

# Revitalising city centres

**Policy context and trends relevant for partner cities in URBACT's City Centre Doctor Action Planning Network**



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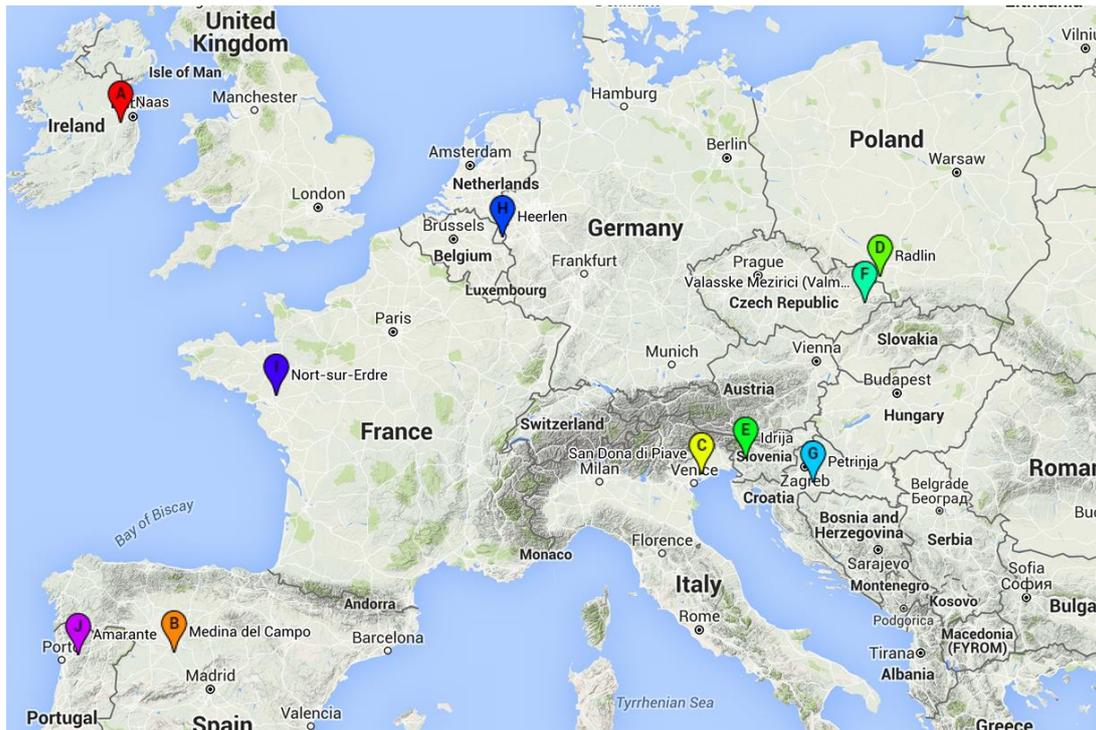
## Table of Contents

1.	The City Centre Doctor Project and the URBACT Programme.....	3
2.	Who is your city centre?.....	4
3.	Global context for revitalisation of city centres .....	5
4.	Urban Mobility.....	7
5.	Smart cities .....	10
6.	Placemaking .....	12
7.	The Millennial world.....	18
8.	The local economy .....	20
9.	Conclusion .....	25
	References .....	26

# 1. The City Centre Doctor Project and the URBACT Programme

The City Centre Doctor Project is an Action Planning Network co-funded by the [URBACT III Programme](#), a European Union territorial cooperation programme helping cities to pursue sustainable integrated urban development.

The City Centre Doctor Project is a partnership of ten smaller cities in ten European countries that are located in proximity to larger cities. See the map below. The aim of the Project is for the partner cities to develop collaboration mechanisms and integrated action plans that will drive revitalisation of their city centres.



- A** – Naas (Ireland)
- B** – Medina del Campo (Spain)
- C** – San Doná di Piave (Italy)
- D** – Radlin (Poland)
- E** – Idrija (Slovenia)
- F** – Valašské Meziříčí (Czech Republic)
- G** – Petrinja (Croatia)
- H** – Heerlen (Netherlands)
- I** – Nort-sur-Erdre (France)
- J** – Amarante (Portugal)

Project partners value the importance of the city centres as drivers of economic activity. These centres are not only places to work, shop and access services, but it is also the places where people spend free time and build up emotional connections with their city. Hence the popular perspective that the city centre is the 'heart' of the city.

The partner cities derive benefits from being part of the economic functional area dominated by the larger city, but at the same time are challenged to compete for the custom of their residents and to attract footfall and business to their respective city centres.

The Project is an opportunity for each partner city to harness the passion and interest of local stakeholders to work together, discuss, consult and design actions that will bring the kind of improvements to their city centres that will attract footfall and thus be a driver for new business formation and business growth and ultimately for job creation.

The key challenges for the city centres to survive and indeed thrive are discussed in this State of the Art paper. After familiarisation visits to each partner city, the following five questions were deemed most relevant for developing themes or topics for further discussion in project network exchanges and at ULG level:

- What are the drivers of a local economy which can be influenced to stimulate new business development and growth in the city centre?
- How do we deal with traffic congestion and the other factors that put people off to come into the city centre?
- What can we do to make our city smart and what can technology do for our city centre?
- What can we do to make our city centre more attractive and a nice experience for people?
- How do we keep young people in our city and in particular how can we get young people to 'hang-out', live and work in the city centre?

## 2. Who is your city centre?

The Harvard economist Ed Glaeser (2011) gives the following harsh definition of a city<sup>1</sup>:

*Cities are the absence of physical space between people and companies. They are proximity, density, closeness. They enable us to work and play together, and their success depends on the demand for physical connection.*

At the heart of cities are their city centres. A city centre however is more than a concentration of buildings in crammed spaces with lots of cars, people and businesses. In many cases it is the engine room for the local economy. It follows from Glaeser's thinking, which is the conventional view, that the more concentrated the resources and inputs in the centre, the higher potential for economic growth (the main aim for all economists). Examples are city centres or downtowns of New York, Shanghai, Hong Kong or Tokyo.

Skyscrapers alone however will not guarantee a well-functioning city centre. It is the last part of Glaeser's definition that is the most powerful: *Success depends on the demand for physical connection*. It is more than the demand for people seeking to connect face-to-face. It should also be considered as aggregate demand for all the transactions, wiring, flows and memes<sup>2</sup> that underpin economic, social and cultural activity in a city centre. If the assumption holds, then stimulating and increasing demand for physical connection will lead to well-functioning city centres, because there will be incentives to invest on the supply side, i.e. infrastructure, facilities, new technology, aesthetics, art etc.

In the City Centre Doctor Project, the opportunity exists for 10 cities to work together to examine the physical connections in their city centres and to experiment and plan actions to stimulate and respond to the demand for physical connection.

The connectivity of people, things, spaces and buildings are to be further explored in the Project. Danish architect Jan Gehl proposes a framework for connectivity<sup>3</sup> based on:

- A lively city – a city with a focus on the importance of life in the public spaces, in particular social and cultural opportunities

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<sup>1</sup> Glaeser, E.L. (2011) *Triumph of the City*, Macmillan, London

<sup>2</sup> A **mem**e (/ˈmi:m/ meem) is an idea, behaviour, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture.

<sup>3</sup> Gehl, J. (2010) *Cities for People*, Island Press, Washington D.C.

- A safe city – a city with a cohesive structure that offers short distances between destinations and a variation of urban functions
- A sustainable and healthy city – a city where a large part of the population walks.

Gehl does not emphasise the role of technology, though his vision of a walkable cohesive city and city centre is also a canvas for the connectivity that technology can provide.



Imagine a compact walkable city centre covered by fibre broadband and Wi-Fi where residents and visitors are able to navigate their way using apps; have real-time information on a range of services and products; can click-and-collect from anywhere in the world at any time; work in co-working spaces and meet with colleagues and clients in cool and creative city places; have smart buildings and appliances that save energy and increase comfort; and where the impact on the environment is monitored and minimised.

Such a city centre is in the making. Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley (2013) of the Brookings Institution recognise that economic growth and wellbeing will be significantly influenced by the place preferences of people and firms<sup>4</sup>. They predict that certain places and in particular city centres with clusters of talent, technology and a reputation for creativity will become 'innovation districts', which will be the engine rooms for new economic activity and sectors.

In such districts there will be a high concentration of people with occupations classified by Richard Florida (2002) as the 'creative class' that will collectively be a new driver for the local economy and thus stimulate growth of local services and supply chains<sup>5</sup>.

In the City Centre Doctor Project, the partner cities have opportunities to examine how their city centres could become future people-friendly as well as technological and talent-laden connected places for new economic activity and growth. Their journey is one to find ways to shape city centres to become viable places for future generations. It is contextualised by global and European goals for sustainable development and growth. In the process more residents will take pride in their city centre and through stronger personal attachment also take responsibility for the vitality of their place.

It matters who is your city centre. The feel, the connectedness, the vibe. As Jan Gehl observes: *First we shape cities, then they shape us.*

### 3. Global context for revitalisation of city centres

The experience of weather conditions that are unseasonal or that are exceptionally harsh reminds us that our life styles and that our built environment cannot insulate us against the major forces of Nature. As is now clear from research on Climate Change, our survival as cities depend on how we affect change in our cities to transform our local economies to low carbon economies while at the same time build resilience to adapt to more dramatic extreme weather episodes.

<sup>4</sup> Katz, B. & Bradley, J. (2013) *The Metropolitan Revolution*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C.

<sup>5</sup> Florida, R. (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Basic Books, New York

As Hank Paulson<sup>6</sup>, former US Treasury Secretary who had to deal with the 2008 financial crisis that started the Great Recession, warns: *The greenhouse-gas crisis, however, won't suddenly manifest itself with a burst, like that of a financial bubble. Climate change is more subtle and cruel. It's cumulative. And our current actions don't just exacerbate the situation — they compound it. Indeed, our failure to make decisions today to avert climate disaster tomorrow is even more serious than our failure to avert the credit crisis in 2008.*

It is obvious that the lifestyle and modus operandi that evolved in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, associated with the spoils of fossil-fuelled technologies, will have to change. A new framework for living sustainably is required. In September 2015 the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by 193 countries at the United Nations<sup>7</sup>. This Agenda is communicated as 17 [Global Goals](#) depicted in the infographic below.



How municipalities manage and develop their city centres will impact on several of these goals. For this Project we will facilitate the commitment of partner cities to contribute to [targets](#)<sup>8</sup> for **Global Goal No 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities**, in particular objective (c): To enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement, planning and management.

To have global goals is a positive step into the future and will require better governance at city level enabling collaboration of role players to develop and implement appropriate actions with more transparency and less social exclusion. To establish such governance levels, role players will benefit from inter-city exchange and learning<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Paulson, H. M. (2015) 'Short-termism and the threat of Climate Change', McKinsey & Co <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/short-termism-and-the-threat-from-climate-change>

<sup>7</sup> Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?page=view&nr=1021&type=230&menu=2059>

<sup>8</sup> Targets for Global Goal No 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities <http://www.globalgoals.org/global-goals/sustainable-cities-and-communities/>

<sup>9</sup> Woeffray, O. (2016) 'Could these three ideas reshape global governance?' <http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/02/3-ideas-to-revive-global-governance>

The URBACT method provides a framework for action planning working groups<sup>10</sup> that include the key stakeholders to drive sustainable integrated local urban development. In the City Centre Doctor Project each city will establish a URBACT Local Group (ULG) with a remit to revitalise their city centres with an integrated approach to address economic, social and environmental challenges.

The work of the ULGs will contribute to a positive local environment for business growth and anticipated job creation. The primary growth policy of the European Union, the Cohesion Policy<sup>11</sup> contains [11 Thematic Objectives](#) to guide programmes and projects. Successful implementation of actions by the ULG partners will contribute to the achievement of **Thematic Objective 3**: Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The approach in the Project will be for partner cities to use the URBACT method to develop appropriate plans for their city centres utilising the following processes:

- **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 analyse their city centre challenges and opportunities from social, economic and environmental development perspectives and develop actions that will have impacts across all three strands.

Most businesses in the city centre are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). A revitalised and more attractive city centre helps them to be more competitive. Using the URBACT method will enable the partner cities to address the following specific challenges for the local business environment such as:

- Learning how to make local economies more sustainable
- Learning more about local consumer preferences and how the offer can be tailored to such preferences for example by increasing convenience and finding suitable hours
- Learning how to make city centre shopping and the work experience more enjoyable
- Learning how to establish an eco-system for turning local creativity into jobs

The ULGs will also have the opportunity to examine some major trends that will impact on city centres as explored in the next chapters.

## 4. Urban Mobility

A critical issue for many cities is the traffic congestion and car dominance that restrict the optimal use of city centres. The partner cities in the Project intend to improve mobility in their city centres so as to increase the attraction of the centres as commercial, shopping and leisure destinations and to discourage 'passing-through' traffic.

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<sup>10</sup> These working groups will be established in accordance with the URBACT Method and will operate as URBACT Local Groups or ULGs

<sup>11</sup> European Commission (2014) 'An introduction to EU Cohesion Policy 2014 – 2020' [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/informat/basic/basic\\_2014\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/basic/basic_2014_en.pdf)

In 2013 the European Commission proposed mechanisms for cities to achieve a better balance in transport modes; more emphasis on sustainable transport modes i.e. public transport, cycling and walking; accessibility for all users; increased transport safety and security; and reductions in air and noise pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. The mechanism is to develop and agree a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) at local level that set targets and actions to achieve the above stated goals<sup>12</sup>.

Cities with a history of car dependency tend to find it difficult to get the balance right in their city centres to manage traffic flow and allocate parking spaces while at the same time securing freedom of movement for pedestrians and creating adequate public places.

Cities such as Copenhagen and Amsterdam showed the way when they stopped planning for cars, parking lots and freeways through the centre. In the case of [Amsterdam](#), the change of mind happened during the oil crisis of the 1970s when the Dutch government decided to save oil by announcing Sundays to be 'car-free' days<sup>13</sup>. The rest is history.

More and more cities are opting for a 'car-free' city centre. [Oslo](#) recently announced that private cars will be banned from the city centre by 2019<sup>14</sup>.

The aim is to make city centres cycle-friendly and walkable with a [range of actions](#)<sup>15</sup>:

- Promoting cycling and walking as healthy, economical and good for the environment
- New infrastructure and including separated bicycle lanes and wider pavements
- Bicycle rental and loan schemes
- Improved safety for cyclists and pedestrians including signage and speed restrictions
- Regulations and spaces for bicycles on buses and trains
- Promoting social acceptance of cyclists by car and bus drivers

#### Case study: Cycling facilities in City of Utrecht, Netherlands



As the momentum for change increases, cities will be focused on new requirements for their city centre such as bicycle storage and parking spaces.

In Utrecht 60% of residents cycle into the city centre every day. The Municipality is now building the largest bicycle parking facility in the world and will increase spaces from 12,000 to 33,000 in 2020.

Source: [Gemeente Utrecht](#)

<sup>12</sup> European Commission (2013), 'A concept for Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans', [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/urban/doc/ump/com\(2013\)913-annex\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/urban/doc/ump/com(2013)913-annex_en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Walker, A. (2016) 'Look how much better a city can be when it designs for people and not cars', <http://gizmodo.com/look-how-much-better-a-city-can-be-when-it-designs-for-1760859711>

<sup>14</sup> Orphanides, K. G. (2015) 'Oslo will be completely car-free by 2019', <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2015-10/20/oslo-first-car-free-european-capital-2019>

<sup>15</sup> McDonald, M., Hall, R., Sammer, G., Roider, O. & Klementschtz, R. (2010) 'CIVITAS Report on Cycling and Walking' [http://www.civitas.eu/sites/default/files/civitas\\_guard\\_final\\_cluster\\_report\\_nr\\_3\\_cycling\\_and\\_walking.pdf](http://www.civitas.eu/sites/default/files/civitas_guard_final_cluster_report_nr_3_cycling_and_walking.pdf)

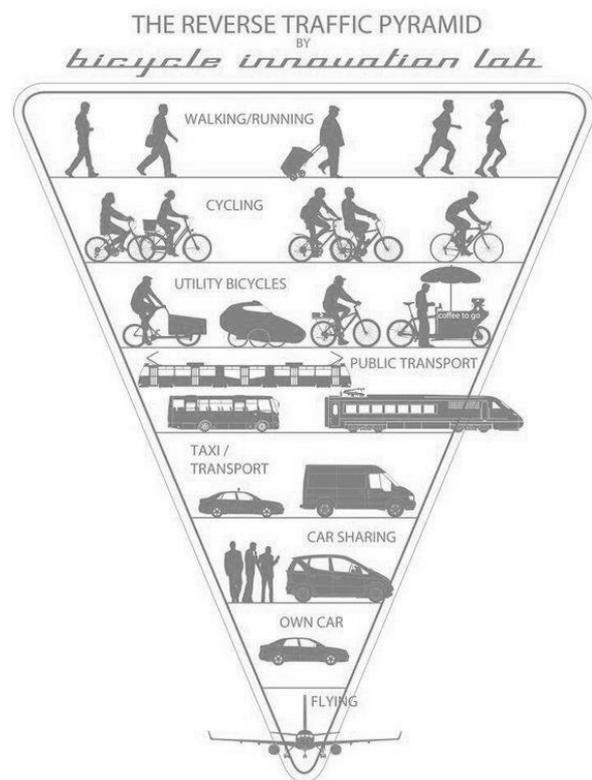
A walkable city centre significantly improves mobility. This can be achieved by assessing the permeability of the city centre – meaning the ease with which pedestrians can move around the city centre. Often city centres developed along main artery roads and over time areas become disconnected because of a lack of direct linkages, cul-de-sacs and boundary walls which then require residents to take circuitous routes. With poor linkages people have an excuse to rather use a car to get from point A to B than to walk or cycle. It also limits the volume of footfall that can be generated in the city centre, which has a knock-on effect on the vitality of areas for retail and offices.

Permeability can be increased with better planning and design and the reconfiguration of the layout of streets, laneways and walkways in the city centre. This requires the Municipality to widely consult with communities and users of the city centre to identify where their frustrations will be and to map possible short-cuts and improvements that will make new routes more attractive. A good toolkit for a systematic approach to improve permeability, including pedestrianisation of streets, is the [Permeability Best Practice Guide](#) developed by the National Transport Authority of Ireland<sup>16</sup>.

A big step to move towards a cycle friendly city however requires the Municipality to introduce policies to turn the hierarchy for road use upside down and give less priority or right-of-way to private cars and to give walking and cycling the highest priority in the city centre. This is demonstrated in the infographic of the 'Reverse Traffic Pyramid'.

Cities can achieve this by changing their by-laws to restrict cars in the use of streets and introducing new designations to streets such as 'shared streets' where there is no distinct divide of the street into car-lane, cycle-lane and footpath, but where all modes have equal rights to use of the street<sup>17</sup>.

Many cities are guiding change through a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) to determine the most effective and sustainable use of the different modes of transport and alignment of infrastructure and services accordingly<sup>18</sup>. SUMPs have more impact if there is a national policy framework with established principles for transport management in cities such as the [Designing Streets](#) Policy of the Scottish Government<sup>19</sup>.



<sup>16</sup> National Transport Authority of Ireland (2015), 'Permeability Best Practice Guide' [https://www.national-transport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Permeability\\_Best\\_Practice\\_Guide\\_NTA\\_20151.pdf](https://www.national-transport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Permeability_Best_Practice_Guide_NTA_20151.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> See for example Auckland City Council's Shared Spaces Programme: <http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/en/planspoliciesprojects/councilprojects/sharedspaces/Pages/home.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> See process of developing SUMP of Aberdeen City Council <http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sump/>

<sup>19</sup> Scottish Government (2010), A Policy Statement for Scotland on Designing Streets <http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/307126/0096540.pdf>

Another major policy instrument is for local authorities to lower speed in the city centre. In Europe 30 km/h zones have been created in 160 city centres<sup>20</sup>. The [benefits](#) include:

- Improved safety and significant reduction in vehicle collisions causing deaths
- Lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions
- Reduction of traffic noise by up to 40%
- More constant traffic flow and less traffic jams
- Eases cycling, walking and embarking from buses and trams

EU Projects that share knowledge and solutions for improving urban mobility:

[ELTIS](#) – The urban mobility observatory

[CIVITAS](#) – The European green transport metropolitan network

[SOLUTIONS](#) – Sharing opportunities for low carbon urban transportation

[ENTER.HUB](#) – Impact of railway hubs on city centres (URBACT II)

Through a better understanding of these urban mobility trends, the URBACT Local Groups in the Project will be able to inform and influence transport planning for their city centres with analysis and a set of actions to raise awareness of the importance of reducing car dependence and experimenting with new concepts such as shared streets, parklets, street design ideas and car-free days.

## 5. Smart cities

We are living in an era where disparate technologies are converging with powerful consequences for how we live; how we spend our time and energy; and how we will connect with our built environment and with communities – locally and globally.

Municipalities seek to innovate their existing functions and services to benefit their cities and residents. In a quest to attain 'smart city' status, they are also investigating technologies that will impact on the fabric and function of city centres.

What is the meaning of the concept? The Centre for Cities in the UK proposes that the concept 'smart cities' should be simplified and understood as meaning cities 'doing things better by using data and technology to deliver more efficient services and to address economic, social and environmental challenges'<sup>21</sup>.

In 2012 the European Union established the European Innovation Partnership for Smart Cities and Communities<sup>22</sup> to deal with challenges in the changeover of European cities to smart cities. The EIP creates a [marketplace for smart initiatives](#) from cities in the EU.

There are significant opportunities for cities to embrace new technologies that could transform how residents relate and interact with their cities. The emerging new practices

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<sup>20</sup> Table of European cities who have adopted 30km/h zones in their city centres (2015)

<http://en.30kmh.eu/files/2015/11/30-kmh-TRENDESETTER-CITIES.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Elli Thomas (2015), 'The state of our smart cities' <http://www.centreforcities.org/blog/the-state-of-our-smart-cities/>

<sup>22</sup> European Commission (2012), 'Smart Cities and Communities – European Innovation Partnership', [http://ec.europa.eu/eip/smartcities/files/ec\\_communication\\_scc.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/eip/smartcities/files/ec_communication_scc.pdf)

and infrastructure could also have significant positive impacts of converting to low carbon economies. Some of the converging technologies include fibre broadband and Wi-Fi systems; localised renewable solar energy systems; cellular phone systems; cloud data storage; together with a proliferation of sensors and near-field radio frequency communication; that can be mashed with conventional systems and fixtures.

Opportunities to develop specific benefits for fixed features in the city centres include systems delivering smart parking, smart lighting, smart bins, real-time traffic apps and smart billboards. These systems have already been piloted and can be considered and evaluated by the ULGs in the City Centre Doctor Project.

### Case study: Smart Parking System in Birmingham, UK

Ask any city centre customer about parking and their frustrations will include getting a parking space, not having enough coins and worrying that time will expire on the parking meter.

The City Council working with IBM and US tech company Streetline created a smart parking app that identifies available parking spaces by analysing real-time data from ultra-low power wireless sensors implanted in parking spaces. Pricing and payment is also done via the app. The results? A saving of 30% of time looking for a parking place.

Source: [Building a Smarter Planet](#)



There are however more transformative changes that new technologies will bring to our cities centres. A major impact will be the exponential growth of the [Internet of Things](#)<sup>23</sup> together with the increased uptake of automation technology (robotics) and the use of Artificial Intelligence. To put this growth in perspective, Cisco anticipates that the number of connected devices (23 billion in 2016) will more than double in the next 4 years.

As these technologies reach critical mass, the disruption of conventional systems will be rapid and possibly cause disorientation, uncertainty and fear among residents and users of our city centres, before people settle into a new normal. These transformative changes will happen as new applications using 'big data' make existing mechanical labour-dependent processes obsolete. Such as driving your own car. Why drive when the car can 'speak' to its environment and drive itself? Why own a car in the first place? Why not just order 'drives' from anywhere to wherever you want to go?<sup>24</sup>

Driverless vehicles are already in our cities thanks not only to the technology pioneered by Google but also with initiatives such as the [CityMobil2](#) European



A new driverless bus system being piloted in the city of [Sion, Switzerland](#)

<sup>23</sup> The Internet of Things is a reference to the communication of machines to machines via the Internet. It has been described in the recent World Economic Forum in Davos as the start of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEsKZGOxNKw> for an introduction to the concept.

<sup>24</sup> This is already happening with Uber, Lyft and MaaS (Mobility as a Service) service providers using mobile technology to connect with users. These companies will convert to driverless cars as they come to market.

project<sup>25</sup>. The driverless electric mini-buses used in this project is developed by the Robosoft company and can carry 10 people. New driverless buses are also operating in Netherlands and Switzerland.

The examples given only pertain to transport, mainly because it is a focus area with the optics of change affecting our daily lives. Even if driverless cars do not take off soon, cars now have parking automation functions<sup>26</sup> and the conversion to electric cars has started. Bloomberg is predicting that the conversion rate to electric cars will cause an [oil crisis](#) with demand tapering off continuously by 2023.<sup>27</sup>

EU Projects that share knowledge on smart cities:

[SMALL GIANTS](#) – A network of small and medium sized cities working on smart city solutions

[IERC](#) – The European Research Cluster for the Internet of Things

[CELCIUS](#) – An EU smart city network for district heating and cooling solutions

[SmartCities](#) – An innovation network between cities and universities in North Sea Region

Will city centres 'escape' these new waves of technological change? No. The question is rather how municipalities will facilitate and regulate these changes affecting city centres.

## 6. Placemaking

Why are some city centres much more appealing to people than others? What makes a place a great place?

These were questions asked by observers and thinkers such as Jane Jacobs and Holly Whyte in the 1960s and 1970s whose subsequent writings became influential in our understanding of great places. Some of their observations are worth reiterating as guidance for a project such as the City Centre Doctor Project.

In his work on the [Street Life Project](#) in Manhattan, New York, Holly Whyte observed what people were doing in public spaces and came to the following conclusions<sup>28</sup>:

"The street is the river of life of the city, the place where we come together, the pathway to the center."

"The human backside is a dimension architects seem to have forgotten."

"What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people."

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<sup>25</sup> The CityMobil2 Project is a demonstration project for automated transport systems funded by the Horizon2020 Programme. The first successful demo took place in the city of Trikala, Greece. See Euronews article <http://www.euronews.com/2015/10/20/driverless-bus-pilot-hopes-to-revolutionise-mass-transport-in-europe/>.

<sup>26</sup> New cars are equipped with 'driverless' technologies such as Intelligent Park Assist Systems (IPAS) [http://at-wiki.assistivetech.net/index.php/Intelligent\\_parking\\_assist\\_systems](http://at-wiki.assistivetech.net/index.php/Intelligent_parking_assist_systems)

<sup>27</sup> Bloomberg Business (2016) 'Another Oil Crash is Coming, and There may be no Recovery' <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-02-24/another-oil-crash-is-coming-and-there-may-be-no-recovery>

<sup>28</sup> Project for Public Spaces article on William H. Whyte <http://www.pps.org/reference/wwhyte/>

“It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished.”

Jane Jacobs<sup>29</sup> lambasted city officials and urban planners who were ignorant of the importance of the public space and how buildings, people and uses relate to each other.

Some of her observations that are as relevant today, include:

“There is no logic that can be superimposed on the city; people make it, and it is to them, not buildings, that we must fit our plans”

“Cities have the capability to provide something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody”

“People must take a modicum of public responsibility for each other even if they have no ties to each other”

“Designing a dream city is easy; rebuilding a living one takes imagination”

“This is what a city is, bits and pieces that supplement each other and support each other”

At a time in the 1960s and 1970s when modernist architecture entered the period of manifestations detached from its surroundings, e.g. brutalism, Whyte and Jacobs brought a focus to the importance of public space, the bustle of people in a city and the proportions of scale and active frontages to such spaces. Their observations of the importance of open spaces to the city and the value of public places were confirmed with more experimentation and studies by a number of organisations and institutions<sup>30</sup>.

Today placemaking is understood to be a combination of user-focused design, community participation and the animation of spaces from which great places can evolve. It is often community-led initiatives supported by experts and the authorities with a shared intent to make a public place better.

The [Project for Public Spaces](#) summarised the guiding principles for placemaking<sup>31</sup>:

#### **a) The community is the expert**

A process to improve public places starts with identifying community talents, leadership and resources. Persons in neighbouring communities often have the knowledge of the history of the area, the way people use the space and the value the space can have with more uses and design improvements.

#### **b) Create a place, not a design**

Design in itself does not ‘make the place’. In an underperforming space new physical elements should be introduced that make people feel welcome and comfortable. A



Times Square, NY today is a testimony to the ideas of Jacobs and Whyte.

<sup>29</sup> Jacobs, J. (1961) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Republished 1991 by Vintage Books, New York

<sup>30</sup> See overview of the research and studies leading to the concept and practice of placemaking by Susan Silberberg of MIT. <https://dusp.mit.edu/sites/dusp.mit.edu/files/attachments/project/mit-dusp-places-in-the-making.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Project for Public Spaces, Eleven Principles for creating Great Community Places <http://www.pps.org/reference/11steps>

co-creating process where community work with designers is the optimum way. The space should further be understood in its relation to uses in its surroundings such as retail, schools or a bus terminus. A great place complements these uses.

### c) Look for partners

Placemaking should not be viewed as an activity of a single group or a few individuals. To create improvements that will be sustainable requires an integrated approach, meaning that other role players should be invited to participate and to seek their support for the ideas to improve the public place. Such role players could be local institutions (e.g. schools, libraries etc.), the business community as well as public representatives and the local authority. Building a partnership significantly increases the resources and momentum for the project.

### d) You can see a lot by observing

By looking at how people are using AND not using a public place it is possible to assess what works in the space. It is the start for a discussion on what can be preserved and what can be changed; what kind of activities or uses are missing; and what will support new types of activities in the space. It is important that observations are not in itself a 'once-off' activity, but will be planned systematically at different times and days to get as comprehensive a picture of the use of the space.

### e) Have a vision

The partners, the community leaders and volunteers together with the designers and officials should develop a shared understanding of what the public place could be like if improved responding to the needs of communities of users and potential users.

This understanding should be visualised (preferably using sketches and non-technical drawings and maps) and communicated on a number of platforms including social media and at local meetings.

### f) Start with the petunias: lighter, quicker, cheaper

A great public space is rarely the result of an all-in-one design, contracted and completed as a 'gift' to the community. Typically getting the place to match the vision requires experimental improvements and adjustments. Initial actions include elements such as seating (preferably loose chairs), planting, kiosks, public art and murals. It is an iterative process taking feedback from users, making new observations and improving designs leading to new actions.



The children's reading 'room' in Bryant Park, behind the New York Library is an example of vision and imagination with minimal costs that transforms a public place.

### g) Triangulate

Arranging different elements in a public place 'to relate to each other' can lead to triangulation, which means people find meaning in this relationship and thus converge and converse with each other in such spaces. For example, benches placed near a 'dog run' in the park and nearby a space for a food kiosk or an ice-cream cart, will encourage people and not only the dog owners to congregate in this space.

## **h) They always say it can't be done**

The effort to make changes to a public space will always meet some resistance and sometimes obstacles quite removed from the public place and its surroundings. The key is to keep open communication channels going with concerned citizens and groups (including public representatives!). It is also useful to remember that it is no-one's job in either the public or private sector to create a place.

## **i) Form supports function**

Form supports function by the adaptation of designs after an iterative process of changes following experimentation; listening to feedback; and discussing with partners and stakeholders what the uses and elements of the public place could and should be. This is not to downplay how important design is and especially how useful the creativity of the designer is to the process. The 'good' designer is comfortable with a messy process where people change their minds, try-out things that don't work and later on agree with things that was said by the designer in the first place.

## **j) Money is not the issue**

A placemaking process following the above guidelines tend to be more suitable for smaller public places that do not require major regeneration and infrastructural expenditure. That said, with good planning and strong inputs from partners and role players, the strategic importance of a great public place could often convince policy makers and budget holders to prioritise resources for investment into such projects. It can also strengthen the case for public funds if the project leaders undertake a cost-benefit analysis to demonstrate the social investment.

## **k) You are never finished**

Ongoing changes in the community and changes in the people's preferences impact on the uses and value of the public place. Those who cooperated in the development of the public place should be open to possibilities of 'taking down' elements to make room for new features. Such flexibility is a hallmark of great places.

Placemaking is an approach to improve the spaces between buildings especially in city centres and to understand how they connect and relate to each other. It is also not just 'physical-making' activities, but also 'experience-making' activities that is essential to co-create a great place. In 2015 the Scottish Government published a [Town Centre Toolkit](#) that for the purposes of placemaking includes the following broad guidelines<sup>32</sup>:

### **a) Mapping the quality of the pedestrian experience**

The exercise is a combination of observations of the behaviour and patterns of pedestrians and interviews with users of public places and open spaces. Its purpose is to at regular intervals measure whether a place is working for people.

### **b) Appraising the commercial centre**

An evaluation of the state of the buildings, shopfronts, footpaths, street furniture and the general look and feel of the 'high street' or commercial centre. It should also

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<sup>32</sup> The Scottish Government Town Centre Toolkit (2015) <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/stpfiles/re-sources/Town-Centre-Action-Plan-Masterplanning-Toolkit.pdf>

include subjective opinions on style, colour and quirkiness as well as objective quantifiable measures such as number of vacant shops, street cleaning schedules, safety and crime incidents and footfall counts.

### c) **Creating active frontages**

The urban form in city and town centres is often characterised by buildings fronting onto the streets, i.e. they are not set back from the street and there is very little open space between the building and the street. Insensitive design often 'wall' the building from the street. To create active frontages requires physical improvements including shop windows, doors, street furniture and planting that softens the frontage that encourage human interaction on the pavement and entering the buildings. Lack of interventions on the other hand could become an 'invitation' for graffiti.

### d) **Greening public spaces**

Parks and playgrounds are not the only 'green spaces' that in a city centre. Greening of spaces should be extended as far as possible in the city centre and includes planting of street trees, flower beds, hanging baskets, pavement parks and community gardens. The ethos of public places is to have places where everyone in the city is welcome to spend time, relax, meet with others and enjoy their city centre.

The greening of spaces creates a welcoming atmosphere in public places.

### e) **Improving and enhancing shopfronts**

One of the biggest deterrents for people to visit and shop in city centres is when the shop fronts are of low quality in design and appearance and if there are many empty shops.

To turn-around the appearances of shops and to attract new shops into previously down-trodden area is a challenge which requires collaboration by all stakeholders, especially getting the retailers to work together in the interest of the place.

Useful actions that ULGs could consider include co-producing shopfront design guidelines that will create consistency and standards for the place; seed funding by the local authority for shop front improvements of the smaller independent shops; temporary uses and pop-up shops in empty spaces; special projects with themes such as Valentine's Day, Christmas etc.; and shopfront competitions and awards.



Sometimes creativity is the main ingredient to transform a shop and a retailer can benefit from paying a creative enterprise to create displays for a new look and feel of the shop and therefore attract more customers.

### f) **Organising an events programme**

Each city wants to organise large events - especially festivals - that they believe enhance the city's reputation. Besides costs, the downside is that such events often require severe disruptions for stakeholders and the benefits do not always live up to the hype. Many retailers complain that events sometimes distract people from shopping and do not always underpin the anticipated increased footfall in the city centre.

Regular smaller events however can blend into the fabric of the city centre and generate positive publicity and new visitor spending patterns. For example, hosting farmers' markets every weekend in public places in the centre; or local cultural activities; or outdoor exhibitions will create a buzz and expectations that 'something is on' in the city centre.

It is also important to not expect just the local authority to organise events. The private and NGO sectors should also be the organisers of events ranging from for example fitness runs to talent competitions.



The Barrack Hill Ball Roll is a unique lottery when thousands of coloured numbered balls cascade and bounce down West View in Cobh, Co. Cork, Ireland

The key is however to be distinctive with the programme of activities and events, in other words to have points of difference comparing to other city centres and the shopping malls on the periphery. The layout of the city centre; the connectivity of the public places; the heritage of the city; and harnessing the creativity of organisers and the local community will be key factors for consideration.

The value of putting in the effort is that the product is difficult to replicate and thus gives the place a competitive advantage.

#### **g) Designing for safety and the weather**

Two things will keep people away from the city centre despite all the efforts and interventions discussed above. A belief that the city centre is unsafe and bad weather.

Even if crime statistics are comparatively low, if people don't feel safe they will avoid the city centre. The concern is often the safety of public spaces. The conclusion drawn by many a city business person is that the perception outweighs the facts.

The question then is what can be done besides continuing to communicate the safety features of the area to customers; investing in more policing; and hoping for sunshine?

The following spatial design interventions have been proven to be successful:

- Ensure a range of uses with different sets of users at different times of the day and evening.
- 'Break-up' the large open spaces such as main squares with their continuous hard surfaces. This can be done with placement of movable planting boxes, loose chairs, kiosks and the installation of interactive features such as water fountains, public games areas (e.g. boules, bocce or dominoes), public art and exhibitions.
- Design residential and office buildings to overlook public places and open spaces.
- Install high standard LED lighting systems preferably [pole-free](#) and smart light intensities sensing the need of people in public spaces.
- Increase permeability in the city centre especially by creating new well-lit pedestrian routes.

- Utilise surveillance technology such as CCTV and webcams AND putting up notices that these cameras are in operation. Today this is not an option anymore and the question rather is how the equipment can be designed and placed to not create more clutter, but 'fit in' with the streetscape and buildings.
- Slow down traffic. Period.

It is also possible to use high quality retractable shop front awnings and free standing parasols to provide shade against the sun and shelter against the rain and therefore minimise adverse impacts of the weather.

URBACT Local Groups in the City Centre Doctor Project are well positioned to lead and initiate placemaking processes in their respective city centres. In the Project's network and capacity building activities the placemaking theme will be explored through training, understanding and application of techniques and approaches.



A CCTV camera mounted on a wall – good spot or not?

## 7. The Millennial world

Young people aged 16-29 in Europe are digitally savvy. More than 80% use social media and nearly 9 in 10 use the Internet on a daily basis compared to 2 out of 3 for the total population<sup>33</sup>. To access the Internet, 74% used a mobile phone in 2014 compared to 44% of the total population.

In the United States the US Chambers of Commerce researched the population group born from 1980 to 1999 to identify patterns that differ from other population age cohorts and more importantly patterns that differ from the same young people age group of other eras. This age group is now general known as the Millennials<sup>34</sup>.

Here are some findings from the surveys conducted by the US Chambers of Commerce:

- More than 80 million of the US population are Millennials of which 40% are not classified as non-Hispanic white. They are more tolerant to ethnic minorities.
- They are focused on self-expression with 75% creating a profile on a social networking site.
- They are never far from their next text, with 80% sleeping with their mobile phone next to their bed.
- More than half of Millennials are interested in entrepreneurship. In the US in 2011 Millennials launched more than 150,000 start-ups per month. They approach entrepreneurship as a way of life.

The Millennials are more focused on social interaction on-line and in person and prefer 'dense urban villages just outside their front door' according to Nielsen, the global market research company<sup>35</sup>. Nielsen goes as far to suggest that they are abandoning the

<sup>33</sup> Eurostat News Release (16 April 2015), 'What it means to be young in the European Union today' <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/6783798/1-16042015-AP-EN.pdf/5d120b02-c8df-4181-9b27-2fe9ca3c9b6b>

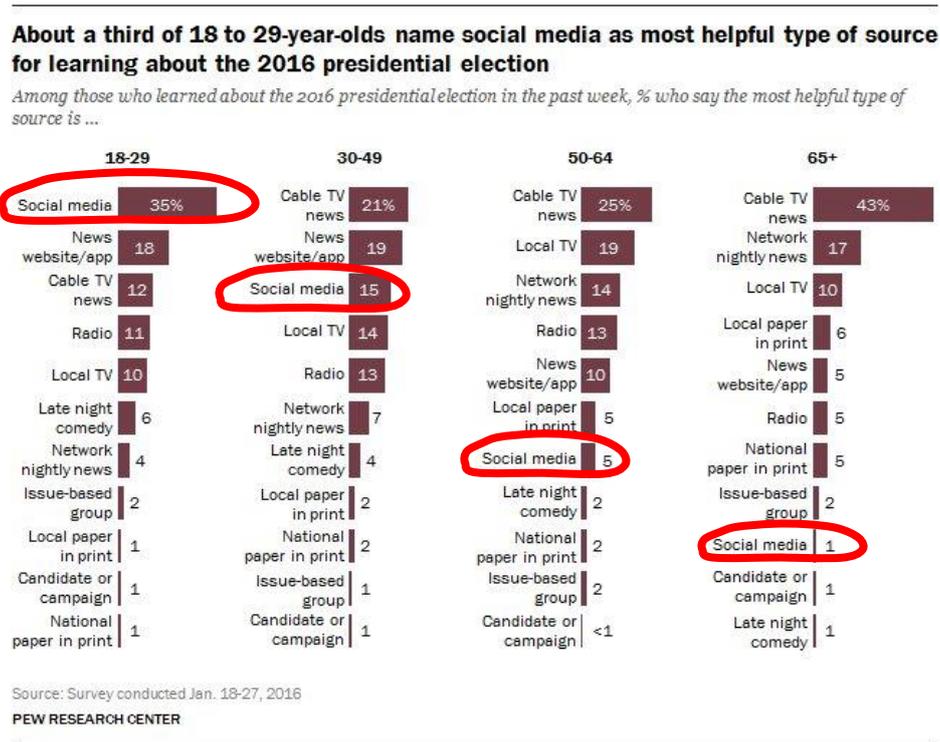
<sup>34</sup> US Chamber of Commerce Foundation (2013), 'The Millennial Generation Research Review' <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/reports/millennial-generation-research-review>

<sup>35</sup> Nielsen (2014), 'Millennials prefer cities to suburbs, subways to driveways' <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2014/millennials-prefer-cities-to-suburbs-subways-to-driveways.html>

American Dream of a nice car and a house in the suburbs, based on the statistic that 62% prefer to live in mixed use residential buildings close to shops, restaurants and offices that is typically on offer in urban centres. They want to combine urban convenience with an exciting art and music scene.

Millennials also adopted quickly to new digital services such as Uber in ridesharing and Zipcar in on-demand car-use provided via apps on their mobile phones. More than 50% of Millennials indicated in a Zogby survey that they use rideshare apps<sup>36</sup>.

Pew Research published the graph below to show their survey results on the use of types of media by age groups as sources for learning about the US Presidential Election<sup>37</sup>.



It graphically demonstrates how differently Millennials are sourcing information using social media and news apps compared to other older age cohorts. The worrying aspect is that this stark difference in how information is sourced could be an indicator for misunderstandings at other levels. Older generations who are more in control of institutions, services and the local economy may assume that younger generations see things similarly to themselves based on the same information broadcasted on mainstream channels, when in fact they don't. The implication for partner cities are that young people in their cities would likely be more inclined to believe a tweet shared by an on-line 'friend' from another country than for instance a statement in the national printed media.

A challenge for all cities is to adapt to the digital age and 'follow' their young people. If this does not happen quickly, the young people might be gone and might not return.

<sup>36</sup> The G Brief (2015), 'Millennials help Ridesharing Redefine the Way We Get Around' <http://thebrief.com/articles/millennials-help-ridesharing-define-the-way-we-get-around-546>

<sup>37</sup> Gottfried, J., Bartel, M., Shearer, E., Mitchell, A. (2016) 'The 2016 Presidential Campaign – a News Event That's Hard to Miss' <http://www.journalism.org/2016/02/04/the-2016-presidential-campaign-a-news-event-thats-hard-to-miss/>

The fear in many smaller cities is that they will lose their young population and thereby the city will lose viability as their ability to reproduce their next generations diminishes.

One approach could be to accept a cycle of change where young people will leave and the city will shrink and that local stakeholders plan accordingly. As Schlappa and Neill (2013) point out that through collaboration in local partnerships new policy frameworks can be developed to address the challenges of urban shrinkage in novel ways. Cities thus should embrace the re-sized offer of services and changes in land-uses in the city centre. Cities 'reset' for an era of shrinking but could again in the future resume a growth phase<sup>38</sup>. Cities therefore 'move on', instead of holding out to somehow retain their young people, who after all, want to venture into a wider world.

It could be more useful to focus on attracting young people (new population) rather than retaining young people (existing population). Adams and Arnkil (2013) advocate that cities need to connect with young people to learn how to address their needs through a process of social innovation<sup>39</sup>. A dialogue and experimentation phase can involve local stakeholders and young people to answer the question what will attract young people to the city and by implication the city centre. The URBACT Local Group could itself be the forum for such a dialogue.

The most important way however for a city to attract young people is to be a location with an annual net increase in jobs. That requires a viable growing local economy.

#### Case study: Jobs for Young People in Maribor, Slovenia

What can be done to help young people find jobs? It may require introducing young people to the type of work and skills for which there are jobs, but which are not seen as 'attractive'. The Municipality of Maribor established a project where young people could volunteer to renovate the City Youth Council premises. To do this they had to learn skills in carpentry, masonry, painting and electrical work.



Source: [My Generation at Work Project](#) (URBACT II)

## 8. The local economy

A vibrant city centre is the symptom or consequence of a viable growing local economy. The City Centre Doctor Project will create opportunities for the partner cities to explore the processes and systems in other cities to manage growth in their local economies.

<sup>38</sup> Schlappa, H. & Neill, W.J.V. (2013) *Cities of Tomorrow – Action Today*. URBACT II Capitalisation. From crisis to choice: re-imagining the future in shrinking cities, URBACT, Paris [http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/import/general\\_library/19765\\_Urbact\\_WS1\\_SHRINKING\\_low\\_FINAL.pdf](http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/import/general_library/19765_Urbact_WS1_SHRINKING_low_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Adams, E. & Arnkil, R. (2013) *Cities of Tomorrow – Action Today*. URBACT II Capitalisation. Supporting urban youth through social innovation: stronger together, URBACT, Paris [http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/import/general\\_library/19765\\_Urbact\\_WS3\\_YOUTH\\_low\\_Final.pdf](http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/import/general_library/19765_Urbact_WS3_YOUTH_low_Final.pdf)

The challenge has also been extensively examined in other URBACT projects. In a capitalisation of the work in these projects, Campbell and Partridge (2013) make the following suggestions for cities to consider<sup>40</sup>:

- Affect internal demand in the local economy by stimulating local spend through promotion of local produce/services, 'buy local' campaigns and community currencies
- Support local companies to export and access new markets
- Nurture an outward-looking and cosmopolitan local business culture
- Use place branding and a strong visual identity to communicate the city's strengths and opportunities thereby influencing external demand
- Create conditions for companies to invest in the city including a single point in the city for all queries, information and advice including technical detail on property, planning, regulations, taxes and charges.
- Be competitive compared to other business locations and develop a business-friendly reputation by removing barriers to entry for new investment and by attracting talent
- Make spaces available for start-ups and accelerator businesses
- Promote an entrepreneurial culture
- Foster collaboration between local businesses and universities (including technical institutions) and research institutes
- Plan the development of sectoral clusters
- Support local businesses to become more productive whether in reducing costs or increasing quality or through innovation

Although the city centre is dependent on the growth in the overall local economy, it can be a catalyst in itself for growth. This is especially the case of a 'healthy' retail sector.

Retail is the bellwether of economic activity in city centres. A cluster of well-presented shops is the best indicator of a vibrant location. Most cities covet an array of quality shops in their city centre. The opposite is also true. There is no clearer sign of a run-down city centre than poorly presented shops and many vacant shops.

The [Institute of Place Management](#) at Manchester Metropolitan University researched the UK 'high streets' and in particular the factors influencing retail. The following table presents a ranking of the 25 priority factors with a high probability to have a cause and effect on the success of the high street/city centre<sup>41</sup>.

PRIORITY	CONSIDERATIONS
<b>1. ACTIVITY HOURS</b>	Ensuring the centre is open when the catchment needs it. What are the shopping hours? Is there an evening economy? Do the activity hours match the customer needs?
<b>2. APPEARANCE</b>	Improving the quality of the visual appearance. How clean is the centre?
<b>3. RETAILERS</b>	Offering the right type and quantity of retailers. What retailers are represented?
<b>4. VISION &amp; STRATEGY</b>	Having a common vision and some leadership. Do the High Street stakeholders collaborate? Is the vision incorporated in local plans?
<b>5. EXPERIENCE</b>	Considering the quality of the experience? Measuring levels of service quality and visitor satisfaction. What is the image of the centre?
<b>6. MANAGEMENT</b>	Building capacity to get things done. Is there effective management – of the shopping centre(s) and town centre?

<sup>40</sup> Campbell, M. & Partridge, A. (2013) *Cities of Tomorrow – Action today. URBACT II capitalisation. More jobs: better cities – a framework for city action on jobs*, URBACT, Paris [http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/import/general\\_library/19765\\_Urbact\\_WS2\\_MORE\\_JOBS\\_low\\_FINAL\\_01.pdf](http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/import/general_library/19765_Urbact_WS2_MORE_JOBS_low_FINAL_01.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> Institute of Place Management (2015), 'High Street UK 2020 – What is the future for the UK high street?' <http://www.placemanagement.org/media/50610/Executive-Summary.pdf>

<b>7. MERCHANDISE</b>	Meeting the needs of the catchment. What is the range and quality of goods on offer?
<b>8. NECESSITIES</b>	Ensuring basic facilities are present and maintained. Is there appropriate car-parking; amenities; general facilities, like places to sit down and toilets etc.?
<b>9. ANCHORS</b>	The presence of an anchor which drives footfall. This could be retail (like a department store) or could be a busy transport interchange or large employer.
<b>10. NETWORKS &amp; PARTNERSHIPS WITH COUNCIL</b>	Presence of strong networks and effective formal or informal partnerships. Do stakeholders communicate and trust each other? Can the council facilitate action (not just lead it?)
<b>11. DIVERSITY</b>	A multi-functional centre. What attractions are there, apart from retail? What is the tenant mix and tenant variety?
<b>12. WALKING</b>	The 'walkability' of the centre. Are linked trips between areas possible – or are the distances too great? Are there other obstacles that stop people walking?
<b>13. ENTERTAINMENT &amp; LEISURE</b>	An entertainment and leisure offer. What is it? Is it attractive to various segments of the catchment?
<b>14. ATTRACTIVE</b>	The 'pulling power' of a city centre. Can it attract people from a distance?
<b>15. PLACE ASSURANCE</b>	Getting the basics right. Does the centre offer a basic level of customer service, is this consistent? Or do some operators, or parts of the offer, let this down?
<b>16. ACCESSIBLE</b>	Each of reach. How convenient is the centre to access? Is it accessible by a number of different means, e.g. car, public transport, cycling.
<b>17. PLACE MARKETING</b>	Communicating the offer. How does the centre market and promote itself? How well does the centre orientate visitors and encourage flow – with signage and guides etc.
<b>18. COMPARISON / CONVENIENCE</b>	The amount of comparison shopping opportunities compared to convenience (usually in percentage terms). Is this sustainable?
<b>19. RECREATIONAL SPACE</b>	The amount and quality of recreational areas and public space/open space. Are there places where people can enjoy spending time without spending money?
<b>20. BARRIERS TO ENTRY</b>	The obstacles that make it difficult for interested retailers to enter the city centre market. What is the city centre doing to make it easier for new businesses to gain entry?
<b>21. CHAIN VS INDEPENDENT</b>	Number of multiples stores and independent stores in the retail mix of a centre/High Street. Is this suitably balanced?
<b>22. SAFETY / CRIME</b>	A city centre KPI measuring perceptions and actual crime including shoplifting. Perceptions of crime are usually higher than actual crime rates.
<b>23. LIVEABLE</b>	The resident population or potential for residential in the centre. Does the centre offer the services/environment that residents need? Doctors, schools etc.
<b>24. ADAPTABILITY</b>	The flexibility of the space/property in a centre. Are there inflexible and outdated units that are unlikely to be re-let or re-purposed.
<b>25. STORE DEVELOPMENT</b>	The willingness of retailers/property owners to develop their stores. Are they willing to coordinate/cooperate in updating activities? Or do they act independently.

There is more to a successful retail sector in the city centre than having a number of good shops. A structure or mechanism to drive these factors is clearly required. In some cities this is done through a partnership of stakeholders for example [Waterford](#) in Ireland<sup>42</sup> or [Louvain la Neuve](#) in Belgium<sup>43</sup>, while in other cities a special company is formed called a Business Improvement District Company (BID) to manage the above factors.

<sup>42</sup> Waterford City Council (2013), 'Waterford City Centre Management Plan' <http://www.waterfordcouncil.ie/en/media/BUSINESS/Reports/Waterford%20City%20Centre%20Management%20Plan%202013.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> The Partnership in Town Centre Management <http://www.tocema-europe.com/dbfiles/cahier1En.pdf>

In the case of BID companies there is the ability via legislation to levy all businesses to fund the BID area management programme. BIDs are created by businesses via a plebiscite every 5 years<sup>44</sup>. Research shows that in New York with its 56 BID companies, the larger BIDs are more successful in creating an impact where property values increase<sup>45</sup>. A key consideration for the partner cities in the Project will be how these priority factors are managed in their city centre and if the ULG can establish a foundation for a future city centre management mechanism.

A focus of partner cities is on how to help city centre retailers to embrace retail innovation. The assumption is that if more retailers embrace innovation then the overall retail offer and presentation will improve, hence the city centre will become more vibrant.

A study by the European Commission's Expert Group on Retail Sector Innovation<sup>46</sup> found that there are four aspects that partner cities in the City Centre Doctor Project will have to take in consideration to promote retail innovation in the city centre namely:

- Retailers are both product and process innovators. On the process side the improvements include smart distribution and logistics, supply chain integration, self-checkout machines and click-and-collect systems. Retailers also co-create product improvements by communicating customer feedback and preferences to producers.
- Retailers are open innovators. They share ideas and risks and in so doing the sector advances. The nature of an open system of innovation means that small suppliers have routes to market for new products where retailers are for example prepared to go into partnership with brand development and product testing.
- Retailers engage in both technological and non-technological innovation. They are well positioned to learn and understand changing consumer behaviour and preferences and in response, are able to develop new services, offerings and messages.
- Retailers tend to innovate incrementally rather than radically. This could be as a consequence of the openness of innovation in the sector, in other words the cost and risk of large scale radical 'solo' innovation can be too high if the benefits are 'absorbed' by easy emulation in the sector. Starting small and prototyping in a few stores could also mean that retailers have a strong business case to finance large investments in a national or international roll-out of innovations.

An exciting new development for partner cities is the opportunity to initiate start-up ecosystems in their city centres as a means to help entrepreneurs to start businesses, in particular young people. An ecosystem will require the following actions<sup>47</sup>:

- Instil an atmosphere for young entrepreneurs to link with each other through shared events, activities, locations and interactions (e.g. meet-ups, training)
- Nurture a mix of different skills and talents concentrated in the city centre
- Identify affordable spaces for co-working with flexibility in terms of hours, work practices (e.g. a pet-friendly ethos) and ease of access
- Provide start-up 'infrastructure' such as coffee shops, bike lanes and broadband
- Import supports such as mentoring, seed funding and VC access to accelerate growth

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<sup>44</sup> UK Dept. for Communities & Local Government (2015) *Business Improvement Districts – Technical Guide for Local Authorities* [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/415990/BIDs\\_Technical\\_Guidance.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/415990/BIDs_Technical_Guidance.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Furman Centre, New York University (2007) *The Benefits of Business Improvement Districts: Evidence from New York City* <http://furmancenter.org/files/publications/FurmanCenterBIDsBrief.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> EC Expert Group on Retail Sector Innovation (2014) Final Report [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/Report\\_from\\_EG\\_on\\_Retail\\_Sector\\_Innovation\\_A4\\_FINAL\\_2.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/Report_from_EG_on_Retail_Sector_Innovation_A4_FINAL_2.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Startup Commons (2016) 'What is Startup Ecosystem?' <http://www.startupcommons.org/what-is-startup-ecosystem.html>

- Connect local entrepreneurs to established businesses and large companies
- Initiate start-up competitions for entrepreneurs to pitch ideas and concepts to venture capital firms and angel investors
- Connect the city's start-up community to similar communities in other cities
- Listen to the needs of young entrepreneurs and find ways to innovate and respond.

Rameet Chawla (2013) points out that the value is however not confined to affordable well-designed, well-located work spaces. It is also the amenities available in co-working spaces that range from free Wi-Fi and coffee to weekly seminars with high-profile guest speakers and shared staff members, such as receptionists, that attract entrepreneurs<sup>48</sup>.

The best indicator of the start-up ecosystem taking off in the city centre will be the amount of co-working space that are becoming available. Typically, this is the result of converting existing buildings and spaces into new work environments. The design specifications of the interiors are however high, because it should be an attractive place to work. The cost savings are made by having open space work places where entrepreneurs use an assigned desk or shared spaces, depending on their needs.



Dogpatch Labs, one of the co-working spaces in Dublin

After surveying people working in co-working spaces, researchers at Harvard University found that high job satisfaction rates and viewing their work as meaningful; having more job control; and feeling part of a community<sup>49</sup>.

The incentive is there for partner cities in the City Centre Doctor Project to explore co-working spaces via their ULGs and to identify spaces and resources and the learning required to create such new work environments in their city centres.

#### Case study: Co-working at the Fumbally Exchange in Dublin, Ireland

'Fumbally Exchange (FEx) helps creative innovators to shine. Together, we are strong and support each other. Our buildings offer more than shared office space. FEx involves community, collaboration, renewal and regeneration.'

FEx is a child of the Great Recession when design professionals in Ireland literally found themselves on the street. Out of their fancy offices, they clubbed together, rented cheap space and started a learning process on how to create new work environments sans the walls.

Source: [The Fumbally Exchange](http://www.fumballyexchange.com)



<sup>48</sup> Chawla, R. (2013) 'What is the Top Benefit of Co-working Spaces?' <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/230446>

<sup>49</sup> Spreitzer, G., Bacevice, P. & Garrett, L. (2015) 'Why People Thrive in Co-working Spaces' <https://hbr.org/2015/05/why-people-thrive-in-coworking-spaces>

## 9. Conclusion

This paper covered a select number of areas in which cities can explore the trends and impacts for their city centre that should influence their strategies and visions for future sustainable integrated urban development of their city centres.

The future city centre will not be viable if it is dominated by cars. The opportunity is there to improve mobility options for residents and visitors making the centre safer, more walkable and more liveable. Such a centre will have more footfall and hence potential for growth for local businesses.

If a city centre shows little exterior changes with an emphasis on preservation, then it could be perceived to be like a museum. New technologies however will enable new smart infrastructure and ways to re-purpose existing elements of the built environment.

The revitalising of the city centre should focus on future generations working and living in the city. Cities should plan for what is important for the younger generation. Their world is much more connected and positive towards new technologies and less driven by status symbols such as car ownership and living in big houses in the suburbs.

The city centre itself is central to how residents identify with their place. More and more people will not be satisfied to leave the development of the centre to the professionals. The many examples of more 'bottom-up' community-led processes to improve the city centres (placemaking) show that volunteers and lay persons in a city can work with agencies and professionals to effect transformative change.

The vitality and vibrancy of the city centre is dependent on the ability to generate and sustain jobs and hence how the local economy can be managed and stimulated. The profound changes in the retail sector brought about by the impact of online trading and changes in consumer behaviour are visible in city centres and requires a new approach. Furthermore, the impact of the Great Recession made people realise that depending on national and global stewardship of the economy does not cushion local adverse impacts.

It is also useful to consider what was not covered in this paper. Clearly wholesale urban renewal (e.g. demolishing buildings on a large scale to make room for new developments) and allocating more parking spaces should not be the first options to consider. It is possible to revitalise a city centre with the softer options which are focused on re-use and re-purpose of buildings and improvements of the public spaces. One should never underestimate the mixture of imagination, plants and paint to 'fix' a building or a street.

A key message is that municipalities are not always going to be problem-solvers and neither should they take all the blame if business is not doing well. In successful city centres a range of stakeholders including business, young people, environmentalists, urbanists, sports clubs, cycle activists and urban designers to name a few, take a leadership role. It is not one agency's role to create and sustain a place.

The solution to revitalising city centres lies in the process. The secret is to put in place a mechanism to galvanise local volunteers, leaders and resources across all stakeholders who work together and are able to experiment and implement a range of smaller actions which will have a transformative collective impact.

The process will take time. It will need a plan to get there.

The tensions that change bring cannot be ignored. People will have to be engaged in the process. There will not be consensus, but there should be ample and multiple opportunities for discussion, debate and the creative exchange of ideas and providing support.

In 1961 Jane Jacobs described processes to revitalise and sustain a city as 'organized complexity'. She argued for a 'web way of thinking' to work with dynamic inter-relationships of systems, processes and self-organization and to move away from simplifying formulas that fit into professions and disciplines and that stifle catalytic changes<sup>50</sup>. Her thinking was prescient. Today the [URBACT Programme](#) provides a framework for cities to develop the mechanisms and approaches to facilitate sustainable integrated urban development. This requires an emphasis not only on the economic elements but also the environmental, social and demographic impacts of actions to revitalise the city centre<sup>51</sup>.

The City Centre Doctor Project will support ten cities to initiate and manage such processes to revitalise their city centres. It will be fascinating to see how as Jan Gehl observed that they shape their cities and how then their cities will shape them.

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<sup>51</sup> European Commission's outline of Integrated Sustainable Urban Development [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2014/integrated-sustainable-urban-development](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2014/integrated-sustainable-urban-development)

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