The Urban Lab of Europe!

CASE STUDY

REPORT

Integrated development in action!

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 12 OCTOBER 2022

Paris - OASIS

See on UIA website

About OASIS

OASIS aims to transform urban spaces to adapt them to climate change. At the same time, it is focusing on two major strategic objectives: reducing the health risks associated with heatwaves and fostering social cohesion at neighbourhood level. The project creates cool islands that can be used in times of heat for communities near to the ten pilot schools where school yards were converted. It was selected because it illustrates how different policies can be integrated in practice - in this case between education, resilience and the 15 minute city. The city is now expanding the project to a further 60 schoolyards using its own funds.

An improved schoolyard (copyright CAUE)

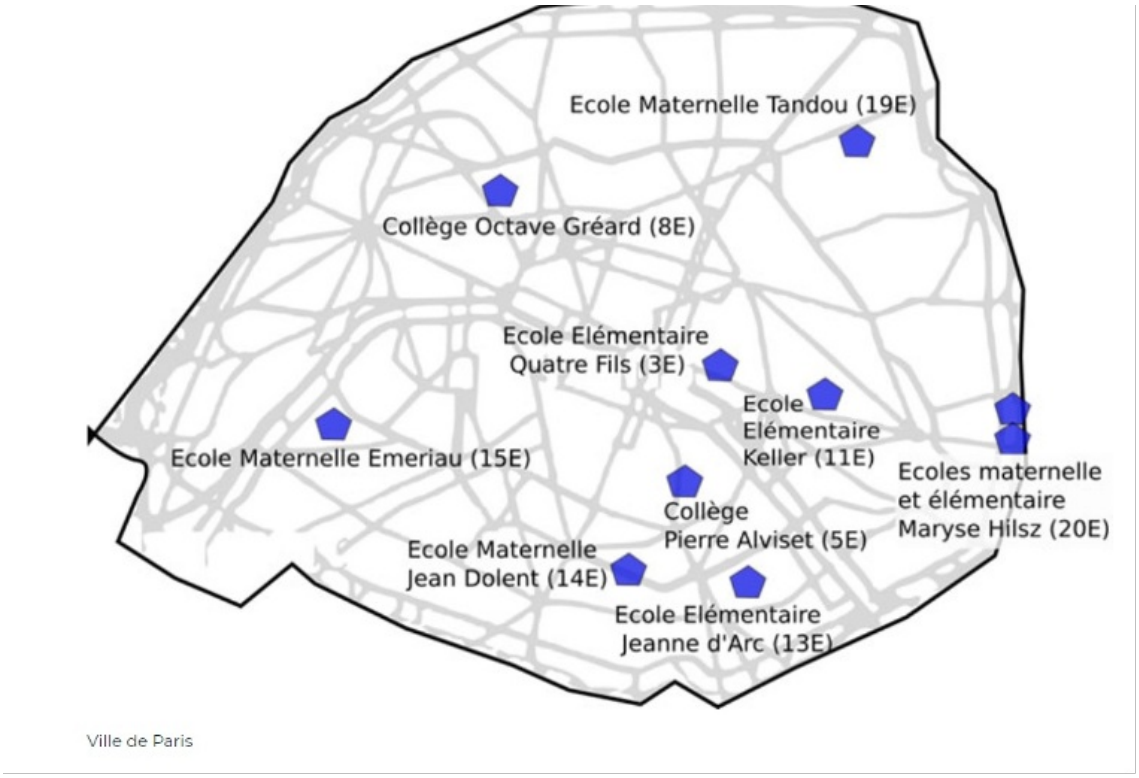
The Oasis project in Paris is a good example of a climate adaptation project that focuses on addressing the heat island effect in cities by providing a cool oasis in a schoolyard setting. The Oasis project demonstrated that improving schoolyards has other benefits, especially for the children in the school where it can improve patterns of play and provide more varied and green surroundings. The schoolyards can also be opened to the community. Outside of heatwaves, the schoolyards are open on Saturdays for neighbours to enjoy a new public space. The majority of Parisians live within 200metres of one of the 700 infant, junior and middle schools.

Context

Heatwaves have been a growing problem in France in the last decades, with a major heatwave back in 2003 in which an estimated 15000 people across the country died prematurely. Most of the deaths were among elderly people. The city of Paris decided to address the problem of the urban heat island effect by creating cool islands in schools by increasing the amount of shade and vegetation, changing the ground surface and introducing water features in schoolyards. Schools were chosen because they are present in every community across the city.

Description

For cool islands to become a reality in elementary, primary and middle schools the City of Paris brought together a diverse partnership. To begin with, such an intervention needed accurate information and data on the weather so France Meteo, the national weather service, was involved. It needed a close partnership with schools so both the education ministry and head teachers were brought on board. It would need technical support in the districts where schools were selected so the local technical units were involved. Local communities were to be involved through a participative process, although this was disrupted by the pandemic.



The ten original Paris Oasis schoolyards (copyright city of Paris)

A critical shift in the project took place during an organised field visit to Antwerp and Brussels in 2019[1]. The trip, curated by one of the delivery partners- Le Conseil d'Architecture, d'Urbanisme et de l'Environnement (CAUE), involved fifty stakeholders from the city including heads of service, head teachers and the technical departments. What they saw in Belgium was a much more radical transformation of the schoolyards than what was being planned in Paris. Not just removing the tarmac and adding in some shade and play equipment but creating dense vegetation, hidden spaces, a range of surfaces and dirt. The result of the field visit was that there was a major change in mindset of the group, it helped to clear doubts and scepticism about the project. One result was that the emphasis of the project shifted to focus more on the well-being of students and the schoolyard as a pedagogic resource.

Oasis schoolyard in Paris (copyright city of Paris)

---

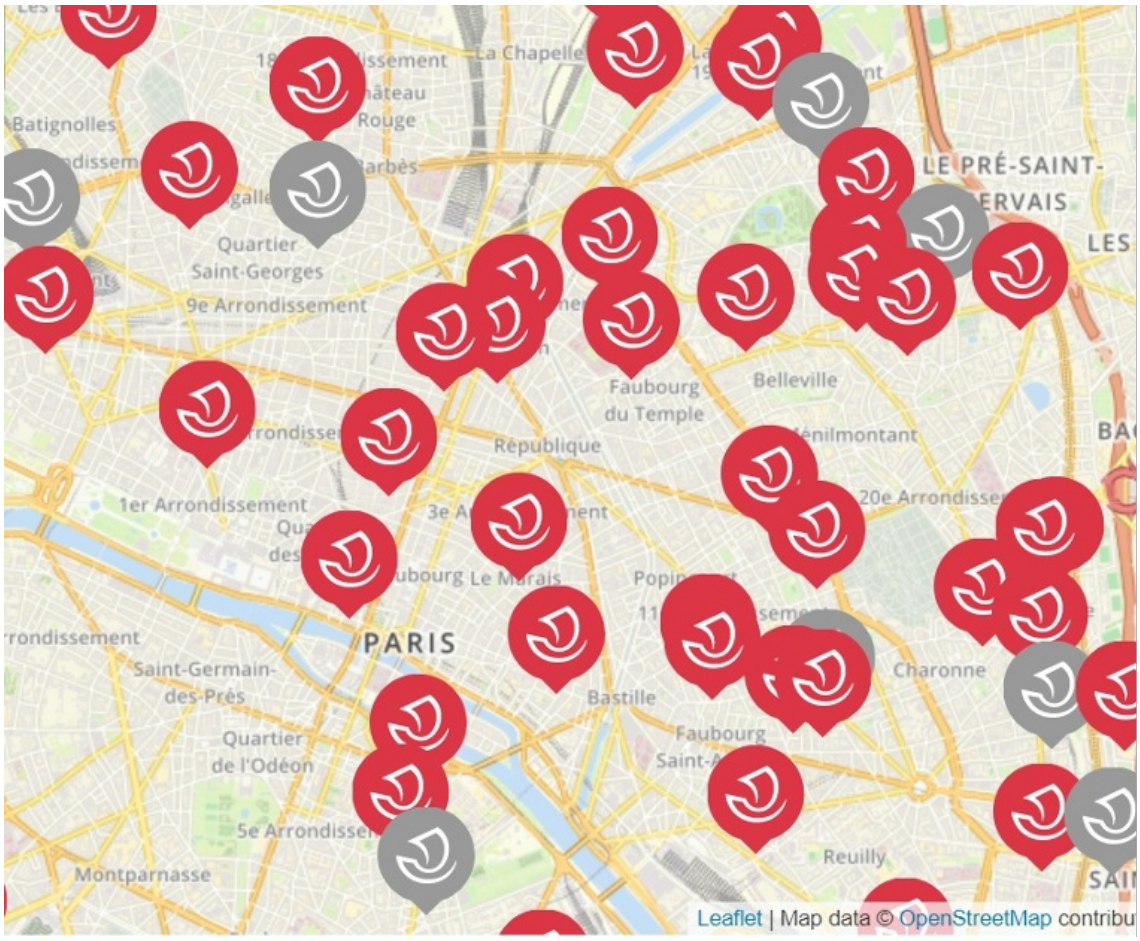
[1] https://www.caue75.fr/media/download/10028

Nature of integration

The analysis of place in Oasis consisted of identifying infant, primary and middle schools (college) in parts of the city that suffered from the heat island effect, and that lacked green space. The main policy driver during the co-design phase of the Oasis project was the Paris Resilience Strategy. This stressed the need to provide cool islands during periods of heat stress in the city. As the project developed and particularly after the field visit to Antwerp, the well-being of children became a second policy priority. In 2020, while the project was already underway, the Mayor of Paris launched the 15-minute city strategy by which key services should be available within 15 minutes of where anyone lives by walking or cycling. 90% of Parisians live within 7 minutes of a school, thus the mainstreaming of Oasis would achieve this goal. Already a further 25 schoolyards were converted in 2021 and a total of 70 will be completed by end of 2022. This is approximately 10% of the 650 schools in the city up to the middle school (college) level. Ultimately it is planned that all school yards with direct street access will be converted.

In terms of the multi-level partnership, Oasis was initiated by the city of Paris and is well aligned with regional (Île de France) and national priorities. The design workshops with teachers and children helped the technical partners to draw up plans for the playgrounds. Direct involvement of children in the co-creation process also proved to be an entertaining educational activity for children. There are also close collaborations with other municipalities in the conurbation such as Seine St Denis[1] which has followed Paris in transforming schoolyards into cool islands.

The Oasis project has generated enormous interest among French cities, and internationally, with over 70 other cities requesting information about the Oasis project or visiting the first ten completed sites. The City of Paris has produced high-quality resources[2] on the process that needs to be followed which, in turn, are facilitating scaling up to take place in the city and beyond.



Some of the 70 Paris schoolyards either transformed or being completed.
(copyright city of Paris)

[1] https://www.leparisien.fr/seine-saint-denis-93/des-cours-oasis-pour-eviter-les-coups-de-chaud-dans-les-colleges-de-seine-saint-denis-07-02-2020-8255130.php

[2] https://www.paris.fr/pages/les-cours-oasis-7389/#ressources-telechargeables-sur-le-projet-oasis

---

Takeaways

- Analysis of needs is central to place-based approaches (mapping heat stress on a territorial basis, mapping citizen access to schools and to green areas);
- Cross-sectoral integration can increase over time as new policy priorities are developed (e.g. 15-minute city);
- Including key technical partners from the outset such as Meteo France and CAUE can underpin the sectoral focus of the project;
- Projects spread in their own city when the policy framework is supportive (resilient city and 15-minute city)
- Innovative demonstrator projects and well-curated transnational site-visits can be effective at inspiring other cities in the same country (see references to field visit to Antwerp and Paris hosting other cities)

Further reading and selected key resources

- City webpage (in French)
- Downloadable resources
- Visit to Belgium