and when our voices, needs and desires are not actively sought, we must claim them. And third, that what looked like a naïve gesture was not a childish dream - it was a vision. Because as this project reminded us, places belong to those who inhabit them, and it is those people who have the deepest knowledge of what needs to change.

Urban space is never neutral. It reflects choices, priorities, interests and power - and too often, the absence of the voices that matter most. This is where PLAYFUL-ED began: with a simple but radical question - who are cities for, and who gets to shape them? And with the conviction that designing cities for those who suffer most from their current design is not a niche concern: it's universal design. And no one should be left out.

I believe our job as EU project designers goes beyond securing resources for the communities and territories we work with.

It is to facilitate connections - as needs matchers - weaving together ideas, communities, institutions, and territories to ignite processes that, in the best cases, enable social innovation with meaningful and lasting impact. From the workshops in Bologna and Brussels to the pilot in Amarante and the multiplier event back in Bologna, PLAYFUL-ED partners tried to do that: a shared process of learning, testing, and reflecting across countries, disciplines, and generations. Transnational cooperation at its best - not just a funding framework, but a space where ideas travel, collide, and grow, and where unfair assumptions which had been normalised get questioned, named and rethought.

At the heart of it all is an intersectional view: a child-friendly city, a feminist city, an ecological city are not separate challenges. They are interconnected dimensions of the same challenging vision. A vision of a just city that works for all, starting from those most marginalised by its current design, who should be not taken into account only as city users, but also as city-makers.

Making this real means staying critical. Too often, lately, the language of "urban regeneration" is co-opted to justify gentrification and speculation. We stand for something different: regeneration as care, access, and redistribution: transformation should be measured not only by the value produced by cool renovations but, most importantly, through the lens of spatial justice and the rebuilding of community bonds that decades of individualism and social fragmentation have eroded.

Small-scale projects like this one are stepping stones. Moments of territorial activation, laboratories of democracy where plural and sometimes conflicting interests around public space can meet and be negotiated. These moments can ignite change. But that spark needs to be carried forward: by public administrations committed to creating the conditions for it - as the Municipality of Amarante committed to - and by communities ready to claim their role of shaping their own time and (public) space.



PART 3

A REPLICABLE FRAMEWORK

IF YOU WANT TO DO THIS IN YOUR CITY

Whether it's your neighbourhood, school grounds... or wherever you want to see more child-friendly shared spaces!

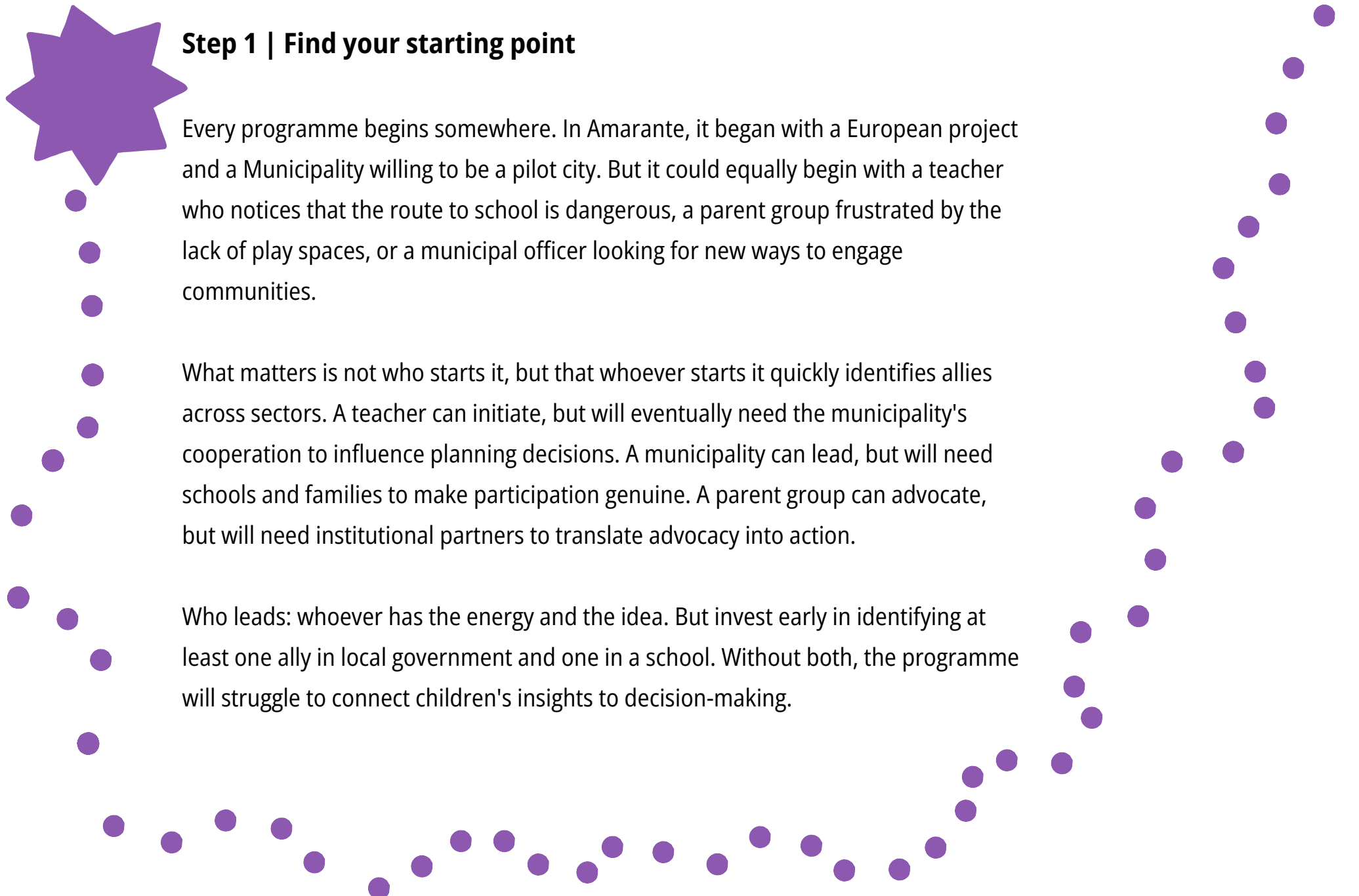
How to use this framework

What follows is not a rigid recipe. It is a practical guide drawn from the Amarante pilot, organised as a sequence of steps that worked for us and that we believe can be adapted to other contexts. Some steps will feel familiar; others may not apply to your situation. The important thing is the overall logic: build relationships first, then listen, then act, then reflect.

This framework is written for anyone who wants to initiate a child-centred placemaking programme, whether you are a municipal officer with institutional authority, a teacher looking to connect your school with urban planning processes, or a parent or community group advocating for change from outside the institutions. At each step, we note who is best placed to lead and what different actors can contribute.

A note on resources: the Amarante pilot was funded through an Erasmus+ KA210 small-scale strategic partnership, which is a modest funding line. Most of the activities described here require very little budget. What they do require is time, relationships, and willingness.

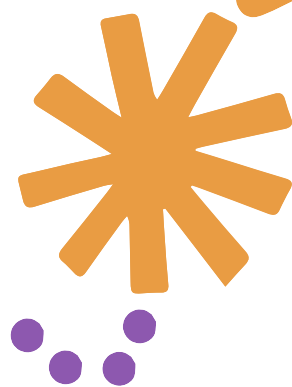
Step 1 | Find your starting point



Every programme begins somewhere. In Amarante, it began with a European project and a Municipality willing to be a pilot city. But it could equally begin with a teacher who notices that the route to school is dangerous, a parent group frustrated by the lack of play spaces, or a municipal officer looking for new ways to engage communities.

What matters is not who starts it, but that whoever starts it quickly identifies allies across sectors. A teacher can initiate, but will eventually need the municipality's cooperation to influence planning decisions. A municipality can lead, but will need schools and families to make participation genuine. A parent group can advocate, but will need institutional partners to translate advocacy into action.

Who leads: whoever has the energy and the idea. But invest early in identifying at least one ally in local government and one in a school. Without both, the programme will struggle to connect children's insights to decision-making.



Step 2 | Build your coalition

Before any activity with children, the institutional ground must be prepared. This means identifying and engaging the stakeholders whose support (or at least non-opposition) will determine whether the programme can happen and whether its findings will be taken seriously.

In Amarante, this involved: the City Councillor for Urban Planning, officers from the divisions of urbanism, mobility, public space, education, culture, environment, and youth, school leaders and teachers, parent associations, and parish councils. The key lesson from Amarante: appeal to the "more than one hat" that most people wear. A traffic engineer who is also a father, a municipal education officer who is also a grandmother, an architect who cycles to work with her children, these are people whose professional and personal experience overlap. Inviting them to speak from both perspectives at once breaks through institutional formality and creates genuine engagement.

Map your stakeholders using the tools in Module 1. Be honest about who has power, who has influence, and who has been historically excluded.

Who leads: ideally, the municipality or a well-connected local organisation. Schools can convene their own networks but may need support to reach across municipal departments.



Step 3 | Choose your site

Not every street or neighbourhood is equally suited to a pilot. Choose a site that:

- Has a meaningful connection to children's daily lives (a school route, a public square near a school, a park or playground that children use or avoid).
- Is walkable and safe enough for groups of children to move through with adult supervision, even if part of the point is to identify where it is not safe.
- Is familiar to the institutional stakeholders you have engaged, so that their professional knowledge of the site can be placed alongside children's experiential knowledge.
- Offers a mix of strengths and problems, not a showcase and not a disaster, so that observations can be nuanced.

In Amarante, the route ran from the primary school (EB1/JI n.º 2) through the historic centre to the Cineteatro. It was an ordinary urban route, not specially selected for its drama, which made the children's observations all the more revealing.

Who leads: the local partner with the best knowledge of the neighbourhood. In a municipality-led programme, the urban planning or education department. In a school-led programme, the teachers who know which routes children actually walk.

Step 4 | Design your programme

The Amarante pilot ran over three days, with a clear sequence: Day 1 for institutional alignment, Day 2 for children's fieldwork, Day 3 for parents and caregivers. This structure worked well, but it is not the only option. A shorter programme (one day) or a longer one (spread over several weeks) can also be effective, depending on your resources and context.

Key design principles from our experience:

- Institutions first, then children, then parents. If you reverse this order, the adults who need to hear children's insights may not be ready to receive them. Day 1 in Amarante was not a formality; it was the session that primed municipal stakeholders to take seriously what came next.
- Brief the teachers thoroughly. Teachers are not chaperones; they are pedagogical partners. In Amarante, the teachers' decision to frame children as "architects of urban space" transformed the energy of Day 2. Give teachers the placemaking tools in advance, discuss how to adapt them for the age group, and co-design the walkshop together.
- Plan for family-friendly logistics. If you want parents to participate, do not schedule their session during working hours. Saturday mornings worked in Amarante. Provide parallel activity spaces so that children can draw and play while adults discuss. Welcome babies and toddlers. These are not extras; they are signals of respect.
- Choose your tools, based on what suits your group, your site, and your time. In Amarante, we used the City Doctors tool, sticker-based observation along the route, participatory mapping, and the reverse periscope. You do not need to use all of them.
- Prepare materials. Stickers (for wayfinding on the route and for children's observations), printed maps (large format, for collective annotation), post-its, markers, drawing materials, clipboards for adults, cameras or phones for documentation, and, if including a periscope session, the materials to build periscopes.

Who leads: the programme design should be a joint effort between the local partner (who knows the context) and any external partners (who bring methodology and a fresh perspective). Teachers should be involved in designing the children's activities specifically.

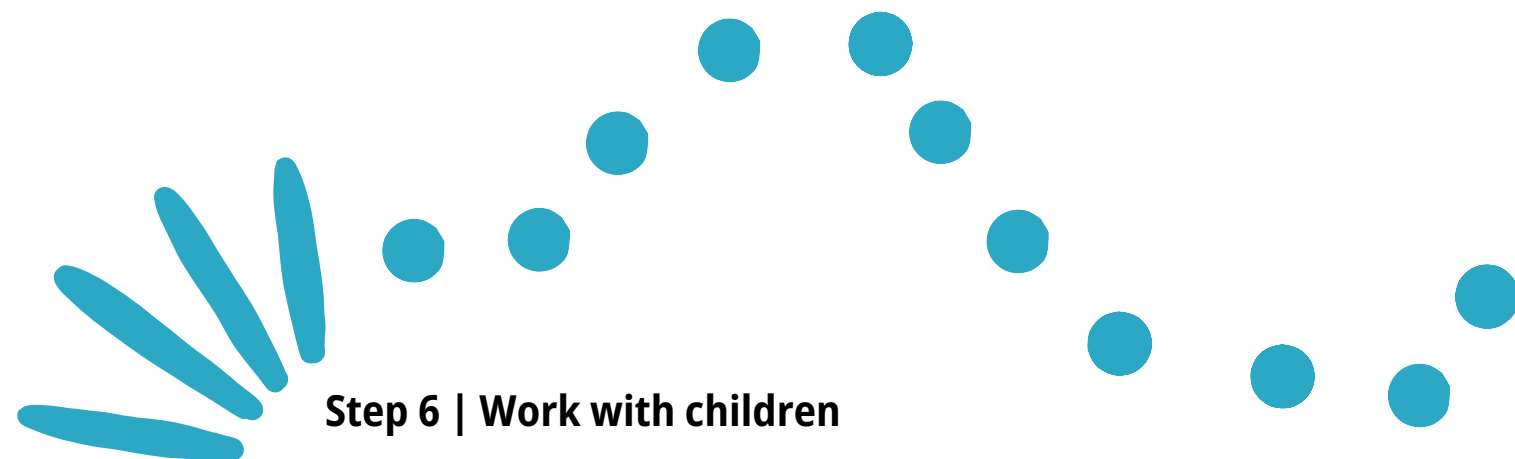
Step 5 | Run the institutional session

This is your "Day 1". Bring together your coalition of stakeholders, present the project's purpose and methodology, and create a shared commitment to listening to children's perspectives.

Practical tips from Amarante:

- Open with a political signal. Having the City Councillor present and speaking first communicated that this was not a peripheral exercise but something the Municipality took seriously. If you can secure a visible institutional endorsement, do so.
- Present the toolkit. Walk stakeholders through the key concepts from Module 1 (child-friendly planning, Arnstein's ladder, the 15-minute city critique) and the tools from Module 2 that will be used. This creates a shared vocabulary.
- Ask a generative question. In Amarante, it was: "What would you like to see in shared public spaces here?" Keep the discussion open and oriented towards aspiration, not problem-listing.
- Document who is in the room and what they commit to. This is your baseline for the feedback loop later.

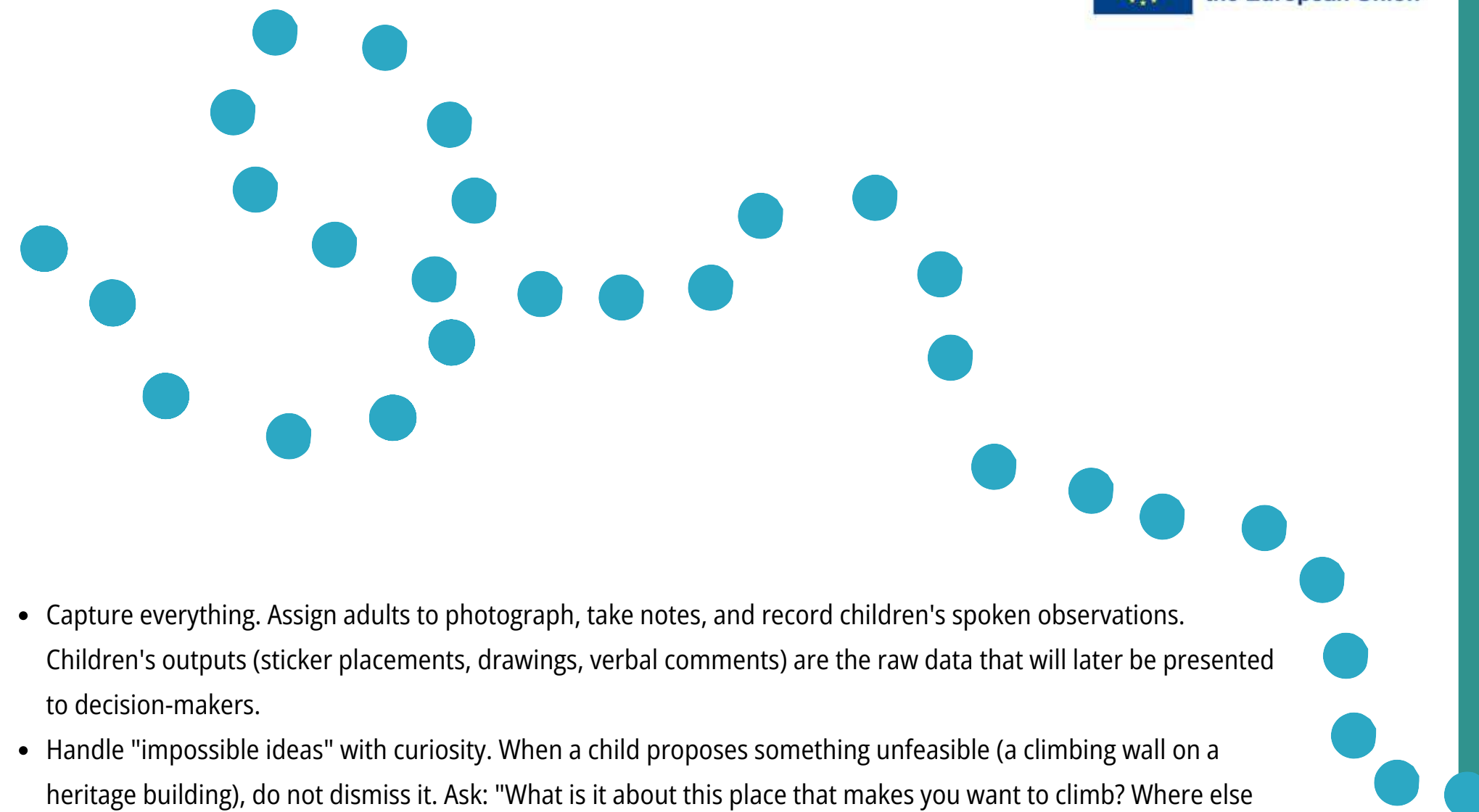
Who leads: the municipality or the most institutionally connected partner.



Step 6 | Work with children

This is your "Day 2", the heart of the programme.
Practical tips from Amarante:

- Wayfinding stickers on the route. Place stickers on the ground along the planned route before the children set out. This serves a dual purpose: it guides the groups (practical) and it signals to children and passers-by that something special is happening in this street today (playful). Give children their own stickers to add as they walk.
- Brief children using the City Doctors framework. Adapt the language for the age group: "We are going to be doctors of this street. We need to find out what is healthy, what is sick, and what medicine it needs." Teachers are essential here.
- Let children lead the pace. Walk at their speed. Stop where they stop. Do not rush observations that seem tangential; they rarely are.



- Capture everything. Assign adults to photograph, take notes, and record children's spoken observations. Children's outputs (sticker placements, drawings, verbal comments) are the raw data that will later be presented to decision-makers.
- Handle "impossible ideas" with curiosity. When a child proposes something unfeasible (a climbing wall on a heritage building), do not dismiss it. Ask: "What is it about this place that makes you want to climb? Where else could we put something like that?" Honour the need, redirect the form.
- Consolidate with maps. Back at the meeting point, have children transfer their observations onto large printed maps. These become the legible bridge between children's experience and planners' language.
- Consent, safety, and supervision. Ensure parental consent is obtained well in advance. Maintain appropriate adult-to-child ratios (we recommend 1 adult per 4 to 6 children on street workshops). Conduct a safety scan of the route beforehand. See Module 2, Tool 0 (Fieldwork Starter).

Who leads: teachers and facilitators jointly, with the local partner managing logistics and the external partner(s) supporting methodology.



Step 7 | Involve parents and caregivers

This is your "Day 3". The goal is twofold: to shift adult perspectives (through embodied experience) and to create a space for parents' own knowledge to surface.

Practical tips from Amarante:

- Use the reverse periscope. Nothing we tested was more effective at producing genuine perspective shifts in adults. Build the periscopes in advance or, even better, as a group activity with parents before the walk (the crafting itself is a conversation starter).
- Walk the same route the children walked. This allows direct comparison between adult and child observations.
- Create a reflection space that welcomes families. Parallel activity zones for children (drawing, post-its, free play) alongside the adult discussion. Refreshments. A relaxed, Saturday-morning atmosphere. One session, not too long: 2 to 3 hours including the walk.
- Ask parents about their own childhoods. This was not planned in Amarante but emerged organically and became one of the richest conversations. Adults reflecting on what they had as children and what their children lack is a powerful motivator for change.
- Listen for the practical details. Parents and grandparents will tell you things that no survey captures: the need for toilets near play areas, seating along routes, shade, play spaces for mixed age groups, the impossibility of a long outing with a toddler if there is nowhere to sit. These are design requirements hiding in everyday complaints.

Who leads: the consortium or organising team, with support from the school (which is the natural communication channel to families).

Step 8 | Close the loop

This is the step that most participatory processes skip, and it is the one that determines whether the programme leads to change or remains a pleasant memory.

Closing the loop means ensuring that children's insights reach the people with the power to act on them, and that those people respond, even if the response is "we cannot do this, and here is why."

In Amarante, the pilot findings are feeding into the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan and the Urban Rehabilitation Area planning process. The multiplier webinar in January 2026 brought additional municipal staff into the conversation. But we would be the first to say this step could have been stronger: a dedicated session where children's sticker maps and observations are formally presented to the municipal council, with a committed timeline for response, would have created a more explicit accountability mechanism.

Practical suggestions:

- Organise a "findings presentation" session where children (supported by teachers) present their observations and proposals to municipal stakeholders. Use the sticker maps, drawings, and photos as visual evidence.
- Ask decision-makers to respond on the spot: which ideas can be explored, which face constraints, and what the next steps will be.
- Document these commitments publicly.
- Return to the children, even briefly, to tell them what happened with their ideas. This closes the feedback loop and demonstrates that participation was not performative.

Who leads: the municipality, ideally with the same stakeholders who participated in Day 1.





Step 9 | Document and share

Good documentation serves three purposes: it creates evidence for local decision-making, it enables other cities to learn from your experience, and it gives participants (especially children) a record of what they contributed.

What to document:

- The process: who was involved, what tools were used, what sequence was followed, what worked and what did not.
- The outputs: children's sticker maps, drawings, verbal observations (transcribed), photos of the workshops and activities, parents' reflections.
- The outcomes: what changed in institutional thinking, what concrete actions followed, what remains to be done.

Formats that work:

- A visual summary (poster or infographic) for public display in the school, municipality, or community centre.
- A short report or case study for sharing with other municipalities and networks.
- Social media documentation (with appropriate consent) for broader visibility.
- Contribution to open-access toolkits like this one.

Who leads: whoever has communications capacity. In a consortium, the partner with design and content skills. In a school-led programme, the school's communications team or a volunteer parent.



Step 10 | Plan for what comes next

A pilot is, by definition, a beginning. The hardest question is what happens when the funded project ends and the external partners go home.

Options for sustainability:

- Embed the approach in existing municipal processes. Child impact assessments for new developments. Mandatory consultation with schools before changes to school-route infrastructure. Regular "child workshop" sessions as part of the city's participatory governance calendar.
- Build capacity within schools. Train teachers to use the placemaking tools independently, so that workshops and observation activities become part of the curriculum rather than one-off events.
- Create a local network. Connect the parents, teachers, and municipal officers who participated in the pilot into an ongoing working group or advisory panel.
- Seek follow-up funding. Programmes like Erasmus+, URBACT, and national urban innovation funds can support deeper and longer iterations.
- Share the toolkit. The document you are reading exists so that the knowledge generated by one small-scale project can travel further than its original funding allowed.

Who leads: the municipality, if institutional embedding is the goal. The school or a community organisation, if grassroots sustainability is the priority. Ideally, both.

ONE-PAGE CHECKLIST

Running a child-centred placemaking programme: 10 (possible) steps

Use this as a quick reference alongside the detailed guide above.

1. Find your starting point

Identify who is initiating (municipality, school, community group).
Find at least one ally in local government and one in a school.

2. Build your coalition

Map stakeholders across municipal departments, schools, parent associations, and community networks.
Appeal to the "more than one hat" people wear.
Hold a preparatory meeting.

3. Choose your site

Select a route or space connected to children's daily lives.
Walk it yourselves first. Print maps.

4. Design your programme

Decide on duration (1 day to 3 days or more).
Select tools to be used.
Brief teachers as pedagogical partners, not chaperones.
Plan family-friendly logistics for any parent session.
Prepare materials: stickers, maps, markers, clipboards, cameras. Build periscopes if including a parent session.

5. Run the institutional session

Convene stakeholders. Present the project. Create shared vocabulary and commitment. Document who is in the room.

6. Work with children Place wayfinding stickers.

Brief children using adapted tools.
Walk at their pace. Capture everything.
Handle "impossible ideas" with curiosity.
Consolidate observations on maps.

7. Involve parents and caregivers

Periscope walk along the same route.
Family-friendly reflection session with parallel children's activities.
Listen for practical details (toilets, seating, shade, mixed-age play).

8. Close the loop

Present children's findings to decision-makers. Ask for responses and commitments. Return to the children to tell them what happened.

9. Document and share

Process, outputs, outcomes. Visual summary, short report, social media.
Contribute to open-access resources.

10. Plan for what comes next

Embed in municipal processes. Build school capacity. Create a local network. Seek follow-up funding. Share the toolkit.

Your turn!

If you use this toolkit, adapt it, test it in your own city, or build on it in any way, we would love to hear about it!

Share your experience, your sticker maps, your "impossible ideas," your lessons learned. And if you are interested in partnering on a future project, whether as a municipality, a school, a community organisation, or a fellow dreamer of better cities for children, get in touch. The best things in this toolkit came from collaboration, and there is always room for more.

Contact us: info@areaeuropa.it

Follow the project: [Instagram](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

Website: <https://sites.google.com/areaeuropa.it/playful-ed/home>



About

PLAYFUL-ED

The basics

Erasmus+ KA2 | Adult education

Participatory Learning And Youthful Urban Living
- EDucating adults to embrace young children's perspectives and needs

Key activities

- Toolkit development
- Capacity building
 - Bologna workshop
 - Brussels workshop
- Pilot - Amarante
- Webinar



FIND OUT MORE ON
OUR PROJECT WEBSITE



Erasmus+ KA210 PLAYFUL-ED [2024-1-BE02-KA210-ADU-000257987]

PLAYFUL-ED



Co-funded by
the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.