



The Urban Lab of Europe!

NEWS

PROJECT

OASIS - School yards: Openness, Adaptation, Sensitisation, Innovation and Social ties: Design and transformation of local urban areas adapted to climate change, working jointly with users

Paris, France

TOPIC

Climate adaptation

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Paris is creating an OASIS in the heart of its neighborhoods and why more cities should follow.

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What could an urban OASIS look like?

Possibly a leafy vibrant place in the midst of a concrete-heavy environment, a serene nook as a break from the hectic urban life, or even an accessible-to-all place, where you can meet your fellow neighbors, share and discuss your ideas as an antidote to the city's anonymity. Whichever your own definition is, Paris aims to make it real in each and every of its neighborhoods.

The OASIS project is led by the City of Paris and its scope is to **transform 10 pilot public schoolyards into “cool islands”**, envisioning a new innovative approach in the design and the function of the schoolyard as a vital core of every neighborhood*.

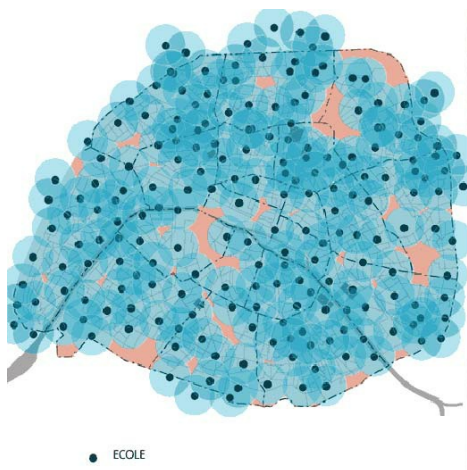
The concept emerged from the city's long-term [resilience strategy](#) which was published in 2017. The idea has been already piloted in 2 rounds (3 schoolyards in 2018, 28 schoolyards in 2019) mainly focusing in the spatial transformation of the schoolyards using sustainable materials, nature-based solutions and the children's participation during the design process.

In 2018, the OASIS project was selected to receive funding from the [Urban Innovative Actions Initiative](#), in order to explore further the multi-benefit potential of its concept. Therefore, the UIA Initiative provided the opportunity for the city to reflect on the generated experience and put the newly acquired knowledge into practice. During the three years of the UIA program, Paris aims to develop a standardized adaptable methodology for transforming asphalt-covered schoolyards into resilient, green, playful and welcoming neighborhood shared spaces for residents of all ages.

How did Paris come up with this idea?

Over the last decades the frequency of heatwaves has increased in Paris and unlike the general impression of the verdant and scenic Parisian gardens, the city in its heart is densely overbuilt. While today the average proportion of accessible green spaces in European cities is around [18.2 sq.m. per resident](#), Paris ranks below the average in the list as it provides 14,69 sq.m. per resident^[1].

Realizing the urgency of the heatwave threat, especially for the vulnerable population, Paris took the initiative to transform schoolyards into “cool” islands, by integrating nature-based solutions for shading and for storm-water management. Thus, eventually every neighborhood would acquire a small park - a cool and shaded refuge for days of extreme heat, considering that every Parisian resides within a radius of 250m from a public school.



There are more than 770 schools (including the “collèges”: middle schools managed by the City) in Paris with an average schoolyard surface of 1000m². With a back-of-the-envelope calculation, if the city manages to green all of its schoolyards, it will achieve a tremendous increase of green spaces, as the newly created green areas will add up to half the surface area of London’s Hyde Park! - so problem solved. However, as one can imagine, this equation is not that simple. Of course, ripping out asphalt and substituting with sustainable pervious material and nature-based solutions does make significant difference. Nevertheless, there are more parameters to consider, for example not every location could provide the same outcomes such as notable decrease of the local temperature or not every schoolyard could be turned entirely green. Moreover, as the OASIS aims to introduce a scheme of a multi-functional schoolyard that opens its doors after school hours to the broader local community, concerns such as safety and maintenance need to be addressed.

Why should more cities follow?

Paris is setting the bar high when it comes to the everyday life quality of its citizens and is determined to fulfill the expectations. In order to connect the right dots and develop a standardized procedure and a set of specifications for delivering small urban oases, the city has developed a multi-stakeholder and cross-disciplinary local team of experts.

With lots of challenges to overcome, unexpected barriers as well as valuable opportunities that emerge during the process, Paris aims to lead the way for an innovative cross-sectoral and multi-level approach on how we shape more sustainable and resilient cities, places where people love to live and raise their families.

Similar to Paris, cities around the globe are seeking for adaptable solutions that will tackle simultaneously complex urban challenges aiming to improve their citizens’ wellbeing and living quality. In general, schools everywhere are likely to have similar characteristics such as: (1) being located in every neighborhood, (2) provide an outdoor space, (3) have an active community built around them (educational community). Therefore, the OASIS project has the potential to become a transferable strategy and most likely an applicable solution for other cities as well.

OASIS aims to offer a breakthrough on how we design and manage public spaces in cities today, stay tuned to follow the milestones and lessons learnt from the OASIS journey!

Note: This article was written in January 2020 before the outbreak of COVID-19. In line with the safety measures announced by the City of Paris, the co-creation and community workshops are currently postponed or implemented online, where applicable. The OASIS partnership is working on integrating the safety measures such as physical distancing and outdoor learning into its scope.

[1] <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/thefutureofcities/space-and-the-city#the-chapter>

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