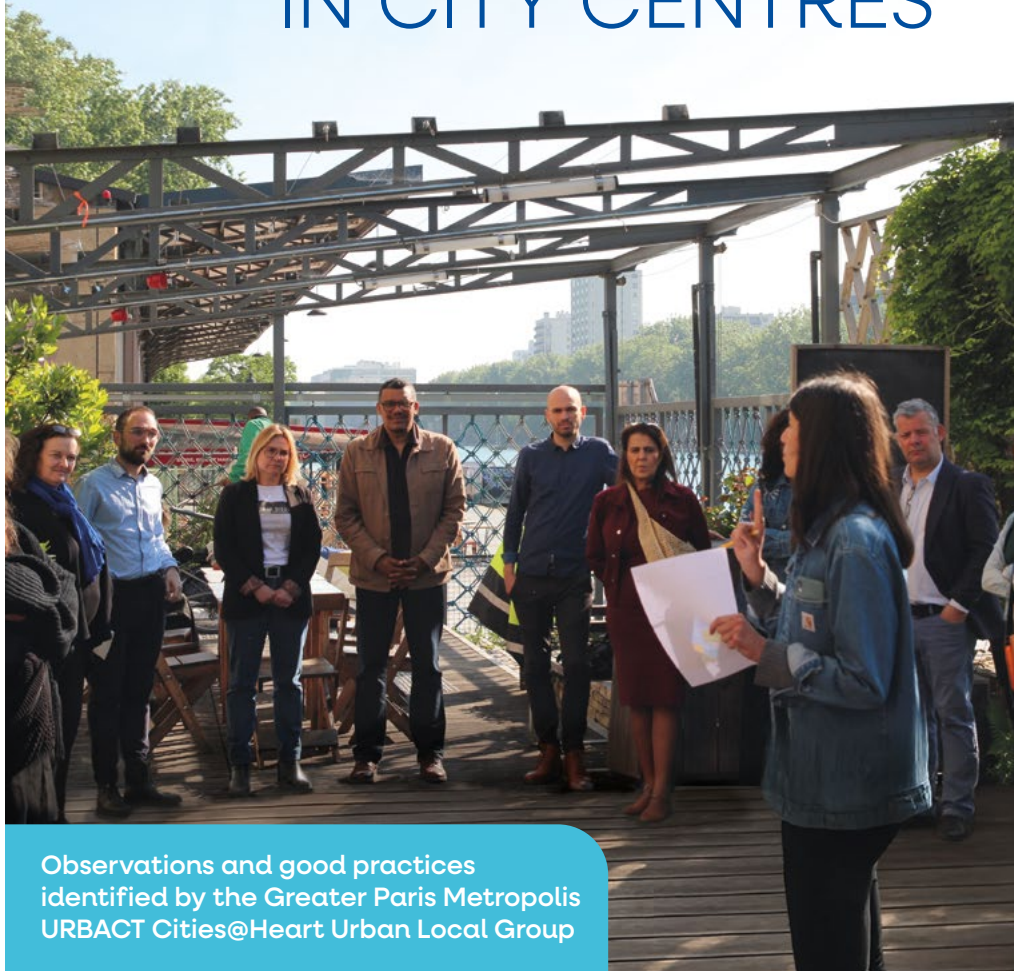




**Métropole
du Grand Paris**

CITIES@HEART
TOWARDS A BALANCED CITY CENTRE

MAKING SPACE FOR CITIZEN DIALOGUE IN CITY CENTRES



Observations and good practices
identified by the Greater Paris Metropolis
URBACT Cities@Heart Urban Local Group

URBACT



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Interreg

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INTRODUCTION



♥ The Lively Downtowns programme

In 2018, under the presidency and initiative of Patrick Ollier and alongside its mayors, the Greater Paris Metropolis made a commitment to revitalising urban centres by creating the Lively Downtowns programme. Since its creation, this program has supported 105 municipalities and offered 91 grants through its dedicated fund, FIMACS (Metropolitan Intervention Fund to support Crafts, Commerce and Services), for a total amount of 35 million euros.

To better evaluate their city centre revitalisation programme and define a dissemination strategy that could be transposed to other urban contexts, including those outside its boundaries, the Greater Paris Metropolis decided to initiate a dialogue with its European counterparts. In 2023, Metropolis became Lead Partner of the URBACT network Cities@Heart.¹ This document presents the context of the network and how participating in the URBACT programme over the course of 30 months allowed the Metropolis to improve its understanding of citizen dialogue in city centres.

¹ Presentation of the URBACT IV Cities@Heart action planning network



The Cities@Heart network in Granada (ES) for a transnational meeting © La Ampliadora

The URBACT programme

Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the URBACT programme encourages collaboration between European urban areas with the goal of proposing integrated solutions to address urban challenges. Cities or urban authorities with different sizes and diverse urban contexts work together for a period of 30 months to develop their understanding of the urban issue at hand and to propose an integrated action plan that addresses the specificities of their local context.

About the Cities@Heart network

The project brings together ten European urban authorities with differing contexts, but a common goal: to promote balanced and inclusive city centres for all users. With relevant indicators and a common strategy, this network aims to create a shared toolbox and methodology for city centres in Europe. City centre management requires transversal skills. As such, governance, participatory democracy, data management, and evaluation tools are some of the many topics addressed by the network's reflections and reports. In close collaboration with local stakeholders working with member partners, the objective of Cities@Heart is to develop tools that promote happy, healthy, and harmonious city centres. Coordinated by the Greater Paris Metropolis as Lead Partner, the publication of the network's final deliverable will be coordinated with the release of this locally focused deliverable and offer a more comprehensive view of city centre policies today and the levers cities have at their disposal.

Cities@Heart is supported by the Greater Paris Metropolis in the role of Lead Partner and brings together nine other project partners:

- Associação de Municípios de Fins Específicos Pentágono Urbano (Portugal)
- Municipality of Cesena (Italy)
- Municipality of Fleurus (Belgium)
- Granada City Council (Spain)
- Municipality of Celje (Slovenia)
- Kraków Metropolis Association (Poland)
- AMFIKYONIES Developmental Organisation S.A. (Greece)
- City of Osijek (Croatia)
- City Council of Sligo, Sligo BID (Ireland)

The Urban Local Group of the Cities@Heart network

At the time of the project's launch, the Metropolis formed a working group—in URBACT terminology, an Urban Local Group (ULG)—to discuss the evaluation and improvement of public policies in city centres. Composed of city centre managers, Metropolis partners (Apar, Paris Region Institute, Centres-Villes en Mouvement) and associated experts, this group had the opportunity of exploring the topic of citizen dialogue in city centre revitalisation projects. Within the Metropolis, the contributing members include the staff of the Proximity Economy Department, the secretariat of the Greater Paris Metropolis Development Council, a participatory entity, and the Citizen Relations Project Manager. Additional Metropolis officials contributed to the group's discussions on an ad hoc basis with presentations on the following topics: artificial intelligence, online participatory platforms or participative actions in housing policy. This text represents the conclusion of discussions, surveys, workshops and field visits conducted within the framework of the Cities@Heart working group, since the network's creation in June 2023.

WHY **FOCUS ON** **CITIZEN DIALOGUE** **IN CITY CENTRES?**





Cities@Heart Meeting in Granada © La Ampliadora

♥ An integrated strategy at the heart of the URBACT methodology

The URBACT method² promotes integrated policies. Integration must be sectoral, horizontal, vertical, and territorial, with the mobilization of investments in infrastructure (hard investments) and social cohesion (soft investments). Focusing on citizen dialogue provides an opportunity for the Lively Downtowns programme to achieve better integration. Involving citizens and stakeholders in city centre projects is a necessary step in building a sustainable strategy that is coherent for all stakeholders.

² The URBACT method



♥ Evaluate the Lively Downtowns program

With the launch of the third edition of the Lively Downtowns programme in 2025, the Metropolis enacted a transformation of the policy framework to maximize its impact. Created in 2018, the program had reached a certain level of maturity, offering a range of technical tools to communities: the Île-de-France Chamber of Commerce Observatory, pedestrian counting with MyTraffic, legal service, etc. However, the project team observed a lack of feedback or indicators in relation to citizen opinion. Proposing recommendations for improving citizen dialogue in city centres is one step towards better monitoring and evaluation of the actions undertaken by municipalities to promote the revitalization of their city centres and shopping districts.

♥ Promoting quality of life and inclusion in the city

Improved citizen dialogue in city centres represents an essential lever for meeting multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined by the UN, in particular:

- **SDG 3: Good health and well-being**
- **SDG 5: Gender Equality**
- **SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure**
- **SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities**

These strategic objectives are central to national and European ambitions and aim to build a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable society. A balanced and welcoming city centre contributes to fostering a more dynamic and connected city. Engaging and mobilising citizens promotes the inclusion of all stakeholders in the city centre. This includes retailers who are also stakeholders in the city centre and can provide stimulation to local economies for more resilience and positive growth.

³ The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



The 17 Sustainable Development Goals³



A study on the social value of city centres conducted by the British urban agency We Made That and LSE Cities for the Mayor of London highlights a key observation “high streets are meeting places and promote exchanges between citizens and cultures. 45% of users surveyed mainly used high streets without a direct link to retail, which demonstrates the importance that [London] users place on the social interactions they allow.”

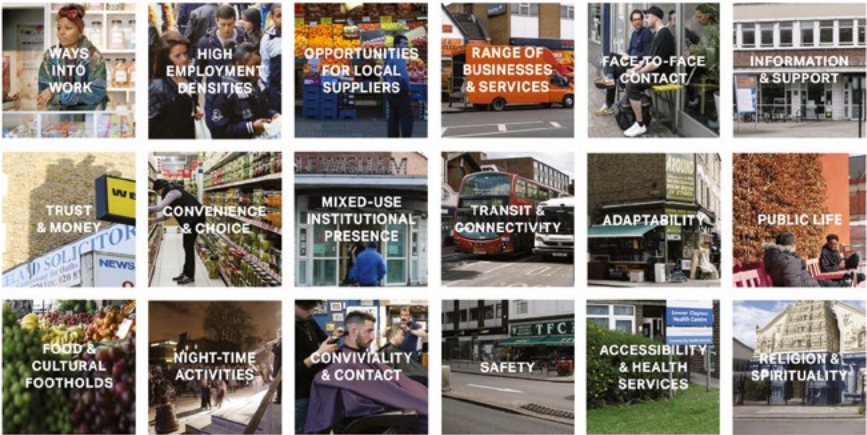
This study highlights the fundamental role of city centres as spaces for collective living. It also underlines the importance of involving citizens and stakeholders in the development of urban projects, to design more vibrant, shared central areas that are adapted to the real needs of residents.

Likewise, the exchanges that take place around city centre businesses are a foundation of social life. Shopkeepers play an essential role in offering residents local services, personalised advice, and regular human contact. Their presence helps strengthen social ties and enliven public spaces.

⁴ We Made That and LSE Cities, for the Mayor of London



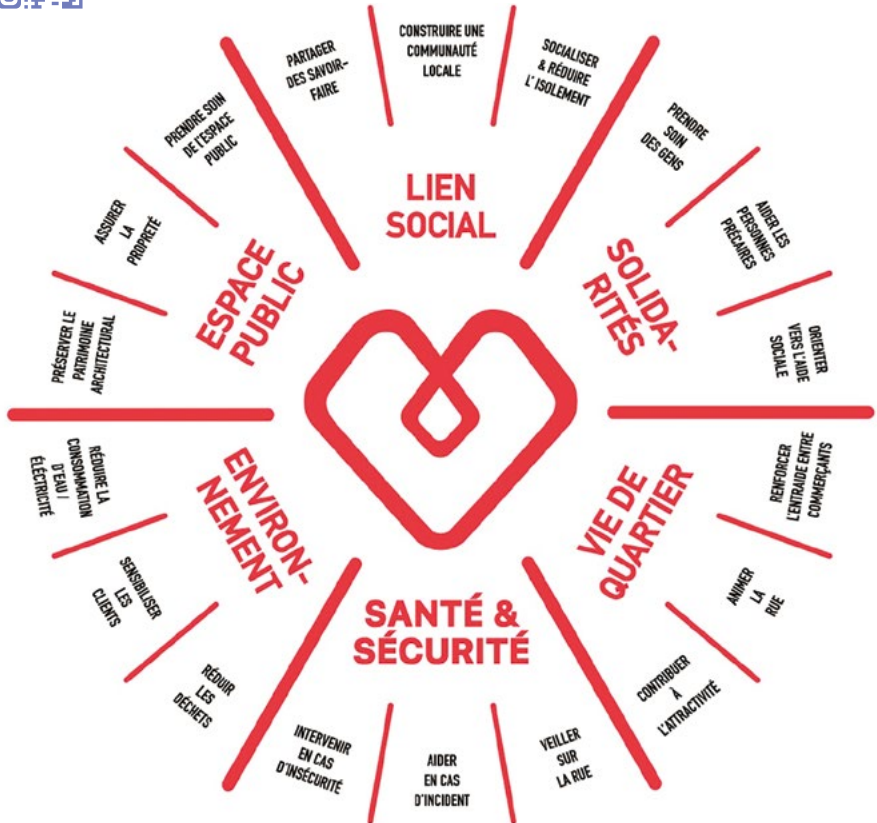
Opportunities for local businesses, conviviality, security, living together: the social contribution of city centres, We Made That and LSE Cities, for the Mayor of London⁴



Wheel of the social and environmental effects of small businesses⁵



⁵ The Dataactivist study to discover the real value of local businesses



Beyond their economic role, retailers can also play a role in urban inclusivity. For example, the Parisian Small Businesses “Family Choice” label promotes child-friendly establishments, in response to certain trends aimed at restricting their presence in private spaces. This type of initiative helps to make the city centre a space open to everyone, regardless of age or specific needs.

⁶ Launch of the “Family Choice” label

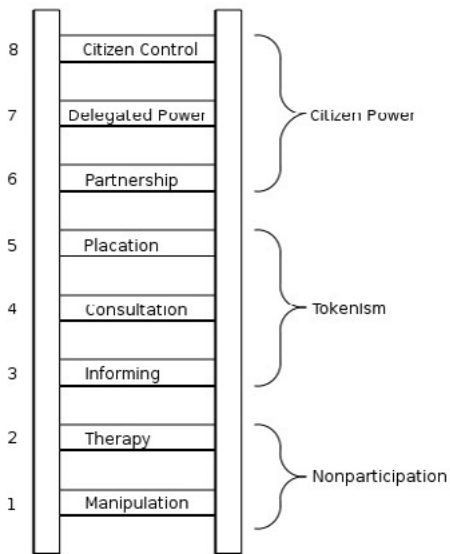


HOW TO DEFINE CITIZEN DIALOGUE IN THE CITY CENTRE?



Umarell, experimenting with the reappropriation of the public space by children, "Making Place" Project, Pantin, 2024. © Rudy Ouazenne for the City of Pantin

Sherry Arnstein's
Citizen Participation Scale ⁷



⁷ Article "A Ladder of Citizen Participation"



Each urban context is unique, and therefore, each approach to citizen dialogue must be adapted to local realities. Sociologist Sherry Arnstein has proposed a scale of participation that classifies the different levels of citizen involvement in projects, ranging from consultation to co-construction. This visual representation of her methodology highlights the issues of power and legitimacy inherent in any participatory processes.

The objective of this text is not to prescribe a single methodology for citizen dialogue applicable to all contexts or to claim to provide a complete manual with all the tools of participatory methodology, but rather to promote better integration of stakeholders in city centre projects, specifically within the Greater Paris Metropolis. The aim is to share advice with city centre managers so that they can adapt their participatory approaches to the specificities of their place, all while drawing inspiration from good practices identified at the Metropolitan and European levels. This written text represents a documentation of the discussions on the subject within the local context of the Greater Paris Metropolis and lays the ground-work for the creation of a new set of policies to enrich the Lively Downtowns program.

♥ The city centre manager at the heart of the social and economic developments of their city

The profession of business manager or city center manager⁸ embodies versatility and multidisciplinary skills by its very nature. The profession originated in Belgium in the 2000s and with the support of the Banque des Territoires, is now an essential position in city administrations across France. City centre or commerce managers act as a liaison between the local government and private stakeholders. The role of a city centre manager is akin to that of a Regeneration Officer in the national Irish programme, Town Centre First⁸.

Although managing a citizen dialogue strategy is not at the heart of the city centre manager job description, the manager plays a key role in coordinating local stakeholders and implementing collaborative projects. With an awareness of the time constraints and responsibilities of the city centre manager position, this text proposes a selection of practical resources for managers wishing to strengthen their ability to lead participatory processes. These tools, primarily in the resources section, include exercises, meeting facilitation techniques, and methodological diagrams for effectively creating connection and structuring dialogue with citizens and stakeholders.

⁸ More on the Town Centre First Policy



A participative workshop
with the network Cities@Heart
© La Ampliadora

♥ An action plan co-constructed with city centre managers

To better assess the current situation in Metropolitan city centres at the start of the Cities@Heart network, the ULG conducted a survey on the management of participation in city centres. The questions were developed by the local group coordinator based on feedback from the ULG workshops and aimed at understanding how participation is approached, the most frequently used strategies, and common challenges in Metropolitan cities. The survey enabled the local group to co-create an action plan with the cities and their managers.

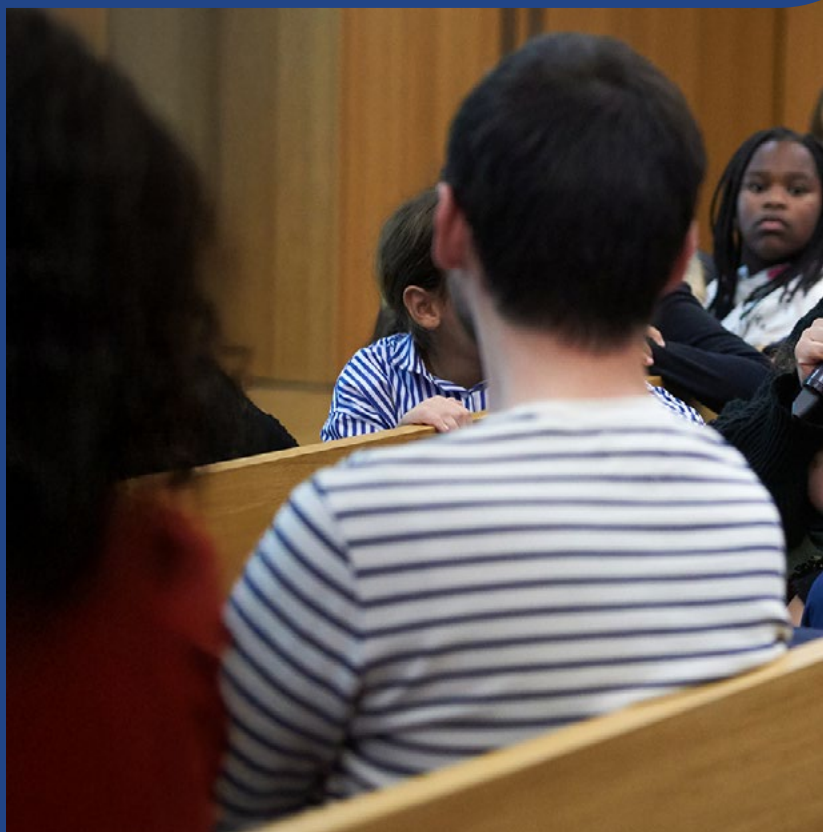
To test this action plan, the Metropolis organized a day of workshops and discussions attended by thirty city centre managers and their counterparts working on participatory democracy. This test event, known as a “small-scale” action, is a key stepping stone of the URBACT Action Planning Network Journey. It allows communities involved in a network to test specific ideas of their action plan in real conditions, generating indicators and increased visibility for their project.

Following the distribution of the participation survey to city centre managers by the ULG, five themes were selected from the responses which compiled the most useful skills or approaches for integrating citizen dialogue. For the small-scale action, a group of expert speakers led five workshops on these topics: stakeholder engagement, drafting surveys, sensitive walks, experimentation in public spaces, and project evaluation. The following portion of this document will focus on each one of these subject areas, providing key takeaways and best practices from cities in the Greater Paris Metropolis and across Europe.



⁹ Small scale actions: an URBACT innovation allowing cities to experiment with new solutions in their local context.

INCREASING INVOLVEMENT OF RESIDENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN CITY CENTRE REVITALISATION PROJECTS



Final presentation of Connecting, an action-based study in the Plaine Saint-Denis neighbourhood for Plaine commune, coordinated by Cuesta + GONGLE © Christophe Fillieule



5 KEYS APPROACHES

♥ 1. Engaging stakeholders

When discussing the pitfalls of participatory projects, we've all heard the familiar critique: "it's always the same people who attend meetings." How do we go further and mobilise those who don't regularly participate in the consultation process? How can we empower people to speak up and share their opinions?

Cuesta, a cultural urbanism cooperative, shares their advice for mobilising stakeholders:

Form stakeholder groups

The municipality proposes to transform a shopping street in the city centre. Who uses this street daily? At what time? What businesses or services are located within the area?

Start by identifying all stakeholders affected by the new project.

Step towards

Once the stakeholders have been identified, meet them where they shop or work. Consider using mobile and tactical consultation tools, such as a tricycle or a portable stand.

Design simple, user-friendly, creative tools

A card game, simple questions to ask in a street interview format: use entertaining techniques to make participants feel comfortable and facilitate discussion.

collectives, parent-teacher associations, sports and artistic clubs, etc. Propose group exercises to imagine solutions.

Embrace controversy

What are the points of tension surrounding the project? Consider scheduling a time for discussion to facilitate a debate around these topics and build a productive dialogue.

Involve artists

Certain artistic processes can offer a new approach: new formats or different ways of meeting, participating, and acting together.

“ To foster citizen engagement, think of the specific interests of each stakeholder group before acting. ”

Harness the reach of existing organisations

Build moments of collective exchange by drawing on existing

Multiply across mediums

Games, workshops, and experiential walks. Employing different techniques calls upon multiple intelligences and encourages the participation of different stakeholder groups.

Target specific audiences

Customise workshops for each target audience: adolescents, young families, elderly people... What location or workshop format is best suited to your target group?

Offer experiences

Propose a tour of the city centre and discussions with merchants to diversify the expected format of consultation workshops.

Evaluate, get feedback

Establish the framework and indicators to be followed before consultation to assess the impact of the project.

Send updates, keep stakeholders informed

As with public reporting, informing stakeholders of project progress maintains engagement and builds trust.

Key takeaways

- Build on what already exists
- Invite playfulness
- Embrace conviviality



Culture Days in Malakoff, workshop with the youth department organised by Cuesta + Esopa productions ©City of Malakoff



Find
engagement
tools with
the Action
Catalogue





Multilingual consultation

Saint-Denis-Pierrefitte – Greater Paris Metropolis



The city of Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, which became Saint-Denis-Pierrefitte on January 1st, reflects its multicultural identity in its downtown revitalisation projects. Saint-Denis-Pierrefitte is part of Seine-Saint-Denis, a department where more than 177 languages are spoken.¹⁰

During sidewalk surveys to gather residents' opinions, project leaders noticed children translating information for their parents. To make the city centre more welcoming, the city decided to communicate information about upcoming developments through leaflets and signs in French, English, and the most spoken additional languages. Whether it's to overcome a communication barrier or simply to let stakeholders know that their language is recognised, reaching out to residents and offering services in multiple languages promotes engagement and mutual understanding.

Cities@Heart
workshop
on engaging
stakeholders
© Greater Paris
Metropolis

¹⁰ La Seine-
Saint-Denis,
a crossroads
of continents





+AGIL, A Participative Research Project

Barcelona – Spain

Daily physical activity is essential for maintaining good health as we age. Unfortunately, our cities can create barriers to urban mobility for older adults. How can we ensure that urban policies don't leave this population behind?

The +Agil Urban project team began with a literature review to understand the features that had the greatest impact on walkability. They then conducted a survey with 150 participants selected from three health centers across the city. Participants assessed the various features and mapped their usual daily routes to the health center and to do their shopping.

Finally, a smaller group participated in a “World Café” workshop, identifying nuances not yet detected by the research group and engaging in an open discussion about mobility in their neighborhoods. By the end of this process, the city had compiled a list of urban features



important for inclusive mobility and streets that reflected the attributes most valued by the city's older population.

This multi-step approach allowed the research team not only to verify the main features highlighted in the literature, but also to understand how crucial the local context is. It was therefore essential to give participants ample space to share their experiences and perspectives, ultimately leading to the development of an inclusive “urban friendliness” index.¹¹

A workshop for the +Agil Urban project
© trescientosmil

Learn more about the project:



¹¹ +Agil urbà online viewer. The research project was led by the Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili research institute and the Vall d'Hebron Research Institute (VHIR), with the participation of Enrico Porfido, Cynthia Pérez, Pablo Martínez, Beatriz Puértolas-Gracia, Aida Ribera, and Laura Mónica Pérez. The results were published in the journal Sustainability under the title “Assessing Older Adults' Walkability in the Surroundings of Primary Care Centers: A Three-Case Study from Barcelona”. In addition, the maps generated by the study were made available through a public online viewer.

♥ 2. Develop a survey as part of a citizen consultation

Surveys are excellent tools for anticipating trends, establishing an initial assessment or asking for feedback on a new project. Compiled by experts, the OECD¹² and IPSOS Quality of Life¹³ indices provide information about global trends on well-being. But how to draft a survey without being an expert?

6 practical tips from CROCIS (Regional Centre for Observation of Commerce, Industry and Services), the economic observatory of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Paris Ile-de-France:

1. Succinctness

The more words there are, the greater the risk of confusion:

→ aim for an average, 8 words per question. Be careful with questions that are too long, too complex or contain too many connecting words.

2. Simplicity

Questions should be understood by the respondent.

→ Put yourself in their shoes.

3. Uniqueness

A question should only measure one variable.

→ Do not ask several questions in one prompt: prompts should contain only 1 verb and no coordinating conjunctions (But, where, and, therefore, or, nor, because).

4. Specificity

The question must measure what we wish to observe.

Always check that the answer to each question corresponds to a specific objective.
→ Avoid general adverbs (usually, frequently, etc.).

5. Neutrality

Remain impartial and objective in formulating questions.

→ Pay attention to the order of questions; this can influence the respondent.

6. Variety

Use several types of questions (closed, order of preference, etc.) to avoid the monotony of a questionnaire.



¹² OECD Better Life

¹³ Ipsos Happiness Index

How to start drafting a good questionnaire

- Introductory sentence: specify who carries out the survey, the target audience and the objective
- Start with a filter question to better target a particular category of the population
- Funnel Techniques: start with general questions and become increasingly specific
- Group questions by theme or block
- End of the questionnaire: ask engaging questions and provide an information sheet or identification form for possible further contact

Recommendations

- No more than ten requests (questions or prompts)
- Announce the number of requests to complete

Pitfalls to avoid

- Terms that are too technical or too vague
→ adapt the language to the target and in certain contexts, provide a glossary including the definition of “ambiguous” words
- Double negatives
- If there is reference to a time, define this very precisely.
- Questions with obvious answers
- Prescriptive questions
- Leading questions soliciting a positive response

Key takeaways

- Promote simplicity
- Have clear goals and targets
- Adapt the tool to the context



Test the
map-based
survey tool
from PARTIMAP



“ Gathering data aids
decision making. ”



Survey development workshop with
Greater Paris Metropolis city centre
managers. © Greater Paris Metropolis



Build Suresnes Together Platform

Suresnes - Greater Paris Metropolis

Citizen participation is at the heart of downtown revitalization policies in Suresnes. Whether it's urban planning or boosting local commerce, the municipality values resident involvement and communicates regularly about its initiatives. To support this approach, the city has created a dedicated platform called “Je participe”, which serves both as a showcase for ongoing projects and a space for information and public consultation. The site features various surveys launched by the city, along with educational content on participatory processes and the history of the participatory budget.



Local commerce
study in Suresnes
©City of Suresnes

One initiative, The Suresnes Commerce Survey, conducted between October and November 2022, gathered 1,200 contributions. Users shared their shopping habits, preferred modes of transport, and expectations regarding the downtown retail offering. To complement this survey, the city organized a meeting titled “Commerce in Suresnes holds no secrets for Neighborhood Council members!”, which presented the tools available to local governments to support commercial vitality. With freely accessible online documentation, these initiatives provide clear and relevant information, presented transparently. This openness helps build lasting trust between the municipality and its residents, and encourages active participation in local life.

Discover
the Suresnes
project:





Surveys to prepare tactical pedestrianisation actions

Niepołomice - Poland

A member of the Krakow Metropolitan Area, the city of Niepołomice is located approximately 25 kilometres from downtown Krakow. This rapidly growing municipality faces increasing challenges related to road traffic. To calm traffic around a central primary school, and with support from the Krakow Metropolitan Area Metropolitan Authority and the Institute for Regional and Urban Development (IRMiR), the city decided to implement a pedestrianisation experiment based on the principles of tactical urbanism. To prepare for the initiative, IRMiR teams developed several surveys distributed to parents, teachers, and children to identify how students travel to school and to better understand family behaviours. Additionally, they conducted observations of traffic behavior around the school during rush hours. The analysis of this data not only



Students participating in the installation of tactical structures around their school in Niepołomice © Krakow Metropolitan Area

helped technical teams refine the intervention but also fostered dialogue between the municipality and its residents, including the youngest among them. Evaluation surveys conducted after the project revealed a high level of satisfaction among participants, with 80% of adults and 71% of children reporting improved safety around the school.

♥ 3. A living survey in the public space: experiential walking

Why use experiential walking?

The Experiential Walk or marche sensible is an organised urban stroll to gather the feelings, perceptions, uses, desires and expectations that a space inspires. It is a qualitative tool, simple and complementary to other more quantitative methods used to obtain feedback from anyone who uses the city centre (employees, residents, tourists, shop-keepers). The results feed into a field diagnosis and to bring out concrete avenues for action.

“ It’s a way to get to the heart of the matter and understand the little things, the daily life that makes up the city centre. ”

Benefits for city centres

Observe differently

→ Take the time to perceive the atmospheres, the uses, the dysfunctions and the potential.

Promoting the voice of citizens

→ Consider residents as experts in everyday life; enrich the analysis with their feedback.

Create a renewed dialogue

→ Break down the classic top-down stance; encourage active listening.

Identify expectations and points of tension

→ Detect obstacles, measure the acceptability of projects, refine priorities.

Share a common vocabulary

→ Bring out collectively generated ideas; nurture a shared vision of the city centre.

Keys to success

Target different participant profiles

residents (young people, families, elderly people, etc.), shopkeepers, technicians, elected officials, employees, tourists, etc.

Prepare a relevant itinerary

with selected stopping points.

Prioritise small groups

(10 to 15 people) to ensure exchanges.

Use visual aids

(maps, post-its, photos, sketches) to document feedback.

Plan for discussion breaks

at each stage, individually and collectively.

Organise a moment for collective discussion at the end of the sensitive walk, discuss the results that will be produced (diagnosis, workshops, conference), ensure follow-up if necessary.

Key takeaways

- **Conduct workshops** in the field, in situ
- **Give time for exchanges** and informal discussions
- **Use visual tools** to map results



For more information:



The local group of the Cities@Heart network in Charenton-le-Pont © Greater Paris Metropolis



Wishfinding

Amsterdam – Netherlands



@ Stichting
Placemakers

“Wishfinding”, an urban planning strategy from the Netherlands, offers another type of exercise to explore public spaces. The workshop can take place in a public space with very few resources (post-its) or with simple installations of directional signs. Participants write their wishes for the city on post-its or stickers. To give a few examples, a resident might want to write “park” on the entrance to a parking lot or “community cafe” on the door of a vacant business. The exercise allows participants to identify their desires and visions for their city center.

To learn
more:



♥ 4. How to test an idea by experimentation

Public spaces are constantly evolving, which can sometimes make it difficult to anticipate and resolve conflicts of use. Experimentation is a key tool for reinventing city centres: it allows new developments or uses to be tested on a small scale and at minimal cost, whether it involves temporary street furniture, pedestrianization initiatives, or pop-up events.

By tackling major issues through micro actions limited in time and space, it becomes possible to measure real impacts, adjust actions over time, and gradually involve stakeholders such as residents, businesses, and elected officials. An experimental, tactical approach makes it possible to initiate profound changes while controlling risks and costs all while laying the foundations for change that is shared and accepted by all.



Umarell, experiment in the reappropriation of public space by children, "Faire Place" Project, Pantin, 2024.
© Rudy Ouazenne for the City of Pantin

Identify a need or challenge

To initiate an experimental project, it is essential to start with a concrete challenge: imagining new uses or developing existing practices in public spaces.

Rely on the challenges encountered locally (mobility, conviviality, appropriation of space, etc.)

Think about actions that could enrich the urban experience or solve an identified problem.

Surround yourself with allies

Successful experimentation also depends on the mobilisation of partners, both internal and external.

Mobilize the resource services of the municipality and/or the agglomeration: town planning, culture, technical services, etc.

Involve associations, local businesses, residents and any stakeholders who can contribute or provide a useful perspective.

“ Experimentation allows us to address important and complex challenges on a small scale, with few resources and limited risks. We test concretely, we observe, and then we adapt what works. ”

Leverage what already exists

Promoting what already works is an asset for ensuring support, strengthening local roots and facilitating ownership.

Rely on events anchored in the habits of residents

Identify local stakeholders already carrying out inspiring initiatives

Incorporate the city's identity and its traditions, for a coherent and authentic approach.

Key takeaways

- Starting from a challenge
- Find your allies
- Build on what already exists



To learn more:





The city centre is yours

Aubervilliers - Greater Paris Metropolis



To promote the use of soft mobility, the City of Aubervilliers organises awareness days. Among these initiatives is the event “The City Center is Yours”, which offers a temporary calming of public spaces in the downtown area. To prepare for these festive gatherings, Cycloscopies workshops are held in collaboration with Les Poussières collective and the graphic design studio Polysémique. Participants collectively design various creative projects, such as decorative bike covers called “enjoliveurs”, wheel ornaments, and even phenakistiscopes, along with participatory performances. To prepare for the event, workshops on the city of tomorrow are also offered, leading to the creation of visuals that express the residents’ aspirations. These posters are then displayed at various points throughout the city center—bus shelters, streets, building façades—to share these visions with the public.

Thanks to festive scenography and activities accessible to all, the street is transformed for a day into a true playground for young and old alike.

The event The city centre is yours © Tina Teyssedre

To learn more:





The ABC Space

Cesena - Italy



This space was created as an action within the **URBACT III KAIRÓS** project's Integrated Action Plan (IAP), which aimed to re-envision the train station area. Recognized as a strategic gateway to the city, this area was already undergoing significant transformation, including the restoration of an industrial archaeology building and the redevelopment of public spaces. While waiting for the final project to be implemented, a small-scale action of the KAIRÓS project involved students from the three high schools facing the station square. The goal was to collect their wishes, needs, and ideas for this part of the city. Through temporary experimentation, this action sought to encourage a new use of the space, also by promoting various events. The street furniture not only creates a more welcoming entrance to the city center but is also consistently used by students before and after school hours. Currently, as a member of the URBACT IV Cities@Heart network, Cesena is developing a comprehensive strategy to improve the city center's accessibility with a three-pronged approach: **"Arrive, Stay, and Enjoy"**. The city center belongs to everyone, not just residents. For this reason, it is essential that its spaces and activities are easily accessible and reachable for all.

Students enjoy a sunny afternoon at the ABC space in Cesena, Italy. © Greater Paris Metropolis

To go further, read the action plan of the City of Cesena:



♥ 5. Embracing a culture of evaluation

No experimentation without evaluation: this is the approach proposed by the Greater Paris Metropolis and the Paris&Co agency, as part of the Metropolitan Innovation Districts (QMI) program. Since March 2023, 10 innovative metropolitan districts have been deployed and more than 75 solutions have been tested across the metropolitan area, through an “open laboratory” approach.

Evaluation starts on day one. Each step of the process—gathering results, taking stock of the effects of experimentation and testing the initial hypothesis—need to be anticipated. Naturally, expectations and hypotheses will vary. Project teams may wish to test the technical performance of a solution, the administrative or financial feasibility of the solution, or the adoption rate by target users. The same holds true for projects deployed in city centres. Obtaining citizens' opinions on the implementation of projects is part of this evaluation process all throughout the course of the project, during its initial implementation and at its closure.



A workshop with the Metropolitan Innovation Districts Programme © Greater Paris Metropolis

The evaluation methodology proposed by Paris&Co to project leaders integrates citizen dialogue and is based on 4 main key actions:

- **Collection of qualitative results**, through the deployment of user questionnaires and monitoring of the data collected.
- **Adaptation of methods or media** to the target group so that users can give their opinion.
- **Communication of information** (signage, flyers) in a way that is easily accessible to users, physically close to the deployed solution if possible.
- **Organisation of testing days** with beta users.

Using the Paris&Co method, project leaders can measure the performance of their solution and identify the positive points or modifications to improve the solution.

Their methodology recommends conducting surveys and evaluation procedures before and after the testing action and applying the same criteria to both sets of tests.

Survey results are key in the identification of indicators to be monitored within the framework of testing actions.

Key takeaways

- **Anticipate the time and groups to mobilize.**
- **Define objectives and expectations in advance.**
- **Be precise in the collection methods before and after the operation.**

“ Experimentation allows us to address important and complex challenges on a small scale, with few resources and limited risks. We test concretely, we observe, and then we adapt what works. Urban experimentation helps make public action more agile by allowing for mistakes, which opens the possibility of testing again if the test is not conclusive. As a result, evaluation becomes a powerful and valuable tool, which validates the relevance of a solution, particularly when considering user feedback. ”

PARIS&CO

OECD
Evaluation
Toolkit:





Metropolitan Innovation Districts

Greater Paris Metropolis



City centre managers participate in an evaluation workshop led by Paris&Co.
© Greater Paris Metropolis

The methodology used in implementing the Metropolitan Neighbourhoods of Innovation program promotes experimentation, skills acquisition, and the dissemination of best practices. It is a tested and proven methodology developed by Paris&Co.

1. Drafting the experimental protocol using the library of indicators, as a means of supporting the city spokesperson

2. Conducting an individual interview with each project leader, once the project has been deployed, to collect the initial results

3. Addition of a tailor-made tool based on the needs of the project (user experience, partner interview, on-site observation, benchmark or legal monitoring note, etc.)

4. Drafting of the final deliverable

Discover the **Metropolitan Innovation Districts** programme:





B-Smart Famalicão

Famalicão – Portugal



Vítor Moreira
presenting
the B-Smart
platform
operated by
the City of
Famalicão
© Brain

Transforming “I think that...” into concrete data: this was the challenge of Vila Nova de Famalicão in Portugal. The B-Smart initiative integrates the categories of Mobility, Governance, Quality of Life, Economy, and Human Experience to generate a practical and transparent smart city model tailored to the city’s specific needs. The city offers three ways to integrate data: reports submitted by citizens, public software generated by an API (Application Programming Interfaces), and images from authorised monitoring devices. This allows Famalicão’s B-SMART team to compare local data with national data, identify potentially risky situations, and provide information on public spending. The program automatically updates to display the city’s spending in real time, providing transparency and useful information to citizens or potential investors.

Conclusion

The reflection on participatory processes presented in this document will be finalized at the same time as the Metropolis's Integrated Action Plan (IAP). With a new policy offering and a cross-disciplinary training program, the actions proposed within this framework aim to improve the integration of citizen dialogue with projects supported by the Lively Downtowns program.

Overall vision

The Greater Paris Metropolis proposes a strategy to better promote citizen dialogue in its city centre policies and action plans. The Lively Downtowns program will support this approach and work to revisit certain policies in the effort to better promote and monitor citizen dialogue initiatives in city centre projects.

Areas of Intervention

The three main areas of intervention are public space management, capacity building, and data tracking. The overarching objective is to foster participatory initiatives throughout the city centre, with a particular emphasis on public and shared spaces.

Since participatory planning is not traditionally part of the core responsibilities of city centre managers, the Metropolis will implement training sessions designed to strengthen collaboration across departments and enhance the skillsets of those involved in urban governance. These sessions aim to bridge institutional gaps and promote a more integrated approach to citizen engagement.

To ensure transparency and effectiveness, participatory actions supported by the Metropolis and carried out in city centres should be systematically monitored. This includes conducting preparatory surveys and implementing evaluation procedures to generate concrete data on how these initiatives are appropriated by residents and what impact they have on the urban environment.

Strategic objectives

- Implement adjustments to make the Lively Downtowns program more participation-oriented
- Encourage the activation and reappropriation of public spaces
- Increase the diversity of actors involved in developing city centre policies, starting with citizens
- Recognise and promote the facilitator dimension of the city centre manager role
- Promote interdisciplinary and integrated collaboration in the city centre

Actions

- Develop a strategy for the evolution of certain policies of the Lively Downtowns program to better promote citizen dialogue
- Develop a policy offering to promote interdisciplinary, participatory and dynamic projects in public spaces
- Document the discussions and observations of the local URBACT group and publish them for distribution to city centre managers
- Offer a dynamic training program with field visits, capacity building exercises and collaborative workshops

For more information, contact the Lively Downtowns team:
centresvillesvivants@metropolegrandparis.fr

APPENDIX:

LIST OF RESOURCES



♥ Participation within the URBACT programme

Participation is built into the URBACT programme, namely in the form of the working groups that build each partner's Integrated Action Plan, the Urban Local Group (ULG). Each group of URBACT networks includes individual networks that choose participation as their main focus. The URBACT website provides a wealth of learnings and good practices.



Learn more about the state of participatory approaches in Europe.



The URBACT III Active Citizens network focused on increasing participation in local governance within the context of small and medium-sized European Cities.



■ Cities@Heart meeting in Celje, Slovenia

♥ Learn and get inspired



European Union

The EU offers trainings on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy through its Community of Practice of the Competence Centre.



OECD

Citizen participation in the public action cycle: Exploring new horizons, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris



The CrAFt Cookbook

New European Bauhaus inspired methodology for sustainable urban transformation integrating local stakeholders.



Participedia

The Wikipedia of participation, filled with examples from around the world.



DemocracyNext

Access resources and toolkits for organising citizen assemblies.



Democracy R&D

Proposes working groups on different subjects related to participation.



Art of Hosting

Resources and trainings for facilitating dialogue.

♥ Quality of Life Surveys



The OECD's Better Life Index reveals global trends in well-being.



Monocle Magazine's annual Quality of Life Survey gives global insights into what people want in their cities.

♥ Toolboxes



People Powered

Find tools to carry out participatory projects and construct your own Participation Playbook.



Placemaking Europe

Placemaking Europe is a non-profit foundation that builds European networks that foster urban transformation through participatory approaches rooted in their local context. Various resources are available in their online toolbox.



Action Catalogue

An interactive tool to search for different types of participatory tools relating to the project format and target audience.

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CENTRES-VILLES
VIVANTS

Learn more
about the Lively
Downtowns
Programme:



CITIES@HEART
TOWARDS A BALANCED CITY CENTRE

URBACT
Cities@Heart
network



Under the direction of
The Communications Department of the
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