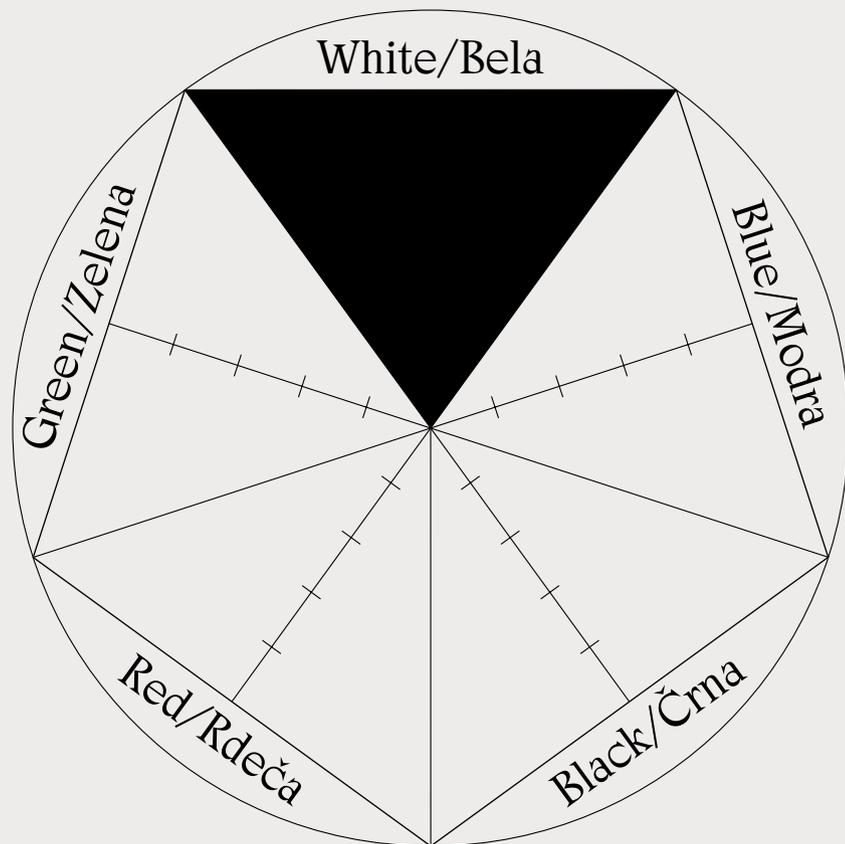


CASE STUDY

3

ŠTUDIJA
PRIMERA



WHITE

health, community, planning, participation, security, solidarity, integration of minorities, equality

BLUE

BLACK

RED

GREEN

BELA

zdravje, skupnost, načrtovanje, participacija, varnost, solidarnost, vključevanje manjšin, enakopravnost

MODRA

ČRNA

RDEČA

ZELENA

SPENDING TIME OUTSIDE AS A PART OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

AUTHOR

MENTOR

CO-MENTOR

STUDY PROGRAMME AND COURSE

YEAR

Nina Ninković Gašić

Prof. Boštjan Botas Kenda

Asst. Prof. Emil Kozole

Visual Communication Design,
Graphic Design

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For years, cities have been losing their urban identity, green spaces, parks and other public spaces to accelerated construction of combined commercial-residential buildings. This process has been making cities less and less liveable. The current project showcases various ways of empowering children as important agents of change in urban environments.

STARTING POINT

The inactive urban lifestyle

Since the mid-20th century, the global population has more than tripled, from 2.5 billion in 1950 to nearly 7.9 billion in 2021 (UN 2022), which spurred a worldwide and rapidly growing trend of urbanisation. Today, urban centres are home to approximately 55% of the world's population, and the United Nations estimates that this figure will reach 68% in 2050 (UN 2018). These phenomena will have far-reaching effects on our quality of life, health and living environment.

In her master's thesis, Ninković Gašić shows that urban environments are designed according to human needs, primarily for protection against elemental forces and external environmental factors, and in line with different patterns of behaviour, ways of working and lifestyles. In comparison with rural environments, they offer more possibilities in terms of the development of personal potential—such as improved social life, education and employment opportunities. The author, accordingly, argues that cities are inextricably linked to humans, as we are the ones who represent, create, shape and change them. Human development is also inextricably linked to its environment, both in the social and spatial sense. How we communicate, move and spend our leisure time depends to a large extent on our surroundings and the environment in which we live.

Living in an urban environment, however, also brings many challenges. According to Tim Gill, former director of the Children's Play Council, the cities we have built in the last 40 years are not sustainable, as they do not promote healthy habits. Poor planning, meanwhile, keeps many away from nature, parks, shops, schools and libraries (2021, 6). In its action plan on physical activity, the World Health Organization (WHO) points out that many rapidly growing cities are now burdened with heavy traffic and cramped neighbourhoods and high-rise housing projects, leading to negative effects such as social alienation, noise and violence. All of this, of course, has a negative impact on people's physical and mental health and well-being (WHO 2022). As a result, many western countries struggle with increased levels of physical inactivity—the WHO notes that due to urbanisation, increased use of technology, and changes in transport patterns and cultural values, the proportion of physically inactive people in the population of many countries has reached 70%. In some, this figure is higher still (*ibid.*).

The scale of the health issues resulting from the modern, sedentary, urban living has become so great that sedentary lifestyle could now be considered an epidemic. What makes this all the more worrying is that, in practice, this means that one in four adults and three in four adolescents—aged 11 to 17 years— worldwide currently do not meet the global recommendations regarding physical activity made by the WHO (WHO 2018). Moreover, WHO identifies physical inactivity as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality. In the US, where 82% of the population lives in urban areas, past projections of human life expectancy now seem falsely optimistic. This is because children are now expected to live shorter and less healthy lives than their parents (Xu et al. 2015, 1–5).

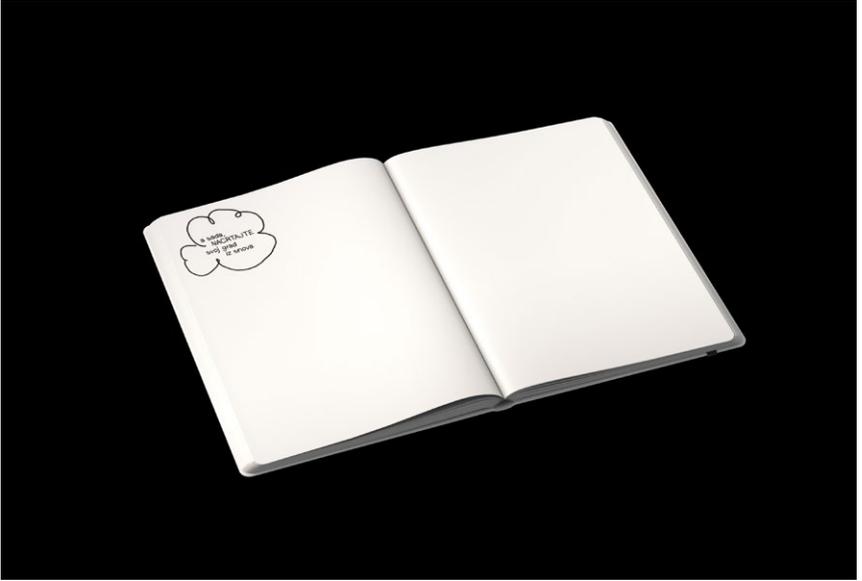
CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE ISSUE

The child as a stranger in their home environment

Historically, urban planning has failed to adequately take into account vulnerable groups, including children, even though the latter tend to be the ones most affected by poor planning. This is especially the case for those in low-income neighbourhoods. Children are excluded from decisions about the environment they will grow up in, even though their needs should be at the centre of attention. This was recognised in 2016 at the

**FIG. 6**

A workshop in the Dragaš drawing school, 2022, author's archive.
Delavnica v šoli risanja Dragaš, 2022, arhiv avtorice.

**FIG. 9**

Nina Ninković Gašić, *Greva ven!* [*Let's Go Outside!*], 2022, author's archive.

Nina Ninković Gašić, *Greva ven!*, 2022, arhiv avtorice.

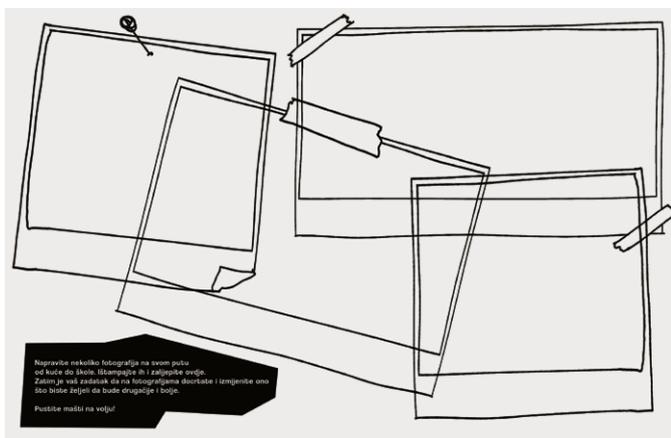


FIG. 10-11

Nina Ninković Gašić, *Greva ven!* [Let's Go Outside!], 2022, author's archive.
 Nina Ninković Gašić, *Greva ven!*, 2022, arhiv avtorice.

United Nations *Habitat III* Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, where participants unanimously agreed that cities must provide equal rights and opportunities for people of all ages (Habitat III 2021).

In his handbook *Shaping Urbanisation for Children*, Jens Aerts points out that without properly planning for children, the urban environment becomes dysfunctional and fragmented, which impacts the development of future generations (Aerts 2018, 21). On the other hand, as Ninković Gašić notes, cities whose streets and other amenities and facilities are developed with the needs of children and families in mind better serve everyone who uses them, including older adults and people with disabilities, as well as young people of working age. Child-friendly urban planning responds to the central argument that cities should be good places for children to grow up in, with a healthy environment for living and playing. One of the aims of this planning approach is therefore to broaden our current understanding of what planning for children means. The goal should be an inclusive approach that includes and respects all aspects of a child's life, not just play.

There are numerous studies and statistics showing that children today play and socialise outdoors much less and are under much more parental supervision than previous generations. In 2017, *The Guardian* published a study showing that 75% of British children spend less time outdoors than prisoners who spend at least an hour a day outdoors (Carrington 2017). The study *Planned housing environments and children's outdoor play: Is child-friendliness possible?* by the authors Rashed Bhuyan and Tracey Skelton, as many as 72% of parents said that when they were their age, they independently played and engaged in physical activity outdoors more than their children do nowadays.

This is not a new trend, however; the authors of the book *One False Move: A Study of Children's Independent Mobility* note that in the various urban environments in the west this trend has been observed for several decades (Hillman et al. 1990, 106–112). Particularly notable is the decline in children's so-called independent mobility, meaning the freedom of children to move and play in their local environment unaccompanied by adults. Many factors influence independent mobility, including the age and gender of children, the proximity and accessibility of favoured destinations, the habits and attitudes of the parents, and their perception of safety (Shaw 2015, 5–50). The aforementioned study by Hillman et al. also showed that in England, in the period between 1971 and 1990, the independent mobility of children, specifically walking and biking to school, already declined from 80% to a worrisome 9%.

The underlying causes that have contributed to this situation, reinforcing the logic of containment, are many and mainly a side effect of wider economic, cultural and social changes (Hillman et al. 1990, 23). The latter is further elaborated by Tim Gill, who cites the growth in road traffic, parents' longer working hours, the decline in the quantity and quality of public space, and the growth of indoor leisure activities as key reasons for change. All of this, in Gill's view, has further coincided with, and arguably been the trigger for, increasingly risk-averse attitudes—what Frank Furedi has called a culture of fear: “a generalised and insidious anxiety about safety that has found expression in fears for children even though they are statistically safer than at any point in human history” (Gill 2007, 14). Ninković Gašić sees such practices as counterproductive for the child, as they make it harder for them to integrate into their local communities, which can lead to apathy towards their surroundings.

Ninković Gašić adds that this trend can result in a deterioration of children's psycho-physical state and mutual social relations, as well as erosion of healthy attitudes towards nature. Derr et al. further point out that greenery around homes, schools and nearby parks is particularly important for children, as it is associated with increased physical activity, a reduction in stress, depression and aggression, better concentration and impulse control, better academic performance, better coping strategies, more imaginative and socially cooperative play, and a stronger sense of connectedness and care for nature (2018, 15).

The environment we live in must therefore be seen as the key determinant of children's health, behaviour and development (WHO 2022) and positive action must be taken to build a better urban infrastructure. Ninković Gašić points out that global change hinges on the younger generations, who represent the future and must therefore be involved in it. If children do not engage with nature while growing up, they are unlikely to ever understand the human dependence on the natural world (Moore 2014, 7). The environmentally friendly habits and relationship with nature that children develop in childhood will become their baseline, something that will shape their future.

The child—an active participant in the urban environment

For Nina Ninković Gašić, the key to a different approach to designing urban environments is in the premise that children should be empowered to create their own environment. When we involve children in the design of public spaces, it is important that we do not regard them as future citizens, but as equal citizens who exist here and now. Many children's rights advocates^① believe that children and adolescents are not just people who *will eventually become* adults, but that they are a unique group who can already make a significant contribution to society just as they are. Urban renewal is, of course, a long and complex process, and big changes at city or national level often require a lot of time, resources and political effort. Yet, as Derr et al. write, when it comes to changing our current unsustainable trajectory, knowledge, political will and efforts to change citizens' behaviour are just as important as clean technology and resource efficiency (Derr et al. 2018, 31).

But changes can also be made at the community and individual level, as Ninković Gašić points out. Small changes like these, which can happen immediately, without waiting for procedures, budgets or performance evaluations, are important first steps that can take us towards new ideas, illustrate possibilities and pave the way for potential major projects that require larger investments.

- ↪ “Strategies such as ‘pedibus’ initiatives can encourage children to walk to school safely, and the creation of urban gardens can provide both healthy foods and venues for social interaction and physical activity. Many of these measures to improve environmental health also help people to be more physically active and eat a healthier diet, so reducing obesity and diseases like diabetes and heart disease.” (WHO 2018)

Ninković Gašić stresses the vital importance of children's participation in such initiatives, as this is the only way to democratise the city.

①

See, for instance, Movshovich 2014 and UN 2021.

By including children, the mindset that has led to cities being designed almost exclusively around the needs of its adult, productive population changes, giving a voice to those who previously went unheard in the city planning process. Children have similar needs as some other categories of citizens, such as the elderly and people with disabilities. The author asserts that to foster urban development, creative ideas are needed—children’s ideas. While it may not always be possible to implement their ideas immediately, it is the adults’ responsibility to recognise the potential of children’s innovations. She also considers the participation of children to have a strong educational aspect, as it helps to create a sense of community, thereby helping children to experience the city as their own.

To figure out how to improve urban design to meet children’s needs, we first need to understand what children and families want from their cities (Buss et al. 2014, 24). In this spirit, Ninković Gašić organised two workshops in Banja Luka. In collaboration with the Dragaš drawing school, under the guidance of Renato Rakić, the workshop participants freely created drawings on the following subjects: mesto po mojem (the city as I would build it), prostor za igro (space to play) and kaj bi rad spremenil v svojem mestu (what I would like to change in my city). In the informal context of the workshop, the children were able to express their thoughts and feelings. Supporting them in this was drawing, developing not only their motor and drawing skills, but also their awareness of their surroundings, both visual and conceptual (Hope 2008, 23). **FIG. 6-7**

In the second workshop, which was organised together with the Sportsko kreativni centar Kids (SKC Kids—Kids Sports and Creative Centre), led by Mirna Vujanović and Nataša Simić, the participants were immersed in an urban environment. On walks from the school to the nearest park and back, the children pointed out what they liked about the environment and what they would change. During the walk, Ninković Gašić took photographs of the locations they passed by and talked about. She then printed the photographs, slightly lightened, on a larger format. The children were then given these photographs so they could draw their ideas, freely expressing what they wished to change or add. **FIG. 8**

Making use of the experience gained at the workshops, Ninković Gašić created a tool that encourages children to interact meaningfully with their environment, to get to know it better, identify with it and reshape it according to their actual needs. The result is a handbook entitled *Greva ven!* [*Let’s Go Outside!*], which is intended to help children take their first steps towards involvement in the improvement of the urban environment. The handbook aims to help children develop—step by step and

day by day—the habit of observing their surroundings in order to broaden their knowledge and perspectives. It spurs creativity, provides them with important information about their environment and their rights and responsibilities, and encourages them as they take the first steps towards building a relationship with design, architecture and urbanism. With the help of a creative task, children are encouraged to take action in their city and in doing so discover that they can be effective agents of change. While the handbook guides them through the tasks, the emphasis is on free play and exploration. The publication does not steer children towards predetermined behaviour, nor does it offer suggestions on what to do or how to play, but rather on how to spend more time outside, play more, pay attention to their surroundings, and in doing so, become more free. It encourages children to write, draw, be active and engage in dialogue, and is intended for long-term use in their free time.

The practices employed by Ninković Gašić encourage a spontaneous and free approach that puts children's needs first. Through problem-solving, they encourage self-expression, imagination and creative thinking. Through dialogue, play and art, the children are taught important lessons about their environment, taking care of oneself and others, as well as how to approach problems from various perspectives. Such practices produce good results in the development of the environment in which children grow up, and can help children develop self-confidence and the ability to express their wishes and needs. **(FIG. 9-11)**

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