

CASE STORY

Children's participation in a city plan: Empoli (Italy)

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Like many other European countries, Italy has recently officially embraced children's participation in planning. In the last ten years, major architecture journals in Italy have devoted issues to children's participation. The Italian Architects Association and National Planning Association have signed a national agreement with the Ministry of Environment for a national campaign including sponsoring projects and design competitions, training, and conferences on children's participation. There are currently hundreds of Italian cities in which some form of children's participation is transforming the urban landscape or the perception of children's needs and rights in planning.

One such example is the City of Empoli*, a city of 48,000 inhabitants, near Florence. In 1998, city officials decided to develop a new city plan through a major investment in children and youth participation. Participatory citywide surveys were carried out in the city's secondary schools and two pilot neighbourhood workshops involved four primary and four middle school classes in rethinking and (re)planning two peripheral problem neighbourhoods. The children's participation, together with the institution of an interdepartmental and community-based coordinating group, served as a catalyst for the involvement of adults in the neighbourhood in the city plan. The children's ideas and citywide consultation process led to numerous changes in the city's original general plan. For example, development proposals were reduced in some areas to allow for increased pedestrian areas and greenways for children. Several streets are to be converted into child friendly "woonerf" type streets. A historic farmhouse has been saved and will be developed into a children's urban farm and environmental education centre. New buildings with innovative mixed uses were built around two new piazzas. The success of this process was recognised by the Italian Government in 1999 when Empoli was awarded a first Sustainable Cities prize for small cities. The jury cited the children's participation component of the plan as a "most effective vehicle towards citywide acceptance of sustainable principles and practices".



Action planning.



Design session.



Working session.



Public presentation at Empoli.

* For more information see: www.comune.empoli.fi.it.