

Citizen Dialogue and City Centres

The Greater Paris Metropolis
URBACT Cities@Heart
Integrated Action Plan
2025



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1. The Greater Paris Metropolis – Network Lead Partner

At a time when our cities are reinventing themselves and our consumption patterns are evolving; it is essential to reflect together about how our city centres and shopping districts can regain their vitality. Today, more than ever, they should be the heart of our social and economic lives.

Faced with new and complex challenges, many cities have seen their attractiveness decline over the last decades, especially in downtowns and shopping districts. Supporting them and finding new ways to positively influence the functions of their city centres is one of Greater Paris Metropolis' missions.

To this end, in 2018 the Paris Greater Metropolis, together with the mayors of its 130 cities, created the Lively Downtowns Program, to assist cities in their metamorphosis.

Initially launched as a Call for Interest (AMI), this program has served the needs of 105 cities. Now in its third iteration, the programme continues to provide support to the cities of the Metropolis with a tailored approach that recognizes the unique context of each participating city.

Even if the **Lively Downtowns** programme has proven valuable to the cities of the Greater Paris Metropolis, there are always improvements to be made. The URBACT methodology has shown time and time again that European collaboration is a path for cities to gain insight into their own challenges and develop integrated, innovative and sustainable solutions. As Lead Partner of the **Cities@Heart URBACT IV Action Planning Network**, the Greater Paris Metropolis is uniquely poised to share and learn with its peers across the European Union.



The Rueil-Malmaison city centre

2. Cities@Heart – The Partnership



The Cities@Heart network in Braga, Portugal for their third transnational meeting

Cities@Heart aims to bring back life to the heart of cities by re-instilling creativity, improving digital access to smarter tools for all, developing inclusivity and adapting to climate change.

To this end, the project brings together ten European urban areas with diverse profiles but with one common goal: **achieving balanced and inclusive city centres for all users**. By collecting relevant indicators and using a common methodology, this network aims to create a holistic policy framework for lasting and meaningful change in the heart of the city. City centre management requires a mastery of diverse domains of expertise. As such, governance, participatory democracy, data management and evaluation tools are some of the many subjects the project has tackled. Working hand in hand with local stakeholders and users, the goal of Cities@Heart is to develop tools that foster happy, healthy and harmonious places.

Cities@Heart (C@H) is led by the Greater Paris Metropolis and includes nine other project partners:

- ❑ **Kraków Metropolis Association** – Poland
- ❑ **The City of Granada** – Spain
- ❑ **The City of Osijek** – Croatia
- ❑ **Associação de Municípios Pentágono Urbano** – Portugal

- **The City of Celje** – Slovenia
- **The City of Sligo** – Ireland
- **The City of Cesena** – Italy
- **The City of Fleurus** – Belgium
- **Amfiktyonies, Development Organisation S.A.** – Greece

For the Greater Paris Metropolis, the principal motivation for leading this network was the opportunity to evaluate policies in a collaborative and supportive setting. In operation since 2018, the Lively Downtowns programme has a solid footing and steady participation from member cities. However, at the time of the creation of the network, the Metropolis teams had little knowledge about how their funding of city centre revitalisation actions were received or perceived by local stakeholders including residents, shopkeepers and professionals. From the launch of the network in 2023, the focus of the Metropolitan integrated action plan has been turned towards the user and asks the question: **how can the Greater Paris Metropolis better integrate citizen dialogue into its Lively Downtowns programme?**

The ideas and reflections of the Greater Paris Metropolis Cities@Heart Urban Local Group were published in the format of an informative booklet in November 2025. The booklet is accessible online in English and in French on the Cities@Heart URBACT page¹ or in the e-reader format on the Greater Paris Metropolis e-reader platform.²

The URBACT programme

Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the URBACT³ 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.

¹Greater Paris Metropolis. (2025). Making space for citizen dialogue in city centres. In https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/2025-11/CitiesAtHeart_CityCentres-CitizenDialogue_EN.pdf. Retrieved December 1, 2025, from <https://urbact.eu/>

² <https://www.calameo.com/books/005979609ff7a2df9c396>

³ <https://urbact.eu/>

3. An Integrated Action Plan for Metropolitan city centres



Members of the Cities@Heart Urban Local Group (ULG) discover the city centre of Charenton-le-Pont

In the same way that the URBACT programme allows cities to explore beyond their national or local context, the URBACT Integrated Action Plan (IAP) Methodology unlocks great potential for intersectoral exchange and understanding. Indeed, this is one way to think about integration: strategies that work to consider all parameters of urban and social complexity. This focus on integration was an important part of the reflection that led the Greater Paris Metropolis to join an URBACT network.

How could the Lively Downtowns programme be more integrated? What aspects need to be accounted for and what can be improved? While important, the link with citizen or private stakeholders had not yet been prioritised in the programme and this focus was determined to be a key factor in transforming the Lively Downtowns Programme towards better integration and thus became the focus of the Greater Paris Metropolis IAP. The absence of a formal treatment of the subject equates to a gap in the Lively Downtowns programme and could be an obstacle to further integration on a long-term basis. Indeed, the question of citizen engagement proved to be a key factor for making the Lively Downtowns programme a more integrated public policy and was designated as the main area of focus for the Greater Paris Metropolis Integrated Action Plan (IAP).



Cities@Heart network members participate in a workshop to build their Integrated Action Plans

3.1 The five Cities@Heart Levers

The topic of citizen engagement touches on the principle five levers of the Cities@Heart methodology and is part of an integrated urban development strategy.

The Cities@Heart City Centre Playbook⁴ and Toolkit⁵ were published in November 2025. The publications are accessible online in English and in French on the Cities@Heart URBACT page or in the e-reader format on the Greater Paris Metropolis e-reader platform⁶. The 5 Cities@Heart levers and complete network methodology are presented in detail in these two publications.

Promoting stakeholder engagement across cities in the Metropolis will further the effectiveness of the Cities@Heart five levers:

Sustain Your Local Commerce

With this action plan, the Greater Paris Metropolitan Area emphasizes the importance of involving local stakeholders in decision-making processes when selecting businesses and

⁴ https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/2025-11/CitiesAtHeart_CityCentrePlaybook_EN.pdf

⁵ https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/2025-11/CitiesAtHeart_Toolkit_EN.pdf

⁶ <https://www.calameo.com/accounts/5979609>

services available in the city center. Their behavior and preferences are key to the success of a vibrant city center, and their involvement fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility.

Reinforce residential life

While the Lively Downtowns program does not address housing policy, city center action plans must consider the needs of residents and users by providing services tailored to locals, whether it be a cargo bike delivery service for people with reduced mobility or cultural offerings for young people.

Promote inclusive environments

What kind of city center for children? What kind of city center for the elderly? To answer these questions, instead of speaking for them, efforts should be made to allow all demographic profiles to share their opinions on how the city is made.

Build Your City Centre Identity

The desires, needs, and stories of residents are part of a city's identity, and their contributions are essential for telling unique stories through projects and events that strengthen the sense of belonging to the downtown area.

Create a Shared Governance

A policy cannot be truly considered integrated without stakeholder input. Citizens and stakeholders must be able to participate in downtown governance, whether through participatory budgeting, neighborhood councils, or public space redevelopment initiatives. As an urban space with diverse functions, downtown management must be cross-cutting. Therefore, downtown governance should be collaborative, not only within the community but also across different sectors: involving various levels of public administration, private actors such as transportation providers and retailers, and the diverse profiles of residents.

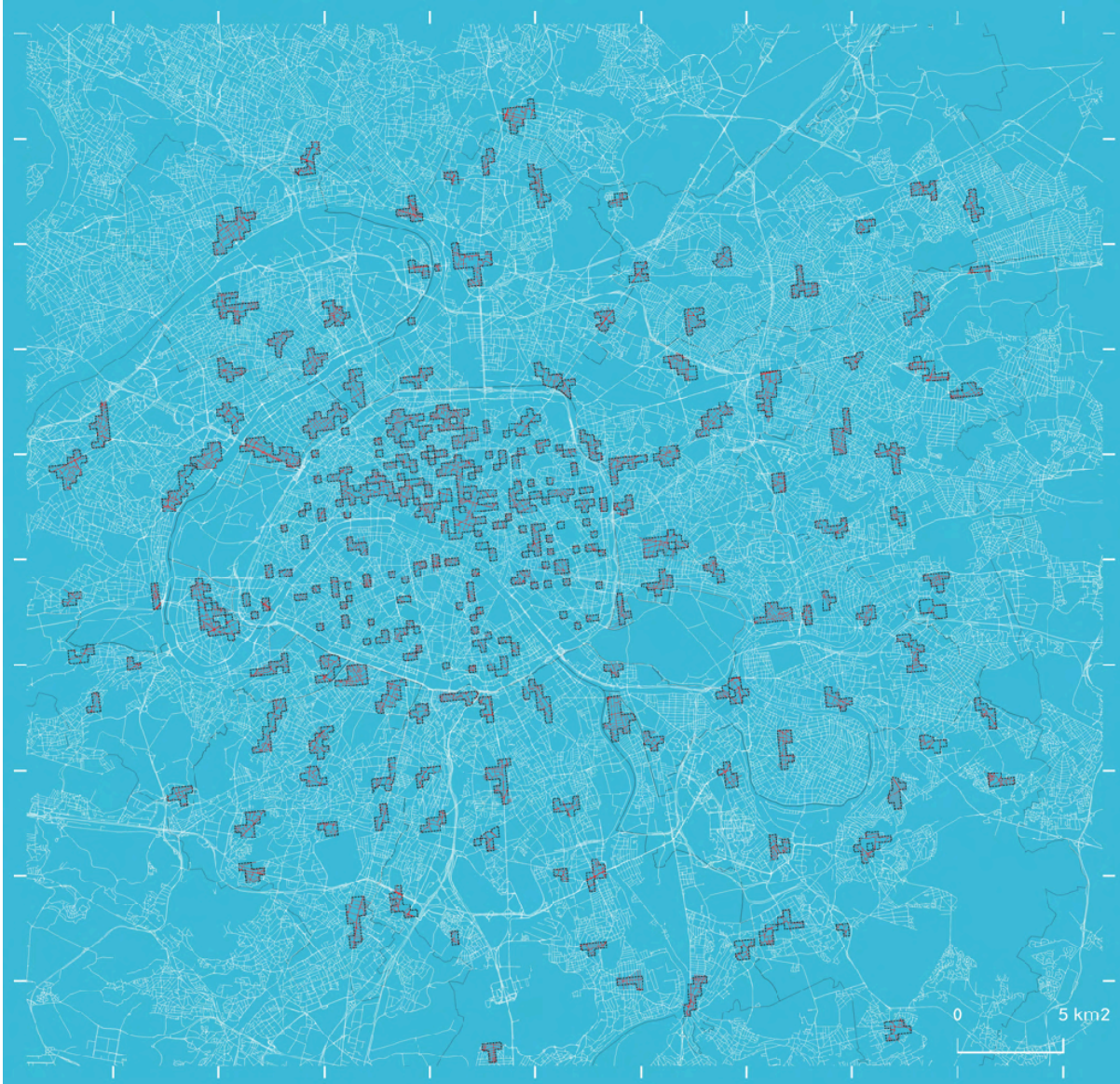
3.2 The governance of the Lively Downtowns Programme

Most administrations are characterized by difficulties with cooperation and a habit of working in silos. Yet, in city centres, to lessen urban sprawl, reduce competition between commercial polarities, there is a need for collaboration, both to establish a common vision based on data and objective assessments and to create tools to share information and build common decisions.

With its expertise in economic planning, air quality and well-being, the Metropolis has the authority to operate the Lively Downtowns programme. As with other Metropolitan programmes, Lively Downtowns acts as a resource centre for participating municipalities. Proposing a committee of experts, access to vital data, a dedicated team and training sessions for city centre managers, the programme provides guidance and facilitates knowledge sharing between member cities thus improving the quality of their city centre revitalisation action plans.

While city administrations operate independently from the Metropolis, one of the goals of the action plan is to foster collaboration locally between different departments working on city centre challenges. Additionally, the Greater Paris Metropolis has the capacity to create unity across its different member cities, as evinced by the network of city centre managers who regularly participate in training sessions and events organised by the Metropolis and its partners. In the same way, the Greater Paris Metropolis has the capacity to create programmes that cut across departments and foster inter-sectorial project management within member cities.

4. Context, needs and vision



A mapping of polycentric polarities in the Greater Paris Metropolis from the Cities@Heart baseline study

The Greater Paris Metropolis was created in 2016, bringing together France's capital city and 129 of Paris' surrounding towns forming a contiguously dense urban entity. Its purpose is to bring these border cities together to act in domains such as town planning, housing, emergency accommodation, climate change or economic development. Mayors are key stakeholders in its governance and in decision-making process.

The Metropolis is home to a total of 7.2 million inhabitants in a mosaic of towns with populations ranging from 2,000 to 2 million inhabitants with diverse urban & socioeconomic contexts. Its main missions are to create a balance between member cities and improve living environments for metropolitan residents as there are significant wealth disparities within the Metropolis.

The Greater Paris Metropolis' five fields of expertise are: energy policy, flood prevention, land use planning, economic, social and cultural development and housing policy.

Revitalising city centres by designing public spaces, greening, and enhancing commercial diversity are challenges most mayors are facing to provide a clean, vibrant, safe, creative, inclusive, healthy environment for all people to live, work, study and enjoy. The Greater Paris Metropolis offers them support both through expertise and its FIMACS (Metropolitan Intervention Fund for the support of Local Actions to promote Commerce, Services and attractiveness) fund activated by city centre managers typically employed by cities.

Lively Downtowns provides tools for the cities of the Metropolis:

- Deliver stronger and credible urban diagnostics (observatories of commercial offering and economic performance)
- Provide resources for the management of a network for city centre managers through technical and financial support with the goal of implementing concrete actions such as pre-emption of vacant ground-floor retail spaces to restart local activities, storefront renovation,
- Support the digitalization or renovation of covered markets.

Like many other city centres in Europe, many city centres within the Metropolis have suffered from a decrease in activity, partially brought on by the proliferation of shopping malls and the rise of e-shopping. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for inhabitants to live according to the principles of sustainable urban proximity, often referred to as the 15-minute city with daily access to shops, infrastructures, amenities & services.

4.1. Social and Economic Context

As the densest area in all of France, with some 7.2 million inhabitants within 814 km², the region of Paris is characterized by great contrasts, and several typologies of urban cores from small villages at the outskirts to medium-size cities and large cities sharing borders with Paris. In the heart of some cities, one also can observe fragmentation, notably around areas with a high percentage of public housing.

The Metropolis age pyramid tends to be steady, with 18% of the population being under 14 years old and 20% over 60 years old. A slight demographic growth shows an increase of 0.2% since 2014. The area concentrates 22% of the National GDP and incomes vary, with some of the richest municipalities in the country, as well as some of the most disadvantaged.



The city centre of Les Lilas, Greater Paris Metropolis, France

The development of city centres

Cities have been naturally built to maximise exchanges and minimise travel. “Exchanges” stands for goods, social interaction, knowledge, culture, work, education or emotional and spiritual support. One of the ways cities historically increased their efficiency as a mechanism for exchange was to use streets as dual space for both movement and exchange. While making journeys on foot or cycle, people would engage in a wide range of spontaneous social, cultural and economic exchanges. This notion of streets not just being for movement but also for exchange was built into the very structure of older city streets – streets were a series of “outdoor rooms” connected by “corridors”.

Traffic has converted the dual function of exchange and movement of streets into a singular function, thereby undermining the efficiency of the entire city as a mechanism for facilitating a great diversity of exchanges. Historically, city centres are characterised by two aspects: diversity and intensity. Essentially, in a limited area, a large variety of services can be found to respond to the daily needs of users.

There are two main ways in which exchanges take place in the city: planned and spontaneous. Spontaneous exchanges play a crucial role in the social, cultural and economic life of cities, giving birth to a more socialised population and personal growth for the individual. Encouraging participation in the life of the city centre and its activities contributes to economic vitality, social cohesion and the attractiveness of these spaces, making a strong case for sustainable urban proximity.

The limits of the city centre

Paris exists as the main polarity within the Greater Paris Metropolis, providing a great variety of retail, local businesses and services. There are almost as many ground floors in Paris (60.000) as in the whole metropolitan area without Paris (80.000). In the Metropolis, a contiguous urban fabric as well as hubs created by public transportation stations sometimes result in multiple commercial polarities within each city's territorial limits. While a city may have an historic core, it can be composed of several commercial hubs. Moreover, the proximity of two adjacent municipalities may result in the city centre of a given town being geographically closer to the neighbouring city, freeing them from being captive to a single polarity. This encourages city centre stakeholders to increase their efforts in maintaining an appealing local commercial offering that contributes to good quality of life in a very dense context.

Public space

Given the number of urban centres, there is a heterogeneity of public spaces: parks, squares, high streets, markets, or spaces adjacent to mobility hubs (train stations, etc.), which, in general, are not considered spaces for social cohesion. The principal function of many of these cities is residential, and as such, they have become dormitory towns. In some cases, cities in the Metropolis are pure products of urban planning, such as the *villes nouvelles* or new towns built during the second half of the 20th century. The slab urbanism promoted during this era has since become obsolete leaving such communities void of an organic street life and social structure in the public space.

Many of these far-flung suburbs are also characterized by limited accessibility. These specificities are further accentuated as the distance from Paris increases, giving rise to cities where the car is the leading mode of transportation, and sometimes the only option to commute from home to work. The map of transport “deserts” often correlates with the lower income bracket⁷. In certain cities, there can also be a general problem of security in public spaces within urban centres, with some areas experiencing a high level of decay, poor lighting, etc. In this regard, the inclusion and gender mainstreaming aspect should be enhanced when considering public space activation projects in these urban areas.

Historic city centres were founded around commercial exchange but in France, the city of tomorrow will have to evolve to retain its relevance in the face of changing consumption patterns. The activation of public spaces through citizen-led initiatives such as greening projects or cultural events, has the potential to reclaim city centres as hubs of activity and a meeting place where all are welcome. As part of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Greater Paris Metropolitan Area launched the “Experience the Games in Your Municipality” initiative, which supported events in public spaces across 86 municipalities within the

⁷Research documenting the distance from public transport in lower income areas of the Metropolis.

<https://thefunambulist.net/editorials/15-minute-walking-distance-from-a-train-station-spatial-inequality-in-paris-banlieues>

metropolitan area, specifically in city centers and along waterways. The Paris Games demonstrated the ability of public spaces to bring together diverse audiences. At the competition venues, as well as elsewhere in Paris and throughout the metropolitan area, visitors and residents alike enjoyed lively, open, and peaceful spaces.

Public facilities

The Greater Paris Metropolis is a territory with contrasts, where, generally speaking, the Western part of Paris has better coverage of facilities than the Northeast, with, for instance, a deficit of childcare throughout the area and a need for better access to medical services, especially in Seine-Saint-Denis⁸. This is due to the imbalance between the number of facilities and the large population. Inequalities can be observed in cultural facilities, especially in terms of accessibility and quality in the surroundings of urban centres.

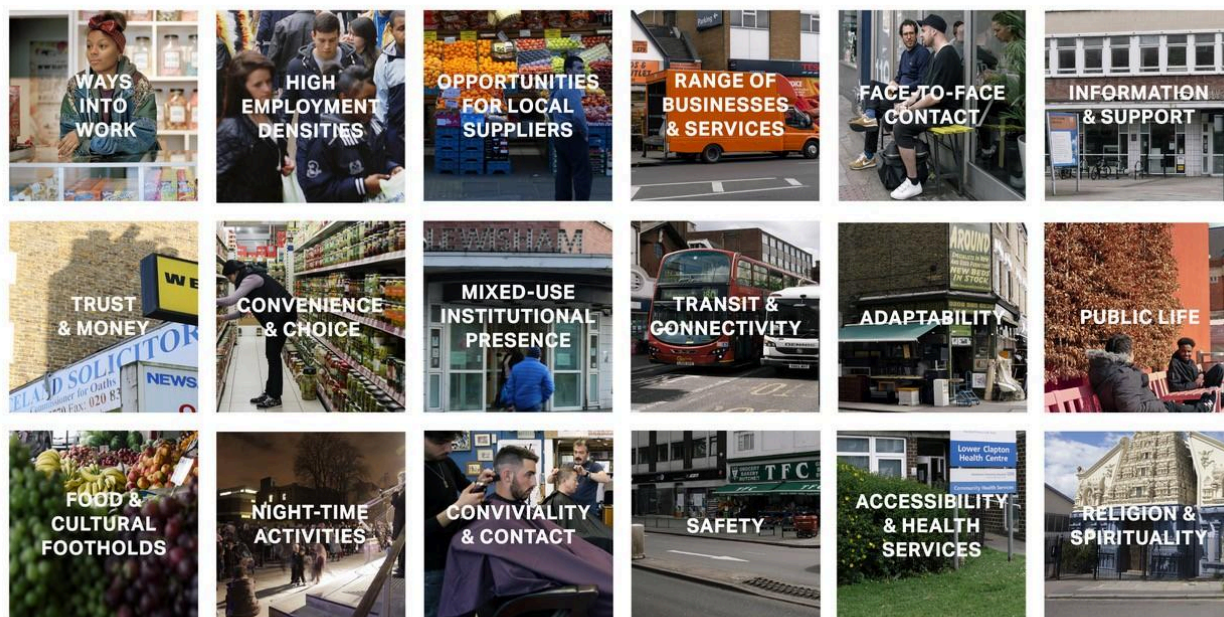
Commerce and proximity supply: evolutions and innovations

There is a general trend at the metropolitan level: "global" services tend to emerge in the wealthier parts of urban centres, while restaurants, especially fast-food establishments, appear in areas with a lower average income. Moreover, there is an existing gap between the focal points of public policies and the reality. While policies aim to promote more specialized businesses (such as specialty products, bookshops, artisan wares, etc.), there is both a shortage of workforce and skills in this sector, and difficulties for craftsmen, designers & freelancers to run a viable business, especially due to the high real estate prices. This also contrasts with the economic reality of inhabitants, who predominantly shop in supermarkets, affordability being key to purchasing habits.

Consequently, there is an estimated vacancy rate of 5 to 20% for commercial spaces, with low commercial vitality and significant difficulty for different cities to adapt their usage plans and offerings to meet the actual demand. According to the Paris and Île-de-France Chamber of Commerce⁹, the density of small shops differs in the urban core of the Paris city limits where the rate is 25.9 per 1,000 inhabitants whereas across the Greater Paris Metropolis, the average density is closer to 10 small businesses per 1,000 inhabitants. Overall, including Paris, the density of the small business offering in the Greater Paris Metropolis is 15.5 per 1,000 inhabitants.

⁸ A tool named *l'Equipomètre* has been created by the Paris Region Institute (urban planning agency) to list the number of facilities in each city

⁹ Local commerce data across the Greater Paris Metropolis: <https://www.entreprises.cci-paris-idf.fr/chiffres-du-commerce>



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

Additionally, the trend of online shopping cannot be ignored. The shift to online retail has negatively impacted small business networks. On a more positive note, businesses are now expected to offer an added value, not only a service. According to a study by the UK-based urbanism agency We Made That,¹⁰ 45% of interactions on high streets are not related to commercial activity. It is not enough to sell a product. Providing an experience and becoming a social hub are now central to small businesses strategies. Policy experts now advocate for a diversity of activities in the city centre, third spaces with or without a commercial offering, boutiques selling different types of products to appeal to different clientele or niche-oriented concept stores.¹¹

4.2. City centre management in the Metropolis and in France

Institutional framework

The Greater Paris Metropolis proximity economy strategy is grounded in the overall policy framework of the institution. The Territorial Coherence Scheme (SCoT)¹² is the backbone of the

¹⁰ High Streets for All Study www.wemadethat.co.uk/projects/high-streets-for-all-study

¹¹ p. 45 Practical Handbook for revitalising the city city centre.

https://www.institutparisregion.fr/fileadmin/NewEtudes/000pack2/Etude_2372/carnetpratique11.pdf

¹² Presentation of the SCoT

<https://metropolegrandparis.fr/fr/schema-metropolitain-de-coherence-territoriale-scot>

Greater Paris Metropolis' policies and is structured around twelve major commitments. The initial stage of the Territorial Coherence Scheme was adopted in January 2022. Key strategies include the commitment to strengthening the presence of nature & agriculture in cities as well as the development of biodiversity by restoring the connections between natural spaces (green + blue grids) to foster peaceful and healthy public spaces.

The first commitment of the Territorial Coherence Scheme is most related to the Lively Downtowns programme. Its goal is to strengthen a polycentric territory through the development of a compact Metropolis, balanced in terms of urban functions as well as wealth creation and economic diversity promotion. In this context, the "Lively Downtowns" programme was launched in 2018 to provide expertise through balanced partnerships with key actors of urban planning, commerce and economic development¹³. This program actively contributes to the strategic orientations mentioned previously, i.e. to reinforce commercial polarities and support to local businesses.

As part of the territorial coherence Scheme, the Metropolis must define a document for the development of crafts, trade and logistics within the next 2 years. This forward-looking document is intended to identify development priorities for the next 15 years. As these sectors are the focus area of the Lively Downtowns programme, the document's recommendations will likely prove influential for future policy developments related to city centre management.

Lively Downtowns Programme



The Lively Downtowns "Centres-villes vivants" programme logo

The Lively Downtowns metropolitan program was created in 2018 and aims to revitalize the city centres and neighbourhoods in the Greater Paris Metropolis. At the time of the programme's creation, the Greater Paris Metropolis Development Council, a body tasked with integrating citizens and citizen dialogue in policy decisions gave recommendations for the Lively Downtowns programme¹⁴.

¹³Presentation of the Lively Downtowns (Centres-villes vivants) programme. <https://www.metropolegrandparis.fr/fr/centres-villes-vivants>

¹⁴ Recommendations by the Greater Paris Metropolis Development Council for the future Lively Downtowns programme.

These recommendations were taken into account in the drafting of the programme's strategic roadmap.

Currently, the primary actions of the program are as follows:

- Creation of a network of city centre managers with training sessions, sharing of expertise, networking and thematic publications,
- Technical, legal and financial support for municipal projects
- Creation of observatories related to the attractiveness of city centres with an observatory of the commercial offering, an observatory of pedestrian footfall, an observatory of market halls and open-air markets and a barometer of residents' expectations,
- Metropolitan Forum on city centres organised annually,
- The creation of a commercial revitalization real estate company (pre-emption, marketing, management and marketing of business premises).

The strategy of the program is based on the partnership between the city's stakeholders. Programme partners include public and private leaders specialised in urbanism and proximity economy:

- Paris Ile-de-France Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Ile-de-France Chamber of Crafts
- Bank of territories
- Paris Urban Planning Atelier (Apur)
- Paris Region Institute (Urbanism research institute)
- Les Canaux (association working on the circular and solidarity economy)
- Centre-Ville en Mouvement (national association of political leaders promoting a focus on city centre policy)
- Cap digital (association specialising in digital technology)
- National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (Anct)
- Commercial revitalisation real estate company, of which the Metropolis is a major shareholder

As the Metropolis' activity grew more ambitious and the Lively Downtowns program gained popularity, it expanded its offerings, proposing, to name just a few, ways to support the social and solidarity economy in the city center or pathways facilitating the creation of third places or cultural centers in the city center. 105 municipalities in the Metropolis are currently or have participated in the Lively Downtowns program and thus benefit from the Metropolis' partnerships and a catalogue of services.

https://www.metropolegrandparis.fr/sites/default/files/media/document/CODEV_saisine_CVV_0.pdf

The Town Centre Manager



Town centre managers take part in a workshop organised by the Greater Paris Metropolis Cities@Heart ULG

A relatively new profession, the Town Centre or Local Commerce Manager must adapt to the local context, playing the role of mediator, coach and foreman. This type of job description first originated in Belgium and has been developing in France for the last twenty years¹⁵. Town Centre Managers are the primary contact point in cities with a Lively Downtowns contract. The Lively Downtowns programme finances the creation of such a position for cities signing a town centre revitalisation contract.

The Town Centre Manager is a relatively new profession that must adapt to the local context, acting as a mediator, coach, and coordinator. Originally developed in Belgium, this role has been evolving in France over the past twenty years. The Lively Downtowns programme offers the possibility to finance the creation of such a position for participating cities. In cities that sign a town centre revitalisation contract under the Lively Downtowns programme, the Town Centre Manager serves as the primary point of contact.

The profile of a Town Centre Manager can vary from city to city, and with good reason. A city in need of event activation and a city undergoing major public works would not necessarily

¹⁵Handbook for the City Centre, Paris Region Institute, p. 38.
https://www.institutparisregion.fr/fileadmin/NewEtudes/000pack2/Etude_2372/carnetpratique11.pdf

choose the same candidate. Typically, the town centre or local commerce managers have qualifications related to business and marketing or urban planning. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Banque des Territoires, a financial instrument of the Caisse de Dépôts dedicated to investment in public projects, launched a programme to subsidise the Local Commerce managers in cities across France, notably those with a city centre revitalisation contract at the national level¹⁶. An assessment of this programme demonstrates the importance of such a role for city centres. Cities in the *Action coeur de ville* programme, the national equivalent of the Lively Downtowns programme, reported that local commerce managers greatly contributed to the revitalisation of the city centre and the position would be maintained as a member of the municipal staff¹⁷.

In France and within the Greater Paris region, there are active networks of city center managers. These professional networks facilitate the exchange of best practices among managers who are often the only professionals working in a given municipality. As part of the Lively Downtowns program and in partnership with the Île-de-France Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI Île-de-France), the Greater Paris Metropolis manages a network of city center managers. These managers can benefit from free training sessions, peer-to-peer information sharing, technical documents, and an online community, both on the managers' website and on LinkedIn.

Action Coeur de Ville

There are different strategies at national level that promote the emergence of various town centre management schemes in terms of public-private partnerships. One of them is *Action Coeur de Ville*, where, at national level, medium-size cities with populations ranging from 20,000 to 200,000 inhabitants can apply to receive a budget for the regeneration and preservation of their urban cores, along with a set of implementation guidelines. In their application, cities must explain the strategy they have devised for their city centre based on a detailed diagnosis of their territory.

Initiated in 2018, the programme was developed jointly between the administration (elected officials) and economic actors from various regions, aiming to address issues related to urban fabric degradation, commercial vitality and management of public space. Given that the scope of this strategy does not encompass The Greater Paris Metropolis cities, the Lively Downtowns program was created to provide knowledge and funding to support the improvement of commercial areas and public spaces. This program has been connecting cities with key institutional partners that are experts in the commerce and crafts sectors. The programme provides diagnoses of city centres as well as data such as footfall counting, legal advice and more. Additionally, in the urban planning domain, there is a distinct focus on financing renovations of market halls or buildings, land and storefront pre-emption, technical and

¹⁶ Report on the Commerce manager programme, Banque des Territoires, page 4. https://www.banquedesterritoires.fr/sites/default/files/2024-03/Exe_DECRYPTAGES_n%C2%B01_BDT_WEB.pdf

¹⁷ Report on the Commerce manager programme, Banque des Territoires, page 11. https://www.banquedesterritoires.fr/sites/default/files/2024-03/Exe_DECRYPTAGES_n%C2%B01_BDT_WEB.pdf

commercial studies, improvement of facades, training on digital skills for shopkeepers, events, urban furniture, etc. City centre policy is not widespread across Europe. Only a handful of countries have dedicated programmes on a national level (Ireland¹⁸, Germany¹⁹). This national programme operated by the ANCT provides increased visibility for the topic of city centres and ample case studies from varying urban environments across France.

Decision-making tools

The level of maturity of decision-making tools in the Paris metropolitan area is advanced yet unbalanced. Indeed, data collection occurs at several levels: at first level, a national open data portal allows the information to be extracted, providing key details informing the local context (income, average age, property value, etc.). At a municipal level, the availability of open data portals is heterogeneous. Finally, at the local level, specific data sets, namely in urban centres, allow the creation of sectorial observatories focusing on commerce or use of public space.

In the case of city centres, the mutualisation of all levels makes it possible to obtain data on commerce, public space, economic development and housing. The data is obtained from various sources: national statistics, internal data managers in some municipalities, local, regional and national studies, private services (real estate, commerce transactions, etc) or specific projects that obtain data through public consultation.

One key service provided to cities in the Lively Downtowns programme is pedestrian footfall data. The company MyTraffic uses AI to generate actionable information indicating hot spots or less frequented areas within a city. The Metropolis also unveiled a programme to test AI-powered solutions within member cities.²⁰ Cities can also rely on the Paris and Regional Chamber of Commerce for their CROCIS²¹ observatory. Their observatory of commerce, industry and services is a useful tool for predicting trends and creating sound local policy to foster revitalisation in city centres.

The Lively Downtowns programme offers cities access to partnerships and expertise that are essential for creating a viable action plan. Cities with a downtown revitalisation contract can finance studies on their public space, commercial offering and many other focus areas. Partners specialised in research and urban or commercial data, such as the Parisian Urbanism Agency or the Paris Region Institute, provide useful studies, maps and expertise. These data sets can be translated into knowledge with some tools that facilitate decision-making through indicators and spatial display.

¹⁸ In Ireland, the “Town Centre First” program <https://towncentrefirst.ie/>

¹⁹ In Germany, the “Living Centers” or Lebendige Zentrum program https://www.staedtebauforderung.info/DE/Programme/LebendigeZentren/lebendigezentren_node.html

²⁰ Presentation of the programme for experimentation with AI-powered tools: <https://www.metropolegrandparis.fr/fr/actualites/la-metropole-du-grand-paris-accelere-lutilisation-de-lintelligence-artificielle-pour-ses>

²¹ <https://www.cci-paris-idf.fr/fr/prospective/crocis>

4.3. Local challenges for city centres



An independent bookstore in the city of Charenton-le-Pont

Increase commerce vitality

One of the greatest challenges lies in maintaining and improving the vitality and commercial diversity of urban centres, especially at times when global and local socioeconomic contexts put local businesses at risk of failure.

Inclusive public space

In such urban zones, creating safe and inclusive public spaces with a high intensity of activities can prove to be a difficult challenge. Public space is free to access, open to all yet partially constrained as it offers a range of uses (from mobility, to economic and social activities, delivery & logistics, offering green space & street furniture, culture, etc.) that may sometimes lead to contradictory priorities. As part of the public realm, planning of public space must be approached in a modular and scalable way, considering the diverse expectations of different users and stakeholders.

Territorial fragmentation

In many cases, the city centre activity must coexist with transportation infrastructures, especially personal vehicles, as some of these areas have low connectivity in public transport and are therefore highly dependent on automobile transportation. Indeed, due to a less efficient public transport offering, the use of the car remains prevalent especially when inhabitants live or work far from the centre of Paris. Access to public transport is likely to change for the better with the arrival of the "Grand Paris Express". Currently the largest European construction project, the new lines will link peripheral areas around Greater Paris and allow users to travel between extremities without passing through the center of Paris. 40 new stations (hubs) are planned by 2032.²²

Stakeholder collaboration & Governance models

Given the heterogeneity among different cities, one of the main challenges that remains is to coordinate and establish strategies to foster participation of stakeholders from across the Metropolis. According to article L. 103-2 of French urbanism law, public consultation is part of a regulatory framework and is mandatory for the approval of major urban projects.

Within the Metropolis, the Development Council is a body dedicated to citizen representation, made up of 48 citizens and 48 experts, who are consulted when generating any strategy that affects the metropolis. In 2017, this citizen consultation body provided a series of recommendations for the revitalization of city centres by promoting socio-spatial and functional diversity, encouraging flexible and multifunctional uses of spaces, and ensuring inclusive urban mobility. It advocates for the integration of nature into urban areas, supports the creation of pleasant and liveable environments, and contributes to the reinvention of planning tools to strengthen central areas. Additionally, it monitors the impact of peripheral commercial developments to prevent urban sprawl and the decline of historic centres²³ to better orient the goals of the Lively Downtowns programme and ensure a viable polycentric Metropolis.

In addition to the Development Council, the Metropolis conducts large-scale surveys and workshops with citizens and stakeholders when drafting public policies. Before rolling out the Low Emissions Zone policies, an online survey was realised to collect user feedback. In a similar fashion workshops and surveys were included in the process of constructing the Metropolitan Housing Plan.

Within the context of the Lively Downtowns programme, the main spokesperson for the city centre is the Town Centre Manager. This person is responsible for implementing the policies and action plan at city level, acting as the link between city councils and private stakeholders. While some managers operate independently, others are part of an entire team typically focusing on urbanism or economic development. Participatory governance and citizen engagement are not

²² Creative Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grand_paris_express.svg

²³ Recommendations from the Development Council, P6
https://www.metropolegrandparis.fr/sites/default/files/media/document/CODEV_saisine_CVV_0.pdf

among the core responsibilities of a Town Centre Manager and are typically managed by other departments in the municipality that oversee sectors local associations, community centres or communication.

Therefore, the city centre manager is often not involved in consultation processes and might not factor in mechanisms to evaluate local opinion when proposing a city centre action plan. Likewise, the Lively Downtowns end-of-contract assessment report does not require cities to provide feedback on how projects were received locally. A combination of these factors has resulted in a lack of local qualitative and quantitative stakeholder feedback for the Lively Downtowns programme. While participatory processes are embedded in national and local law, the voice of citizens and users should be more integrated into this governance to ensure there is some level of consensus when new projects are introduced. Increasing the presence of citizen dialogue in developing city centre policy is the primary objective of the Cities@Heart local group in the Greater Paris Metropolis.

4.4. Problem identification with and by local stakeholders

4.4.1. The Greater Paris Metropolis ULG (Urban Local Group)



The ninth ULG meeting in Charenton-le-Pont

Bringing together key players from the public & private sectors as well as from the civil society is key to ensuring the development of a properly integrated and strategic approach according to

the methodology proposed by the URBACT programme. Creating a local steering group or Urban Local Group (ULG) is central to the URBACT methodology. Bearing in mind this idea, the Greater Paris Metropolis chose ULG members directly linked to the challenges of governance and involvement of users. Their experience and expertise have supported the production of this Integrated Action plan.

The ULG consists of members from different departments of the Metropolis, urban planning and city centre management experts, town centre managers and intermittent participation from the public and private sectors as well as stakeholders from the civil society.

The ULG relies on the aforementioned partners of the Lively Downtowns programme: Apur, Paris Region Institute, ANCT and the association Centre-Ville en Mouvement.

Parisian Urbanism Atelier's (Apur) mission is to document, analyse and develop prospective strategies concerning urban and societal developments in Paris and the Greater Paris Metropolis.

Paris Region Institute (IPR) carries out studies and projects that are key to decision-making processes of the Region and its partners. From small to large cities, the institute intervenes in many areas such as urban planning, housing, transport, mobility, the environment, biodiversity, energy, waste, economy, employment, safety, health, sport and social issues. 200 experts cover all these subjects to provide strategic advice to local authorities and regional development stakeholders.

The **National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ANCT)** is a "project factory" enabling local authorities to carry out their projects. Its mission is to facilitate local authorities' access to the resources they need to carry out their projects should they be technical or financial engineering, partnerships or subsidies. Additionally, the ANCT is the administrative body managing the URBACT programme for the European Union and both entities share many objectives.

For nearly 20 years, **Centre Ville en Mouvement**, an association of political representatives, has been working on the renewal of city centres. Its mission is to work with all the actors of city centres on cross-cutting subjects related to the revitalisation of city centres (businesses, mobility, logistics, urban planning, housing, environment, living environment, etc.) by relying on real expertise.

4 cities in the Metropolis were chosen according to their size, geographical location, the typology of their population and their action plan to revitalize their city center

- The City of Pierrefitte-sur-Seine (now Saint-Denis-Pierrefitte since January 2025)
- The City of Le Plessis-Tréville
- The City of Charenton-le-Pont
- The City of Sevran

Within the Metropolis, the **Department of Citizen Dialogue and the Development Council of Paris Greater Metropolis (Codev)**. The Department of Citizen Dialogue is responsible for coordinating major participatory campaigns and the Codev is a participatory democracy body made up of volunteer members from civil society.

The aim of the IAP will be to find effective ways and operational tools to integrate participative democracy into the decision-making process of the Lively Downtowns programme. The IAP will focus on increasing citizen engagement from the first step of policy design to its implementation and monitoring. To do so, the IAP will benchmark good practices and will use its small-scale actions to experiment with capacity-building tools to be used by cities and local stakeholders such as town managers.

4.4.2 ULG Methodology

As much as possible, the ULG meetings have been organised in-person and have included site visits to enrich the understanding of the entire Metropolis and provide opportunities for connection between ULG members. Meetings have included site visits to the cities of Charenton-le-Pont and le Plessis-Tréville as well as an interactive small-scale action.

Several interactive sessions have been held so far including the exploration of case studies highlighting existing situations and giving keys of learning processes to inform project framework before taking action. The ULG coordinator moderates each session giving voice to each member regarding the subjects tackled in each session.

A typical session consists of the following:

- Presentation of Cities@Heart Transnational progress
- One of the ULG members' action or case study
- A proposal for collective analysis of the case study
- A workshop to develop the IAP
- A presentation by an expert

These presentations are followed by interactive discussions among the group members. The methodologies, processes and tools used include SWOT diagrams, a world café or gamification of policy design. After months of exchanges and learning, ULG members made certain conclusions about citizen dialogue in city centres. Indeed, many tools can be co-created and adapted to a specific situation. Failures are often due to a lack of real public consultation and or lack of preparation ahead of consultation campaigns.

For example, one city in the ULG created an open-air market at the request of the district council. This market has been stopped due to a lack of customers. As a result of time constraints and lack of planning foresight, the inhabitants were not involved and questioned. Additional market research and a participatory approach could have resulted in a more positive outcome. To avoid this type of situation and to encourage participatory processes overall, the goal of the Metropolis ULG is to identify the skill sets and policy reforms which would allow town centre managers and stakeholders to carry out successful participatory actions to improve city centres.

Problem tree

Using the problem tree exercise, we were able to identify the main hurdles to encouraging participation in city centres which are not unique to the downtown area. ULG members and city centre managers found that the root of the participation deficit boils down to unclear projects. In this context, unclear is synonymous with “lacking vision”. Projects fail to pursue an integrated method, are not presented as well or as widely as they could be and this results in a loss of confidence among users which translates to low turnout and failed projects.

SWOT

A SWOT analysis proved to be an interesting exercise as we were able to identify the strengths of participatory measures in the city centre. Indeed, the city centre is often a common meeting place and therefore a wide variety of opinions can be consulted when carrying out participatory actions in this urban context.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Proximity of the actors Best practices Learning from mistakes Scope of the law	Recent Practices Lack of strong political will Fear of controversy No obligation to consult for certain projects
Opportunities	Threats
Artificial Intelligence Data and digital Tools Crowdsourcing Need to evaluate public policy efficiency Residents' desire for more democracy	Individualism Mistrust of the politicians Need to act quickly Municipal budgets Lobbies from communities

4.4.3. Co-create a vision for Cities@Heart in the Greater Paris Metropolis

Local Priorities

The local priority is to involve daily users (citizens, small business owners, active workforce, commuters, students, visitors, etc...) in the urban policy decision-making process, from the very beginning to inform the design of the policy, before planning takes place, during the implementation process and beyond the initial roll-out. Yet, the challenge is to achieve more participatory governance when the main duties of the Town Centre Manager do not require a specific focus on this aspect of urban planning.

Learning needs

In the context of the Lively Downtowns Programme, The Greater Paris Metropolis requires an enhancement of its citizen dialogue strategy, as well as an update to its Town Centre Management (TCM) models to monitor citizen perception regarding city centres. Additionally, there is a need for data collection and its translation into effective policies related to a compendium of best practices, encompassing both commerce and public space.

Overall Vision

The Greater Paris Metropolis proposes a strategy to better integrate citizen dialogue in city centre policies and action plans. The Living Downtowns Programme will support this approach and work to redesign its policy to encourage definition and monitoring of citizen dialogue in city centre projects.

Strategic Objectives

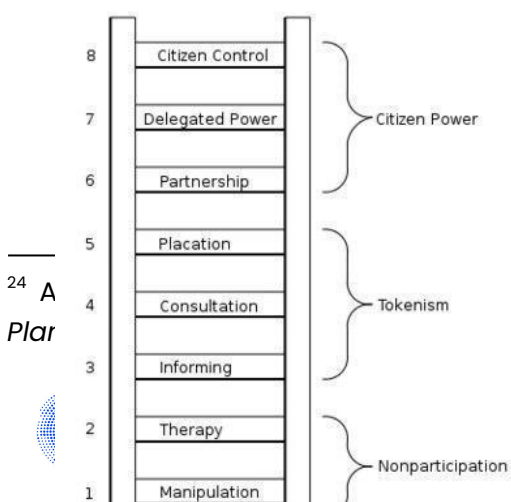
- Implement policy adjustments to make the Lively Downtowns programme more focused on participation.
- Encourage the activation and reappropriation of the public space.
- Increase the diversity of stakeholders involved in creating city centre policies starting with citizens.
- Recognize and empower the facilitator dimension of the role of the city centre manager.
- Foster interdisciplinary and integrated collaboration in the city centre.

Key Actions

- Create a strategy to rewrite certain policies of the Lively Downtown programme to better highlight citizen dialogue and integrate citizen engagement.
- Develop a service to foster interdisciplinary, participative and dynamic projects in the public space.
- Cocreate a Practical Manual for managers and a training programme with sessions dedicated to site visits, capacity building and collaboration.

4.5. Defining participation and understanding the corpus

Within the context of the Lively Downtowns programme, town centre managers are the prime contact person for the Metropolis team. Yet, the primary function of a Town Centre Manager is not facilitating participation. Likewise, the Lively Downtowns programme has largely focused on the economics of the city centre and supporting physical improvements to the public space. As such, the citizen engagement goals will differ from those of a team fully dedicated to participatory processes. It is necessary to define citizen dialogue and its scope within the context of the Integrated Action Plan for the Greater Paris Metropolis Lively Downtowns programme.



According to the seminal article by Shelly Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation"²⁴, there are three main categories of what we might ordinarily call participation, and it is important to understand the nuances of each level, especially when meeting with stakeholders. Indeed, in many cases, initiatives proposed by a Town Centre Manager would likely

tizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of* 10.1080/01944366908977225

fall under the category of “consultation” or “informing”. If these types of initiatives are not already taken to account in a city centre action plan, they should be. However, the goal is to move up the ladder and achieve true partnership with stakeholders in the city centre, likely through collaborations with departments more specialised in participatory processes.

A graph perhaps better suited to this discussion is the Public Participation Scale designed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)²⁵. This graph emphasizes the transparency between the objective of the participatory process and the message communicated to citizens. If the objective is simply to inform citizens about a future project, it is important not to give citizens the impression that they will have opportunities to express their opinions on the project. Sometimes, it is not the level of participation that counts but the level of transparency and credibility assured by the public authority.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Although a city centre manager cannot be expected to undertake the participation strategy for their city, the IAP strives to familiarize them with the main ideas and strategies of citizen engagement and to improve the quality of these approaches locally.

4.5.1. The challenge of the Greater Paris Metropolis ULG: participation in city centres

Increased citizen engagement in city centre policy is the focus of the Greater Paris Metropolis IAP. A problem tree exercise was conducted in the early meetings of the ULG and found that the

²⁵ International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

root causes of low participation are numerous and result in projects that the public has a difficult time understanding. The role of a city centre manager is not to work solely on participation. Therefore, the IAP is focused on Town Centre Manager capacity building and not fully solving the issue of low citizen engagement in city centre policy. In the case of Paris Greater Metropolis, the disparities among the cities in terms of participative democracy and target audiences, was identified as the target issue. Therefore, solutions should be adaptable to many different contexts and segments of the population.

To aid with the drafting of the IAP and provide contrast with examples from outside of the Metropolis, the city of Agen was able to present their work as Lead Partner of the Active Citizens Network during the URBACT III program. Their strategy was based on a placemaking approach and involved mobilizing the younger generations using playful techniques such as a photo booth or a serious game. At the national level, the ANCT was able to present its "Terre engagement" programme, a resource centre for small municipalities that offers training, webinars and a call centre.

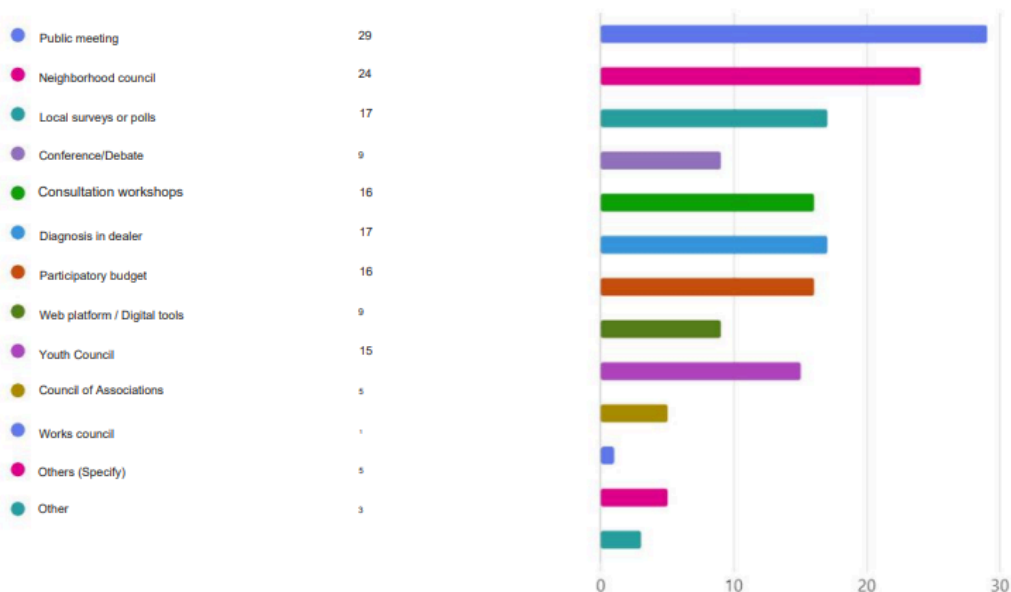
A first step to defining the problem was the co-creation of a survey that offered an overview of the types of participation techniques most often used to gauge public opinion and interest. The questions were drafted by the ULG Coordinator using the feedback from ULG workshop sessions and focus on understanding how participation is addressed, the most frequently used strategies and common pitfalls for Metropolitan cities. The survey was launched in summer 2024 and results were collected early fall. The analysis of the results yielded a list of techniques most often used for public concertation. After some study and exchanges with city centre managers, good practices were divided into 5 different themes.

Below are some questions and the responses collected from 34 managers who contributed responses:

. Have you already implemented consultation processes in your municipality in connection with the revitalization/development of city centers and neighborhoods? (0 points)



Which participatory devices have you tried out in your municipality among the following proposals? (Check the devices that
ifs concerned) (0 points)



Results from the survey sent to city centre managers

4.5.2. Main integration challenges

Horizontal Integration: encouraging cooperation in cities

In the environment of the cities that constitute the Greater Paris Metropolis, the management of urban centres is often carried out through the figure of the Town Centre Manager, whose function is to activate and coordinate the different stakeholders, involving municipal departments, investors, private agents, etc., according to the local context. Many cities have teams that are dedicated to public consultation. However, the focus of public consultation campaigns may not be in the city centre. In some cities, participation is seen as an inconvenience rather than an opportunity. Across the Metropolis the interest and engagement with participation is highly variable. One integration challenge is the disparities between cities, some being well advanced in the participative democracy process, while others are far behind in securing stakeholder involvement.

However, city centers are not always the subject of regular public consultation campaigns, and city center managers are not always involved in citizen dialogue processes. From a political perspective, in some cities, participation can be perceived as a drawback rather than an opportunity. Across the entire metropolitan area, interest in and commitment to participation vary considerably. To achieve better horizontal integration within each municipality, this action plan includes awareness-raising activities on participatory processes for city center managers, as well as training sessions for staff in cities that have signed the "Lively Downtowns" charter.

Vertical Integration: between metropolitan and local strategies

Through better horizontal integration within cities, the Metropolis can encourage improved vertical integration, from the municipal level to the Lively Downtowns team. At full

implementation, the action plan proposes to identify indicators related to stakeholder engagement in city centres. Equipping city centre managers with the skills they need to monitor for these indicators, will contribute to better transparency between cities and the Metropolis which will in turn allow the Lively Downtowns programme to make policy improvements.

4.6. Small scale action



A lunch organised with city centres managers during the Metropolis' Small Scale Action

In April 2025, together with the ULG, the Lively Downtowns programme organised a full day of workshops for city centre managers focusing on citizen dialogue. The event was organised using the results of the city centre manager survey from 2024. The target audience was ULG members and town centre managers. A tool to train city centre managers, the event was held in person and each workshop focused on a thematic area in the planned city centre manager participation handbook.

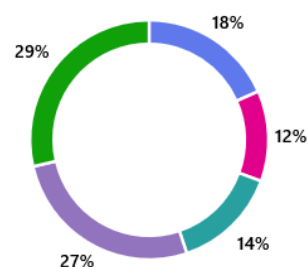
The goal was to train participants in methodologies and tools that can be used regularly to involve users at all stages of action implementation in city centre action plans: before, during and after implementation. The five workshops mainly focused on developing monitoring processes and working on innovative tactics for engagement: mobilising stakeholders, writing a survey, experiential walks, experimenting actions in the public space and evaluation. As a part of the prefiguration process to draft the Integrated Action Plan, the secondary goal of the event was to obtain feedback from managers. At the end of the event, participants were asked to respond to a survey. They gave feedback indicating their level of satisfaction with the training, the usefulness of each session and additional interests to explore in future sessions. The event demonstrated the necessity to pursue capacity building efforts around stakeholder engagement. The survey results allowed the Lively Downtowns team insight into what type of capacity building content is wanted or needed by city centre managers. Responses indicate

that all the five themes addressed are of interest to the city centre managers but there was a particular need to work on evaluation, experimentation and organising interactive sessions. At the end of this masterclass, the ULG met to decide how the event could inform the IAP strategy, using feedback of the managers to measure satisfaction with the workshops.

10. Quels sujets aimeriez-vous approfondir lors d'une prochaine session ? (0 point)

[En savoir plus](#)

● Techniques avancées d'animation participative	9
● Outils numériques pour la concertation citoyenne	6
● Méthodes de sondage en milieu urbain	7
● Expérimentation et tests de dispositifs	13
● Indicateurs de mesure de l'impact d'un projet	14



Text: "What subjects would you like to explore deeper during a future session?" City centre managers reported an interest in all the topics explored during the small-scale action: organising dynamic meetings, digital tools, drafting surveys, experiential surveys, experimentation and following indicators

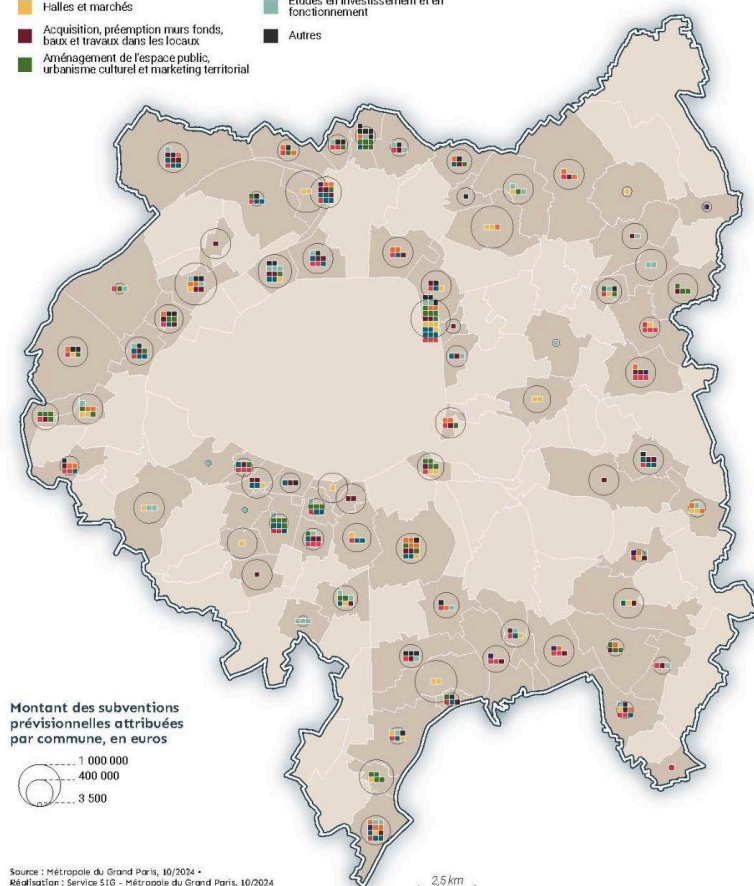
Going forward, the survey data will be used to prioritise the training modules and activities chosen for the city centre manager capacity building workshops. The survey also contains practical information such as the preferred format for the meeting (in-person or remote) or the regularity of training sessions. As was the case with the ULG meetings, city centre managers enjoyed the opportunity to meet with their counterparts in other cities and exchange about their individual challenges in an understanding, knowledgeable environment. Along with convivial moments around a cup of coffee or a meal, the in-person workshop format encourages learning and will be prioritised for long-term actions. The workshop was limited to 40 participants. While over 40 people registered, the actual turnout amounted to 32 participants from nearly all the geographical areas of the Metropolis.

4.7. Vision and focus

Bilan du programme Centres-Villes Vivants de la Métropole du Grand Paris entre 2019 et 2024

Typologie des actions des Centres-Villes Vivants
Un carré = une action

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ Animations commerciales | ■ Managers de commerce |
| ■ Devantures commerciales, signalétique et logistique urbaine | ■ Boutiques éphémères, lieux-nœuds, nature en ville, service à la population |
| ■ Halles et marchés | ■ Études en investissement et en fonctionnement |
| ■ Acquisition, préemption murs fonds, baux et travaux dans les locaux | ■ Autres |
| ■ Aménagement de l'espace public, urbanisme culturel et marketing territorial | |



Visual presenting the actions cofinanced by the programme Lively Downtowns²⁶

Already recognized within its own metropolitan and national networks, the Metropolis wished to continue evaluating its program at the European level and decided to apply to the URBACT program with the Cities@Heart network, assuming the responsibility of coordinating it as the Lead Partner. It is also within this evaluation framework that the Metropolis began to examine the issue of citizen dialogue more closely. The Living City Centers program has gained the trust of mayors and municipal staff, but what about citizen input?

Structured as a resource center for municipalities, the program had not, until now, recommended a methodology for citizen dialogue to be used in the implementation of projects

²⁶https://www.metropolegrandparis.fr/sites/default/files/media/document/CVV%20-%20Bilan%20et%20bonnes%20pratiques_v5.pdf

in city centers, which ULG members considered a shortcoming or omission. Citizen dialogue in city centers is a real challenge that the Metropolis is currently addressing. It aimed to improve the decision-making process within its "Lively Downtowns" program at the Metropolitan and municipal levels. Approaching the program's tenth anniversary in 2028, the Metropolis hopes to better involve citizens in the future of their city centers by making its actions more transparent and accessible.

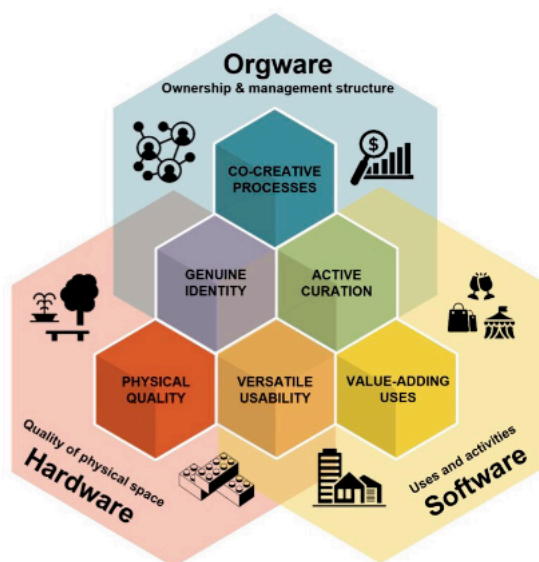
The Metropolis has already observed a lack of ownership of certain projects funded under the program. This means that, sometimes, the cities applying for its funding have not always understood what citizens want or what they truly need. For example, one city requested significant funding to create a new market, presented as a citizen demand. However, the project failed, probably because the municipality had not consulted a sufficiently large group of residents' representatives, nor involved them enough in the process to understand their expectations and real needs.

While co-creation between public authorities and citizens is an ideal in the field of participatory democracy, the Metropolis is currently working on more modest levels of participation (informing, consulting) to ensure that these essential steps are respected. Beyond its impact on project success, the lack of connection with citizens is problematic in and of itself. The metropolitan area lacks indicators to understand how the "Lively Downtowns" program is perceived by the populations it is intended to serve. Regarding city centers, the situation is particularly urgent in European cities. Many people have a strong attachment to their city center, whether it is thriving or declining. Many also express frustration with the complexity of the issues related to urban revitalization. A participatory campaign could help clarify these issues for citizens, stakeholders, and public decision-makers.

The desired outcome is for projects funded by the Metropolis to be genuinely desired and beneficial to the local population. Ultimately, participating cities will be required to provide data demonstrating how they gather and integrate citizen input into the implementation of their action plans, employing a variety of techniques to capture diverse perspectives throughout the process. The Metropolis aims to develop indicators and training tools to support city center managers in achieving this objective, alongside other citizen engagement initiatives.

5. Overall logic and integrated approach

In its diagram illustrating the ideal functioning of project structures in public spaces, Placemaking Europe outlines the necessary facets in three categories: “orgware” (organization), hardware, and software. This is another way of articulating the concept of integration, which is central to the URBACT methodology. The Lively Downtowns program has made significant progress in the hardware categories and has activated categories related to software and organizational software. What is perhaps still lacking is robustness regarding the “software” aspect—the co-creation process that also involves a notion of evaluation and shared governance.



Placemaking Europe diagram for great public spaces²⁷

To better understand the IAP structure, it is important to know that the governance model of the Greater Paris Metropolis differs from that of a city. In the Metropolitan area, teams generally work indirectly with citizens and users impacted by their policies. This is why policies should be adapted to enable the Metropolis to erase communication barriers between users, cities and Metropolitan policies. As much as possible, the Lively Downtowns team should have access to information reflecting citizen feedback and provide the framework for the city centre managers to monitor chosen indicators.

Engaging with stakeholders is part of a larger strategy to activate the public space according to principles related to placemaking: community-driven and human-centred development, multidisciplinary programming and adaptive planning integrating experimentation and incremental adjustments. The Cities@Heart Greater Paris Metropolis action plan is divided into

²⁷[https://placemaking-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PE - Cities In Placemaking - Report 01.pdf](https://placemaking-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PE_-_Cities_In_Placemaking_-_Report_01.pdf)

three principal areas of intervention: policy improvement, public space activation and capacity building. Tackling the issue of stakeholder involvement from three different angles contributes to better integration overall.

Offering services related to community-oriented public spaces activation allows the Lively Downtowns team to go further up the “ladder of participation”, as described by Sherry Arnstein. While action themes 1 and 3 focus on gathering feedback, public space initiatives promote a spirit of mutual learning and co-construction with users. Finally, capacity building initiatives provide living space for dialogue, not only between city centre managers, but also across disciplines within cities. The goal of the Greater Paris Metropolis Cities@Heart ULG is to foster a more complete vision for city centre revitalisation action plans, spurring city centre managers and cities towards better interaction with stakeholders, firstly to obtain their feedback and ultimately, to work together improving their cities.

5.1 Objectives

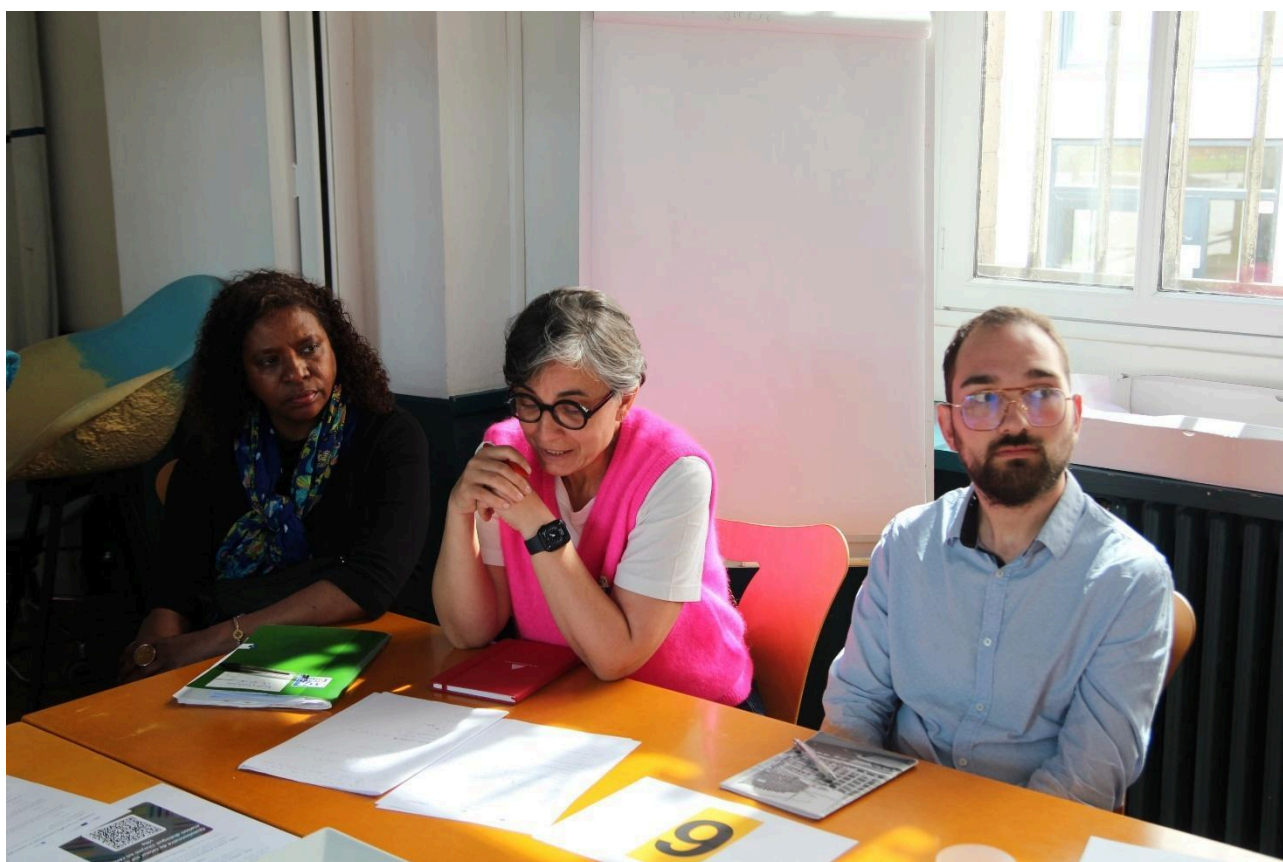


5.1.1. Objective 1: Encourage a culture of stakeholder involvement and monitoring in city centre policies

The Greater Paris Metropolis is situated at an operationally disadvantageous position when participatory processes are concerned. With a relatively small staff of 5 people to service the 7.2 million users frequenting their city centres, the strength of the Metropolis lies less in its ability to conduct on-the-ground assessments of city centres and more in its ability to facilitate knowledge sharing and policy improvements. The Metropolis can orient cities' policies but perhaps more importantly, the Metropolis cofinances city initiatives and can infuse a culture of participatory governance with its hallmark Lively Downtowns programme. Through a process of

observation and co-construction, the Metropolis aims to improve the Lively Centres programme by increasing awareness and monitoring of participatory measures in city centre development.

- 1A *Make recommendations for the next Town Centre and Commerce Barometer evaluation*
- 1B *Stakeholders recommendation: Organise a preliminary consultation with the Development Council*
- 1C *Stakeholders recommendation: establish indicators*
- 1D *Survey on the perception of city centres*
- 1E *Analysis of indicators: Create a strategy to target citizen dialogue*
- 1F *Working on indicators: Integrate learnings during the CVV3 assessment period*
- 1G *Organise a long-term consultation with the Development Council*



A workshop organised by the Metropolitan Cities@Heart ULG

5.1.2 Objective 2 : Integrating citizen dialogue in the Lively Downtowns Programme Offer of Services

To encourage participatory culture in the city centre, the Greater Paris Metropolis plans to create a service to support placemaking initiatives in the public space. Projects would have to be participatory in nature, incorporate creative approaches and contribute to activating the city centre. Having already experimented with such initiatives during the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Metropolis aims to provide a more structured programme focused on transforming the city centre. The programme would support initiatives relating to tactical urbanism, transitory or cultural urbanism and could include a wide variety of programming including events, art installations, public workshops or shared meals. The programme represents a key opportunity to achieve the most ideal level of participation identified in Arnstein's ladder:

co-construction. The town centre manager would provide a holistic evaluation of the city centre context and needs which would inform the co-construction process carried out by municipal staff and city stakeholders (associations, local businesses, arts organisations, etc.).

- 2A *Conduct study to establish the needs and potential for a placemaking programme in the Greater Paris Metropolis*
- 2B *Launch a placemaking programme for cities in the Lively Downtowns programme*
- 2C *Create a cohort of cities participating in the placemaking programme and monitor their progress in partnership with leaders in the sector*
- 2D *Join a European Project working on stakeholder engagement and improvement of the public space*
- 2E *Organise publication of findings from public space initiatives*

5.1.3 Objective 3: Capacity building – Providing practical tools for city centre managers: publications

To attain this objective, the ULG has recommended organisation of capacity building activities. With a small-scale action event to launch and test activities, the capacity building deliverables proposed include a printed manual with best practices as well as a series of events and webinars. The initial outputs of the network will take the form of a manual for citizen dialogue in city centres with practical exercises and best practices from across Europe and the Metropolis.

- 3A *Handbook with Toolbox*
- 3B *Good Practice Guide*

5.1.4 Objective 4: Capacity Building – Providing practical tools for City Centre Managers : experiences and meetings

Primarily focused on interactive, in-person events, the capacity building portion of the action plan aims to improve collaborations between city services but also between city centre managers. As much as possible, the training sessions will incorporate practical tools, time for convivial, informal discussions and site-specific visits. Training modules should reflect the values and vision of the overall action plan. Therefore, capacity building efforts will incorporate innovative techniques for organising meetings, embrace a collaborative approach and improve through monitoring and regular feedback from city centre managers.

- 4A *Small scale action training managers on the key strategic areas identified for capacity building*
- 4B *Small scale action survey to evaluate IAP strategy*
- 4C *Webinar and events programme*
- 4D *Presentation of placemaking study*
- 4E *Participation and public space activation event at the next Metropolitan City Centre Forum*

6. Action planning details

The Action Plan will primarily be deployed in the period from 2025 to 2027. Additional goals are set for 2030 in keeping with the SCoT, the Territorial Coherence Scheme which provides orientations for the Metropolis for the next twenty years. The SCoT envisions a metropolis that is polycentric, ecologically responsible, and socially cohesive. Achieving this vision requires more than infrastructure—it demands creativity, legitimacy, and trust. Citizen engagement is the mechanism through which these intangible assets are cultivated.

- Creativity and imagination: Citizens bring lived experience and creative insight that enrich urban planning beyond institutional expertise.
- Legitimacy: Participatory processes ensure that decisions reflect collective aspirations and needs.
- Trust: Long-term transformation depends on public confidence in institutions and their responsiveness.

In the future, the most successful urban centres will be those that:

- Adapt to evolving needs through continuous dialogue with residents.
- Celebrate local identity by empowering communities to shape their public spaces.
- Foster economic diversity by supporting citizen-led initiatives, pop-up commerce, and cultural programming.
- Build resilience by integrating citizen feedback into climate adaptation, mobility, and housing strategies.

Through tools like thematic workshops, and metropolitan observatories, and initiatives in the public space, the action plan proposes city centre managers to embed citizen engagement into every phase of urban revitalization—from diagnostics to implementation.

6.1. Summary of Actions – Details

6.1.1 Objective 1 : Encourage a culture of stakeholder involvement and monitoring in city centre policies

1A Make recommendations for the next Town Centre and Commerce Barometer evaluation

The Town Centre and Commerce Barometer²⁸ is calculated annually by the Centre-ville en mouvement association. As part of the action plan, it is proposed to modify the survey to include questions targeting citizens' opinions. The specific questions are still being finalized, but the aim is to obtain users' perceptions of downtown areas and to assess whether citizens truly feel that their wishes and needs are being considered in downtown revitalisation projects.

²⁸ The Town Centre and Commerce barometer has evaluated city centre activity since 2016. <https://www.centre-ville.org/barometres-centre-ville-commerces/>

1B Stakeholders recommendation: Organise a preliminary consultation with the Development Council

This action was carried out before the publication of the IAP in summer 2025.

A meeting was organized with members of the Development Council to present the Cities@Heart network, the work of the Urban Local Group (ULG), and the action plan. During a second session, the Development Council discussed its vision for city centers and the metropolitan policies implemented for their revitalization and preservation. This preliminary meeting prepares the groundwork for a more in-depth discussion with this participatory body of the Metropolis.

1C Stakeholders recommendation: establish indicators

The Cities@Heart network was launched with the aim of proposing an evaluation method for city center revitalization initiatives in Europe, as well as within the Greater Paris Metropolis through the "Lively Downtowns" program. Identifying indicators to be monitored in an evaluation process is part of this work. At the beginning of the planning process, the local group proposed identifying indicators related to the challenges of internal citizen dialogue. Over several months of discussions, the ULG proposed integrating work on indicators into the consultation process, which will be carried out in two phases: first, through interactive workshops, and then through an online survey.

After selecting participants through a random lottery, the Metropolis proposes to organise three in-person workshops with a group of approximately 30 citizens, similar to the consultation process implemented within the framework of the PMHH (Metropolitan Housing and Accommodation Plan). The participatory work carried out with this group of citizens is intended to provide source material for developing an online survey, as well as indicators for monitoring citizen dialogue. For example, indicators related to citizen dialogue in city centers could include concepts such as trust, the vibrancy of public spaces, or the relevance of the retail offerings. Similar indicators have been identified within the framework of the American Civic Commons²⁹ program, which regularly publishes surveys on city centers within its network.

1D Survey on the perception of city centres

This initiative, conducted directly by and for the Metropolis, will involve a survey using the "Je participe" (I Participate) platform, which is used for large-scale public opinion polls in preparation for the implementation of major public policies (Low Emission Zones, etc.). City centers have not yet been the subject of a campaign disseminated via this platform. The ULG has proposed conducting a survey on the perception of city centers using this platform. The objective is to enrich the process of identifying indicators to be monitored within the framework of action plans co-financed by the Metropolis and to obtain citizen feedback on metropolitan city centers. Ideally, the survey would be conducted several times. This first survey will be

²⁹ Mésurer le commun

https://civiccommons.us/app/uploads/2020/10/Final_RCC_Metrics-Framework_0920_Digital.pdf

organized in conjunction with the 10th anniversary of the "Centres-villes vivants" (Lively City Centers) program.

1E Analysis of indicators: Create a strategy to target citizen dialogue

In 2024, the third edition of the Living City Centers program was approved by the Metropolitan Council. Once again, the program has been expanded to include new initiatives. This third edition was proposed only after an analysis of the program's activities over its first six years, which revealed the most requested types of actions and the allocation of funds across different areas of intervention. Furthermore, the third edition aims to better integrate a culture of evaluation. Therefore, cities applying to CVV3 must select indicators to track when submitting their action plan. The choice of indicators is not prescriptive. This approach will allow the Living City Centers team to analyze all the proposed indicators, harmonize them, and create a functional evaluation-based methodology that provides recommendations for each indicator. After implementing the workshops on citizen dialogue and the "Lively Downtowns" survey on the "I participate" platform, the teams of the Living City Centres program will also have access to data to establish indicators to monitor in relation to this theme.

1F Working on indicators: Integrate learnings during the CVV3 assessment period

Once the Lively Downtowns indicators are established, organised and codified, ideally in the second year of CVV3, the Lively Downtowns team can go about adapting those indicators to address the subject of participation. If the indicators most relevant to participatory processes are not frequently listed during the assessment period, the Metropolis team will propose a specially tailored indicator that will allow cities to gauge and mobilise participation. Potential indicators include satisfaction in city centre policies, level of hostile behaviour (or lack of it) or event attendance.

After an initial analysis and careful selection, priority indicators chosen in the second year of CVV3 can be proposed to cities applying for funding in the third and subsequent years of the programme. By the third year, indicator(s) linked to citizen dialogue will be recommended to cities. When preparing the fourth edition of the programme (CVV4), the indicators will once again be evaluated to continually renew and improve the Lively Downtowns programme.

1G Organise a long-term consultation with the Development Council

Sessions organised by the Development Council in 2025 allowed the Lively Downtowns team to obtain a citizen's definition of the city centre. This consultation consisted of a 2-hour session to present the Cities@Heart network and the Lively Downtowns programme, and a 2-hour session dedicated to free conversation with citizens about their vision of a city centre. This work could be significantly deepened and built upon the conclusions from the last Development Council reports on city centres as well as their reports on urban density and third places which relate to building community in city centres. This type of working group would have to be scheduled at least 6 months in advance and would likely take place over several months.

6.1.2. Objective 2 : Integrating citizen dialogue in the Lively Downtowns Programme Offer of Services

To encourage participatory culture in the city centre, the Greater Paris Metropolis plans to create a service to support placemaking initiatives in the public space. The programme represents a key opportunity to achieve the most ideal level of participation identified in Arnstein's ladder: co-construction.

2A Conduct study to establish the needs and potential for a placemaking programme in the Greater Paris Metropolis

Action launched at the end of 2025.

The first phase in launching this programme is the funding of market research to understand the current situation in the Metropolis, the needs of the cities and the recommended structure for the programme.

2B Launch a placemaking programme for cities in the Lively Downtowns programme

This action entails the creation and launch of services for public space activation in the Lively Downtowns programme. The details of the action will be informed by the aforementioned study.

2C Create a cohort of cities participating in the placemaking programme and monitor their progress in partnership with leaders in the sector

Once the public space activation, or placemaking offering is launched, cities with a co-financed action will be invited to join a network with the project partners working on the action in question. Together, with a cohort of cities, indicators and measurement tools will be chosen to guide a working group with the goal of exchanging knowledge, confronting challenges and making improvements.

2D Join a European Project working on stakeholder engagement and improvement of the public space

For financial and strategic reasons, the Lively Downtowns team has identified European programmes that would be complimentary to this IAP. The main objectives of participating in a European programme would be to gain knowledge for improving policies and to share with other European partners the Lively Downtowns vision of public spaces and how they relate to the proximity economy.

2E Organise publication of findings from public space initiatives

As communication objectives are often part of European project deliverables, one goal is to use participation in these projects to disseminate learnings from the Greater Paris Metropolis. The first target audience would be the French-speaking market, but the Metropolis would also plan for an English version of its publication on the activation of public spaces. Such a publication would allow the Greater Paris Metropolis to position itself as a leader in European policy as an innovative public authority making the necessary link between proximity economy and public space an integral part of its territorial development strategy.

6.1.3 Objective 3 : Capacity building – Providing practical tools for city centre managers: publications

To attain this objective, the ULG has recommended organisation of capacity building activities. With a small-scale action event to launch and test activities, the capacity building deliverables proposed include a printed manual with best practices as well as a series of events and webinars. The initial outputs of the network will take the form of a manual for citizen dialogue in city centres with practical exercises and best practices from across Europe and the Metropolis.

3A Handbook with Toolbox:

The methodology survey carried out within the ULG in 2024 was analysed to produce key areas of intervention relevant to city centre managers. The handbook, good practice guide and events programme will all be organised according to the themes below :

- General Introduction about Citizen dialogue in the city centre

This theme is meant to give a general introduction to the subject matter: presenting key concepts and resources available in French and, at a European level, in English. The introductory material should also make the case for a participatory approach.

- Facilitating participation during meetings

The goal of this thematic area is to provide tools and techniques for conducting successful meetings with city stakeholders through techniques such as a World Café or Problem Tree.

- Conducting surveys using digital tools

Survey results are only as good as the questions that make them. This theme is focused on the art of the survey or questionnaire: types of surveys, types of questions and the chosen means of communication.

- Experiential walk: conducting surveys in the public space

Gauging public opinion is not something that can be completely confined to a city hall building. To really understand the city, it is important to embrace an experiential approach through an experiential walk.

- Test a new programme by experimenting

Between keeping the status quo and financing large infrastructure projects, there is a middle ground. Initiatives such as tactical or cultural urbanism have become essential to testing ideas in the public space. These techniques allow cities to experiment with new uses but to not come with the same risk as large infrastructure projects. These experiments in the city centre could be financed by the proposed programme cited in Objective 2.

- Evaluating projects in the town centre

Evaluation can take place at all phases of a project: conception, midpoint and end. Like a survey, evaluation is closely linked to the choice of indicators established at the beginning of a project. Choosing the right indicators is key to credible project evaluations and managers should be

able to understand how to choose indicators and monitor them throughout the duration of the city centre project.

3B Good Practice Guide

- 1 good practice for each thematic area, from Europe and the Metropolis

The Good practice guide will glean best practices from Europe and the Metropolis, the goal being to offer concrete examples and a toolbox for each capacity building thematic area.

6.1.4. Capacity Building – Training Sessions and Networking Events

4A Small scale action training managers on the key strategic areas identified for capacity building

Masterclass for the city centre managers (all are invited) which will focus on the 5 themes of the manual (Objective 3).

4B Small scale action survey to evaluate IAP strategy

Determine the needs of city centre managers and improve the Action Plan based on their feedback.

4C Webinar and events programme

The first event will be the small-scale action followed by a series of webinars and in-person events. The goal is to organise an event per theme by the end of 2027. Initial feedback from city centre managers indicate an interest in mobilising stakeholders, experimenting in the public space and better project evaluation through surveys and assessment methodology.

4D Presentation of placemaking study

Certain actions in this IAP have already been launched, namely the placemaking study proposed in action 2A. In the call for tender requirements, the Metropolis requested a public presentation of the study's findings for city centre managers and city employees working in related fields. An in-person presentation would create momentum for the new initiative and provide the opportunity to exchange potential project ideas.

4E Participation and public space activation event at the next Metropolitan City Centre Forum

Organised annually by the Metropolis and Centre-ville en mouvement, the Metropolitan City Centre Forum provides an opportunity to showcase good practices in city centre policy across the Metropolis. An event with high visibility among city centre managers and stakeholders across the Greater Paris Metropolis, the Forum is the ideal setting to present the ongoing work carried out by the public space activation working group and by cities with supported actions.

Annexe : Action table and calendar

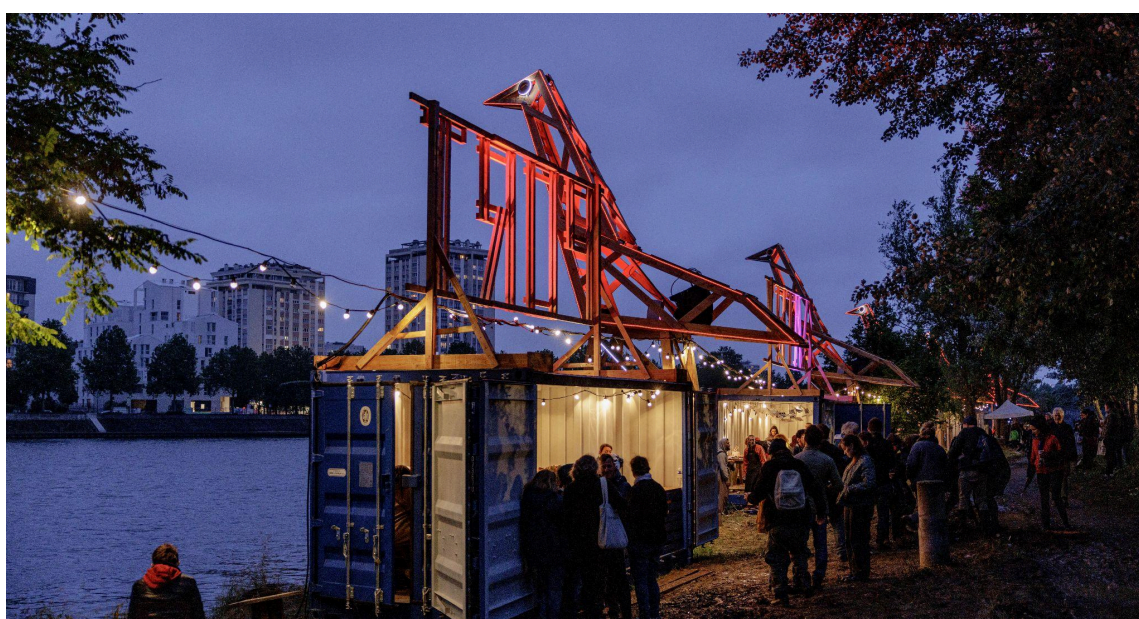
Action Number	Action description	Output target(s)	Action Lead	Key partners	Resource needs	Time-frame	Where can we get inspiration from ?
1A	Make recommendations for the next City Centres and Commerce barometer evaluation	Integrate public opinion in the survey of city centres	Centre-ville en Mouvement Association	Centre-ville en Mouvement	TBD with Centre-ville en Mouvement	spring 2026	Barometers or opinion polls (Ipsos, etc.)
1B	Stakeholders recommendation: Organise a preliminary consultation with the Development council	Gather the opinions of citizens on their city centre	Greater Paris Metropolis Development Council	Greater Paris Metropolis Development Council	1 day's work for 3 employees of the Metropolis	summer 2025	Benchmark of similar campaigns run by Development councils in France
1C	Stakeholders recommendation: establish indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 in-person workshops - Establish key indicators to monitor citizen engagement in city centre programmes 	Lively Downtowns Programme	Communication department, Departments with experience	10 days work for 1 employee of the Metropolis, 80,000 EUR consulting fees	autumn 2026	Data webinar with URBACT "Data Love", the Action Catalogue, Citizen Science initiatives
1D	Survey on the perception of city centres	Establish a frame of reference for the perception of city centres in the Metropolis	Greater Paris Metropolis - Citizen Dialogue Department	"Je participe" platform operators	Online platform : 20 days work for 1 employee of the Metropolis, 14,000 EUR consulting fees	January 2027	Analyse past participation campaigns, Cities with robust online participation platforms (Nantes)
1E	Analysis of indicators: Create a strategy to target citizen dialogue	Changes in programme format for Lively Downtowns	Lively Downtowns programme	Cities participating in the Living Downtowns programme	5 days work for 2 employees of the Metropolis	summer 2027	ANCT programme Territoires en commun, Civic commons programme
1F	Working on indicators: Integrate learnings during the CVV3 assessment period	Living Downtowns programme 4th edition: revisiting requirements and intervention	Lively Downtowns Programme	Cities participating in the Living Downtowns programme, CCI, CMA	5 days work for 2 employees of the Metropolis, 20,000 EUR consulting fees	2027	Town Centre First Policy (IE), BID governance, Action Catalogue, Strade Aperte (IT)
1G	Organise a long-term consultation with the Development council	Publish new study with citizen recommendations	Greater Paris Metropolis Development Council	Greater Paris Metropolis Development Council	Development council; 10 days work for 2 employees of the Metropolis	2028	Similar campaigns with other developmental councils

2. INTEGRATING CITIZEN DIALOGUE IN THE LIVELY DOWNTOWNS PROGRAMME OFFER OF SERVICES

Action Number	Action description	Output target(s)	Action Lead	Key partners	Resource needs	Time-frame	Where can we get inspiration from ?
2A	Conduct study to establish the needs and potential for a placemaking offering for the Lively Downtowns Programme	Report to assess best strategies and interest across the Metropolis	Lively Downtowns Programme	Collectives and research centers specialised in urbanism	20,000 EUR	2026	Studies published by POLAU, ARUP, Placemaking Europe
2B	Launch a placemaking offering for cities in the Lively Downtowns programme	10 cities in the 4 major geographical areas of the Metropolis with eligible projects	Lively Downtowns Programme	Cities, county-level governance (EPT), Region, Apur and IPR	500,000 EUR estimate with a potential of 50 000 euros per city per project, investment and operating budget	2026	PPS, Placemaking Europe, POLAU, New European Bauhaus, Apur guide de transitory urbanism
2C	Create a cohort of cities participating in the placemaking programme and monitor their progress	10 cities in the 4 major geographical areas of the Metropolis with eligible projects	Greater Paris Metropolis - Lively Downtowns Programme, Consultant	Région Ile-de-France, Grand Paris Aménagement, POLAU, Apur	1 day a week for 1 member of the Lively Downtowns team	2028	Milan Strade Aperte and Piazze Aperte programme, Cities in Placemaking, Île-de-France Region
2D	Join a European Project working on stakeholder engagement and improvement of the public space	Successful application by the end of 2026	Lively Downtowns and Innovation departments	Member cities	Consultant services from EY : 5,000 EUR per application	2027	Trainings in EU project funds and applications, URBACT, Placemaking Europe, EY
2E	Organise publication of findings from public space initiatives	Publication of EU-led and Metropolis-coordinated findings in a manual of good practices for sustainable urban proximity in city centres	Greater Paris Metropolis, European Union, consultant	Member cities, Horizon NEB, Creative Europe	20,000 EUR to coordinate publication, potentially supplemented by EU funds	2030	Horizon NEB, URBACT, C40 Cities, UN Habitat

3. CAPACITY BUILDING – PROVIDING PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR CITY CENTRE MANAGERS : PUBLICATIONS

Action Number	Action description	Output target(s)	Action Lead	Key partners	Resource needs	Time-frame	Where can we get inspiration from ?
3A	Handbook with Toolbox: The handbook, good practice guide and events programme will be organised with the same areas of focus : -General Introduction on the subject of Citizen dialogue in the city centre -Facilitating participation during meetings -Conducting surveys -Conducting surveys in the public space -Test a new programme by experimenting -Evaluating projects in the town centre						
		Print and digital booklet	Greater Paris Metropolis	IPR, CVM, APUR, AMCV	10,000 EUR for design and printing	November 2025	Placemaking Europe toolbox, ANCT
3B	Good practice Guide	Print and digital booklet	Greater Paris Metropolis	IPR, CVM, APUR, AMCV	same costs for action C2	November 2025	Placemaking Europe toolbox, ANCT



Good practice in public space activation

4. CAPACITY BUILDING – PROVIDING PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR CITY CENTRE MANAGERS : EXPERIENCES AND MEETINGS

Action Number	Action description	Output target(s)	Action Lead	Key partners	Resource needs	Time-frame	Where can we get inspiration from ?
2A	Small scale action training managers on the key strategic areas identified for capacity building	Full-day training session	Lively Downtowns Programme	Urbanism collectives specialised in participation, Institut Paris Région, Chamber of Commerce, Paris & Co	A maximum of 3500 euros to cover workshop and catering costs	2025	Active Citizens network, ANCT Action Coeur de Ville, CommunAgir
2B	Small scale action survey to evaluate IAP strategy	Manager feedback on methodology	Lively Downtowns Programme	Metropolis Digital team, IPR and APUR to assist with survey development	Assistance on survey development, 1 day of work	2025	Survey benchmark
2C	Webinar and events programme	7 In-person and online events counting the small-scale action	Lively Downtowns Programme	IPR, CVM, APUR, AMCV	Outside expertise, facilitation; estimate of 150,000 euros to run a training programme on a yearly basis. Actions A4-A6 could potentially be coordinated by this collective or business.	2025-2027	Online course structure, Podcasts, Codev, Metropolitan Explorers
2D	Presentation of placemaking study	Presentation, workshop and meal with city centre managers and collective	Greater Paris Metropolis	Member cities, consultant	Catering : 3000 euros	2026	Trainings in EU project funds and applications, URBACT, Placemaking Europe, EY
2E	Participation and public space activation event at the next Metropolitan City Centre Forum	Workshop or round-table discussion	Greater Paris Metropolis, member cities,	Member cities, consultant	2 days of work	2026	Horizon NEB, URBACT, C40 Cities, UN Habitat

6.2. Resources



The URBACT Cities@Heart network is supported by ERDF funds.

Currently, most actions proposed by the IAP have already been accounted for in the Greater Paris Metropolis budget. The study of indicators and integration of participatory techniques can be completed “in house” by the Lively Downtowns staff. External expertise would be useful but is not necessary. The handbook and best practice guide have also been budgeted by the communications department. In terms of capacity building activities, the Metropolis regularly organises webinars and workshops for town centre managers in partnership with ULG members Paris Region Institute and the Île-de-France Chambre of Commerce. These partnerships are already factored into the operating budget of the proximity economy department.

While most essential actions proposed are financially very modest and do not require substantial outside funding, it is important to encourage the Metropolis and its cities to diversify their sources of funding and rely on a network of institutions for their city centre projects. Potential sources of funding include ERDF and FSE funds, EU City to City Exchanges and Horizon. The project funds targeted include those working to increase inclusion, civic engagement and activation of the public space in sectors such as civic participation, events and cultural urbanism. Cities@Heart Partners such as Sligo (Ireland) have received European and international funds to improve their city centre. The internal knowledge of the network could prove valuable in the research for funding sources.

Within the context of the current EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027, the Commission has introduced a Policy Objective advocating ‘A Europe closer to citizens’, supporting local development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU with tailor-made instruments backing up local authorities in their integrated approaches. Additionally, the New European Urban Agenda and the New European Bauhaus incorporate participatory processes as a cross-cutting working principle (developed through consulting, co-developing, and self-government processes). The costliest action is the public space activation initiative. The Metropolis hopes to supplement the funding of this programme through European grants. The New European Bauhaus is the programme that seems most suited to the framework of the action.

6.2.1 Funding sources already identified

Horizon Europe – New European Bauhaus

Provides up to 15M€ for projects focusing on climate neutrality, participative governance and social innovation. The projects under the “Destination 1: Connecting the green transformation social inclusion and local democracy” are particularly promising, namely HORIZON-NEB-2025-01-PARTICIPATION-01, HORIZON-NEB-2025-01-PARTICIPATION-02, and HORIZON-NEB-2025-01-PARTICIPATION-03. The interdisciplinary scope of these projects corresponds to the specific goals of the Lively Downtowns public space initiatives: foster lively city centres through public space activation and stakeholder engagement.

Destination 1: Connecting the green transformation social inclusion and local democracy					
Topic identifier	Topic title	Type of action	Indicative budget (EUR million)	N. projects	Legal & financial set up
HORIZON-NEB-2025-01-PARTICIPATION-01	The impact of common space on neighbourhood communities	RIA	10.50	3	Lump sum
HORIZON-NEB-2025-01-PARTICIPATION-02	Fostering and maintaining the social fabric for the green transition in neighbourhoods	RIA	9.00	3	Lump sum
HORIZON-NEB-2025-01-PARTICIPATION-03	Beautiful, sustainable and inclusive street furniture for the transformation of neighbourhoods	IA	10.40	2	Financial support to third parties
HORIZON-NEB-2025-01-PARTICIPATION-04	Network of neighbourhoods for innovative policies on gentrification	CSA	2.50	1	Lump sum

Compact Cities

The Greater Paris Metropolis recently applied to join a consortium for the Compact Cities Call launched by the European Urban Initiative. The activities of the Lively Downtowns programme focus primarily on the proximity economy. With a more research-oriented approach, participation in the programme would allow the Metropolis to create networks in Europe and gain more insight into proximity-related policies across Europe. Due to its size, the Metropolis

would not receive funding for participating in the project. However, the opportunities resulting from being a part of this consortium will likely be beneficial to the overall goals of the IAP.

European Urban Initiative – Innovative Actions

The EUI call for Innovative actions will open in 2026. From studying the past calls and themes, it is likely that the future call will be related to subjects of sustainable urban proximity. The programme offers up to 2 million EUR in funding for innovative actions focusing on scalable, transferable urban innovations with strong citizen engagement. The Metropolis will be watching for news on this call.

URBACT

The Greater Paris Metropolis has already had the experience of being Lead Partner in the Cities@Heart URBACT network. The Metropolis could leverage its experience and expertise to launch another Action Planning Network related to public space activation. Other cities that have already launched similar networks include Udine (Playful Paradigm) and Milan (Tactical Urbanism Transfer Network).

6.5. Risk analysis

The primary source of risk is linked to the role of the Greater Paris Metropolis. As presented in different passages of this document, the Metropolis influences its member cities generally through indirect action. The Metropolis provides knowledge and resources which then will be mobilised to realise city improvement projects. Thus, the policies of the Greater Paris Metropolis are dependent on the will and engagement of mayors in member cities.

The degree of seriousness with which participation is handled varies greatly from city to city. In some cities, major infrastructure projects sometimes introduce a large public consultation phase only after the final plans are approved. On the other hand, some cities in the metropolis are highly invested in citizens as part of the decision-making process. While the Lively Downtowns programme can supply recommendations, town centre managers will also need political support and resources within their municipality

Risk Analysis Table

RISK ANALYSIS TABLE	Description of the Risks	Likelihood	Impact	Prevention	Mitigation
Administrative Risks	Length of administrative procedures and organisation of decision-making processes in the Metropolis	High	Moderate	Take this input into account in the lifetime of the action	Prepare for immediate set up as soon as the administrative processes are validated
	Lack of staff and human resources within the structure of the Metropolis and member cities	Low	Low	Properly assess ahead of action the time needed to proceed	Allocate relevant number & member of staff to implement action or hire third party specialists to undertake the job
	Public procurement process can minimise opportunities for small scale action projects, namely in member cities	Low	Low	Consider resources for the small-scale actions from the very beginning of the project	Find internal resources or initiate collaboration with the private sector. Compile a list of actors to allow more flexibility when building projects.
	Political changes in municipality or the Metropolis shifts strategic focus	Moderate	High	Settle all resources before elections and get approval for requests in the draft budget	Keep the action plan "tentative" until the political footing is certain
Financial Risks	Planned budget does not match final objectives of the Metropolis	High	Moderate	Plan a limited budget in case it is needed and anticipate its implementation	If necessary, modify the action plan
	Delays in funding availability in the Metropolis or member cities	High	High	Plan ahead for budget co-financing	Find other funding sources
	Changing budget priorities	High	High	Secure budget for priority actions first	Involve other stakeholders and resources
	Costs & delivery variations depending on different service providers	High	High	Difficult to forecast	Seek various forms of funding & other kinds of resources (material, equipment, etc.)
Operational Risks	The person in charge is leaving the organization	Moderate	Moderate	Plan for a group of persons rather than just a single one to be responsible of the action	Divide responsibilities according to different parts of the actions
	Long-term user engagement (city centre managers)	Medium	Moderate	Distil operational information that users can easily activate	Enhance active participation, encourage peer learning and find programme ambassadors
	Level of users' skills might differ from one to the other	Medium	Moderate	Propose different learning opportunities related to different skillsets	Create learning tracks to adapt to the right target
	Lack of interest among users (city centre managers)	High	High	Develop customised actions directly in link with users' needs	Involve users from the very beginning and beyond the action's lifetime, evaluate regularly
	Loss of focus with the action plan implementation	High	Moderate	One action, one indicator, one objective	Use the SMART method
Other Risks	Connection with the private and commercial sector	High	Moderate	Provide a pathway for private-sector actors to be a part of the action plan (shopkeepers, service providers)	Make a point of including the private sector among the stakeholders to be engaged in city centre action plans.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Governance

The draft action plan was presented to Metropolis department heads, the goal being to obtain institutional approval before finishing the final strategy. The input from upper management is essential to proposing a truly actionable roadmap. The network of city managers is already active and unified through the existing programmes run by the Metropolis and its partners. Mobilising this group should not be a relative challenge.

A key part of the action plan will also be mobilising other services and working with the consultant chosen to carry out the public space activation study. It will be necessary to work with the Development Council to understand how a Lively Downtowns working group can be created and with what timeline. The consultant working on public space activation will be chosen for their expertise related to participation and activation of the public space. Their opinions and findings will inform and hopefully improve the proposed action plan.

In spring of 2026, municipal elections will take place in France which will certainly slow down decision-making processes in the Greater Paris Metropolis. The governance of the Metropolis is grounded in the cooperation and participation of mayors from member cities. As such, the action plan must leave space for the inevitable political reorganisations that will take place.

7.2 Evaluation

A culture of evaluation is central to the Cities@Heart methodology. Therefore, every proposed action must be accompanied by an evaluation process. The first objective of the action plan is to better integrate citizen dialogue into the Lively Downtowns programme. This involves identifying indicators based on citizen feedback and includes evaluation phases conducted with residents of the metropolitan area or in relation to the Lively Downtowns action plans.

7.3 Framework for delivery

The stability and popularity of the Lively Downtowns programme form the foundation for this Integrated Action Plan. The programme already has the support of Mayors and Metropolitan political leadership. This programme has secured funding for the next few years and is thus less vulnerable to budget constraints. The stability of the programme is also a factor contributing to its success among Metropolitan cities. The timing of the election cycle in 2026 could prove to be a challenging time but also potentially advantageous as cities are often eager to show how they support citizen opinions directly before and after an election.

On a national and international scale, there is also growing awareness surrounding proximity economy policies and the philosophy of placemaking. The momentum building around these two areas of policy could be a sign of a greater societal shift and an eagerness to both support

city centre revitalisation initiatives and participative, interdisciplinary projects in public spaces. As such, more funding and support could become available in the coming years.

However, more importantly, in the coming years, citizens, stakeholders and public services will be more welcoming of innovative approaches to bring vitality to their city centres. Social interaction and proximity services are proving more and more necessary for the improvement of both economic and psychological well-being. This Integrated Action Plan hinges on what makes city centres unique: they are places for everyone. A successful city centre takes all voices into account to achieve balance and in doing so, becomes more and more vibrant. It's this integrated approach that will make the Lively Downtowns programme more whole and improve Greater Paris Metropolis policy overall.

Credits

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Learn more about the network:

urbact.eu/networks/citiesheart

Learn more about the Lively Downtowns Programme:

<https://www.metropolegrandparis.fr/fr/centres-villes-vivants>