

## 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

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BY MARIA SITZOGLU

# OASIS takes off! - Final Journal

See on UIA  
website



In spring 2023, the OASIS Schoolyard project concluded with its UIA pilot phase of transforming and evaluating the performance of 10 schoolyards. Today, it has already taken off the new adventure of replicating the approach to many other schoolyards in the city of Paris and beyond!

## Executive Summary

The OASIS concept was initially formed around the idea of re-naturing existing urban spaces to become more adaptive to climate change impacts. However, its development transformed it into an innovative endeavor that addresses both pressing social and environmental challenges. The project's overarching vision is to create green, accessible, and inclusive schoolyards that function as "cool islands" in the heart of densely built neighborhoods. At its core, the OASIS Schoolyards project prioritizes the wellbeing of children, fosters social cohesion within neighborhoods, and advocates for active community involvement across the project's lifecycle. The acronym "O.A.S.I.S." stands for Openness, Adaptation, Sensitisation, Innovation and Social ties.

The project's main activities included participatory processes with the school community, engagement with local residents, and awareness-raising workshops about climate change. More specifically, the project's development relied heavily on:

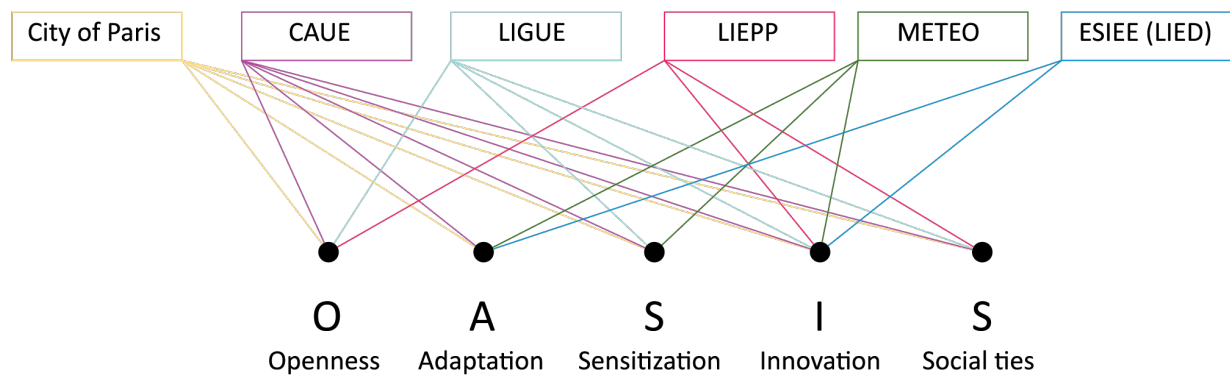
- the co-designing processes with the school children for re-designing their space and,
- the engagement and participatory activities with the broader school community for sharing the responsibility of using and managing the schoolyard.

Additionally, the project provisioned multiple convenings of experts from different sectors to ensure the appropriateness of the final designs from environmental, social, and educational perspectives.

The fundamental aim of the OASIS Schoolyard project is to revolutionize the design and utilization of schoolyards today. Following the completion of its four-year pilot project cycle, it is safe to say that the project fulfilled the initial vision by developing and implementing an approach that shifts from asphalt-covered and sports-oriented schoolyards to greener areas that accommodate the needs of every child. This approach has been the outcome of an intensive participatory process in all project stages, from the design to the maintenance of the facility.

In a nutshell, 10 UIA schoolyards have been transformed across Paris following a participatory process that resulted in the active involvement of children and educators, the engagement of parents and the broader neighborhood, and the appropriate training of Municipal Departments (e.g Departments for Technical Works,

Department of Education). The OASIS approach initiates the slow process of a mindset shift about how we design schoolyards, how we use them, and last but not least, how we maintain them. This holistic approach is the outcome of a coordinated collaboration among multiple local partners, and therefore, the project's success showcases the value of the multi-level and cross-sectoral cooperation.



## Project's progress

Early on, the city of Paris acknowledged the value of the OASIS project not only for the school community but also for the overall improvement of the local microclimate in every neighborhood. Therefore, Paris prioritized the institutionalization of the OASIS Schoolyards project and managed to secure funding for more schools before concluding with its pilot phase. The ending of the UIA co-funded project marked the smooth transition from piloting solutions to forming new standards for schoolyard design and protocols for tendering the next OASIS projects.

The UIA pilot phase provided the opportunity to explore various solutions and approaches and deliver high-quality schoolyards. However, the required resources for identical replication will not always be available beyond the UIA period. Thus, the city is managing this challenge by establishing specific standards for materials and designs and continually working on finding alternative low-cost yet high-quality solutions. A typical example is the design of play areas with natural materials instead of fancy pre-fabricated structures. See Web Article [here](#) to learn more about teepee tents co-constructed with parents instead of pre-fabricated products.

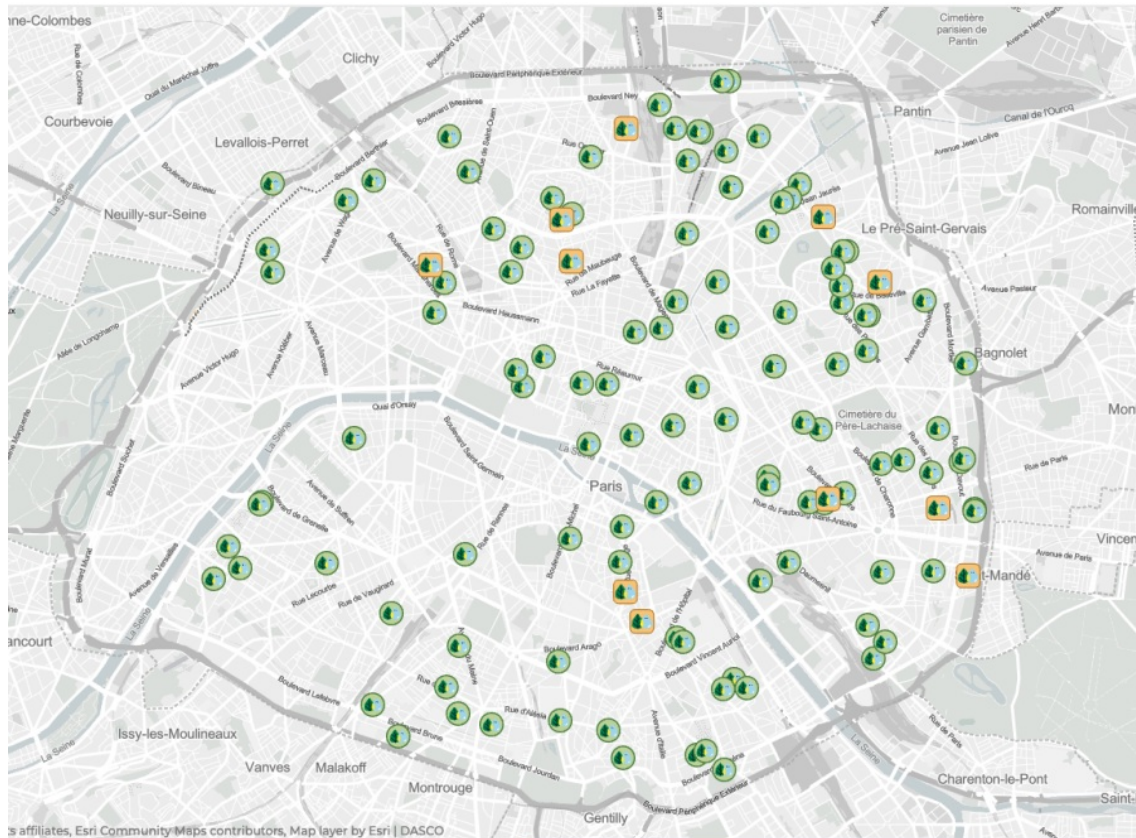


Jean D'Arc Elementary Schoolyard, City of Paris | Photo credits: CAUE75



# From a neighborhood pilot to the city scale and beyond!

The city of Paris has the ambition to transform all public schoolyards in the following years. An [interactive map](#) has been developed to locate all the OASIS Schoolyards that are being transformed throughout the years. Currently, more than 130 schools across the city have OASIS Schoolyards. The map is regularly updated.



OASIS Interactive Map | Locations of the transformed schoolyards |  
Yellow stamp: Collège - Green stamp: Ecole

Additionally, the team envisions to inspire other cities and designers worldwide to develop OASIS-influenced schoolyards. More specifically, the consortium partner CAUE75, who has been responsible for the participatory processes and the overall design of the schoolyard, created the [OASIS Schoolyards Observatory](#), aiming to establish an online “hub” for showcasing projects that have adopted the OASIS approach. This digital platform aims to become populated with projects from all around the world. Currently, the uploaded projects are mainly located in Paris and other cities across France.

Program ▾ Cost ▾ Surface ▾ Coatings ▾ Facilities ▾



**Raymond Queneau College**  
5th arrondissement - Paris (75)



**Bercy nursery school**  
12th arrondissement - Paris (75)



**Achard nursery school**  
BORDEAUX - Gironde (33)



**Benaige Elementary School**  
BORDEAUX - Gironde (33)



**Multi reception Toddler dock**  
BORDEAUX - Gironde (33)



**Alphonse Dupeux nursery school**  
BORDEAUX - Gironde (33)



**Jacques Prévert Elementary School**  
BORDEAUX - Gironde (33)



**Comprehensive school Brussels**  
9th arrondissement - Paris (75)

OASIS Schoolyards Observatory

## Generated Knowledge



OASIS Schoolyards planting workshops | photo credits: CAUE75

Implementing the OASIS Schoolyards project has been an intense process with many stakeholders involved and - as expected- many challenges to overcome. A wealth of knowledge has emerged throughout the project cycle, and numerous tools for facilitating and replicating the OASIS approach have been developed. The key lessons learned are shared below:

### Speaking the language of your audience

One of the main OASIS objectives was transforming the schoolyards to truly resonate with the children's aspirations and needs. Therefore, time and resources were invested in developing the appropriate participatory tools for achieving a meaningful engagement of the core participants, the children. From the project's logo and illustrations to the language and methods (collage, models, drawings) used during the workshops, the messages,

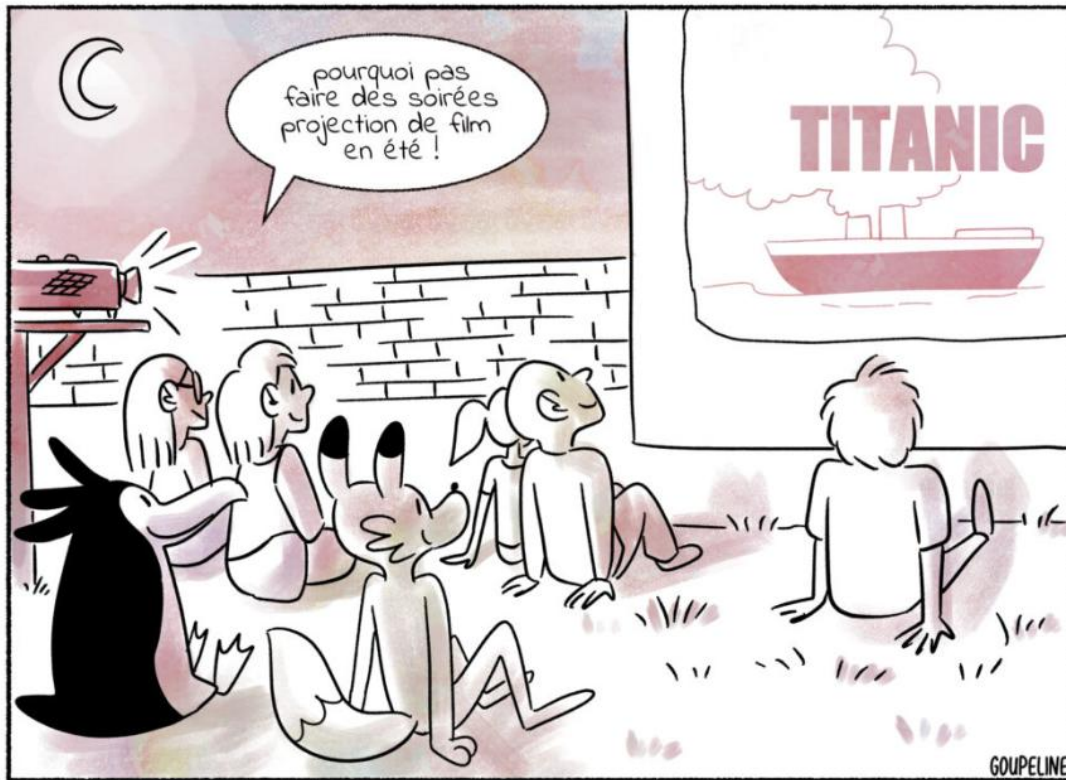


instructions and outcomes were tailored to the level of understanding and the needs of the children. The OASIS team has documented every process step, from the co-design stage to the final technical plans. In doing so, it is evident that the children's ideas were truly transferred from the initial conceptual stage to the final construction, making them the real designers and owners of their everyday space with the guidance of adult experts.



OASIS co-design workshops | Children's model | Photo credits: CAUE75

In parallel, a method that worked for broader community engagement was the real-time sketching of the shared ideas by the participants. More specifically, in the second community meeting round, the discussion topic was activities that could be coordinated by the residents in the schoolyard. Illustrators were invited to join each discussion table and sketch the ideas shared by the residents. These illustrations were then used to re-engage the local communities after the pandemic. At that moment, the residents showed increased engagement when they realized that the ideas for their neighbourhood's school were shared by their community (bottom-up) and not imposed by the project coordinator (top-down).



OASIS neighbourhood engagement workshops | Ideas Illustrations | credits: LaLigue

## Building sense of ownership

The main construction works for the schoolyards' transformation took place in the summertime when the schools were closed. However, certain structures were left "incomplete" on purpose, providing the opportunity for the school community to contribute to the final finishings. A number of "co-making" workshops were coordinated per school during weekends, where parents and children were invited to participate in the construction of elements such as planting beds, benches, tipi tents, play equipment structures and many more. These activities aimed to build a sense of ownership and responsibility of their communal space by sharing a common experience and creating a bond between them and the schoolyard.

## Aiming for Inclusiveness

The OASIS approach aims to design schoolyards that reflect every child's needs and personality. The OASIS Schoolyards are polyvalent and gender-neutral spaces that prioritize imaginative play, social interaction, and nature-based learning over the typical focus on sports-dominated areas. While acknowledging the importance of sports for physical education, the OASIS Schoolyard doesn't exclude sports but rather integrates them with quiet zones for relaxation and areas designed for experiential learning. The goal is to create a balanced environment where children can engage in active play, find moments of calm, and explore nature, fostering a deeper connection with the natural world. This approach ensures that the schoolyard offers diverse opportunities for children to learn and thrive.

Additionally, OASIS considered involving the broader local community to transform schoolyards into neighbourhood parks after school hours. However, achieving inclusivity has proven challenging, despite selecting 10 pilot schools from diverse districts with varying demographics. Simply choosing schools from different areas doesn't guarantee inclusiveness; additional efforts are necessary to expand the project's reach. School directors played a pivotal role in engaging school families.

One of the most challenging tasks was connecting with the wider public. Limited time availability among local residents, coupled with their diverse characteristics such as age, education level, priorities, and needs, complicated the engagement process. To address this, the OASIS project collaborated with local NGOs, organizations, and stakeholders, leveraging their networks. Just like the school directors, the success of participatory processes heavily relied on the commitment of these local NGOs. Identifying shared priorities and a common vision between the project and these stakeholders emerged as a crucial step in achieving a satisfactory level of inclusiveness. This alignment helped bridge gaps and fostered a sense of community involvement in the project.

## Securing commitment to participation by creating a shared experience

The OASIS project is a project that proposes an innovative way of designing, using and maintaining the schoolyards relying on a common understanding of the project's benefits and the active participation of multiple actors. Achieving this innovation required a mindset shift of all the involved stakeholders, from the Municipal departments' staff to the school directors, teachers and parents. A key moment that admittedly defined the success of the OASIS project, has been the [study trip](#) to similar projects in Belgium. A team of 50 stakeholders from Paris visited examples of natural schoolyards in Brussels and Antwerp and had the opportunity to experience the project themselves while also to discuss their concerns with their counterparts. This shared experience has been a reassuring moment for the feasibility and the advantages of developing the OASIS project in Paris. Moreover, it laid the foundation for building an alliance of different stakeholders that advocated for the project's benefits to the community, helping the project move forward.

## Trust and collaborative decision making

One of the OASIS ambitions was the development of an innovative governance scheme based on the principles of participatory democracy. The formation of "OASIS Collectives," community stewardship committees envisioned as an important mechanism for operating and managing the schoolyards after school hours. However, this goal is yet to be achieved due to the aforementioned challenges posed by the pandemic and a lack of meaningful engagement and trust.

The complexity of public engagement processes derives from the difficulty of bringing everyone to the table and the lack of the citizens' understanding and readiness for collaborative procedures. Communicating with the local residents has been challenging not only to disseminate the invitation for the meetings but also to describe the purpose of those meetings effectively; "what is being asked from the citizens to contribute in". The drawback of this engagement process has been the synchronization with the co-design activities with the pupils. Bounded on the project's time schedule, the coordinator of the local residents' engagement process had to proceed with the community meetings before the finalization of the transformation plans. Therefore, the participants were confused about the topic of discussion. Furthermore, the idea to bring in performers to lead the discussion of the first community meetings was considered "too artistic" for this process stage. These two factors eventually led to low turnout in the meetings with local residents and an overall weak engagement of the broader community in the project. Ultimately, the project partners realized the need for (1) rescheduling the community meetings as a subsequent activity of the co-design workshops and (2) communicating a simple message to the participants with clear and short-term steps for building the sense of the community's co-ownership of the space.

The co-management of the schoolyards has been achieved within the level of the school community. Today, the openings of the schoolyards to the broader public are currently organized only on Saturdays in a certain number of schools, coordinated by the Municipality (Department of Education), which is responsible for the security and cleaning of the space.

Ultimately, the OASIS project produced various material for helping other urban authorities replicate the approach in their schools. From co-design tools and educational material to manuals for construction and maintenance. More specifically, any city that is interested to follow the OASIS approach can benefit from the following resources:

- A FAQ before embarking the OASIS journey [here](#)
- Co-designing phase Introductive video [here](#) (subtitled)
- OASIS Recommendations Booklet [here](#) (English and Spanish versions available)
- OASIS Maintenance Guide [here](#) (English and Spanish versions available)
- Training videos for educational communities [here](#)

## Conclusion





Photo credits: CAUE75

Paris has already replicated the approach in more than 130 schoolyards. Although not every school community has embraced the project with the same eagerness, institutionalizing it within the city procedures has created hype around it. More and more school directors, parents, and teachers are expressing interest in adopting the OASIS approach to their schools. The excitement of the beneficiaries is a critical factor in the success of participatory projects, as their sustainability relies on the dedicated commitment of the participants.

The OASIS project highlights the value of developing participatory projects for tackling climate change long-term challenges. In this project, the innovation of technical solutions goes hand in hand with the active participation of the final users and their awareness raising. The project aimed to create more climate-friendly spaces by deploying low cost solutions that can easily be replicable and managed. This is an essential aspect of the OASIS approach as it makes it feasible and adaptable to different contexts without requiring resources for high-tech equipment and specific technical expertise for its maintenance.

Ultimately, by providing the opportunity to learn close to nature and empowering the young generation to embrace a more sustainable way of living, we can all become more optimistic that today's youth will become critical thinkers and inspired leaders for shaping sustainable and just cities and communities.

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[Climate adaptation](#)

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[See on UIA website](#)

