



La città dei bambini - The Children's City : demonstrative actions for sustainable development for the urban environment with children as catalysers of community participation and as parameters to measure the quality of life for everyone



LIFE97 ENV/IT/000091

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Project description:

Background

Today, most cities do not constitute a safe living environment for children, or even for adults. Children and adults must be able to go freely about their lives in cities, to work and play, to be able to independently inhabit different parts of the city, and to be able to travel safely from one area to another. Since 1997 the Italian Ministry of the Environment has promoted the annual initiative, “Forum of sustainable cities for little boys and girls”, which awards a prize to local authorities which have implemented the largest number of projects in support of enhancing children’s quality of life. The project was developed through combining the experience and expertise of Arciragazzi and the CNR Institute of Psychology, with the educational and environmental policy objectives of the local authorities of Cremona and Fano. In Italy, just like in other European countries, many municipalities have established Youth Town Councils (YTC’s), which provide an institutional seat where children and teenagers can present their views and requests, and also experience the reality of urban administrative, without simply imitating the activities of the “adult” Councils. At present there are over 100 YTC’s in Italy.

Objectives

The project was essentially based on the role of children in urban

administrations and the overall sustainability of cities. The main aim of the project was to promote a gradual change in the urban environment in order to prevent, reduce and defeat social malaise, and as a result, improve the living environment. The project attempted to move away from the conventional idea of cities which are planned and developed by adults, to examine a new approach to urban planning which caters for everybody's needs, including children's, and considers the quality of life of children as an environmental parameter and meter of successful urban development. One of the project's educational actions, called "participative planning", aimed at creating active citizens, capable of taking an active interest in the problems of their areas and negotiating, in a constructive way, with local authorities in the planning of "children's spaces". The project promoters believed that by using a "participative" approach to the planning of such spaces, children and teenagers would have more respect for and take better care of these spaces. A longer term objective of the participative planning methodology was to promote a cultural change in the urban administrative system. A change that would see the quality of life of all citizens, including the elderly and the disabled, takes precedence over profit and economic priorities. Another important objective of the project was to allow the children to go to school by themselves. This conquest of autonomy on the part of children is considered as one of the most important conditions of becoming an adult. The action "To school we go by ourselves" was conceived not only to offer primary school children a first important autonomous experience, but also to verify how much choosing the child as a parameter of change can affect the modification of both physical and social characteristics of the city.

Results

The partners used the project to test their hypothesis by carrying out two different actions in two Italian cities, Cremona and Fano. Local authorities in both cities have for a long time given considerable attention to the child/city relationship. The two actions, called "Participative Planning" and "To School we go by Ourselves" were completed within the two years of the Life Environment project. Arciragazzi held two participative planning workshops in Rome, within the framework of the 1999 and 2000 Roman Summer event "The town in your pocket". One of the objectives of this project was to assess the effectiveness and reproducibility of the experiences of the two cities involved in the initiative. In Cremona and Fano, the project resulted in significant political awareness in the local authorities, which now intend to pursue the development of the project beyond the terms of the LIFE Environment programme and to extend it to other districts and to other activities involving the participation of children and urban transformation. In both cities a wide-ranging debate on urban security was also initiated, particularly by the "To school we go by ourselves" action. This was not a repressive debate, as is usually the case, but instead, in a proactive way used the presence of children in the street and their right to autonomy as an effective instrument to promote the reduction of environmental dangers. Children's tangible participation in initiatives such as the planning of a "children's space", or their presence along "home-school" routes, in turn promoted interest in, and the participation of, other groups in society, including the children's families, the elderly, voluntary service associations, tradesmen and policemen. Simple activities, which involved a limited number of children and adults, with a small financial investment, produced powerful social involvement in both cities.

Important political compromises were made and some interesting modifications in administrative priorities and choices were achieved. In fact, both actions encouraged strong participation of families, schools and various other social categories and at the same time, committed local authorities to adopt a coherent attitude towards children and as a consequence, to change the order of priorities in administrative choices. This represents one of the most interesting aspects of the project. During the course of the LIFE project, a number of meetings were held with other Italian cities interested in its reproduction. In summary, the most important results achieved were: - An awakening of the interest of local authorities and various social categories in children's problems in the context of the sustainable development of cities, and stimulating them to act accordingly; - An increase in the number of children going to school by themselves and on foot; - The realisation of projects planned by children, which modified structural characteristics and encouraged autonomy in both children and the most disadvantaged members of their communities; - The production of two bilingual (Italian/ English) CD Roms: "Me and my city, to school we go by ourselves" in Fano, and "A city to cover on foot" in Cremona; - The production of two technical handbooks by CNR on the two actions of the project: "To school we go by ourselves" and "Participative planning", in order to facilitate the reproducibility of the experiences; - The organisation of an International Convention, "From children to cities: participative planning and social context in Italy and Europe" with the Italian, English, Spanish, Norwegian and German partners, researchers and experts, in order to draw conclusions from and discuss the activities undertaken. To study the changes that came about as a result of the two actions of the project, the CNR Institute of Psychology prepared some analysis and monitoring tools, which were also employed in the other cities of the international network organised by the Institute. As a result of this, some specific indicators for the action "To school we go by ourselves" were established. The periodic compilation of the indicators card made it possible for the different cities to trace experiences.

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Environmental issues addressed:

Themes

Land-use & Planning - Urban design (urban-rural)
Information - Governance - Public and Stakeholders participation

Keywords

urban planning, quality of life, social participation

Target EU Legislation

• Urban Environment

- COM(98)605 - "Communication on Sustainable Urban Development in the European Union: A Framework fo ...
- Decision 1411/2001/EC - "Community Framework for co-operation to promote sustainable urban develo ...

Natura 2000 sites

Not applicable

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Beneficiaries:

Coordinator	Associazione Arciragazzi
Type of organisation	NGO-Foundation
Description	Educational association
Partners	CNR Institute of Psychology (Rome) Municipality of Cremona Municipality of Fano

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Administrative data:

Project reference	LIFE97 ENV/IT/000091
Duration	01-OCT-1998 to 01-OCT -2000
Total budget	910,809.25 €
EU contribution	384,938.79 €
Project location	Lombardia(Italia) Marche(Italia) Lazio(Italia)

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Read more:

Project web site	Website
Publication: Book	Title: "Participated planning" Author: CNR Institute of Psychology (Rome) Editor: CNR Institute of Psychology (Rome)
Publication: Book	Title: "To school we go by ourselves" Author: CNR Institute of Psychology (Rome) Editor: CNR Institute of Psychology (Rome)

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