

Could *School Urbanism* be an answer?

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Abstract

In a world where change has become constant and the answers are almost transitory, learning is, probably, one of the main values to preserve and to promote. But, when both urban and educational systems are in a profound transformation what should the wise attitude be? In this paper we will try to demonstrate that *School Urbanism*, a new analytical and operational concept, could be an answer to realize what is changing in cities and schools and their relationship and how this efficient link enables mutual benefits for the urban quality of life in general.

Learning with what is happening in cities and schools provides a broad understanding about the society and the territory. Looking carefully we can see the institutional changes, in the latest years. In urban and educational systems, for instance, we recognize some signs of innovative governance emerging which indicate the will to try new tools and mechanisms of governance but, are they sufficient and are they going in the right direction? In the authors' opinion the answer is no. Some steps were taken but are not enough to implement innovative governance, spatial strategies and policy tools to deal with these two systems.

Besides the improvements (e.g. creation of the School Mapping and its incorporation in the formal documents of Master Plans), urban planning and school planning are still working back to back, even in the most developed countries. This reality makes a huge waste of resources and inefficiency in both systems and part of this disconnection comes from an inappropriate model of governance between cities and schools. Three examples could be provided for a quick demonstration about the cost of this gap:

First, in an environmental approach school facilities are a big energy consumer, not only in accessibility, but with their activities too. Energy efficiency in school is exemplar to students and its neighborhoods. With a low carbon approach urban planning and management are able to improve the relationship with the city. With the increase of motorization and distance between house and school, the students have been walking and cycling less, relying more on transports, especially their parents' private ones. This has caused several bad tendencies: increase in traffic congestion, unsafe public spaces, increasing the greenhouse effects and –the family and public expenses. Adding to health issues – child obesity and respiratory problems – and security – less people on foot and the sense of the unknown amplifies the feeling of urban fear and public space degradation, creating a cohesion problem.

Secondly, in a social approach we now know that the surroundings and the neighborhood have become instances capable of generating educational unevenness. With a growing territorial and social disparities verified in the last decades, the school as a proximity facility has been particularly affected by these changes. Recruiting the students, almost at their catchment areas, the school has become dependent on the performance of the “qualities” of its surrounding community.

Depending more on the quality of the demand (student characteristics and their families and communities) than the quality of the offer (schools, resources and means), the student school results need to be framed within the relationship of the school and its surrounding territory and this circumstance could create an equity problem.

Thirdly, in an economical approach we can identify the strait connection between development and knowledge where a learning society is central to achieve a competitive city. Economic growth hasn't a direct correlation with educational performance. But, even knowing that, there are evidences that provide understanding between the relationship of a stimulant environment and a good quality of life. When some territories or neighborhoods are in a spiral of decline and have poor surroundings we will probably have a development problem. To build rich, sustainable and livable communities we need to fulfill this hiatus.

To improve the urban and school systems referred, we will need to go further. The relationships between governance changes, policy learning and innovation, in urban or in educational policies only change when we put them working together, in a more appropriate and interconnected way. To do that a new concept has to emerge and "*School Urbanism*" could be an answer.

In this paper we intend to show the past practices and the new trends of the relationship between cities and schools. The dimensions of integration, around development, cohesion and equity will be exposed and will inform the methodology approach proposed.

To operate *School Urbanism* we propose a set of key ideas to drive the methodological approaches concerning urban planning and school planning practice:

Territorialisation – territory as the centre of planning, management and administration;

Integration - of the planning instruments and policies, urban and educational (existent or to be created) that together act on the factors that interfere in the capability of the territories;

Articulation – between the several levels of planning, management and governance, where each scale has to find the specific answers to the problems found;

Participation – of citizens and agents to design solutions, from its beginning until their implementation and evaluation;

Flexibility – in the planning and management methods and processes, as well as different scales and times, adapting to the cultural local conditions but respecting the goals to be achieved;

Innovation – experimenting processes and technological tools, making it more open to the communities;

Evaluation – included in the process, that is dynamic, according to the observation and verification of the goals to be achieved.

Within this paper, supported by examples when possible, we'll present *School Urbanism*. This new concept tries to find a more common and integrative field between the educational policy and the urban and regional policies in order to improve the social and territorial cohesion and equity, essential to promote the desired development. This represents a true challenge to the good governance of cities and to the educational /institutional systems.

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