

Factsheet

Why Schoolyard Greening Matters

BIOTraCes' insights from an urban schoolyard greening program in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain.



By greening schoolyards we can create stronger ties between people and nature in urban spaces. It goes beyond improving their aesthetics; it is a way to transform these spaces from the perspective of equality, inclusiveness, pedagogical innovation, adaptation to climate change and strengthening children's links with biodiversity. However, in our research we still encounter voices critical of schoolyard interventions. Rethinking how we conceive and use these spaces can drive transformative change — from schoolyards to more resilient cities with nature at their core. Here is why:



1. Inclusive Designs with a Gender Perspective

A green, inclusive, and multifunctional schoolyard gives all students the same opportunities to thrive. Traditionally, schoolyards have been designed around sports courts for soccer or basketball, which studies show can be exclusionary. These spaces tend to favor children with certain behavioral profiles, limiting play and self-expression opportunities for most girls and many boys. By redesigning schoolyards to include nature and spaces for different activities, we can encourage cooperative and creative play, teamwork, and shared learning for everyone.



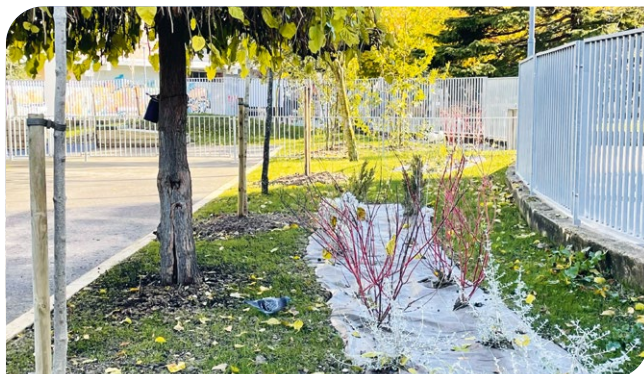
2. Inclusivity & Social Equity

Greening schoolyards can help make sure all children have access to urban green spaces. Research in various European and North American cities reveals that lower-income neighbourhoods often lack high quality natural spaces and biodiversity, while wealthier (and often whiter) neighbourhoods tend to have more greenery. By renaturalising public schoolyards in these communities, we can create spaces where children from all backgrounds and abilities can access urban nature, play, and learn.



3. A New Space for Learning

Schoolyards can serve as outdoor classrooms that foster pedagogical innovation and learning by doing. When children engage with nature—through touch, smell, and sound—they can become more creative and critical thinkers, with a better understanding of the environment. A green schoolyard provides daily opportunities for hands-on exploration and expands academic outcomes beyond regular classroom lessons. In the long run, these experiences can promote pro-environmental behaviors in adulthood.



4. Sustainability & Biodiversity

Integrating gardens, trees, or bird or insect hotels into urban schoolyards teaches kids about nature and nurtures a deeper connection with nature.

Through direct interaction with plants, animals, and ecosystems—such as growing, harvesting, cooking, and eating their own food—children learn about biodiversity. This can help to cultivate a lifelong sense of care and respect for the environment.



5. Climate Resilience

Greening schoolyards helps schools adapt to climate change impacts like heat waves and the urban heat island effect. Replacing asphalt with natural materials like trees, permeable and natural soils, and plants can provide natural cooling and shade, while

improving water infiltration. This not only makes school environments more pleasant for children but also safer during extreme heat events.



6. Schools as Community Hubs

A well-designed schoolyard is more than just a playground, it is a community space. After school hours, green schoolyards can become gathering places for neighbors of all ages. Additionally, making school zones safer and more accessible for walking and cycling promotes active mobility and a sense of belonging. This strengthens community ties and contributes to social cohesion.

A Call to Action

Investing in greener schoolyards is an investment in education, public health, and resilience. By prioritising green, inclusive, and multifunctional spaces for kids to play, learn and grow, we can strengthen communities, and build a sustainable and just future for all. Let's move away together from grey, sterile, and uninspiring school environments and transform them into exciting spaces that encourage curiosity, creativity, inclusivity and a life-long learning with and in nature. These lessons learned from transforming schoolyards should guide us in reshaping our cities.



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