

AGENTS OF CO-EXISTENCE

Baseline Study



URBACT



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Section 1

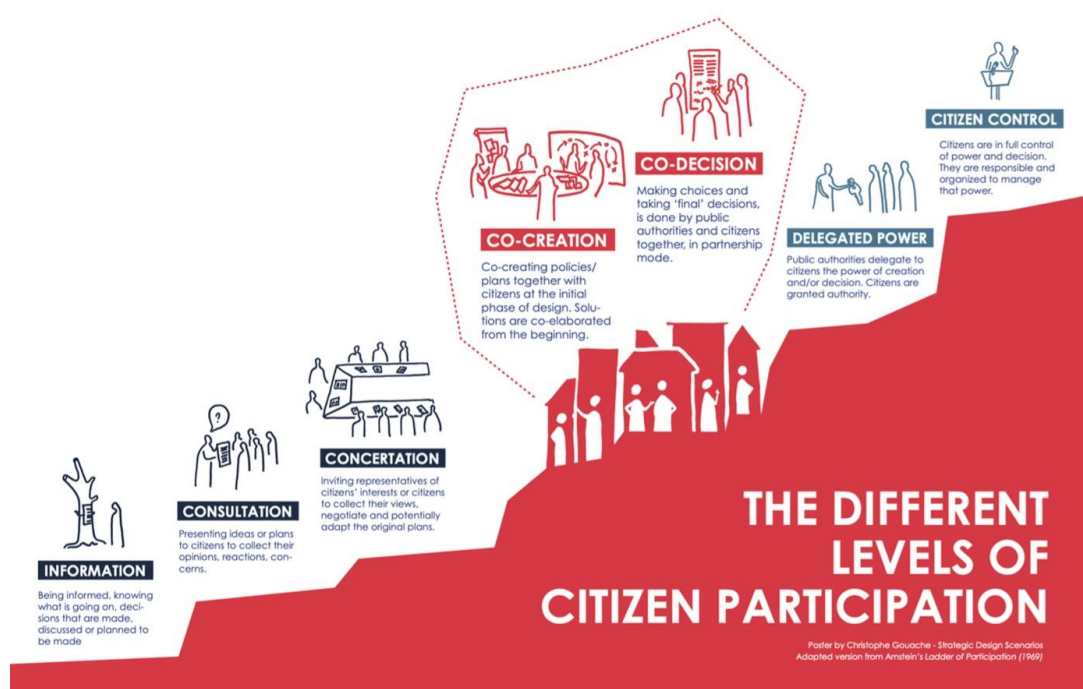
European overview

Public sector innovation is crucial for a future-proof society

Inclusive citizen participation in public policies is not a new concept. Many countries have wide-ranging initiatives that promote citizen involvement in governance and decision-making processes. According to literature, (e.g. International Social Survey Program, Economist Intelligence Unit's measure) citizens are more active when democratic governance is at its best, thus quality of governance correlates to high levels of participation.

The different levels of citizen participation are well-defined in Arnstein's ladder of participation, first published back in 1969. In the URBACT Active Citizens Baseline Study an adapted version of this model was presented which describes the many forms of citizen participation clearly.

FIGURE 1. THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION



The *URBACT Lisbon City Lab Paper* (2019) clearly describes the crucial role of cities as the most local forms of government in the process of stimulating citizen participation and thus enhancing democratic governance. Indeed, we can witness a growing appetite for innovation and experimentation in many European cities, with a specific effort to engage under-represented groups in decision-making.

Addressing public sector innovation is crucial to efficiently tackle current policy challenges: a future-proof society (a society that is prepared to face the effects of a pandemic, climate change, and the digitalisation of the world) is dependent on a creative, flexible, agile, accountable, and trustworthy public administration. And while co-creation and co-design of politics, and in general, civic participation is a broadly accepted thematic field, there is far less debate and action in the European policy arena on how to improve the skills and capabilities of all civil servants and stimulate new ways of working to promote specifically social innovation and inclusion. Actually, there is no overall European Union regulation or policy that targets public sector innovation per se, but there are several transversal policies and frameworks developed on relevant broader issues such as digitalisation, urban development, green transition, and inclusion.

¹ <https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/2022-10/ActiveCitizens%20APN%20Baseline%20study.pdf>

In line with the above, the specific urban issue the network intends to tackle is how to embrace social innovation and inclusion in all fields of local governance by improving the skills and capabilities of municipal staff and creating new organisational structures to boost civic participation further and create a more solid basis of democracy.

The key issues here are how governments can best engage employees' skills and expertise, motivate them, boost their professional development, and reward their initiatives and successes. **We need not only empowered civil servants, who have the skills, knowledge, and attitude to encourage public service innovation but also new ways of organisational structures and regulations that enable this (i.e. leadership capability, organisational culture, and corporate functions).** Mindset, attitude, and behaviour are just as important or maybe even more than specific hard or soft skills in enabling innovation within the public sector.

Scanning the policy landscape

In the field of open governance and public sector efficiency enhancement OECD's Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI²) is one of the most important policy suppliers. Their primary mission is to identify, analyse, and showcase cutting-edge practices, tools, and methodologies that drive public sector innovation. (See examples from the OPSI case study library: Agent of Open Government and Future Mentor programme)

The *Core Skills for Public Sector Innovation*³ report is probably the most relevant to the topic to be mentioned here. The OECD's innovation framework emphasises putting people first in innovative organisations: how effective the public sector is at being innovative will likely depend on the abilities and skills of individual civil servants, how they are organised in teams, and how the public administration is structured.

The developed model for public sector innovation is based on **six "core" skill categories**. Not all public employees will be required to utilise or apply these skills daily. However, in a modern 21st-century public service they should at least be somewhat familiar with these six areas:

-) **Iteration:** developing policies, products and services incrementally and experimentally;
-) **Data literacy:** ensure that decisions are data-driven;
-) **User-centricity:** public services should focus on addressing citizens' needs;

² <https://oecd-opsi.org/>

³ Source: https://www.oecd.org/media/oecdorg/satellitesites/opsi/contents/files/OECD_OPSI-core_skills_for_public_sector_innovation-201704.pdf; OPSI works in a close collaboration with the European Commission, and this report was issued with the support of the Horizon2020 program

Agents of Open Government (São Paulo, Brazil)

Agents of Open Government, a larger city initiative known as "São Paulo Aberta" (Open São Paulo), attempts to provide a **platform for peer-to-peer learning**, where private individuals with useful skills are given assistance in developing courses for public servants, civil society organisations, and communities in every region of São Paulo. This programme reflects a rising worldwide trend that institutions may become smarter - more effective and efficient - by utilising the knowledge and expertise of individuals outside of government.

One agent, for instance, collaborated with educators on the difficulties of teenage girls. They created a blog together to exchange experiences and gain a better understanding of the struggles young women face in these neighbourhoods.

Others spoke about ideas for making simple apps that may help their neighbourhood. In the frame of a mapping workshop it was demonstrated to public employees how to map community services while significantly reducing costs by using a variety of free and open source applications.

Source: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/action-plan-sao-paulo-brazil-2021-2024/>

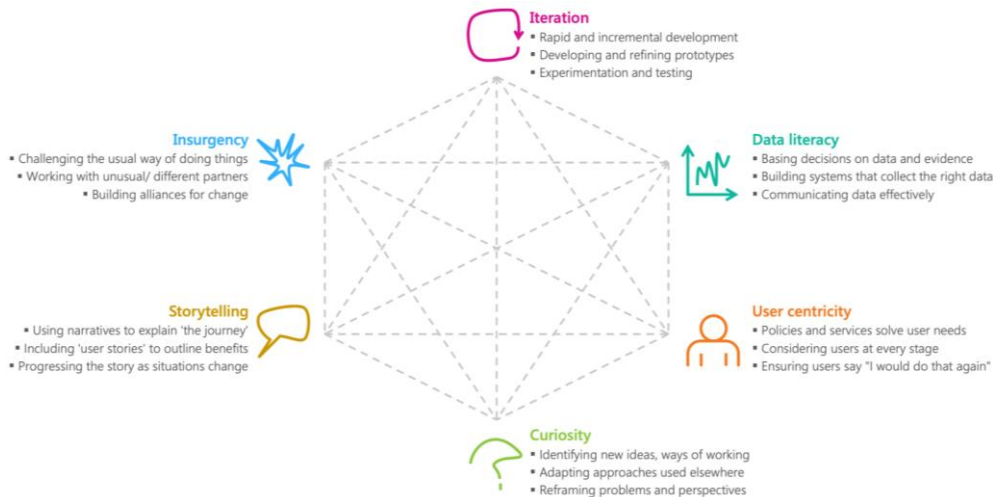
Future Mentors programme

The Future Mentors programme is a reversed mentoring programme in which a small group of young people mentor a decision maker from their own city about the hopes, dreams, and fears of the young generation regarding the future of their city. The programme is a platform for youth in cities to get into a dialogue with the decision makers and get their concerns and wishes heard. Twenty-six cities around Europe participated in the programme in 2022. The Future Mentors programme was created for Eurocities network in spring 2022 by the City of Espoo. The programme has inspired the participating cities to create new structures for youth participation and dialogue between the youth and the decision makers.

Source: <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/future-mentors/>

-) **Curiosity:** seeking and trying new ideas or ways of working;
-) **Storytelling:** explaining the change in a way that creates engaging narratives;
-) **Insurgency:** challenging the status quo and working with unusual partners.

FIGURE 2. CORE SKILL CATEGORIES



For each of the 6 core skills to innovate in the public sector, the model provides a matrix that decomposes each skill area into four practical elements at the three levels of capacities - basic awareness, emerging capability, and regular practitioner. It is possible to use the matrix for creating profiles of innovators, depending on their set of functions and responsibilities.

Although there is no overall European Union regulation that targets public sector innovation per se, the European Commission follows closely OPSI's developments and provides guidelines on public sector innovation: in 2013, it appointed an Expert Group⁴ encouraging the EU and its Member States to overcome innovation barriers in the public sector by, for instance, improving the management and ownership of innovation processes, empowering innovation actors and providing standards for innovation.

Lots of achievements have been reached in this field and many of the Expert Group's recommendations have been implemented (such as innovation labs and networks, policy labs, innovation scoreboards, or [toolboxes](#)), however, adopting an attitude of experimentation and entrepreneurship in city administration is still a key innovation barrier to be overcome.

Between 2009 and 2019 the *European Public Sector Award (EPSA)* accumulated more than 1350 innovative practices from administrations across Europe with more than 300 of them recognised as best practices. EPSA's last edition of 2019 saw a diverse array of entries, hailing from 28 distinct European countries and EU agencies. Embracing the overarching theme of "New Solutions to Complex Challenges – A public sector citizen-centric, sustainable and fit for the future", the event sought projects dedicated to tackling present and future societal challenges while prioritising the needs of citizens. The outcome of EPSA 2019 demonstrated the ongoing commitment of the European public sector in providing solutions that resonate with citizens, especially during demanding times.

One of the goals of the 2019 edition was to "introduce innovative solutions that rely more closely on citizen engagement and on partnerships with the private or non-profit sector for better public service delivery"⁵. Moreover, the search for the best practices was targeting solutions incorporating a receptiveness to innovative approaches. Focus was on implementing fresh methods to

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/42-public_sector_innovation_-_towards_a_new_architecture.pdf

⁵ Source: <https://epsa2019.eu/en/content/EPSA-2019-Theme.35/>

involve employees and other stakeholders in service design and encouraging collaboration across different departments thus fostering a culture of transparency and openness within the organisation and towards external partners.

The report based on the results of EPSA 2019, *New solutions to complex challenges: A public sector citizen-centric, sustainable and fit for the future*⁶, has also identified a relevant trend on which this project builds on of “the continuing importance for public administrations of encouraging initiatives by public servants in delivering services to citizens, especially where this arises from staff members taking on responsibilities to address new challenges which go beyond, but do not conflict with, their existing responsibilities”.

Opening up the government

Improving civil servants’ capacities and enhancing organisational structures and regulations to foster civic participation can contribute to developing urban solutions in various fields. It would be relevant for almost every thematic partnership established in the *Urban Agenda for the European Union* (UAEU). Generally, this policy challenge solution will aid all three pillars of the UAEU:

-) Better Regulation: introducing/improving regulations on civic participation, improving internal rules, frameworks and mechanisms for promoting and facilitating experiments with citizen engagement among civil servants;
-) Better Funding: experimenting with innovative funding models stemming from civic participation (social impact bonds, participative budgets, favour banks, etc.), using design thinking for optimising the financing of public services;
-) Better Knowledge: improving the flow of information/knowledge (managing innovation risks, motivating and incentivising civil servants to experiment with citizen engagement, establishing open innovation platforms, etc.).

UN New Urban Agenda (2016) which has envisioned the cities to be “participatory, promote civic engagement, engender a sense of belonging and ownership among all their inhabitants” confirms the need for the civil servants’ skills enhancement in the field of public sector innovation. Following the Agenda, by improving the participatory and social innovation skills of civil servants we recognise the role of civil society and other relevant stakeholders as equally important actors in urban decision-making. The aspiration to “readdress the way we plan, finance, develop, govern and manage cities” implied in the Agenda lies at the very core of the Agents of co-existence network. Additionally, some countries represented by the network cities (Denmark, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Spain), and even some partner cities (Banská Bystrica, Iași, Valencian Community) are committed to the Action Plans developed within the *Open Government Partnership (OGP)*, an international platform for reformers promoting more responsive and transparent governments and strengthening citizens’ involvement in decision-making processes.

One of Open Government Partnership’s policy focuses is inclusion: it is recognised that governments must provide for all citizens to be truly open and representative, including those who may have particular policy requirements, intellectual, physical, or social vulnerabilities, or lack political access or influence.

To ensure that policies reflect the needs, goals, and contributions of individuals who will use them, open government is a crucial way to increase the diversity of those who participate in policy making. Specific commitments local governments made include expanded access to sexual/reproduction healthcare, inclusive leadership, participatory budgeting, better representation mechanisms. OGP uses commitments as an instrument for achieving ambitious goals, therefore, the network could integrate it and design commitments that advance the priorities of underrepresented groups.

One of URBACT’s cross-cutting themes **Gender equality** is a distinctive policy area within the OGP. Throughout the Partnership, various stakeholders such as civil society, governments, and other key actors are actively engaging in the use of OGP action plans to ensure open government commitments are evaluated from a gender perspective. They are also striving to involve a more diverse range of gender groups in their national and local OGP processes. In addition to incorporating gender-informed

⁶ Source: https://epsa2019.eu/files/EPsa2019_publication_web.pdf

commitments, advocates for open government reform are collaborating with gender and inclusion advocates within the OGP framework to better acknowledge and address the real-life experiences of women, girls, and individuals across the gender and sexual-identity spectrum.

These commitments encompass several initiatives, including efforts to combat gender-based violence through comprehensive data collection and analysis across government agencies. Additionally, there are projects aimed at increasing women-owned businesses' access to public procurement opportunities and the creation of platforms to disseminate information about healthcare clinics and gather feedback on the quality of care provided.

URBACT's Gender Equal Cities report of 2022 clearly positions local administrations as the critical nodes for gender mainstreaming. By empowering women and marginalised groups, local policies enable broader civic participation, ensuring a more representative and democratic decision-making process. The emphasis on gender equality serves as a catalyst for positive change, cultivating a more solid basis for democracy that nurtures creativity, resilience, and collective growth within the community. As a result, local governance becomes more responsive to the diverse needs of its population and works towards creating a society where every individual can thrive and prosper regardless of gender or background.

A key document outlining the policy foundation for sustainable urban development in Europe is the *New Leipzig Charter* adopted in late 2020. According to the Charter, cities must create integrated and sustainable urban development plans and make sure that they are implemented for the entire city, from its functional sectors to its neighbourhoods. The Cohesion Policy and its framework for sustainable urban development are closely linked with the paper. The Charter's implementation in national or regional urban policy was agreed upon by the Member States.

Public sector innovation could be considered as an elaboration on one of the five New Leipzig Charter principles of good urban governance, 'participation and co-creation', which claims that there is a prominent need for encouraging new forms of citizen participation in urban development. These measures are seen as potentially enabling cities to "manage conflicting interests, share responsibilities and find innovative solutions." Empowering civil servants for innovation puts into practice the Charter statements by 1) upskilling employees so that they can keep up with current challenges and trends, 2) incentivising individual innovation and experimental attitude in sustainable urban development.

Following also the conclusions of the *URBACT Lisbon City Lab Paper (2019)* on citizen participation, the AoCE network builds on the premise that the further spread of civic participation in urban decision-making is likely to be conditioned by, first and foremost, promoting a structural shift in the attitudes of the people involved. **"Civil servants can be deeply resistant to opening up to citizens. Consequently, there is a need for encouragement and support"**. This support can a.o. be achieved through further development of digital skills and competences. A lot has been published about digital transformation and digital competencies of public administration workers.

[Badges – Rewarding Data and Innovation Work \(Louisville, USA\)](#)

The Louisville Metro Badge Program rewards employees for tasks like creating an open dataset, crowdsourcing information from citizens or collaborating with other departments on projects. There's a tiered reward system for civil servants who participate, with prizes ranging from LinkedIn recommendations to recognition at a city-wide awards ceremony.

Employees can join the Louisville Metro Badge group to browse available badges and track their progress. Once they finish a task, they submit evidence – a dataset, testimonial, screenshot or photo of them at an event – then can add the badge to their digital profile.

To complete a track, employees must collect 10 out of the 15 possible badges. They range from simple tasks – like reading an innovation-themed book – to more complex endeavours, like integrating voice activation into a project.

The main goal is to boost innovation in all government departments, rather than concentrating efforts in the typical fields for government innovation, data and digital.

Source: <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/badges-rewarding-data-and-innovation-work/>

This pillar has been supported by the OECD Framework for digital talent and skills in the public sector, a competency framework for civil servants on AI and digital transformation by UNESCO, and it is in a broad sense covered by the European Skills Agenda. Nevertheless, soft skills and ability to think creatively and innovatively are not precisely covered by the policy frameworks in regard to civil servants, except by previously mentioned *Core Skills for Public Sector Innovation* that doesn't focus on the urban dimension of civil workers. As “**digital transition**” is one of URBACT's cross-cutting themes the AoCE network will most definitely look at good practices in this field to learn from (see practices for applying digital tools for motivating and training civil servants and improve their digital skills: Badges of Louisville, Labcapital of Bogota, Open data-skilled staff of Espoo).

[LABcapital: Online Public Innovation Course for Public Officials \(Bogota, Colombia\)](#)

In the frame of the implementation of Bogota's Development Plan "Bogotá Mejor para Todos 2016-2020", a Public Innovation LAB was created in the Veeduría Distrital with the objective of developing innovative solutions to solve public challenges and improve public management, increasing trust between citizens and public offices.

LABcapital has 3 lines of action: Promotion of innovation in public management, Innovative initiatives and Innovative public policy evaluation. For its first component, LABcapital has implemented an online course on capacity building for public officials in public innovation. The course has been developed as a mechanism to engage public officials of at least 16 of Bogota's public offices in a learning community.

Since 2016, the course has sought to strengthen the public officials' capacities for problem identification, idea generation, user-centricity and many other relevant tools and methodologies that allow them to solve complex problems. The course focuses on developing the skills of the public officials so that they become beacons of innovation within their own offices, further spreading innovation within the public sector.

From 2018, approximately 420 public officials have taken the course. The course aims to continue improving its methodology for engaging public officials, hopefully becoming an example for scalability in other cities, the national level public offices and maybe even opening the course to citizens.

Source: <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/online-public-innovation-course-for-public-officials-labcapital/>

[Open data – skilled staff \(Espoo, Finland\)](#)

Espoo being one of the biggest cities of Finland have a quite advanced GIS system (<https://kartat.espoo.fi/IMS/en/Map>) and apply GIS in several fields of their work.

The whole city is available in a 3D model as digital twin including 6 -7000 datasets which are continuously developed including new datasets. Data also regularly collected from citizens through the MyEspoo webpage where map-based questionnaires are conducted with citizens about their experiences using the city and about the values of the city. All these qualitative data are included into the GIS database and applied for planning developments.

The development and maintenance of the database's software requires IT programming expertise which is not available in the municipality that's why this is externalised. However, there are GIS experts in the municipality who support departments, especially the urban planning department's work by GIS analyses and maps. Beside the GIS experts, also other officers can use the database which is available through an online platform.

Different officers and leaders in the municipality have different rights to access the database which is also available for the citizens.

If new functions are introduced into the system, trainings are organised for officers to be able to use them. Thus, it is ensured that on top of the GIS experts also other staff members can apply the GIS system.

Regarding the future plans of Espoo, they would like to standardise and organise data better to make it even easier to use by the municipality staff. In addition, they would like to make even more data opened for the public.

In this case a **special digital skill is required from the municipality staffs** to be able to use GIS based tools to **manage and apply information collected from citizens**.

Source: *ALT/BAU URBACT network's report on application areas of GIS for monitoring vacant places in cities:*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/14YGIbaG2zgIQkZYMEv5XAWUbK5OFP-ra/view?pli=1>

On top of the above-mentioned URBACT cross-cutting themes (gender equality and digital transition) the theme of green transition is going to be tackled by the AoCE network. Inside green transition, there are good practices, especially for the involvement of citizens in the management of urban green spaces (see example of the training from Budapest)

Urban green space can stimulate local identity and community spirit strongly, because if managed well, small-scale actions in this field potentially work as quick wins. Thus, they are ideal for promoting not only pro-environmental behaviour (i.e. “everyone is responsible”), but also the importance of civic participation (i.e. “everyone can act”). Furthermore, most green spaces in a city provide encounters among citizens, fostering dialogue, social cohesion, and civic participation. In line with this, the topic of green transition will be integrated into the Network mainly through the topic of developing green public spaces, as among the broad topics of green transition, it is a top priority for citizens in urban areas. Green transition and climate adaptation appeal to the inhabitants’ safety and quality of life. Thus, they are relatively ‘easy’ topics to engage citizens.

Public sector innovation in a broad way is a tool for promoting the New European Bauhaus values, namely sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics. The inclusion aspect is the most prominent one, given the focus of the network on involving all city dwellers in urban decision-making and innovation. The sustainability angle is also present since green spaces and initiatives have great potential for fostering civic participation. It is also possible to claim that aesthetics, defined as ‘the quality of experience, beyond functionality’, is reflected in the very core ambition of the network: transforming cooperation between civil workers and citizens from a set of bureaucratic rhetorical obligations into genuine mutual interest. Which stands for creating meaningful interpersonal experiences and going beyond functionality at this level.

Working towards a 21st Century-fit Civil Service

Besides the earlier mentioned fundamental policy initiatives backed by OECD and EU it makes sense to reflect on some interesting bottom-up initiatives stemming from the growing need to rethink civil service and bring new ideas into public administrations. (See example for a bottom-up initiative: Development in dialogue from Breda, NL, also AoCE partner)

Important for the AoCE network is Demos Helsinki, an independent think tank. It has recently issued *A New Ethos for the Civil Service (2023)*⁷ that contains a simple idea: “civil servants need to be reignited with the purpose.”

⁷ Source: <https://demoshelsinki.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/A-new-ethos-for-the-civil-service-Demos-Helsinki.pdf>

Training curriculum on smart UGS Governance for public authorities (12th district of Budapest, Hungary)

In the frame of the UGB Central Europe project a training curriculum was developed, and a training was implemented for the staff of the Municipality of the 12th district of Budapest.

The main objective of the UGB project was to improve planning, management and decision-making capacities of the public sector related to urban green spaces.

Smart solutions promoting cooperation of different governance levels, sectors and internally across various departments of authorities are being developed under the project, together with this training curriculum for municipalities on application of integrated UGS planning and management in the context of multi-stakeholder governance.

As planning and **running a multi-level governance process** is a complex task, clear instructions and a proper **training** was necessary. Thanks to the project including the implementation of this training, the Municipality managed to initiate several programs related to urban greens space management with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

Source: <https://programme2014-20.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/UGB/Training-Curriculum-on-Smart-UGS-Governance-for-Public-Autho.pdf>

Development in dialogue (Breda, the Netherlands)

Development in dialogue is a new approach applied by the officers of the Municipality of Breda managing cultural heritage sites.

Experience learned that strict protection of heritage is not always necessary. In general, most of the owners take good care of heritage. If they don't, it is mostly unintentionally and because of a lack of knowledge on how to value and valorise the heritage they own. The focus thus should be on dialogue: providing knowledge that fits their needs and the needs of other stakeholders while preserving heritage values.

To ensure the practice can be run, it is necessary to get heritage advisors in a proactive role. The earlier they can start a dialogue with owners and other stakeholders the more successful the practice. The heritage advisors need an open attitude to their profession and views from others. Also, they have to have good communication skills and extensive knowledge of the cultural heritage in relation to spatial planning and other disciplines to tackle problems. In short: **the heritage advisor should be skilled in design thinking.**

In the last years this practice has been used by the Municipality of Breda for several successful projects.

Source: *Good Practice Catalogue of WaVE Interreg Europe project*: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/good-practices/development-in-dialogue>

According to the “New Ethos” at least four characteristics of industrial-era administration serve as obstacles to societal change. These very things—a rule-based mindset, short-termism, incremental decision-making, and silo-based implementation—are what gives government employees a sense of stability. New values for a civil service in the 21st century are now emerging from multiple regions of the world. We can encourage a new ethos for the public service by infusing persons and groups with them: an ethos to drive societal transformation. These four principles are humility, wisdom, imagination, and collaboration. Infusing the impediments with these principles can build a civil service that delivers according to the new reality.

Three recommendations are given to build a 21st century-fit civil service:

-) Scout forerunners and co-create a bold vision for the ethos of your civil service;
-) Set the stage for real-life experimentation and spread the learnings;
-) Consolidate, institutionalise, and codify best practices.

The four typical obstacles of the industrial-era administration can be overcome with the use of the above mentioned three recommendations by improving the skills of civil servants in the 6 fields - iteration, data literacy, user-centricity, curiosity, storytelling and insurgency - suggested by OPSI’s report on the *Core Skills for Public Sector Innovation*.

A similar idea is shared by the Creative Bureaucracy Festival, an annual event started in 2018 that brings together public sector innovators at all levels in Berlin, Germany. It can be called a somewhat bottom-up movement where bureaucrats are given space and time to be creative and collaborate with like-minded people globally. It brings together bureaucrats and their allies – those who, at all levels of government, fight for the common good and make a difference. *The Creative Bureaucracy Manifesto*⁸ is standing for “organisational structures and cultures that are open-minded and solution-oriented” and there is a clear role of civil servants’ empowerment in this.

During the 2023 edition of Creative Bureaucracy Festival the topic of inclusion was considered through the prism of mission-oriented innovation policies (MOIPs). Missions are time-bound, framed, measurable and targeted instruments that help to mobilise relevant stakeholders to tackle real societal challenges. Missions imply cross-actor innovation and 21st century civil servants need new skills, tools and instruments to guide challenge-oriented policies stirring the developments across a range of stakeholders, which makes Agents of co-existence project of extra relevance.

Many previous URBACT networks dealt with civic participation from various aspects, three of them tackled public service innovation directly, touching the question of how the capacities and capabilities of civil servants as the catalysts of innovation can be improved. The added value of the AoCE network when working towards a 21st Century Fit Civil Service can be understood by analysing the outcomes of these three previous networks.

⁸ Source: <https://creativebureaucracy.org/about/manifesto/>

Probably the most direct link to AoCE is *the BoostInno* URBACT action planning network. It tackled the burning question of how to boost social innovation by local governments and within this mission it also dealt with how to manage social innovation in municipal structures. Together with the *CHANGE!* network (see case studies of Aarhus and Gdańsk) BoostInno had a big impact within the URBACT community, putting the municipality as a potential catalyst of social innovation into the spotlight, and explaining what changes should be made in city administration to be able to absorb social innovation. However, less concrete work has been done with regards to the profile of civil servants (competences, roles, capabilities) to become a booster for social innovation and new municipal structures to support public service innovation and civic participation.

Case of Gdańsk: 100% social

The local government in Gdańsk made various attempts to involve the community in the city's strategy (Gdańsk 2030 Plus), to start user-led design, and to give communities the power to integrate community ideas and service design. For instance, the story of change in cooperation started with The Annual Programme of Gdańsk City Cooperation with NGOs, which has been developing together with stakeholders since 2001. The crucial element in this approach is reconsidering how municipalities function and dismantling old silos by forming "working groups" centred around certain policies and associated results.

One of the central innovations including civil servants was the Club of Gdańsk that can be described as an informal collective of civil servants and NGO representatives, collaborating in a think-tank setting to exchange ideas, brainstorm solutions, and establish core principles for the city openly and transparently. Each participant has an equal voice, and the approach fosters genuine co-creation within a structured framework. Empowering municipality workers in such a way had a great result.

However, based on the feedback from local leaders and the conclusions drawn from the discussions held during the *CHANGE!* study visit, it was clear that local public servants need more capacity building and new structures to encourage their innovative thinking and give them the ability to find new ideas and scalable initiatives from communities. They require deeper experience and education to fully understand communities, integrate various lines of support, dismantle internal silos, and create lasting mutually beneficial partnerships.

Source: case study from the CHANGE! URBACT network

Centre for Innovation in Aarhus

CFIA or Centre for Innovation in Aarhus was created in the framework of a new strategy for innovation in Aarhus with the main goal to increase cross-departmental cooperation and to solve future challenges in a smarter way reaching the ambitious goals for growth and development, nevertheless. Operationally it is supported by a cross-departmental fund and has eight full-time consultants (process facilitators and experts in design thinking techniques) working for it. It has a physical space that provides a fantastic workshop area and temporary office space for city workers engaged in cross-departmental innovative initiatives.

Seven important areas for innovation have been designated by the city council of Aarhus. These are related to 7 problems that have been designated as wicked problems. They are wicked because they are not easy to define or narrow down to a single department in the municipality. The problems are: Mental health among young people, Health, recruitment, the democratic conversation, sustainability, sustainable growth, and mixed districts.

The answers to these problems and many other societal problems must be developed by bringing stakeholders together across silos in a methodical design process. This way of thinking is an expertise at CFIA. For example, this is done through the "Innovation engine", which uses a lean start-up methodology that involves rapid iteration and experimentation combined with robust evaluation design. To progress through the three different levels of the "engine" it must be validated both by external and internal stakeholders.

In this example we see that the CFIA organisational model can help to better grasp innovation concepts, processes, and tools, encourage innovation inside a municipality and allow civil servants to take charge of innovation initiatives.

Source: case study from the CHANGE! URBACT network

The *CHANGE! – social design of social public services* URBACT Action Planning Network was about co-designing social public services towards a more collaborative service provision by fostering relationships among citizens within their local social networks. This network touched on the core issues of the current network in a theoretical way, not directly tackling capacity building of civil servants (e.g. the case study on Gdańsk explained how flexible organisational structures support the absorption of social innovation). The cities of Aarhus and Gdańsk are both partners in the AoCE-network, but also participated in *CHANGE!*

Lessons to be learned

Previously we have seen that Open Government and civic participation in the decision-making process concerning urban development require a combination of on the one hand “improvement of skills of civil servants” and on the other “build on new and better organisational structures”. (see a good practice from UK for building a new organisational structure)

Current administrations often show 4 characteristics that serve as obstacles to societal change. At the same time these very things – a rule-based mindset, short-termism, incremental decision making and silo-based implementation – are what gives government employees a sense of stability.

A new attitude and values can be achieved when we embrace new guiding principles such as “humility, wisdom, imagination and collaboration”. These principles should be included in every approach focusing on improving the skills of civil servants in the 6 fields, as described in the OPSI report “Core Skills for Public Sector Innovation”. The AoCE Network will explore ways to do so in its approach.

At the same time ways to actually build a 21st century-fit civil service will be explored. For this the network will focus on ways to co-create a bold vision for the ethos of the civil service, help to set the stage for real-life experimentation, and consolidate and institutionalise best practices. To do so, the AoCE network will explore citizen participation practices to help reach the 21st century fit civil service and innovations in services. As was stated in the Demos’s report “A new ethos for the civil service”⁹ civil servants are agents of governance: to invest in their personal and professional growth is to invest in our societies’ collective ability to build a fair, sustainable, and joyful future. It is what we aim to achieve with the URBACT Network “Agents of co-existence”.

Statutory services based on value, rather than legislation (Melton Mowbray Planning Service, UK)

The council of Melton Mowbray applied a new approach to redesign their planning service. A Service Designer guided the Planning Manager and staff together to co-create their new service, where iterative and learning methodologies are used as a foundation for the approach. The Planning Service was recognised as having poor customer relations. Complaints to elected councillors were increasing through strongly verbal feedback. Applications were taking too long, evidence that was required did not seem to be relevant, and final planning decisions were often contentious. Finally, being a Planning Officer was not recognised as a rewarding job, and staff simply came to work to do their tasks and go home. Therefore, focus on redesigning this service had become a council priority.

The objective of the innovation was to develop a motivating working environment where staff would work together as teams. And that the problems with the customers would be resolved.

The innovation itself comprised of a Design Thinking methodology that incorporates System Thinking. This allowed the Planning manager and her team to develop a new citizen centred view of the service and recognise how poorly aligned that service was with the needs of customers. The manager led the innovation herself.

The first step was to understand how well the current service is designed and delivers.

The second step was taking real planning applications to create several experiments to learn what customers needed, and how to go about dealing with applications in new ways.

The third step was to create a prototype way of working that incorporates the digital tools to support the process.

The staff were given end to end ownership of applications, which allowed them to have a sense of accomplishment, and also allowed to modify how they undertook the applications based on the needs of individual customers.

The outcome is that about 30% of activities were stripped out of the process that they deemed unnecessary. And the refusal rate for submitted applications dropped from around 45% to under 5%. The customer complaints have reduced as the Planning officers are able to be flexible to their needs.

Source: <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/statutory-services-based-on-value-rather-than-legislation/>

⁹ See p. 48, ‘A new ethos for the Civil Service’, Report by Demos Helsinki

Section 2

Partner profiles

1. Co-existence & citizen participation

The city of Genk is a super diverse city, hosting residents from more than 100 nationalities, with almost 58% of the population having a migration background. The city aspires to grow into a cosmopolitan city where everyone feels at home, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, identity, gender, or orientation. Despite its modest size, with approximately 67.000 inhabitants, Genk faces metropolitan challenges such as climate change, poverty, deprivation, and unemployment.

Participation already has a long history in Genk and is well represented within the organisation, giving the presence of **an alderman responsible for participation and a participation officer**. In Genk, participation starts from a partnership in which people actively work on developing authentic and equal relationships with citizens. Participation, in this respect, is more than an instrument but a **continuous process** in which one actively works on building relationships, seeking out different opinions, establishing an open dialogue, and honouring the different types of contributions to the process. In addition, participation in Genk is not **limited to practical challenges or problems**, but also explores new futures for the city and its citizens (in the most diverse policy areas) or aims to promote coexistence by investing in making connections.

The city of Genk employs a **participation expert** who plays a crucial role in the policy unit, guiding the integration of participatory approaches in Genk's policies and administration. In her advisory capacity, she also supports her colleagues in the design and implementation of participatory projects. There is also a position called **youth consultant on participation** which focuses on facilitating participatory projects related to children and youth. A new participatory profile has recently been integrated into the Environment and Sustainable Development Department. Despite the presence of these experts, the knowledge regarding participatory processes is **fragmented across various departments**. The participation expert is currently exploring **how to centralise** this fragmented knowledge and make it accessible to and usable for all Genk employees.

In principle, the city focuses on **physical participation processes** in small groups of representative citizens, allowing the city to engage in genuine dialogues with its residents. When groups become too large, there is a risk that people may hesitate to speak up. In addition to physical communication processes, the online Bpart Participation platform is also utilised, where residents can propose their ideas. The online platform serves as a means for the city to collect ideas and for residents to respond to them. It is a useful tool to reach those who wish to participate but cannot or prefer not to attend physical participation events.

The city of Genk works closely with its different thematic **advisory councils**. These councils are composed of representatives from various organisations, NGOs, citizens and communities. They meet once a month and are supported by a civil servant who is dedicated to the topic of the respective advisory council. Besides these formal urban advisory councils, Genk also works closely together with different organisations to enhance civic participation. Regular partnerships with various associations and advisory councils lead to **short-term or well-defined initiatives that actively engage the wider community**.

To actively engage a diverse range of participants in participatory processes, the city works closely with **intermediaries** who act as a bridge between the city and the community. They can help spread the message and provide clarification where needed. These intermediaries include both internal staff, such as neighbourhood managers and liaison officers, and external associations or federations.

In terms of youth involvement, Genk is a child-friendly city. The youth service offers three sustainable **participation programs: Junior Team, G10, and Youth Council**. These programs aim to give a voice to children in primary education, and secondary education, as well as young adults in higher education. However, engaging children and young people from Genk to participate in these initiatives remains a challenge. The city is also exploring ways to integrate the voice of children and young people into other departments, and not just within the youth department.

Data about Genk

- Country = Belgium
- Region = Province Limburg
- Population = 67.614 inhabitants
- Demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity): 0-17: 19.4%, 18-64: 60,0%, 65+: 20.6 %; 58.4% of the inhabitants have a non-Belgian origin. Genk, hosts residents with 126 different origins.
- Employment levels: 38,1 % unemployment rate
- Economy profile (per capita GDP, key local industry/employment sectors): 21.1% of the workforce is engaged in the secondary sector (including industry and construction), while 78.2% are in the service sector
- Functional Urban Area: not part of FUA
- Total number of civil servants: 1.138

Based on their earlier experiences in citizen participation, Genk has identified the following quite specific learning needs on top of the ones all partners find challenging:

One of these learning needs is related to **the city's communication**. Citizens of Genk receive a lot of information from the city, making it difficult for them to prioritise what matters most to them. Moreover, sometimes communication simply reaches people too late, or they perceive city-related communications as 'boring'.

The city of Genk also wishes to learn how to **actively involve different types of citizen profiles** – and not just the usual suspects. They are for example currently further installing a child-friendly mindset in the entire organisation, so that when departments work in a participatory way, they do not only think about involving adults but also try to involve young people. Although children don't yet have a political voice, every decision made by the city, directly or indirectly affects children and young people. After all, children are not only our future. They are also already active participants in our city. Unfortunately, it is not **so easy to involve a representative group of young people** in participation projects because schools are already overloaded with requests to participate in events, and if you target specific organisations (such as youth movements), the children do not always represent the diversity within society.

The main focus of Genk in their Integrated Action Plan will be to explore and develop specific strategies and methods which can be applied to on the one hand **improve the skills and capabilities of all employees** and on the other hand, **establish a participatory culture within the organisation**. The city of Genk already has a **clear city-wide vision on participation**. They for example always collaborate with relevant departments to identify which forms of participation (methodologies) best match the questions posed by the departments. Genk would like to **further explore methods to motivate civil servants to embrace participatory practices and genuinely acknowledge the outputs of these processes** by incorporating them into the solutions. To improve the skills of civil servants, Genk believes that it makes little sense to involve a broad group of civil servants in formal trainings about participation if they are not already engaged in it themselves. It is important that the involved civil servants already feel some sense of urgency to implement it in their daily activities. Simply having a toolbox of methodologies would therefore be insufficient.

Recently, the city has implemented **an experimental cross-sectoral collaboration to enable civil servants with limited participatory expertise to work in a participatory way**. For instance, during the participatory process on mobility plans, the urban development department worked in a duo job with the neighbourhood managers/participation officer. This tandem of civil servants organised the participatory process together and led the different citizen dialogues in which citizens could discuss and alter the proposed mobility plans for their neighbourhood. Prior to the dialogues, each citizen of the particular neighbourhood received an invitation to take part in the mobility plan trajectory. Furthermore, this information was also shared through the different city-wide channels: city magazine, social media, etc. Besides the organised dialogues, the participation platform was also used as a channel for citizens to take part differently and a citizen science process was included (people that were interested in monitoring traffic received a sensor to place on their window). All input from citizens were collected and analysed to design a new mobility plan which – after approval of the city council – was communicated to the participants of the trajectory (via mail) and the broader population (via city magazine).

Currently, the city is **developing a framework** to determine whether participation is suitable for a particular phase of a project and, if so, which type of participation method is most appropriate. The development of this framework will be one of Genk's testing actions within their Integrated Action Plan. In a next step, the city will create **a knowledge-sharing platform** where colleagues with experience can provide brief descriptions of their projects. Other colleagues interested in similar initiatives can then learn from their experiences, including what went well and what could have been improved. There is already an initiative in the city called 'lunch & learn' where colleagues informally share knowledge with each other during their lunch break. However, the information exchanged during these sessions has not yet been documented on a shared platform. In essence, the Integrated Action Plan and Testing Actions **aim to better disseminate existing knowledge and encourage colleagues to engage in dialogue and mutual learning**.

Besides encouraging (informal) peer-to-peer learning, the city wants to experiment and be inspired on how to deal with the results of formal participatory processes: e.g. strategies to inform and involve citizens, urban stakeholders, and employees on these outcomes. Specifically, **they want to look at how a participatory process can be a catalyst for a broader transformation process among the population and not solely by the citizens who took part in the process**. One of the key results of the IAP would be exploring methods to embed the Genker habits in the organisation and society.

1. Co-existence & citizen participation

Gdańsk is the capital of the Pomeranian Voivodship and a major Polish centre of economy and administration. Vital institutions of the central and local governments have their seats in Gdańsk. Openness and the free movement of people, goods, and ideas have invariably formed the foundations of Gdańsk's development over the centuries. There is the recognition of the **brand of Gdańsk**, which around the world is associated with '**Solidarity**' and the struggle for freedom.

The City of Gdańsk proves the merit of this brand considering the efforts and achievements they have already reached in citizen participation. The main responsible department for the work on participation is the **Mayor's Office for District Councils and Cooperation with Citizens** and a unit for **Local Cooperation and Social Innovation**, which is part of the **Social Development Department** and is responsible for coordinating the city's cooperation with the civil society organisations, supporting voluntarism and local initiatives in the communities, developing and supporting social innovations and innovators.

With the leadership of this unit, the city of Gdańsk has developed and **implemented many tools for practicing participatory democracy**. All urban policies: strategies and programs are co-created with the residents. The system of consultations is legally regulated by the City Council, and the tools of representative democracy have been enriched by the election of district councillors – community leaders who provide a social base for the city councillors.

One of the successful tools applied by Gdańsk is the **participatory budget** (Civic Budget) which has been implemented in Gdańsk for 12 years including a specific **Green Civic Budget** available only for green issues. The city has also introduced **citizens' assemblies** for public debate and decision-making. In addition, they have mechanisms operating for many years to financially support residents' initiatives in the form of **six funds for micro-grants** for informal groups and civic organisations. These are youth, neighbourhood, senior, recreation and sports, equal treatment, and innovation funds. The city also supports NGOs by providing premises for public services provided by NGOs and for activities for local communities. Gdańsk subsidises run by **NGOs Neighbourhood Houses**, created locally but cooperating in a network of local centres. On top of these, there are many cross-sector collegial bodies - **Social Councils**, composed of representatives of all societal sectors and constituting advisory bodies to the Mayor and the City Council.

Moreover, to build an open and responsible society, the city of Gdańsk developed the '**Ecosystem for Civic Education**' which now consists of **Democracy Week**, **Civic Lesson**, and **supporting self-governance of students**. The lessons based on unique scenarios, co-created by Gdańsk teachers networking for new ideas in education are not a part of regular school curriculums. The leading role in the ecosystem is taken by students' governments – democratically elected bodies at schools. Gdańsk Democracy Week is co-organised by them in schools and in the European Solidarity Centre, where additionally the Youth Forum – an annual conference organised by youth for youth takes place. Every two years Gdańsk Youth Council is elected and has the status of an advisory body to the City Council. The **Youth Council** takes a **leading role in engaging young people in participatory processes**. Their representatives are invited to take part in working groups, public consultations, and all types of events referring to citizens' participation.

Regarding civil servants' skills and capacities for citizen engagement, in the frame of the **BoostInno URBACT project**, Gdańsk has already **identified the range of skills and attitudes** necessary for officials to take on the role of brokerage and change agents. Some of these skills of civil servants have been already improved through training organised by the HR department of the municipality.

Data about Gdańsk

- Country = Poland
- Region = Pomorskie
- Population = 486.345 inhabitants
- Demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity): Youth 82.025; active population 18-60 – 291.431; seniors 112.889; majority Polish
- Employment levels: 2,3 % unemployment rate, youth unemployment rate 9%
- Economy profile (per capita GDP, key local industry/employment sectors): GDP 17.000 euro per capita, growth: 2022 – 5,4%, 2023 – 1,2%, Port and marine industry, high-tech, business services, creative sectors, tourism
- Functional Urban Area: Gdańsk -Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area
- Total number of civil servants: 1.294

There are also **informal learning activities** where civil servants can develop their skills within the organisation. For instance, Gdańsk organises many events like conferences, seminars, and celebrations referring to citizens' participation and participatory democracy and civil servants are encouraged to take part in them. In addition, Gdańsk was the first city in Poland to implement a **CSR voluntary program** in public administration.

Finally, before the pandemic, the **think tank Gdańsk Lab** was established inside the municipality where an open, cross-sectorial group of civil servants was working on innovative solutions for the administration. During the pandemic, its activities faded. As part of this project, the City intends to resume its activities.

2. Citizen participation in practice

With its longstanding involvement in citizen participation, Gdańsk has many good practices to offer to the AoCE network. Already 23 years ago, the City of Gdańsk introduced its **annual Programme of Cooperation of the City with Non-Governmental Organisations** into democratic practice as the first public policy in Gdańsk fully co-created with stakeholders. Since then, this program has been developed annually with the participation of representatives of the civic and public sectors. It is a document that defines the principles and forms of cooperation, priority tasks and the funds to be allocated for their implementation. On its basis, calls for proposals are announced via **the digital platform www.witkac.pl**. The program defines principles of partnerships between the city and NGOs and joint initiatives for local communities, as well as procedures for co-creating legal acts with organisations. The program is subject to annual self-evaluation carried out jointly by organisations and City Hall. The allocation for the cooperation program is about 1% of the city's current expenses, in 2022 it was ca. €25,000,000.

Under the Program, an ecosystem of municipal initiatives is created in the priority areas. There are 26 areas of cooperation, all important for social inclusion and involvement of residents, but supporting local initiatives and volunteering, equal treatment, and integration of immigrants is crucial.

The annual practice of joint evaluation of the old program and co-creation of the new one distinguishes it from many other urban policies where these processes are not as stable. The integrated approach to the program is unique. It is cross-sectorial, and most city departments are involved in its creation and implementation. The full digitisation of calls for proposals is an innovative element that increases accessibility.

Another longstanding initiative in Gdańsk has been the development of **Neighbourhood Houses (NH)** as a tool for advancing local development with residents. They have by now become a significant component of the crisis intervention system and the democratisation of the system of providing social services in local communities. In 2011, the partnership consisting of NGOs, Gdańsk City, and local entrepreneurs worked out the "Neighbourhood House Model". To this day, new NHs are created based on this model in the districts of Gdańsk, focusing on the activity of residents and increasing their ability to cause positive social changes based on their strengths and resources. NH is a field of activity and self-help for residents. They are established and run by civil organisations with the City's financial support. Organisations may apply for funds for running houses as part of a grant system announced annually. Each of them is unique according to the needs of the district in which it is seated. Today Gdańsk has 23 Neighbourhood Houses in 16 districts.

One of the other tools of participatory democracy established under the Cooperation Program is the **Gdańsk Funds**. It is a mechanism whose task is to stimulate residents' social activity and increase local communities' involvement in activities for the common good. In 2023, Gdańsk ensures the functioning of six funds: neighbourhood, youth, senior, sports and recreation, equality, and innovation. Under these funds, informal groups of residents can apply for co-financing their ideas in the amount of up to €180, and non-governmental organisations up to €1,800. The funds come from the city budget, but the operators selected to manage them are independent civic organisations. In 2021, the innovation fund adopted the formula of the **"INNaczej" ("Different") Incubator of Social Innovation**. Here, residents can obtain funding of up to €2,500 to implement an innovative social project. They also receive comprehensive support through consultations, training, and mentoring activities. Under these funds, in 2022, a total of 265 projects were implemented: 175 by informal groups and 90 by organisations. The amount transferred in 2022 for implementing initiatives under the Gdańsk Funds is approximately €150,000.

The Citizens' Assembly is a way to democratically make decisions on issues important to the local community, region, or country. A randomly selected, representative group of residents is invited to deal with a given topic. The key element of the Citizens' Assembly is a debate and the recommendations developed in its course. The panel's recommendations are binding, distinguishing this tool from other consulting activities. The citizens' Assembly is accompanied by open public consultations, under which all interested residents can present their opinions on a given issue to the panel, the mayor, and the councillors. Gdańsk was the first city in Poland to conduct a Citizens Assembly in 2016. In total, three panels were held, the first in 2016 on "How to better prepare Gdańsk for heavy rainfall as part of adapting the city to climate change," the second and third in 2017 on "How to improve air quality in Gdańsk" and "How to support civic activity in Gdańsk." Although the first two assemblies were successful the third one was not. Reasons were amongst others that the topic for discussion was not clearly defined, which led to non-specific recommendations that were hard to implement, which then again led to discouragement and distrust of the citizens. A lot of the goodwill created by earlier assemblies got lost along the way. This example clearly shows where things can take a wrong turn if you are not careful in designing the citizen participation and/or decision-making process.

The **(Green) Civic Budget** is a response to the needs of residents. Introduced in Gdańsk in 2013, the civic budget grew and changed its regulations, adapting to the residents' expectations. The principles of the civic budget in Gdańsk are evaluated annually, and the regulations are changed if necessary and possible. One of the evaluation factors is an analysis of the submitted projects, which has shown that the residents' priorities changed after a few years: an increasing number of projects concerned planting trees and creating new green spaces in the city. This is how the idea of allocating a specific part of the funds as part of the annual civic budget was born: In 2020 the Green Civic Budget was introduced. Only projects related to increasing the share of greenery in the city and protecting the natural environment can be submitted to this part of the budget.

The new open space – **Social Hub "Dolna Brama"** – dedicated to civic participation and social innovation incubation was opened in September. The Unit for Local Cooperation and Social Innovation responsible for the coordination of the city's cooperation with civil society organisations is now located there. One of the tasks of this place and the team working there is to enhance practicing of participatory democracy. This is a new and reach asset and the coordination of the project will be located there. There is also a budget allocated for citizen initiatives and support for civic organisations. The Department for District Councils and Cooperation with Citizens is already involved.

3. Moving forward – ideas for next steps in citizen participation

Even though Gdańsk has already developed, tested, and successfully applied several tools and methods for citizen engagement, they have also realised where they still need to improve and can learn from other partners. They would like to learn how to encourage a **wide range of residents to engage** in participatory processes and contribute to decision-making. On the one hand, this requires an **increase of trust** in the relationship between public administration and residents. On the other hand, they need to learn and apply new methods for **changing civil servants' attitudes and behaviours** in this regard including a **common understanding of participation and its importance** in city governance. Gdańsk also realised the **challenge of building the results of participation processes** into the actual project or policy implementations. Thirdly, they are looking for solutions **to motivate civil servants** of the municipality **to communicate to residents** if their idea was not implemented and if it was how it was executed. Gdańsk would like to learn how to communicate to residents if their suggestions were considered, applied, or rejected in such a way that they can absorb and are nonetheless willing to participate again in the future.

Based upon this, the focus of the IAP will be related to the legal regulation of social consultancy. In Gdańsk, the **rules for consulting city policies and initiatives** are regulated by the resolution of the City Council. This document must **be revised** and updated to incorporate new trends of open governance and the need to enable citizens' broad participation. The other part of the IAP will focus on practical manual tools **for citizen participation** (testing action) and the method of how to apply the manual inside the administration. Finally, they would like to establish a **digital platform** for participatory processes in the city, a platform where citizens can be engaged, and information collected.

1. Co-existence & citizen participation

Kekava town is located 18 km from the centre of Riga. It mainly fulfils the functions of a "**dormitory district**" of Riga with 50% of the workers living in the area commuting to their workplaces in Riga daily.

The municipality consists of three towns – Ķekava, Baloži, and Baldone and three rural territories – Ķekava, Baldone, and Daugmale. The three towns have different economic profiles and different identities which results in different challenges also with regards to citizen engagement. The **Development Program 2021-2027** tries to target all of these challenges specifying priorities and actions such as further improvement of the municipality governance system, training of municipal staff, establishment of an NGO council and its involvement in decision-making processes, elaboration and implementation of a cooperation model between the local government and NGOs, facilitation of the establishment and operation of neighbourhood associations and their involvement in decision making, supporting initiatives to develop neighbourhood (community) development plans and introduction of smart village concept etc.

Kekava municipality has taken steps towards the implementation of its Development Program, and they already apply different tools and methods to interact with the local community:

For instance, they actively communicate with the Kekava community through the City's **social media, webpage, and monthly newsletter** providing information on the planned events and decisions to be taken ensuring openness of the local government. Openness is also increased by streaming the **Municipality Council meetings online** which anyone can follow. Moreover, local inhabitants and civic organisations are invited to participate and voice their interests at the **meetings with the political and executive leaders** of the municipality. These meetings, such as public hearings about development and planning documents and projects, as well as the year-end meetings of the Chairman of the Municipality Council (and senior executives) on the implemented projects, are organised in different locations of the municipality to **reach out to the inhabitants closer to their place of living**.

On top of these, for several years already the local government has been involving the community in the municipal budgeting process by asking to submit proposals, aggregating them, and taking them into account within the available financial resources. **Meetings with inhabitants on budget proposals** are organised in different locations of the municipality, online participation option is also provided.

To support community initiatives, the local government annually announces **grant competitions** where **NGOs, foundations, and civic organisations can apply** for financial support to implement a wide spectrum of social integration, educational, healthy lifestyle, arts, culture, and other activities.

Moreover, in 2023, Kekava municipality introduced the **participatory budget** as one of the first local governments in Latvia. The new Local Government Law stipulates that at least 0,5% of the municipal budget must be allocated to the participatory budget starting from 2025. But already in 2023, the local government of Kekava municipality will implement 6 project ideas submitted for participatory budget, its total financing amounting to € 170 000.

Data about Kekava

- Country = Latvia
- Region = Latvija
- Population = 32.500 inhabitants
- Demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity): 21,6% - under working age, 63,1% - in working age (15-63 y.o.a.), 15,3% - above working age; 75% - Latvians + Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians
- Employment levels: 2,6 % unemployment rate,
- Economy profile (per capita GDP, key local industry/employment sectors): 12 971 EUR GDP per capita, wholesale and retail, logistics and warehousing, food production, metal processing, freight transport, IT companies
- Functional Urban Area: Riga city FUA
- Total number of civil servants: 163 (central administration)

2. Citizen participation in practice

Kekava highlights the operation of their **Local Action Groups (“Partnerība Daugavkrasts”)** as a good practice to be shared with partners. These Local Action Groups involve all active stakeholders of the Kekava municipality including the local government, active citizens, NGOs, entrepreneurs, youth, women, farmers, seniors, etc. They have elaborated the **Community-driven Local Development Strategy** for Kekava Municipality 2021-2027 and implemented it through different projects with different funding, including EU funds.

The **mentioned year-end meetings of the Chairman of the Municipality Council** (and senior executives) are also worth mentioning as a good example. It shows the local government is prepared to go out and meet citizens where they live. The personal presence of top political leaders and senior executives of the municipality is much appreciated. On the other hand, however, Kekava admits there is not sufficient traceability of further work with expressed proposals, low interest (low turn-out of participants, short connection times of remote participants), and a lack of constructive proposals. This is something they wish to improve within the AoCE network.

3. Moving forward – Ideas for next steps in Citizen Participation

Following the Development Program 2021-2027 wishes to invest in **capacity-building** (skills, capabilities, awareness, etc.) of all municipal employees. They especially want to work on providing a wide **internal understanding** that everyone, both together and individually, can and should contribute to the dialogue between the local government and inhabitants. Kekava wishes to increase the understanding of municipal employees that it is **not only the responsibility of one specific department** to work with citizen participation issues. Also, they want to strengthen or improve the individual capacities and skills of local government officials and staff for **better communication with citizens**.

Second, Kekava realised that there are **too few community associations** that may serve as legitimate representatives and be able to voice the interests of the respective territorial community group pragmatically not forgetting about the co-existence principle with other interest groups. Thus, Kekava is looking for **tools to engage different community target groups** in a meaningful dialogue respecting different values. In parallel, they need to tackle the **challenge of dealing with lobbying** of very narrow interests. In principle, Kekava would like to implement co-existence and co-creation balancing different interests across the whole territory of the municipality. This is especially challenging since the 3 towns and the 3 rural territories of the Kekava municipality have different sizes and profiles with different needs and wishes. The City’s vision is that the active citizens of each settlement (town, village, neighbourhood) form associations that join in a network as the Council of Communities. Currently, only a few settlements have formed such **neighbourhood associations** which is not enough according to city officials.

With these challenges in mind, the IAP will include a description of the identified **capacity-building measures to boost the capabilities of municipal politicians and employees** to conduct meaningful dialogue with citizens and encourage civic participation. It will also describe the identified steps to **activate different community groups** to engage in structured dialogue with the local government and cooperate with other target groups living in the same municipality.

That way the IAP will support the tasks set out in the municipality’s **Development Program** – to facilitate the establishment and operation of communities (**neighbourhood associations**) and their involvement in the local decision-making process.

The key result of the IAP will then be an **improved awareness and skills of municipal politicians and staff** on how to encourage civic participation in local decision-making; as well as an improved awareness and **skills of various community groups in the whole territory of the municipality** thanks to a **model** developed for cooperation between local authorities and the communities of residents (neighbourhood associations). The model would also describe the establishment of municipal support, including financial support. The development of this model will be one of the testing actions. As a testing action, Kekava also wishes to test some **tools for activating civic participation**, e.g., advisory boards, a voting app, etc. The establishment of a **Community Council** and **engagement events** aimed at promoting neighbourhood associations are also planned.

1. Co-existence & citizen participation

The city of Budaörs is relatively young, it earned its city rank only in 1986. Following the political change of the system in 1989, it started to develop dynamically. Due to the pleasant natural environment and the closeness to Budapest, many people decided to settle in the residential areas of Budaörs moving out from the capital city. It resulted in a rapidly increasing population who needed new services. The municipality of Budaörs had to find the financial resources for these services and established industrial parks on the outskirts of the city. As the industrial parks were created next to the highway, several companies such as IKEA, Decathlon, OBI were attracted whose taxes provide a strong financial basis for the functionality of the municipality's high-level services. Recently, these **companies** have started to cooperate with the municipality improving their social services in the frame of **CSR activities**. However, the most successful cooperations have been developed with **NGOs** from the field of cultural and creative industry and education. In these cooperations, NGOs provide free **services for citizens** such as designing and leading animation courses for children and youth, organisation of concerts, exhibitions, community-building actions, providing digital services for elderly people, and after-school mentoring for students. While the municipality provides a place for free and allocates a budget for these activities.

Besides companies and NGOs, the **residents' participation** in public issues has increased thanks to the improved sense of belonging to Budaörs. As most of the current residents of Budaörs moved out from Budapest, it took some years to see the development of their new identity: the **identity of Budaörs**. This identity still needs to be reinforced to be a driven force for citizens to participate and contribute to public issues.

2. Citizen participation in practice

The growing sense of belonging also creates a larger wish amongst citizens to actively participate in decision-making processes. Budaörs has a longstanding, very well-known animation festival, **Primanima**. Primanima is an association working on animation videos and organising animation festivals in Budaörs. The association received a home in a municipality-owned building in the city centre of Budaörs. Primanima cooperates with the municipality by regularly organising animation workshops for kids. Based on this good relationship, the Municipality asked Primanima to contribute to the co-production of the Climate Strategy of Budaörs by organising workshops where elementary school students designed animation videos on climate-related topics. Through the videos, students could share their views regarding the climate-friendly future of Budaörs and were involved in the co-creation of the strategy in a gamified way.

Data about Budaörs

- Country = Hungary
- Region = Közép-Magyarország
- Population = 29.350 inhabitants
- Demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity): 86% of the population Hungarian, apart from the Hungarians, only one nationality, the Germans, exceeded 1% of the total population+ Gypsies, Romanians, Greeks, Armenians, Slovaks and Serbs
- Employment levels: 3 % unemployment rate
- Economy profile (per capita GDP, key local industry/employment sectors): Service Sector: commercial
- Functional Urban Area: small city in the FUA of Budapest
- Total number of civil servants: 172 (Mayor's Office), around 500 (the whole municipality)

PICTURE 1. PRIMANIMA



Participating in the CITIES4CSR URBACT network, the City established a regular co-working platform, called “**Budaörs Community – Community CSR Platform**” for local businesses and institutions, engaging them to work together for the common good in various thematic workstreams. Currently, the CSR Platform consists of 16 members: 12 companies, 3 NGO’s and the municipality. One of the recent success stories of the platform is an internship program developed under the coordination of the municipality where a robotic company located in Budaörs, a local high school, and an after-school mentoring institution called **Tanoda** started to cooperate. In the frame of this internship program, one student from the programming course of the high school and one talented student from Tanoda can work at the robotic company and get experience in this field while the company’s challenge of having a lack of enough workforce is mitigated by the contribution of the students. There are also examples of ad-hoc CSR actions managed through the platform: For instance, IKEA provided furniture for the new building of Tanoda and TetraPak delivered pallets to create an outdoor temporary sitting area for a jazz festival organised by an NGO in the city center. In both cases, a company contributed to improving a service (educational and cultural) provided by an NGO under the coordination of the municipality.

3. Moving forward – ideas for next steps in citizen participation

For their Integrated Action Plan, Budaörs is looking for methods **to expand the cooperation opportunities** between citizens, companies, institutions, and the municipality **applying** the experiences and structures of the **existing successful operations**. Second, they will focus on practices that can reinforce and develop the **new Budaörs identity** to make citizens more motivated to participate in the planning and implementation of innovations in public services. In general, Budaörs wishes to learn how to **improve the participatory culture of citizens, and** what type of **new tools and techniques** can be used to **reach citizens, especially young people**.

Further, Budaörs wishes to learn how to **communicate its results to the citizens** after a successful participation process, and how citizens can follow up **the implementation journey of their suggestions/ needs** communicated to the municipality through the participation process. Practices are welcomed to create a **permanent channel for citizens** to communicate new ideas to the municipality. At the same time, Budaörs realises the **lack of sufficient knowledge about participation** available in the city administration. On top of a **series of trainings**, which might help to start mitigating this challenge, they want to find a way to **create an internal group of civil servants** who are responsible specifically for **citizen participation** and help to **improve the capability and attitude of civil servants** toward participation which is also challenging right now. For this, they would also like to find ways to create an **internal platform for civil servants** where they can share and discuss their **innovative ideas** in the municipality. Their testing actions will be focussing on the training to improve skills and capabilities and the creation of an internal group responsible for citizen participation.

Also, Budaörs has a strong wish to intensify citizen participation. In their Integrated Action Plan, they will therefore focus on ways to involve citizens more actively. The following testing actions are planned to be undertaken by Budaörs within the frame of the AoCE network:

1) Go to the places of citizens instead of inviting them to the city hall to participate

The Municipality of Budaörs finances several social and cultural creative services designed and implemented by NGOs. For instance, the city provides a place for free for the Postart Cultural Centre and Zichy Major which host cultural events, community actions, workshops, and exhibitions. The Municipality also financially contributes to the operation of the Telekuckó. Telekuckó is a place in the city centre where the Municipality provides digital services for elderly people who need support in digital transformation and guidance in applying the services of the Municipality. The above-mentioned Tanoda is also a service that is supported by the municipality but implemented by an NGO.

Regarding citizen participation, the common in these places is the opportunity they provide for the city to meet specific groups of citizens in their environment. A **new approach of citizen participation** could be introduced in the frame of a testing action where **the city would go to the citizens** organising events in Postart Cultural Centre, in Zichy Major, Telekucko, or in the Tanoda **instead of inviting citizens to the city hall to participate** in public issues.



PICTURE 2-3. TANODA

2) Applying digital twin for co-creating new developments in the city

With the help of Primanima, project ideas of the City could be designed and presented to citizens as digital twins. This way citizens can imagine and understand what the city is planning and can better contribute to the planned projects. Therefore, **animation can be applied as a tool for citizens' involvement** in project development.

3) Internal innovation and idea generation platform of the municipality

Currently, there are no official channels in the municipality to share and discuss new ideas targeting social innovation or innovation in citizen participation. A possible testing action could be to **develop an internal innovation and idea-generation platform** where civil servants can share and develop innovations together. For instance, as a first case of the platform, involved civil servants could develop a project for **experimenting with participatory budgeting**.

1. Co-existence & citizen participation

Banská Bystrica is the economic, administrative, and cultural centre of central Slovakia and the seat of the Banská Bystrica self-governing region. Historically it is a mining city, however, currently, the economy is built on banking, education, and tourism. With the establishment of Matej Bel University in 1992, Banská Bystrica became one of the centres of higher education in Slovakia. On top of developing a new economic profile of the city, the need for a new and more open way of governance emerged in the city administration resulting in the decision to enter the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)** in October 2020. OGP fostered a supportive environment to enable citizen participation in urban development through enhancing participation processes in this field. Currently, there is a **dedicated position in the city office** – a Coordinator for open government and participation. It means that only one person covers the open government and participation agenda, however, another person in a full-time position and two students will be hired to create a small department of participation.

Banská Bystrica has experience in **participatory budgeting** and launched several **participatory initiatives** with citizens (e.g., Revitalisation of housing estates, City Park revitalisation, Open Government strategy development, Integrated Urban strategy development). They also have small experiments on mobilising citizens to conduct **small action steps** in their neighbourhoods to help the city to **tackle climate change**. In addition, **thematic committees** operate in the City consisting of experts and MP's functioning as advisory bodies to the City Council. Furthermore, there is a partnership of the City with the **Dialogue Centre n.o.**, an NGO that is helping the city to develop an open governance culture. Finally, there is a „**Board of Students**” that is supposed to function as an advisory body to the mayor of the City as well as a bridge builder to young people. However, it doesn't function very well. On one side there is a lack of interest from students and on another side lack of capacity of the city to work on maintenance of the vital relations with young people. Now they are just relying on **social media**, especially Facebook to attract young people. The City sometimes also directly approaches partners from the major universities to help reach some students.

Regarding the actions taken so far to upskill civil servants, they are trying to integrate “**educational parts**” where they invite employees /staff of the City office to take part in designing participatory planning and participatory meetings related to urban development. However, employees often say that they don't have time to contribute, and they are not hired to work on participation. This is also related to the issue that they haven't established the policy yet, whether the city office expects the participation department (which is small) to cover all the participation agenda or some employees should be upskilled from all relevant departments to do participation activities at least to some extent. Also, the internal initiative called “**City Office Breakfast**” was established as an informal safe space to discuss things around open government. However, they struggle to maintain the meetings regularly due to the lack of capacities of employees.

All in all, Banská Bystrica has taken important steps towards open government introducing different forms of citizen involvement but faced multiple challenges which they hope to tackle with the help of the AoCE partners' contribution.

2. Citizen participation in practice

On top of the above-presented practices and initiatives, the OGP partnership brought to life some other good practices in Banská Bystrica.

As a member of the Open Government Partnership, the city implemented a small project with OECD and the European Commission called „Innovative implementation of the principle of partnership in the EU cohesion policy”, through which 9 EU municipalities received technical assistance from OECD experts, among them also Banská Bystrica municipality. Within the scope of this project, together with OECD experts, the city developed a **new participatory method called “Ideathon”**. They have organised face-to-face as well as online participation in the process of creating the Integrated Urban Strategy. Ideathon is an innovative participatory format for brainstorming of individuals from different backgrounds, with different skills and intentions,

Data about Banská Bystrica

- Country = Slovakia
- Region = Stredné Slovensko
- Population = 73.831 inhabitants
- Demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity): Average age: 21% old people
 - 49.025 in active age, Majority of Slovaks
- Employment levels: 3,5% unemployment rate
- Economy profile (per capita GDP, key local industry/employment sectors): 10.917 euro GDP per capita, Service Sector (tertiary)
- Functional Urban Area: Banská Bystrica
- Total number of civil servants: City office – 284 civil servants

who come together to jointly identify different ideas, solutions, or actions within a particular topic. Ideations are time-limited, can take several hours or even days, and are realised through online or offline workshops and consultations.

A recently developed initiative is the **“collaboratory”**: a permanent city platform for fostering a dialogic way of communicating, and discussing “hot” city topics. It functions as a platform for the ongoing cooperation of different stakeholders, including citizens, in developing various complex public policies. It was previously applied in the OGP action planning process, however, it needs a restart, where more stakeholders are identified, and old ones are reactivated to fit into the AoCE project. This platform also has a board, which the city uses as a “strategic and advisory body for the Open Government development”. One of the key features of this platform is that it is facilitated by professional facilitators who use dialogue methods such as “the art of hosting” and “harvesting methods”.

3. Moving forward – Ideas for next steps in citizen participation

Unfortunately, there is a **polarised atmosphere** in Banská Bystrica that deactivates the genuine innovative potential of the city. Thus, the city needs to learn about depolarisation strategies and methodologies and find a way to mobilise the **“silent” majority** of citizens as there is a lack of interest in citizens to participate in public matters. For the bigger part, only groups of „activists” that are motivated politically are currently „active”. Therefore, Banská Bystrica is looking for **tools and methodologies** to reach out and **motivate larger groups of citizens and different stakeholders** to participate in decision-making processes and to ensure that the **results from participatory processes** are indeed being **taken into account**. Also, the city is open to learning how to develop **expert communities** in the city and create innovative partnerships and ecosystems across different sectors. With this polarised atmosphere comes distrust: Distrust of citizens towards city office senior management and political leadership and vice versa. Since these polarised mindsets are also apparent on the civil servant's side, an important question is how to change the **conservative mindset** of the **staff** of the city office and how to **overcome fears** and be open to change, open towards experimentation with new **ways of communication and relationship building with citizens and in general how to handle and implement management of organisational/cultural change**. In addition, how to increase the understanding of **when to use participation** and **what level** of participation to use on different processes/agendas, understanding **what benefits** participation can bring to different departments. Furthermore, how to **motivate the self-development** of the staff as well as leadership in general, including **training in participatory leadership**. Finally, what the city can do to **improve the facilitation skills** of civil servants to be able to organise and process quality participatory/group conversations?

Banská Bystrica sees which areas need improvement regarding the skills and attitudes of civil servants. They also understand that a new working structure and method is needed to reach their goals. In this regard, the city also wants to learn how to build a **participation department**. Currently, one participation officer takes care of all the activities related to citizen participation while it is not just one person's but all departments' responsibility to contribute to citizen involvement. Besides this participation department, Banská Bystrica wishes to find ways to **bring innovation to the operational mechanisms** of all city departments and to set up **efficient participation processes across different departments**. This might also require a **change in the traditional way of leading** as current decisions are being made at the top, thus there are **serious power relation issues**. Also, there is a strong political influence due to a dominant representative democracy style as opposed to a participatory democracy style. Therefore the city needs to also work on building capacities of politicians so they can operate in a more dialogic and collaborative manner, creating opportunities for dialogue with politicians systematically.

Other learning needs include areas of interdepartmental collaboration, **setting up and running effective formats such as internal breakfast /internal collaboratory/spaces for safe feedback** and discussions on how to improve ways of working, skills to give constructive feedback, and **spaces for mutual learning** and community of practice among city staff.

The city has developed and implemented its first **Open Government Action Plan 2021/2023**. This included also the development of the Open Government Roadmap 2030 for Banská Bystrica city, as a basis for further OGP actions. With this the city has also created a dedicated job position, *“coordinator for open government and participation”*, and it has developed a systematic collaboration with civic partner organisation “Dialogue Centre”. Currently, the city is working on the development of the **2nd Action Plan for Open Government 2024/2027** and would like to **integrate this with the work on the Integrated Action Plan of Agents of Coexistence**.

In line with the above-mentioned, the focus of the Integrated Action plan is to decrease the political **depolarisation** in the city and mobilise the “silent” majority of citizens. To reach this goal, it is necessary to increase the already **existing potentials, capacities, and resources** in the city office regarding quality participation processes. Therefore, the **participatory agenda must be spread across the municipality departments**, not just relying on a small unit dedicated to participation. This way all civil

servants feel that they are all in the same boat and understand what the real benefits are of open government and participation. Banská Bystrica is going to develop testing actions to **increase the motivation of civil servants** and leaders to switch to a participatory way of governing and **increase the acceptance of results from participatory processes**. Further actions will address the **improvement of communication across departments**. For instance, they are planning to create and identify sustainable and **effective ways of running informal dialogic meetings** regularly with the city office staff, including city leadership on the open government agenda and **developing useful tools** for understanding when and at what level to use participation. Finally, an action is going to be dedicated to the activation and future maintenance of the **Collaboratory platform**.

1. Co-existence & citizen participation

Iași, located in north-eastern Romania, has a rich historical background that has shaped it into one of the country's oldest and most significant cities. Urbanisation and industrialisation drew people from rural areas to Iași for work and education. Political changes, including communist rule, influenced the city's social structure. Post-communist transition and European integration have continued to shape Iași's sociological landscape, making it a vibrant and diverse urban centre. Along with the Iași County Council, the Iași Metropolitan Area includes 27 localities. Iași Metropolitan Area Association doesn't have a civic participation department, but Iași City Hall does, and it's called: the **Department of Relations with Civil Society** in the Community Relations and Public Policy Service which manages the link between public administration and non-governmental organisations as well as projects and initiatives having impact on community development.

The main **objectives of citizen participation** in the city are developing strategies for tackling the city's main challenges such as improving **mobility**, solving parking problems, creating new **green spaces**, and attracting EU investments. To reach their goal, the City Hall of Iași carries out: **annual public consultations** regarding the budget allocation at the local level, **consultations on specific topics** of public interest as needed such as replanting the linden trees in the central area of the city, the sustainable urban mobility plan, the integrated urban development strategy, the general urban plan, etc. These public consultations, discussion groups, and other forms of participation that act as a more general democratisation process have been tried with mixed levels of success. More permanent channels of dialogue are possible through the **Citizen Information Centre** for citizens and **Neighbourhood centres**.

The collaborations with **non-governmental organisations** resulted in different projects to be financed from the local budget in the fields of culture and youth. An important development was made in 2018 when the public debate on the **Regulation for the financing of civil society projects** took place in Iași based on the Law 350/2005 regarding the non-reimbursable financing from public funds allocated for non-profit activities of general interest. Under this regulation, a new financing line for non-governmental organisations was opened for the first time in Romania.

Iași also has experience in **involving young people** in public issues: dozens of students participate in **Internship programs** at the City Hall in collaboration with several faculties in this field, especially from the "Al. I. Cuza" University.

Finally, Iași has been a member of the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)** international initiative since 2018. As part of the OGP measures, Iași undertook the "**Collaborative Solutions**" project through which the people of Iași decided the city's priorities in 7 strategic areas of development (Culture, Order and public safety, Good governance and digitisation, Health and Environment, Education, Mobility, Public spaces). This project used the **Design Thinking method**. The concept involves turning a problem into a process where you ask yourself the right questions to find solutions through empathy. Design Thinking is a way to solve problems creatively starting from the consumer (citizen) and iterating (then reiterating) actions and solutions addressed to citizens. The project combined different learning activities through public debates and sharing of potential problems that they came across in their daily activities (work-related, family, or leisure activities) in the city.

Data about Iași

- Country = Romania
- Region = Nord-Est
- Population = 393.574 inhabitants
- Demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity): diverse population incl. Roma, Hungarian, Ukrainian, German, Turkish, Russian Lipovans, Jews, Italians. Half of the population is Romanian
- Employment levels: 3,03 % unemployment rate, youth unemployment: 0,75%
- Economy profile (per capita GDP, key local industry/employment sectors): 12.027 EUR GDP per capita, service sector: wholesale, retail, construction IT&C, tourism
- Functional Urban Area: Iași Municipality Functional Urban Area
- Total number of civil servants: 610.937

2. Citizen participation in practice

Among all the practices Iași has applied so far to engage their citizens, they found the *Neighbourhood centres* the most successful one to be shared with the AoCE partners as good practice.

PICTURE 4. NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER

Ever since 2006, the City Hall of Iași has set itself the objective of creating the right framework for participatory democracy, by establishing 7 neighbourhood centres for Păcurari, Nicolina, Tătărași, Alexandru cel Bun, Frumoasa, Copou, and Centru. The establishment of neighbourhood centres is part of a strategy to involve citizens in community life and find optimal solutions for improving public services. The aim is to bring the administration as close as possible to the citizens, being an example of decentralisation of services but at the same time efficiency. The objective of participatory democracy is to give the citizen the right to speak to involve them more in decision-making. Beyond electoral periods, it proposes spaces for dialogue and rapprochement between elected representatives and citizens.



3. Moving forward – Ideas for next steps in citizen participation

Even though the idea of neighbourhood centres is one of the good practices of Iași in AoCE, not all centres are active enough and work effectively. Thus, Iași is thinking about implementing a testing action in some of the less active centres by inviting residents to discuss and jointly implement the **renewal of the centres**. This way perhaps people will embrace the place as their own: a safe place to communicate needs and share ideas with the city administration. According to their initial idea, also a **shared services community system** is going to be tested in the select centres to make residents active in their neighbourhood.

The city can also reach citizens through **block meetings**. In several districts of the city, a block of houses has regular meetings where residents discuss the common issues of their house and its area and decide on concrete actions to be implemented. They discuss public issues on an operational level. In the frame of a testing action, Iași will try to find ways to **engage these groups and involve them in public issues**.

This testing action perfectly fits in with the challenges and learning needs Iași has identified and will work on in their Integrated Action Plan. The most important issue for them is to learn how to create **mutual trust** among citizens, decision-makers, and civil servants of the public administration to increase the desire to collaborate. The public perception is that the biggest obstacles are on the one hand, the lack of will on the part of the administration and the other, the lack of active citizens interested in the common good, resulting in a low degree of structuring and efficiency of public participation. These challenges are accompanied by **(political) frustration** of citizens when they want something that is not carried out by the administration. Thus, Iași would like to learn how to create coherent **channels of dialogue** and consultation regarding the measures that the local administration takes related to the topics of interest to the community: traffic, environment, mobility, air pollution, and urban planning.

Equally important for them is to learn how to **communicate the decision mechanism** of the municipality to citizens to understand how and when their ideas are taken into consideration. On top of these, Iași is open to looking into **data collection methods** for making better decisions, especially about mobility, demographics, and migration.

Regarding the cooperation of the city administration with a specific group of citizens, Iași would like to learn how to **better involve young people** in the process of citizen participation. At the moment, there is no strategy or policy for that, while there is a big opportunity as **Iași is an important educational and economical centre** attracting many young people to the city for study or work. The city of Iași was even The Youth Capital of Romania between 2019 – 2020.

The City is also looking for new ways to **cooperate with NGOs**. NGOs are strong innovators in Iași regularly coming up with new ideas for the improvement of public services and having the potential to make major changes in the city. Unfortunately, **public administration** does **not always understand how NGOs work which prevents them from possible cooperation**.

Further, Iași has realised through the AoCE Network the need to **upskill employees** in terms of collaboration with citizens. Currently, there are too few opportunities to develop the skills of employees due to a lack of accredited courses dedicated to this field. This leads to the impossibility of acquiring new skills by employees who work directly with citizens. In their Integrated Action Plan Iași wishes to look at different methods to work on a programme for employees to improve skills and competencies such as communication skills, respect, ability to work collaboratively, empathy, resilience, patience, political awareness, etc.

Finally, Iași identified challenges in the city administration's working culture and rules that prevent them from implementing a successful citizen participation process. First of all, they lack a **clear legislative framework for collaboration** between citizens and local administration including tools, methodologies, and policies. Secondly, they find it challenging to **handle the changes** in legislation, policy, and management of the administration. Thirdly, there is a lack of **financial and human resources** for citizen participation. This currently prevents Iași from implementing participation as a process instead of as a series of ad-hoc actions.

QUART DE POBLET

1. Co-existence & citizen participation

Quart de Poblet is in the **proximity of the city of Valencia** which played the main role in its growth. As Valencia expanded, the town became an attractive **suburban destination** for those seeking a more relaxed, yet accessible, lifestyle. Today, Quart de Poblet stands as a **thriving industrial town**, characterised by its robust economy, modern amenities, and a dynamic mix of residential, commercial, and industrial areas. It has a historical journey from a rural village to an industrial hub. Quart de Poblet has a **diverse community**. This diversity enriched the town's cultural landscape, fostering a vibrant and inclusive community. In recent years there has been, and is expected to continue to be, a large influx of new inhabitants due to the opening of new housing spaces. The municipality intends to engage all target groups of this diverse community by establishing the **Department of Citizen Participation**. Besides, there is also a **Youth Department** in the municipality that tries to involve young people in the project activities. On top of it, two **councillors** are assigned to citizen participation and open government while the rest of the councillors are also committed to transparency and participation.

This commitment has evolved from occasional collaborations in the organisation of activities of social, economic, and cultural interest, and the consolidation of citizen participation councils in all areas (youth, children, women, sports, social...), to the signing of agreements for the management of specific programmes and services. Quart de Poblet has progressively strengthened its resolve to establish mechanisms and tools for ensuring citizen participation, thereby adopting a participatory approach to managing public resources and engaging all stakeholders.

Data about Quart de Poblet

- Country = Spain
- Region = Comunidad Valenciana
- Population = 25.167 inhabitants
- Demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity): < 16 years old: 13.97%, 16 to 29: 13.98%, 30 to 64: 50.08%, 64 >: 21.97%, Spanish (92.9%), EU (1.4%), TCN (5.7%)
- Employment levels: 16,5 % unemployment rate,
- Economy profile (per capita GDP, key local industry/employment sectors): 20.443 € GDP per capita, Tertiary Sector - Services
- Functional Urban Area: FUA of Valencia
- Total number of civil servants: 250

For instance, Quart de Poblet **fosters citizen participation in urban development** through a multifaceted approach. This includes maintaining transparency in decision-making processes and ensuring **open access to information about development projects**. They utilise **online platforms** and **social media** which expands the reach of engagement efforts. Moreover, **civic education** and **information campaigns** are organised to empower residents to participate effectively. Furthermore, collaborations are established with community organisations and stakeholders who contribute to developing inclusive urban plans.

Quart de Poblet City Council is part of various networks of local and regional entities that converge towards the common goal of allowing the sharing of experiences and facilitating joint community revitalisation efforts.

They are part of the "Xarxa Participa" (**Participate Network**) initiated by the Huerta Sur Foundation, where **civil servants** from different municipalities and organisations work in a coordinated manner to **strengthen** the associative network and **participation, share information, work on methodologies**, programs, and knowledge.

Also, they are affiliated with the "Xarxa de Governança Participativa Municipal" (**Network of Participatory Municipal Governance of the Valencian Community**), committing to enhance the actions outlined in the Letter of Adherence to the Network.

PICTURE 5. OPEN ACCESS TO INFORMATION



Finally, Quart de Poblet is working on the "Ajuntament Obert" (**Open City Council**) project to make **municipal management more transparent** and facilitate the **interaction of residents with the council** and the municipal government through **virtual tools** (social networks, online platforms), thus bringing municipal public management closer to the inhabitants of the town.

2. Citizen participation in practice

The **civic management** applied by Quart de Poblet is a form of citizen participation in which a **non-profit organisation is entrusted with the management of municipal activities**, facilities, and services that are amenable to indirect management. Its primary objectives include promoting the involvement of the community and/or associations in initiatives of public interest, including the very objects they manage. As a result, non-profit civic entities, organisations, and citizen associations can participate in the management of services or facilities that are under the ownership of Quart de Poblet.

This model of civic management, involving organised civil society, is formalised through a **collaboration agreement**. Despite establishing mutual obligations, it does not fall under the legal nature of public sector contracts. Consequently, it does not constitute a form of contracting for public service management, and its scope should not conflict with the basic regulations in public sector contracting, nor the applicable European directives in this regard.

3. Moving forward – Ideas for next steps in citizen participation

Quart de Poblet is interested to learn how **all members** of their community can be actively **engaged in decision-making processes** that affect the town. Which **tools** should they apply to include more people in citizen participation? How can they encourage citizens to be active in public issues? For this, the establishment of stable resources to support actively engaging citizens is necessary and this will therefore be a focus point in the upcoming years. Regarding human resources, they wish to learn **how to involve municipal staff in different forms of participation**.

Quart de Poblet also faces challenges regarding **communication with citizens**. They would like to know how to **ensure transparency**, both in terms of the information provided to citizens and the clarity of the actions of public employees. In this regard, the city realises the importance of creating strategies for systematising information and monitoring of actions implemented.

Based on the lessons learned from AocE partners, the focus of the Integrated Action Plan will be on developing and adapting tools, methods, practices, and processes which **promote transparency, inclusivity, and empowerment within the local governance structure**. This, to reach **effective citizen participation** which contributes to better decision-making, improved service delivery, and a stronger sense of community. It also aims to establish a system for welcoming and integrating new groups of citizens who join.

They would like to get inspiration to **create a channel** inside the municipality where all departments can communicate with each other and with citizens smoothly and effectively as their testing action. To do this, they will introduce changes to their website and communication channels (citizen service offices, app, social networks...). Further, they wish to increase the possibilities of carrying out online procedures by incorporating training and accompaniment processes for citizens, organise and coordinate the council's internal information and carry out periodic open consultations. Also, they want to innovate in reception and welcome systems to facilitate integration of new inhabitants. The **civil servants will receive training** to use the channel effectively without duplicating tasks or slowing down processes.

1. Co-existence & citizen participation

Aarhus is the second largest city in Denmark. In recent decades, Aarhus has become increasingly diverse due to immigration and globalisation. It is also a young city its largest age group is the 23-year-olds. In this context, the main objective of citizen participation in Aarhus, from a political perspective, is to bring political decision making closer to all citizens/voters. From a public perspective, it aims to bring officials closer to the citizens to ensure that services and solutions align with the needs and preferences of the different groups of residents.

Citizen participation is decentralised into different departments in the municipality e.g., **Citizen Service** which is the main entrance to the public sector. Citizen Service is one of the departments that have dedicated most time to the experimentation and testing of new tools for citizen engagement.

In Citizen Service, the Department of Innovation and Democracy oversees various citizen engagement activities such as **citizen proposals, participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies, civic lotteries, educating young people in democracy, and digital installations** to lower the barrier to participation. However, this is just one of several departments throughout Aarhus Municipality that work on citizen participation. For instance, the libraries also have dedicated employees for planning and implementing citizen engagement processes. The same applies to Engineering and Environmental Services (e.g., the Department of Civic Engagement) as well as the Mayor's Office, where the Department of Innovation and Civic Engagement is located.

Aarhus has a lot of experience in using digital means for participation processes, in part 2 we will see some good examples. Also, there are different kinds of **citizen advisory groups** (e.g., the Accessibility Council and the Disability Council that act as an advisory to the City Council and the municipal departments). Furthermore, Citizen Service is managing three kinds of **networks**; one for the youth, one for vulnerable groups, and a senior network, where representatives from the target groups meet with Citizen Service 3-4 times a year. Both to present the challenges they encounter with the public sector and to advise the municipality on the development of new solutions. These networks help the city reach out to citizens with participatory processes.

The city also utilises „**public telephones**” where citizens can record their qualitative suggestions for urban development. In addition, it is also possible to collect quantitative data from a sample of the population via **Digital Post** (in Denmark you receive your mail from public Danish authorities digitally). Finally, the city has a lot of **examples of citizen workshops, interviews, focus groups**, etc.

One can safely say that Aarhus has completed many participatory processes and is strong on methodology. Although **skills to perform open participation** more broadly disseminated in the organisation and the **mindset to use citizens' input** more properly are **sometimes missing**.

Currently, there is an ongoing **effort to upskill employees** within the administration to adapt new forms of citizen participation. However, there is a **lack of a formalised structure for these initiatives**. This is an area where Aarhus sees room for improvement and a need for a more organised approach.

Data about Aarhus

- Country = Denmark
- Region = Midtjylland
- Population = 362.337 inhabitants
- Demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity): Average age: Male (49,1 %), Female (50,9 %), 18,3% of immigrants
- Employment levels: 9% unemployment rate, 2% youth unemployment
- Economy profile (per capita GDP, key local industry/employment sectors): 410.000 DDK per capita, growth+ 3,78 % in average per year, Service Sector (tertiary)
- Functional Urban Area: Aarhus Municipality consist of 18 smaller towns
- Total number of civil servants: 23.112 full-time positions in the Municipality

2. Citizen participation in practice

On top of the above-presented practices and initiatives, Aarhus has several other good practices to be shared with their partners in the Agents of Co-Existence Network and beyond.

The Aarhus Compass is the city of Aarhus' (new) framework of understanding focusing on less system, and more citizen. This new focus is a shift from a New Public Management focus on efficiency KPIs to a more citizen-centric value-based system, where we must instead **try to understand what matters to citizens**. The Aarhus Compass is based on three main pillars:

1. Strengthened focus on value (Aarhus must be a good city for everyone)
2. Strengthened co-creation and co-production (We create value together with citizens and with society)
3. More knowledge-informed management and practice (We translate knowledge into value)

With the Compass in mind, employees preparing policy recommendations and notes regarding projects, new initiatives, etc., must consider and write down how it creates value for the citizens.

Aarhus has good experience with *using digital tools* for cutting cost, strengthening communication, creating accessibility, security and boosting participation. Several of the tools used are:

1. A digital platform (www.deltag.aarhus.dk) creates visibility and overview 24/7 on all devices. Besides that, it lowers the cost in relation to collecting the proposals and managing the voting.
2. Use Open-Source software (CONSUL) which cuts cost for IT-Development.
3. The use of Digital Mail infrastructure in Denmark makes it possible to specify specific target groups in for example a geographical area. This allows to target communication and making sure that everyone gets the information and know what is going on and how they can participate.
4. The use of government backed single sign-on for verification makes the login process recognisable and secures against voting fraud.

In collaboration with FO-Aarhus (Free Education Association), Aarhus Municipality has developed the concept of '**democracy helpers**'. The concept involves employing 6-8 young people (age 18-27) in helping with holding the elections. The young people employed are citizens who need a bit of structure in their daily lives and to build their skills and confidence before either searching for a job or apply for an education. As part of their employment, they participate in a democracy course facilitated by FO-Aarhus, where they gain insight into democracy and the Danish electoral process. The role of a democracy helper is thus twofold. It aims to:

1. Provide young individuals with concrete work experience that they can use in their future employment and/or educational paths.
2. Enhance the democratic participation of young people by giving them in-depth knowledge of democracy and introducing them to specific election tasks.

Since the municipal and regional elections in 2021, democracy helpers have become a permanent part of Aarhus Municipality's election secretariat.

Sager der Samler (or: "Citizen Change") is a place and a platform for citizen-led change, run independently as a community of people who support each other in taking initiative and acting on problems and dreams from their own lives. The result is courage, agency, and initiatives that renew society and democracy on a local scale. Basically, it is about being an activist in your own life and at the same time being a part of a community of mutual support. Everyone is welcome. Everyone can participate by starting their initiative or by contributing to someone else's. A challenge for Sager der Samler initiatives and at the same time the City of Aarhus is the following: The municipality sometimes tries to copy the ideas of developed by citizens through this initiative. Often, this leads to a lack of passion, where this same passion was a large part of its bottom-up success. Further, the involvement of the municipality leads to more bureaucracy and higher costs. Also, the funding for a platform such as Sager der Samler is insecure. Finding the necessary funding takes a lot of time and energy that could otherwise have gone into creating valuable social, cultural, and community projects. Finally, it is difficult to go from a small and passion-driven project to a larger project with more impact.

3. Moving forward – Ideas for next steps in citizen participation

Aarhus is looking for the **best citizen engagement process** (e.g., create a common set of rules together with the citizens before the citizen meeting begins, use a neutral facilitator, and start by discussing fear and hope). To make this process successful, they need to tackle the challenge of **distrust of citizens towards politicians and civil servants** having the feeling of not having any influence on local policy – not even when the municipality asks for their input. Aarhus is struggling to fill the gap between reality as experienced by citizens and the image politicians perceive. Aarhus also needs to **handle unclear power relations** in citizen engagement (democracy creates ambiguity). It makes their work even more challenging that the tone in the public sphere is **polarising** and less forgiving while the goal is to **involve the large groups of minorities, young people, less educated, and citizens living outside the city centre** who are disconnected from regular citizen participation. They intend to reach their goal by improving the **quality of communication** towards citizens to be clear, relevant, sufficient, and easy to understand.

Even though Aarhus has good practices in involving young people, they have also identified challenges working with the **Youth Council**: The dialogue with the city council is good and ideas are welcomed, but they often **lack the resources** to back it up. In addition, the Youth Council is often asked about subjects directly related to children and youth themes, but the Youth Council **would like to talk more about subjects** that are important to the **whole of society** (such as the climate agenda).

One of the existing tools particularly effective in citizen involvement is **participatory budgeting**. Still, some questions also have emerged in this regard: How to choose the framework for each budget? How to communicate about this new form of participation to citizens? How to make it accessible for all citizens?

Like other partner cities, Aarhus also joined AoCE to learn how to build structures and **improve the skills of civil servants** to improve citizen engagement. They find it important to **improve the working methods** for the administration as a whole, for they are convinced it will help **create** transparency for the citizens in a complex system; giving feedback and tracking input from early stage to decision-making.

For their Integrated Action Plan, Aarhus **would like to tackle the 4 main challenges they identified with their stakeholders**: the unclear power relations in citizen engagement, the quality of communication towards citizens, the lack of influence on decision-making, and the lack of structures and skill for citizen engagement. They want to use *“the Democratic Conversation”* as a *framework for this*. As a new way to approach the challenges that the public sector faces, Aarhus City Council has identified a series of **wicked problems** that they, as a municipality, cannot solve on their own, and which perhaps may not be solvable at all. However, Aarhus believes they can influence these wicked problems in the right direction if they think and act in new ways. One of the identified wicked problems is the democratic conversation. In this understanding of the problem, there is a focus on two concepts: democratic trust and democratic self-confidence. Democratic trust is about our fundamental trust that others will listen to us and engage with us with respect and a desire to understand and become wiser. Trust in politicians, the media, and the public administration is essential in this context. Democratic self-confidence is related to the individual citizen's democratic self-perception and belief that one can influence others through speech and action. Based on the knowledge and learnings gathered in Agents of Co-existence, Aarhus plans to **work on the democratic conversation in the frame of their testing action**.

1. Co-existence & citizen participation

Breda is a medium-sized urban area and the largest city in the Southwest of the Netherlands with a growing population due to migration. There is a growing dichotomy in Breda's society based on livelihood security and equality of opportunity. This division follows geographical lines within the city. Roughly speaking the northern part of the city is characterised by social housing, low income, low education level, a large population of immigrants, less opportunities. The middle and higher classes (those with the most opportunities) are in the southern half of the city. In this challenging context within Breda municipality, they work together to ensure equity of opportunity for all residents, to reduce this divide. They do this through citizen participation and by consistently and sustainably engaging in dialogue with their residents. Breda holds the opinion that governments can no longer do without the voice of inhabitants and will have to be proactive in this.

Breda's goal is to prevent **unwanted polarisation** with citizen participation by improving accountability, and public satisfaction, improving decision-making, empowering citizens, and applying appropriate participation methods in the process. **Accountability** means that when citizens are involved in decision-making, it becomes easier to hold local officials accountable for their actions and decisions. Regarding **public satisfaction**, civil participation can lead to greater public satisfaction and trust in local government. When citizens see that their input is valued and acted upon, they are more likely to have a positive view of their local authorities. Thanks to citizen participation **improved decision-making** is expected: Breda aims to tap into the collective knowledge, ideas, and expertise of their citizens. By involving the community in decision-making processes, they can make more informed and effective decisions that align with the needs and preferences of the people. In addition, the introduction of civil participation aims to **empower citizens** by giving them a voice in local policies, projects, and issues that directly affect their lives. It promotes a **sense of ownership** and responsibility among residents. Depending on the kind of policy development, Breda currently applies different participation methods such as neighbourhood councils, advisory committees (with a Senior council and a Youth council), online platforms (a.o. [Breda Platform voor Iedereen](#)), and public consultations.

Data about Breda

- Country = the Netherlands
- Region = Noord-Brabant
- Population = 186.000 inhabitants
- Demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity): 27% of population has a migration background
- Employment levels: 3.6% unemployment rate, youth unemployment: 11,8% in the age group 15-24
- Economy profile (per capita GDP, key local industry/employment sectors): 53.000 Euro per capita, Service Sector: commercial and public services
- Functional Urban Area: medium sized urban area, urban function to 400.000 inhabitants of the region
- Total number of civil servants: 3000

2. Citizen participation in practice

Social organisations in Breda work together within 6 "[value networks](#)" to draw up an implementation plan. The value networks are: "togetherness and self-reliance", "existence security", "a safe home", "coming home to Breda", "a healthy and active life" and "a promising youth". Each value network jointly produces an implementation plan based on the value that the network wants to add to the local community. In working together, the partners jointly look at what they want to achieve and how they want to realise their goals. By working together on one joint plan, duplication is avoided, gaps are noted, and everyone's expertise and knowledge are fully utilised.

Subsequently, organisations can apply for a subsidy for the activities included in the implementation plan and receive a subsidy for their activities from the municipality of Breda.

With the [Verbeter Breda](#) (Improve Breda) program Breda works on equal opportunities, wherever you grow up in Breda. The goal is to achieve this within one generation. In 2040 Breda's inhabitants should have enough opportunities to live their own valuable lives. Living, school and income are central to this. And they will do this together: inhabitants, schools, companies, police, housing corporations, health care and welfare, the municipality, and the state are working towards a permanently better Breda!

The “Verbeter Breda”-program is not just another program. It is about changing what is already there. And it is about working together in new ways with joint responsibility for the results. This is all laid down in the “Verbeter Breda”-principles: with and for residents, prevention, neighbourhood, and city-oriented, multi-year approach, we support differently, and we work on trust. “Verbeter Breda” goes beyond individual input. We all represent each other, whether you are a professional or an inhabitant. The basis for everything is trust, equality and give and take.

3. Moving forward – Ideas for next steps in citizen participation

One of the main challenges in citizen participation in Breda is the **growing unwanted polarisation** which has become a prominent issue in recent years. Typically, the Netherlands is known for its progressive and inclusive values. But it has in recent years experienced a growing divide within its population. This unwanted polarisation can be attributed to several factors: the issue of immigration and integration, economic inequality, political fragmentation, social media and echo chambers, the struggle with cultural values and identity, global rise of populism and nationalism. These aspects also contribute to a **growing division between government and citizens**, which can affect citizen participation. Several government scandals in the Netherlands have significantly eroded public trust in government institutions and officials. Many citizens who depend on government intervention for their livelihood or healthcare services and/or housing needs, experience government as an institution that does not help solve their problems, but only makes them worse. This loss of trust leads to less citizen participation. Therefore, in their testing actions and integrated action plan, Breda wishes to specifically focus on the question of how to cope with unwanted polarisation and how citizen participation can add to the solution of this.

They intend to **develop a program that should strengthen the cooperation between civil servants and individual citizens in solving citizens’ problems**. As a result, awareness and understanding of the authenticity of problems (and the stacking of problems) among vulnerable citizens is expected. In addition, a method will be developed in the IAP by which they can train their civil servants to become more sensitive and cooperative to citizens’ needs. As a first test for their testing actions, an employee was appointed to work for both the Security Department and the Social Policy Department, thus creating new and better connections on preventive and social policy about inclusion and diversity and specifically on polarisation.

Section 3

Synthesis, Methodology, Network Roadmap

SYNTHESIS

As we have seen in the partner profiles, most of the partners have experience and knowledge in citizen participation. With the cooperation within the URBACT Agents of Co-Existence Network, they wish to deepen that experience and knowledge in the upcoming period. Overall, the ambition in each city in the partnership boils down to the ambition to transform the way their local government engages their citizens in decision-making processes. To do this, cities need reformers, not only from outside but also from within the government.

Based on previous chapters, including a European overview of the policy challenge and the partner profiles, the AoCE partnership agreed on focussing on the following themes:

Theme 1 - Working together with citizens

Theme 2 - Innovators coming into government

Theme 3 - Focus on staff, internal capabilities, and officials as innovators

Theme 4 - New working methods and rethinking the rules.

Inside each theme, partners have identified sub-themes, expressed their knowledge needs, and highlighted their good practices.

All partners are already applying different methods, tools, techniques, and approaches to citizen participation (sub-theme 1.1). At the same time, they are struggling **to find solutions to increase trust in government institutions**, tackle polarisation issues and mobilise the silent majority of their population improving the participatory culture of citizens (sub-theme 1.2, 1.3). Fortunately, some partners have well-elaborated systems for cooperating with young people or other specific groups of citizens represented by NGOs (sub-theme 1.4, 1.5). Also, many partners have extensive experience with and tested **tools for participatory budgeting**. It will be interesting to compare the methods and tools applied by partners in this regard to make participatory budgeting more effective in the partner cities.

We can safely say that the partners already have a deep knowledge about 'working with citizens' but they have a lack of knowledge on **how to embed the results of citizen participation into the daily work of the administration** (theme 2.1). Another important element is the innovations and new ways of thinking that citizens can bring to the table. Generally speaking, civil servants (very often experts in their field) find it difficult to embrace citizens' ideas as possible solutions for the policies being discussed (theme 2.1).

Moreover, they struggle to follow up on citizens' ideas, whether the idea has been taken into consideration or explain why it could not be implemented. They are also looking for new ways to communicate these decisions to citizens in such a way that they can easily absorb them. (sub-theme 2.2). To sum up, partners want to know how **to create transparency in decision-making** (sub-theme 2.2).

As mentioned before, AoCE particularly focuses on **improving the skills and capacities of civil servants** (theme 3) to implement citizen participation processes more successfully. Partners found the **communication and facilitation skills** (sub-theme 3.1) the most important skills of civil servants to be improved. Some partner cities need to improve their civil servants' knowledge of citizen engagement methods (sub-theme 3.2). Further, partners wish to focus not only on civil servants in general but focus especially on the leaders of the municipality, to **achieve participatory leadership** in tackling power relation issues (sub-theme 3.3). Almost all partners expressed their willingness to **make changes in the attitude, and mindset of their civil servants** to overcome fear and increase motivation for innovation and citizen participation (sub-theme 3.4). Thus, there is a significant need for learning and a lack of knowledge in the partnership in theme 3. However, some good practices from outside the partnership have been identified in the first chapter of the Baseline Study. These cities could be asked to share their knowledge with the AoCE partners. For instance, the 12th district of Budapest, owner of *the Training curriculum on smart UGS Governance for public authorities'* good practice, is scheduled to be involved in the 2nd core network meeting, which is organised in Budaörs, in the neighbouring city of the 12th district of Budapest.

On top of upskilling civil servants, partners would like to **explore and establish new working methods** for and rethink the rules of citizen participation (theme 4). As with theme 3, the main questions for partners in this theme are: how to increase cross-department collaborations involving all departments in citizen participation; how to set up and run an internal platform for civil servants being a safe place for innovating and mutual learning; and how to create a clear legal framework for working with citizens. Half of the partners have already set up a participation department or at least established a position for a participation officer. They will exchange knowledge about their working methods and support those partners who haven't created such a unit in their organisation yet but would like to do so in the future.

In table 1 the learning needs of partners within each of the (sub)themes are described as well as their potential contribution through good practices to the learning needs of other cities.

TABLE 1. MATRIX OF THE GOOD PRACTICES AND KNOWLEDGE NEEDS

Having a good practice related to the theme	Having a good practice but also needs knowledge	Having only knowledge needs										
AoCE focus areas	Sub-themes	GENK	GDANSK	KEKAVA	BUDAÖRS	BANSKA BYSTRICA	IASI	QUART DE POBLET	AARHUS	BREDA	GPs from outside the AoCE partnership	
THEME1 - WORKING TOGETHER WITH CITIZENS	Citizen engagement approach/ methods/tools	The 22	Citizens' Assembly	Local Action Groups	KN	Ideathon DECIDIM online platform	KN	KN	Aarhus Compass	Development in dialogue		
	Increase trust-tackling polarisation-mobilise silent majority	A lot of initiatives, but the most recent one is 'the Genker habits' which is the result of 'the 22'	Neighbourhood Houses as mini publics	KN	"Budörs Community – Community CSR Platform	Collaboratory platform	Neighborhood centers	KN	Sager der Samler (Citizen Change)	KN		
	Improve the participatory culture of citizens		Social Hub – innovation and collaboration open space Pact of collaboration and residents Council in Ubozce St.24 communal building	KN	KN	KN		KN				
	Involving young people incl children	Junior Team, G10, and Youth Council			Primanima's animation workshop		KN		Democracy helpers			
	Cooperation with NGOs	Advisory councils	Annual Programme of Cooperation of the City with Non-Governmental Organisations Gdansk Funds – mini grants for NGOs & informal groups	KN			KN	Civic management model		Value network		
	Participatory budget	Participatory budgeting – the role of project coaches	Civic Budget, including Green Civic Budget			KN			Digital tools in participatory budgeting			
THEME2 - INNOVATORS COMING INTO GOVERNMENT	Embed the results of civic participation	KN	KN		KN	KN		KN				
	Follow-up of citizens ideas - transparency of decision making	Set of rules in participatory budgetting + follow-up during implementation	KN		KN		KN	KN	KN			
THEME 3 - FOCUS ON STAFF, INTERNAL CAPABILITIES, OFFICIALS AS INNOVATORS	Improving communication and facilitation skills	KN	KN			KN		KN	KN			
	Improve knowledge about citizen engagement methods	KN			KN	KN			KN	Open data – skilled staff (Espoo, Finland)	LABcapital: Online Public Innovation Course for Public Officials (Bogota, Colombia)	
	Participatory leadership - tackling power relation issue	KN			KN	KN				Training curriculum on smart UGS Governance for public authorities (12th district of Budapest, Hungary)		
	Change in attitude, mindset, overcome fear, increase motivation for innovation	KN	KN	KN	KN	KN					Badges – Rewarding Data and Innovation Work (Louisville, USA)	
THEME 4 - NEW WORKING METHODS AND RETHINKING THE RULES	Setting up a participation department, establish position of participation officer	Dedicated position for participaton officer	Department for District Councils and Cooperation with Citizens incl. a unit for Local Cooperation and Social Innovation		KN	Dedicated position in the City office – a Coordinator for open government and participation	Department of relations with civil society in the Community Relations and Public Policy Service	Department of Citizen Participation	In Citizen Service, the Department of Development and Democracy			
	Cross-departent collaborations-involving all departments in citizen participation	Duo jobs between urban development and neighbourhood managers		KN	KN	KN	KN	KN	KN			
	Internal platform for civil servants, safe place for innovating, mutual learning				KN	KN						
	Clear legislative framework for collaboration			KN			KN					

METHODOLOGY AND NETWORK WORKPLAN

TRANSNATIONAL LEVEL ACTIVITIES

The transnational level activities of the AoCE Network were developed based on the four key themes, and the learning needs identified in the first phase of their cooperation, amongst others during the first Core Network Meeting. This meeting has already been organised in Genk and Breda in November 2023. Another five in-person **Core Network Meetings** and two smaller partner meetings called Agents in action meetings are planned along the different stages of the project.

Each of the first four transnational meetings will focus on one of the key-themes as described before. The cross-cutting themes “green transition”, “digitalisation” and “gender equality” will be addressed in Horizontal Hub Meetings included into the agenda of the core network meetings.

The 6th core network meeting will be the final event organised as an in-person meeting for the entire partnership in Genk. It is planned for Sept-Oct, 2025, aimed partly at disseminating the Integrated Action Plans, partly at organising a professional dialogue (e.g. Fish-bowl) linked to implementation possibilities and strategies, enhancing the financing of the prepared Integrated Action Plans by exploring financial innovations.

In each core network meeting the following sessions will be organised:

PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHOPS

These workshops will be dedicated to the specific theme to be addressed. But also a workshop dedicated to the integrated action plans, facilitated by the LE is planned. In the workshops the focus will be on iterative co-creation and innovation. Partners will present their related experiences and challenges, while the LE will bring examples from outside the partnership. They are essentially collaborative events or sessions where participants come together to identify, analyse, and develop solutions for a specific problem or set of problems.

The main goal of these workshops is to foster creative thinking, encourage teamwork between the project partners, and facilitate learning by sharing ideas, experiences, and perspectives. Innovative methods and ideas to work “out-of-the box” will be used during these workshops.

HORIZONTAL HUB MEETINGS

Here we will discuss horizontal/cross-cutting themes (digital transition, greening, gender equality). To address these themes we will include and involve external speakers, including ad-hoc experts. We will however also look at good practices. For instance, during the second Core Network Meeting a Walkshop will be organised together with the Municipality of Hegyvidék, district 12 of Budapest, where partners can discuss the links with the horizontal theme ‘green transition’.

AoCE@SCHOOL

To address partners’ learning needs and knowledge gaps, so-called AoCE@school sessions will be organised during the transnational events. These ‘masterclasses’ will be held by invited experts from within and outside the network. They can also be related to a successful initiative linked to the central theme addressed at one of the transnational meetings.

STUDY VISITS and WALKS

During the transnational meetings, the partners will be inspired by local study visits (or walks) and related presentations. They will be organised by the host and will support peer learning, give inspiration to the visiting partners, and help them think about potential actions in their own approach through a problem-solving workshop.

THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS

To make sure there is continuous knowledge-sharing among the partners linked to all four key themes the transnational meetings will also include thematic working group (TWG) sessions. These sessions will allow partner cities to focus on those themes and subthemes that are of importance for the development of their IAPs and testing actions. Participation in a TWG will allow partners to learn from other cities, share their know-how, and support each other. TWGs will be organised according to the expressed needs of the partner cities.

Between Autumn 2024 and Spring 2025 two specific Thematic Working Groups, called “agents in action meetings” will be organised. These will be an open university type of capacity building events for staff members in respectively Iași and Kekava. This will be a ‘learning by doing’- activity, prepared by the Lead Expert, if possible, accompanied by an ad hoc expert. The “agents in action meetings” will focus on a particular subject, such as “growing polarisation” and how to address that. Another important topic that might be addressed is improving communication around citizen participation processes.

PEER REVIEW SESSIONS

In the frame of the 3rd core network meeting in Gdańsk, a *testing action* planning session will be organised where all partners share their testing actions they plan to implement. During the next (4th) core network meeting organised in October 2024 in Aarhus, a testing action peer review session will be organised where partners can support each other in the implementation of their testing action and making conclusions about the lessons learnt from the testing process to be included into the Action Plans. Testing Actions are expected to consist of various capacity-building actions for civil servants.

The 5th core network meeting organised in Quart de Poblet will also include a peer review session targeting the finalisation of the Action Plans.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER PROJECTS

During the URBACT Summer University in Malmö, the Hub networks - Agents of Co-Existence, One Health 4 Cities, and Cities@Heart - all provided complementary views on holistic sustainability. The network most closely linked to the AOCE method and objectives is Cities for Sustainability Governance (CSG). To take advantage of the similarities between these projects, active cooperation between the two networks is foreseen on several levels:

-) The LE and if possible, the LP of CSG will be invited to one of the transnational events of AoCE Network and will be asked to present their activities and findings under an AoCE@School-session. They will also be encouraged to take part in Study visits during that same transnational event.
-) A potential online “idea-thon” with Cities for Sustainability Governance on how to tackle polarisation and safeguard democracy has been put on the Roadmap for late 2024.
-) Other opportunities will be sought during the journey. This could also include local level cooperation between cities of the two partnerships that are located in the same country.

LOCAL LEVEL ACTIVITIES

URBACT Local Group (ULG) members are key in co-creating integrated urban policies. The following approaches and activities have been planned to provide a safe space at partner level to support co-creation:

LEARNING NEEDS, GRIDS and LOGS

Efficient links between exchange and learning activities with ULGs will be ensured through the formulation of **Learning Needs** (6 per partner) and the creation of **Learning Grids** (6+3 related to horizontal themes per partner), while the learning journeys will be summarised by each ULG in the frame of interactive **Learning Logs**. Partners, including ULG members, will collect their learning needs in an online survey (Mentimeter) at the end of each Online Academy in preparation for the upcoming Core Network meeting. Learning Grids are going to be prepared at the end of each Core Network meeting where partners summarise their lessons learnt from the meeting. Learning Logs will be formulated as action tables. After each Core Network meeting, partners will draft actions to fill the action tables. The format for these will be provided in the Action Plan template drafted by the LE. Finalising the Action Plan, partners will review their action tables and select and fine-tune the ones which they find suitable to include in the final IAP.

INTEGRATED ACTION PLANS

The likely focuses of the Integrated Action Plans will of course depend on local situations and legislations, but most likely they will tackle actions to build capacities of civil servants and decision makers, to change municipal operations and regulations to better support co-creation. The other potential focus of the IAPs is on actions to foster civic participation and social inclusion. Special attention will be given to the integration of horizontal themes into the Integrated Action Plans.

A dedicated peer review session related to the draft IAPs will be organised during Core Network Meeting 5, and the final IAPs will be disseminated in local public meetings.

TESTING ACTIONS

The action planning process will be supported by empowering capacity building actions in the framework of Testing Actions. These will be for example specific training for the staff, conceptualisation, design thinking workshops, etc. to achieve quick wins during the lifetime of the network, to overcome resistance, and motivate local actors to create and later implement the Integrated Action Plans. Empowering local capacity building actions is essential in the implementation of the network's goals, due to the innovative and sensible character of the project theme.

TABLE 2. FOCUS OF THE ACTION PLANS AND IDEAS FOR TESTING ACTIONS

	IAP focus	Testing action
Genk	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Establishing a sustainable culture of participation 2) Identification of different strategies for embedding the results of a participative process into the broader local society 	Peer learning platform created inside the municipality to better disseminate existing knowledge and encourage colleagues to engage in dialogue and mutual learning
Gdańsk	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1)The rules for consulting city policies and initiatives are regulated by the resolution of the City Council. This document has to be revised and updated 2)Practical manual of the tools for citizens participation and the method how to apply the manual inside the administration. 3)Establish a digital platform for participatory processes in the city, a platform where citizens can be engaged, and information collected. 	Preparing a manual of the tools enabling citizens' participation. During the project run these tools will be used in practice and their usefulness will be tested.
Kekava	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1)Identifying capacity building measures to boost capabilities of municipal politicians and employees 2)Activate different community groups 3)Facilitate establishment and operation of communities (neighbourhood associations) and their involvement in local decision-making process. 	<p>Tools for activating civic participation– e.g. advisory boards, a voting app etc.</p> <p>Establishment of Community Council and engagement events</p>
Budaörs	Not yet identified	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1)New approach of citizen participation introduced where the City would go to the citizens organising events in Postart Cultural Centre, in Zichy Major, Telekucko or in the Tanoda instead of inviting citizens to the city hall to participate in public issues. 2)Applying digital twin for co-creating new developments in the city 3)Internal innovation and idea generation platform of the municipality
Banská Bystrica	<p>Integrated with OGP AP,</p> <p>decrease the political depolarisation</p> <p>to increase the already existing potentials, capacities and resources</p> <p>increase the motivation of civil servants</p> <p>increase the acceptance of results from participatory processes</p> <p>improvement of communication across departments</p> <p>identify sustainable and effective way of running informal dialogic meetings</p> <p>developing useful tools</p> <p>maintenance of the Collaboratory platform</p>	Test capacity building actions to develop the necessary mindsets, skills & tools of civil servants and politicians in order to "plug in" principles (participation, transparency and collaboration) of open government into the everyday agenda of the whole municipality. It would also help to tackle the depolarisation dialogues between City office, politicians, and NGOs in the city.
Iași	Not yet identified	Activating neighbourhood centres and involving the community of block meetings into public issues.
Quart de Poblet	Promote transparency, inclusivity, and empowerment within the local governance structure in order to reach effective citizen participation	Create a channel inside the municipality where all departments can communicate with each other and with citizens in a smooth and effective way. The civil servants would be trained to use the

		channel effectively without duplicating tasks or slowing down processes.
Aarhus	Tackle the unclear power relations in citizen engagement the quality of communication towards citizens, the lack of influence on decision making, the lack of structures and skill for citizen engagement.	Work on the democratic conversation
Breda	1)Develop a program to strengthen the cooperation between civil servants and individual citizens in solving citizens' problems 2)Method will be developed by which they can train their civil servants to become more sensitive and cooperative to citizens' needs.	Not yet identified

URBACT LOCAL GROUPS

The URBACT Local Groups in the network will mainly be new groups, however in most cases there are existing working relationships between the group members. Although the composition of the ULGs varies slightly from partner to partner, there are key actors in each group:

1. Cross sectoral groups of civil servants
2. "Change-maker" NGOs (e.g. Sager de Samler in Aarhus, BO Diversity in Breda, Young Budaörs Architects Association or CIVICA Association in Iași, Gdańsk Council of NGOs and Gdańsk Social Innovation Foundation).
3. Open democracy or other already established platforms (e.g. Breda for everyone, City Collaborator Board or Dialogue Centre in Banská Bystrica, Budaörs Community – Community CSR Platform, Local Participation Council in Quart de Poblet.)
4. Citizen associations and informal groups (e.g. the neighbourhood association for the development of Mežinieki in Kekava).

It is foreseen that each partner organises at least 8 ULG meetings (to provide a clear interconnection with transnational meetings).

Partners have identified their ULG Coordinators as potential change makers. It is a common intention that the ULGs will have a flexible structure and include other sub-groups along the way. In line with this, ULG meetings should be less formal, trying to encourage out-of-the-box thinking.

LINKING TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND LOCAL ACTIVITIES

The basic principle for building bridges between the transnational and local learning processes (both directions) is organising ULG meetings before and after each transnational event (thus 8 ULG meetings per city are foreseen at least), where local ULG members can discuss and get to know the related exchange and learning outputs. This process will be boosted by the following activities:

ONLINE ACADEMY

Before each core network meeting an online academy will be organised. This is a dedicated online session for all URBACT Local Groups to help them formulate their learning needs concerning the upcoming transnational meeting. At the end of each online academy, the ULGs formulate their **learning needs**. These will be taken into consideration by the Lead Expert, the Lead Partner, and the host city (or cities) organising the upcoming core network meeting, who will reflect on these needs.

Based upon the outcome of the Online Academy, the Lead Expert is to draft a "*Rationale*" linked to the themes to be explored in the upcoming transnational meeting.

It could be a showstopper of a problem that has stopped working or a way to identify improvement backlog items for your next sprint. The main goal of this process is to foster creative thinking, encourage teamwork, and facilitate learning by sharing ideas, experiences, and perspectives.

LEARNING GRID

At the end of each core network meeting a learning grid will be created by the host partner, capturing the learning process, and formulating takeaways. There are different possible ways to capture the learning process, depending on the situation or project visited/explained:

1. Photo elicitation (an interview method in visual sociology that uses visual images to elicit comments) and/or
2. Using a learning grid on the spot (collecting key learning points, analysing their relevance related to the planned IAP, describing the actions to be carried out until the next transnational event to achieve goals and review). This tool helps partners to formulate messages to take home and to reflect on the progress made at local level until the following transnational meeting (when a review will be made). Additional learning grids will be created by each partner related to the three horizontal themes during Masterclasses/Walkshops.

By having a review on local actions implemented between transnational events, a monitoring system is going to operate to check whether lessons learnt are being embedded into Testing Actions and Action Plans. This monitoring is ensured by regularly asking partners to provide draft versions of their Action Plans which are quality checked by the LE.

In line with the URBACT philosophy, ULG Coordinators have a specific role (and specific resources allocated) in the local learning process: they coordinate the activities of the ULGs. Participation of ULG Coordinators is planned at project level meetings: 1 ULG member per meeting for each city (not necessarily the ULG Coordinator in each case).

COMMUNICATION AND THE FINAL NETWORK PRODUCT

GOVERNANCE CAMPAIGN

The Communication Plan is prepared by the Lead Partner and will not be explained in detail in this Baseline Study-Network Roadmap. On top of the compulsory communication activities however, the most important network-specific local communication activity is a “governance campaign” in each city, based on “**Agents LIVE videos**” in national languages with English subtitles. This campaign is also explained in detail in the Communication Plan.

The ULG Coordinator (supported by a video professional) is to conduct interviews/reports with previously identified change-makers. These videos should highlight the local journey to be taken towards a more open and inclusive government, parallel to the action planning process. They will feed the creation of a local communication campaign.

GOOD PRACTICE CATALOGUE

Partners will together create a Good Practice Catalogue with descriptions by the good practice owners, also including comments, reflections, valuable lessons from project partners. The process to create this Catalogue started during the Marketplace in Core network meeting 1 in Genk.

QUARTELY NETWORK REPORTS

As required, the network will produce **6 tailor-made Quarterly Network Reports** to capture different thematic and methodological results.

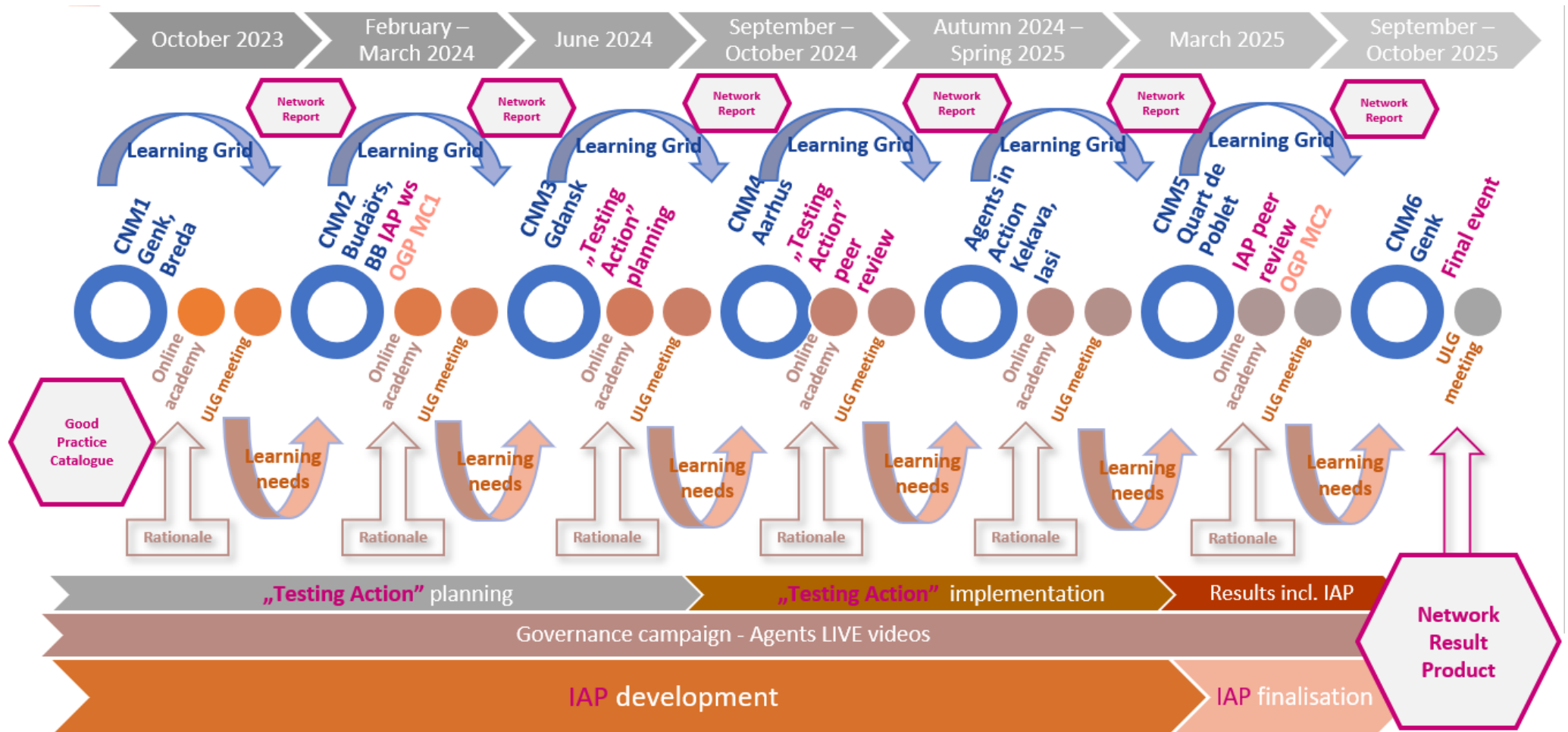
NETWORK ARTICLES

As described in the Network Communication Plan also 3 “complex” Network Articles will be presented throughout the project.

FINAL NETWORK PRODUCT

The **Network Results Product** will be drafted by the LE, based on inputs from the partnership. Most likely it will be a handbook or e-learning material linked to capacity building of civil servants and creating new organisational structures. It will address the biggest challenges identified by cities, a.o. tackling growing polarisation, restoring trust between government and citizens, activating (different groups of) citizens, communicating and developing strategies to improve skills and competencies of civil servants including training methods. It will provide a concise description of the partners’ journey, present the approach, methodology and tools we used along the journey, as well as an overview of the entire process, and the main learnings and specific recommendations will be presented. The Network Results Product will also cover the network-level events and milestones. Of course, an overview of the Integrated Action Plans will be included, as well as the Testing Actions.

FIGURE 4. NETWORK WORKPLAN



NETWORK ROADMAP

To ensure the smooth implementation of the above explained activities the LP and LE will prepare a detailed network roadmap table for each 6 months of the project including specific meeting dates and concrete deadlines for delivering outputs. From January to July 2024 the table has already been prepared (see Table 3).

TABLE 3. NETWORK ROADMAP – JANUARY – JULY 2024

		January	February	March	April	May	June	July
Partners' tasks	Network meetings	23/25 Jan - Online Academy 1 _Rationale presented discussed _Learning needs jointly identified		4-8 March - CNM2 Budaörs-Banska Bystrica _Action Planning workshop _OGP 1 Masterclass _Theme 2 GPs presented _Learning grid		Online Academy 2 _Rationale presented discussed _Learning needs jointly identified		CNM3 Gdansk _"Testing actions" planning workshop Theme 3 and 4
	ULG meetings	1 ULG meeting/partner organized _meeting report+attendance sheets sent to LP by the end of February (incl also activation stage meetings)			1 ULG meeting/partner organized _Learning grid shared with ULG members _meeting report+attendance sheets sent to LP by the end of June			
	Testing Action	Collecting ideas for "testing action"				"Testing action" idea developed in the form, sent to LP and LE	Start implementing testing actions	
	Action Plan		Policy context chapter drafted	Formulating draft actions based on the lessons learnt from CNM1, OA1 and CNM2			Formulating draft actions based on CNM1, OA1, CNM2, OA2, CNM3	
Lead Expert tasks - LP contributes	Thematic Outputs	Rationale for OA1	Good Practice Catalogue	Rationale for OA2		Quarterly network report (Jan-March)		Quarterly network report (April-June)
	Quality check, meeting preparation	Action Plan template		Drafting OA 2 agenda		Testing action form	Quality check of testing action ideas	
			Analysing learning needs - drafting CNM2 agenda		Analysing learning needs - drafting CNM3 agenda			

For the remaining period of the project, the exact table can be prepared only in a later stage to make sure that the plan is adapted to the circumstances at that time and the specific needs and situations of partners. Therefore, a new table is going to be prepared for each half year, with specific updates to be made in each core network meeting including more details regarding the next steps in the project implementation.

The first 6 months-table, as well as each new table, includes both the partners' and the Lead Expert's tasks.

The **core network meetings** are going to be designed by the LE and the LP in cooperation with the host partners. The 2nd Core Network Meeting will be organised by Budaörs and Banská Bystrica together. To minimise the carbon footprint of the network this will be a longer meeting split up in two parts. The meeting is already planned for March 4-8 2024. Key components will be:

-) Focus on the integrated approach: a problem-solving workshop dedicated to the integrated action plans, facilitated by the LE.
-) Innovation Imperative: During this meeting the partnership will work with Theme 2 "Innovators coming to the government". Partners will present their related experiences and challenges, while the Lead Expert will bring examples from outside the partnership.
-) Within the second Horizontal Hub meeting (discussing horizontal themes) there will be a Walkshop organised together with Municipality of Hegyvidék, district 12 of Budapest, where partners can discuss the links with the horizontal theme 'green transition'. For this, external speakers, including URBACT ad-hoc experts will also be involved.
-) As Banská Bystrica is a member of the Open Government Partnership, there will be a AoCE@school masterclass, linked to the work of this global network (inviting external speakers).

For further inspiration and learnings study visits and further presentations will be also organised to explore the good practices of host cities. The adaptation potential of the good practices visited will be explored through a problem-solving workshop.

The 1st **Online Academy** will focus on presenting ideas on Theme 2 (**how to embed the results of citizen participation into the daily work of the administration**) and will include a discussion and an interactive exercise. The meeting will be closed by a Mentimeter survey where participants indicate their learning needs regarding the topic discussed making recommendations for the agenda of the 2nd core network meeting.

The 2nd Online Academy will start with the presentation of each partner sharing their draft action tables; therefore, they present what they have learnt so far from the project based on the 1st and 2nd core network meeting and the 1st Online Academy. Following, the LE presents the initial ideas about the 2nd Rationale which will be discussed with the participants. The Academy finishes again with a Mentimeter survey to identify learning needs which will be applied by the LE finalising the Rationale and by the LP, and the organising city (or cities) drafting the agenda of the next Core Network Meeting. We are going to test this structure of the Online Academy agenda in this first period of the project and amend it if needed for the rest of the project implementation.

The follow-up of the **local activities** is primarily ensured by submitting brief ULG meeting reports and attendance sheets to the LP. The communication tasks and deadlines for partners are described in detail in the Communication Plan and Content Plan provided by the LP.

The LE will support partners in developing their testing actions by providing a **testing action form** including some questions to be answered by partners. This way they will prepare a draft plan for their testing action. The template will include a summary of the testing action, budget needed for the implementation, internal capacity and stakeholders going to be involved in the testing action, timeframe for the implementation including the specific action steps, and outputs/results expected from the actions. The LE and LP will quality-check all partners' testing action forms and provide suggestions for improvements. Based on the LE's and LP's feedback,

partners will finalise their testing action form and **present their plans** during the 3rd core network meeting in Gdańsk. From June 2024, partners start the implementation of their testing actions. In September-October 2024, a **testing action peer review** will be organised during the 4th core network meeting in Aarhus.

In parallel, partners will start the development of their action plan. As a first step, the LE will draft an **Action Plan template** to provide a standardised format and guidance for partners to elaborate their IAP. The template is prepared based on the template provided by the URBACT Secretariat but will include project-specific details. The template will be prepared in January 2024. It will be shared with partners in February 2024 who will then start to fill in the policy context chapter of the IAP. During the 2nd core network meeting in March 2024 an **action planning workshop** will be organised where partners will receive further guidance on how to work on their IAP. Following the meeting, partners will formulate draft actions based on the lessons learnt from the first 2 core network meetings and the 1st Online Academy. They will summarise their actions in **action tables** which they present during the 2nd Online Academy.

At the beginning of this first 6th months, the LE will also prepare the **Good Practice Catalogue** with the contribution of each partner. The good practices have already been identified and briefly presented in the partner profiles in the Baseline Study. These practices will be explained in more details in the Catalogue.

Finally, the LE and LP will draft the 1st **Quarterly Network Report** in April 2024 covering the activities implemented in January – March 2024. The second report will be drafted in July covering the period of April – June 2024.

CONCLUSION

The URBACT Agents of the Co-Existence Network will explore ways to foster civic participation. In particular, they will look at the role of civil servants. Can they be the bridge between politics/politicians ('the government') and the citizens/NGOs who want to be more and better involved in decision-making? And if so, what skills and competencies do these "21st century fit civil servants" need for this role?

Studies show that, in general, all actors involved in local democracy are in favour of more participatory decision-making, whether they are politicians, citizens from civil society or civil servants. Civil servants consider it important to involve citizens in the decision-making process. However, they generally lean more towards 'consulting citizens' rather than giving them actual decisive powers. This is not so strange, given that civil servants are usually experts in their field and are not trained or used to relying on the expertise of the public. Also, 'the system' doesn't always make it easy for civil servants to involve citizens in the decision-making process. These characteristics of industrial-era administration act as obstacles to societal change:

-) a rule-based mindset (no room for improvisation or doing things a different way)
-) short-termism (the project needs to be finished as soon as possible, no time)
-) incremental decision-making (who is the real decision-maker?)
-) silo-based implementation (gives employees a sense of stability)

When you take these characteristics into account you can easily see why it is difficult to engage civil servants in participation processes with citizens on topics for which they are responsible. In a general sense, we see that old, long-established habits of decision-making in the public domain often get in the way of effective cooperation between citizens and the government. We realise that existing ways are no longer working, but at the same time we find it very difficult to introduce new ways from within the system we have set up. Instead of bringing about systemic change, we opt for what appears to be a safe option: we introduce new ways of working through pilots. If the pilot works, we copy it for other projects, until there comes a time when the pilot does not work, and then we let things rest. In reality, for a real transition, we need systemic change: a different behaviour from politicians, civil servants, and also from citizens / civil society. Everyone has a role to play in successfully opening the decision-making process.

Over the next 2 years, the Agents of Co-Existence network will focus on improving the skills and competences of municipal staff while creating new organisational structures to further boost civic participation and create a more solid basis of democracy. For it is as the mayor of the City of Genk, lead partner of the network, said when kicking off the Network's first meeting in November: "Civic participation is a process, not a project!"

ANNEX 1: BRIEF OVERVIEW CORE NETWORK MEETINGS 3-6

Core Network Meeting 3: in-person meeting for the entire partnership organised by Gdańsk (2-3 days), planned for June 2024. Key components will be:

-) Planning “testing actions”: a workshop dedicated to the “testing actions” planning process, facilitated by the Lead Expert.
-) Innovation Imperative: out of the 4 themes presented in chapter 4.2.1, at this meeting the partnership will work with Theme 3 (Focusing on staff and internal capabilities) and 4 (New working methods and rethinking the rules).
-) This will be inspired by the local study visit and related presentations, while the adaptation potential of the good practice visited will be explored through a problem-solving workshop.

Core Network Meeting 4: in-person meeting for the entire partnership, organised by Aarhus (2-3 days), planned for September-October, 2024:

-) Peer review related to the training modules of capacity building actions (as Testing Actions). Testing Actions are expected to consist of various capacity building actions for civil servants.
-) Innovation Imperative: out of the 4 AoCE themes, at this meeting the partnership will work with Theme 3 (Focusing on staff and internal capabilities) and 4 (New working methods and rethinking the rules).
-) This will be inspired by the local study visit and related presentations, while the adaptation potential of the good practices visited will be explored through a problem-solving workshop.

Core Network Meeting 5: in-person meeting for the entire partnership, organised by Quart de Poblet (2-3 days), planned for March, 2025. Key components include:

-) Peer review of the draft Action Plans (LE)
-) Innovation Imperative: out of the 4 AoCE themes, at this meeting the partnership will work with theme 4 (New working methods and rethinking the rules)
-) This will be inspired by the local study visit and related presentations, while the adaptation potential of the good practices visited will be explored through a problem-solving workshop.
-) A second Masterclass related to the Open Government Partnership will be also organised.

Core Network Meeting 6: in-person meeting for the entire partnership, organised by Genk, together with the final event (2-3 days), planned for Sept-Oct, 2025, aimed partly at disseminating the Action Plans, partly at organising a professional dialogue (e.g. Fish-bowl) linked to implementation possibilities and strategies, enhancing funding of prepared Integrated Action Plans by exploring financial innovation.