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Les Espaces d'apprentissage : une question urbaine et territoriale

Learning Spaces: an Urban and Territorial Issue

Cristina Renzoni et Paola Savoldi (dir.)



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Introduction

- 1 This article contributes to the debate on the possibilities of “re-conquering the street”¹ as everyday public space and inclusive infrastructure in relation to welfare spaces. Therefore, the authors retrace the project *La mia scuola va in classe A* (My School Goes to Class-A), with which they investigated the potential engagement of schools and educating communities as an opportunity for active mobility practices and policies on a broader urban scale. The promotion of active mobility systems, networks, itineraries and sequences of bicycle and pedestrian public spaces plays an important role in improving citizens’ health and well-being in cities. From a socio-ecological transition perspective, it is necessary to rethink public space as a fundamental right to mobility, responding to the need for accessibility, connection, and inclusion. The project to redefine the street as public space, therefore accessible to all, is meant to guarantee not only safe travel but also the possibility of encounter, confrontation and growth for children who cross it.² Improving and increasing the infrastructure for active mobility is one of the priority actions to be pursued for an ecological transition. It is central to radically change the paradigm that connotes roads as technical space for moving, reduced to their quantitative dimensions³ and configured as ‘corridors’ for cars. The design of pedestrian and cycle spaces contributes to preserving the soil, stitching up public spaces and intensifying relations between different parts of the city. Experiencing the ‘sense of closeness’ at the human scale⁴ plays a crucial role in re-

establishing a point of equilibrium between human and environment, which has been deeply undermined by the trend towards ‘motorisation’.⁵

- 2 A necessary first step towards this transformation is to adopt a change of mentality, habits and priorities. Therefore, a process of inhabitant involvement that starts with their actual needs and allows them to participate is fundamental, in order to nourish a dialogue of mutual learning in which the urban planner can be an intermediary between imagined spatialities and everyday habits. In this sense, the school can be an important interlocutor to start from, as it is recognised in its educational role, in addition to the variety of institutional and non-institutional actors that orbit around it. The great heritage of spaces, their recognisability and capillary diffusion in Italian territories constitute an important opportunity for the transformation of urban space and daily mobility habits of the youngest inhabitants, who are most impacted by the harshness of streets.
- 3 The priority need for comfort, accessibility and safety, requiring a child to move, is being declined in a more general demand for “moving in the right way.” This is happening through a project of (ground made of new) architectural devices capable not only of solving specific problems for the most vulnerable populations, but also of constructing a continuous plot that can express a sense of public space.⁶
- 4 In retracing the Venetian case of research-action, the aim is to enrich an already varied national and international geography of school engagement experiences in the design of urban space, chosen for their spatial and human relational capital.⁷ The paper proposes a critical reading of the *La mia scuola va in classe A* project in Venice through the reconstruction of its two main operational phases, adopting different methodological approaches. The first was derived from children’s involvement, and in the second, the research group played an active role through their participation in the co-designing process. The contents of the various educational and participative itinerary sessions administered to some of the classes in the four primary schools will be retraced, through semi-structured interviews with municipal administration technicians, educator-facilitators involved in the process, and a reconnaissance of the main reports of the project activities.
- 5 The process will then be critically re-read through three different but complementary research trajectories, linked by a reflection on the emergence of new actor relations between the school community, the local government, universities and the third sector in terms of the governance of proximity processes oriented towards active mobility. The contribution ends with a look at ways of designing spaces around schools, in an urban perspective attentive to all the different “phases of life”⁸).

Rewind the Project: *La mia scuola va in classe A* as Promoted by The City of Venice

- 6 *La mia scuola va in classe A* (2019-2022 edition) is a three-year project promoted by the Municipality of Venice and co-funded by the Ministry of the Environment’s *Programma sperimentale nazionale di mobilità sostenibile casa-scuola e casa-lavoro* (Experimental programme for sustainable home-school and home-work mobility). The objectives set in the call for proposals, aimed at territorial areas with a population of over 100,000 inhabitants, were the reduction of traffic, pollution and parking of motor

vehicles near schools, and the promotion of active mobility as solutions to the problems arising from sedentary lifestyles. The participating projects were aimed at encouraging initiatives to share means of transport (carpooling, bike sharing or car sharing), the organisation of pedibus – initiatives to walk to school in groups accompanied by an adult, defining meeting points, routes and stops –, the creation of protected routes between home and school, along with training and educational activities aimed at sustainable mobility education. In some cases, groups of neighbouring local authorities have participated in partnerships, such as the municipalities of the province of Rieti in Lazio, the lower Vallesina in Marche, Siena in Tuscany and Lecce in Puglia. With the collaboration of consulting companies, they have developed technological platforms and applications to support the planning of daily trips, training for school mobility managers and road education programmes, along with the activation of bicycle and pedibus lines. In the case of San Salvario in Turin, a pilot project of a mobility plan for the neighbourhood was proposed with widespread interventions, such as the pedestrianisation of sections of the boulevards in front of schools to ensure safe access. This was in continuity with the changes to the street space introduced on a transitional basis, as a response to the pandemic contingency.⁹

- 7 The participatory process of *La mia scuola va in classe A*, in which the authors were actively engaged, is part of the third edition of a project series – and related funding – that started within the three-year period between 2012 and 2015. It included the participation of the City of Venice in the European project Planning Sustainable Regional Urban Mobility in the Alpine Space (PUMAS), financed within the framework of the European Alpine Space Programme. Subsequent funding lines – such as PON Metro for the second period and the Ministry of the Environment for the third – were used to give continuity to the principles, methodologies, and objectives of PUMAS. The common objective of the different editions was to harmonise the educational actions and participative paths for the design and implementation of interventions favouring active mobility within home-school routes, through a rethinking of street space as well as threshold and proximity areas of primary schools in the Venetian hinterland.
- 8 With this project, the City of Venice has decided to measure its ability to change the habits of inhabitants with and through schools, involving the school communities in co-designing transitional spaces between school and city, and in the drafting and implementation of Sustainable School Mobility Plans. Therefore, the working group of the Municipal Technical Office decided to seek support from a group of facilitator-educators from the Cooperativa Sestante di Venezia (Sestante Cooperative of Venice), through a direct assignment, and from a group of researcher-urbanists from the Iuav University of Venice, through an ad hoc collaboration agreement.
- 9 The temporal continuity of the projects led to the recognition of a new agency for the management of proximity processes in the schools. This was because of their capillary and widespread structures within the Venetian hinterland, and in the plurality of groups and individuals that met within and around its spaces. To this end, both in the third edition (2019-2022) and in the previous ones, the project's first action was the involvement of schools through the sharing of a call for participation addressed to all the headmasters of the mainland and motorised islands of the Venetian municipal territory. The metrics adopted by the Municipality supported the school communities' candidacy for an existing commitment to sustainability issues and related practices, thus eluding territorial parameters. However, in the two three-year periods of the third

edition,¹⁰ the number of candidate schools – eight in total – corresponded to the maximum number of accessions envisaged, based on the economic plan built on project resources. Therefore, with the adhesion to the project, the schools and their communities were called upon to make a pact – both formal and operative, but also in terms of shared values – around the project’s mission and actions. A three-year activities programme was thus introduced within the school’s *Piano Triennale dell’Offerta Formativa* (Educational Offer Plan),¹¹ and a school representative was appointed to act both as a spokesperson for the project and a communication intermediary between the school, the Municipality and the third sector agencies involved. The engagement of the child and adult school communities was achieved in line with the experiments conducted within PUMAS, which then flowed into the guideline writings based on those outlined by Eltis, a European urban mobility observatory.¹² The strengthening of a task force between the school community and the city took place through different levels of engagement by the Municipality, together with the *Cooperativa Sestante di Venezia* and the university research group. This includes that of the children’s school community, through the involvement of classes in educational and participatory paths built on the promotion of an urban culture of sustainability, coordinated and promoted by architects from the technical office and educators from the social cooperative (step 1); and that of the adult school community, both through the work of teachers chosen as project representatives within the school, and teachers’ and parents’ involvement in co-designing tables (step 2). In these circumstances, what emerges is an innovative declination of the relationship between urban planning and educational design, where – as will be highlighted in the two operational steps of the process –, “the field of action and policy of education and urban development overlap both spatially and in terms of content”.¹³

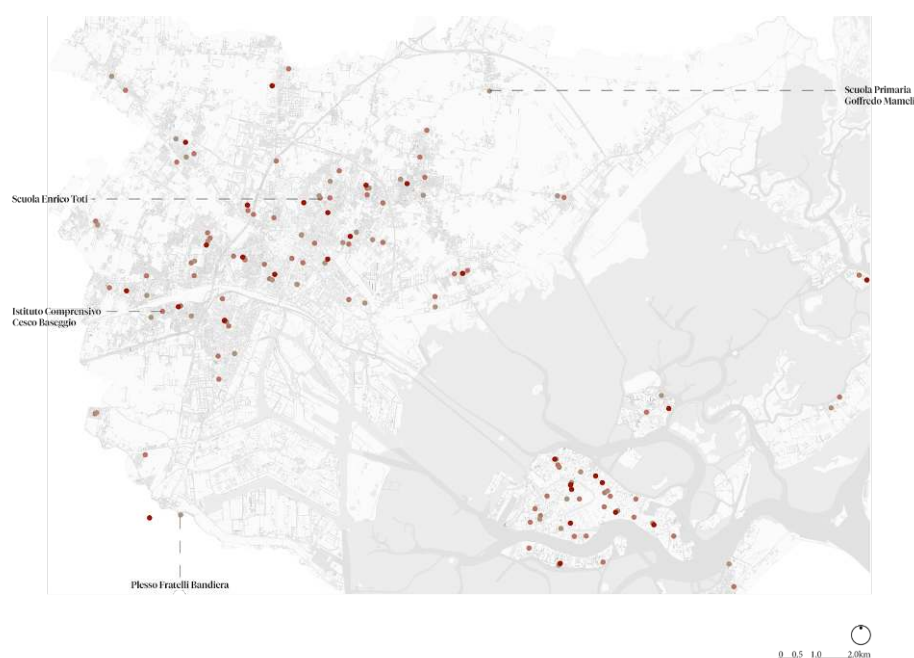
Step 1: Active Mobility as a “School Subject”

- 10 Inhabitants’ participation and the resulting social interaction are fundamental to the potential of transforming the development model towards sustainability.¹⁴ Along with this perspective, by exploring the nexus between education and the production of urban proximity space through the involvement of both children’s and adults’ school communities, a different cultural approach to the project, and thus to change, may be represented. This makes active mobility both a “school subject” and a lens through which to look at the network of spaces and objects for which the school is the focal point. Different studies on the field of geography and pedagogy show, for example, how the affirmation of the child as a social actor and bearer of knowledge¹⁵ can positively nurture the aims and assumptions of participation, on the one hand; and on the other, new predispositions of projectuality that simultaneously recognize an inclusive and strategic lever in the ecological and imaginative attitude of childhood.¹⁶
- 11 In *La mia scuola va in classe A*, the participation of the child school community was achieved through an educational programme made up of various learning activities, through which the students – with regard to mobility systems – were called upon to explore, survey and transform the school’s urban proximity spaces. The activities promoted in this phase of the project (*urban safari*, green mile, bike to school, metrominute) were coordinated by the group of educator-facilitators of the *Cooperativa Sestante* of Venice, in accordance with the group of architects at the Technical Office. In particular, through the *urban safari*, the children explored a 500-

meter radius around the school using photographic media to collect "visual information" on strengths and weaknesses. The green mile, on the other hand, was a sustainable mobility competition between classes, in which each child was given a score based on the type of travel used on the home-school commute, in terms of CO₂ produced during the journey. Once data had been collected for this activity, it showed that the "greenest" class (and therefore the one with the lowest CO₂ production) saw all pupils walk to school for 15 days. With the bike-to-school programme, the children evaluated the negative and positive points of the home-school journey by bike, then questioned what signposting was needed along the routes, identifying common rules of behaviour throughout the journey. Metrominute, on the other hand, consisted of cartographic reading and an evaluation of the travel time within child-friendly home-school routes, through a collection of data on the presence of parking spaces, bus lines, parks and meaningful places for children in general. The educational path was then concluded with a questionnaire that students were given, aimed at allowing children to express their desires in terms of the possible transformation of the spaces around and beyond the school. The requests made by the children through the questionnaires were presented by the municipal working group at the beginning of the co-design table phase, forming the starting point of the interaction between adults. However, the students' views as a prerequisite for the activation of the adult co-design moments became marginal within the discussions.

- 12 Nevertheless, as will be discussed below, the mutual learning process triggered by the work of the tables, as well as the urban project itself, will then attempt to bring the focus back to the perspective of childhood and the strongly qualitative sense that accompanies it with regard to urban development.

Figure 1. Location of the four schools involved in the project in the Municipality of Venice



Images elaborated by the authors and Heloise Maestrelli

Step 2: Moving the Gaze from Material Space to Immaterial Space and Back

- 13 To go through the participation phase, in which the authors played an active role in the process, the four schools will be presented in terms of their spatial characteristics, which became the starting point for discussions during the participatory tables, together with the children's requests inherited from the first phase.
- 14 The four schools involved in the project are located in four different urban contexts, some on the borders of the Municipality of Venice (Fig. 1), some on the edge of settlements close to the countryside, and others in purely residential neighbourhoods of urban areas built during the last century. The G. Mameli School (Fig. 2) is located north of Favaro Veneto, between the district of Dese and the countryside, and is separated from the built-up area by the river. Another peripheral case is the F.lli Bandiera School (Fig. 3), located south of the industrial complex of Porto Marghera, on the embankment of the Naviglio del Brenta at the edge of the residential area of Malcontenta. The C. Baseggio (Fig. 4) and E. Toti (Fig. 5) schools are located in denser urban contexts; the former in the Catene district, near the recently finished public park between Marghera and the railway, and the latter inserted in the residential fabric of Mestre. The four schools present representative conditions of viability and accessibility, with relational and typological characteristics that may be recognisable in other similar cases. In some cases, the entrances to the buildings overlook a particularly congested street, especially at entry and exit times. This makes the threshold space a fundamental design point, identifying favourable conditions for formulating hypotheses to reduce the presence of motor vehicles. The possibilities of connection to existing active mobility networks are also different, as are the availability of open proximity spaces dedicated to other services. As mentioned above, the four schools were selected based on specific eligibility criteria, such as participation in preparatory training activities and adhesion to projects focusing on sustainable mobility, and not with the specific intention of composing a heterogeneous group. Despite this, they made it possible to witness the effect of similar actions in different contexts, thus bringing added value to the search for experimental intervention solutions to promote sustainable mobility and expand the system of relations between school and territory.
- 15 The G. Mameli Primary School in Dese is located in the Municipality of Favaro Veneto, on the northern edge of the Municipality of Venice. Access is located in the courtyard, on the provincial road heading towards the Municipality of Marcon. The issues that emerged concerned the arrangement of the car park, which can be accessed from a secondary road shared with a private home, along with the design of a new waiting area and school bus parking space. From the access to the car park, establishing a 'school zone' up to the junction with the main road was imagined by reshaping the carriageway through the insertion of a cycle-pedestrian path and by painting the road surface and the electrical cabin on the corner, signalling an experimentation with changing the road system. For the access area and around the perimeter of the courtyard, the fence was replaced, increasing the parking spaces for waiting at the school entrance and exit. In Dese, a raised pedestrian crosswalk was introduced to make access to the school more visible and to slow down traffic.

- 16 The F.lli Bandiera Primary School in Malcontenta is located between the embankment of the Brenta Canal and a road connecting to the lagoon front. The main critical issues that emerged at the co-design workshop concerned the securing of the school front and the cycle-pedestrian access routes from the neighbouring built-up areas. In front of the school, a section of 'school road' bordered by two raised pedestrian crossings, highlighted by painting the road surface, and the removal of private parking near the school gates are to be tested. To make waiting in the area outside the school safer and more comfortable, it was decided to include furniture and a shelter. In addition, a new pedestrian crossing connected to the parking area of the sports facilities near the school has been planned. Concerning sections that can be travelled by foot or by bicycle, it was considered necessary to make the passage from the nearby Municipality of Mira safe, which is also the school's catchment area. This was done through pavement completion and the marking of new crossings useful for the implementation of the pedibus project. The particular location of the school also made it interesting to deal with the re-paving and lighting of the path on the embankment of the Naviglio del Brenta, which allows access to the courtyard from a new rear entrance.
- 17 The C. Baseggio Primary School is located on the Catene district's main road. The ideas discussed with parents and teachers concerned designing the uncultivated space beside the secondary entrance to the courtyard and reconfiguring the street front. Through the introduction of a section of 'school road' in front of the courtyard, bordered by two raised pedestrian and bicycle crossings, it was decided to limit the speed of cars at entry and exit times, as well as to reduce parking near the school's entrance on the main road. The division of access areas into two fronts and the transformation of the lawn area, now improperly used as a car park, guarantees an extension of the space for outdoor school activities and the creation of a safe waiting area, away from traffic. In addition, it is planned to develop pedibus routes, connecting the main parking areas with the school by restoring bumpy pavement or paving new paths towards Parco Catene.
- 18 The E. Toti Primary School in Mestre presents different characteristics, as it is the most typical urban case, located in a densely built-up residential area. The proposed experiments concerned the implementation of bicycle and pedestrian paths to allow children to reach the school from strategic 'kiss and go' parking points. To make the routes safe, a section of 'school road' has been introduced adjacent to the entrance that also reaches kindergartens in the area. The school road could function as a *Zona a Traffico Limitato* (Restricted Traffic Zone) together with the streets adjacent to the school during entry and exit times, producing a two-way cycle lane. A further transformation envisaged is the expansion of cycle and pedestrian accessibility by extending the existing Pediplan section.

Figure 2. Map of mobility and welfare spaces of G. Mameli Primary School, Dese



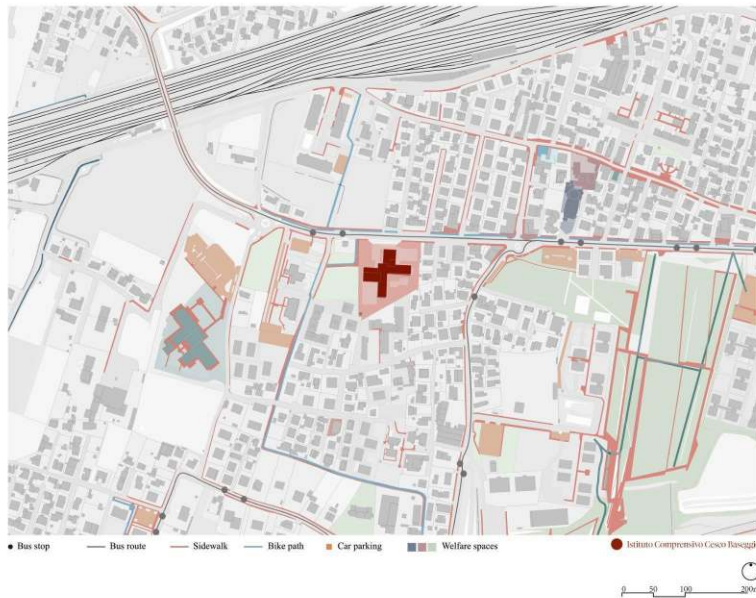
Images elaborated by the authors and Heloise Maestrelli

Figure 3. Map of mobility and welfare spaces of F.lli Bandiera Primary School, Malcontenta



Images elaborated by the authors and Heloise Maestrelli

Figure 4. Map of mobility and welfare spaces of Cesco Baseggio Primary School, Catene



Images elaborated by the authors and Heloise Maestrelli

Figure 5. Map of mobility and welfare spaces of Enrico Toti Primary School, Mestre



Images elaborated by the authors and Heloise Maestrelli

Three Different but Complementary Perspectives on the Project

- 19 Moving our attention away from the material space of the four schools involved in the interventions to the immaterial network of subjects, groups and governance dynamics that characterised the process, let us now relocate the *La mia scuola va in classe A* experience within three different but complementary critical trajectories. The first trajectory relates to the construction of participatory processes and the co-designing of change between school and city. The second concerns the theme of active mobility as the object of the participatory process; and the third relates to the essential project efforts fine-tuned with the school community to envision future possibilities.

New Project Communities, New Policy Communities: A City-School Laboratory

- 20 In the *La mia scuola va in classe A* process, schools and the so-called "educational communities" of four inland Venetian primary schools were urged to redefine and rediscover their relationship with urban space, the context of proximity, and the city. Meanwhile, the city came into the daily school routine, attempting to redefine not only its forms but also its activities, through the creation of original transformative processes that are simultaneously material, quotidian and educational. In this respect, the paradigms of urban action have therefore been reoriented, combining: 1) the promotion of an urban culture of sustainability through schools; 2) the recognition of children as bearers of knowledge and agents of change; 3) the constitution of new actor relationships between schools, territorial governments, universities, and local actors. Locally, the effects of the innovative elements introduced by the European PUMAS project played a crucial role in this regard. The development and testing of a process chain collected under the PUMAS Guidelines served as the operational and strategic support for all subsequent editions of the project. New project and policy communities met to reflect upon the spaces around the four schools of the Venetian hinterland involved in the project, based on European principles and methodologies. New project communities have experienced "everyday transformative trajectories i.e. directly linked to the first-hand experience of a space, a service, an urban route, a set of relationships".¹⁷ New communities of integrated local policies propose a dilution of educational policies within urban ones, rethinking established patterns of interaction between problems and solutions.¹⁸ However, the participatory dimension of the project required a complicated collaborative effort between groups with different aptitudes, sensibilities as well as levels of knowledge of school's urban proximity spaces. The process was in fact particularly challenging, also due to the shift from an offline to an online setting for the participatory step of the process, addressed to the adult school community.¹⁹ For example, the Municipal Administration of Venice was called to continue and improve experimentation and use of multi-actor tools and forms of urban (mobility) planning with schools, a not so simple operation. Moreover, in the Veneto Region and its wider national context, the participatory approach in urban planning is often still considered an exception,²⁰ and is usually associated with "experimental or extraordinary policies"²¹, as in this case. This effort also clashed with the strict criteria set forth with regard to invitations to be proposed: time limit for the activation of

processes and interventions. During the third edition of the project, for example, this aspect added to the difficulties linked to the health emergency, hindering the possibility for the educating community to fully engage in the process. This was visible through the low number of adherents to the co-designing tables comprised of teachers and parents, but also in the little valorisation of the instances promoted by the students in interpreting the urban context as an educational experience. These critical points exposed two opposed issues. On the one hand, there was the risk that these projects would end (out of exhaustion) “without the strength to sustain the process, with all parties represented but in the direction of the promoting party”.²² On the other hand, the locally rooted municipal overseers confused their consultation role with full-scale participation²³ in the closing phase of the project, although rightly appealing to a systemic vision ruled by the priority of interventions to be implemented. Experts and technicians from the university and the Municipal Technical Office had to put into practice a design approach open to inclusion, listening and accompaniment, working alongside the school community. Interestingly, during the project implementation, facilitator-educators of the Cooperativa Sestante di Venezia and university representatives have taken on a “didactic role” in addition to their roles as technical support operators and facilitation experts. During the co-designing tables, both parties favoured a recombining dimension between local subjects and institutions in a mutual-learning perspective, bringing “the urban matter” into “the school matter” and highlighting the educational value of the process and of the project itself. The adult school community was encouraged to responsibly participate, by actively contributing to the pooling of critical issues and design strategies, working to overcome sterile oppositions. The goal was to strengthen the role of schools in producing knowledge and educational content that spills out into the street and into the city, thus transforming it. The co-design process aimed at favouring the recovery of active mobility, to the detriment of vehicular mobility. It has also highlighted how the issue of freeing the street and the school threshold space from cars, in order to return them to the *general interest*, is one of the fiercest disputes of our time. The school threshold space therefore emerges as one of the few existing – and resisting – fragments of public space where we are still called upon to dissolve and exercise conflict. However, it is the very nature of the project, with the construction of integrated actions of welfare, education and urban space, to potentially transfigure the role of the car from a “powerful device of urban transformation”²⁴ to an obstacle to be removed in order to allow the full blooming of the person and the participation of all (Art. 3 Constitution of the Italian Republic). Finally, in the long run and as a final step, this perspective seems to be substantiated by the introduction of training courses for teachers (set up by the Municipal Technical Office and the Cooperativa Sestante di Venezia, with the sponsorship of the Regional School Office) to enable school communities to be the driving force behind Sustainable School Mobility Plans, with the support of the Municipality. In other words, the goal is to try to promote and consolidate new project communities and new policy communities through original school-city labs, in order to acknowledge schools as generators of cities, propelling centres of a socio-ecological and socio-educational transition of the communities and territories which they are part of.

Active Mobility as the Object of the Participatory Process Involving the Educating Community in the Reimagination of School Spaces

- 21 While active mobility is a relevant issue of concern for all urban administrations,²⁵ it is particularly important for schools, since at two times of the day – the beginning and end of lessons – their surrounding spaces become a traffic hub. In thinking about new design solutions for such specific and localised issues, the involvement of schools has a strategic, symbolic and educational significance. The proposed projects addressed active mobility through moments of training and occasions for repeatedly galvanizing the school community to develop suggestions for urban regeneration. These activities gave rise to networks of children, parents, and teachers who established potential alliances in accompanying municipal administrations in their choices regarding the transformation of the city.
- 22 During children’s explorations of urban safaris, for example, observations ‘naturally’ emerged that point to critical issues on the way to school. The demands for transformation focused on dimensions related to meeting and sharing outside of school. The children asked for more quality spaces; a reduced presence of vehicular traffic; an increase in trees, vegetation, and places to play; as well as safer and more visible bicycle and pedestrian paths. This appears contradictory to what was discussed by the community of parents and teachers. The aspects noted by the children were mainly approached with a higher degree of importance by those already sensitive to the issue of modal shift, and who walk or cycle to school.
- 23 The comparison between the educating community, the facilitators and the researchers showed the validity of the discussion process in the development of a generative and self-learning conflict, which sees the inclusion of the younger generations in the construction of collective choices as having a strong innovative role. The presence of parents and teachers accustomed to motorised mobility, who manifested the need to have a car park near the school, was noted in the working tables. It was therefore necessary to reiterate the nature of the funding and the requirements of the expected project proposals, which are aimed at bringing about transformations that favour a change in behaviour toward sustainable mobility. What emerged in the working tables points to rethinking the governance and design of school access as a lever to intervene in social and spatial inequality. In acting on the often-sizable space hitherto occupied by parking for private vehicles, the aim is to guarantee inclusion and full availability of use of public space, a place of opportunities and meetings, where a ‘need for the city’ is expressed. In favouring access, both figuratively and physically, the school thus plays the role of a democratic institution, guaranteeing the rights of all the members of the educating community. Furthermore, as mentioned above, it also removes obstacles and barriers to the right to “the development of the human person and effective participation”.²⁶ The project of re-imagining school fronts aimed to disrupt the paradigm of using private cars to access the school, by intervening in the design of the public space at the threshold of school buildings and courtyards. Solutions were identified to facilitate active mobility, including cycling and walking, also because of the introduction of pedibus. The soil intervention proposals concerned were: pavement completion and the improvement of bicycle and pedestrian paths in poor condition; the arrangement, securing or relocation of pedestrian crossings; and the identification of ‘school zones,’ as an element of innovative urban design for the Municipality of Venice.

- 24 To meet the requirements of ensuring safety, reducing the use of private motor vehicles and leaving more public space for people near schools, it was decided to experiment with the introduction of 'school roads.' This experimentation was made possible thanks to advances introduced into the highway code by the so-called *Decreto Semplificazioni 120/2020* (Ministerial Decree), which aims to protect weak road users, starting with the spaces in the vicinity of schools.²⁷ In the cases addressed concerning the co-design of the interventions for the four primary schools, it was seen how experimentation could be understood, on the one hand, as a synthesis device for the required interventions. At the same time, however, it has turned out to be a challenging transformation, as it stimulates a change of behaviour in the use of portions of the street usually dedicated to parking or the passage of cars. The experimentation represents an innovation for the Municipality of Venice, and is a first step towards the possible implementation of lasting interventions. Imaginable long-term developments of these actions could be permanent pedestrianisation, temporary pedestrianisation – during school entrance and exit times – or the realisation of projects for speed moderation and increased road safety with the insertion of street furniture.
- 25 To ensure effects over longer time horizons and to give continuity to active mobility improvement projects, the programme included a training course for teachers in order to identify possible school Mobility Managers. Their presence as intermediaries, between the project and the school community, for the drafting and implementation of School Mobility Plans could introduce the monitoring of the evolution of active mobility behaviour by bridging the school and the territory.²⁸ Their informed point of view within the schools would allow them to have their finger on the pulse of the situation and to implement planned actions that encourage sustainable urban mobility, guaranteeing the possibility for schools to be able to apply for further bids and access funding to carry out additional works.

Pouncing, Essential Design Elements of a Shared Cartoon

- 26 The design approach used during the participatory process can be described with the image of the pouncing²⁹ technique. Tracing the trigger points of a preparatory cartoon shared with the school community identified essential elements, giving a glimpse of the overall shapes of possible future directions. The intent was to give an initial idea of how space might become, so that it accommodates different ways of being inhabited and incentivizes more sustainable mobility practices. Through direct experimentation, the collective imagination was thus oriented toward the design of environments in which the school could act as a catalyst for urbanity, as in the cases of school streets, school squares,³⁰ hybrid spaces beyond the fence, and educational neighbourhood opportunities.
- 27 Designing actions used micro-surgical but recognizable interventions that give spatial connotation to current and future instances, taking into account everyday habits; while seeking spatial outcomes with qualitative and quantitative metrics that can root more sustainable and innovative proposals over time. Given the modalities of the calls for funding recounted in the process reconnaissance, the proposed projects arose from a design approach able to consider the integrated needs of different actors. To hold together the different instances and find a common goal, a perspective from above and

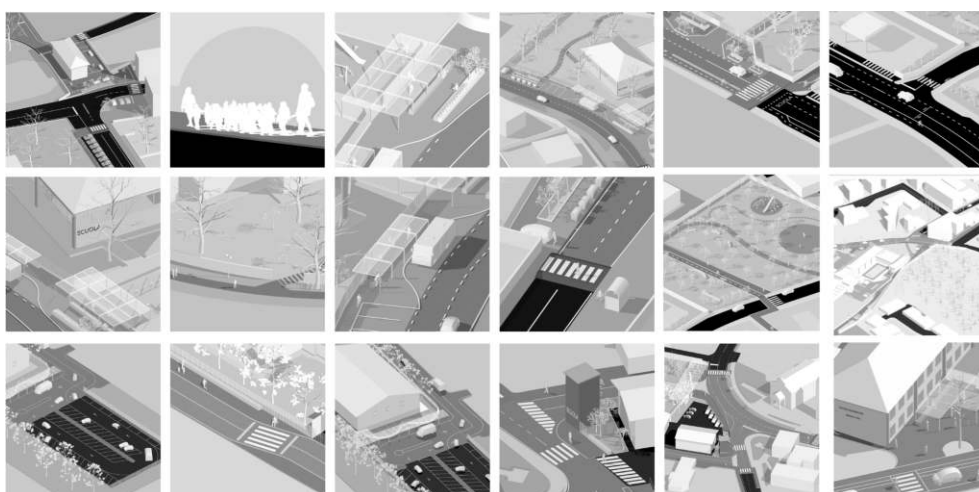
below was constructed, with short-term and long-term time horizons that could define the different degrees of project activities. Some interventions have been envisaged for immediate implementation, characterised by low-cost and active participation in the construction phase by the school community, and others are becoming part of the municipal administration's agenda to guide future planning actions.

- 28 The contexts in which schools are located were read through the engagement process, which identified the most critical issues and project opportunities to work on, interfacing with multiple actors and degrees of interest in various spaces by different actors in the school community. The result is a shared project in which urban planners put themselves in a listening position and find their role in the process, acting as an intermediary between community and territory, and spatializing the requests of the different actors.
- 29 Participation in the listening tables triggered a process of mutual learning, the university's involvement in the design being the impetus for finding effective communication tools to create an imaginary. In the time between the first and second meeting, the result was the projection of different actors' aspirations, and an attempt to make the urban space the scene of future project potentialities.
- 30 For this, we worked by reasoning on some snapshots – that is, photo-insertions from above and below – of the project proposals, which have come to constitute de facto scenarios of more complex urban modification possibilities in the future.
- 31 The project was articulated with an abacus of spatial devices that give the spaces involved continuity, legibility and the capacity for evolution, making them recognizable in the immediate term, but also triggering a reverberation at a larger scale. With specific and recurrent elements, the aim is to design with less, selecting the actions and areas of intervention to give a hierarchy to the potential for use and the possibilities for immediate innovation.
- 32 The essential elements of the project focused on specific environments, the street space, the school threshold, and the (mostly open) public spaces of proximity.
- 33 The street space was rethought so that it could accommodate the call's proposals to encourage sustainable mobility, with the idea of future enhancement toward greater autonomy in children's experience of urban space. To reduce traffic congestion, mark pedibus routes, and highlight school approach points, work was done with roadway redesign where possible, reducing the power of car space in favour of pedestrian and bicycle space, and painting or raising the ground. To redefine threshold space, the continuity of painted material was worked on concerning paths and school fences. Spatial devices were thought of that could accommodate different functions according to their place on the perimeter, such as walls with greater heights when meant to partition and lesser heights when meant to provide seating or shelters that could serve as both access spaces and public transportation stops. To achieve visual communication and disincentivize the misuse of certain open spaces as parking lots or has having increased potential for parking space near the schools, vegetation has been improved, with plantings in ponds or on the ground when possible.
- 34 Thinking about elements that may have integrated hybrid uses is advantageous for the creation of environments that grant users with a higher possibility for manipulation, accommodating their expressed instances while remaining available to unprecedented (and playful) revisitation dictated by uses. In this way, the path of children's

involvement was crucial, constituting a bottom-up view that manages to focus on some substantial issues in order to give more urbanity to public space. The children's patrols have highlighted a focus on the materiality of the space they walk through and inhabit daily, suggesting design possibilities that are oriented toward the definition of comfortable, inclusive, and safe spaces, because they are designed from the viewpoint of one of the weakest groups, but not specialised and directly dedicated to them, to the point of becoming infantilized.

- 35 There is a need to highlight the implicit pedagogical role of urban design, because it is an everyday scene of possibilities and imaginaries in formation, which must be able to accommodate even the least heard voices such as those of the youngest, since they lack political representation. In this sense, engagement pathways such as the one recounted have the potential to make people aware of their right to the city, and generate possibilities for interaction among different actors, stimulating the creation of design tools on multiple temporal and spatial scales.

Figure 6. Project devices proposed during the participation process



Images elaborated by the authors and Heloise Maestrelli

Back to the (Future) School

- 36 The experiment conducted in the *La mia scuola va in classe A* project pointed out precisely how little and poorly the spaces around schools are often used. In everyday practices, these spaces are relegated to the role of temporary parking lots for passing cars. In contrast, by placing the school at the centre of urban life, as a place not only devoted to education but more generally to culture and encounters, these spaces can play a much more relevant role. If the school is seen as a public, stable, continuous, and vital presence that can offer meeting spaces and creativity to urban populations – a kind of civic centre, where the different neighbourhood networks find a foothold³¹ –, the spaces around schools can also acquire another role.
- 37 These spaces, which sometimes include open areas, wide sidewalks, parks, playgrounds, small squares, and much more, are often disconnected from one another: getting from one to the other is difficult for an adult, and impossible for a child alone. However, if their presence today is not valued in spatial organisation, it is much more so in the

practices of parents and children. How many pedibus or shared home-school routes cross through the spaces connecting them? How many spontaneous routes are defined between schools, parks, squares, spaces and collective facilities?

- 38 On the other hand, the centrality of the school in the city and the ways in which it is accessed within neighbourhoods have been the subject of a corpus of hypotheses, theories, and projects that, with some recurrence, spanned much of the 20th century: from the early studies on neighbourhood unity by Clarence Perry, who in New York proposed defining neighbourhood size based on the population needed to fill a school that could be reached in 10-15 minutes on foot without encountering driveways; to the more recent work by Liane Lefebvre capable of bringing the focus back to children's time and play space as an engine of innovation in the configuration of urban spaces.³²
- 39 Nevertheless, we often forget this knowledge and return to thinking of schools and their accessibility as mere technical issues, specific problems to be solved.
- 40 However, the school, along with other collective facilities, spaces for sports, culture, leisure, and health, can be considered today as new *agoras*; that is, spaces that the population feels belong to them, recognized as places of collective identity. It is thus clear that attributing relevance to these sets of spaces is a commitment to act to reduce their access threshold at various scales, by adopting different strategies: improving the practicability of surrounding spaces, connecting services and facilities with each other using slow mobility systems, and strengthening connections with the public mobility network. This is what we have tried to do in the design experiments conducted with the four schools in Mestre.
- 41 Reducing the access threshold means working on the visibility, permeability and safe conditions of services and facilities. Use is facilitated when the spaces surrounding a school, park, or sports facility are made more easily accessible. This also somewhat goes for the area surrounding the space where the main activity takes place, as it becomes available to a wider audience beyond the user of that service. For example, parents walking or biking their children to school should be able to stop and wait in a safe and comfortable space, such that it contributes to strengthening the fabric of collective spaces in a town or neighbourhood. The same can be said of a sports facility, where areas outside the premises can themselves become places of socialisation for those waiting and watching sports activities. Think also of a library, toy library, museum or park, whose activities reverberate on surrounding spaces that are often not adequately adapted. It is often a matter of shaping more articulated systems of mineral and vegetated surfaces, canopies, hedges and trees, as well as seating and spaces for people and bicycles to stop, through which to establish the many missing connections between the urban system and collective facilities, thereby helping to strengthen and enhance their role.
- 42 Simplifying and facilitating access to collective services or equipment also comes through a closer connection with slow mobility networks. Sidewalk and bicycle path networks must be placed in continuity with each other and with services and facilities, for which they must almost become offshoots.
- 43 Alongside efforts to increase the amount of available bicycle and pedestrian routes, much more work needs to be done to reduce discontinuities within them, between them, and in their connection to the collective services and facilities they are supposed to connect. It only takes a break of one or two metres along a pedestrian or bicycle path, or a failure to connect with the intended equipment, to undermine the autonomy

of a child, a disabled person, a visually impaired person, or an elderly person and their ability to move around the city, rendering the path itself useless.

- 44 On a different scale, reducing the access threshold means empowering everyone to be able to independently reach a collective service or equipment by enhancing the public mobility network, streetcars, and buses.
- 45 From the activation of such strategies, we can begin to look at the school as the nucleus of a system of routes and spaces capable of transforming the act of going to school from an immediate time, to an experience of getting to know the city and autonomizing the child. This helps to innervate the city with sequences of collective spaces capable of enriching and making it more permeable and safer for pedestrians and cyclists, while achieving several goals.
- 46 The first is to make pedestrian and bicycle access to schools easier and safer. This may require, for example, turning school entrances – which are often oriented toward the driveway and parking lot –, into a space that benefits pedestrians and bicycle pathways, building canopies to connect multiple school facilities (school and gymnasium, or kindergarten and primary school), protecting children from the weather during their daily commute. For the same reason, through shelters, one can try to connect the entrance of the schoolyard to the entrance of the building, as well as towards the waiting space for parents.
- 47 The second is to strengthen school grounds as collective spaces, holding them together and giving spatial coherence to the set of school access points and other collective facilities, through public mobility stops and bicycle and pedestrian paths. It is often the fragmentation resulting from the separate management of different urban facilities that detracts from the meaning and role that urban space can play.
- 48 The third objective is to improve the connection between schools and other collective spaces in the neighbourhood. This assumes that in the daily practices of children and parents, the relationship with parks, playgrounds and other public facilities is particularly important. Consequently, the issue becomes no longer related to just the safety of individual home-school, home-park, or home-work routes, but the ringing of multiple destinations, a network of uninterrupted routes and flows (home-school-park-work-services, etc.) and the possible connections between such places.
- 49 Spaces around schools have often been considered a technical problem to be solved through the achievement of standards: ensuring minimum quantitative levels has led to trivialising the relational dimension of these spaces, and the spatial characters of the problem.³³ In this way, taking refuge within sectorial logic, each agency and each technician has tended to deal only with their particular issue. Further, the distribution of services and equipment has given up measuring itself against the possibility of guaranteeing a better ‘diffuse quality’ to the city, as it is incapable of intercepting the nexus between actions and experiences of daily life.³⁴
- 50 An inalienable goal consists of being able to use collective services and facilities, such as schools, without perceiving limitations to one’s ‘right to space’ and being disillusioned by their presence. Working to lower and reduce entry thresholds so that they are extensively accessible to different populations, their ‘accessibility’ is therefore understood here as a tool through which to guarantee ‘the right to have rights to education, health, leisure, etc.’³⁵

- 51 Consequently, the guarantee of an equitable presence of collective services and facilities where one can educate oneself, practice sports, be cared for, spend leisure time, etc., has been one of the banners (standards) to be defended and supported through social and urban policies throughout the twentieth century. Therefore, today it is precisely their accessibility that must be guaranteed. This means that the physical, social, economic, and even symbolic space that surrounds and renders accessible collective areas and facilities, including that of schools, must be comfortable, healthy and safe, allowing anyone to access and participate in them without any impediment or embarrassment. Those who experience limited access to these activities are at a disadvantage and are excluded, which represents a form of injustice.³⁶
- 52 The point that seems relevant to us, granting these hypotheses with a more general character than at first glance, is that to make any city adhere to this elementary idea there needs to be a radical change in the idea of accessibility, by leveraging the important structure of existing collective spaces and facilities. This has been cultivated in recent decades and developed through very selective infrastructural policies aimed at privileging vehicular and individual mobility at the expense of pedestrian-cycle and collective mobility, discriminating against and often marginalizing the vast and articulated set of weaker and struggling populations.
- 53 Thus, these are policies that have so far refused to confront the benefits required at all the different 'stages of life'.³⁷

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ABSTRACTS

The paper proposes the first results of the *La mia scuola va in classe A* project, a participatory research and planning process promoted by the City of Venice, with the collaboration of the Cooperativa Sestante di Venezia and the Iuav University of Venice. Co-funded by MIT's "National Experimental Program of Sustainable Home-School and Home-Work Mobility." The project tries to rethink the relationship between school and city, between school spaces and urban fabric, through the development of educational and participatory processes aimed at the school system. The participatory pathway involves the school community in developing actions and interventions that promote active mobility on home-school routes and a rethinking of the street, threshold and proximity spaces of four inland Venetian elementary schools. Through a reconstruction of the process, we reflect on how to interweave relationships and mutual learning between school and city, with the shared elaboration of an imaginary oriented toward active mobility, awareness of the importance of motor autonomy and the psycho-physical well-being of the local community. The proposed design solutions will have the role of holding together the different instances in a fertile path leading to the improvement of the conditions of the spaces of mobility and proximity, with the idea of opening the city to the school and the school to the city, to improve the relationship between people and to return spaces of possibility to children.

La contribution propose les premiers résultats du projet *La mia scuola va in classe A*, un projet de recherche et de conception participative promu par la municipalité de Venise, avec la collaboration de la coopérative Sestante et de l'université Iuav de Venise. Cofinancé par le "Programme expérimental national de mobilité durable domicile-école et domicile-travail" du MIT. Le projet tente de repenser la relation entre l'école et la ville, entre les espaces scolaires et le tissu urbain, à travers le développement de processus éducatifs et participatifs destinés au système scolaire. Le processus participatif implique la communauté scolaire dans le développement d'actions et d'interventions qui favorisent la mobilité active dans les trajets domicile-école et une refonte de la rue, du seuil et des espaces de proximité de quatre écoles primaires dans l'arrière-pays vénitien. À travers une reconstruction du processus, la contribution réfléchit à la manière d'imbriquer les relations et l'apprentissage mutuel entre l'école et la ville, avec l'élaboration partagée d'une imagerie orientée vers la mobilité active, la prise de conscience de l'importance de l'autonomie motrice et le bien-être psycho-physique de la communauté locale. Les solutions de conception proposées auront pour rôle de réunir les différentes instances dans un parcours fertile conduisant à l'amélioration des conditions des espaces de mobilité et de proximité, dans l'idée d'ouvrir la ville à l'école et l'école à la ville, d'améliorer la relation entre les personnes et de redonner des espaces de possibilité aux enfants.

INDEX

Mots-clés: École, Espace urbain, Politiques urbaines, Communauté éducative, Mobilité

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AUTHORS

FABRIZIA CANNELLA

Fabrizia Cannella, architect and PhD student in Urbanism at the Università Iuav di Venezia
fcannella@iuav.it

SAMUEL FATTORELLI

Samuel Fattorelli, architect and PhD student in Urbanism at the Università Iuav di Venezia.
sfattorelli@iuav.it

MARIA CHIARA TOSI

Maria Chiara Tosi, PhD in Urbanism (La Sapienza Rome 1996), Visiting Researcher at the college of Environmental Design UC Berkeley (1994-95 USA), is Full Professor in Urban Design. At Università Iuav di Venezia she is also scientific coordinator of the PhD in Urbanism, Director of School of Doctorate Studies and head of the Research Cluster CityLab.
ariachiara.tosi@iuav.it

VALENTINA ROSSELLA ZUCCA

Valentina Rossella Zucca, architect and PhD student in Urbanism at the Università Iuav di Venezia
vrzucca@iuav.it