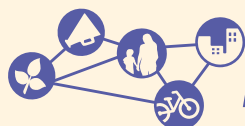




Review of
*inspiring
case studies*
Play Streets
and School Streets



Montréal Urban
Ecology Centre

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The promotion of two innovative models to encourage free play

SHARED STREETS WHERE CHILDREN CAN PLAY

In recent years, Quebec has witnessed increased municipal interest in strategies promoting free play in public spaces. Following the project “In my street, we play”, launched by the city of Beloeil in 2015, several dozen cities have authorized free play on selected residential streets, allowing young people (and the not so young) to utilize public space to have fun, interact, play and move around in a safe, creative and friendly way.

“LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS” TO INTRODUCE TWO NEW MODELS OF STREET SHARING

Internationally, other arrangements for free play and independent mobility for children exist. With the project “Levelling the playing fields”, the Montreal Urban Ecology Center (CEUM) and the School of Public Health of the University of Montreal (ESPUM) are introducing two new models of street transformations which give children back the right to the city: the school street and the play street.

This research-intervention project led by multidisciplinary researchers and practitioners aims to deploy free play pilot interventions in 5 Canadian communities, in order to observe and collect data on these two innovative models of re-allocating urban space in favor of young children.

This sheet defines the characteristics of school and play streets, then offers interesting case studies to inspire Canadian practices.



Play Street: definition and benefits

DEFINITION

A Play Street is a residential street temporarily closed to car traffic to encourage free play and independent travel for children, but also for adolescents and local residents. The goal is to create safe and welcoming spaces near places of residence in order to give citizens back the right to use the public domain, while also contributing to good health, the power to act, and community cohesion. A play street creates a space that people of all ages and abilities can use creatively and as needed.

The creation of a play street is often based on a participatory process, with the residents of the neighborhood, especially the parents, being particularly involved in the implementation and management of the system.

BENEFITS

As a light and inexpensive intervention which does not involve closing the streets to car traffic permanently, the establishment of a play street improves the quality of life within the community where it is established. Play streets have a positive impact on the well-being of children and the whole community in the following ways:

- Offers a safe and friendly local public space, thanks to calmed motor vehicle traffic in residential areas;
- Encourages more time spent outdoors and more physical activity for all residents;
- Allows young people to play independently, freely and spontaneously in public spaces;
- Fosters social ties, particularly intergenerational, between members of the neighbourhood;
- Gives citizens back their right to the city, especially the most vulnerable populations; and
- Opens the decision-making process to residents of the area, including children.

Inspirational Case Studies



Ghent and Brussels, Belgium: The Speelstraat or “streets reserved for games”

Project Characteristics

These are residential streets temporarily closed to traffic during school vacation periods (Easter, Summer and September), between 2pm and 8pm. Only residents, emergency vehicles and cyclists have access to the street, at low speed and respecting the priority given to children playing, pedestrians and cyclists. It is also recommended that residents do not park on the street during the play period, in order to provide more space for children.

Objectives

1. Provide children with a safe area to play and cycle on the street.
2. Give adults the opportunity to get to know their neighbours.

Mobilization of stakeholders and project implementation

A resident or a group of residents applies for a permit, which is granted by the City for two years under the following conditions:

- That the target street functions predominantly for residential use, with minimal through traffic or regular public transport service;
- That at least 2/3 of the residents of the targeted street support its use as a Speelstraat.

Closing devices

Designated sponsors manage the street closure, deploying the following **fixed barriers** during periods of free play:

- A C3 sign (red and white circular sign indicating that access is prohibited, in both directions, to any driver);
- An additional sign “street reserved for playing”, which specifies the hours and/or days during which the street is closed.

Designate street sponsors

Residents become the resource persons for the City of Ghent and the neighbourhood. Their role is as follows:

- Survey residents before filing the application;
- Monitor and make appointments with the city;
- Manage (installation and removal) road barriers;
- Supervise children (but they are not responsible for their safety);
- Act as the point person for questions from the city or from residents; and
- Evaluate the proper functioning of the projects.



Photo: City of Edinburgh



Photo: City of Ghent



Seattle, "Play Street" Program

Project Characteristics

Launched in May 2014, Seattle's program has grown rapidly, with more than 250 residents having applied for "Play Streets". The concept designates a street closure, lasting from a single event to regular times throughout the year (maximum of three periods per week). These periods are limited to six hours a day and must end by 10pm or before sunset.

Objectives

1. Encourage the use of local streets for free play, in an active and safe manner.
2. Promote social ties between neighbours of all ages.
3. Provide access to additional public spaces in areas where private parks and gardens are scarce.
4. Allow local traffic.

Mobilization of stakeholders and project implementation

Citizens (street residents or community groups) submit requests, after informing residents of the process (by pamphlets, a meeting, etc.), with explicit community support required. After evaluation of the request, the City grants a permit for a maximum of 6 months, after which the request must be renewed.



Photo: Paul Kiefer

Closing devices

The City of Seattle provides standardized and mandatory signage, which must be installed at each end of the section closed to traffic:

- A "Play Street" sign, which also displays the contacts at the City to obtain more information on the process.
- A "no through traffic" sign, notifying drivers of the street closure, except for local residents.

The purchase and installation of an adequate device to close the street is the responsibility of the residents (see green box below).

Use a "tactical" and "homemade" street closure system

To manage street closures, two options are available:

1. Use trash cans or private garden furniture
2. Rent barriers from a local firm, for a relatively low cost

Whichever option is preferred, the elements acting as barriers must be:

- Spaced no more than 5 feet apart
- Minimum 3 feet high
- Interconnected (by a rope, banners, etc...)
- Installed at the two extremities of the play street



Photo: City of Seattle



The Playing Out Program in the UK

Project Characteristics

Launched informally in June 2009 by two Bristol parents, this resident-led play street model has spread to hundreds of local streets within the UK, including the cities of Bristol and London, and to other countries such as Australia). These are temporary but consistent street closures, allowing children to play and move around freely. The program rests on several important pillars: each project is managed by the citizens, at a modest cost, using the existing space, and are sustainable and consistent over time, as well as safe, legal and inclusive.

Objectives

1. Encourage communities to regularly close their local street in order to encourage free play for children.
2. Improve the health and well-being of children.
3. Improve community cohesion.
4. Help citizens to become actively involved and to rethink issues of the right to the city.
5. Accelerate changes in the use of the public domain, through light and inexpensive actions.

Mobilization of stakeholders and project implementation

The process takes approximately 2 to 3 months, from the citizens' request to the city to the implementation of the street closure.

Project leaders must consult local residents, then assign the following roles:

- **The organizer:** the project leader, who coordinates the periods of free play on the street, must be enthusiastic and fully committed to the process.
- **The stewards:** they are responsible for street security. Two reliable people are positioned at each vehicle entry point during each free play period.
- **Supporters:** people providing support are necessary for all tasks related to the project: helping to publicize it, preparing pamphlets, disseminating information, putting in place suitable signage, documenting the project by taking photographs, etc.



Photos: PlayingOut

Closing devices

The rules may vary depending on the local city council. In general, it is advisable to:

- Close the ends of the street with barriers, cones or bins;
- Install signs or place the "Playing Out" logo to publicize the project.

Positioned at the entrances to the street, the stewards have a major role in the proper functioning of the play street. With this in mind, they must:

- Wear a fluorescent vest to be visible to everyone and easily identifiable;
- Manage the safe passage of vehicles by talking to drivers to warn them, then whistling or shouting a clearly identifiable message to people playing on the street;
- Warn children and adults of the end of the free play period, ten minutes before the street reopens.

Important lessons¹

For residents, the biggest success factors are:

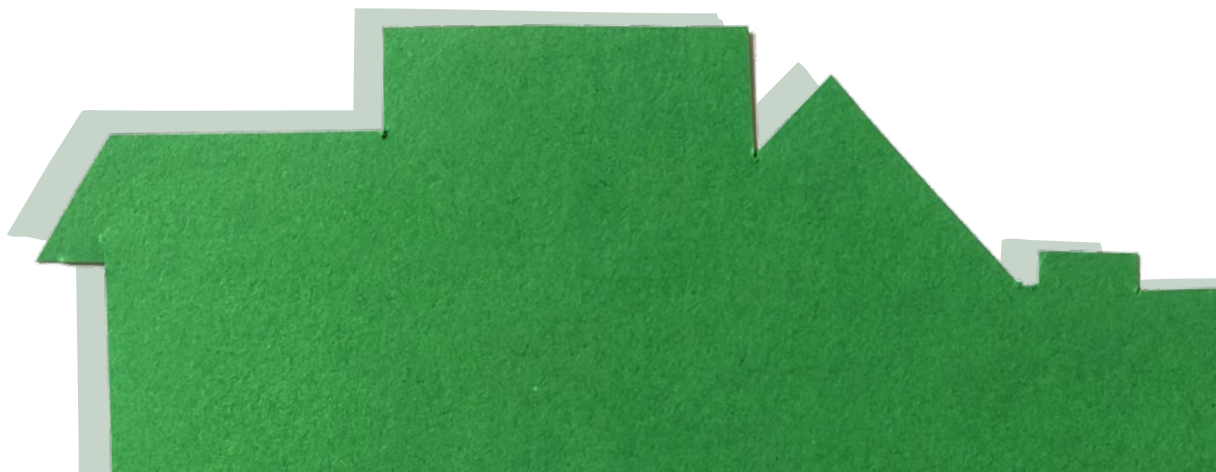
- Support from the neighborhood and their peers;
- A simple and accessible municipal framework;
- Clear support;
- A basic guide for the management of lane closures.

It is also relevant to strengthen support in the most vulnerable neighborhoods, by offering concrete support to deploy the project, or covering certain costs (printing posters, etc.).

As for municipalities, the obstacles identified are mainly linked to:

- A lack of clarity as to the legal base from which to deploy the project (because it is part of a national program, to be confronted with local regulations which may differ);
- Administrative costs;
- Concerns about potential risks to children and possible disputes between neighbours.

¹ Based on the analysis of Alice Ferguson (2019). *Playing out: a grassroots street play revolution*, *Cities & Health*, 3: 1-2, 20-28.





The “Rue Aux Enfants, Rue Pour Tous” program in France

Project Characteristics

The program was launched in 2015, with the aim of creating free play spaces for children and adolescents near their homes, especially in vulnerable neighborhoods where access to private gardens and green spaces is scarce. It is about making children want to play freely, but also discovering their environment, the street, the city, and to encourage them to confront reality, to assert themselves, and to grow.

The project involves closing a street temporarily to motorized traffic for targeted periods, or on a regular or event basis. Between 2016 and 2019, more than 80 “streets for children, streets for all” projects were implemented, including nearly 40 in disadvantaged areas.

Objectives

1. Reclaim public space for all
2. Promote active modes of travel (walking, cycling, rollerblading...)
3. Encourage interaction through free play and encourage intergenerational ties
4. Encourage citizens to want to pay attention to the built environment and rethink amenities (urban furniture, planting, etc.)
5. Involve children and adolescents in the fabric of the city, by involving them in the organization of each “streets for children” (events, design, etc.).

Mobilization of stakeholders and project implementation

The establishment of the street generally starts as a citizen initiative, and is then based on a collaboration of local actors: parents, associations, neighborhoods, etc. It sometimes happens that the municipality initiates the movement and deploys the means necessary for projects, especially in neighborhoods with more precarious populations.

Closing devices

The closed area is clearly demarcated, and access is managed by volunteers. Specific signage has been put in place, with “Street reserved for play” signs. Play elements, mobile or not, ephemeral or not, can be installed, and events can be organized.



Photo: Rue de l'avenir

Accelerate changes in practice

The program encourages free play and active mobility, but also offers organized activities with the aim of attracting children and adolescents, thereby promoting practical use and the progressive appropriation of public spaces.

Depending on the context of each project, the profiles of the children in the neighbourhood and the possible partnerships with local actors, the activities can vary greatly: toy library, active modes of travel (bicycle, scooter, roller skates, etc.), artistic or sporting activities, live shows, awareness-raising activities on road safety, the environment, architecture or sustainable development, DIY workshops, bicycle mechanics, street greening, etc.

Network project leaders

The collective who initiated the program is responsible for the review of existing projects, with the aim of disseminating good practices, creating support platforms, and encouraging the development of other “streets for children” in the French territory.



School-Street: definitions and case studies

DEFINITION

The concept² designates a street adjacent to a school to be closed to automobile traffic for a period of 15 to 90 minutes, during children's arrival and departure times. The goal is to create a friendly and safe environment around schools, in order to encourage independent and active mobility for children. Its implementation is generally based on a participatory process involving the municipality, school staff, children, parents, and community stakeholders.

BENEFITS

Like Play Streets, from which it takes the same typology, the establishment of a school street has a positive impact on the district and on its local residents. This includes the children who are the first recipients of the approach, but also their families, neighbors, teachers, etc.

In fact, the creation of a school street contributes to increasing the quality of the living environment in the area where the school street is implemented:

- By improving safety and accessibility around the school for users coming on foot, by bicycle, by scooter, etc.;
- By promoting the independent mobility of children in their daily journeys;
- By easing car traffic during rush hour;
- By creating a play area or meeting point for children and families around the school;
- By reducing air pollution in the area during peak hours.

School streets also benefit the mental and physical health of children, by encouraging active travel and the tranquility of the neighborhood (less noise, less conflicts between modes of transport, etc.), and by promoting social interaction between individuals of the same age and between different generations.

² The schoolstreet concept is inspired by the Schoolstraat initiative.

Inspirational case studies



“School streets” pilot project, Edinburgh (UK)

Project Characteristics

Launched in 2015, the pilot project was implemented over eight months around eleven targeted schools. A section of street adjacent to each school was closed to road traffic during children’s arrival and departure times, i.e. every morning and evening from Monday to Friday for 30 to 60 minutes.

Mobilization of stakeholders

1. City Council and Transport and Environment Committee:

the initiative is primarily municipal, with the selection of 11 schools for the first wave of pilot projects, according to the criteria of the School Streets pilot project evaluation.

2. School management and staff, students and parents:

the mobilization and implementation of pilot projects are then carried out by collaboration between local actors.

Project stages and regulatory aspects

1. Phasing of the pilot project: In collaboration with the principals of the identified schools, the municipality decided to carry out six projects in the first phase (2015) and three projects in the second phase (2016).

2. Impact studies and awareness by the municipality:

Updating the travel plan to encourage active transportation, dissemination of information, study of mobility dynamics, etc.

3. Regulations and implementation: Adoption of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) and implementation of signage warning motorists of the closure of the street during the beginning and ending of the school day during the eight-month study period.

4. Evaluation of the pilot projects: With a view to continue the project on a permanent basis, based on the results of the impact study, which accounted for the following elements:

- Evolution of the use of the car for moving children to their schools
- Increased walking as a means of transportation to school
- At the drop-off points for children who continue to be returned by their parents
- Speed and volume of traffic
- Air quality in the targeted sector
- Acceptability of the project by the local community (parents, children, residents, etc.)

Closing devices

- Signs prohibiting the passage of motorized vehicles (except for emergency vehicles and residents)
- Police presence to enforce the closure of the street

Related program to support active mobility:

Walk Once a Week (WOW) Program: Supported by Living Streets, the WOW campaign encourages young people to walk to school by granting certification badges if the student walks to school at least once a week for a month.



Photos: North Edinburgh News



“School streets” pilot project, Camden, London (UK)

Project Characteristics

This is the first school street pilot project in the city of London, initiated in 2017, around 4 schools in the district.

Mobilization of stakeholders

Led by the Camden Borough public health team, the program aims to carry out the initiative in collaboration with schools. A call for projects addressed to school administrators and the public was made in order to identify the participating schools in the temporary school street pilot project. Other city actions related to planning, consultation and evaluation activities were organized to promote walking and cycling.

Actors mobilized: **School principals, parents, members of the local and school community**

Objectives

- Soothe road traffic around the school
- Make the streets near the school safer when children arrive and depart
- Reduce car transport to school
- Improve air quality in the area

Related approaches helping to promote active mobility in children:

Transport for London (TfL) Sustainable Travel, Active Responsible Safe (STARS) program: This certification system rewards schools that organize:

- Awareness and education activities for active transportation
- Concrete initiatives to increase the number of children walking and cycling to school

The Walking School Bus initiatives are also helping to increase active trips to school, by offering children collective walking trips under the supervision of parents or volunteers.



Photo: HealthySchoolStreet

Project implementation stages and regulatory aspects

1. Selection of participating schools according to the following criteria:

- The anticipated benefits for the area of intervention
- The rate of collisions over the past three years
- The surrounding pedestrian and cycling networks
- The involvement of schools in planning the travel of their students

2. Formal agreement between the municipality and the principals of the schools.

3. Regulations: in the UK, the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (s1 and s6-9) gives municipalities the right to restrict or regulate road traffic, with the aim of promoting user safety. The adoption of an Experimental Traffic Order (ETO) allows temporary measures to be carried out.

4. Implementation of facilities and evaluation: Implementation, impact study and consultations with the various stakeholders, with the aim of guiding decision-making.

5. Realization of permanent improvements based on the results of the evaluation.

Closing devices

- Retractable bollards set up by school staff
- Temporary or permanent one-way signs
- Signage prohibiting car traffic during certain periods or permanently in the case of the establishment of a one-way street
- Photo radar to fine vehicles on school corridors during prohibited periods



Photo: Beth A. Birmingham



4-day school street experiment, Mountview Avenue, Toronto, ON

Project Characteristics

Initiated by the organization 8 80 Cities and supported by the city of Toronto, a school street pilot project was tested for a 4-day period at the end of October 2019. A section of Mountview Avenue in front of the school was closed to road traffic for one hour during children's arrival and departure times, i.e. between 8am and 9am and then between 3pm and 4pm. The school bus stop was moved to an adjacent street, and the children walked the remaining 50 meters to the school across the closed street.

The intervention, implemented with the help of school volunteers and students, aimed to set up a car-free environment, and to encourage the independent, active and sustainable mobility of children in a safe context.

Project implementation stages and regulatory aspects

- 1. Start-up (May):** documentation of inspiring practices, support from a city councilor and choice of site.
- 2. Mobilization of stakeholders and validation of the school (June):** 8 80 Cities, the EcoKids association, representatives of the counselor of the chosen school, and the sustainable development office of the local school board. The school principal agrees to the project.
- 3. Regulations (July and August):** 8 80 Cities, the office of Councilor Perk, and the transportation department of the city of Toronto are working on the regulatory framework for the project. The option chosen is to request a street closure permit for an event, which is easier to obtain but which limits the intervention to a 4-day period. Dialogue with the school to choose the dates and submit the permit to municipal authorities.
- 4. Feasibility (mid-September to mid-October):** collaboration between 8 80 Cities and the "Street Events" unit to clarify the scope of the permit and make field visits in anticipation of the school street pilot.
- 5. Implementation of the project (from October 28 to 31, 2019):** Launch of the project on the first day, with a press conference, a speech by the city councilor and school and festivities leaders. Street closure managed by volunteers.

Objectives

1. Reduce pollution around the school
2. Reduce stress and chaos associated with children's arrival and departure times
3. Promote physical activity in children
4. Reduce automobile travel

Closure devices

- **Road signs** notifying the public of the street closure, provided by the city.
- **Six handcrafted wooden barriers**, inspired by a model of the open source platform "Wikiblock": low cost (\$50 per unit), easy to build (assembled without screws or nails), and attractive (painted in bright colors to create an inviting atmosphere).

During the two closed periods, volunteers installed the barriers at both ends of the street, as well as in front of the entrance to an underground parking lot. During the day, the barriers were put aside but left on the street, and they were stored in the school at night. When the street was closed, at least 4 volunteers were present, identifiable by fluorescent jackets, to enforce the street closure, inform the public about the project, operate the office of the "engagement hub", and collect the impressions/sentiments of users.

Good practices for mobilizing children and parents:

- **Rely on an association which involves the students:** The school's "Eco Team", including a teacher and students, created and circulated posters in classes to publicize the project. The team also collected data before and after the project and provided equipment to play on the street. Their enthusiastic involvement helped to mobilize the school.
- **Organize a festive launch (here, with a red carpet!):** To publicize the initiative, unite the community and celebrate collective commitment.
- **Set up a kiosk on site:** to inform residents, generate dialogue around the project and encourage the mobilization of stakeholders.



One-day pilot project, Sir James Douglas Elementary School, Victoria, BC

Project Characteristics

This was the first street school pilot project in the city of Victoria, a one-day intervention to test the street closure system around a primary school. A small section of the street adjacent to Sir James Douglas Elementary School (located between the main access street and the school staff parking lot) was closed for two 45-minute periods at the entrance and at the exit of the school. Children and parents were encouraged to come to school on foot or by bicycle.

Despite the difficulties, especially regarding regulatory aspects, the project was appreciated by the majority of parents. A working group has been set up to extend and replicate this initiative around other schools in the city of Victoria.

Mobilization of stakeholders and implementation of the project

The process involved a large number of actors with the following responsibilities:

- 1. Parents, members of the school's active transportation committee and school administration:** mobilization of several stakeholders concerned about the safety of children around the school during the start and end of the school day.
- 2. School administration and City of Victoria:** validation of the parents' interest in the implementation of a school street pilot project, then implementing the temporary event for the day.
- 3. City of Victoria, community players:**
 - a. Establishment of a working group, focused on the creation of other school street projects across the City, in particular by the addition of school streets in the 2019-2022 strategic plan for the city of Victoria.
 - b. Creation of a guide for the implementation of school streets in 2019.

Objectives

1. Make local streets safer
2. Promote physical activity and independent mobility
3. Improve air quality
4. Create social ties in the neighborhood
5. Reduce car traffic

Best Practices identified³

- **Propose related activities to involve the community:** workshops on active mobility, games, etc.
- **Involve teachers**, in addition to other stakeholders such as parents and school administration.
- **Redistributing traffic** is not always a big problem.



Photo: Katherine Brandt

³ According to the 8 80 Cities *School Streets Guidebook*: <https://www.880cities.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/school-streets-guidebook-2019.pdf>

