



**“Let the Kids Play in the Streets” MEPs call for democratisation of urban neighbourhood public spaces**

On June 19th, the European Cyclists’ Federation (ECF) hosted a stakeholders roundtable for the EU project Metamorphosis, aimed at transforming neighbourhoods to be more children friendly. The event was enlightened with presentations on equity, democracy, social and spatial justice and urban planning by:

- MEP Michael Cramer
- MEP Alexandra Phillips
- Piotr Rapacz Coordinator for sustainable urban mobility at DG MOVE at the European Commission
- Matthias Van Wijndaele advisor to the Mobility Minister of the Brussels Capital Region representing Pascal Smet.
- Mikael Colville-Anderson Founder of Copenhagenize and host of TV Series "Life Sized City"
- Karl Reiter Founder of Austrian Mobility Research and leader of the Metamorphosis project

Streets, highways and parking – cars take up an enormous amount of space in European cities, making them inaccessible to children. Many urban spaces are planned for the convenience of large cars forcing cyclists and pedestrians to squeeze together on the edges of road. “Driving an SUV in the city is like using a chainsaw to cut butter,” said Karl Reiter. It makes no sense to most people, except for the one holding the power of overkill.

Freshly elected MEP Alexandra Phillips (UK) called for “wilderness in our cities, space where usage and purpose is not defined“. Debating in Brussels on Wednesday, she supported adapting EU cities to children’s needs, which presupposes taking their opinions into account and making urban spaces unrestricted.

Urban Democracy was the keyword of the event, inspiring discussion on how public spaces should be prioritised and reallocated to create an inclusive environment for all road users. “Urban design must be used for the public good, for all residents.” explains Dr Randy Rzewnicki, transport and health expert at the European Cyclists’ Federation, who hosted the event.

The EU project Metamorphosis works toward creating a “new normal” where public urban space can be used in a human-centred manner and reallocated fairly to all users. The European Mobility Week campaign pursues a similar goal and aims to give people the chance to explore the role of city streets. It also seeks to improve public health and the quality of life through promoting clean mobility and finding innovative solutions to reduce car-use. Piotr Rapacz explained that the campaign “is not closing down the streets for cars, we are opening them up for people”.

#### Children as Urban Mentors

Centring urban design around cars is a recent phenomenon, streets used to be the perfect place for children to develop – to play, to argue, to fraternise, to grow up. As Mikael Colville-Anderson puts it, “we need to go back to the future, back to a time when we were intelligent and rational about urban planning”.

The key to sustainable urban planning lies within simplicity itself, namely relying on children as urban mentors. MEP Alexandra Phillips, Mikael Colville-Anderson and Karl Reiter all stressed the vital role children play in their projects. Alexandra Phillips urges that “we need to take children by their hands, walk with them around the city, and listen to their comments, observe how they move around.” Karl Reiter revealed that “It’s illegal and unsafe for kids to play in the streets. Creating cities for children means involving them in the planning process!”

#### A Child-Friendly Environment makes Healthier People

The benefits of a child-friendly city are manifold, extending into the areas of health and environment. MEP Michael Cramer highlights that health, transport and climate change have become inseparable topics, as the transport sector is currently the only economic sector where CO2 emissions are still on the rise; “We can’t fight climate change without a change in mobility”

Cities need to be restructured and re-planned democratically, a societal change will be necessary, . Matthias Van Wijnendaele stated that “infrastructure can change the future, can change behaviour. In Brussels, we are changing the culture of living in a city again”.

The event was closed by Mikael Colville-Anderson’s inspiring words: “We have to stop measuring our success by car sales as an economic indicator, it is time to end that. We should measure ourselves by the health of our children”.

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Notes to editor:

Video Recording of the Event

Press Photos

About the European Cyclists' Federation: With over 80 members across more than 40 countries, the European Cyclists’ Federation (ECF) unites cyclists’ associations from across the globe, giving them a voice on the international level. Our aim is to get more people cycling more often by influencing policy in favor of cycling.

ecf.com @EuCyclistsFed

About the Metamorphosis project: Metamorphosis is on transforming neighbourhoods with a focus on children. Metamorphosis starts from the premise that when a neighbourhood has many children on its public spaces, this is a major indicator that it is well designed as a sustainable neighbourhood. The word sustainability itself is already inseparably combined with children as it implicates 'designed for the next generation'.

[www.metamorphosis-project.eu](http://www.metamorphosis-project.eu)

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