Thematic Session

Welcoming Cities:

Building civic trust through interaction and participation

#URBACTfest

urbact.eu/city-festival-2026

URBACT CITY FESTIVAL
29-30 September 2026 - Nicosia, Cyprus

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Δήμος Λευκωσίας
Nicosia Municipality

Questions

- **What is the potential of interaction and participation in building welcoming cities?**
- **How do city councils need to change?**



Context

- human reality of migration in cities
- increasingly fast-paced, volatile
- systematic spread of anti-migrant-discourses undermining social trust



Our speakers

URBACT APN



How to build welcoming cities that are based on human rights together with all residents?

- Kulthum Laoufi, Département Seine-Saint-Denis
- Edyta Wykurz, city of Sosnowiec

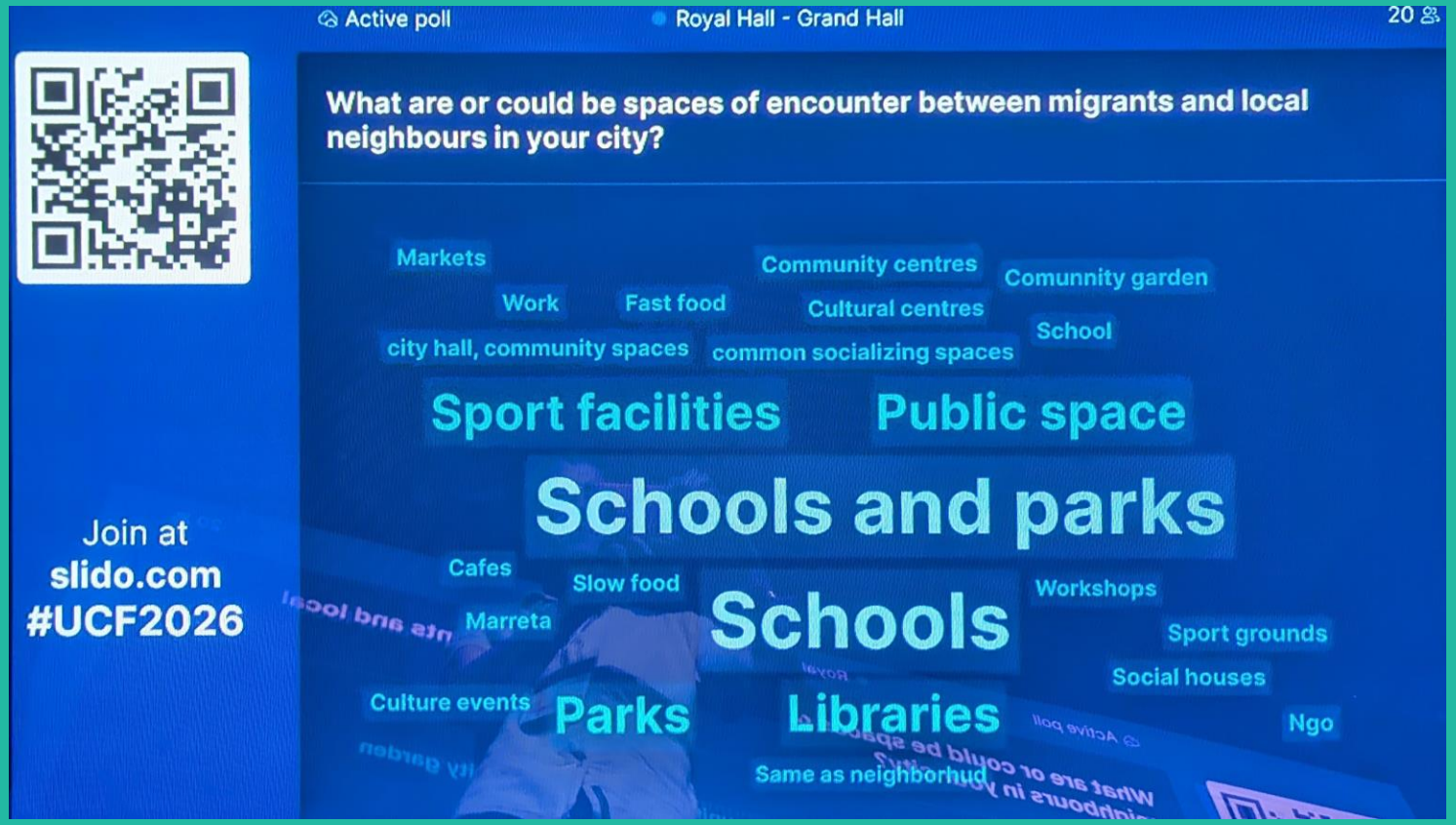
Our speakers

URBACT ITN Einstein Academy

How to create spaces of encounter where refugees and local neighbors can live, learn, and work together from day one?

- Jan Braat, city of Utrecht

Participants survey on civic participation and interaction

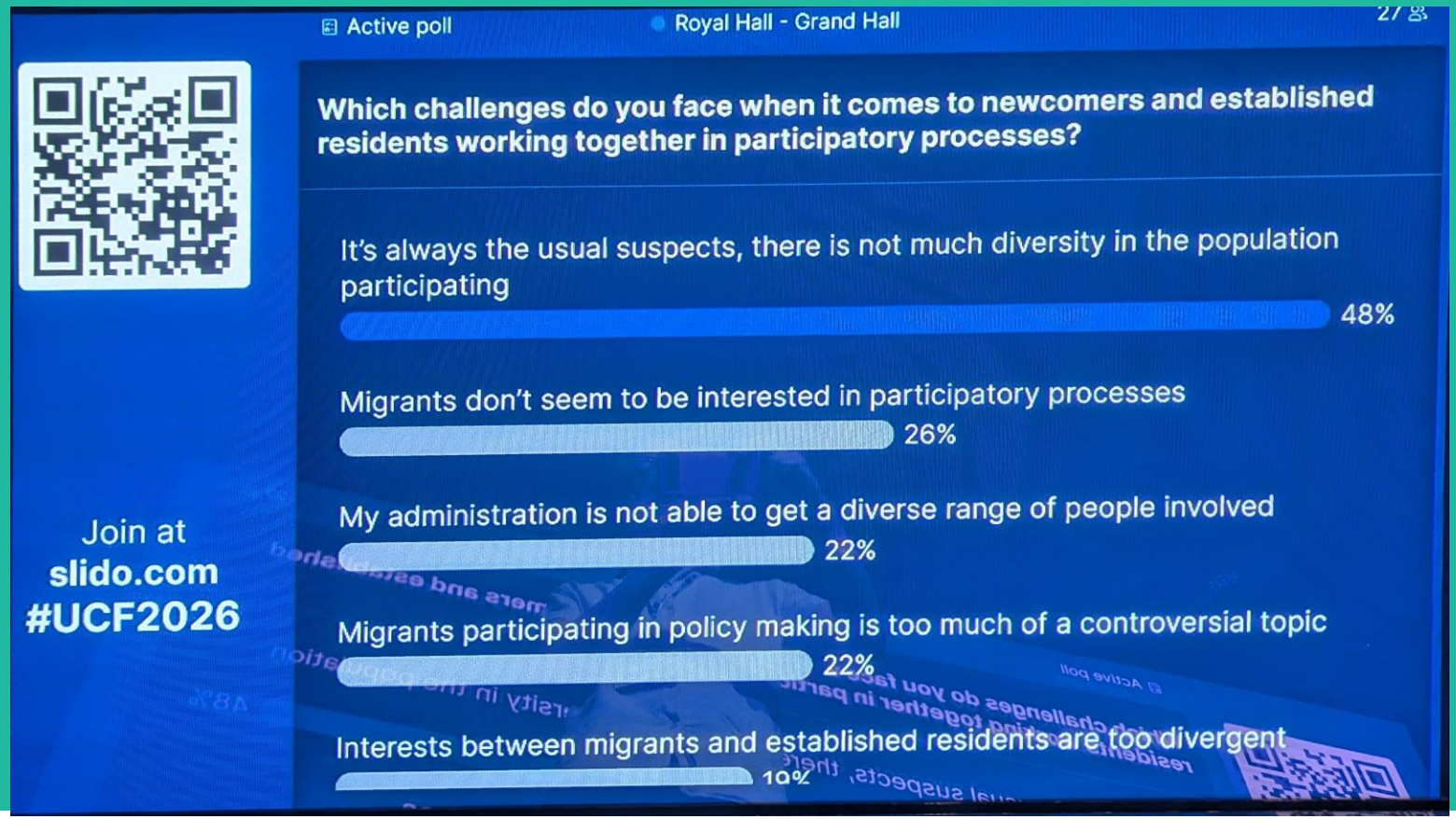


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Participants survey on civic participation and interaction



Introducing the cases

Seine-Saint-Denis

Context

- 1.7 million inhabitants
- Youngest département in metropolitan France – 35% under 25
- 32% immigrants and 25% foreign nationals
- A vibrant civil society and highly diverse population
- A strong commitment to inclusion, interculturality and unconditional access to public services



Introducing the cases

Practice: Assemblée des 100 voix”

Enabling migrants and other under-represented people to take part in democracy

- Citizen assembly designed to amplify voices that are rarely or insufficiently heard
- 100+50 members selected to reflect the diversity of Seine-Saint-Denis
- Young people and foreign residents intentionally over-represented
- Open to residents without French nationality and to people with no previous expertise in public policy
- inclusive, cycle-based process: understand → investigate in the field → develop proposals → report back → dialogue with the administration and politicians
- Cycle 1 focused on caregiving: findings and proposals are now being translated into institutional recommendations



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Introducing the cases

Sosnowiec

Context

- 179.000 inhabitants, part of GZM metropolis with 2.3 million inhabitants
- Recent arrivals of Ukrainian refugees and economic migrants from Asia and Latin America
- How to include newcomers and counter demographic decline…

  …while maintaining social cohesion and addressing long-term residents' concerns about increasing cultural diversity?

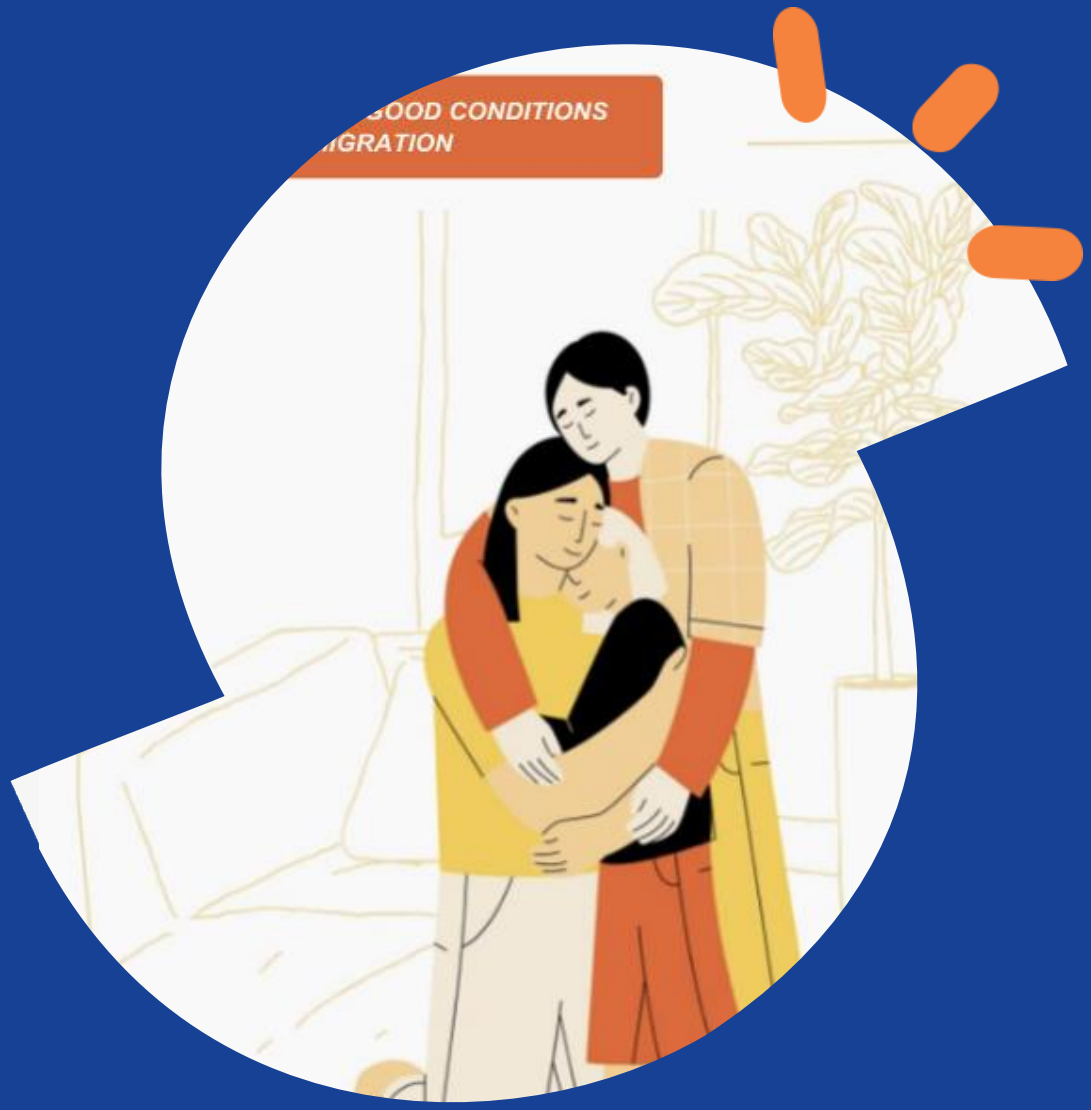


Introducing the cases

Practice: the migrant survey

From assumptions to an evidence-based, systematic approach

- Turning migrants' voices into tailor-made actions
- Same resources, more impact
- Efficient cooperation - synergy between local institutions, stakeholders and newcomers
- Rediscovering our multicultural heritage



Introducing the cases

Utrecht

Context

- 380,000 inhabitants representing 172 different nationalities
- 42% of the inhabitants have a migration background
- Home to 3,137 refugees with a residence permit and 1,500 displaced persons from Ukrainian
- Human Rights City: freedom, equality and dignity.



Introducing the cases

Plan Einstein Ecosystem

a local refugee reception model based on living, learning and working together

- Active from day 1
- Inclusive activities open to whole neighbourhood
- Future free EG English,Entrepreneurship
- Transfer to other cities: Warsaw, Zagreb, Coimbra, Thessaloniki, Suceava etc



Social innovation through new encounters?

What do city council workers have to learn?

to make the most out of civic participation

How to shape a welcoming city narrative based on your practice?

What are the biggest challenges in creating welcoming cities through participation?

Over to you....

Ask questions! Comment…

Share your successes and failures!

How does your city foster interaction between old and new residents? What works, what doesn't?

(How) Can civic participation address divisive issues?

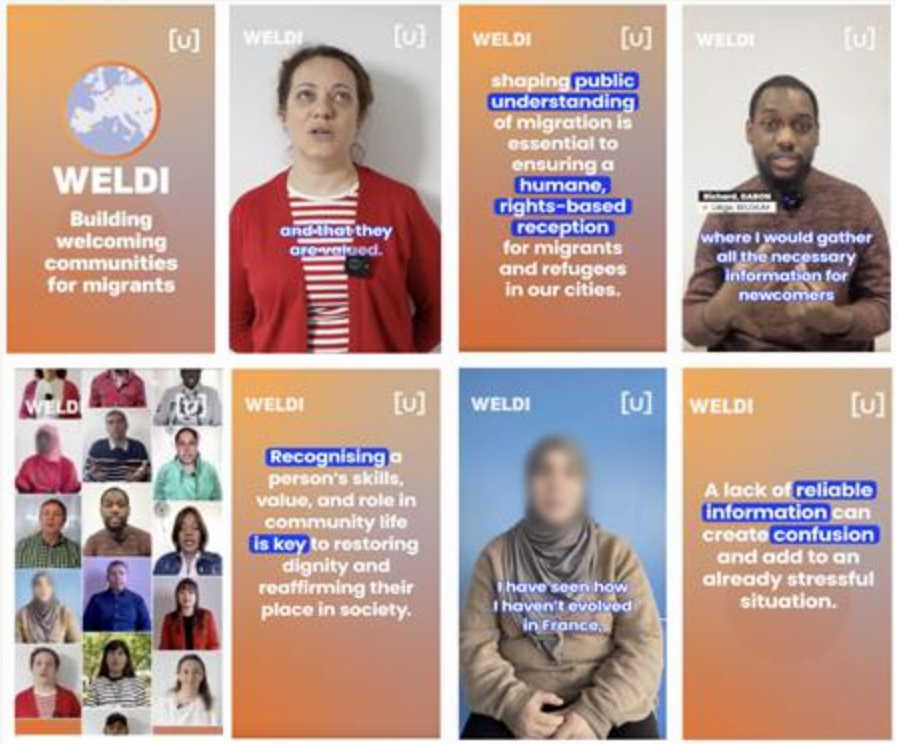
Want to know more about welcoming cities & participation?

Agents of Co-Existence: Participation Assessment Framework



Want to know more about welcoming cities & participation?

WELDI's migrant recommendation videos



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Want to know more about welcoming cities & participation?

WELDI's serious game set « build a human rights city »



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Plan Einstein Academy



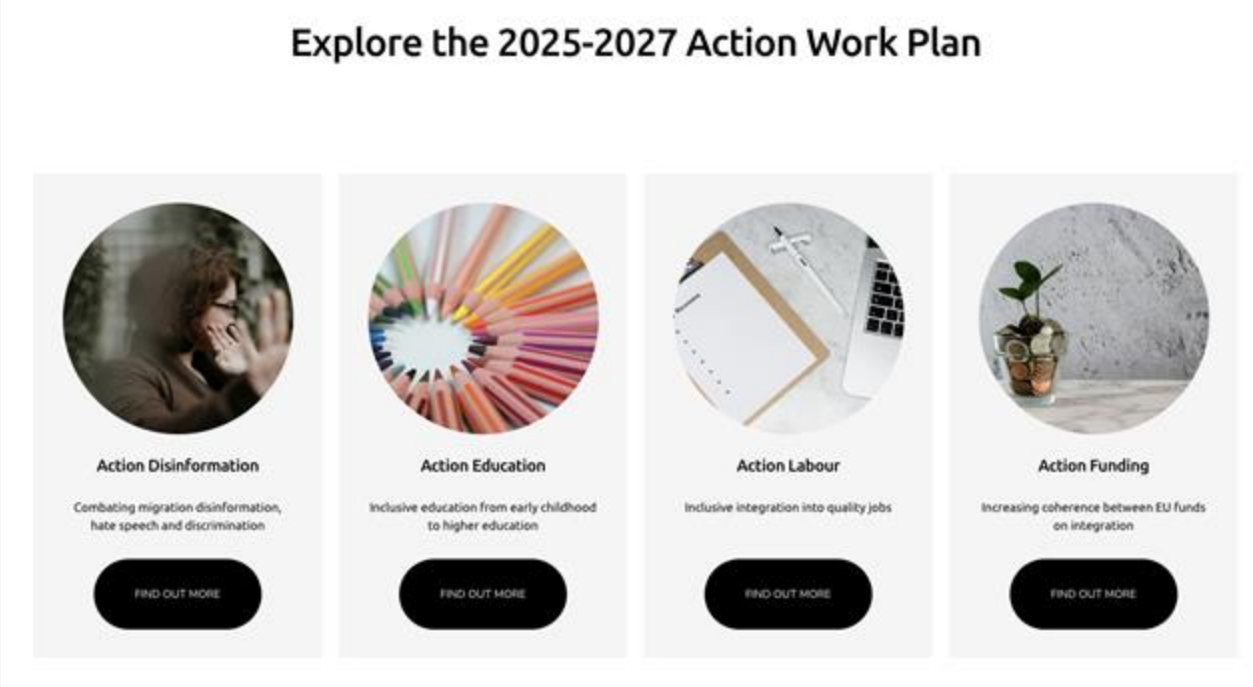
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Urban Agenda Partnership on the inclusion of migrants and refugees



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