

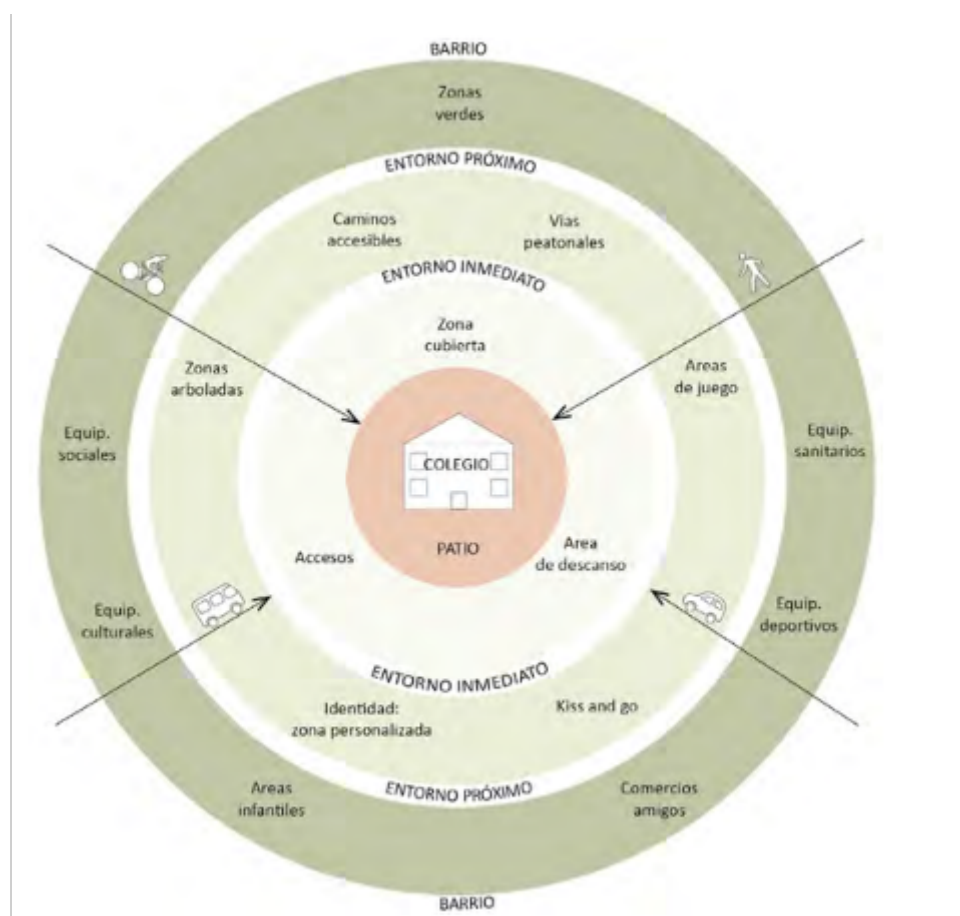
# **SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS AND THEIR TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE IN THE FACE OF SOCIETAL CHALLENGES**

*Posted on 05/06/2023 by Naider*

In the midst of a whirlwind of **change in the urban planning model** of our cities and urban environments, work is being done to make public space **more inhabitant-friendly, favouring socialisation, comfort and contact with nature, as well as non-motorised mobility** to the detriment of private vehicles. All of this is aimed at increasing the quality of life and well-being of the people who live in them and making cities attractive and sustainable places to live in. Examples of these are cities such as Barcelona and its superblocks, Paris as a 15-minute city or the German city of Freiburg as an example of an ecological and sustainable city.

All of this has led to a **rethinking** and reformulation of what an **urban environment** is and should offer. We have moved **from a stagnant and segmented vision to an ecosystemic approach**: an integral and multidisciplinary view that considers all the biotic and abiotic elements of a defined environment and the relationships and interactions between them in order to ensure balance and well-being. It is under this perspective that we begin to consider the ecosystem services that these spaces should provide.

Under this premise, the ecosystem configured by **school environments** is presented as a **space of interaction that is on the path of transition towards an integral approach** that values all these variables. We are talking about a key space for the care of children, as they are spaces that play an enormous role in their lives, both for the time they spend there and for the crucial role they play as an educational and socialising space, which also extends to the neighbours of the neighbourhoods in which the schools are located. And ultimately to families, work ecosystems and future generations; this is the butterfly effect. This is a clear example of an ecosystem in which a wide range of interrelated elements interact and which, until now, have gone largely unnoticed.

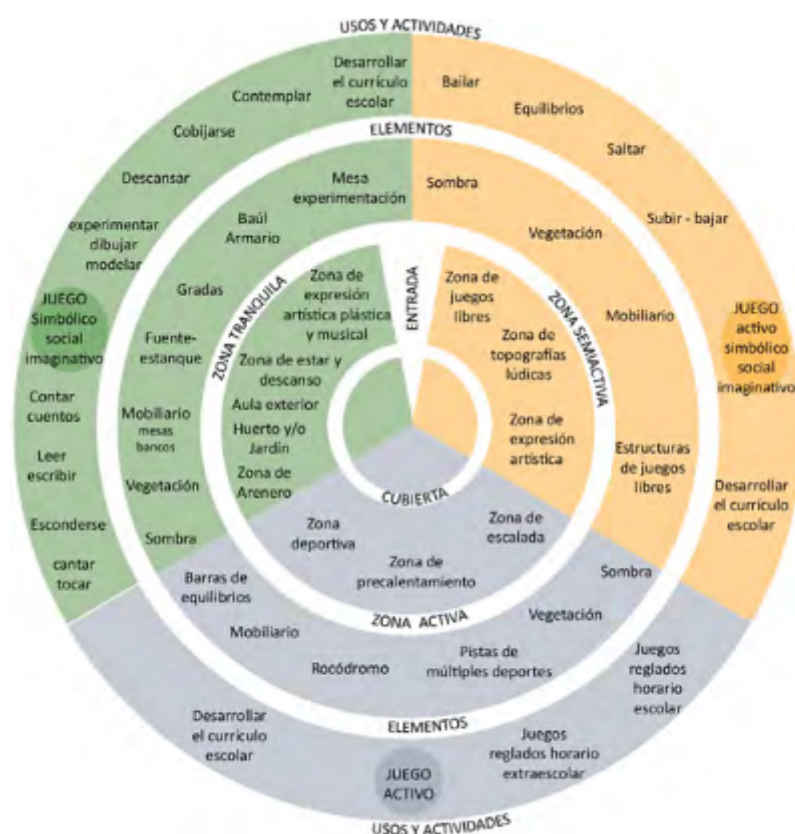


Source: [Guía de diseño de entornos escolares](#), Madrid City Council (2017)

Depending on where we place the geographical limits of this school environment, the elements and interactions to be considered expand, diversify and become more complex. The elements that

define them and their distribution in space are factors that have a direct impact on the health and well-being of the community and condition the different uses that will be attributed to them, as a space for socialisation, learning, play, sport and curriculum.

Furthermore, they are also **spaces from which to transform and influence the gender relations** that have been perpetuated historically since childhood through the configuration and design of these schoolyards. Thus, in recent years a process of reflection and redefinition of these complex ecosystems has begun, attempting to transform these grey, hard and homogeneous spaces into **living spaces, diverse and integrated into the environment** in which they are located, which encourage the interactions of all the elements that inhabit them and turn them into **health-promoting, co-educational spaces that promote coexistence** between the different agents of society. Thus, they are positioned as **strategic urban spaces** to be considered in urban regeneration policies.



Source: [Guía de diseño de entornos escolares](#), Madrid City Council (2017)

School environments must be understood as spaces that promote health, they must be healthy school environments. Childhood is a crucial stage in human development marked by continuous biological, psychological and social changes that will condition health in childhood and adulthood. Intervening in school playgrounds and their environments offers, therefore, a strategic opportunity to address the health and child development challenges we face, as well as being spaces where coexistence and interaction between the different generations of society can be fostered. In this concept of health, we return to the importance of a **holistic and ecosystemic approach**. A space that offers health must consider **all the variables that affect health, both physical and emotional**.

We are therefore talking about spaces integrated into the urban fabric that encourage physical and mental activity and play in various forms and intensities; that offer thermally comfortable spaces that are integrated into nature; that offer heterogeneous and aesthetically pleasing recreational

spaces; spaces that are safe from a physical and emotional point of view.

Focusing on the effect of nature on health in particular, numerous studies have shown the importance of contact with nature on the physical (Dadvand et al., 2015) and emotional (Moll et al., 2022) well-being of children. Thus, the lack of this contact with nature resulting from a more urban lifestyle can lead to Nature Deficit Disorder, which makes us more vulnerable to negative moods and reduced attentional capacities (Louv, 2020). Studies such as "*Childhood nature connection and constructive hope: A review of research on connecting with nature and coping with environmental*" and "*Green Breaks: The Restorative Effect of the School Environment's Green Areas on Children's Cognitive Performance*" show that nature schools increase children's resilience, relieve their stress and improve their attentional skills. Furthermore, it has been observed that this contact with nature in childhood is directly related to pro-environmental attitudes.

Therefore, through intervention in a single variable (nature) but taking into account its relationship with the rest of the elements, we observe how we have a direct or indirect impact on many factors (thermal comfort, aesthetics, environmental quality, emotional well-being and the promotion of pro-environmental behaviour, among others, in addition to educational ones). One more example to defend the need to continue rethinking and transforming each of our ecosystems under the prism of a holistic view. Thus, healthy school environments are presented as a **strategic space with great potential to transform social, educational and environmental relations and behaviour in our society**.

---

Este es uno de los artículos incluidos en la [publicación de primavera de NAIDER](#).

Imagen principal: Bernard Spragg. NZ, Flickr

