"Making a difference"
Communicating to and working with the community

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"Making a difference" - communicating to and working with the community

Sustainable mobility development is a core factor for livable climate-friendly cities and communities. In order to support municipalities in the development of sustainable mobility offers, the Ride & Smile project developed ideas on how children or schools can make an active contribution to improvement here.

By actively addressing the issues and taking practical action, children can not only learn early on that they have a variety of options for making conscious mobility choices. Early engagement also impacts how children act later as adults.

In the context of small school-based projects, learners can also participate as experts in planning and designing their own living environment and routes to school. On the one hand, this means that first the everyday problems of e.g., road traffic or safety on the way to school have to be perceived, documented and analyzed (e.g. by traffic counts, by surveys, by observations, etc.). On the other hand, it also means that it does not have to remain with analyzing and accepting, but that improvements or proposals for solutions are also developed, pointed out and tested in the lessons.

A lot of persuasion is needed to implement improvements together with the parents or the municipality. First of all, it is important to sensitize the parents or the municipality to issues such as the traffic situation, danger spots, or grievances. This works particularly well if the children first identify the problems themselves and, if possible, even analyze them on the basis of data (e.g., traffic counts, photo documentation, etc.). They can then develop proposals for solutions and present them to parents and/or decision-makers.

The following examples show how students can participate as experts in the planning and design of their own living environment and routes to school and thus make an active contribution to improvement.

Example 1:
Our school needs specific space for safe and secure storage of bicycles.
- The children document the current situation in the schoolyard with the help of photos (e.g., bicycles lying around, bicycles standing unprotected in the rain).
- The children collect ideas on how the situation in the schoolyard could be improved.
- The students create a presentation in which they point out the problems and show their proposed solutions (in this case, e.g., a bicycle storage area on the school grounds).
- The students present their project to parents and/or municipal decision-makers.

Example 2:
Speed limits around the school
- The children document the current traffic situation around the school (e.g., traffic counts, speed measurements, video documentation).
- The children collect ideas on how the traffic situation could be improved
- The students prepare a presentation in which they point out the problems they have identified and propose solutions (e.g., speed limit, installation of safe bike lanes, regular checks by the local police, installation of crossing guards with the help of parents).
- Students present their project to parents and/or community decision-makers

Example 3:
Identify routes to school and take action to ensure safety on the way to school.
- Children document the current situation of routes to school (e.g., traffic counts, photos of vehicles on the sidewalk/bike path)
- Children collect ideas on how to make routes to school safer
- Students create a presentation in which they point out the problems they have identified and outline their proposed solutions (in this case, for example, identifying common routes to school, then making them as safe as possible and designating them for all children through school route maps, forming school route partners, or setting up parent stops)
- Students present their project to parents and/or community decision makers.

Example 4:
Feel-good and scary places in our town
- The children document the current situation in the place where they live and go to school (e.g., district exploration, photo safari, writing experience reports) and identify places of well-being and fear in the process
- The children collect ideas on how to eliminate or at least defuse the places of fear
- The students create a presentation in which they point out the identified places of fear and show their proposed solutions (here, e.g., improving lighting, improving the quality of stay by creating green spaces or playgrounds)
- The students present their project to parents and/or municipal decision-makers.

Nevertheless, habits are stable. Parents who regularly take their children to school by car for various motives cannot be dissuaded by one-off actions. Drivers who are used to driving fast through residential areas will find it difficult to change this behavior. And convincing local authorities to invest money or take targeted measures to improve the school situation, for example, is not easy either. The following tips can be helpful to them in implementing project plans:

Persuasion is important - thick boards must be drilled
"Thick boards" must be drilled to convince parents and the municipalities that, for example, there are advantages for the children to become independent, to move around, to walk to school. Or that the municipality must ensure safe routes to school by actively improving the traffic situation in the school environment. This requires constant information and communication. The children must also experience this content through the classroom and, if possible, carry the information home.

Step by step - small steps lead to success
As a rule, unrealistic goals or demands quickly lead to rejection by parents and communities. However, if the children develop their own proposals (e.g., small, realistic, and feasible measures) based on their teaching results and then present these to parents and/or decision-makers in the communities, the latter will probably be more willing to implement appropriate measures and thus make an initial contribution to improvement.

Demanding parental and municipal responsibility
Parents and local authorities are more likely to be convinced if all those involved (school, children, parents and local authorities) are on board

and committed to a corresponding measure (e.g. ensuring safe and good routes to school, no parked cars in intersections or on sidewalks, crossing aids, traffic lights if necessary, speed limits for car traffic in the school environment and residential area, parent stops if necessary, bans on stopping in the school area, checks).

Nothing happens immediately - a long breath is necessary
If you want to reach parents and communities, it makes sense and is necessary to address relevant topics regularly and in all grades in lessons, projects, school festivals and events and thus anchor them in school life and, if possible, in the curriculum. All actions and efforts must be repeated regularly and as publicly as possible, so that „future" generations of students and their parents are constantly informed and involved.

Of course, the ideas, examples and hints given here are only suggestions that must be adapted to the respective possibilities and needs of your own school. As a starting point, consider and discuss together with the children and colleagues of your school. What problems exist at your school? Which ones are particularly urgent to solve? For which challenge do you want to take a first step and thus contribute to improving the overall situation through a first small activity.

APPENDIX: A READING TO DO IN THE CLASSROOM

The Streets For Kids Campaign:
The Clean Cities Campaign is a European coalition of more than 70 NGOs and grassroots groups that aims to encourage cities to switch to zero-emission transportation. #StreetsforKids is the Clean Cities Campaign initiative that aims to get „school streets in front of every school by 2030" by promoting days of action in cities across Europe.

What is a school street?
A School Street is a road closure strategy to restrict motorised traffic, where walking and cycling zones are created in front of schools, at least during dropoff and pick-up times.

Why this campaign?
The campaign wants to raise awareness of the risks associated with air pollution and noise and road safety, influence home-school travel choices, and encourage the use of non-polluting solutions (walking, biking, public transportation, shared mobility). Accidents involving children, caused by cars, are still unfortunately many throughout Europe: road traffic injury is the leading cause of death for children and young adults aged 5–29 years. Children should be able to walk, bike and scooter to school every day, without being forced to breathe polluted air and cross dangerous roads. This is why there is a strong need for #StreetsforKids.

How does it work?
The campaign focuses very much on the beautiful, festive, colorful side of school streets. Communication is important since parents and citizens need to be „educated," more so than children. Usually adults see only the „boredom" of parking far away, the waste of time of taking a walk. Instead, children appreciate free space to play. That's why the campaign encourages local committees and entities to organize, even for one day, street games, parties, bike rides together.
The communication works through the website dedicated page, and social media. Participants are asked to send their photos from every event, even small ones, to testify that it can be done and that it is fun. In these channels you can find the list of events: the next one will be on May 5th 2023! Clean Cities provides materials for communication, posters, but also pins, stickers, a banner saying „We want school streets!" and pdfs to print, videos, letters to send to mayors and principals, press releases.

What do the logo and slogan represent?
The logo is a rainbow street connecting home and school, to make the point that the street must once again become a place of life and safety. It was created through a participatory process that involved European groups very sensitive to the issue, notably the Spanish Revuelta Escolar, the British Mums For Lungs, La Rue et à nous from Paris and Kidical Mass from Cologne. In May 2022 nearly 400 groups took the streets shouting "Streets for kids" in front of schools all across Europe (go see the map and photos on the website!).

How to participate to a #StreetsForKids day of action?
Choose the school, street, and action that best fits your context, send an email invitation, and start posting on social media. Often all you need

to do is ask permission from the vigilantes a week in advance. Then register your event on the site so it can be seen by everyone. Print posters, stickers, signs, if possible distributing them to groups or schools. On the Day of Action, take lots of beautiful photos -- you will receive directions on how to take them in a way that respects children's privacy -- and share them with the network using the hashtag #StreetsForKids!