Learning Situation

Greening Our City

Urban areas across Europe are becoming increasingly dense, warmer and more dependent on energy-intensive infrastructures. At the same time, it is becoming clear that cities offer important opportunities to rethink how public spaces can support well-being, climate resilience and community life. Even small green interventions — a row of trees or a redesigned courtyard — can make a noticeable difference in how people experience their neighbourhoods.

In recent years, nature-based ideas and green and blue infrastructure have gained attention as promising ways to improve daily life in cities. These approaches highlight that greener public spaces can benefit both people and the environment at once, offering shade during heatwaves, cleaner air, managing stormwater during heavy downpours, creating spaces for social interaction and habitats for urban biodiversity. They also open up new ways of thinking about how cities use space and how communities can participate in shaping their surroundings.

This Learning Situation invites students to explore these ideas within their own city and to consider how specific public areas could realistically become greener, more pleasant and more resilient.

Driving Question

How can we transform public urban spaces into green areas that improve the quality of life in our city?

Scenario

Many cities have limited green spaces, as most areas are occupied by roads, buildings, and parking spaces. To address this challenge, the local authority has launched a public call for innovative ideas to green urban spaces and make the city healthier and more sustainable. The goal is to improve air quality, reduce heat, improve stormwater management, and enhance the well-being of residents and visitors.
Citizens are invited to submit proposals identifying priorities and creative solutions for transforming existing public areas into greener, more liveable spaces.

Task

Students design an evidence-based proposal responding to their local authority's call for ideas to greening urban spaces in their city. Working in groups, they select one specific area and develop a clear, research-informed idea for how it could be transformed into a greener and more liveable public space while helping address the effects of climate change. The goal is to demonstrate that the proposal is feasible, sustainable, and beneficial for both the environment and the community.

This activity implies a holistic approach.
Students explore the Driving Question by considering several interconnected aspects of proposing a viable solution — such as identifying community challenges and needs, stakeholder engagement, design choices (are the proposed plans suitable for the given environment), contributions to climate challenges, and medium- and long-term maintenance considerations.
This learning situation is intentionally broad and flexible, allowing each group of students to take agency in choosing which space to focus on and what type of transformation to propose. This encourages students to lead their own inquiry, make creative decisions, and explore topics and solutions according to their interests.

To support this process, teachers may use the Lesson Plan developed for this topic, which guides the activity step by step while leaving the students with agency to steer their own work and learning.

LESSON PLAN

Alternative Approaches

In addition to the approach described in the Task above, we also propose alternative ways of implementing the Learning Situation. When choosing one of these alternative options, the Lesson Plan developed for the main Driving Question can still serve as a reference, but it should be adapted to match the different structure and focus of the chosen approach.

1. Single-Challenge Approach

Teachers may choose to focus the activity on **one single specific greening issue** that is particularly relevant to the local context.

This option is often easier to manage because:

- **it may require less time**, since the class concentrates on a single well-defined challenge;
- **it simplifies planning**, as all students work within the same theme;
- **it increases local relevance**, allowing teachers to select a challenge that is meaningful and visible in the school's immediate surroundings.

In the single-challenge approach, all student groups will work on the same overarching urban sustainability challenge. To provide focus and structure, each group can be assigned one of four perspectives to guide their investigation:

- **Where:** Investigating and describing the current state
- **Who:** Exploring community needs and preferences, including residents, schools, and local businesses.
- **Why:** Examining and describing the specific environmental challenges
- **How:** Identifying feasible types of planting, design interventions, or other practical solutions.

This structure allows students to **specialise in one dimension of the challenge** while maintaining a shared focus. At the end of the research phase, the groups will **come together to combine their findings**, creating a comprehensive understanding of the issue and collaboratively proposing informed, well-rounded solutions.

Suggested Local Challenges (What can be done…?)

Reducing heat islands

Students analyse urban areas exposed to extreme heat and identify how greening strategies could reduce temperatures.
What can be done to reduce heat in selected areas through planting strategies or small-scale greening actions?

Improving air quality around schools or busy roads

Students identify areas where pollution affects students or residents and examine possible greening interventions.
What can be done to improve air quality through hedges, shrubs, trees or vertical gardens?

Managing Stormwater in Flood-Prone Urban Areas

Students investigate areas in the city or school surroundings that are vulnerable to flooding during heavy rain and analyse how green infrastructure can help absorb stormwater.
What can be done to reduce flooding and improve stormwater absorption through rain gardens, permeable surfaces, bioswales, or other nature-based solutions?

Boosting Biodiversity in Urban Neighbourhoods

Students explore places where biodiversity is low (e.g., paved courtyards, mono-species lawns, or heavily built-up areas) and assess how targeted greening can support pollinators, birds, soil health, and overall ecological diversity.

What can be done to increase biodiversity through diverse planting, pollinator-friendly habitats, micro-gardens, or restoring small natural areas?

Enhancing Well-Being Through Urban Green Spaces

Students examine how access to nature, green areas, and outdoor spaces affects mental and physical well-being in their school or neighbourhood. They identify areas lacking inviting, healthy outdoor environments and explore how greening interventions can support relaxation, social interaction, and physical activity.
What can be done to enhance well-being through shaded seating areas, small gardens, quiet zones, or redesigned green schoolyards?

2. Developing Your Own Learning Situation

Teachers may design their own Learning Situation within the Greening topic. The examples provided above are suggestions and can be adapted or replaced with other local challenges that better reflect students' environment and community needs. **Teachers may also consult local authorities or stakeholders to identify a meaningful and realistic focus for their students.**

A good Driving Question should:

- be relevant and motivating for students;
- be feasible within available time and resources;
- support structured group work;
- involve accessible stakeholders (families, municipality, local associations);
- be linked to at least three of the five project competences.

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