Walk'n'Roll Cities
Guidebook

Where streets belong to people

3. How? Implementation issues

European Union
European Regional Development Fund

URBACT
Driving change for better cities

URBACT drives change for better cities using participatory and integrated tools. Since 2002, it's the European Territorial Cooperation programme, which is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the Member and Partner States. Building on the exchange and learning experience from its beneficiary cities, the URBACT Knowledge Hub brings together thematic insights, good practices and policy recommendations about mobility and other hot topics at European level.

Find out more about it!

www.urbact.eu/knowledge-hub

@urbact

Index

Why?

Booklet 1:
Intro and challenges

What?

Booklet 2:
The visions and interventions

How?

Booklet 3:
Implementation issues

How can we make it happen?

Political will & commitment

Local politicians like mayors, aldermen and city councillors have a central role in reversing how our cities developed since the second half of the past century. They are the ones who can drive the development of policies and strategies, adopt these and, by the same mandate, initiate (and monitor) what's delivered.

To reverse the functional city with its traffic network designed to facilitate quick and uninterrupted movement of cars **means to have strong political will and commitment**. Most cities worked for a long time to establish exactly these structures – that today need to be ripped down in response to emerging challenges at global and local level, such as the climate crisis world-wide or emission loads, segregation of spaces and people at closer scale. **These very structures became an integral part of today societies' values and habits**, something that is clearly visible by people's affinity to car use. Consequently, politicians can expect to meet **controversial reactions and heavy opposition** from some **citizens and stakeholders** once they challenge the use of cars and the space it needs. In addition, this negative effect may also bring about heavy consequences at the next elections.

Unsurprisingly, many politicians prefer staying away from really challenging the status quo and try to get away with making minor (often cosmetic) improvements – for instance adding a few km-s of protected bike lanes here and there – instead of drastically rethinking the entire car-oriented mobility structure. **Why should politicians commit to transforming cities** to places for people, of proximity and of accessibility **given these possible consequences?**

The answer is simple: these investments **pay off for the city, its residents and for themselves.**
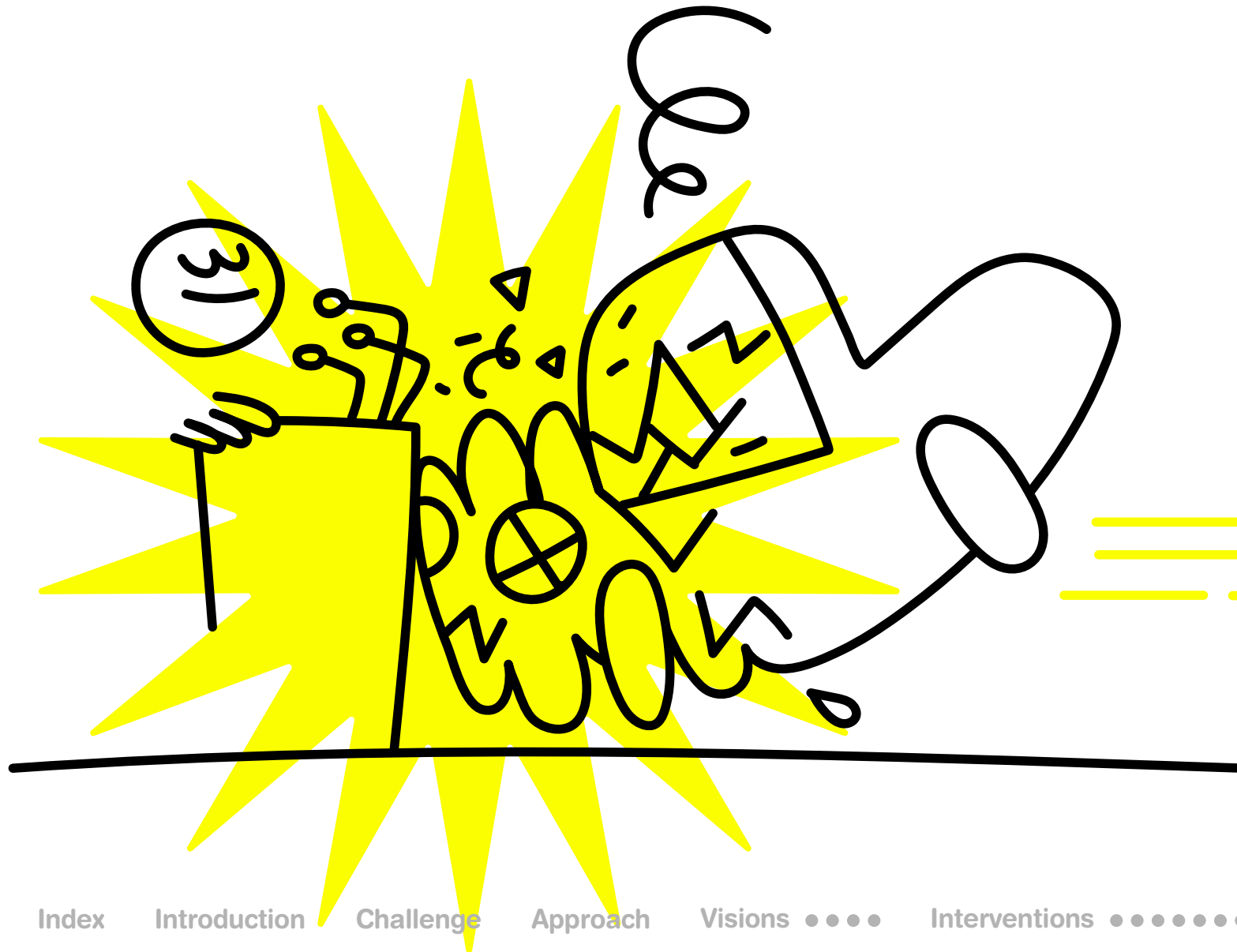
What arguments support political commitment?
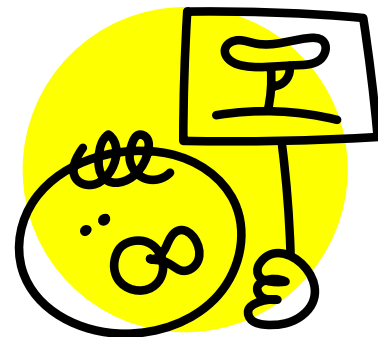
The claim of future generations

Politicians are responsible for driving a long-term sustainable development of their city: to create conditions for a high quality of life, for a vibrant local economy, for social cohesion within the city society, **not only today but as well for the next generations**. This often comes along with the need to challenge privileges of today's generation, like access 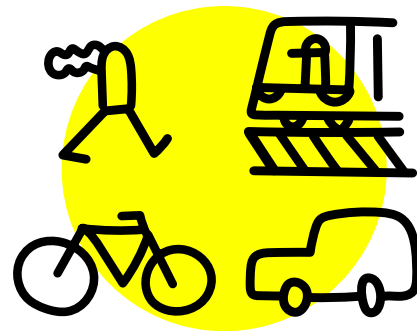to the city area by car, which damage the conditions for the next ones. This change **requires a strategic view, clear commitment and strong will by politicians** to argue and push for an integrated urban development that – while making the city a better place for its current residents – also safeguards it for future generations.

The need to take care of all citizens and stakeholders

Clearly, elected representatives are responsible to set the frame for good living conditions and a healthy local economy for today as well, holding the decision-making process. They have to take **care of the needs and concerns of all population groups and stakeholders and provide equal opportunities for all**. They need to carefully assess and balance the different –and often contrasting – needs and have to avoid giving priority to certain groups. When it comes to urban mobility **they should follow the "accessibility for all" principle instead of giving priority to car users**. Similarly, it is important to create a fair distribution of public space amongst the many user claims instead of focusing on transport and in this motorised individual modes.
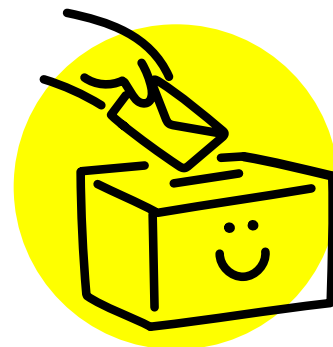
Engagement for a liveable city pays off

There are many good examples of political leaders who drive a major change to how traffic is organised in the city. **The mayors of Pontevedra (ES) and Ljubljana (SI)** are two good examples. Both **are engaged and still work for large scale pedestrianisation projects that heavily cut back car use and access**. Both are **in office for decades** today and their efforts are highly valued by the local population.

What do politicians need to keep in mind?

These **key elements are essential for local politicians and decision-makers** to address people in the transition to a city of proximity:

Communicate your vision and objectives

Talking on car-restrictive measures right away usually creates an emotional debate with fierce opposition. Instead, **communication needs to focus on the objectives that shall be achieved**. Like liveable streets for residents. An attractive city centre. Or good air quality, better road safety and public health conditions. **People understand these objectives** and are most generally likely to agree to them. The need for measures like a citywide speed 30 km/h policy are easier to communicate, once objectives are well explained and clearly set out.

Concentrate on the positive aspects of changes

Stakeholders opposing the transition to a city of proximity and accessibility usually exaggerate on perceived negative consequences. In answer, **leading the communication efforts with stakeholders**, looking out to the public needs to **focus on the positive aspects at stake**. And take up arguments and activities of stakeholders in support of the transition. **Using arguments and objectives that nobody can oppose** adds to the positive narrative. Like improving road safety conditions for children.

Showcase your commitment by presence

Elected representatives are best suited to explain the need for the transition to a city of proximity and accessibility themselves. They **use a language that citizens and stakeholders understand**, while experts might talk in a too "technical" manner. Moreover, presence and active communication by politicians increases their credibility.

Lead by example

Politicians who lead by example improve the legitimation of their commitment. If they walk and cycle or use public transport themselves, people recognise that they stand true to their values and their objective to improve life in the city, by pushing sustainable mobility use and creating public spaces for people.

Give time for people to recognise the benefits of change

Change creates, in many cases, **concerns or fears**, since established structures and habits get challenged. Politicians need to give people the opportunity to experience that **change is to their benefit**. Applying **tests** to **demonstrate what this might look like** is highly valuable to give people time to recognise the pros and cons. They as well hold the appeal to **be reversible if needed**. Test periods need to be long enough to allow people to get used to change though, like 3-6 months .

Exploit 'windows of opportunity'

Commitment to major changes like transforming the city into a place for people **gets contested at times where the public opinion is critical to politicians**. Typically, this is during **elections** at local level, but as well at regional or national elections. The best window of opportunity to **start change is directly after local elections** to exploit the full term to produce visible results. **"Quick wins" interventions** and pilot projects present good options to come to **tangible and accepted results** in a short time span.

Knowledge, expertise

A strong political will and commitment is crucial to initiate transformative processes, when allocating and using urban public spaces, and shifting from car dependency to active forms of mobility. Once set in motion, however, thoroughly planning and making the change happen is impossible without extensive and up-to-date thematic and methodological knowledge and expertise at hand.

In fact, if **key decision-makers** don't have **at least a basic understanding** of the problems and their implications for the future of the city, as well as the possible solutions in the first place, it becomes difficult to imagine that they would commit to making the (often unpopular) decisions, necessary to initiate and follow through the interventions to rehumanise urban public spaces. Therefore, the successful implementation of the necessary interventions needs **consistent knowledge transfer and management, the continuous development of the knowledge base,** as well as the use of **awareness-raising and education** to disseminate the knowledge to all relevant groups.

Certainly, external experts can be an important source of detailed thematic and methodological experience. Using external expertise at various steps of the transformation process is inevitable. However, ultimately it's the local politicians who take responsibility for the decisions and the local professionals who manage the delivery of the various interventions on a daily basis – and confront with opposing opinions. Therefore, if **there are no in-house capacities on different levels of the local authority**, and even at the various stakeholders in the city, **the change process is likely to fail**, despite the best intentions.

It's not just the professionals...

It is not just politicians and professionals in the field who need to be the target groups of knowledge transfer. Below you will find the main groups and their respective importance:
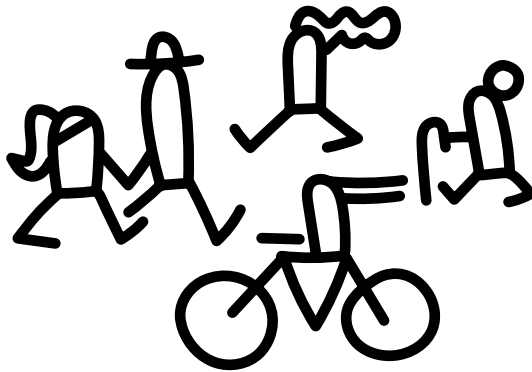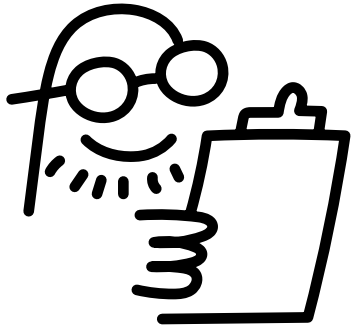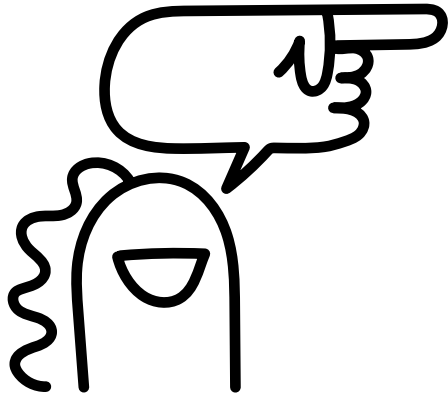
Politicians, decision-makers

As it has been already indicated, **at least a basic understanding of the topic is essential** if politicians, decision-makers are expected to commit to the transformation. This cannot be taken for granted, so **local politicians** – the mayor and the council members – **need "education"**, certainly not in the traditional sense of the word. Since it's very rare that local politicians participate in formal education in urban issues, this should usually be initiated from inside – although there are examples where a group of residents, advocacy groups raise and bring attention to the issue. Politicians don't need detailed thematic knowledge, but they definitely need to see **the problems, what is at stakes if they are not addressed and how the city can become a better place as a result of the interventions.** They need to see evidence, real-life success stories from other cities, but they also need to understand the difficulties and risks of taking away perceived privileges from people. They usually prefer not too technical, concise information.

City practitioners in municipalities

Professionals at the local authority dealing with public space development and mobility issues need to possess thorough thematic and methodological knowledge. These professionals need to be up-to-date regarding the most recent i**nnovative approaches and solutions in the field**.

Having committed decision-makers with at least basic understanding of the challenges and possible solutions and a knowledgable team of specialists in place is crucial. That being said, mobility issues and the public space realm definitely require an integrated approach and affect a number of other areas: economic development, housing, education, even cultural services. Rehumanising streets, implementing a shift to sustainable urban mobility is also a cultural change, requiring the contribution of most departments at the local authority.

Therefore, it's important that there's **at least awareness and basic knowledge** (similar in the level of detail for politicians but more specific to the respective departmental profession) **across the entire organisation**. Besides, this broad understanding needs to be present at organisations like the public transport company, the company responsible for the management and maintenance of public spaces, among other stakeholders.

Residents

Last, but not least, there's a major difference between trying to sell the idea of transforming public spaces and limiting car use to an uninformed public, and actually having a meaningful dialogue with **locals and other stakeholders**, who understand the challenge and its implications, as well as the potential benefits of the planned interventions. Therefore, using innovative approaches and various channels **to raise awareness and educate the population** are also key to success.
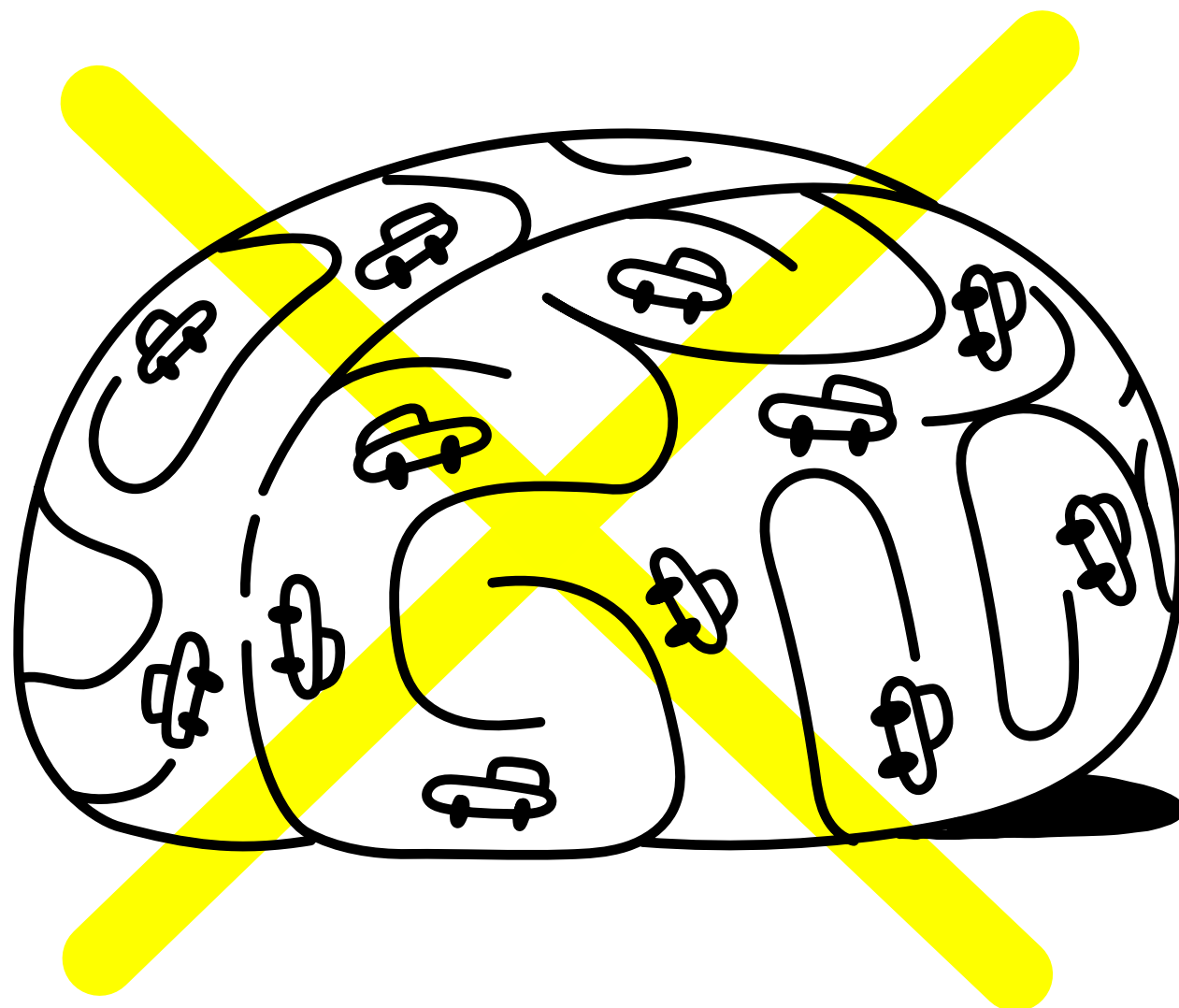
What can cities do?

Assuming there is a political intention to deliver transformative measures, **the most important step is to build a strong team of professionals with solid thematic**, like urban development, mobility, traffic planning, public space development; **and methodological**, as participarory practices, communication, project management, monitoring and evaluation **knowledge and skills**. Building such a multidisciplinary team and having most of the necessary capacities in-house is usually easier in larger cities. Small and medium-sized cities might need to involve more external expertise.

Once this team is in place, it's paramount to **keep the team's knowledge up-to-date**, and to follow the latest trends and innovative solutions. Attending **thematic conferences**, even though these events sometimes seem waste of time; **becoming members of thematic networks**, like for instance Civitas, Placemaking Europe, POLIS; **subscribing to thematic newsletters and publications** are all important. **Learning from other cities** is also an excellent source of knowledge! Participating in transnational networks, take for instance URBACT Networks or Interreg programmes, provides inspiration, ideas, good practices and knowledge. Studying in detail the case of other cities that have successfully made the transformation is also invaluable. If done properly, organising study tours is also a modest investment that offers significant returns. In fact, field visits where politicians can see the changes and benefits of the transformation and hear the story from their peers can also play an important role in strengthening their engagement.

If there's a committed in-house team with up-to-date knowledge, their job is not just to manage the transformation process and deliver the interventions, but it's at least equally important **that they share their knowledge – constantly communicate, educate the various target groups in the city.**

Shared vision and strategy
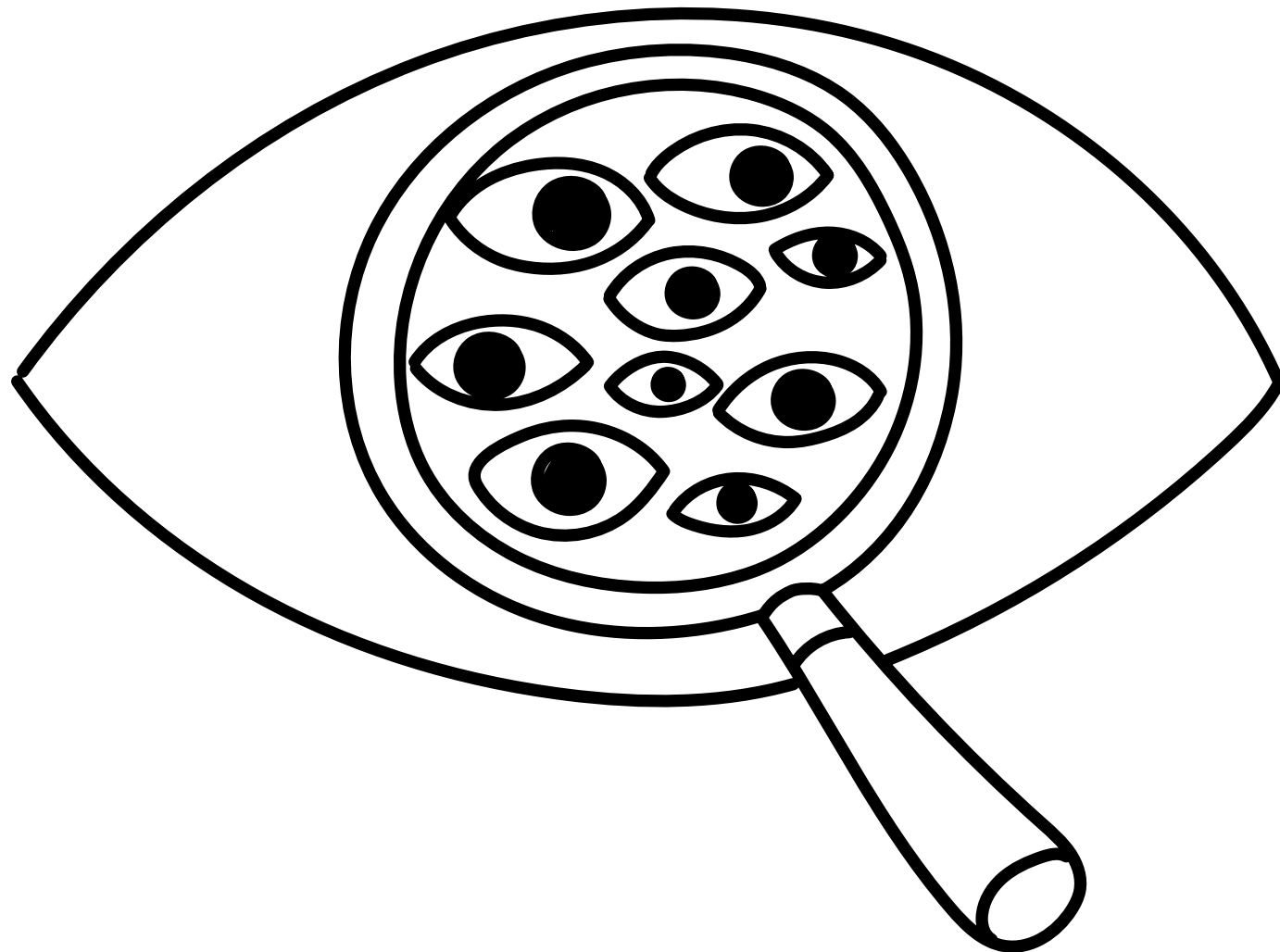
Integrated projects need visions and strategies to build a robust framework for sustainable public spaces and mobility. Some of these visions have been presented in Booklet 2 and can potentially be part of a specific urban vision for your city. Urban strategies and plans tend to support any ambitions and overall visions, but with more practical elements, specific alignment and a project narrative.

Particularly with mobility projects, **the narrative is a decisive factor** to transform the public space and create quality innovation, as well as carbon reduction measures. Your ideas and solutions need to get accepted by the public opinion. A **common understanding is needed to create a shared vision and strategy**. Ideally, you create ownership within the stakeholder groups, who might join your cause and defend the same ideas as you and, most importantly, may help you co-design and further develop joint actions. Both visions and strategies are stronger when locals are involved in their creation.

Inviting and engaging a variety of different stakeholder groups into the design process of your city's mobility strategy will most certainly pay off. It will develop a solid and considerably common vision that is more inclusive, more resilient to foreseeable obstacles, and it will build up the trust between the stakeholders who are able to support actions and strengthen the sense of community. As a matter of fact, the vision becomes a part of the community's identity, with messages being carried out beyond the usual suspects – like the municipality staff. The URBACT Method, which is based upon the principles of participative and integrated planning shall come at hand.

Inviting and engaging a variety of different stakeholder groups into the design process of your city's mobility strategy will most certainly pay off. It will develop a solid and considerably common vision that is more inclusive, more resilient to foreseeable obstacles, and it will build up the trust between the stakeholders who are able to support actions and strengthen the sense of community. As a matter of fact, **the vision becomes a part of the community's identity, with messages being carried out beyond the usual suspects** – like the municipality staff. The URBACT Method, which is based upon the principles of participative and integrated planning shall come at hand.

The first step in the development of a joint vision is to find a clear overview of all the interested parties who could be involved in the process, private and public alike. It's vital to conduct a **stakeholder mapping**, which will evolve as the project progresses and new stakeholders are added to the planning process. A detailed analysis of those groups and their **interests**, as well as their respective level of **influence** is needed. Also, this will help to overcome **any inequalities in terms of power between interest groups, gain acceptance and enable compromises**.

Continuous **management and interaction** are helpful factors for transparency throughout the whole process. Consistent communication and stakeholder involvement shall be put into place throughout the whole process – until the final decision-making phase and even beyond. This can make everyone feel included and can, therefore, create a feeling of ownership, trust and foster the collaboration from all parties. By also leaving space for **bottom-up initiatives** and making room for **co-creation processes**, stakeholders should be empowered to internalise the project's desires and ensure an effective implementation. This can also create more acceptance and willingness to uptake the vision and overall interventions. Reducing obstacles, like language barriers or a variety of educational and social backgrounds beforehand, can reduce stress and minimise negative effects. The goal should be to maintain flexibility within the process and be prepared for different scenarios.

Providing solid **expertise and knowledge about the intervention's area**, while also keeping an open ear to new inputs from different stakeholders, further empower all people and prevent a patronising top-down hierarchy. Opposing voices are naturally welcome, they might bring important insights to light. However, if too much room is left for opposition credibility, willpower and assertiveness might be reduced. This is the reason why transparency and facilitation are so crucial when co-creating strategies.

How about strategies and political cycles? Whenever there's a change in the government's leading political parties, project visions and strategies are under threat. They can be rejected, changed or just get less attention. **The more a vision and a strategy are mainstreamed in stakeholder groups, the more realistic it's for them to survive in the city's political agenda**. Furthermore, **governance structures** are key to ensure integrated strategies can be upscaled and, yet, adapted according to location and scale.

To maintain an **integrated planning approach** a multidimensional analysis is recommended, considering **vertical cooperation** between different levels of authorities of metropolitan scale, city region and municipalities and local communities, while also taking **horizontal policy** to ensure the collaboration between multiple municipal services and local agencies. The different **sectoral approaches**, the social, economic and planning aspects should be considered equally important. **All sectoral policies should be checked on their potential externalities on others** – like external social and environmental effects, for example, if parents can choose a school geographically located anywhere in the city, it might result in additional car use.

Funding is often perceived as a daunting step within any strategy, still, it's an aspect that **must be considered from a very early stage**. It needs to be reflected in taking into account different governance levels whilst keeping a balance between hard and soft investments. To foster realisation and successfully achieve the common vision, goals can be aligned with funders and implementing actors. This can be backed by a set of legal rules to ensure implementation, allowing for the development of a quality control system, enforcing existing and new measures.

Participative approach

Most urban development interventions affect the life of citizens, especially when it comes to spatial changes through urban projects. The local communities have to live with the consequences of new buildings and infrastructure in the city for decades to come, whether they like it or not. That's exactly why it's important to plan and implement physical interventions in a way that enables all concerned parties – civil society included – to play an active and influential role in decisions that affect their lives.
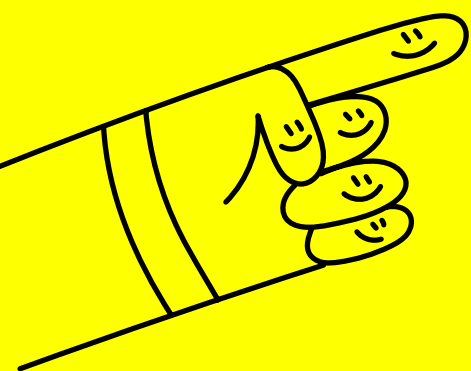
Participation is **one of the key principles of the URBACT Method**, being defined as follows: a participative approach is based on the strong partnerships between public bodies, the private sector, knowledge institutions and civil society – including associations, NGOs, citizens. It's recognised as a **cornerstone of local democracy** and efficient urban development policies.
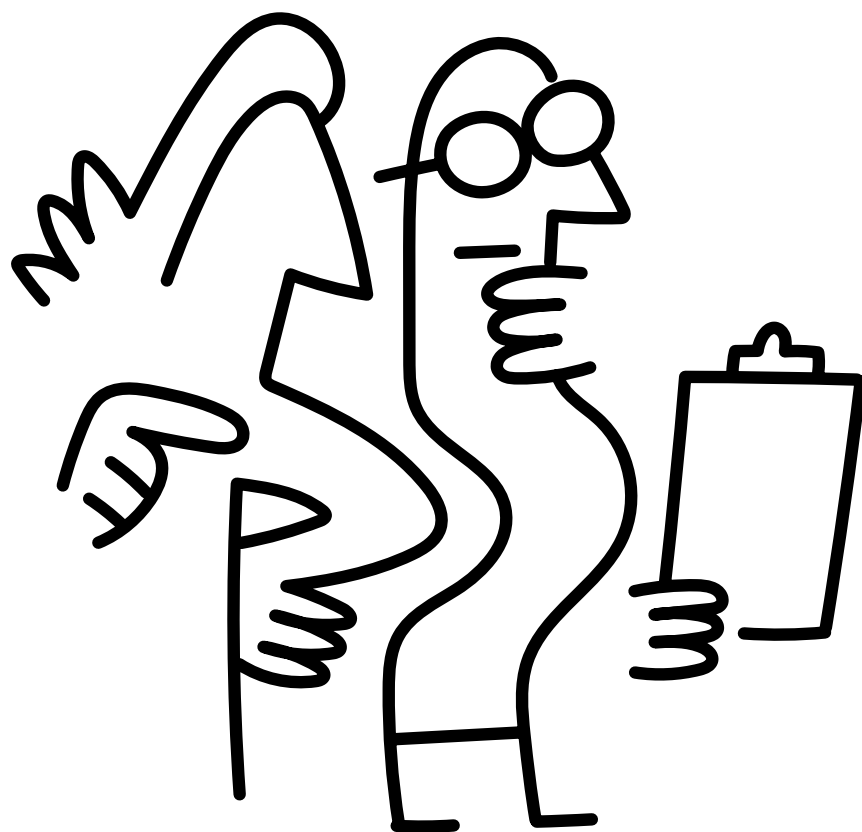
Most people move around in cities on a regular basis and have frequent interactions with public spaces. Consequently, **any transformation of public spaces and mobility systems directly affects their everyday life**. In addition, the shift towards more sustainable urban mobility and more human spaces often leads to measures that **hurt the real or perceived interests** of a (very vocal) group of residents: the car users. Unsurprisingly, mobility and public space interventions are often controversial and spark strong opposition.

Having said that, it's important to use a participatory approach when designing and implementing interventions that transform public spaces and contribute to a shift towards more sustainable means of transport. This must be done by **involving all stakeholders from the start of the process**, explaining what is intended to be achieved. Having an honest dialogue also helps to better understand the real needs and motivations of various actors. Giving them the opportunity to influence the transformation process **has a range of benefits:**

- The interventions designed and implemented in this way, enable decision-makers to better take into account the most important needs of end users.

- It can contribute to changing the mind of some opposing stakeholders.

- It brings in a range of new ideas and perspectives.

- It gives an opportunity to a wide range of stakeholders - not just the "loudest" groups - to have their voice heard.
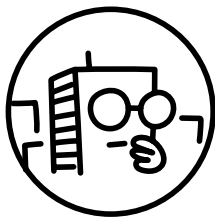
What do cities need to keep in mind?

Communication to promote actions – especially one-**way communication – does not equal participation. Real participation involves a genuine dialogue, co-design and even co-creation**. Stakeholders will only be ready to actively participate if they feel that they are not only listened to, but also heard. In this sense, their contributions can actually shape the outcomes.

That said, **developing and using a positive narrative of the change process is fundamental**. This narrative should concentrate on the vision: the positive changes, the improvement in the quality of life the city wants to achieve. If **consensus can be consolidated around the vision**, it will be much easier for all stakeholders – the local authority included – to make the necessary compromises regarding the details of the specific actions leading to the vision.

It's crucial that you **give the opportunity to all stakeholders**, in fact, encourage all and not just a select few or the usual suspects, **to participate and have a voice**. In addition, make an extra effort to actively involve those groups that normally have a **"weaker voice"** – for instance children, women, lower income residents and people with mobility impairments.

Be aware and prepared that the **opposers are usually the loudest and most vocal**. Still, that doesn't necessarily mean that they represent the majority's opinion. By all means listen to their arguments too, but when there is no consensus and a decision is needed, **always choose the option that is in the interest of the wider public** – as opposed to the particular interest of certain groups.

During the participatory process you usually discover that, besides the opposers, there are **many who agree** and support the proposed changes. Make sure to **"recruit" them as your allies**. They are powerful and credible messengers, besides being living proof that the local authority is not the only one that represents certain ideas.

When transforming public spaces, the way we use streets, **temporary solutions and tests can be useful** ways to demonstrate the changes in real life for a limited time – and with the option of reversing those changes. These experiments also **provide better context for a more meaningful dialogue** with people. There's a significant difference between discussing something in theory and actually experiencing change and its effects. Such interventions are also useful in **improving and fine-tuning the final design**, before the city commits to costly and irreversible mistakes.

It's also important to note that people are better equipped to make a meaningful contribution when the subject of dialogue is a specific public space, street or neighbourhood. Even more so if the dialogue is actually taking place in that specific place. So, instead of convening in a room at the municipality, it is better to **set up tables, mock-ups, and maps in the physical space that is the subject of the planned changes.**

Finally, properly applying a participative approach is not easy: **it requires time and significant resources** from the part of local authority. Nevertheless, when it comes to interventions affecting public spaces and mobility, it's the right path to follow.

Financial resources, regulations

Legal framework

Local municipalities have a wide range of competences, among them, the **duty to comply and enforce regulations**. For example, urban design rules are important means to translate visions into reality, which might have impacts that are even more tangible than costly new infrastructure. During Covid-19 pandemics, there were many examples of tactical urbanism interventions, which could even be turned into permanent solutions. The Barcelona Superblocks (see 5.7 - Superblock), for instance, provides an interesting approach of how innovative ideas can be tested with inexpensive interventions, which can then be followed by more expensive measures and developments.

In many cases, however, **local authorities face barriers that keep them from achieving the objectives that were originally intended with the regulations**. Common challenges include the conflicts of different kinds, for instance, a municipality might improve a public space by restricting and limiting car use in certain streets, but as a consequence, generate a gentrification process. As rent regulation is often a national government responsibility, at the local level there's little cities can do to control the increase of rents. All this means that municipalities have to carefully count the externalities of their regulations.

Taxation is an important part of local governance. Cities are in very different positions across countries, to what extent they can determine different types of taxes. For example, real estate taxes can provide an important opportunity to get a partial return of the public money that had previously been invested in the development of public infrastructure. However, such real estate value dependent taxes are not allowed in some countries as part of the local taxes.

Financing the implementation of actions

In light of the first-ever thematic URBACT e-University, in early 2022 the programme has delivered to Action Planning Network's partner cities a capacity-building curriculum, which focused on funding and resourcing. Participants got a glimpse, tips and knowledge on **how to put together a funding strategy for actions that were planned under their local Integrated Action Plans**. A set of very useful tools was consolidated and all materials can be found at the URBACT Toolbox[1]. This includes a step-by-step explanation on how to implement the action plans, and a comparative analysis on financial opportunities, how to access funding and resources at European, national, and regional level or through public private partnerships. In addition, there you can find references to the most relevant EU funds for the 2021 - 2027 programming period.

Sharing examples and ideas of **financial engineering measures** and the EU **mechanisms for cities** is also recommended. Potential beneficiaries should analyse the InvestEU Fund[2], which aims at stimulating long-term economic growth and competitiveness in the European Union, by combining funds, in the form of loans and guarantees. This fund is structured around four areas of intervention: sustainable infrastructure, research, innovation and digitisation, SMEs and social investments and skills.

In order to implement different projects and turn plans, visions and interventions into reality, it's essential to have the knowledge **to combine direct and indirect funds – structural and investment funds**, ESI funds and the funds managed by both National and Regional authorities, such as National Operational Programs and Regional Operational Programs. Synergy among the diverse EU funds is crucial to concretely and more effectively implement the action plans, which partners have developed along the URBACT networks.

What can cities do?

Cities should look out for financial resources and ensure their use also for "unusual", experimental and innovative ideas. One way for that is to **establish a fund** for such ideas, with a jury to select the most promising ones from the incoming bids, enabling cities to try out new solutions with enough flexibility. Another option is **to streamline an integrated idea within different budget lines from the city** – parks and green space divisions, transport and mobility department or even social inclusion programmes.

In order to create additional financial resources for projects of public interest, cities might **cross-finance** such projects by revenues gained from profitable investments. An example for this is the **inclusionary zoning**, where the city might oblige developers of free-market housing to transform a given share of the dwellings into the affordable housing units. There's a myriad of innovative ways to finance strategies built around interventions and visions – such as People - Public - Private - Partnerships (PPPP), Social Impact Bonds (SIB), crowdsourcing, community bonds or Corporate Social Responsibility. These possibilities should be carefully examined by local authorities, taking into account advantages and constraints.
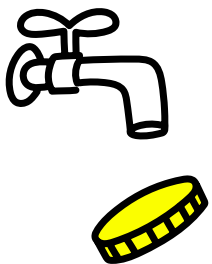
What potential sources of co-financing?

How to identify these sources of funding?
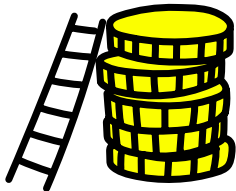
What tools are there to help us through the URBACT methology?

1. www.urbact.eu/toolbox-home
2. https://investeu.europa.eu/index_en

Experiences from cities

How cities are using these visions and interventions?

Walk'n'Roll helps cities find **inspiration to make the most of their streets and public space while calming down car traffic**. Some readers might have had an easier time relating to the visions and the interventions that were described and illustrated in the first two Booklets. However, the results and final figures from the showcased cities are just a glimpse into a much larger process: from endless discussions, finding compromises, planning, designing, making decisions, securing resources to actually putting actions into practice, there's a whole lot of questions and challenges that unfold in the backstage.

This is precisely the reason why the **last part of Booklet 3 summarises the experience from URBACT cities**. Through **interviews**, city practitioners, metropolitan authorities and decision-makers from all over Europe share their thoughts on things that go far beyond any specific intervention. They rather reflect on the **complexity of mobility issues and the potential for public space's transformation**.

In practice, different visions and interventions need to be combined and adapted at the local level. The present interviews delve into the **importance of political support, suitable governance models, participative methods, thematic knowledge**, as things that can be perceived as potential challenges – like changes in core teams or management, ensuring funding and legal frameworks. Thus, the experience from these cities does not always transpire success stories, but also real-life difficulties and other lessons learnt.

Turku
Space4People

Manchester
RiConnect

Bielefeld
Space4People

Krakow
RiConnect

Nova Gorica
Thriving Streets

Parma
Thriving Streets
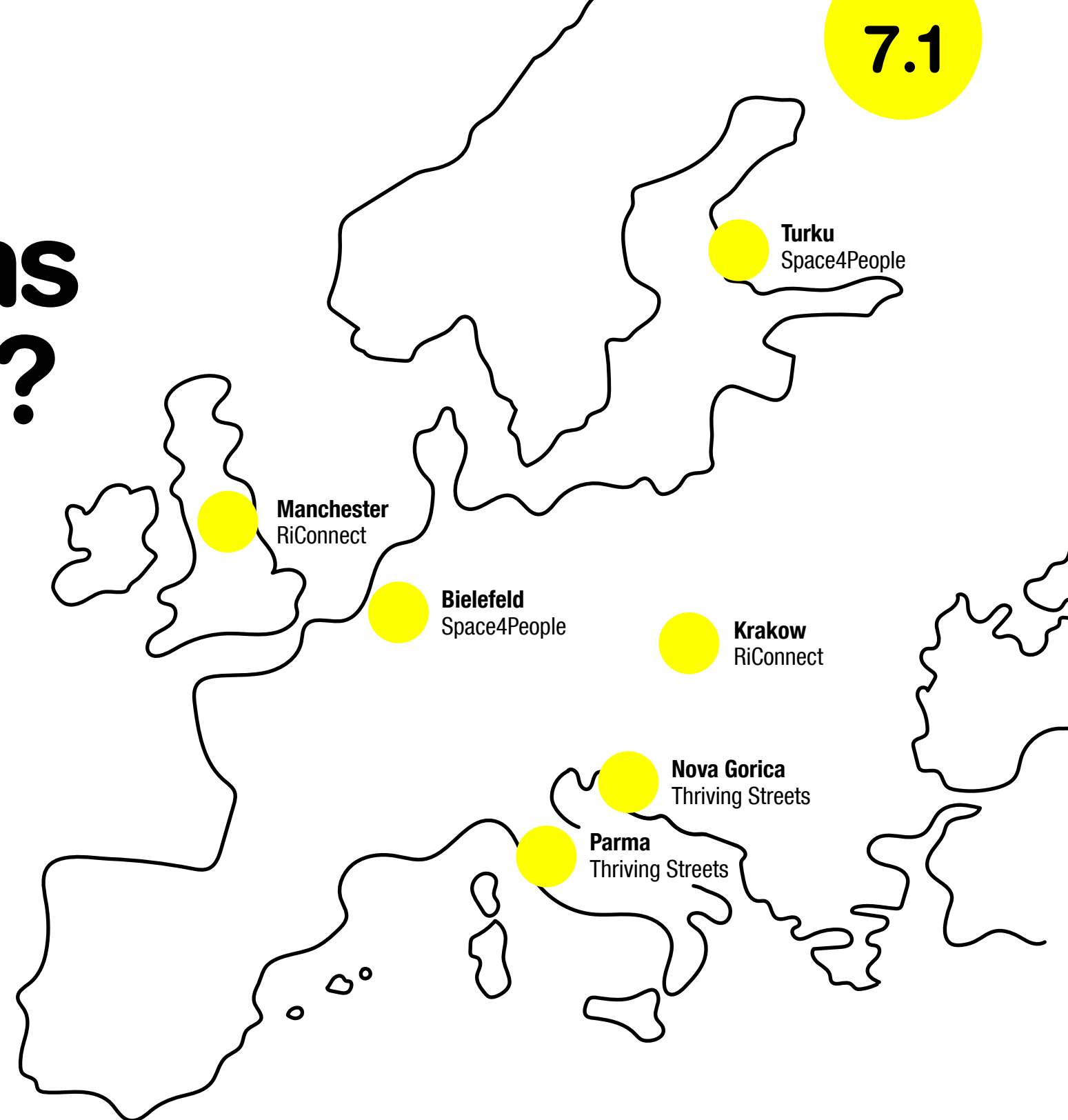
Turku

Interview with Marie Nyman

Marie Nyman
Landscape architect at the city of Turku (FI)

Space4People
Action Planning Network
On November 21st, 2022

What are the main challenges on public space use and sustainable urban mobility in Turku?

Our city centre has a block design, a square shaped structure. Streets are very wide, and they were built for car use over the last decades. With the use of cars being made so easy and practical, many people opt to simply use the car. Our general plan and city strategies indicate that the share of sustainable modes should be increased though. Especially active modes like walking and cycling. Our main challenge here is that streets need to be re-designed to accommodate other transport modes than cars.

What do you expect to be the trickiest part in this process?

The most crucial part concerns the accessibility of the city centre by car. In the last years, we developed a big change with the opening of a parking garage, directly below the main square in the city centre. We want to create less need for on-street parking, so that this space can be used for other purposes. But when you challenge the way people are using the street, you can expect a big follow up discussion and resistance, since they are used to parking on the street and to drive basically everywhere they want to go.

"Big discussions" sound like a source for potential conflicts. How do politicians address this issue? What is their position on this challenge?

Our politicians are well aware of this challenge, but they also acknowledge that the city has set certain goals, like the modal shift in favour of sustainable modes. And they are aware that keeping to these goals means making decisions. Of course, there are different perspectives among decision-makers, as they represent different population groups. But they appreciate well-discussed and thought-out visions on why we should make changes. Like in the case of our Space4People Action Planning Network's pilot project: the Summer Street, which was done in 2021 and 2022 and well backed-up by our politicians, even when facing some backlash from the public opinion first.

Some people welcomed the idea to have a more people-focused use of the street, others thought it was a waste of resources. Decision-makers favoured the option to run the ideas as a soft way to test a new street design, without permanent consequences. Testing public space changes has proven to be a good approach. We are now moving this test experience to a new location, which is called the Winter Plaza, where a small street in the Old Town is shut for traffic and used as a plaza for lights and seating.

When testing is done and results are at hand, what is the next step towards permanent changes?

All our pilots are based on the strategic idea that places – or streets – should somehow be used in a different and better way than how they are used now. But to actually achieve a permanent change can sometimes take a long time. First, necessary resources need to be secured, then, using public consultations, the street design needs to be developed. All that, while the necessary political decisions are put into place. It takes time, but changes happen. The transformation of Kristiinankatu, where the Summer Street pilot ran, is now part of our traffic strategy. The goal is that this street will have pedestrian priority with car access limited to residents and local retail.

How are you financing the permanent intervention?

It's almost 100% local funding. We have concrete plans for the next few years and we are able to balance these with the available budget. But we need to see which projects can be done in a realistic timeframe. This is one reason why the implementation of projects can take some time, as there are many projects and other subjects that need to be done at the same time. We get support, though sometimes for temporary installations, like for the Summer Street from entrepreneurs. They were very excited about it and brought activities and events to the street. We have some possibilities to apply for state subsidies or EU funding as well, but we use this only if they are applicable for a certain project at that time.

When you plan new street designs like for the Summer Street, do you face any regulatory limitations, like national legislation?

We have some freedom to decide on the design of the streets at local level. Still, the design needs to be based on the bigger vision within the transport development plan, of course. But this is of our own making again. Design can vary considerably, from shared space principles to a road of fully separated spaces per mode – or to implement a cycling street, as we already did in Turku. There are rarely limitations coming from national level. National authorities rather provide specific streets designs that we can use, but the decision on how the design and functionality looks is done at local level. Limitations are more from practical needs at local level, like costs for maintenance or the necessity to cater for municipal or emergency services.

"Decision-makers favoured the option to run the ideas as a soft way to test a new street design, without permanent consequences. Testing public space changes has proven to be a good approach"

How do you decide which locations are subject to street design and public space interventions?

We have an overall plan for our streets and, for some of the streets, the plan defines a need for redevelopment to meet our objectives. That was the case for Kristiinankatu, as there was already the objective to create a more pedestrian-friendly space. There are other streets with similar goals, like for closing a gap in the pedestrian network. But there are other factors to change a street as well, like for the coming Winter Plaza. Residents want to create a calmer place by regulating through traffic in this street. The road is Y-shaped for some part, like a fork, and the idea for one of the branches is to transform into a plaza. Pilot projects are always set up on what we might want to change in the long-run, while giving locals a chance to first-hand experience the changes in the short-term.

To which extent does participation play a role?

This is an area where we still need to do some work, but we are active. All plans and strategies are put together according to the legally defined level of public consultation, of course. But we invest in more intensive ways of participation, like in the case of our online participation platform, which is called "State your opinion". In this website, people can comment and share their views on different projects. We started two years ago and, today, this is the more usual way to do consultations.

People can see each other's comments and can react to each other by their comments. "Commenting" turns into a kind of dialogue and not just simply one's opinion. Examples include online discussions for projects to renew playgrounds, or presenting different options to renew a street and collect opinions and arguments on that. A prominent example is the development of the current harbour area, where the 15 entries for the idea competition were presented to a wider audience. People could review all bids and do their own rates and share their impressions.

Do you look for inspirations and ideas from other cities?

Yes, we are always searching for inspiration from other cities. Most generally, we look at other Nordic cities, since they share similar conditions, especially the long winter months. Like in Denmark, Sweden, Norway or other Finnish cities. We take a look beyond the Nordic areas as well of course, but mostly the first view is to comparable situations.

What would you like to see within the next five years?

I would like to see people use public space more often, even more if they just use it without any specific regulation or initiative telling them to do so. I would call that a kind of a "use your city" mentality. As a landscape architect, I would like to see more greenery to make the city centre more enjoyable, walkable and resilient. I would like to see public space that serves other activities than traffic, and which is used in different ways than today. There's a lot of activities going on in Turku and I'm confident about positive outcomes. ●

Turku – Marie Nyman

Bielefeld

Interview with Olaf Lewald

Olaf Lewald
Head of Office for Mobility in Bielefeld (DE)

Space4People
Action Planning Network
On November 18th, 2022

What are the main challenges on public space use and sustainable urban mobility in Bielefeld?

We share a challenge with many other European cities: to maintain the centrality and attractiveness of its inner city that is home to a diverse set of functions and stakeholders. At the same time, we need to react to emerging global problems like climate change and public health conditions. Today, public space use in the inner city is a mix of pedestrian areas, roads and parking spaces, squares and to – to a minor extent – greeneries and green surfaces. We need to find a way to transform the city centre, especially the Old Town area, to maintain its appeal to people and to meet the challenges presented by climate change, like urban heat islands. But this has to meet the different and contrasting views of a wide set of stakeholders.

Can you tell us more on the contrasting views of stakeholders?

Contrasting views focus on topics of traffic: some people want to go by car directly to the entry for shops, others favour a calmer city centre with less traffic. A strong stakeholder group is the retailers, who want to keep the city centre and their shop accessible by car. Shop owners tend to think that customers coming by car are their main clients. We know that this is not the case, but retailers are hard to convince otherwise. Gastronomists agree with retailers on the need for good car access conditions. That being said, they also see that there is additional profit in nice outdoor gastronomy. In this view, transforming parking to outdoor seating or reducing car traffic is welcome.

Another expressive group is the residents, who want to maintain access to their homes for parking and deliveries. At the same time, they say that the Old Town area is too noisy with too much through traffic, especially at night. Visitors, yet, take another position. They come to the Old Town for shopping, for gastronomy or simply to walk and stick around. Cutting back on-street parking is no major problem, since there are parking garages. Many visitors do not take the car at all. Instead, they walk, cycle and use public transport. They appreciate space for playing, sitting down and meeting each other.

How do you create a common vision for public space use with all these contrasting viewpoints?

We ran an intensive participation process for the case of the Old Town. First, we listened to all groups to understand how they imagine changes in the area. Then we invited stakeholders for workshops to jointly develop ideas on what interventions could be done and where these could be tested, while we worked with the public as well and created our own website (www.altstadtraum.de) for the project. There anyone could read on present ideas, become aware of the state of play of potential actions and on the next steps. They could also come up with their own proposals and comments. The website complemented the workshops, so we got a good coverage of all opinions from different groups, even from those who did not have the time to join a long workshop or did not feel comfortable with it. All in all, the process was a success, but we also had some participants who were a bit disappointed that their ideas were not fully taken up.

Do you have suggestions on how to cope with people that are disappointed from that?

Yes, stay in touch with them and try to explain why the proposal was not taken up. In the end, it is about a participative, democratic process. Also in the workshops, not all decisions count with a consensus and, in the end, it's the city council that has the final say. People accept how participation processes work, as well the role of the city council, even if they voted for other parties than the ones in power.

What kind of role did politicians take in the participation process?

Not all of them are happy with transforming public space and traffic calming, as in the Old Town project. But they are all aware of the climate crisis and the need to find answers at the local level. The real difference between political parties is more in the speed of change and how ambitious local objectives and interventions should be put in place. For the Old Town participation, the political party members took part as observers in the workshops and acted as facilitators. They left decisions on what to test, where to test it and how to test it to the participants. If needed, they also talked with particular stakeholders if they voiced doubts or fears during the process. Their main input was the mission statement for the project: to find solutions to make the Old Town more attractive to people – like for shopping or gatherings, with more space for seating, greeneries, and less space for parking.

> **"It's a successful approach to have a concept or idea that should be implemented and turn it into reality using additional funding that complement local resources"**

**The pilots in the Old Town are finalised today.
How will you finance the permanent changes to come?**

We have some experience in using external budgets for our projects. In 2015 and 2016, our work to approach climate change and how we would move in the city was integrated to our mobility strategy. And in this process, we planned and delivered a large-scale project to redesign the main local transport hub, the Jahnplatz. The budget of the project was 20 million EUR. We reduced the number of car lanes, added space for walking and cycling, renewed neighbouring streets and revamped the public transport node, which sees almost 1 000 buses crossing the square each day. This project was only made possible thanks to **European Regional Development Funds (ERDF)**.

It was a very significant project, since people could see that something was being changed with the implementation. It went beyond pure thinking and dreaming, there were tangible results like the rapid growth of cyclists and more space at hand for people. Our politicians recognised that we were on the right track and dedicated further budget to more projects thanks to this. Not only big interventions like the Jahnplatz reconstruction, but smaller ones too like banning cars from a street or reducing on-street parking in another one. Likewise, politicians increased our capacities at the Office for Mobility. They appreciated our work

efforts. But clearly, political leaders are both interested in and happy about additional funding from regional, national or EU sources for projects that are on our agenda. It's a successful approach to have a concept or idea that should be implemented and turn it into reality using additional funding that complement local resources.

When you look at all the sites with potential for future projects, where do you get your ideas from?

We are very interested in examples from Europe, but also the USA and Canada. There are very good examples at hand and we are keeping in touch, networking and participation in EU funded transnational projects. Not just to exchange experiences, but also to learn and transfer solutions. This is important for us, since our political goal is to cut by half the share of cars until 2030. We developed a set of concepts for this: for walking, cycling, car use and public transport. These are our "bibles" for the coming tasks. Since the overall goal is very ambitious, we compare the concepts with other cities' visions and projects that are implemented.

What would you like to see happening in the next five years?

This is difficult to say and hard to predict, just look at this year's events. But if I can simply tell my wishes, I would like to see more and larger pedestrian zones. Public space redesigned for and by people. To turn car lanes into bike lanes and to transform parking space in the street to other uses by adding more green and also water in the city – like for cooling down temperatures in the hot summers. My bigger wish is that living conditions in Bielefeld are improved for people, not only in the centre, but also in the other districts. So, people appreciate living in Bielefeld, that they see and use public space as a community. Bielefeld is a growing city with lots of change coming up in different areas. So, conditions for living should be as comfortable and nice as possible for the Bielefelders. ⬤

City of Bielefeld– Stadt

Greater Manchester

Interview with Jonathan Marsh

Jonathan Marsh
Acting Head of Strategic Planning & Innovation,
Transport for Greater Manchester, UK
RiConnect Action Planning Network
On November 14th, 2022

What are the main challenges you face regarding public spaces and sustainable urban mobility in the Manchester metropolitan area?

Within our local transport plan, Greater Manchester's Sustianable Urban Mobility Plan, we have this policy and strategy called "streets for all". This strategy builds up on four main parts: improving quality of life, protecting our environment, supporting sustainable economic growth and developing innovative city regions.

One of the main challenges is to stimulate behavioural change, getting people out of their cars and shifting their travel modes towards public transport and active mobility, like walking and cycling. By these means, many policy targets would be met simultaneously, like improving public health and air quality and boosting decarbonisation. This is part of the Bee Network agenda in Greater Manchester.

It seems to include mobility measures as well as other matters. Do you have a policy that integrates different topics? Is TfGM the only agency involved?

The "streets for all" approach is looking at people and places alike. Quite a lot of the projects we work on are linked to the changes that are happening on the surrounding space as well, so it could be improving walking and cycling routes as a part of town centre regeneration that includes enhancing the public realm.

Within the Greater Manchester area, there are ten different local authorities, which work closely together. The mayor of Greater Manchester acts as the lead of the combined authority. TfGM deliver the transport policies set by the Greater Manchester Mayor and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

We help with the development of strategies initiated by the local authorities, which are aligned to the local transport plan objectives. Together, developing cases for funding or ways of working around design from a "streets for all" perspective. For this, we are developing a design guide with an integrated design review panel to ensure a collaborative and design-proof approach. It is the Local Authorities that design and deliver the projects, making them happen.

How does funding work? Is it a purely public investment or does the private sector also contribute?

The main funding source for infrastructure projects is the Government, an example of this is the **City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement**. We are designing and developing business cases for a broad range of transport and place making projects, many of which are **Streets for All** type projects. Some transport improvement funding also comes from the private sector through urban development projects. Currently there is no formal framework for potential land value capture that could support infrastructure delivery. Some local authorities do have a community infrastructure levy though, which is a fixed amount which developers contribute towards specific infrastructure – e.g. transportation or education sectors.

To which extent does participation play a role?

One of the key principles in the "streets for all" strategy is to engage people from an early stage and throughout the whole planning process. For example, within our **RiConnect** Action Planning Network in **Oldham** in Greater Manchester, we are working with stakeholders including public representatives, politicians and local authority officers, taking them all on this journey. For example, we undertook some corridor studies where we engaged with stakeholders to test the approach using interviews, co-creation and sketching up ideas with the help of a local artist.

What are usual difficulties and challenges in the transformation of streets and mobility initiatives?

The key challenge is that we have a quite constrained urban environment with narrow streets. Often, there won't be enough space to accommodate all mobility needs, those of active travel, public transport and motorised vehicles, at least, not simultaneously. One of the challenges is to keep the balance between some of these needs and the required objectives. Sometimes it will be a choice we need to make: how we collaborate and work collectively to get high quality infrastructure in limited space. Another challenge is the high car dependency within the polycentric structure of Greater Manchester, which increases as you move away from the dense core.

"within our RiConnect Action Planning Network in Oldham in Greater Manchester, we are working with stakeholders including public representatives, politicians and local authority officers, taking them all on this journey."

Proposed Plan Layout

KEY

🟨	Pedestrian Realm
⬜	Carriageway

1. New Public Square Extension
2. New Pocket Park
3. Widened Pavement - right turn only
4. Tactical Street Tree Planting
5. Optimised Junction with Pedestrian Crossings
6. One Way Carriageway
7. Bus and Cycle Only Access
8. Improved Bus Stop Environment
9. Minor Improvement
10. Shop Frontage Improvements
11. Pop-Up Stalls
12. Cycle Hub
13. Street Furniture

How about knowledge exchange, do you get inspiration from other cities? Which ones are important for you to learn from?

We are always looking at what different cities and places within the UK, Europe and around the world are doing. We were particularly interested and learnt a lot from the healthy streets agenda in London. It also helps working with European partners and organisations, especially those focusing on Metropolitan Areas, an example being the URBACT RiConnect Network.

What are your ambitions for the next five years?

As part of delviering our Bee Network commitments we are keen to focus on our participatory approaches, as we learnt this helps building consensus and delviery of strong schemes. By delivering the right proposals, we can learn for future projects, and secure future funding as well. But above all, continue to support behavioural change as part of the Bee Network[1] and maximise the benefits for society as quickly as we can. 🟡

Through the Integrated Action Plan of Transport of Greater Manchester a program for public space improvement in the City of Oldham was developed Source: TfGM

1. https://beeactive.tfgm.com/bee-network-vision/

Krakow metropolis
Interview with Daniel Wrzoszczyk and Paweł Guzek

Daniel Wrzoszczyk
Executive Director at the Krakow
Metropolis Association - KMA (PL)

RiConnect
Action Planning Network
On November 14th 2022

Paweł Guzek
Coordinator at the Krakow
Metropolis Association - KMA (PL)

Please describe the main challenges that you faced in terms of sustainable urban mobility in the city of Krakow and the metropolitan area?

Daniel: The Krakow Metropolitan Agency is not a formal institution, but a metropolitan association, which is not created in the framework of our national Polish law. One big challenge concerns the variety of authorities, having 15 municipalities responsible for an organised mobility system. This makes it hard to find common ground and establish shared goals. It requires a lot of coordination to establish collaboration and achieve compromises. There's also a big problem of car-dependency in our area, causing congestion and delays. The suburbanisation process also adds on to this and creates new challenges concerning interconnectivity. Funding is an issue, especially now with the inflation, which unfortunately leads us to think about raising prices for public transport users, for example.

What's the vision you developed for the metropolitan area with the park and ride (P&R) that was implemented in the region?

Paweł: The process was originally stimulated by integrated territorial investments from the European Commission. This led the city of Krakow to invest in infrastructure to meet the challenges of congestion. The main idea was to create a P&R system in the region, in connection with fast agglomeration railway, the tramway stops or the bus stations in the municipalities from the metropolitan area. We believe that these interventions, especially P&R connected with fast agglomeation railway as a backbone of our mobility system in the functional area, becomes the impulse for further development.

This is only one element of the bigger vision, of course, with the goal in mind to transform mobility towards public transport and away from individual car dependency. In every P&R project, Bike and Ride facilities are an obligatory element. This is the first level of creating an integrated system, connecting active mobility with the mobility nodes. The second are projects connected with cycle paths that connect with the mobility nodes. We think about the last mile in mobility. The two levels also refer to spatial relations, as there are different circumstances in the city of Krakow compared to its surroundings – e.g. the density of public transportation or cycling networks.

What ideas did you co-create with the municipality of Skawina, from the Krakow metropolitan area and URBACT beneficiary city? Do the mobility projects you work with have an impact at local level?

Daniel: In Skawina, the connection between urban and mobility planning was very visible. We have built the mobility infrastructure of a P+R but we also co-created ideas that take care of the development of the city centre. This was done with a consultation process with local stakeholders. By including passengers as well as residents, we were able to think ahead and create strategies that consider future developments and needs of inhabitants and commuters alike. The creation of the P&R in a brownfield area in Skawina and the reconstruction of the local train station also brought with it an urban transformation. This was clearly visible over the years: where there once was an empty – and sometimes scary – train station, we now have a café and a public library. It's now a lively and cultural place that people appreciate visiting.

Workshop – KMA

What about challenges and difficulties in the implementation of such projects in the metropolitan area?

Paweł: The variety of different scales, levels of infrastructure and specific needs of the municipalities is a big challenge when it comes to explaining our aims and maintaining a stringent narrative. Therefore, first we need to build a common understanding of the problem at a wider level. And, if you want to build a common understanding, you need the data and you must show the bigger picture from a metropolitan scale. If all the municipalities that have a railway would build a P&R, for example, we could see an effect in Krakow, too, with less congestion and less traffic in the surrounding areas and the city centre.

"Our main vision is to create an infrastructure that makes the mobility shift easier for people."

What is your long-term vision for the Krakow metropolitan area?

Daniel: We would like to see full public transport and empty streets with no or fewer cars. And we would love to see that people believe and rely on public transport and see the possibilities that come with mobility as a service. To achieve that, we need to progress and continue our development with those elements that are structuring the mobility of our region. So first of all, the progress of our P&R system should be fully connected with cycle paths and other means of public transport.

Also, when it comes to solutions for our passengers, for example, the integrated ticket price for the region – or a combined organised transport of the city and the municipalities by trains, buses, and trams. In general, we wish for less car dependency, not only in Krakow, but all over Europe. We are talking about the future of our environment and climate in general. In the next five, ten years, it can be too late to react if we don't start now. ●

KMA developed a smart growth scenario for the city of Skavina in the Metropolitan Area of Krakow
Source: KMA
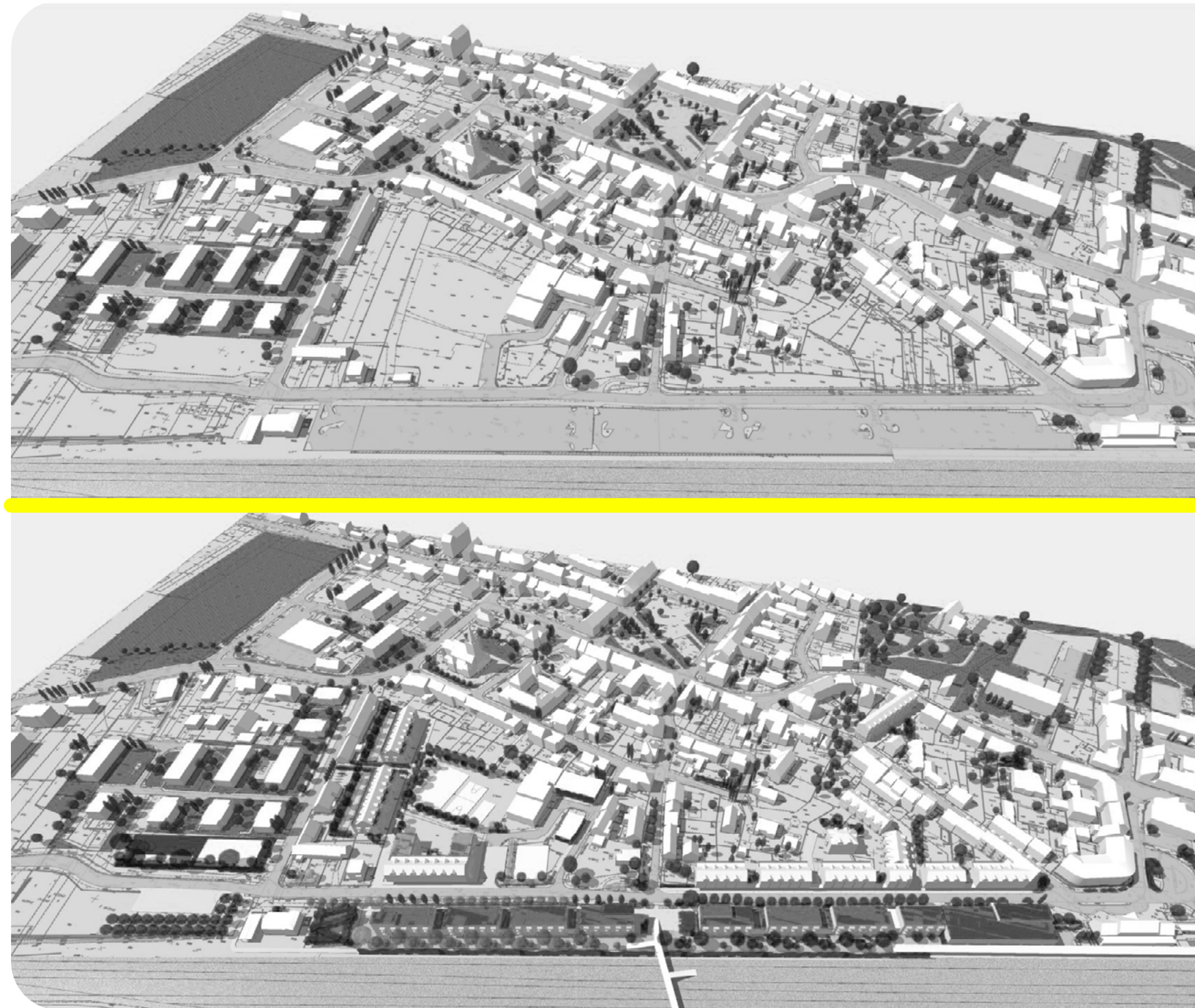
Parma

Interview with Patrizia Marani

Patrizia Marani
Senior Project Manager, European projects - Parma (IT)

Thriving Streets
Action Planning Network
On November 24th, 2022

Tell me about your city. What's the city's background and what are the main challenges you face when it comes to urban mobility and public space use?

Parma is a typical Italian medium-sized city, located in the Po valley. It's dense with a traditional city centre and narrow streets, which were not originally designed for car traffic. On the one hand, it's a really nice place to be with historic buildings, beautiful landscape and a strong identity. On the other hand, we certainly have our own set of problems. The most pressing is poor air quality: **the Po valley is one of the most polluted areas in Europe due to the combination of its geographical position, strong industrial activity, density, and the extensive use of motorised vehicles**. While our city centre is a limited access zone, the share of walking, cycling and the use of public transport is quite high and is slowly increasing. Nevertheless, **Parma is still a very car-oriented city**, with all its negative implications. We also experience conflicts in the use of public spaces, not just between cars and people, but also between different groups of residents. Finally, Parma – just like many other cities – **suffers from the closing of shops in the city centre**, due to the combined effect of shopping centres located in the outskirts and the increasing role of e-commerce.

Most of these challenges are very similar to the ones many other cities face. What has Parma done and plans to do to address those challenges?

The city has been aware of these challenges and working a lot to better understand the specific problems and identify the possible solutions. Parma is one of the early signatories of the Covenant of Mayors, the city has a sustainable energy and climate action plan (SECAP) and was one of the first cities in Italy having a sustainable urban mobility plan (SUMP). Most recently, we have been selected as one of the 100 climate neutral cities. We even applied for the green city award. While we did not win, the thorough and detailed evaluation has provided us with invaluable insights.

Parma has accomplished a range of significant improvements in the past couple of years, including the **extension and improvement of its cycling network**, as well as of micro-mobility and sharing systems – e.g. bike, car, e-scooter. **Public transport has also been developed and the city centre has been designated a limited access zone**. Other successful initiatives include the network of mobility managers, coordinated by the local authority or the bike-to-work programme.

We had local elections in June this year, and sustainable urban **mobility remained a top priority for our council**. The city's mobility strategy has not changed significantly - we still pursue the plan to improve sustainability, livability, and security in Parma. An important goal is to **turn the area within the ring-road into a low-emission zone**. That's a major change, also involving the improvement of multimodality and parking management, the expansion of the cycling network in the city and in the suburbs and the introduction of incentives for public transport. The new vice mayor, who's responsible for mobility, is committed to extending the Tempo30 zone to all neighbourhoods and continuing pedestrianisation in the inner city. The city also keeps on changing the allocation of public spaces and introducing traffic-calming measures around schools, using the school-street approach.

It's clear that you have a range of strategic documents, plans. Do these strategies really reflect a common vision?

When it comes to making Parma more livable and improving the quality of life of residents by reducing car traffic and implementing a shift towards active mobility, there's clearly a **strong political commitment** in place. Most members of the city council understand the need for transformation and support the relevant interventions. And, if prior experience is any indication, we can say that our city council is willing to push changes even when there are different views from certain groups of the residents.

The area where we can still improve and do more is the engagement of citizens. While the city used a participatory approach when preparing the strategies mentioned above, there is still a long way to go to ensure more active involvement of all residents – not just in the planning stage, but also in the implementation of actions. However, the new mayor is really committed to significantly strengthening citizen participation. So, the various innovative participative methods that we learnt through our URBACT Networks will be really useful. In Thriving Streets, for instance, we successfully used gamification to raise awareness and to better mobilise school-children and their families to choose active mobility.

Do you have up-to-date thematic knowledge in place at the local authority?

The city of Parma is very fortunate: we have professionals in all relevant departments with extensive knowledge and experience. Numerous young people have been recruited recently and they are a good source of ambition and innovative new ideas. Also, it's important to keep the knowledge up to date, for this matter the regional and national governments are of great help. **We learn a lot from our peers, too – other Italian cities share their experiences through various platforms** – mainly through the thematic working groups of the National Association of Italian Cities. Finally, we also learn from **the various European**

"In Thriving Streets, for instance, we successfully used gamification to raise awareness and to better mobilise school-children and their families to choose active mobility."

networks – like the Covenant of Mayors, Civitas, Energy Cities – and our own transnational cooperation projects financed by URBACT, INTERREG and Horizon 2020. These are **also great sources of inspiration and innovation. Where we need improvement is the more effective dissemination of this knowledge within the organisation.**

What's also important to mention is that, in order to address mobility and public space challenges, an integrated approach is needed. From this perspective it's really helpful that we have a new leadership that's pushing for a better integration of departments and strategies.

What about human resources, capacity and financial resources?

In most cases, capacity per se is not a problem. However, the challenge is that significant capacities are needed to deal with small, less strategic – albeit important – tasks like, for instance, evaluating and issuing permits to enter the limited access zone in the city centre. This leaves very limited time for developing creative solutions.

In urban development, money is never enough, especially when it comes to transforming transport infrastructure and public spaces. Having said that, Parma has been traditionally quite successful in obtaining regional, national and European funds. **The lack of money has rarely been a major obstacle to implementing changes**. Most recently, the European Commission's Reconstruction and Resilience Facility (RRF) has been instrumental in developing our active mobility infrastructure and public space improvement projects in the city.

Speaking about funding, it's also important to highlight the role that **grants can – potentially – play in orienting cities' actions towards important goals like more sustainable urban mobility**. Requiring the widening of sidewalks or the addition of protected bike lanes or not allowing the addition of new car lanes, as a condition of funding, when a city street is redeveloped, for instance, could be more effective than simply recommending the application of certain general principles. ⬤

Parma, Oltretorrente neighbourhood – Consultation in the street

Nova Gorica

Interview with Aleksandra Torbica and Natasa Kolenc

Aleksandra Torbica
Investment Department,
Municipality of Nova Gorica (SI)

Natasa Kolenc
Development Office,
Municipality of Nova Gorica (SI)

Thriving Streets
Action Planning Network
On November 14th 2022

Can you tell us a few words about Nova Gorica?

Aleksandra: Nova Gorica is a **cross-border town, located at the border between Slovenia and Italy**. After WWII, the area was split into 2 parts: Gorizia in Italy and what, later, became Nova Gorica in Slovenia. While Gorizia has an old town, most of Nova Gorica was newly built after the war, hence the dominance of modernist architecture. However, thanks to its history and location, **the city still exhibits a distinct mediterranean vibe**. The urban core has approximately 19 000 inhabitants, but the cross-border urban area has as many as 60 000 residents.

What are the main challenges regarding public spaces and sustainable urban mobility in your city?

Aleksandra: When speaking about public spaces, we need to differentiate between the old settlement and the newly built neighbourhoods of the city. **In the old parts the main challenge is to reclaim and regenerate public spaces now almost totally occupied by cars** –moving and stationary – displacing other important functions. The "new town", however, was built as a modern city, **designed for cars from the ground up, with wide roads, abundant parking places**. The challenge, therefore, is to transform a city designed for cars and turn it into a city for people. Unlike many other cities, though, we don't have that collective memory of a more human place we can refer to. There's hope however, a major street was pedestrianised and parking places were eliminated as early as in the nineties. If it was possible then, at the height of car dominance, it should definitely be possible now.

Natasa: But it is still difficult. We have an **extremely strong car culture**, people want to use their car wherever they go, and want to keep the car as close to their residence – or their destination – as possible. This endangers green spaces and creates conflicts especially in older parts, which have originally not been designed for cars. On the other hand, the **nice climate offers great potential for active mobility.**

How about your city leaders? Is there a political will to transform your city into a more human place?

Aleksandra: The **"strategic intention" is there**. Politicians understand the need for a greener city, better public spaces, less car-oriented mobility and even communicate this vision. However, **when it comes to translating this vision into practical measures**, interventions that are often unpopular and involve taking away certain privileges and rights of the residents, political calculation and the fear from negative reactions often interfere.

Natasa: When decisions are needed, investment projects need to be approved – that is the moment of truth and unfortunately politicians often back off if they sense opposition.

Aleksandra: Also, there is a **knowledge and understanding deficit**, sorry to say. Politicians understand the need for more sustainable urban mobility and better public spaces. Yet, they **don't see the more indirect, longer term benefits, like for instance improved public health, stronger communities**. In fact, sometimes they don't seem to be aware of even basic economic realities or simply ignore them, like the astronomical investment and maintenance costs associated with building and providing free parking places and wide roads. On top of that, many of them simply don't even want to hear these uncomfortable facts.

Natasa: Seeing the example of other cities would be important. Before our study visit to Pontevedra (ES), even I was sceptical. I was totally convinced that Nova Gorica needed to change, but I also thought that those changes would require time, and that we were not ready yet. Then came our Thriving Streets study visit to Pontevedra and it made me realise that change can actually happen! It requires commitment and dedication, but there is no need to wait for an indefinite amount of time, until the city is "better prepared". Imagine, if I was sceptical – what do we expect from decision-makers who have less information, experience, and knowledge?

This brings me to the issue of having a shared vision and strategy. Do you have those? In what documents are the vision and strategy manifested?

Aleksandra: The Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) was prepared and approved by the City Council back **in 2017**, clearly articulating our vision, strategy and key projects. Some of those projects have already been implemented, like the cycling paths and regeneration of certain public spaces, the rest is yet to be done. The city's **parking policy is being prepared now**, it's a difficult process that is full of confrontations. Especially when it comes to residential parking. At the moment, we have an abundance of free public parking in residential areas, but this cannot be maintained forever.

Whether or not what is manifested in these documents is a **shared** vision and strategy, that is an entirely different question. Politicians definitely know the content, but most of them – very pragmatically – try to pick and implement the interventions that they believe to generate less conflicts, are more popular, or at least less unpopular, and postpone the harder stuff to the remote future.

"To have a meaningful dialogue with people, they need to have at least a basic level of understanding. Otherwise, the conversation will be controlled by emotions and particular interests"

And let's not forget about the **role the national or regional governments – or even the European Union – can play in orienting cities towards the right direction**. Honestly, I am grateful to our government for demanding the preparation of a SUMP and then only financing projects that are in line with this plan. This is a very powerful instrument to positively influence and steer local actions and gently push local politicians to take decisions they would otherwise keep postponing and avoiding.

When it comes to changes that directly affect people's everyday life, participatory approach is crucial. What are your experiences?

Natasa: Participatory approach is vital. It's a difficult and time consuming aspect, but you still have to do it – and **do it from the very beginning**. If you honestly share your plans, facts and arguments, **it helps to build trust**. This is something that cannot be done at a later stage.

Aleksandra: Another important thing to keep in mind that using a **participatory approach does not equal marketing**. It's not about selling your ideas and narrative. It's about having a dialogue that sometimes leads to outcomes, which are quite different from what you envisage at the beginning. Take the **example of the Solkan neighbourhood**, where we implemented our Small Scale Action in Thriving Streets. There is this beautiful small square in the old neighbourhood, in front of a church, potentially a great place for people to hang around, meet, and enjoy themselves. This place today is completely occupied by cars and useless for other functions.

The idea was to reorganise the square and create a real community space by repositioning some of the parking places. We started a dialogue with the people in the area, and many welcomed the temporary changes we introduced. In the end, however, the opposers – e.g. residents and church-goers who insisted on parking right in front of their house or the church – were the loudest and the original state in the square was restored. One may say that the participative process has not been successful, as we did not reach a consensus or a solution that was acceptable for the majority.

Looking back, however, it was a really valuable lesson in terms of the information we received, the issues we understood, the trust we built. Even the relationship improved between the residents, the administration and decision-makers. And we don't give up, we will continue.

Great example and learnings. Finally, let's speak a bit about the importance of knowledge and expertise. Do you think you have the necessary knowledge within the municipality? What do you do to keep up-to-date and follow the latest innovative ideas and solutions?

Aleksandra: I believe that we have the necessary knowledge in place. It all started more than **20 years ago, when we had a colleague who was really committed to sustainable urban mobility** - definitely not a mainstream topic back then, at least in this part of Europe. She was a **real champion, pushing the agenda and promoting the topic in the various departments** - so we have a history of dealing with the issue. Fortunately, we also have a **very good national knowledge sharing structure**: the Institute for Spatial Policies (IPOP), which works hard to facilitate the exchange of experience between cities and to disseminate good practices and innovative solutions. **Transnational knowledge sharing initiatives**, projects, just like the URBACT Network Thriving Streets, also play a fundamental role, as they gently **force cities to take the next steps**.

Overall, I can say that we have a good level of knowledge for a municipality of this size. **Where we still have a lot to do is the dissemination of at least part of this knowledge among the other relevant departments**. For instance, there is the department responsible for the maintenance of streets, but they don't intend to implement more innovative measures. They keep doing the same old things in the same old way.

Another area where we need improvement is the knowledge of residents. To have a meaningful dialogue with people, they need to have at least a basic level of understanding. Otherwise, the conversation will be controlled by emotions and particular interests. So, **awareness raising and even education of the people is also crucial** – our local Sustainable Mobility Centre (CTM)[1] supports that process. 🟡

1. https://turizem-novagorica-vipavskadolina.si/en/sustainable-mobility-centre/

Temporary intervention in the Solkan neighbourhood - "sacrificing" parking places to create a space for the local community

Action Planning Network's partners

RiConnect

Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona (ES)
Stowarzyszenie Metropolia Krakowska (PL)
Anaptyxiaki Meizonos Astikis Thessalonikis (EL)
Métropole du Grand Paris (FR)
Obszar Metropolitalny Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot (PL)
Área Metropolitana do Porto (PT)
Transport for Greater Manchester (UK)
Vervoerregio Amsterdam (NL)

urbact.eu/riconnect
riconnect@amb.cat

Thriving Streets

Parma (IT)
Antwerp (BE)
Igoumenitsa (EL)
Nova Gorica (SI)
Klaipèda (LT)
Radom (PL)
Oradea (RO)
Santo Tirso (PT)
Debrecen (HU)
London Borough of Southwark (UK)

urbact.eu/thriving-streets
p.marani@comune.parma.it

Space4People

Bielefeld (DE)
Valga (EE)
Panevèžys (LT)
Serres (EL)
Arad (RO)
Nazaré (PT)
Guía de Isora (ES)
Turku (FI)
Saint-Germain-en-Laye (FR)

urbact.eu/space4people
olaf.lewald@bielefeld.de

Walk'n'Roll community

People who took active part at any of our W'n'R webinars and seminars.
Dani Alsina, Oriol Barba, Mikel Berra-Sandín, Marie-Luise Colditz, Donia Dumitrescu, Julita Ewert-Stawowy, Tiago Lopes Farias, Albert Gassull, Angela Gori, Loles Herrero, Pedro Homem de Gouveia, Marc Iglesias, Daan Janssens, Nataša Kolenc, Neda Kostandinovic, Paul Lecroart, Olaf Lewald, Patrizia Marani, Noemí Martínez, Kristof De Mesmaeker, Ariadna Miquel, Anton Nikitin, Judith Recio, Ana Poças Ribeiro, Jørn Roar Moe, Carlos Moreno, Ana Maria Motoc, Xavier Nogués, Maite Pérez, Robert Pressl, Marta Rofin, Irina Rotaru, Mina Sanatgar, Daniel Serra, Bernardo de Sola, Reinhold Stadler, Paraskevi Tarani, Lise-Adélaïde Thomas, Xavi Tiana, Jiri Tintera, Isabel Tomé, Aleksandra Torbica, Elsie Wraighte.

urbact.eu/knowledge-hub