

# FNI Policy Brief # 2/2023

JANUARY 2023

PÅL WILTER SKEDSMO

## Success stories

**How participatory approaches and co-creation can contribute to a safer school commute**

### Key points

- The right to participation is a fundamental human right, also for children
- Efforts to increase the participation of pupils have been successful in several countries
- Participation lead to ownership and long term changes and can be initiated at school level.



FRIDTJOF NANSENS INSTITUTT  
FRIDTJOF NANSEN INSTITUTE

# *What if people valued efficient, safe and environmentally friendly mobility over car ownership?*

Car dependency on the school commute is a global challenge. The rise in car ownership has led to more traffic and fewer children walking to school, which in fact could be a social trap as parents opt to drive their children to school as a form of protection from other cars. Further exacerbating this in several countries is an education policy that enables parents to choose their child's school, which compounds the issue of suburban sprawl. At the same time, improvements in public transport, construction of bike lanes, car sharing and other new forms of mobility may – or may not – affect how citizens prioritize and choose regarding the school commute.

The CoMobility project aims to provide alternatives to the use of private cars, facilitate a permanent habitual change regarding the choice of means of transportation to school. All this will be assessed with respect to the impact on the quality of air and traffic in Warsaw. This will take place in co-creation with schools and municipalities.

Achieving such ambitious goals also require that we consider and evaluate what has or has not worked elsewhere.

To enable a co-creation process, inspiration can be found from efforts from around the globe. What characterizes successful or inspirational attempts at encouraging habitual changes?

Rather than having strict criteria for what can be labelled a success; we can for the time being simply hold that solutions that lead to: less congestion, improved transport safety, reduced air and noise pollution, improved accessibility of different transport modes etc. around schools are worth to consider. Such efforts may range from small-scale local initiatives at schools, to municipal and national policies and programs. The following presentation will therefore consist of examples covering these different levels.

It is also worth to point out that local initiatives at schools could need municipal support and that what happens several places around the world is that municipalities provide a package of tools that schools may make use of.

When considering criteria for success, we also have to accept that human nature is such that it is probably not designing an efficient transport system that is the most difficult; but that people actually accept it and changes practices: As many see the car as an extension of the home and themselves, it's a big step to consider alternative means of transport such as walking, cycling, or using public transport is a big one. For some of the examples provided in the following it is thus too early to consider whether they are successful or not. But we hope that this at least will indicate some of the scope and possibilities that experiences from around the world can show us.



*The traffic agent app "Kids' tracks"*

In this policy brief we will look at some examples that have a potential for either: (1) Offering alternatives to the use of private cars, (2) Reduce traffic around schools, and potentially air pollution immediately around schools, or (3) Which involve kids in decision-making.

## Participation as a fundamental right

To start with the final point, children have – according to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union – certain rights concerning how they can express their views, how their perspectives shall be taken into consideration etc. These fundamental rights may be more elaborated in national legislation and further stated in school curriculums etc.

The question then arises whether this can be utilized as an entry point for urban mobility related to the school commute and urban areas that pupils make use of in their everyday lives. Experiences from Norway indicate various ways in how this can be done rather successfully, and we will now turn to those examples. Two different digital applications have been developed in Norway:

In both, kids could report on positive and negative aspects related to their school commute etc.

These two applications essentially have the same approach: that kids can self-report what concerns them in their daily surroundings, what they like, dislike, places they consider to be dangerous traffic-wise etc.

However, the Traffic agent app was open to all kids and they could report from (Oslo) individually, and the reporting was not supervised. Due to GDPR issues with Google and Apple, this app was discontinued although considered to be a success in terms of user penetration and the kind of feedback it provided.

Hence, we will in the following focus on Kid's tracks which have a different approach as it requires a teacher at a given school to open it up and start a project with its pupils.

## Kid's tracks

A paradox in Norway is that the majority of municipalities in Norway have greater knowledge as to the movements of elks than that of children and adolescents. To alleviate this, a digital registration tool was developed that gives a clearer indication of children's movements in and around their neighbouring area, which places they like and don't like.

The application let kids report on what they like/dislike in their neighbourhood/around schools.

The purpose is to give kids a voice in urban development as the use of the application lets kids report directly in a map that city planners can incorporate directly into their planning process.

Among the main benefits are that it uses the same maps as municipalities in area planning, which makes it easier to integrate the perspectives of kids for city planners.

**"Children (...) may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity."**

**Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**

# CoMobility

*CoMobility is a transdisciplinary international research project in which we analyse attitudes and behaviours related to mobility, with a particular focus on alternatives to the use of private cars. In the co-creation process, we plan to identify barriers and opportunities for different mobility choices. Also, we will co-design interventions and solutions that will facilitate a permanent habitual change regarding the choice of the means of transportation. The solutions co-created together with municipalities, local communities, businesses, and other relevant stakeholders will be assessed with respect to their impact on the quality of air and traffic in Warsaw. Our research will result in the package of tools and methods, including the documentation of the co-creation process of new transport solutions and the integrated machine learning, transport and environmental model. We will share our findings and research results with local governments and other cities in Poland and Europe in a series of workshops. The results will be made publicly available*

As a school project, it can be incorporated into different subjects at school through five basic steps once the teacher has assigned its pupils to a project:

- Pupils locate their school
- Each pupil then draws his/her route to school
- Icon stickers are used to identify and describe spots along the route on the map
- When data is registered it is made available for city planners.

Once Kids' Tracks has been completed, a planner can thus visit the class and talk about what the municipality has learnt about the use of the neighborhood, and what they intend to do next.

In Norway, the application Kid's tracks have led to increased participation by kids in a way that city planners can easily translate and integrate into the planning process. Likewise, the Vienna smart city strategy encourages stakeholder opinions through the app "Sag's Wien" and gives the possibility of involvement in various projects.<sup>1</sup>

## At school level

Numerous efforts can be carried out without the development of national planning tools and policies. Let us now turn to some of these.

## Take 5! Walking Zones

The "Take 5 walking zone" scheme aims to encourage children and families to walk for at least part of

their journey to and from school. Take 5! schemes increase opportunities for healthy exercise, reduce traffic and congestion around the school gate and improve the local environment for the whole community.<sup>2</sup>

## Walk to school challenge

The WOW is a pupil-led initiative where children self-report how they get to school every day using an interactive tool. It encourages sustainable travel (walk, cycle or scoot) once a week for a month, which will earn pupils with a badge.

On average, WOW schools report:

- 30% reduction in car journeys to school
- 23% increase in walking rates<sup>3</sup>

WOW is thus based on individual schools taking part in the scheme. The significant changes that are reported, perhaps indicates that the reasons for choosing transport mode is more related to habit and comfort than structural needs. The transferability of such numbers is therefore not evident.

## Cycling trains to school

Several Portuguese cities are adopting the idea of "cycling trains to school". The Ciclo Expresso initiative involves trains of cycles that have a predetermined route and destination. Along the route children can join the 'train' at scheduled stops. In Lisbon there are 17 schools participating with 28 defined routes to join.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Sag's Wien - Die App für Ihre Anliegen an die Stadt:  
<https://www.wien.gv.at/sagswien/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> Leaflet with inspiration and tips for how to proceed with Take 5:  
<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/asset-library/imported->

[assets/5%20minute%20walking%20zone%20how%20to%20do.pdf](https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/asset-library/imported-assets/5%20minute%20walking%20zone%20how%20to%20do.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> According to project website,  
<https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/projects/wow>

<sup>4</sup> Cycling trains,  
<https://www.themayor.eu/en/a/view/portuguese-cities-are-adopting-cycling-trains-to-school-idea-11509>



## City street experiments

Various so-called city-street experiments ask whether the present (im-)balance between traffic channel and public spaces should be reversed for the benefit of the latter?

By repurposing sections of or entire streets, street experiments are:

“Intentional, temporary changes of the street use, regulation and/or form, aimed at exploring systemic change in urban mobility”<sup>5</sup>

One crucial asset of street experiments is that they are intentionally temporary. This temporality of city streets means that one can experiment and try different solutions. One way to look at urban transport and the traffic situation around schools is to ask fundamental questions about the purpose of the streets, and street experiments ask such questions as what a street is and what purpose it serves?

As such; street experiments, largely originating from Latin America, may be used to temporarily change the use of a given street (section) or area<sup>6</sup>. One instructive example is from Fortaleza, Brazil where street experiments led to a 80% reduction crossing distances, 50% reduction of cars running at high speed, 50% reduction in road fatalities, 109% increase of pedestrians and 34% increase of people sitting in the streets.

## School streets

A School Street is a road outside a school with a temporary restriction on motorised traffic at school drop-off and pick-up times. The restriction applies to school traffic and through

traffic. The result is a safer, healthier and pleasant environment for everyone.<sup>7</sup>

Wroclaw is the first city in Poland to initiate a pilot with school streets.<sup>8</sup> The implementation of the pilot was preceded by a number of preliminary activities. A study of traffic outside the participating schools was conducted, and surveys among children and parents were carried out. The surveys focused on the topic of children's preferred method of getting to school and their feelings about daily travel. After the surveys were carried out, the traffic organisation was changed on the basis of a draft prepared by the Municipal Engineering Department of the Wrocław City Office. The traffic restrictions were monitored by the Municipal Police during the piloting period. Finally, two schools took part in the pilot. Based on the experiences from the pilot, it was concluded that this type of measure increases the safety of children and it was decided that it could be applied to other schools in Wrocław in the future. Wrocław is also at the forefront in Poland of trying out an application that promotes healthy and active modes of transportation to school.

Experiences from London indicate that such interventions has led to reduced traffic/congestion, greater ease and safety in which kids can participate in active travel to and from school. It was also reported less dissatisfaction with air quality than at Control Schools. But some challenges persist, and among those are: challenges of parking, onward journeys and danger from traffic. Add to this the concerns around the perception that some School Streets

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.streetexperiments.com>

<sup>6</sup>See <https://www.streetexperiments.com/>

<sup>7</sup> See <http://schoolstreets.org.uk/>

<sup>8</sup>

<https://www.themayor.eu/en/a/view/wroclaw-with-first-school-street-in-poland-5983>



Pål Wilter Skedsmo  
[pskedsmo@fni.no](mailto:pskedsmo@fni.no)

are not fully enforced and continued frustration with congestion. Essentially, the main challenge seems to be enforcement. Successful street experiments may be turned into a permanent feature.

### Learning from others

Through EIT Urban Mobility: not only is EU funding available, but also inspiration and examples of a broad range of projects relevant for cities and municipalities. EIT Urban Mobility is an initiative of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). Since January 2019 EIT have been working to encourage positive changes in the way people move around cities in order to make them more liveable places. We aim to become the largest European initiative transforming urban mobility. Co-funding of up to € 400 million (2020-2026) from the EIT, a body of the European Union, will help make this happen.

### Conclusion

In this policy brief we have seen how a mix of participatory approaches that allows kids to participate in the planning process as well as school level initiatives may work to initiate

change. The key message seems to be – as in the city street experiments – that much can be learnt and experience through temporary experiments that may lead to longer term changes. At the same time, initiatives such as Take 5! is low hanging fruit at school level. On the other hand, to develop tools to involve kids interactively could be a municipal or even national task.

### Links and sources of inspiration

- [eit Urban Mobility](#)
- [Ealing Grid for Learning - School Travel plans](#)
- [Gamification of safe street design](#)
- [GdyniaMobilna](#)
- [Sag's Wien](#)
- [School Streets](#)
- [Street Experiments SET Collection](#)
- [StreetsblogNYC](#)
- [The Mayor.eu](#)
- [Traffic snake game](#)
- [Walking school bus](#)

© Fridtjof Nansen Institute,  
January 2023

ISBN 978-82-7613-752-1  
ISSN 2703-7223

#### Success stories

How participatory approaches and co-creation can contribute to a safer school commute

Author: Pål Wilter Skedsmo

The Fridtjof Nansen Institute is a non-profit, independent research institute focusing on international environmental, energy and resource management. The institute has a multi-disciplinary approach, with main emphasis on political science and international law

Fridtjof Nansens vei 17 | P.O. Box 326 |  
NO-1326 Lysaker | Norway  
Telephone (+47) 67 11 19 00  
E-mail [post@fni.no](mailto:post@fni.no) | [www.fni.no](http://www.fni.no)

#### About the author

Pål Wilter Skedsmo is a social anthropologist (PhD). His main research interests are environmental politics, civil society, public participation, democratisation and development aid in post-socialist states. Geographically, his research has especially focused on Armenia, the South Caucasus, Russia, and more recently Poland. New areas of interest are the management of plant genetic resources in the post-Soviet area and new modes of mobility in urban development.

#### Funding

CoMobility benefits from a 2.05 million € grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Grants. The National Centre for Research and Development is the project Operator. The project is co-financed in 15% from the Polish budgetary funds.

# CoMobility



FRIDTJOF NANSENS INSTITUTT  
FRIDTJOF NANSEN INSTITUTE