

JOURNAL

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

EDIT 11 MAY 2021

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OASIS Schoolyards Journal 2: Welcoming the newly transformed schoolyards

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Executive Summary

It has been over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic and cities worldwide are facing multiple challenges in preserving the continuity of city services for their citizens while ensuring that all safety measures are being followed. Schools have been significantly affected by the pandemic outbreak as in many countries, they were closed for a long period of time. According to [UNESCO](#), schools in France remained closed for almost 11 weeks this past year, following the relevant French Government's directive.

Despite the school closures throughout the year, the OASIS project managed to complete the participatory activities with the school community and progress fully with the transformation of the schoolyards which eventually provided a new opportunity for outdoor learning to 9 different Parisian neighborhoods amidst the pandemic.

This Journal aims to provide an overview of the OASIS project progress during this past year, specifically focusing on the phase of transforming the schoolyards according to the school community co-designed plans. This annual progress report will revisit the implementation challenges table as they were initially analyzed in the [OASIS Journal N°1](#), summarize the current status of the project and put under the spotlight the prevailing issues that occurred during the implementation.

From the co – designing phase to implementation: A fine-tuned process

Following the well-rounded co-design phase with the school community ([see details in Journal N°1](#)), the OASIS partnership conducted a thorough process, as described below, for ensuring the final transformation outcome

will completely resonate with the needs and aspirations of their users.



The OASIS Schoolyards transformation roadmap till today

Review with Experts

Once the concept plans for the 10 schoolyards were prepared, the OASIS partnership coordinated an interdisciplinary meeting with experts and practitioners from various sectors such as design, environment and education in order to review the plans and provide feedback.

Construction Plans

Based on this feedback, the OASIS design leading partner ([CAEU 75](#)) finalized the schoolyard plans and proceeded in the development of the construction plans in close collaboration with the Municipal Department of Technical Works (DCPA) and their respective sub-departments in each arrondissement (SLA). This collaboration was the key element for the appropriate transition from the concept phase to the technical construction plans as well as the preparation of the guidelines and requirements for the public procurement process.

Every schoolyard needed different types of construction works due to the different spatial characteristics, technical and environmental constrains and apparently, the unique and place-based design concepts developed for each one of the 9 cases.

A detailed document was prepared for every schoolyard including an elaborated description of the required constructions works, recommended materials and important guidelines. The contractors had a month to review the schoolyard plans and proceed with the specific construction details and selected products which were in turn approved by the Municipal Department of Technical Works (DCPA).

Construction Works

The overall coordinator of the UIA OASIS project is now the Municipal Department of Education and at this stage of the schoolyard transformation, the project manager of the construction works has been the Municipal Department of Technical Works (DCPA). Additionally, the Department of Environment (DEVE) also contributed with their experience by undertaking the supervision and execution of landscaping operations such as spreading the topsoil, planting with plants supplied by the city's plant nursery, protecting the existing trees, installing the automatic irrigation systems.

Unforeseen challenges such as soil pollution occurred in a few cases, urged the City of Paris to conduct further

surveys in order to ensure that the newly transformed schoolyards will be a safe and healthy environment for their users. The additional costs and responsibility for these surveys were undertaken by the City of Paris and more specifically the Municipal Department of Health contributed in developing and approving the appropriate measures for resolving the cases of contaminated soil. Although the additional surveys led to the delay of certain tasks the project managed to meet the initial deadline for delivering the schoolyards by the beginning of the school year.

Re-opening of the schoolyards

The major technical works are already complete and the doors of the schoolyards are now open and welcoming their pupils every day, however, the final refinements are expected to be completed by the school community during the current and following months. For example, specific areas of the schoolyard still remain inaccessible as the new plants will begin growing during the school year and pupils will have the opportunity to participate in planting, observing and learning the life cycle of plants.

In summary, the OASIS project provides an excellent example of cross-departmental and multi-level collaboration towards a common vision. Critical to the success of the OASIS project is that every actor involved in this process has been appointed with a clear role from the beginning of the project and was aware of every step of the OASIS roadmap which led to a common understanding of the challenges, the timeframe the short and long term results. Throughout both the co-design and implementation phase the main target group – the school community – is involved with a particular role.

The OASIS strategy for a more sustainable construction site

The OASIS approach aims to achieve a radical transformation of the schoolyards by converting them into green and enjoyable places for recreation, however, this transformation does not imply wiping out everything that currently exists on the site. In line with the “sustainable and resilient design” principles of the project, the OASIS partnership has worked on mapping the existing “assets” of the schoolyards and assessing their condition in order to preserve them in place or reuse them elsewhere. A detailed report has been developed for each one of the UIA OASIS Schoolyards including the documentation of the existing trees and vegetation that need to be preserved and carefully protected during the construction works while also the equipment such as benches, basketball hoops, trash bins that are in good condition and can be re-used in the same or other schoolyards. Moreover, the Municipal Department of Technical Works has a special workshop dedicated to collecting, restoring and reusing materials such as wood and urban furniture. Therefore, all collected reusable materials from the demolition of the OASIS schoolyards will be refurbished and re-used in the same or other public spaces in the city.

OASIS Participatory activities amid the pandemic

School Community

The OASIS partnership invested time and resources in developing opportunities for the school community to be involved in every step of the process enabling every participant to fully comprehend and get familiarized with the complex and multi-stage procedure for the realization of a participatory planning project – from co-planning to implementation. In doing so, the OASIS project aims not only to successfully transform the schoolyards according to the co-designed ideas but to create the culture of civic engagement in the school community and strengthen the sense of shared pride and co- ownership.

July 2020 – Schoolyards under construction

Last July, the pupils of each school participated in a preparation workshop for welcoming the construction workers to their schoolyards. The pupils painted the “Cour Oasis en chantier” banners and celebrated the first day of the construction works.



March 2021 – Schoolyards are in use

Following the completion of the “heavy” construction works for transforming the schoolyards (unraveling the asphalt pavements, creating hills, installing equipment), the pupils were expected to contribute in the final refinements of the schoolyard design such as planting vegetation, placing small elements such as log steps on the ground and many more activities. More specifically, a 5-day participatory workshop took place in the first week of March aiming to actively involve children in the finalization of their schoolyards.



Jean Dolent kindergarten workshop for placing log steps and planting flowers

Furthermore, a series of participatory workshops are planned in the coming months for an initial exchange of feedback for the newly transformed schoolyards aiming to establish the sense of co-ownership of the place and collectively decide on the guidelines and tasks for using and maintaining this shared space. These workshops are coordinated by the OASIS partner responsible for citizen engagement ([La Ligue de l'enseignement](#)) and the outcomes will be shared and analyzed in the next project Journal.

Engagement activities with the local community

While the active participation of the school community was achieved by integrating the safety measures into the scheduled activities, the engaging actions with the broader community has been a more complicated task during the pandemic. The school community is an already defined community with a limited number of people who had the opportunity to convene safely when the schools were open. On the contrary, the general safety measures taken for minimizing the outbreak of the pandemic didn't allow physical gatherings of the local communities and therefore it disrupted the series of the OASIS neighborhood meetings.

However, the OASIS partnership adjusted their engagement strategy to the new situation and managed to reach out and actively engage local stakeholders for most of the OASIS Schools via online meetings. For this purpose, the OASIS partnership collaborated with several Municipal Departments “House of Associations and Citizen Life” (Maison de la Vie Associative et Citoyenne) which are located in every arrondissement. This collaboration helped the OASIS partnership in mapping local organizations in each of the OASIS Schoolyards' neighborhoods and gradually initiate an online engagement strategy.

Overview of the Implementation Challenges


The table below provides an updated overview of the project's implementation challenges which were initially analyzed in the [OASIS Journal No 1](#). Regardless the uncertainty of this past year, the OASIS project achieved significant progress avoiding delays in the initial project schedule, while also developed alternative solutions for overcoming unexpected issues that occurred due to the pandemic.

Challenge

Observation


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Leadership

Challenge level 


- There is strong political will backing the project.
- The responsibility of the OASIS project coordination was transferred from the General Secretariat to the Department of Education.
- A possible risk might be the loss of the accomplished cross-sectoral support within the Municipality as the resilient dividend of this project has been its capacity to tackle multiple urban challenges and objectives (climate adaptation, social cohesion, holistic education, citizen empowerment) through its horizontal approach.

Public procurement

Challenge level 


- The City managed to successfully overcome this challenge for the construction works as analyzed in the [OASIS Journal No 1](#).
- The procurement process was completed on time and delivered the appropriate outcomes.
- The significant contribution of CAUE 75 (the OASIS partner, responsible for the design phase) as well as the contribution of other Municipal Departments with relevant experience (e.g. Department of Environment) played a key role for developing the public procurement guidelines.
- The pending risk for public procurement will be regarding the maintenance of the schoolyards, which is still to be defined.

Organizational arrangements within the urban authority (cross-department working)

Challenge level 

- The OASIS partnership achieved a cross-departmental collaboration within the Municipality as various Municipal Departments have collaborated for different aspects of the project.
- A remaining challenge is still the internal communication of the project within the Municipality in order to get aligned with other complementary initiatives led by the City of Paris. (e.g. The 15-min city Plan)

Participative approach for co-implementation

Challenge level 


- In line with the successful and well-structured participative approach that was implemented during the co-design phase, the OASIS partnership managed to conduct a number of participatory activities with the pupils during the schoolyards' construction phase as well.

Monitoring and evaluation

Challenge level 

- No risk identified for the environmental monitoring and evaluation process. Initial evaluation findings from the comparison between before and after the schoolyards transformation are expected in the coming months.
- The social evaluation methods and schedule has been re-adjusted to the current situation as gatherings in the schoolyards have been postponed due to school closures and the COVID-19 safety measures.

Communication with target beneficiaries and users

Challenge level 

- The OASIS partnership has revisited and adjusted the communication strategy for engaging the local communities taking into consideration the COVID-19 safety measures, however, the remote engagement processes require particular attention on ensuring inclusiveness.
- Threat of letting people down if the OASIS Schoolyard expectations are not met.

Upscaling

Challenge level



- The City of Paris is currently developing a framework for school selection envisioning to institutionalize it as a permanent process.
- An important challenge will be to identify the appropriate funding resources for transforming the schoolyards according to the OASIS standards. The OASIS partnership is currently working on reducing the total budget for each transformation considering the limited available funding resources for the next year due to the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.
- The OASIS partnership has developed the insightful manual for tips and guidelines "[Cahier de recommandations pour la transformation des cours d'écoles](#)" that will facilitate the replication of the project in more schools.

Spotlight on today's prevailing challenges

Leadership

The project enjoys a strong political will as the Mayor who supported it from the beginning in 2018, was re-elected in the recent elections. However, internal changes within the local government led to re-structuring core departments within the Municipality. The OASIS project, which was initially coordinated by the Municipality's General Secretariat, has now been delegated to the Department of Education. On the one hand, this change has been beneficial for the sustainability of the project as it is now successfully embedded into the core activities of the Department of Education while also the project manager remains the same person ensuring a smooth transition and the continuity of the project. On the other hand, a possible risk that might occur due to this change, is establishing and sustaining the highly needed cross-departmental collaboration for applying the OASIS approach in all stages - from the co-design phase to the construction and maintenance of the schoolyards.

Public Procurement

The development of the public procurement guidelines and requirements has been an intensive task as it required a shift in the way schoolyards were built till the recently. Asphalt pavements and pre-manufactured play equipment were now being replaced with nature-based solutions, landscaping and loose parts play settings. The valuable contribution of CAUE 75 from the beginning of the public procurement process and the close supervision of the construction sites ensured the high quality of the final outcome.



Schoolyard playgrounds before and after the transformation



Maryse Hilsz kindergarten before and after the transformation

Organizational arrangements within the urban authority (cross-department working)

In January, the City of Paris kicked off a new initiative called “ville du quart d’heure” (the 15-minute city) which has been a key pillar of Anne Hidalgo’s (the current re-elected Mayor of Paris) re-election campaign.

What is the 15-min city plan?

Influenced by similar approaches that have been already applied in Melbourne, Copenhagen and The Hague, the idea was initially developed by the Sorbonne professor [Carlos Moreno](#) who believes that we are entering the “post-vehicle era” and suggests the provision of key city amenities within a 15-min walk/ ride or use of public transportation from every Parisian’s doorstep.

In a nutshell, the 15-min city plan aims to create self-sufficient communities in the heart of every Parisian arrondissement. It is developed around the following four main principles: proximity, diversity, density and ubiquity anticipating that all districts within the city will be able to fulfill six main social functions: living, working, supplying, caring, learning and enjoying.

The expected multiple benefits of the “15-min city plan” are the development of socially and economically mixed districts, the significant reduction of pollution and eventually the overall improvement of quality of life of both the residents and the visitors of Paris.

Within the frame of this initiative, a number of schoolyards, initially 12 and currently 48 schoolyards, are open to public on Saturdays from 10am – 5pm to provide an extra open space amenity to the residents of the local neighborhood. Although the OASIS partnership has been consulted and contributed to the selection of these 48 schools, this initiative has not been fine-tuned with the OASIS project from the beginning as it was announced by a different Municipal department with a different coordination team. However, today, this new program has been delegated to the Educational Department as well and 7 out of 9 transformed OASIS Schools are among the selected schools. It is noteworthy that the initial communication gap between those two projects had caused a confusion in local communities and school administrations as multiple issues regarding safety and maintenance emerged since this new initiative didn’t align with the original schedule and methodology of the OASIS project.

The OASIS approach has its foundation in co-creation and participation, it aims to build together with the local community the framework and the protocol for opening the schoolyards and the implications that this action brings such as responsibilities for maintenance and safety. The top down approach of the new initiative has partially disrupted the continuity of the OASIS project within the local communities, however, **it also unlocked a significant opportunity for strengthening the concept of transforming the schoolyards into the neighborhoods’ social hubs after school hours and gaining the support of the public opinion.** Moreover, the complementarity of these two projects would be beneficial in the long-term for upscaling the OASIS project across the city by securing stronger political will and funding. For example, the City of Paris has already allocated budget for the security and the cleaning staff during the Saturday schoolyard openings for the selected 48 schools.



At this moment, that the schoolyards are already transformed and officials as well as citizens can actually experience the benefits of the OASIS approach, it is essential to invest in the effective communication of the OASIS project internally within the Municipality in order to avoid any further confusion of the local communities which are already engaged and on board to the project while also to benefit from a cross-departmental support.

Communication with target beneficiaries and users

From the beginning of the project, the communication strategy with the school community and the local residents has been the backbone of this innovative concept. The effective engagement and active involvement of the beneficiaries is the key element for the long-term sustainability of the project. However, the unprecedented challenge of the pandemic caused a major disruption to the planned engagement strategy and urged the OASIS partnership to revisit and adjust the communication methods to the new circumstances. As described earlier in this Journal, the engagement of the school community was less complex than reaching out to the broader local neighborhood.

The updated engagement strategy for the local residents due to the pandemic is heavily depended on e-engagement actions as the OASIS partnership is facilitating online discussions mainly with the local NGOs. Despite the appropriateness of the e-engagement method for the current circumstances, these actions need to be complemented with safe offline engagement approaches as the online reach out can be quite limited in terms of inclusiveness. Different social groups might not have access to online campaigns and activities due to lack of skills and experience or lack of access to online tools and devices. The topic of inclusiveness should be particularly prioritized in the face of this current crisis as the social groups that are affected the most are the vulnerable and marginalized citizens with limited access to services and amenities.

Upscaling

The City of Paris envisions to transform approximately 25 - 30 schoolyards per year, applying the innovative OASIS approach. The OASIS partnership has already developed a number of tools and templates, such as the co-design activities, educational material, construction and material guidelines for implementing the different phases of the approach. Nevertheless, the challenge will be to preserve the achieved high quality standards in all future schoolyard transformations within a tight timeframe and with a limited budget.

Additionally, the selection process for eligible schools every year to become OASIS schoolyards is at the top of the agenda at the Department of Education. The two scenarios are the following:

- the **“mainstream approach”**, which is to select schools according to their current condition of maintenance and infrastructure
- the **“atypical approach”**, which is to conduct a community competition and explore which schools are more eager to embrace the holistic OASIS approach throughout all the project stages – co-design, schoolyard transformation, open-access to the neighborhood activities.

The willingness of the school and the local community to invest time and effort into this project plays a key role for the sustainability of the project. Therefore, the dilemma lies in finding the right balance between the current condition of school infrastructure and the current willingness of the communities in order to prioritize the eligible schools for transformation. The topic is still under discussion as the OASIS partnership is also seeking ways to reduce the overall cost of the OASIS approach.

In the phase of upscaling, it is critical to preserve the principles of the OASIS user-centered concept and avoid any simplified replications that might narrow down the process only to the construction phase. This is the biggest challenge the City of Paris will have to overcome as the announced target goal of transformations every year is quite ambitious. It remains to be seen how the OASIS partnership will manage to establish fail-safe mechanisms that will preserve the authenticity of this innovative project.

What's coming up next?

In the upcoming months, the anticipated next steps are the participatory workshops with the school community for completing the final refinements of the schoolyards while also for harvesting the first insights and feedback regarding the newly transformed spaces. Moreover, the OASIS partnership will explore the alternative ways in engaging the local communities and concluding into a placemaking and co-management plan for initiating the phase of open-access schoolyards after school-hours.

Additionally, although there is still one out of the ten schoolyards that remains to be transformed, the OASIS partners responsible for the environmental and social evaluation will proceed with comparing the pre- and after-

data analysis of the schoolyards aiming to document and measure the change in the local microclimate as well as the impact of the OASIS transformation to the usability of the schoolyards by the pupils and the social cohesion of the broader local community.

Acknowledgements

This report was written based on the inputs and material provided by the OASIS project coordinator and representatives of the OASIS partnership during this past year. I would like to thank all the partners for sharing their insights, concerns and lessons learnt from their experience in implementing the OASIS project.

Climate adaptation

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