

# The Children's City Project

## **WHY DO WE NEED CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION?**

After examining the characteristics of the degradation of the urban environment and the costs that this entails for the child's development, in particular as far as play experience and autonomous mobility are concerned, the article goes on to discuss the role of children's contribution to the promotion of real and consistent change in the city.

The reasons underlying the recent increase in the number of experiments on children's participation are examined together with the main characteristics of this strategy as a privileged access to knowledge concerning the needs of our younger citizens and as an innovative resource in solving the city's problems. It is shown how children's participation experiments can lead to the acquisition of a fresh sensitivity and competence by city administrators and technicians.

An analysis is made of several proposals made by children in the course of participation experiments followed by the authors in cities in Italy and abroad during ten year's of activities in the "The Children's City" project. These proposals confirm the children's capacity to identify the city's problems as they emerge and to propose solutions that are often innovative or useful for all members of the population.

## **URBAN MOBILITY AS A MEASURE OF DEMOCRACY IN THE CITY**

Over the past few decades public spaces in the cities have lost their identity as a public dimension for meeting and social intercourse. The streets and squares are now dominated by motor cars.

The autonomous mobility of pedestrians, especially elderly persons, children and the handicapped has been severely curtailed. Only a profound change in the way the city is governed can restore the citizens' right to mobility.

Here children can be of help. Children have the right and the need to be able to go out on their own, to cross the street, to meet their friends and play with them. Scientific research has clearly revealed the limits imposed by traffic and the various hazards represent a serious limitation of the children's development.

A city that accepts to take the child as a parameter for change is committed to making radical decisions in favour of the guaranteed mobility of all its citizens. As a first step in this process the "Let's go to school on our own" initiative is proposed.

## **LET'S GO TO SCHOOL ON OUR OWN. A PROPOSAL FOR AUTONOMY**

As one of the objectives of the Children's city programme in Italy is the enhancement of children's autonomous mobility, the research group of the CNR (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, de Roma) has begun to experiment with new methods that might allow to overcome some of the barriers in children's patterns of free movement. The aim of the presentation is to discuss the method developed as part of a proposal called "Going alone to school". The method comprises a collaboration with several local actors, children included, who are willing to analyse the environmental and social context in which children journey from home to school, to plan for its improvements, and to change the conditions so that children can go alone to school when they are 7 years old. Recent examples from two Italian towns indicate that it is possible to brake the resistance coming from families and to let children journey alone to school.

[The Children's Project Website](#) (Italian and Spanish currently, English coming soon)