



Guidelines for revitalising the 'heart' of the city – the city centre
- A methodology developed in the City Centre Doctor Project



By Wessel Badenhorst, URBACT Lead Expert

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The people of the City Centre Doctor Project



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Introduction

All cities have a centre which historically and functionally brings residents, businesses, services and a range of social activities together. The city centre is often the nexus for the social, economic and cultural development of urban conurbations and their hinterlands.

An active city centre is a key indicator of a healthy city – meaning: a city where there is economic growth, where there are good social services and supports, as well as cultural interaction and programmes. The vitality - the level and range of activity - is hence a good indicator of the viability of the centre to be considered by key stakeholders such as investors and customers as to a city's attractiveness.

How can a city centre become more active? What are the factors that deflate activity in the city centre? What role do citizens, businesses and institutions play to influence activity in the city centre? How important is the urban design, connectivity and permeability of the city centre to sustain its vitality?

These are questions that can drive initiatives to improve the liveliness and diversity of the city centre with a focus on actions that will increase footfall and generate positive publicity.

The context for city centre development also determines the type and scope of activities and development that is possible. Smaller cities have to be more selective with limited resources compared to larger cities. With improved transportation and connectivity, cities are also much more accessible and reachable for a larger population catchment area, thus city centres compete with each other and need to differentiate and excel to attract custom. In the past decades alternatives for shopping in the city centres have been established such as shopping malls and retail parks on the periphery and in the suburbs.

In the case of smaller cities, the challenge is not to overreach in a resource-intensive race, but to unlock local creativity and distinctiveness. In this regard ten small cities from across Europe formed a partnership, the City Centre Doctor Project, to identify challenges to their city centre, analyse perceptions and reality of their centres, share ideas and practices and support each other to develop actions that will strengthen processes

to revitalise their city centres. Their rationale is that if successful, more activity will lead to businesses expanding and locating in the city centre and this will ultimately lead to new jobs.

The Project was enabled and sponsored by the **URBACT Programme**, the European Union's foremost programme for cities, large and small, to engage in integrated sustainable urban development. Most of the actions that were conceptualised in the Project are within the means of the cities to deliver themselves. Many of these actions were first tested by experimenting with beta actions. There are also actions which are ambitious and will require external funding and expertise. The Project gave cities the opportunity to research and formulate proposals for such funding.

These guidelines will reflect the learning and knowledge shared in the City Centre Doctor Project. It is the strong conviction in the Project that the knowledge gained is replicable, especially in smaller cities which make up the largest proportion of the urban areas of Europe. The guidelines cover the following themes:

1. Main considerations in designing a transnational network for cities to learn from each other and to drive action planning and implementation to revitalise their city centres.
2. How to start a process to revitalise the city centre (and where not to start!).
3. Ways to enable community-led, evidence-based place analysis to better understand the city centre.
4. Getting creative to generate ideas for revitalising the city centre.
5. Using beta actions as catalysts that give momentum to a process of revitalising the city centre.
6. In the end, it is about the people, not the money.... Getting from ideas to action

URBACT

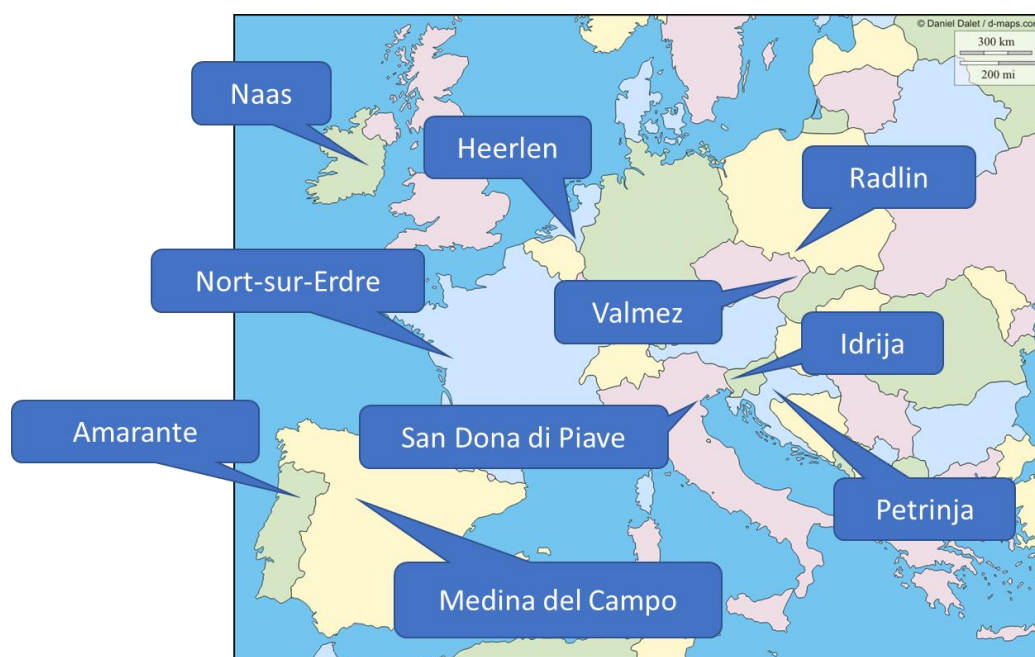
Often city authorities view European projects with scepticism because of the perceptions of extra administrative burden, the restrictions on the use of funding and the limited direct impact of project outputs.

The URBACT Programme (www.urbact.eu) is different. There are no promises of significant funding or extra resources. There is a clear focus on learning, capacity building and developing winning strategies.

The Programme is all about preparing and laying the foundations for successful changes in urban environments – making sure that what cities aim to do is attainable and involves citizens, businesses, civic organisations and the different layers of public administration. It is a two-year window where a city can ask questions to all its stakeholders, learn from other cities and experiment with prototypes/models for new approaches, designs or services.

1. Designing a transnational network for cities to learn from each other and to drive action planning and implementation to revitalise their city centres

The City Centre Doctor Project was conceived as a means for ten small cities (e.g. the partner city with the largest population, Heerlen = 87,500) to co-examine their city centres and co-create initiatives that could drive revitalisation in their respective city centres. The following map shows the partner cities in the Project.



The cities applied to become partners in the project during a Call issued by URBACT in 2015. The lead expert and project manager of the lead partner city visited candidate cities with two objectives in mind namely: 1) Will the candidate city fit into the project as per the criteria – size, proximity to a larger city, lack of vitality in the city centre and adequate organisational capabilities to participate in an EU project; and 2) Does the candidate city present good practices or challenges that will provide learning experiences for other partners.

A baseline study was compiled by the lead expert that included case studies of the selected partner cities. The main issues across all the cities included: 1) the under-utilisation of spaces in the centre ranging from vacant shops to poorly maintained public spaces; 2) traffic congestion; 3) poor retail offer; 4) lack of activity / liveliness / vibrancy / attractiveness; and 4) fear of losing young people. These issues became main policy focus areas of the project. Processes were designed to collectively develop deeper understanding of the issues and to explore initiatives that could result in positive impacts.

The following table shows the learning needs analysis which informed capacity building objectives and where cities were assessed as to their experience in tackling city centre issues.

Partner City	Options			Specific needs
	A. We have experience tackling city centre policy challenges / issues	B. We have some experience to share but a lot to learn	C. We want to be involved in this network to learn from other parts of Europe	
San Doná di Piave (IT)	√			Integration of social needs with commercial uses in the city centre.
Amarante (PT)		√		Attracting visitors to the city, that can bring more business to the city.
Heerlen (NL)	√			Benchmarking practices with other cities.
Idrija (SO)		√		Integration of young people: the approaches and best practices.
Medina del Campo (ES)		√		Updating our work methodology. New relationships with other European cities of similar scale.
Naas (IE)			√	Creating a culture for change. Retail innovation.
Nort-sur-Erdre (FR)		√		Methodological and animation approaches for revitalisation.
Petrinja (HR)			√	To get experience in participating in these projects and making an Action Plan for the city centre.
Radlin (PL)			√	Ideas and mechanisms for creating attractive city centre.
Valmez (CZ)		√		Examples of using city centre as common social 'live' space.

The following table shows the physical commonalities among the partner cities in the Project.

Partner City	Cities where rivers are a central feature close to the centre	Cities with a large main square that is a focal point for the city	Cities with a city centre stretched out along the main street and a limited grid pattern	Cities that are well connected with multi-modal transport systems to a neighbouring large city	Cities with a historical centre and many heritage and listed buildings
San Doná di Piave	√	√		√	
Amarante	√	√	√		√
Heerlen		√		√	
Idrija	√	√	√		√
Medina del Campo		√		√	√
Naas			√	√	
Nort-sur-Erdre	√		√	√	
Petrinja	√		√		√
Radlin			√	√	
Valmez	√	√			√

Once a baseline was established all partners then agreed a road map to arrive at an Integrated Action Plan for the revitalisation of their respective city centres.

The project design (as per the Application Form submitted to the URBACT Programme) was made clear to the candidate cities on application. The design included the following main outputs;

- the establishment of URBACT Local Groups (ULGs) consisting of persons from key city centre stakeholders with a commitment to work together for two years in a dedicated action planning process;
- a shared methodology and approach to place and problem analysis used by all ten ULGs;
- an active engagement of local citizens to generate ideas for revitalisation of the city centre;
- a series of facilitated study visits with specific learning elements such as city centre walks and city centre talks that involved all ten partner cities playing host to their project partners;
- a communication structure and plan in each city to inform stakeholders and citizens of progress made in the project and to deepen citizen engagement at various stages of the project and during study visits;
- the commitment to share with partners the challenges and opportunities at each development stage of the project and to seek feedback that could assist with adjustments in local approach and application;
- the delivery of integrated action plans that clearly display the direction (vision and objectives) and specific actions for revitalisation to be implemented by the main role players who are present in the ULG.

The road map of the project aligned with the project design. Over a period of two years the partners were expected to in concert complete five stages of project implementation as illustrated in the following graph.



All ten partner cities successfully completed the five stages of project implementation. There was consensus that deliverables per stage served as building blocks for the next stage and that the phased approach helped cities to deepen their understanding of processes to revitalise city centres while spending enough time thinking and trying different interventions within their own means, before committing to implement actions.

2. How to start a process to revitalise the city centre (and where not to start!)

There is always this question about who will be the right people to start and implement a process. The answer is: the people that are in the room when a process starts.

So, the task is to get people in the room who will make it possible to implement an integrated strategy or plan to revitalise the city centre. Each partner in the City Centre Doctor Project was tasked to establish a URBACT Local Group (ULG) who had the responsibility for the action planning process and to create the structure for the implementation process.

Logic might dictate that it is the people who control the budgets and have the power to make decisions that should be in the room. That however is not the starting point for putting a process together to revitalise the city centre. The reason is actually simple – these are busy people who will not have the time to spend on participating in the different stages of the project or visiting the different project partner cities, and who will prefer well designed proposals for actions to be presented to them for decisions and budget allocation. It does however make imminent sense to ask the powerful people to nominate their representative/s onto the ULG and to remain informed throughout the process.

The URBACT Programme required an inclusive approach to the composition of the ULG. This meant that to establish a structure for the purposes of revitalising the city centre (i.e. the ULG), each partner city had to conduct a stakeholder analysis and to match the findings with a selection of individuals who provided the diversity of skills and interests to serve as members on the ULG. Consistently across all partner cities the inclusion of retailers, young people and local development agencies (e.g. with a focus on tourism, enterprise support and/or community development) were sought.

A variety of organisations became members of the ULGs. In the case of the city of Heerlen for example, a specialist retail development agency, Streetwise, was invited to serve on the ULG. This gave other members in the ULG the insight into the challenges to nurture local independent shops and to fill vacant premises. In the case of the city of Amarante, the local rural development agency became a member of the ULG because the area is well known for the quality of agricultural produce and it was reasoned that the agency could assist with the city centre becoming a hub for marketing these local products. In the case of the city of Naas, the centre for independent living of older people, McAuley Place, became a member of the ULG and played a decisive role to influence the responsiveness and value of the city centre for intergenerational activities.

It was also understood that the local authorities in all the partner cities would play a key role in their respective ULGs, both through the involvement of their elected leaders and through the support of senior officials.

Each partner city had to appoint a ULG coordinator. In the case of one city, Medina del Campo, three coordinators were appointed. This was the case because the city had a well-established coordinating structure for sustainable development, namely Medina 21, and wanted the ULG to function as a sub-structure. With a culture of collaboration and citizen participation, this arrangement worked well for the city in this project. In the case of a few partner cities the coordinator changed during the project period. There however was never a period of a vacuum with no coordination in any of the partner cities during the project.

The key challenge for the ULG Coordinator was to help the newly formed ULGs to develop and accept a leadership role in their city. This role meant the members of the ULG had to inspire and enable others including citizens to take on activities as part of a process to revitalise the city centre.

The project was designed in such a way that during transnational meetings, project partners – who always included the ULG coordinators and one or two other ULG members – could set the tasks for the specific stage in the project (in synchronisation with the specific transnational meeting) while also getting a clear understanding of how to meet the expectations in their respective ULGS and what tools and exercises to use to build the capacity and trust in their ULGs. ULG coordinators were also always in contact with the lead expert via e-mail and Skype to get support and advice on how to facilitate their local processes and to deal with specific challenges.

At the start of the project in the first transnational meeting the project partners agreed a vision and values for the project which was

VISION FOR A SUCCESSFUL CITY CENTRE

- It has a good **mix** and a **balance** of consumer products, services and activities. There is a **diversity** detectable in the range of options for residents, workers and visitors alike.
- The **walkability** of the city centre is a strong feature with good infrastructure for cycling, walking and connecting with public transport. The city centre is not dominated by cars.
- There is a presence of all ages among residents and visitors in the city centre. The way that facilities are used in the city centre shows that there is a **synergy** between **generations**.
- Compared to other places the city centre is **competitive** and **affordable**.
- The city centre is **vibrant**. It is full of life and it is **tolerant** and **accepting** of many ideas, trends and influences.
- The city centre is **green**. Although it has a compact urban form, the parks and public spaces of the city centre is a major attraction for residents, workers and visitors alike.
- For entrepreneurs and investors, the city centre is a **responsive** place where both the work talent and the markets are available that make it possible to start and grow businesses. The city centre is therefore a place that offers work.

anticipated to guide all ten partner cities during their development processes. This was a practical way for all partner cities to steer their processes in the same direction with a mutual adherence to the values that all agreed to imbue into the project.

OUR VALUES IN THE CITY CENTRE DOCTOR PROJECT

Passion about places: We are participants in this network because we are passionate about our city centres and want to work with all stakeholders to make it better places for all.

Active listening: We always try to understand and appreciate how people feel about their city centre.

Mutual respect: We believe that all opinions must be heard and respected. We believe that we can only develop meaningful action if we respect each other's roles and perspectives.

Scenarios: Each city centre has its own dynamics shaped by the historical and cultural interaction between its people and place. We believe each city centre should be approached as a scenario where it is not possible to just copy what worked in another place, but rather through engagement and sensitive experimentation to help stakeholders to make meaningful changes.

Open minded: We actively nurture a culture of openness to new things and ideas. We believe that in this project we can create the conditions for people to share ideas, try new things and be comfortable if it does not work or is rejected.

Customer service: We help stakeholders to translate what they heard and learnt from customers and other cities in this project into better local services.

On reflection, it is clear that the success of the City Centre Doctor Project can be attributed to getting the foundations right at the start of the process. The partner cities knew from the beginning what was expected of them in terms of setting up their ULGs, appointing ULG coordinators and committing to the project's shared values and a common vision for success in the project. Once the foundations were in place, the ULGs continued to build their capacity and grew in confidence with each stage. A skill set was developed in each city to analyse the city centre, understand the dynamics that influence vitality, conduct meaningful citizen participation in ideas generation and execute experiments with some of those ideas as beta actions. This project thus had the principal outcome of development of people to take control and care of their place.

3. Ways to enable community-led, evidence-based place analysis to better understand the city centre

One of the more distracting aspects of any discussion on the health of the city centre is the myths or urban legends that are sometimes parried with conviction such as: ‘the centre needs more parking spaces’, ‘too many charity shops’ and ‘if we can only get [flavour-of-the-month famous brand] to open a shop in the centre’. Any project to revitalise the city centre that uncritically accepts such statements as the key challenges will likely end up in failure. So, what should be the key challenges to address in the city centre and how should the city go about identifying the challenges and the opportunities for the city centre?

After the ULGs were established, the next stage in the project was for ULGs to develop and use tools that would produce data about the city centre in a systematic way and be applied similarly by all partner cities. The objective was to gather data from citizens and involve citizens and ULG members in the processes of surveying, observation and recording. Such data then informed discussion at ULG level and also at transnational or project level. Each of the partner cities produced a place analysis report which captured the tools they used, statistics generated and the analysis and findings that led to better identification of challenges and opportunity.

Two specific tools that were shaped and agreed at a transnational meeting in the partner city of Heerlen (June 2016) can be of value as templates for other cities examining the challenges and opportunities in their city centre, namely a ‘city centre user survey’ and a ‘public space observation sheet’.

In each partner city, a survey was conducted with residents to determine their preferences as ‘users’ of the city centre. Interviews were organised and administered by the ULGs with a project-agreed minimum target of 150 respondents per city. All cities managed to exceed the target (See table).

All ULGs were satisfied with a diverse profile of respondents regarding age, occupation and education as well as having a gender balance.

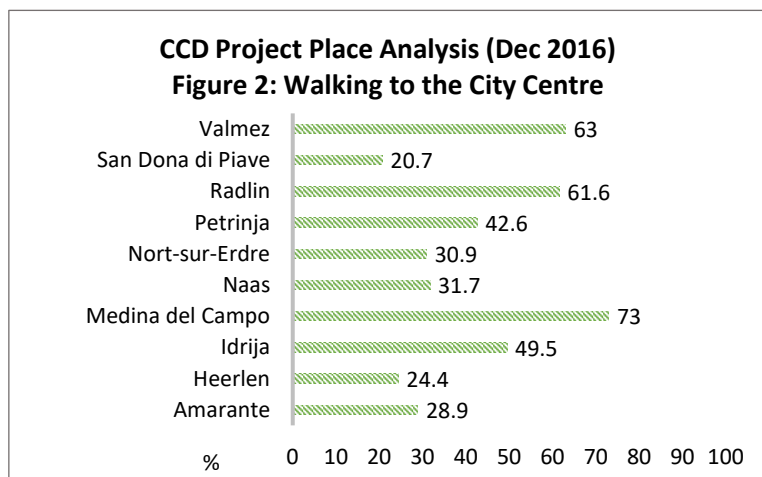
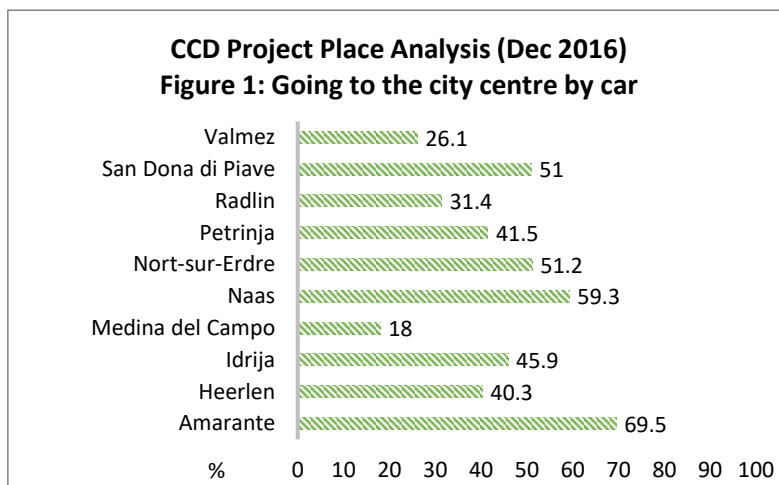
City	Population	Survey
Valašské Meziříčí (Valmez)	22,449	284
San Doná di Piave	41,815	367
Radlin	18,028	267
Petrinja	15,480	340
Nort-sur-Erdre	8,272	162
Naas	20,713	317
Medina del Campo	21,305	225
Idrija	11,937	198
Heerlen	87,495	711
Amarante	54,973	308

Some cities such as Heerlen and San Dona di Piave used the opportunity to compare the survey results with previous studies of their city centres. Some ULGs in cities such as Petrinja, Valmez and Nort-sur-Erdre mapped a defined area as the agreed functional city centre to communicate to respondents in the survey.

In Appendix A, a template is provided of the ‘city centre user survey’ as agreed by the partner cities. The added value of an inter-city action planning network is that partner cities can use each other’s data as benchmarks. Two themes that illustrate the value of using the data for a better understanding of the challenges by making comparisons with the other partner cities are: *Mobility and perceptions of safety in the city centre* and *Perceptions of the attractiveness of retail and leisure in the city centre*.

Figure 1 for example shows that Amarante and Naas have a relative high car dependency with 69.5% and 59.3% of respondents respectively mainly using the car to go to the city centre.

Respondents in the cities of Medina del Campo and Valmez on the other hand are less inclined to drive to the city centre by car and more amenable to walk to their city centre. See Figure 2.

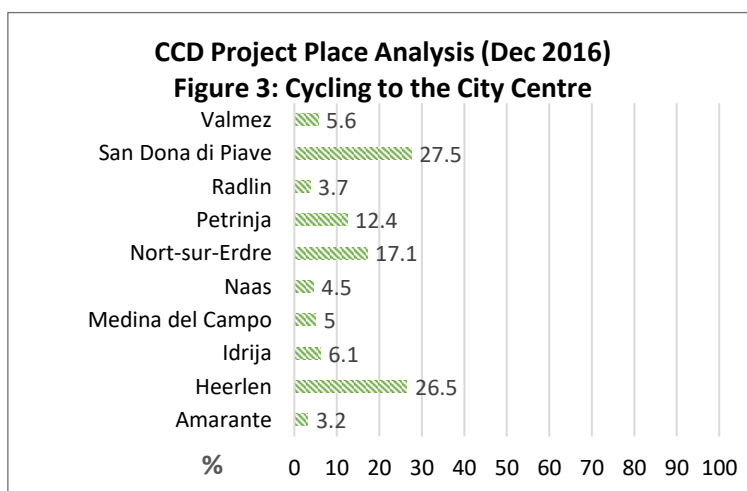


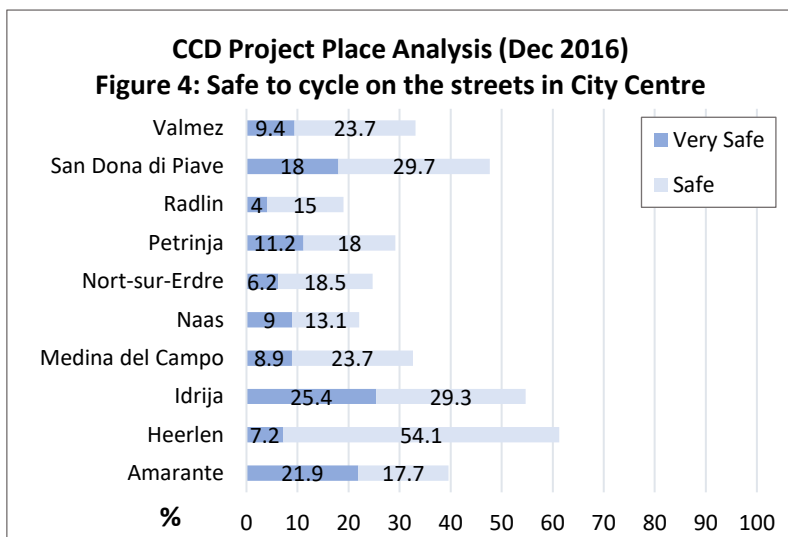
The lower levels of walking to the centre in Heerlen and San Dona di Piave is balanced by higher levels of respondents cycling to the city centre as is evident in Figure 3.

It is also clear that in most cities partner cities cycling is not an option favoured by respondents to travel to the city centre, despite favourable conditions to cycle.

Only Idrija, Petrinja and Amarante have hilly terrain where the steep gradients will deter the uptake of cycling as a viable mode of transport.

A barrier may be the perception of safety to cycle in the city centre. The fear to cycle safely in the city centre is evident from Figure 4 where only in Heerlen and Idrija did the majority of respondents say they feel safe to cycle in the city centre.





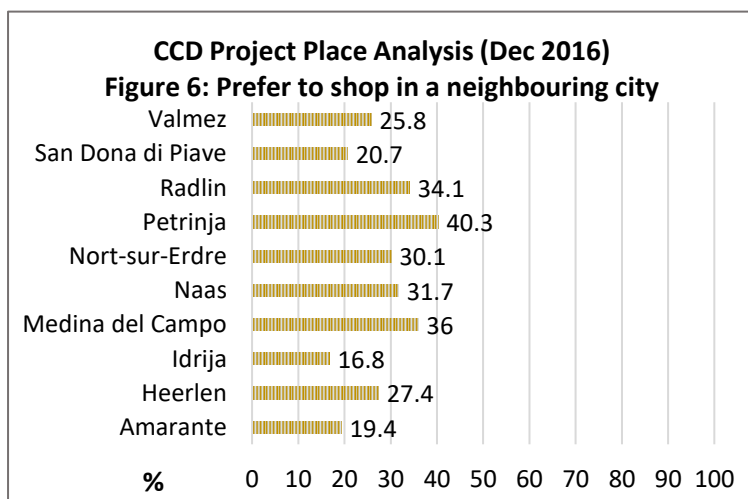
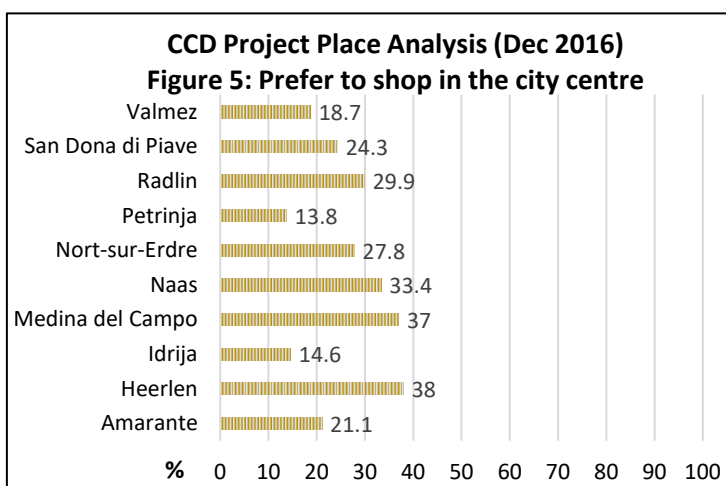
By comparing their data with those of their peers in the project, it became clear for partners that there are challenges and opportunities to improve cycling rates in their city centres.

The positive example of the lead partner, San Dona Di Piave also provided inspiration by confirming that their rating for safe cycling in the centre improved after a number of interventions in recent years to create cycle lanes

and limit car use in parts of the centre. It also helps when the mayor sets the example by always cycling to functions and to work.

The ability of retail in the city centre to attract customers amidst strong competition from shopping malls on the periphery and shopping destinations in neighbouring and larger cities is a priority consideration for all partners. A series of questions were included in the place survey to measure factors such as frequency of visits to the city centre, preferences for retail locations and preferred retail categories in city centre.

The value of the data for each partner is best illustrated by making an analysis for one specific city namely Idrija. In Figure 5 it shows that compared to their partner cities, the city centres of Idrija and Petrinja were less preferred as a shopping destination.



In the case of Petrinja it is clear from Figure 6 that there is a shopping destination in a neighbouring city which is more attractive to the residents of Petrinja. Geographically Petrinja is adjacent to its larger sister city Sisak.

This is not the same for Idrija where compared to the partner cities, the shopping destinations in neighbouring cities hold little attraction for residents. There is also

a geographical explanation, because Idrija is more isolated in the foothills of the Alps and not in close proximity to larger neighbouring cities.

It is evident that the respondents in Idrija clearly prefer to shop in malls outside the city centre as shown in Figure 7.

The question then is what will attract residents to spend time, and hopefully also money, in the city centre of Idrija?

To answer this question, the ULG in Idrija did a cross-tabulation of two questions in the survey namely 'age' and 'shopping preferences in the centre'.

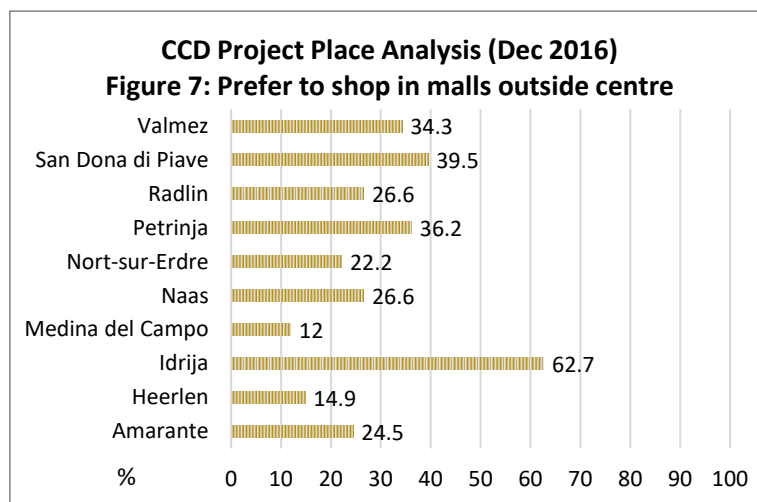


Figure 8 shows a clear preference among younger respondents for a better, more experiential leisure offer in the city centre while older respondents preferred the convenience of the goods and services they need on a regular basis such as food, groceries and banking to be close by in the city centre.

Retail Category	Age				
	<18 years	18 - 25 years	26 - 44 years	46 - 64 years	65+ years
Fashion boutiques	0%	0%	8%	12%	0%
All clothing & shoes	0%	0%	22%	20%	18%
Electronic equipment	0%	0%	2%	4%	9%
Electrical and home appliances	0%	0%	0%	4%	9%
Furniture and home decor	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%
Books and office supplies	0%	5%	29%	30%	18%
Coffee shops and bakeries	25%	68%	61%	45%	27%
Restaurants and bars	25%	27%	40%	25%	27%
Food stores (supermarkets)	0%	14%	43%	48%	55%
Services – personal care and beauty	0%	5%	32%	28%	9%
Services - financial	0%	9%	32%	39%	45%
Services – property and travel	0%	0%	1%	3%	0%
Other	50%	9%	5%	16%	18%

This analysis helped the ULG in Idrija to explore ways to make the city centre more interesting for younger residents, while not discarding the importance of the traditional retail role of the city centre for older residents.

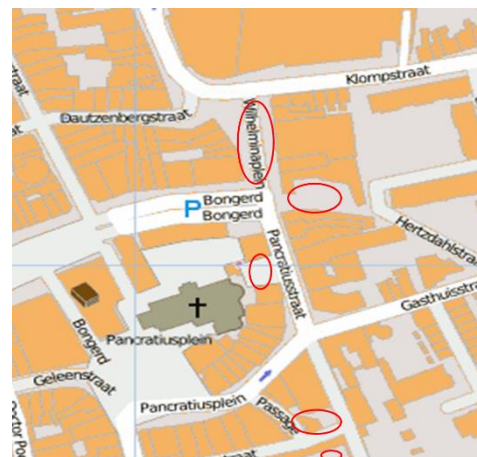
Another very useful tool used by the ULGs was the 'public space observation sheet' to assist small groups of citizens to make their observations of how public spaces were being used in the city centre. See Appendix B for a template of the 'public space observation sheet'.

Studies by organisations such as the Urban Land Institute, Congress for New Urbanism, Academy of Urbanism, Brookings Institution, Institute of Place Management and the Project for Public Spaces independently show the strategic relationship between the use of open spaces in a city centre and its vitality. To the extent that dereliction of open spaces are clear signs of decay in the city centre while extensive use of open spaces with organised activities (e.g. local festivals) as well as through many instances of less organised socialising indicate liveliness in the city centre.

Many of the above-mentioned organisations also advocate placemaking as a process to turn around decaying or disused public spaces. Placemaking is an iterative process where citizens, businesses and local authorities design activities for and improvements to their public spaces that will lead to new uses and to a stronger attachment and positive perceptions of the city centre.

The placemaking approach was embraced by the partner cities as one of the more realistic and affordable ways of engaging citizens in the process of revitalising their city centres. To start such a process required information of the use of targeted public spaces in the city centre. In the transnational meeting in Heerlen in June 2016 the partner cities adapted the tools for place observation such as the 'place game' developed by the Project for Public Spaces and produced the 'public space observation sheet'. All partner cities used the sheet to collect data of the use of specific public spaces in their city centres.

A good example is how the city of Heerlen targeted the five smaller squares in the city centre (circled in red in the map) that were less used than the main square, the Pancratiusplein. The ULG set up small groups (5 to 8 people) to make observations of the uses in these squares at different times of the day and on different days of the week. A part of the observation process was also to engage in conversations with users of the public spaces and with the local businesses located next to these squares. The information gathered helped the ULG to convince key stakeholders to embark on a series of beta actions to enliven the areas with huge positive impacts, both for the quality of life of residents and for the viability of local businesses.



The place analysis stage formed the foundation to establish informed problem identification and to help the stakeholders make evidenced-based decisions and not only to rely on their own preferences and priorities for interventions in the city centre. Many of the ULGs also combined the place analysis tools described above with the tools and skills that they acquired at the URBACT Summer University in Rotterdam to articulate and formulate their problems and objectives for action planning (e.g. the 'problem tree').

The reality is that place analysis is about choosing which problems to address and why. Hence, it should not be a means to accentuate 'pet' convenient agendas, but a way to define what is strategic and attainable with available resources.

4. Getting creative to generate ideas for revitalising the city centre

Once the problems were identified in the place analysis stage – or more accurately, once the challenges that could be addressed realistically and strategically were selected - the ULGs entered the stage of ideas generation. Each partner city was asked to conduct a number of public engagement events. The Project used the term 'Ideas Café' to describe such events and a set of guidelines were developed to assist with organising such events as per Appendix C. The aim was to create a relaxed setting where citizens could move around to different tables depending on their interests and to participate in more than one conversation.



Ideas Café in Petrinja



Ideas Café in Valmez

All the citizen engagement events started with the ULG presenting their findings from the place analysis stage and the challenges that they seek to address. Ideas generated were captured for further deliberation in ULG meetings.

Partner cities also benefited from hosting study visits where the visiting partners conducted city centre walks and gave valuable feedback with their observations and ideas to their host partner. This was a feature of every study visit and also served as training to learn to 'see' aspects and relationships between form and space, especially to experience the city at eye level as advocated by Jan Gehl, Jane Jacobs and Holly Whyte.



City Centre Walk in Radlin



City Centre Walk in Amarante

A feedback tool that worked very well during each of the study visits is to use four flipcharts to capture observations and ideas for the city centre to | **STOP** | **START** | **CONTINUE** | **IMPROVE** | . The four categories work well because they are mutually exclusive and cover all directions to go with a proposed observation or idea. After the city centre walk, participants divided up into small groups to discuss their observations and ideas. These were then written on Post-its and at the end of the exercise the groups would place their observations and ideas on the relevant flipcharts.



City Centre Walk feedback in Valmez



City Centre Walk feedback in Nort-sur-Erdre

Spokespersons for each small group then presented the feedback usually starting with the positives, namely what participants observed as the aspects which the host city should maintain and continue, then proceeding to the observed negatives that should be stopped, while also pointing out to the aspects that can be improved. The final category was for participants to present their ideas for new initiatives that the host city could consider revitalising their city centre. The feedback exercise was always couched as a gift that the partners gave to the host city and was appreciated as such.

During the study visit to Nort-sur-Erdre in April 2017, an Ideas Market was facilitated by ad hoc expert Miguel Souza. It was a very useful mechanism for partners to share the ideas generated in their own cities and ‘trade’ for the ideas from other cities. The success of this exercise and the subsequent dialogues between partner cities was evident in how partners took ideas from each other and then tested these ideas with beta actions. Two very practical examples are how Valmez was inspired by the idea of a lights festival organised in Medina del Campo and then developed their own lights festival; and where Radlin visited Valmez to see how they constructed an urban beach on their main square and thereafter with the assistance of Valmez installed their own urban beach.



Following the successful ideas stage in the project, the ideas never stopped flowing and the ULGs in partner cities continue to inform and inspire each other with new ideas via the project’s WhatsApp Group.

5. Using beta actions as catalysts that give momentum to a process of revitalising the city centre

Beta Actions is a term used to describe short-term prototype actions or models to demonstrate a proposed action with the intention to evaluate its impact and viability after a period of three to six months. These beta actions/activities are usually affordable within the budget of local authorities and normally won't require a complex brief and procurement.

The rationale is that if the URBACT Local Group (ULG) received positive feedback from residents and stakeholders and decided that the beta action demonstrated potential for the success of a 'fully-fledged' action, then the beta action will form part of the final integrated action plan for revitalising the city centre. Conversely, if the ULG received feedback suggesting the beta action is not workable or should be changed, then the proposed action can be adjusted accordingly or closed together with a report on the learning gained in the process.

Sometimes a beta action is followed by another beta action, especially if the feedback from residents and stakeholders gave the ULG inspiration to change or adjust the original beta action and then to test the improvements with a 'new' beta action. This can become an iterative process (i.e. many adjustments after the feedback from residents and stakeholders) which will result in a process of co-creation of actions.

In the City Centre Doctor Project each partner city embarked on a number of beta actions. A sister document to these guidelines describe case studies of such actions undertaken in the respective partner cities ([*Beta Actions: Testing Ideas and Preparing for Change*](#)).

A few themes emerged especially with actions to create more liveliness in the public spaces in the city centre. In cities such as Idrija, Valmez and Radlin the beta initiatives were aimed at bringing residents to the main square to spend more time meeting with each other, playing and feeling good about their city. Idrija created a 'playground' with loose deck chairs and board games and some organised activities (music), while Valmez and Radlin created urban beaches where especially young people could play volleyball and 'hang out'.



Main square 'playground' in Idrija



'Urban beach' in Radlin

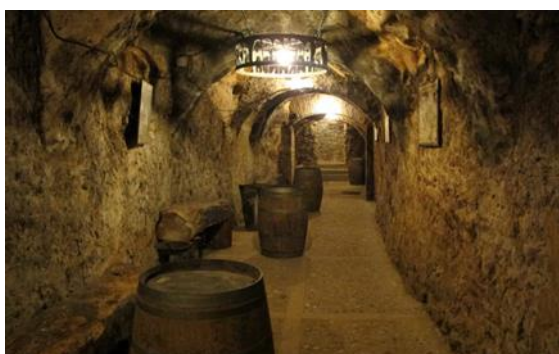
These were mainly temporary installations over the summer season and could appear to be ‘standard fare’ for outside observers, but for the ULGs and the inhabitants in these cities it gave a great psychological boost and the confidence to try more actions and for citizens to get excited about their public spaces in the centre.

Cities such as Heerlen, Medina del Campo and San Dona di Piave have a history of festivals and events that happen in their city centre and hence their main public places are more designed and upgraded for regular public activities. These cities however used the beta actions as a way to explore forgotten or less and disused spaces to create new activation and areas for creativity. In Heerlen the ideas for the ‘Hotel Urbana’ was inspired by outdoor installations and pop-ups in other city areas. The ULG was inspired to transform an area with little activity into an ‘outside hotel’ – meaning that the hotel facilities were recreated outside, illustrated by the cardboard tents that became ‘hotel rooms’ against the backdrop of a new street mural.



Cardboard tents in ‘Hotel Urbana’ in the city of Heerlen.

In Medina del Campo the city regularly celebrates its illustrious heritage with several pageantry events. It now wants to turn to the potential that lies beneath the surface of the city centre with a beta action to help land owners to open up a series of unused cellars for cultural activities and possible future commercial uses. In San Dona di Piave an unused water tank is being re-imagined by the ULG as a cultural centre with multiple uses especially for youth and art activities. The beta action was to create drawings and computer visualisations of possible uses with the help of architects as aids to stimulate public debates and policy proposals.



Unused cellars in Medina del Campo



Artist impression of uses inside old water tank in city centre of San Dona di Piave

The most effective beta actions were often very simple and straight forward, requiring little more than imagination, a bit of paint and permission from the local authority. In Nort-sur-Erdre the ULG initiated beta actions to improve information and way finding to the city centre with cartoon-type information boards and colourful road signs for pedestrians stencilled and painted onto the pavements.

In Medina del Campo, the ULG identified from their place analysis survey a need to encourage more cycling to the city centre. They took inspiration from new urban initiatives to create shared spaces where cyclists and motorists 'share' the road. To do that they wanted to indicate a lower speed limit, the direction for travelling and that cyclists are welcome in the middle of the road. The local authority agreed, and the road markings as illustrated below have been painted on the road linking the Castle La Mota and the city centre.



Pedestrian signage in Nort-sur-Erdre



Shared street in Medina del Campo

The most important aspect of creating beta actions is that it should have a positive and inspiring impact on local residents and visitors. That could mean simply to organise activities in existing spaces which have not happened before and to coordinate the cooperation of community organisations and the media to facilitate community participation and buzz (i.e. excitement for the events). In the city of Petrinja, the ULG brought community organisations together to plan and prepare 'parktivities' in the parks and green spaces of the city. These activities were also combined with public information stands to promote ideas for future development of green areas in the city centre. In Radlin the ULG were able to organise community fun activities in the public spaces around the popular Olympic Sports Centre with very good support from the local media.



Community activities in Radlin



Community 'parktivities' in Petrinja

6. In the end it is about people, not the money... Getting from ideas to action

The infographics developed by the lead partner, San Dona di Piave, and displayed in this chapter, give an indication of the focus and vision of each partner city and their planned intentions to revitalise their city centres. These are captured by integrated action plans communicated at public events and to key stakeholders. Many of the cities kept their ULG structure in place to facilitate implementation and monitoring of plans.

The aim of the project was to deliver integrated action plans in each partner city. The URBACT Programme sets up the funding for Action Planning Networks such as the City Centre Doctor Project to ensure that each participating city will at the end of the project have agreed a set of actions following the comprehensive planning process intrinsic to the URBACT method, with the following outcomes:

- **Collaboration** of stakeholders in the URBACT Local Group (ULG) which will include action implementation extending beyond the project period as well as continuing development of related projects and programmes in an integrated sustainable manner.
- **Networking** by ULG members with local city organisations, with other partner cities in the Project, and with other European cities during URBACT events.
- **Transnational exchange** and learning between partner cities in the City Centre Doctor Project during study visits and through providing peer to peer support.
- **Community engagement** with residents and businesses in the process of understanding and analysis of city issues and in developing and testing ideas for actions.
- **Integrated Action Planning** where the ULGs analysed their city centre



challenges and opportunities from social, economic and environmental perspectives and accordingly developed actions with impacts across all three strands.

Collectively the successful implementation of the actions in these integrated action plans will contribute to the achievement of the European Union's Cohesion Policy **Thematic Objective 3**: "Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)".

Most businesses in the city centre of partner cities are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). A revitalised and more attractive city centre helps them to be more competitive.

Using the URBACT method enabled partner cities to 'face-up' to specific challenges for their local business environment in the city centre by:

- Learning how to make their local economies more sustainable for example with better mobility.
- Learning more about local consumer preferences and how the offer in the city centre could be tailored to such preferences for example by making city centre shopping and working in the city centre more enjoyable.

VISION
To ensure a better use of the city center's potential in Petrinja!

POPULATION: being more attractive for people through education, culture and social services

SPACES: more inclusive infrastructures and a brand new visual identity

ECONOMY: a more business-attractive environment

TO BECOME:
A modern, entrepreneurial, knowledge-oriented and attractive cities, also for tourists!

THE INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

Petrinja
www.petrinja.hr

URBACT Driving change for better cities
European Union
A CCD Town

The VISION for the city of Idrija:

SMART CITY
Socially Equal
Innovation driven
Specialized
Sustainable
Heritage Inspired

Making the city center a place to go after work, for shopping, relaxing and socializing!

THE INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

Idrija
www.idrija.si

URBACT Driving change for better cities
European Union
A CCD Town

STARTING POINTS:
Perceived decreasing of the presence of people in the city center
Need for urban renewal (and to link every action to existing plans)

THE INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

Re-thinking the main square
Construction of a parking lot
New pedestrian zones in City Center
New navigation system (totems)
Summer activities in different areas
Summer festival
Access to urban underground
Renovation of river's banks and embankment

Valašské Meziříčí
<http://www.valasskemezirici.cz/>

URBACT Driving change for better cities
European Union
A CCD Town

- Learning how to establish an eco-system for turning local creativity into jobs, especially to attract young people to the city centre.

The critical point here is that the main impact of the project, by design and by outcome, was a comprehensive learning process with the potential for cultural change in how the city centre is developed and managed and what it offers for residents and visitors.

This meant that it was not per se about how much money the European Union was putting into cities with project funding to revitalise city centres. It was much more about how cities could develop their own capacity and leadership and grow in confidence to implement well planned actions, which significantly increased the possibility to get funding for these actions.

At the end of a project the important question to answer is: ‘So what?’ or ‘Has anything changed because of the project?’ This project is a success if today (i.e. post-project) more local citizens, young and old, are participating in activities to plan and revitalise their city centre; if beta actions beget more creativity and more actions; and if a culture of action planning using project tools has been instilled or strengthened.

FROM MINING TO ... WELL BEING!

- very large vehicle traffic on the main street & lack of parking places,
- poor bicycle paths (do not feel safe when cycling or crossing the street),
- lack of services and facilities (cafes and pubs, cinema, etc...)
- bad air quality (mostly in the autumn-winter period) and not green enough.

GIVE THE CITY BACK TO CITIZENS

1. Acting in order to improve the main street (Korfantego Street)
2. Improving usability and layout of Radlińskich Olimpijczyków Square
3. Improving services, facilities and usability of the connecting streets in between

THE INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

Radlin
<https://miasto.radlin.pl/>

URBACT Driving change for better cities
European Union
radlin
A CCD Town

STARTING POINTS:

Not enough people/visitors in the city center, because of:

- A lack of "compact" shopping area
- A lack of diversity in retail
- An high number of vacant shops / empty spaces
- Public space is unattractive not enough atmosphere, lack of green.

THE INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

5 areas

- Public Spaces
- Culture, heritage, sport, education
- Events, leisure, experience, marketing
- Sustainability, mobility
- Retail, hospitality, offices, housing

Heerlen
www.heerlen.nl

URBACT Driving change for better cities
European Union
Heerlen
A CCD Town

SAN DONA': AN HISTORICAL MODERN CITY!

- EDUCATION DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SCHOOLS IMPROVEMENTS
- CREATIVE ACTION FOR BOOSTING LOCAL BUSINESSES
- SMARTER PUBLIC SPACES RE-GENERATION
- MORE AND MORE AN AGE FRIENDLY CITY

THE INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

HOW?

- Coalescing actors—firms, public administrations, potential entrepreneurs and service providers;
- By influencing local policy-making about the use of empty—spaces for new entrepreneurial or cultural activities;
- By working with residents, businesses and other stakeholders to recover the centre's vitality;
- By Supporting such a transformation through revised strategies for mobility.

San Donà di Piave
<http://www.sandonadipiave.net/>

URBACT Driving change for better cities
European Union
San Donà di Piave
A CCD Town

A good Integrated Action Plan (IAP) will include actions which clearly shows that the ULG has been on a 'learning journey' - from problem identification to ideas to experimentation (beta actions) to action formulation to implementation schedule.

This will be evident in the first chapters of the IAP where the learning opportunities and tools are described up to a 'final page' with key information on the action including context, goals, indicators for implementation and for success, assigned responsibilities, timeframe, budget as well as the risks to be managed during implementation.

The action 'Street Shops with History' from the city of Amarante's IAP is a good example. The ULG identified the problem of weak re-

tail sales in the city centre and was especially concerned about the traditional shops who could go out of business and will be difficult to replace. A number of actions in the IAP are designed to improve the user experience of the city centre and in addition, this action is designed specifically to work with local owners of traditional shops to tell the history of the shops and to recognise the shops as part of the identity of Amarante. The idea came from similar actions in Lisbon (acknowledged as an URBACT Good Practice) experienced by some of the ULG members. The action was first 'prototyped' with a beta action and after evaluation, it was decided to proceed with a programme targeting traditional distinguished shops in the city centre.

City centres, whether in big or small cities, are similar to living organisms. If they are unused (no exercise) they can become sick (urban decay). On the other hand, if they are well used and 'loved' by residents, workers and visitors alike, they are vibrant and have a 'buzz'. There is no magic wand to create the sparkle. This project however shows that there is a way to get stakeholders working together to create an atmosphere and ecosystem for 'trying things' after learning from other cities and with an attitude of 'if at first it does not work, try again'. Today this approach and activities could be described as elements of urban innovation. For any small city or large town that want to start such a revitalisation process, there are ten cities who were the partners in the City Centre Doctor Project that are more than happy to share their experiences.

5. Street Shops with History	
Project overview	Distinction and preservation of shops with history, contributing to position trade as a differentiating brand of the city and as an economic activity that generates employment.
Goals	Preserving identity (internal aspect, distinctive products and services, own brand ...) and history (encouraging the creation of collections with documents that may contribute to the valorisation of the establishment and brand) of the traditional trade.
Key Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review existing criteria by adapting them to the context and reality of the city; 2. Survey and Mapping of shops that respect the criteria defined for the award of the distinction; 3. Definition of intervention strategy, defining support and benefits for distinguished shops; 4. Creation of communication media for the project; 5. Periodic follow-up and re-evaluation (time to be defined) of the distinguished shops, verifying that they continue to respect the criteria of the distinction and follow its evolution.
Lead Entity	Municipality of Amarante
Partners	RUA, AEA e AEVM
Results to be achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Profitable local market with high demand; · Identity trade network that shows itself as a tourist opportunity; · Preserving the commercial history of the city, divulging it.
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increase of sales in traditional shops; · Increase of employment in traditional stores; · Number of applications to the 'Street Shops with History' Program; · Number of distinguished shops.
Schedule	Beta Action 03/10/2017 Start of the Municipal Program 2018
Budget	30.000€
Financing source	Tourism of Portugal - Sustainability Support Line
Associated Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Lack of adhesion or investment capacity of local commerce with history; · Lack of continuity of some business, due to the absence of a new generation interested in pursuing / developing the business; · Mismatches between supply and demand.

Links to City Centre Doctor Project Activities and Social Media sites

Videos Study Visits

Kick-off Meeting in Heerlen <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8MjuiNfq1w>

Study visit to Amarante <https://www.facebook.com/citycentredoctor.amarante/videos/721722867984657/?t=2>

Study visit to Idrija <https://youtu.be/loWuljLLbvc>

Study visit to Valašské Meziříčí (Valmez) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWB3uhzmhoQ>

Videos Ideas Generation

Ideas Café in Valmez https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_2tpAINUzw

Ideas generation workshop in Heerlen <https://www.facebook.com/CityCentreDoctorHeerlen/videos/1655971387764668/?t=45>

Launch of Naas Engagers <https://www.facebook.com/NaasEngagers/videos/362913997471521/?t=36>

Videos Beta Actions

Beta Action 1 in Radlin <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tep8ISdOTW8>

Beta Action 2 in Radlin <https://www.facebook.com/miasto.radlin/videos/1345327045544183/?t=0>

Beta Action 1 in Valmez <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GunlARdLPbg>

Beta Action 2 in Valmez https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxfYWtd_jgc

Video mapping beta action in Medina del Campo <https://www.facebook.com/ecogedrones/videos/2342273219331593/>

Making street murals in Heerlen <https://www.facebook.com/HeerlenMijnStad/videos/952123034970135/?t=69>

Storytelling on shop windows in Amarante <http://ruamarante.pt/2017/10/02/mimo-a-minha-cidade/>

Videos City Centre Vision

Urban Heerlen <https://www.facebook.com/HeerlenMijnStad/videos/753471118168662/?t=55>

San Dona di Piave – a Gift for Young People <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdOURX7zTTA>

Facebook Pages

City Centre Doctor Project <https://www.facebook.com/citycentredoctor/>

City Centre Doctor Amarante <https://www.facebook.com/citycentredoctor.amarante/>

City Centre Doctor Idrija <https://www.facebook.com/ulgidrija/>

City Centre Doctor Petrinja <https://www.facebook.com/ccdpetrinja/>

City Centre Doctor Valašské Meziříčí (Valmez) <https://www.facebook.com/ULGVALMEZ/>

City Centre Doctor Nort-sur-Erdre <https://www.facebook.com/City-centre-doctor-Nort-sur-Erdre-571305326393726/>

City Centre Doctor Heerlen <https://www.facebook.com/CityCentreDoctorHeerlen/>

City Centre Doctor Radlin <https://www.facebook.com/urbactradlin/>

City Centre Doctor Medina del Campo <https://www.facebook.com/urbactMDC/>

City Centre Doctor San Dona di Piave <https://www.facebook.com/UrbactSanDona/>

Twitter Pages

City Centre Doctor Project <https://twitter.com/CityCentreDoc>

City Centre Doctor Project Medina del Campo <https://twitter.com/UrbactMDC>

City Centre Doctor Heerlen <https://twitter.com/ccdheerlen>

City Centre Doctor Valmez https://twitter.com/Antonin_Horin

City Centre Doctor Nort-sur-Erdre <https://twitter.com/CCDnortsurerdre>



The people of the City Centre Doctor Project





APPENDIX A

City Centre Doctor Project Survey Perceptions of the city centre



The purpose of this questionnaire is to get residents' views of their city centre. This will enable the URBACT Local Group to do a place analysis which will inform the key stakeholders to plan actions to create more vibrancy in the city centre.

A. Place of residence (where you live):

- 1 In the city centre
- 2 In the suburbs
- 3 Outside this city

B. Place of birth (where you were born):

- 1 In this city
- 2 Outside this city but in this country
- 3 Outside this country

C. The time it takes to walk from your residence (where you live) to the city centre:

- 1 < 10 minutes
- 2 10 – 19 minutes
- 3 20 – 29 minutes
- 4 30+ minutes

D. The main mode of transport that you use to travel to the city centre:

- 1 Walk
- 2 Cycle
- 3 Bus
- 4 Train/Tram/BRT
- 5 Car
- 6 Other. Please specify: _____

E. Gender:

- 1 Female
- 2 Male
- 3 Transgender/Fluid

F. Age:

- 1 < 18 years
- 2 18 – 25 years
- 3 26 – 44 years
- 4 46 – 64 years
- 5 65+ years

G. Occupation:

- 1 Full-time student
- 2 Part-time employee
- 3 Full-time office employee
- 4 Full-time retail/services employee
- 5 Full-time manufacturing employee
- 6 Manager/employer
- 7 Self-employed/start-up/own business
- 8 Not studying and not in work
- 9 Other. Please specify: _____

H. Education (highest qualification):

- 1 Primary school
- 2 Secondary school
- 3 Post secondary diploma/apprenticeship
- 4 Primary degree
- 5 Post graduate degree (Masters/PhD)
- 6 Other. Please specify: _____

I. How safe do you feel at night in the city centre?

Rating scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very unsafe and 5 is very safe

J. How safe do you feel to walk across the streets in the city centre?

Rating scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very unsafe and 5 is very safe

K. How safe do you feel to cycle on the streets in the city centre?

Rating scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very unsafe and 5 is very safe

L. How many times do you go to the city centre to do shopping?

- 1 Every day
- 2 Two to three times a week
- 3 Once a week
- 4 Once every two weeks
- 5 Once or twice a month
- 6 Only occasionally (less than once a month)

M. How many times do you go to the city centre for leisure purposes when it is the summer?

- 1 Every day
- 2 Two to three times a week
- 3 Once a week
- 4 Once every two weeks
- 5 Once or twice a month
- 6 Only occasionally (less than once a month)

N. How many times do you go to the city centre for leisure purposes when it is not summer?

- 1 Every day
- 2 Two to three times a week
- 3 Once a week
- 4 Once every two weeks
- 5 Once or twice a month
- 6 Only occasionally (less than once a month)

O. For which categories of retail do you prefer to shop in the city centre? (Tick all the preferences)

- 1 Fashion boutiques
- 2 All clothing & shoes
- 3 Electronic equipment
- 4 Electrical and home appliances
- 5 Furniture and home decor
- 6 Books and office supplies
- 7 Coffee shops and bakeries
- 8 Restaurants and bars
- 9 Supermarkets
- 10 Services – personal care and beauty
- 11 Services - financial
- 12 Services – property and travel
- 13 Other. Please specify: _____

P. What activities do you prefer to do in your leisure time in the city centre? (Tick all the preferences)

- 1 Meeting with friends
- 2 Going to a coffee shop
- 3 Going to a restaurant or a bar
- 4 Going to a musical or arts event
- 5 Going to the cinema
- 6 Other. Please specify: _____

Q. What other services do you use in the city centre? (Tick all the preferences)

- 1 Postal services
- 2 Youth services
- 3 Services for older people
- 4 Health services
- 5 Welfare office
- 6 Other. Please specify: _____

R. Are you satisfied with the shopping hours in the city centre?

Rating scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very unsatisfied and 5 is very satisfied

S. Are you satisfied with the hours for leisure activities in the city centre?

Rating scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very unsatisfied and 5 is very satisfied

T. Where is your favourite place for shopping?

- 1 City centre
- 2 Shopping centre/mall outside the city centre
- 3 Another city in close proximity
- 4 Online (Internet)
- 5 Other. Please specify: _____

U. Where is your favourite place for leisure activities?

- 1 City centre
- 2 Shopping centre/mall outside the city centre
- 3 Another city in close proximity
- 4 Online (Internet)
- 5 Other. Please specify: _____

V. Where do you prefer to work?

- 1 City centre
- 2 In the city suburbs
- 3 Another city in close proximity
- 4 Other. Please specify: _____

W. Where do you prefer to do business?

- 1 City centre
- 2 In the city suburbs
- 3 Another city in close proximity
- 4 Other. Please specify: _____

X. Where do you think are there more job opportunities?

- 1 City centre
- 2 In the city suburbs
- 3 Another city in close proximity
- 4 Other. Please specify: _____

Y. Where do you think is a good place to start a business?

- 1 City centre
- 2 In the city suburbs
- 3 Another city in close proximity
- 4 Other. Please specify: _____



APPENDIX B

City Centre Doctor Project Survey

Observations of a public space in the city centre



The purpose of this observations sheet is to record observations of the features and uses of a designated public space in the city centre. This will enable the URBACT Local Group to do a place analysis which will inform the key stakeholders to plan actions to create more vibrancy in the city centre.

Name of public space: _____

Names of the streets that form boundaries for the public space:

Date of observation: _____

Times of observation (from and to): _____

Persons involved in the observation:

Cross reference to previous observations (date and time): _____

Outline map of the main features of the public space

Make a map of the designated public space

Describe the boundaries e.g. street names, shops, buildings

Indicate the main features of the public space. Use symbols for elements such as trees, benches, loose chairs, kiosks, playground, sports field etc.

Indicate on the map the location where people activities were observed. Include data such as number of people, age groups, type of activity, time of day, weather and length of time that activity took place.

Access & linkages

Is there a good connection between the space and the adjacent buildings, or is it surrounded by blank walls?

Can people easily walk to the place?

Do sidewalks/pavements lead to and from the adjacent areas?

Can people use a variety of transportation options – bus train, car, bicycle, etc. – to reach the place?

Does the space function for people with special needs/disabilities?

Comfort & Image

Does the place make a good first impression?

Are there enough places to sit? Are seats conveniently located? Do people have choices of places to sit, either in the sun or shade?

Are spaces clean and free of litter? Do people tend to pick up litter when they see it?

Does the area feel safe?

Are people taking pictures? Are there many photo opportunities available?

Do vehicles dominate pedestrian use of the space?

Uses & Activities (Animation)

Are people using the space or is it empty?

Is it used by people of different ages?

How many different types of activities are occurring – e.g. people walking, eating, playing baseball, chess, relaxing, reading etc.?

Which parts of the space are used and which are not?

Are there choices of things to do?

Is there a management presence, or can you identify anyone who oversees the space?

Sociability

Is this a place where you would choose to meet your friends? Are people meeting friends here or having discussions with neighbours/regulars?

Are people in groups? Are they talking with one another?

Do people seem to know each other by face or by name?

Are people smiling? Do people make eye contact with each other?

Do people use the place regularly and by choice?

Is there a mix of ages and ethnic groups that generally reflect the community at large?



APPENDIX C

City Centre Doctor Project Guidance Note: Ideas Generation



Rationale

All the partners in the *City Centre Doctor Project* (CCD) successfully completed a **Place Analysis** of their city centres in the 4th Quarter of 2016. The 3rd stage of the 5-stage process to develop integrated action plans to revitalise the city centre is **generating ideas** to address the problems and build on the strengths of the city centres as identified in the Place Analysis.

The purpose of this guidance note is to help the ULGs in the partner cities to design and organise activities engaging stakeholders and the residents by which ideas will be generated for revitalising the city centre.

The guidance note is presented in a Question and Answer format. If there are still questions to be answered, amended versions of this note will be produced!

Why go through the trouble to organise ideas generation activities?

All people are creative. This is the basic premise for using co-creating processes to develop products, services and now also policies for future users ([Sanders and Stappers, 2007](#)). For our CCD project, we can define creativity as new and different ways to view, communicate and address the identified problems or challenges in the city centre. We do not always know if the ideas people come up with will work. Therefore, we should rely on a very basic approach – harvest the numbers and diversity. In other words, the more people with different perspectives and interests representing a range of stakeholders that we involve in our processes, the more chances for us to ‘think through’ and design better actions.

Opening ourselves to the participation of many people to share their perspectives and ideas also means that we do not fall in a trap of designing processes with outcomes that are merely re-affirmation of our own long-held ideas. It also means that we are open to test new ideas and if necessary, to change our minds.

The conventional approach to get ideas is to contract one or a few experts (consultants) to present us with ‘solutions’. Co-creation on the other hand is a collaborative approach. It gives the ULG the scope to involve residents and stakeholders in developing a mutual understanding of problems, challenges, strengths and opportunities in the city centre; to widely seek and discuss in creative ways ideas that could revitalise the city centre; and to then build an integrated action plan with the commitment and joint responsibility for implementation by stakeholders and residents.

Furthermore, a collaborative approach to ideas generation enables the ULG to increase transparency in the action planning process; to increase citizen participation that promotes democracy and inclusion; and to increase the sense of ownership in communities of the action plan.

A collaborative approach also means that role players tap into each other’s networks and that the quest for answers and resources extends even outside of the locality, for instance by [crowdsourcing](#) on the Internet.

What are the type of ideas generation activities anticipated for the project?

To do ideas generation, your ULG should plan and organise some events and communication activities to facilitate participation of either the residents or target groups or specific key stakeholders.

You can be creative in designing your activities. For example, you can use local artists to create an installation or performance in a public space to attract attention and engage the public.

San Dona di Piave Municipality contracted artist Silvia Gobbo to do an installation with apples in the main piazza in the summer of 2015. Residents wrote their ideas on stickers that they placed on the apples. They also uploaded photos of ‘their apples’ onto Facebook. See [video](#).



Or the ULG can create a ‘discussion wall’ where residents and visitors can post their ideas.

Or a pop-up street venue using a parking space for discussions about topics such as mobility.

ULG coordinators can challenge their ULG members to come up with ‘crazy’ ideas – remember the newspaper exercise during the Amarante study visit! From these ideas, you can [brainstorm](#) to design and plan your activities.

It is also useful to use the conventional methods of dialogue and interviews – especially if you are seeking to get the ideas and opinions of stakeholders. That means setting up meetings for instance with retailer groups and/or social issues groups and NGOs.



Then there is some fancy names for intensive idea generation workshops which often also involve prototyping those ideas (these events sometimes go on for whole weekends) such as a [hackathon](#), [boot camp](#), [deep diving](#) and [living labs](#). My suggestion is to maybe

consider such activities that are more resource intensive as possible actions in the action plan if the ULG wants to pursue such intensive workshops in the future.

How should the ULG deal with ‘unrealistic’ ideas?

Even though there is a logic to make sure ideas are ‘realistic’, in other words ensuring that ideas are within the means of the group or the city to act upon, the ideas generation stage is **not the best time** to make such decisions. The opposite is more appropriate! Do not constrain the ideas generation process with restrictions that it should for example meet specific conditions such as be in line with the municipality’s policies and budget limitations.

The premise is that a process of ideas generation that is more free flowing will allow for more creative responses and inputs.

There will be a final stage when decisions are made on which ideas to pursue for developing actions when ideas will be critically scrutinised to determine if they are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound).

Which groups should be targeted for ideas generation activities?

The ULG should decide who are the key groups to engage in ideas generation activities. To help making decisions, the ULG could use tools such as [stakeholder analysis](#).

The importance of identifying groups to engage at this stage is **not only** because of the ideas they may share. It is also because they may be the groups that the ULG see as beneficiaries from the revitalisation of the city centre, such as young people; or older people who are retired and living in the centre; or entrepreneurs who want to start businesses in the centre; or residents and visitors who prefer shopping in the centre.

It could also be influential people or groups who could significantly contribute to future actions to revitalise the city centre or people who may resist the changes proposed in an action plan (for example motorists if a problem is car dependency). An important part of this project is to find ways to enter in dialogue with such persons to at least understand their concerns, but also to try and persuade them of the value of the intended project outcomes.

Once the ULG decided which groups to target for ideas generation discussions/activities, then it can match proposed activities with specific target groups. For example, there could be activities for the general public, but there could also be a specific session where all city cyclists are invited.

There is a simple approach to ideas generation – do not only ask people what they think or feel, but what they can do to address the problems and opportunities identified in the place analysis. Make sure to ask many people their ideas as well as what they will be prepared to do themselves!

What about the ideas already generated during the place analysis stage in the ULG?

No doubt by now, the ULG have in the discussions of the problems in the city centre also raised several ideas to solve those problems or to change and revitalise the centre. This stage is the time to test some of those ideas.

Idea generation activities should also be arranged in such a way as to make proposals from the ULG (i.e. suggest the ideas already formulated in the ULG) to residents or specific target groups and to get their opinion and their suggestions to make those ideas better, otherwise also to understand what resistance there may be to such ideas.

The main purpose in this stage is to get feedback and to deepen understanding on ideas, intent and possible impacts. The analysis of each idea will happen in the next stage where the ULG will make decisions on which ideas will most likely be aspirational or more practical to address the problems and opportunities raised in the place analysis.

What then is the role of experts and professionals such as planners, architects and urban designers?

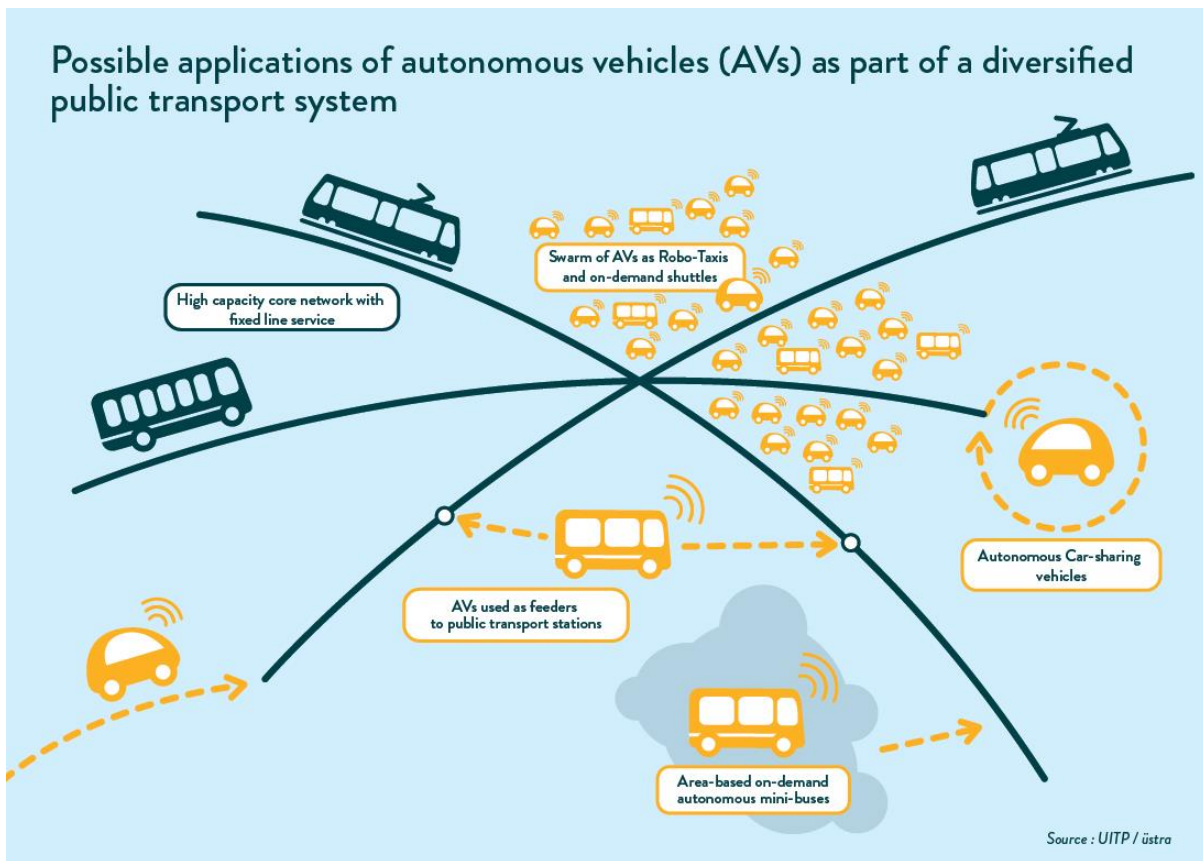
The knowledge and creativity of experts and professionals remain very valuable for our ideas generation events. In fact, the role of experts should be influential in any of the stages of the integrated action planning process.

There is a ‘but’ or a proviso. The role of experts should be a support role to the members of the ULG and to stakeholders. Such experts should be good listeners and be able to ‘reflect’ the ideas and discussions of participants in events or ULG meetings for instance showing ideas in visual formats (i.e. drawings or sketches) as well as referencing other examples of similar issues and ideas.

Don’t be afraid to ask such experts to volunteer their knowledge and skills for the project. Most of the time professionals see their work as a vocation and are prepared to contribute if they believe in ‘the good cause’ served by the project.

What should we do with the ideas that have been generated?

It is important to capture the ideas at least in writing. There are however technologies that can for instance assist with the visualisation of ideas such as this infographic below.



This is especially useful for complex ideas with many ‘moving parts’ to be explained in one image.

Otherwise, a good way of capturing ideas is to create a simple template for how each idea should be written up for example:

No	Description of idea	City Centre Issue	Suggested by?

Are there specific idea generation activities that all partners are required to perform?

Glad you asked!

If each ULG can as a minimum organise an **Ideas Café** (See Appendix I) and an **Ideas Exhibition** (See Appendix II) during this stage, then as a project we will have significantly contributed to the governance processes in our cities. To be practical, it might be useful to do the Ideas Exhibition last and after the Nort-sur-Erdre study visit, so partners can include ideas they traded at the market!

How should the ideas generation stage be documented?

Catalogue

It will be useful to have a short summary of each idea with some references of where the idea came from and the context of the issue/problem/opportunity. These can be catalogued in a database and grouped for future referencing. See the template above.

Photographs and videos

Please capture the ideas generation events with photographs and videos and disseminate via social media and of course via the CCD Communications Office!

Final words

There will be a great opportunity to take the ideas generated in each partner city 'to the market' at the next study visit in Nort-sur-Erdre on 3rd April 2017!

A reminder that there are also many ideas that can be researched by the ULG on the Internet! My favourite resource for city centre actions is the [Town Centre Toolkit](#) issued by the Scottish Government.

Wessel Badenhorst

Lead Expert

City Centre Doctor Project

3rd February 2017

Appendix I



City Centre Doctor Project Example of an Ideas Cafe



The purpose of this example is to guide the ULG in setting up an event for ideas generation by sharing insights from the place analysis phase.

Steps:

1. **Set up the room as a café with small tables and chairs (or rent a real café for 2 to 3 hours!).**



2. **Place a unique menu on each table.**

The menu should have one or two items related to the problems and issues identified in the place analysis report. A short description of the items should include some statistics or observations to inform the discussions.



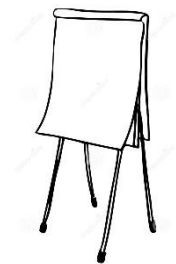
The menu at each table should be different!

The menu is the agenda at that specific table for discussion of ideas to address the problem (item) and discussed proposed initiatives raised by others.

3. Allocate a facilitator and a scribe to each table.

Divide up the ULG so members can facilitate the discussions at each of the tables.

Also, assign a volunteer as a scribe to the table. The scribe will write ideas on Post-Its to be then placed on the flip chart with the heading of the issue/problem/opportunity that is an item on the menu at the table.



4. Invite participants to 'mingle'.

Participants in the ideas café should be guided by the maître d' (a ULG member) to what options they have for participating in discussions. The more open the event is organised, the more freedom for the participants to move between tables and join or leave discussions at their own will.

On the other hand, if the event is organised in a more structured manner, participants could be taken by the maître d' to their table to be seated with other participants for a 'round table' discussion (i.e. all have equal status around the table). This will be the case if the ULG wants to ensure that for instance different stakeholders or age groups are interacting with each other at the table.

5. Create an ideas wall.

At the end of the event, select one or two walls of the room and put all the flip charts from the tables close to each other on the wall/s.

Ask participants to vote with colour stickers for the following:

- a) ideas that they have heard for the first time at this event
- b) ideas that they think are achievable in the short term (within 6 months)
- c) ideas that they think will be strategic to implement – that is trigger more actions and gain support from residents for more change.

It is not so useful to ask which ideas they like most. It is not a referendum. Unfortunately, popular ideas are not always good ideas to address issues.

6. Communicate with participants after the event.

Make sure that participants feel and know that their ideas have been captured. That means that after the event the ULG continues to communicate with participants. A practical way is to register participants at the event and to ask them for e-mail, Twitter, WhatsApp (phone no) and Facebook addresses. Group and connect them in an e-mail database; by following their Twitter and Facebook pages; and by joining them up in a WhatsApp Group.



City Centre Doctor Project Example of an Ideas Exhibition



The purpose of this example is to guide the ULG in setting up an event to share ideas for discussion and to stimulate more ideas.

Steps:

1. Select a venue that is central and easily accessible for the public.

The exhibition will probably be open for at least a week. The venue can be indoors or on a public square in the city centre. If it is outdoors, the best will be to hire/purchase a pop-up gazebo or canopy which can be stored every evening for the duration of the exhibition.



Note that if you want to use CCD Project funds to purchase a canopy/gazebo, it must be branded in accordance with the URBACT branding guidelines. Ask Simone for guidance!

2. Engage artists and designers to create visual presentations of ideas.

The exhibition is an opportunity to inspire the residents with ideas for revitalisation of the city centre. Think of it as a means to 'sell' ideas to the residents and stakeholders.

Therefore, it is helpful to engage artists that will do the layout and curate the content of the exhibition with the purpose of making a visual impact on the audience.

This should however remain an inexpensive event. One way to achieve that is to extensively make use of recycled materials and thus contribute to the local circular economy.

Here are examples of ideas exhibitions from the [Institute without Boundaries](#) in Toronto.



It will also make sense to think of what to do with materials after the event. For example, it could become a travelling exhibition to schools, libraries and/or community centres.

Finally make sure to recycle all the materials used after the exhibition is closed.

3. Create a narrative.

Think of the audience as people who know nothing of the project and what the problems are in the city centre. Arrange the ideas according to the issues identified during the place analysis. Then tell a story!

Please remember to give recognition to idea creators and contributors, even if it is one panel where all participants in events and processes are acknowledged for their contributions.

4. Make an event out of the event!

By having an exhibition, there are opportunities for spin-off events. There should be an opening of the exhibition and this could also involve politicians and spokespersons of stakeholders. By them speaking at such an opening, they are demonstrating a commitment to the process.

Other spin-offs could be to host discussions during the week of the exhibition with specific target groups to get their feedback on the ideas displayed.

Make sure there are different ways for people to make their comments such as suggestion boxes and online and social media platforms. Advertise the ULG's Facebook page and other platforms including CCD's Twitter page.

This is also an opportunity for local citizens to volunteer for the implementation of future activities and actions. Have the registration list ready for them!

5. Make videos out of the events!

People will always be curious when they see other people at an event or here interviews from participants. The word the marketing people use is that you must create a 'buzz' for your event.

No better way than getting some videos 'trending' on social media.

Note: Any person wanting to re-use the above examples in other projects or work are very welcome, with the understanding that they will give credit to the City Centre Doctor Project and the URBACT Programme as the source for these ideas.



Acknowledgements

The knowledge gained through the participation and dedication of the partners in the City Centre Doctor Project made it possible to put these guidelines together. The willingness to learn from each other, to try new things (i.e. taking on the risk of failure) and to develop plans and actions that improve the city centre for the benefit of the residents, provided content for contemplation and insight. These guidelines are not definitive; however, an important contribution has been made to the iterative process of understanding the dynamics of city centres in smaller cities and large towns in Europe. This was made possible because of active support from the URBACT Programme of the European Union. Thank you all! WB

