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UrbSecurity

To frame this document we can refer to the Urbact website (UrbSecurity | URBACT) where UrbSecurity is mentioned as an Action Planning Network analyses strategies and projective concepts of cities' design that could contribute to prevent segregation and anti-social behaviour, and consecutively to improve citizen's quality of life and their perception of urban security and safety. The project aims to expand the application of safety and security in public spaces and urban planning and management in the 9 cities of the network:

- Municipality of Leiria - Portugal (Lead Partner)
- City of Mechelen - Belgium
- City of Pella - Greece
- Municipality of Madrid - Spain
- Szabolcs 05 - Hungary (Regional Authority)
- City of Longford - Ireland
- Municipality of Parma - Italy
- Union of Romagna Faentina - Italy
- City of Michalovce - Slovakia.

To frame Mechelen within this network we can refer to the Urbact Website (Mechelen | URBACT) as partner in the project.



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Why the topic: Reducing nuisance in public parks?

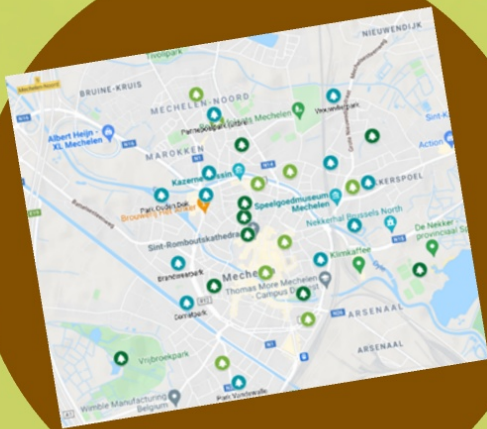
Every day, our city guards need to manually open and close 18 public parks. On top of that they perform regular visits to parks where complaints regularly come from.

The city council plans to create about 10 additional parks.
<https://www.voormechelen.be/parkenplan>

Mechelen as well as all other UrbSecurity participating cities encounter nuisance in public parks. All of us did try out some activities but none of them seem to get the desired result.

So, we were thinking, let's have a closer look at this.

- Do we really know why, what, where and how?
- If we don't, how can we get the knowledge?
- In case or once we do, how can we transform that information into corrective actions.
- This is a topic, having a wide range of possible angles.
- The design of a park, the type and location of its furniture, how to influence behaviour...



Definitions

Nudging

Attempt to alter people's behaviour in a predictable way

Nuisance

Annoying, unpleasant, or obnoxious behaviour

The below some different types of nuisances we handle:

- Theft without aggravating circumstances
- Vandalism
- Pollute public space
- Litter
- Dog poo
- Take out garbage bags before 7pm for collection
- Household waste bags in public trash bin
- Landfill
- Peeing
- Parking
- Public domain capture and recovery
- Entering prohibited terrain
- Boom cars
- Night noise
- Bullying on the street

Viability test

Process/method to be implemented when (re)organising a public place



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Automatic closing of parks

Mechelen has 18 parks daily being closed and opened manually by the city guards. This results in almost 4 VTE. As indicated before half of them are nuisance sensitive. Proposals to leave the others open 24/7 were refused or stopped. For the other half we are convinced that automating this will reduce nuisance as visitors will adapt to the hours and the situation.

Problem is of course that this is something to be done in collaboration with multiple departments, all having issues with the technical limits as well as budget constraints.

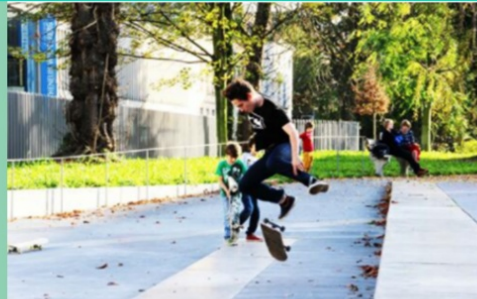
Ongoing and we'll keep you informed

As we were gathering info based on experiences in other cities, on 23/10/2019 we visited Gent.

Great city, of course but also innovative.

At a school (KTA Mobi, located near the center of the city) there is a playground, which after school-hours is made public and where the gate is closed automatically at sundown. 15 minutes before a bell warns the visitors and if you should still be in the park after closing, an alarm button can be pushed which will connect you to the police permanent service who'll register you and can open the gates

Nieuw Coupurepark is overdag speelplaats, 's avonds buurtpark en 's nachts dicht (Gent) | Het Nieuwsblad or https://www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20140524_031



Big brothers and sisters

Local youth, from the age of 16, voluntarily keep an eye on public parks in their neighbourhood.

Works very well during summer season and will be implemented in 't Hofke, our selected park)



BIN

Stands for “Buurt Informatie Netwerk” (Neighbourhood information network). A two-way communication allowing citizens to alert police who's checking the information and alerts a public network by texting.

DATA : We need objective data

As far as we are aware no objective data is available.

In projects like this it seems clear we need to take initiative to get some data.

Further on in the document you'll be able to see what we did concerning

- Park selection
- People counting
- Survey

Binless picnic area



A public park in Mechelen called Vrijbroekpark, managed by the province of Antwerp has a picnic area. There is a table which is made of trees from the same park that were broken during a storm. The interesting part of this idea is that bins are removed. The idea is that visitors take along the waste they brought in. Vrijbroekpark - Provincie Antwerpen

Results for Vrijbroekpark are mixed:

- Some visitors (mainly between the age of 20-30 and families) are keen on the idea, bring sustainable cutlery and leave the area as it was when they came in.
- Other families bring in plastic and leave it in a bin near the exit of the park or even worse, leave it all behind.
- When cleaners arrive in the morning, they often find beer cans and booze bottles and empty sacks of crisps.
- When collaborators pass by the area, they have a chat with the visitors. If needed they explain the concept. This seems to work as visitors know they were spot, and collaborators have an idea who the visitors are.
- The concept is also explained when schools visit the park



While these results are mixed, the idea will not be given up. Certainly, no bins will be installed, and the goal is to have all bins removed all over the park.

Girls oriented

We noticed constructions to play and toys in parks are mainly boys oriented.

To found out more about this 3 2-hour - sessions were organized in 4 different cities with a minimum of 8 girls present.

It seems girls prefer to play and to chill while looking for a safe space. “Guys need to change their behaviour.

Girls have the same rights, but the guys think they’re tough” is an often-heard comment.

They have complaints about safety, lack of activity, drug abuse closing hours.

Girls would like parks with more integration of type of activities for different groups of age.

They’d like to be involved in the process of rearranging a park.



Hanging out

Parallel to our project, the city of Mechelen is also in collaboration with the Thomas More High School along with experts on a platform stimulation teachers to go outside the classrooms.

It might be farfetched but we did see a possible link to our public parks.

HOME | Hanging Out! (ipsantarem.wixsite.com)



Incorporating natural elements



Constructive Play; Making & building

Benefits: all age groups, children learn how actions change outcomes, it forms brain connections, aids complex thinking.



Imaginative Play: 0-6 years

socialisation, creativity, language skills

Dublin :

How often do we see playgrounds almost boring by neatness and clinical organisation.

Going against the current, against popular decisions Dublin was able to have playgrounds installed with natural looking equipment : wood, water, stones.

- Natural games keep people more active, longer, and creative
- Rope following the route
- Wooden steps guiding the route

Mix park functions

Parks are used for playing, picnicking

Those functions should be mixed within the location of the park



Nudging : Intro

Intro

- If you want to alter behaviour, nudging is an attempt to do so without forbidding options.
- There for, during our transnational meeting we organized a Nudging for dummies session introducing what nudging is about. So if we enlighten all involved people into the art of nudging probably some of them will take that into consideration when they need to take a decision.

Types

- Signs (examples further on)
- Furniture
- Sounds
- Smell

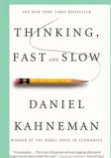
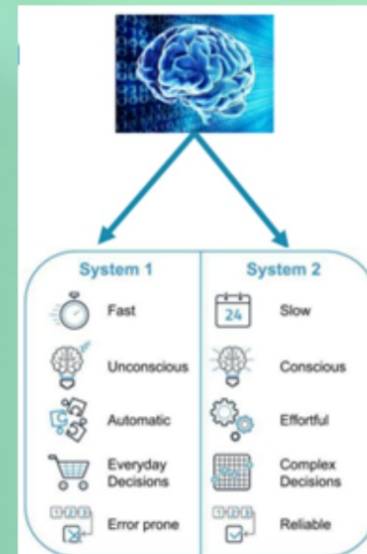
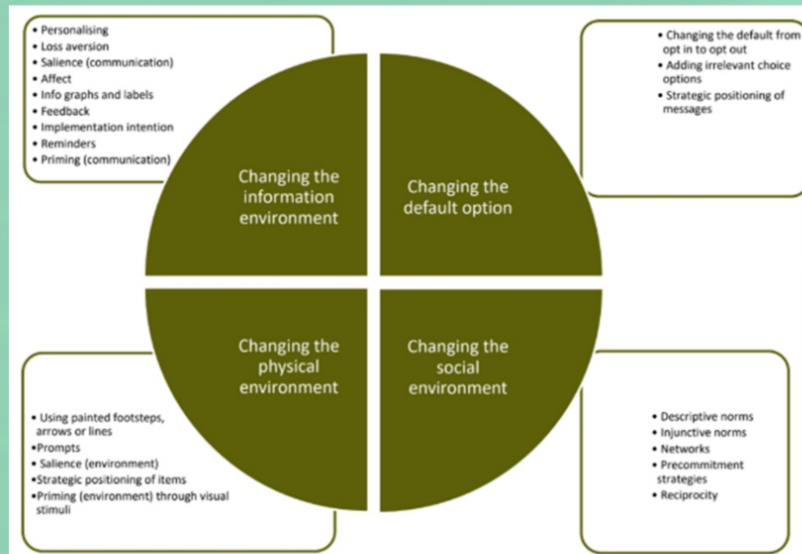
Having people taking ownership

- One of the positive impacts on behaviour is to give people ownership.
- During the pandemic there was a boom in home delivery firms. Well, in the beginning a driver was given a key and had to find the van he/she was using for the day on the carpark. Accidents, repairing costs even fuel costs decrease when a driver was given a dedicated van, even if this was done by shift (where often the drivers from different shift, using the same van got together and improved the usage of the van for all)

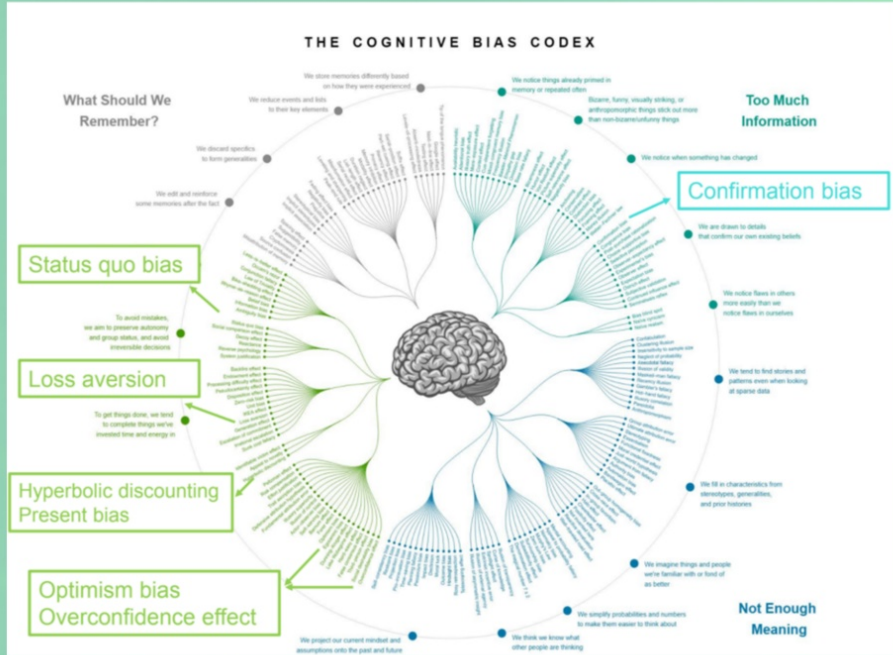
Nudging : Theoretical background info

As indicated before, nudging is an attempt to influence decision making based on techniques finding their origin in experiments of behavioural science

Below we'll briefly describe the science behind it, practical examples, implementations done along with their result. At the end we'll list some of our implementations and we hope to provide some results for them.



Nudging : Theoretical background info



In a first step, we wanted to enlighten all involved people into the art of nudging.

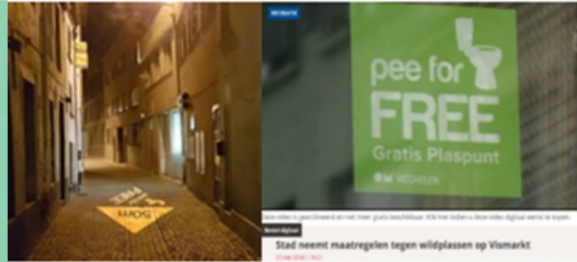
Therefore, during our Transnational Meeting with the UrbSecurity network, we did invite all ULG members to the “Nudging for dummies” session given by a national authority in this field being Pieter Raymaekers (professor University Leuven), where the slides above come from.

Hereby the link to the presentation : [Nudging for dummies](#)

Nudging : Practical translation

Some examples implemented in Mechelen

A before-and after shot of a dead corner where we put a fake door and some eyes in different forms, giving the feeling one is looked at



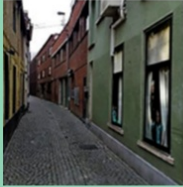
In collaboration with pubs, guiding people to appropriate toilets

Public ashtray :
As smoking is allowed but cigarette butts can't be thrown away on the street nor the gutter, Mechelen integrated them all over the city center



Nudging : Practical translation

Some examples implemented in Mechelen



Printed window with someone looking out of it on a blind wall
Even while there is nobody this may result in a feeling of natural supervision

"3D" pedestrian crossing
Results in a reflex a slowing down.
However the effect may be short lived.



A blind wall, now having art and a carpet, guiding people towards a self-cleaning urinal in the corner



Nudging : Practical translation

Some examples from elsewhere



Drawn footsteps guiding to bin
Bright prints guide people towards a bin, or stairs (instead of an elevator)

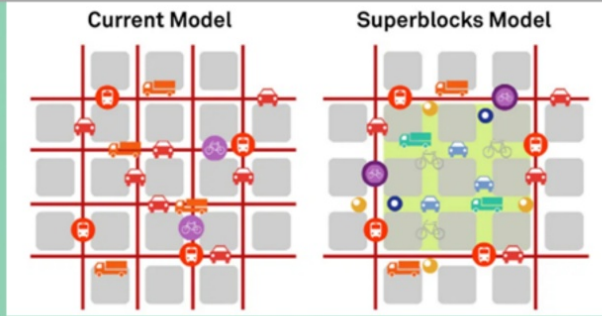


Gamification towards bin

Despite what may be thought this seems effective for all ages
A bit outside but within our department, we modified the letter people received when they didn't pay a fine within the given period. Just by doing so (adding colour, adding sentences like 80% of people in the same situation opted to pay within the limit, adding options (instead of proving a simple choice A or B, we offered A, B and B- (where most of the time option B is selected) we had a result of 20% more people paying within the limits.

Nudging : Practical translation

Superblocs Barcelona



Superblock (Superilla) Barcelona—a city redefined. Public Realm (citiesforum.org)



Themed sculptures



- During the process, we were thinking about integrating one or more sculptures linked to a place for meditate on multiple subjects.
- The statue in the picture has a QR code linking you to a website where people with trauma can publish their story.
- You can imagine a portal on multiple subjects like integration, racism, gender equality...
- This idea was not kept at the end, mostly due to time delay

Viability test

Along with local groups, habitants, city departments, police and other involved, the idea is to come up with a guideline, listing elements to consider and pass on to architects and implementing departments.

All is based on the CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design) idea, having 4 guidelines

- Accessibility and control of it
- Natural supervision and social control
- Functions and managing the decline
- Technological support

Our department of prevention lists elements to be present as well as elements to avoid.
As this depends on the location, this results in a kind of checklist.

Elements to be present

- Attract different categories of age.

This enhances natural supervision

- Provide see-through fences
- Reduce the number entrances and exits (max 2)
- Adapt the kind of shrubs to the location
like thorny one nearby window
- Make the location of the benches out of the sun but with an overview
- Provide activities for boys as well as for girls
- Use gamification towards the bins
- Provide fibre-connection for monitoring equipment
- Implement active frontages (shop, pub, restaurant)

Elements to avoid

- Spread areas depending on their function
- Hard fences
- Remove weeds
- Remove broken elements (plays, city furniture, lightning)
- Remove shelters
- Bins on hidden locations

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Overview

As it was, from the beginning on, the idea to check for actions allowing to reduce nuisance in public parks, we first needed to select the park in which we wanted to test our actions. To do so, we looked around for data, information and running projects that would help us on this.

As the idea of re-arranging 't Hofke was pickup with other departments we invested and participated in this project. In the detailed topic description you'll find a list of all elements provided during this UrbSecurity project and linked to this, we considered this as the major actions.

To be able to define when people visited the park, we needed to gather data using people counting hardware and software

Besides knowing when and how many people visit the park, we also wanted to know why they did or didn't, hence the survey.

During the entire project the viability test was implemented

As test concerning ownership, participation and nudging, a smart bench will be installed.

Every step, except for the installation is already taken.

During the further rearrangement process nudging techniques will be implemented.

Gathering info we had

Tickets with complaints

City guards can report malfunctions, cases of nuisance, extreme litter.
Since 2019, (till 09/08/2021) 7723 tickets were created. 20% of them are linked to nuisance. Another 20% of them are linked to litter

Statistics received from closing the parks

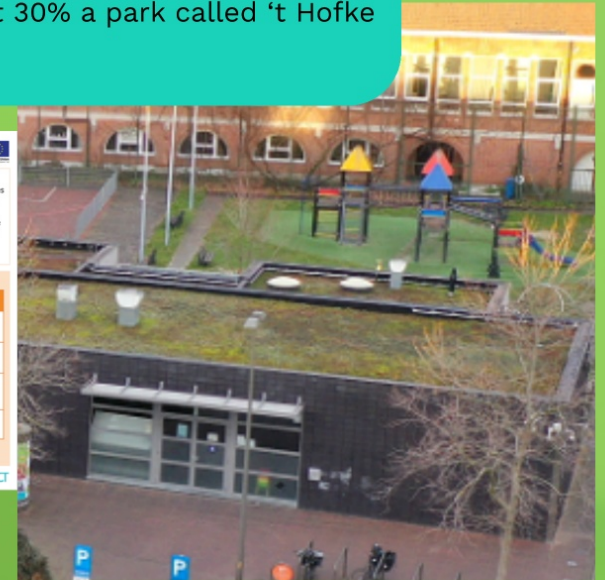
Every day (365/365) City guards also open and close 18 public parks. They have the possibility to record the state of the park. In over 90% of the cases the park is clean while no more than 1% is considered as not. Since 2018 (till 09/08/2021) 3478 supervisions were done over 163 locations.
About 1000 (over 30%) of the supervisions are done in our public parks.
From that 30% about 30% a park called 't Hofke is the locations

Tickets increased surveillance

City guards also supervise locations where citizens have complaints about.
Since 2018 (till 09/08/2021) 3478 supervisions were done over 163 locations.
About 1000 (over 30%) of the supervisions are done in our public parks.
From that 30% about 30% a park called 't Hofke is the locations.

ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITY	Dates	OUTPUTS	Related ACTIVITIES	BLOCKERS / Concerns
	Preparing meeting	10/2020	ppt	Defining process to select parks to visit as stakeholders	
	Meeting	10/2020	Meeting report	Meeting with University	
	Gathering info	11/2020	Excel tables and charts	Data on parks by city guards Data on parks by tickets Cleaning	
	Final Meeting	11/2020	Meeting report	Meeting with University : decision 't Hofke	

www.urbact.eu



Rearrangement of the park 't Hofke

In general one could say that the entire process of the re-organisation of the park 't Hofke can be framed within this UrbSecurity project.

While both timings do not match, all the ideas we mentioned before were discussed during the re-arrangement process. Below the current situation (early 2021)



Some results

- The current football field will be replaced by a smaller better equipped one with a softer surface. This part will be surrounded by seating areas. Reducing the size of the football field makes space for an adventurous playing area including a climbing wall, a trail to follow and natural game elements
- Removing the old playground equipment allows new equipment matching the children's wishing list. It will be split in a -5-year dedicated zone, a +5-year zone and a third one with shaded benches, a tree hut, and a fantasy corner with an out-door kitchen and a thematical area.
- Zones in between the areas will be filled with benches and hollow bushes to create safe spaces.
- Nudging elements will be incorporated.
- Maintenance and management will be organised in participation with youth organisations and prevention workers stimulation the co-ownership.

Along with this major topic, below the list of small scale actions linked to this one.

People counting

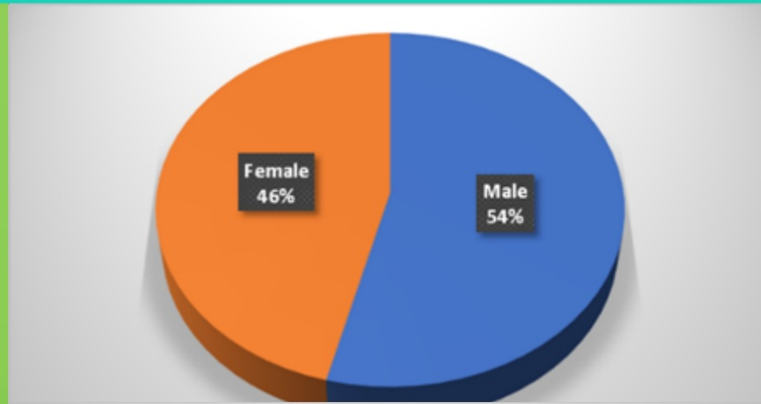
Do we know when and how many people come into a park?
Not really. In this first attempt, we selected one of the critical parks having 1 physical entry, to count the people coming in.
This consists of a hardware sensor and combined with the needed software it registers when people coming into a park uses AI to get the gender



SSA Neighbourhood Park 't Hofke : People counting		Mechelen		
Gather objective data to select park enhancements	Stakeholders : ULG Department of municipality Other involved people not included in the ULG	Links to Strategy : How to reduce nuisance in public parks	Risks : Limited possibilities to engage visitors due to Covid Slow progress due to involvement of multiple departments	
		Finance & Resources : Small Scale Action Funding, Urbsecurity		
		Action Readiness : Ongoing		
ACTIVITIES				
ACTIVITY	Dates	OUTPUTS	Related ACTIVITIES	BLOCKERS / Concerns
Method selection	11/2020	Comparing possibilities		Multiple possibilities
Supplier selection	12/2020	Asking quotes, comparing offers, selecting supplier : Acuity		One 1 answer
Hardware installation	18/01/2021			
Software set up	01-04/2021	Setting up dashboards, reports, alerts, accounts, gender info...		Supplier issues
Gathering info	Ongoing	Website Excel tables and charts	Weekly gathering data	

People counting

Some charts below based on data from 18/01/2021- 18/01/2022:



Public survey

Use up-to-date technology (door-to-door, hand-to-hand, flyers/posters with QR code to form...) to gather info.

- Personal info (gender, age)
- Do you visit your local public park?
- If not, why not?
- At what time of the day, week, year?
- What is your type of activity in the park?
- What do you like-dislike?
-



A survey in collaboration with the youth department will be held preceding the reorganisation of the park. We're trying hard to have a say in the questions asked as well as the multiple possibilities to get replies to this survey.

Already we are sure to be able to analyse the results and will come back with an extensive overview because we're sure there are some useful conclusions to be made.

Smart bench 't Hofke - Skatepark

One of the items of reducing nuisance in public parks is to give people ownership. Linked to that, comes the idea to provide them something for which visitors not only see the use but are so keen to have it that they'll take care of it.
We were looking for something to combine gathering data, the idea of ownership with a nudging element and link that to participation.

So we came up with the suggestion of a sustainable solar powered smart bench:

- They allow to add Wi-Fi connection and sensors for CO2, noise, temperature, humidity and air pressure.
- The ownership of the bench will be given to local representatives and, of course, flanked by local politicians covered by the local press
- We nudge visitors towards the bench by offering them a power source
- As we will incorporate maintenance and management to local groups participation is included

Basic solar-powered smart benches allow visitors to charge their phones and tablets.
4 USB ports and two wireless charging points are provided.
Depending the options you could at Wi-Fi connection and sensors allowing to return you data on the charging volume (the use of the bench), air pollution, etc.

In the process of gathering information we checked for people with experience.
So, at the end, we visited the city of Dendermonde where they opted to have 5 of those benches installed.

Benches have been installed in 2018 and over those 3 years there were no signs of vandalism, indicating people appreciate the idea and are taking care of it. As the city of Dendermonde provides its own public Wi-Fi network, no further options were installed.



Smart bench 't Hofke

Pro's

- fairly flexible as the benches can be moved from one place to another
- sustainable due to solar powering
- useful as the benches attract a lot of people

Con's

- Pricy (5000-6000€)
- Becomes hot in the summer

We're still in the middle of some financial and administrative issues. Once those are cleared, we'll update this document and return a status and if possible, results.

We're holding on for next from the Urbact secretariat to give us a green light on this but are in the meanwhile receiving quotes from different possible suppliers.

We went back and forth to get this incorporated in the UrbSecurity project but finally, when all administrative issues were solved, the benches are now ordered.

Perfect example on how to collaborate with external partners as Mooimakers will pay on of the benches while the other one will be installed in the park we selected for this project.

Still one crucial item remains, which is the timing.

As the selected park will be rearranged, hopefully 2022 we are in doubt whether to install the bench and have it replaced afterwards or just hold on for the final installation. At the end costs will decide on this topic.

Implementing nudging techniques 't Hofke

While the implementation of the reorganised park will be done after the closing of this project, we can already inform that the following nudging elements will be incorporated:

- Guiding people towards the bins
- Gamification
- Smart bench
- Fake eyes/windows on the wall to enhance natural supervision

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Outcome or what were the results?

People counting

As indicated, we now know exactly when (which months most, weekday most , what time most) how many people came into the park, nothing much has been done with this info.

On the other hand, we now have numbers indicating that only 40% of the visitors are women.

Once the park will be reorganised, we will be able to compare the number of people to the same period the year before.

That might give us an idea if the reorganisation attracts more people in the park.

Hardware (purchase and installation:€) and software (activation and license : ...€) is funded

A result on another level is that we noticed other departments and organisation checked with us for experience and are thinking about implemented the same idea, not only in a closed environment but also in shopping streets.

Survey

Due to the involvement of multiple departments combined with the fact that some previously heavy involved people left the organisation, we run into an extreme delay.

At the time we need to finalise this document, this is still ongoing. We hope having more concrete information by the end of the summer 2022.



Outcome or what were the results?

Smart bench

Depending on the date of installation we'll update this chapter.

While for the beginning we opted for just a solar powered bench, the idea is to leave the possibility open for Wi-Fi connection and sensors.

While the info coming from the sensors can be very useful, it is not to forget these options require additional hardware- and license costs.

As we implemented 2 benches (1 in 't Hofke and another one in a skate) the idea is to have more of them spread over the center of the city.

At the time we need to finalise this document, the benches are ordered, and the installation will be done during summer 2022.



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Project guidelines

Viability test

During this and other processes we encountered the importance of the viability test.

As indicated before, not only it groups all involved organisations and people, but it forces/gives the opportunity to all to participate while at the same time everyone is engaged to follow the entire process.

Budget is a pain

Total revision budget for the rearrangement for the park 't Hofke is estimated 200000.

Clearly this puts the impact of the UrbSecurity budget in perspective.

While this explains the fact that we needed to comply with the project timing, the involvement of our project gave the entire process a boost.

Timing is a pain

Certainly when working in projects like this, it is unavoidable to work in collaboration with as well external as internal partners. Add to that local political involvement and it becomes clear that delays may occur. It was certainly impossible to have all our ideas nicely matching the timeline of the UrbSecurity project.

- Smart Bench ongoing but still to be installed
- Citizen survey ongoing but we need to hold on for some decisions by other departments



Guidelines

Project guidelines

Get local politicians involved

During the different stages of a viability project we encountered the importance of informing and feeding the mandate holders.

Take in account that unpopular decisions will need concrete arguments and may run against a wall of non-corporation.

Do not try to have everyone ULG member in every meeting.

We tried to have people involved.

So therefor, we did split up meetings and invited not all ULG partners on all ULG meetings.

Not all people taking part in the participation section needed to be active on the entire viability test project, let alone on administrative meetings with people participating in the funding.

While the composition of an ULG group may change, it is a good idea to have the structure of the groups made permanent.

Guidelines

Practical guidelines

Nudging

Due to the positive result of previous implemented nudging elements to reduce urinating in public, we strongly recommend getting in touch with people or organisation that are knowledgeable on nudging.

Most of the techniques are low cost and can be implemented quickly. Even tough results may not be everlasting, the positive effect is proven and regularly changing the type and/or the location of a nudging techniques keeps people alert.

Gather objective, measurable data

We can assume a lot but the only way to make sure of a conclusion with arguments is to have data.

Not only current visitors must be implemented but surely also it is important to have an idea on the likes and dislikes of the entire neighbourhood

People counting : have 2 of them

When setting up a people counting solution, have it at least installed in 2 parks.

This should allow you to see if a difference in number of visitors is linked to a newly installed element

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Conclusion

This project participation was a great learning curve. We didn't have a clue what we were getting into. For us, as dummies to this, all was new. We were ignorant on the jargon, the acronyms, the entire framework and setup as well as the administrative process and the evolution of the project. We probably still are and therefore we may have been taken it all very down to earth, rather than on a highbrow theoretical level.

Hence, we're sure that people familiar with such a project, will find some of the paragraphs we wrote might be way too obvious.

We estimate it would be more efficient when participants in such a project can start at the same knowledge level of the program or at least have a introducing session explaining the Urbact framework, the network setup, the goals, the steps, the administration, the to do's and the don'ts.

We were encouraged by the ideas of the other project members. We were amazed about the investment and courage of the lead partner and can only stress out the importance of an enthuse and inspiring lead expert.

As final line, we could conclude this was an intriguing, interesting time allowing us to get a first glance in such a project.

Having now encountered all of that, we feel a lot more apt for a new, next project to participate.

Looking forward to that.

Thanks

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