



INNOVATIVE LEARNING TOOLKIT

PROJECT TITLE: BOX CITY

Tags: Town planning

Overview:

Box City is a town-planning tool that involves community members, groups and children in thinking about the layout and environment of their town. It is a hands-on, participatory exercise where participants have to try to design their city using models of buildings (the boxes) and trees etc. Participants make buildings to scale from recycled materials and place them on a huge street map of their local area. It provides a hands-on and three dimensional illustration of how the community might look, where changes need to be made, and options for present building use. Its aim is to teach people how cities are planned, or unplanned, what makes a quality city and how citizens can participate.

From one of the case studies: "Each student creates a house from the GeoBlocks (ordinary counting cubes). We discuss architecture, and learn about blueprints. Students create their plan, and then use construction paper to make the houses. Many have decks, steps, shutters, and interesting facades. We have a retirement facility, and apartments also, to show the needs of various housing. As a class, we brainstorm the services our city needs.

Those buildings are made with cubes and recycled boxes and are assigned to individuals. We include a City Hall, Police and Fire Station, library, school, hospital, industry, airport, shops, restaurants, hotel, museums, and office buildings as needs. We usually have a ball park or stadium, swimming pool, parks, movie theater, video store, as some of the places which provide a amenities for the residents.

We use a large piece of construction paper and place our buildings in appropriate places with zoning in mind. Usually our city is a river city, because so many cities began this way. Then we add streets, trees and greenery, and matchbox cars to make our city come alive. Our last step is to name our city. We vote on a name after it's assembled."

The concept has been used by [Auckland City Council](#) in Avondale and Glen Innes as part of the process for dealing with growth in those areas.

Why is it relevant to PTS?

Is focussed on the involvement of local community members working together on an environmental issue pertaining to their neighbourhood.

Has a strong educational focus.

Involves the use of participatory, hands-on modelling techniques.



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While it predominantly focuses on the built environment (houses and town buildings) it could be adapted to be used for the natural environment too - or the interactions between the built and natural environment.

Ideas and tips for PTS:

Consider the use of a physical modelling device aimed at children and supported by schools in the PTS areas.

In most cases, facilitators work closely with schools to ensure that the Box City day supported the school curriculum.

Facilitators also tend to support the Box City event with a number of other educational initiatives focussed on the area such as a road safety walk

Contacts:

www.cubekc.org

Haylock H., Burt S., and Craymen N, Remember the days in the old school yard in Planning Quarterly, September 2000.