

State of the Art

Policy context and trends in revitalising city centres



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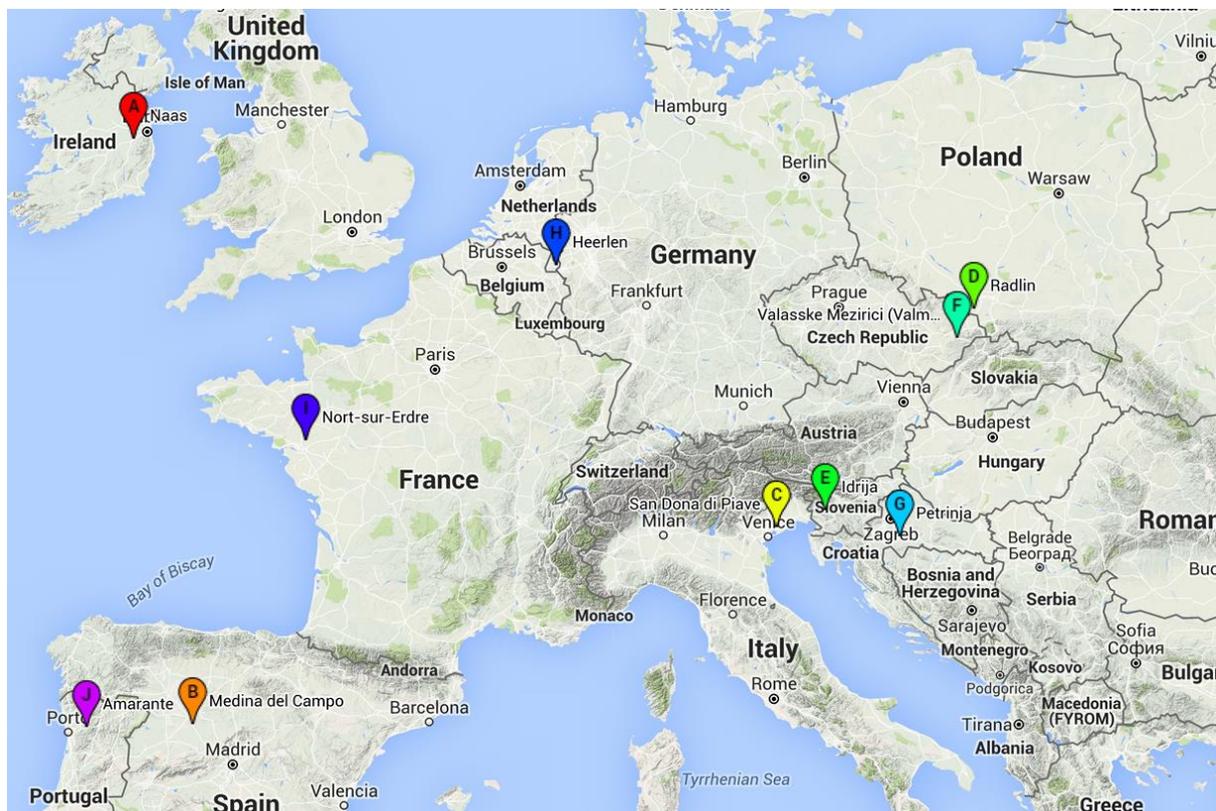
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1. The City Centre Doctor Project and the URBACT Programme

The City Centre Doctor Project is one of 21 Action Planning Networks co-funded by the [URBACT III Programme](#), a European Union territorial cooperation programme helping cities to pursue sustainable integrated urban development.

The URBACT Programme assists projects in a structured manner with three types of interventions namely by engaging partner cities in transnational exchanges which fosters inter-city learning; by building the capacity of partner cities through skills training and knowledge sharing; and by capturing and publishing the knowledge created in the projects.

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 centres of their cities as drivers of economic activity. The city centre is not only a place where people work, shop and access services, but it is also the place where people spend some of their 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 URBACT methodology outlines a project process that starts with a systematic analysis of the challenges, policies and trends that inform the project aim and objectives together with an analysis of the specific challenges and modus operandi in each partner city. This information is captured in a baseline study. It presents the project with a starting point and a focus. In a two year process each project establishes a local collaboration mechanism called the URBACT Local Group to develop an integrated action plan via a process of learning and exchange at transnational level and at local community level. After a project period of two years, the plans and project process findings will form the basis for a capitalisation of knowledge which will also show the progress made since the baseline study.

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.

Some of the key challenges for the city centres to survive and indeed thrive are discussed in this State of the Art paper.

The range of topics are however wide and varied. 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 place 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?

These questions inform the topics for this State of the Art paper.

2. Who is your city centre?

The Harvard economist Ed Glaeser (2011) gives the following harsh definition of a city¹:

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 cramped 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 holy grail for all economists). The city centres or downtowns of New York, Shanghai, Hong Kong or Singapore comes to mind.

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 memes² 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 will be topics for learning and planning. The Danish architect Jan Gehl identifies four goals that provide a framework for connectivity³ namely:

- A lively city – a city with a focus on the importance of life in the public spaces, in particular social and cultural opportunities
- A safe city – a city with a cohesive structure that offers short distances between destinations and a variation of urban functions
- A sustainable city – a city where a large part of the population walks, cycle and use public transport
- A healthy city – a city where walking and cycling is a natural ingredient of daily routines for all age groups.

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

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

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

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 firms⁴. 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. It follows that 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 chains⁵.

In the City Centre Doctor Project, the partner cities will 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.

The Project's activities will however take place in a policy context where local decisions have global impacts. Partner cities will be made aware of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Thematic Objectives for the EU Regional Policy Strategy 2014 – 2020. The impact that the Project can have in the achievement of the objectives for the URBACT III Programme is relevant in this regard.

Most of all the Project is a journey for partner cities to explore ways to shape their city centres to become more sustainable for future generations. In doing so they will ensure that more residents take a pride in their city centre and through their attachment to the centre 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.*

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

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

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 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 episodes⁶.

As Hank Paulson, 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 19th and 20th 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 Nations⁷. This Agenda is communicated as 17 [Global Goals](#) depicted in the infographic below.



⁶ 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>

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

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](#)⁸ for **Global Goal No 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities**, namely:

- a. To ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing; and basic services; and upgrade slums
- b. To provide access for all to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems; improving road safety; expanding public transport; giving special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons
- c. To enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement, planning and management**
- d. To strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage
- e. To significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations and to substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product
- f. To reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management
- g. To provide access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities
- h. To support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning
- i. To substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change and resilience to disasters.

The partner cities in the City Centre Doctor Project will in particular aim to achieve Target c. (in bold above) by establishing action planning working groups⁹ for their city centres that will include all the key stakeholders and with a remit to revitalise their city centres with an integrated approach to address economic, social and environmental challenges.

To have global goals is a positive step into the future, but equally of importance will be better governance which requires improved collaboration between role players, more

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

⁹ These working groups will be established in accordance with the URBACT Method and will operate as URBACT Local Groups or ULGs

transparency as well as a determination to develop and implement appropriate actions. To achieve desired outcomes increasingly depends on inter-city exchange and learning¹⁰.

The European Union agreed in 2012 its growth strategy for the period 2014 to 2020¹¹. The Strategy contains very specific targets to be achieved by 2020 namely:

- An employment rate of 75% of the 20-64 years' age cohort
- Investment in R&D/innovation at 3% of EU GDP
- Greenhouse gas emissions 20% lower than 1990 level
- 20% of energy production from renewables
- 20% increase in energy efficiency
- School drop-out rates to below 10%
- 40% of 20-34 years' age cohort completing third level education
- 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion

To reach these targets the primary growth policy of the European Union, the Cohesion Policy¹² contains [11 Thematic Objectives](#) to guide programmes and projects, namely:

1. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation
2. Enhancing access to, and use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT)
3. **Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)**
4. Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors
5. Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management
6. Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency
7. Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures
8. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility
9. Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination
10. Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning
11. Improving the efficiency of public administration.

Partner cities in the City Centre Doctor Project will develop plans to revitalise city centres thereby creating environments more conducive for businesses to be competitive. Successful implementation of actions 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 taking in consideration the policy context

¹⁰ Woeffray, O. (2016) 'Could these three ideas reshape global governance?'
<http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/02/3-ideas-to-revive-global-governance>

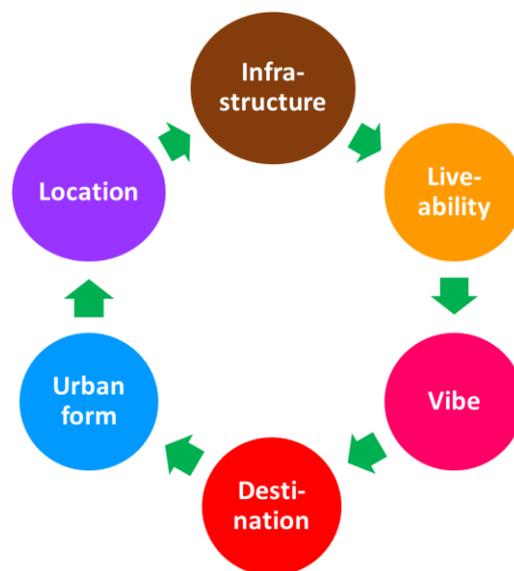
¹¹ European Commission (2012) 'Europe 2020: Europe's Growth Strategy'
http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/europe_2020_explained.pdf

¹² 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

at global, European, national, regional and local level and will consist of the following elements:

- **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 members and member organisations in the ULG; with other partner cities in the City Centre Doctor Project; and with a range of other European cities and interested parties 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** in the process of understanding and analysis of city issues and in developing and testing ideas for actions
- **Integrated Action Planning** by engaging the ULG to understand their city centre challenges and opportunities from its social, economic and environmental development perspectives and to design actions that will have impacts across all three strands.

The challenges and opportunities in a city centre are wide ranging. The following graphic gives a sense of the main areas that could be considered in the Integrated Action Planning process:



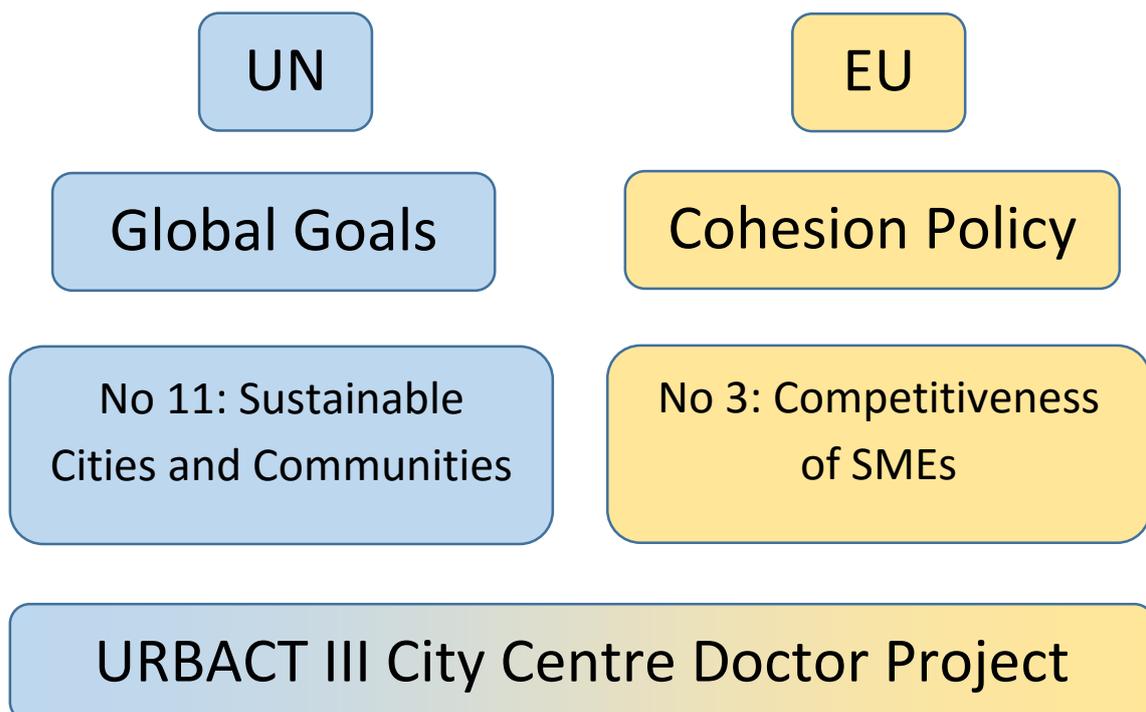
These areas are too broad to address with a single plan. Each ULG will have to be highly selective and focused on themes more specific to their local challenges and opportunities. It is suggested that some of the mainstream projects that will be normally part of the works programmes of municipalities should NOT be included in the Integrated Action Plans. Rather the plans should include actions which would otherwise not have been possible whether it is because the learning process have created pathways of discovery or whether it is because stakeholders have been grouped together and find themselves in a situation where they can cooperate to achieve benefits for all parties involved.

Most businesses in the city centre are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). A better functioning and more responsive city centre will make them more competitive if the centre is therefore more attractive as a destination.

The focus on the competitiveness of these businesses in the city centre and the competitiveness of the city centre as a location per se will be the most important criteria for action selection. Using the URBACT method will enable the partner cities to address the following specific challenges related to the Thematic Objective No. 3 namely:

- Learning how to make local economies more sustainable
- Learning more about local consumer preferences
- Learning about how the offer can be tailored to such preferences in a very localised way i.e. conveniently close to home and at flexible hours
- Learning how to make shopping and the work experience in the city centre more enjoyable
- Learning how to establish an eco-system for turning local creativity into jobs

To conclude, the following graphic illustrates how the City Centre Doctor Project fits into the policy context.



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

4. Mobility

Cities with a strong 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' days¹³. 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 2019¹⁴.

The aim is to make city centres cycle-friendly and walkable. This requires a [range of actions](#)¹⁵ such as:

- 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](#)

¹³ 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>

¹⁴ 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>

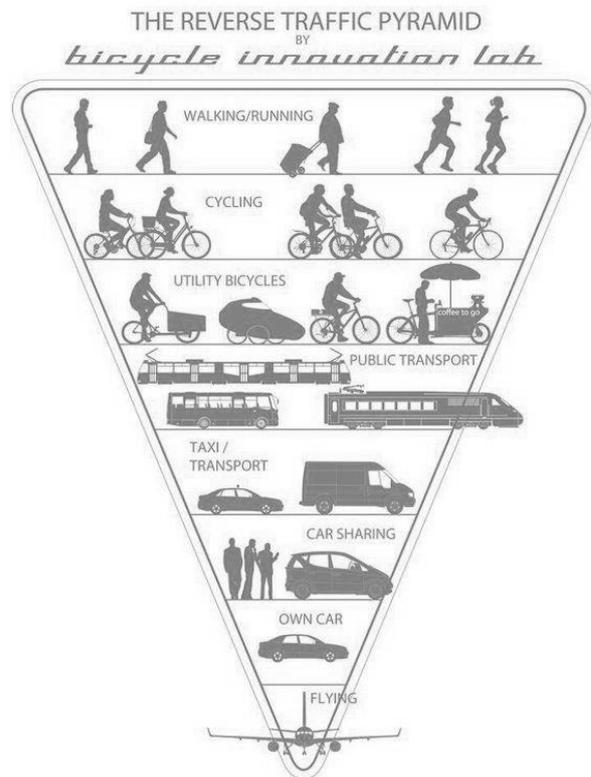
¹⁵ McDonald, M., Hall, R., Sammer, G., Roider, O. & Klementschtz, R. (2010) 'CIVITAS Report on Cycling and Walking' http://www.civitas.eu/sites/default/files/civitas_guard_final_cluster_report_nr_3_cycling_and_walking.pdf

To improve mobility also requires making the city centre more walkable. 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 circuitous routes for residents and visitors to get from point A to point B. With such 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 then 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.

Through better planning and design and in particular the reconfiguration of the layout of streets, laneways and walkways in the city centre, permeability can be increased. 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 for instance the [Permeability Best Practice Guide](#) developed by the National Transport Authority of Ireland¹⁶.

The big step to change a city 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'.

Some cities achieve this by changing their bye-laws to restrict cars in the use of streets and by introducing new designations to streets for example as 'shared streets' where there is no distinct divide of the street into car-lane, cycle-lane and footpath, but where all three modes have equal rights to use of the street¹⁷.



¹⁶ National Transport Authority of Ireland (2015), 'Permeability Best Practice Guide'

https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Permeability_Best_Practice_Guide_NTA_20151.pdf

¹⁷ See for example Auckland City Council's Shared Spaces Programme:

<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/en/planspoliciesprojects/councilprojects/sharedspaces/Pages/home.aspx>

Many cities are guiding change through a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) which is essentially the city's transport masterplan to determine the most effective and sustainable use of the different modes of transport and alignment of infrastructure and services accordingly¹⁸. Local SUMPs have more impact if there is a national policy framework such as the Designing [Streets Policy Statement of the Scottish Government](#)¹⁹ which established principles for transport management in cities and in particular in city centres for example that street design must consider place before movement and therefore the functioning of the place in a city centre has precedence over the free flow of cars.

Another major policy instrument for the local authority is to regulate speed in the city centre. Throughout Europe 30 km/h zones have been created in 160 city centres²⁰. The [benefits](#) include:

- Improved safety and significant reduction in vehicle collisions causing deaths
- Lower CO₂ 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

Most of the partner cities in the City Centre Doctor Project intend to improve mobility in their city centres as a means to increase attractiveness of the city centres as shopping and leisure destinations and to discourage traffic that are passing through and that could use alternative routes.

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)

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

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

²⁰ Table of European cities who have adopted 30km/h zones in their city centres (2015) <http://en.30kmh.eu/files/2015/11/30-kmh-TRENDSSETTER-CITIES.pdf>

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 are pursuing the innovation of existing functions and services that could be of great benefit to their cities and to residents. In a quest to become smart cities, they are also investigating technologies that will impact on the fabric and function of city centres.

'Smart cities' unfortunately can be a faddish label. The temptation is to add the word smart in front of any project with a bit of tech and innovation mixed into its objectives, especially if funding can be chased (e.g. smart people project, smart housing project etc.). The Centre for Cities in the UK advocates that maybe 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'²¹.

There are however significant opportunities for cities to embrace new technologies that could transform how residents relate and interact with their cities. The emerging new practices 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; together with a proliferation of sensors; together with localised renewable solar energy systems; together with cellular phone systems; together with cloud data storage; together with near-field radio frequency communication; mashed with conventional systems and containers such as lamp posts, rubbish bins and bus shelters.

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](#)



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

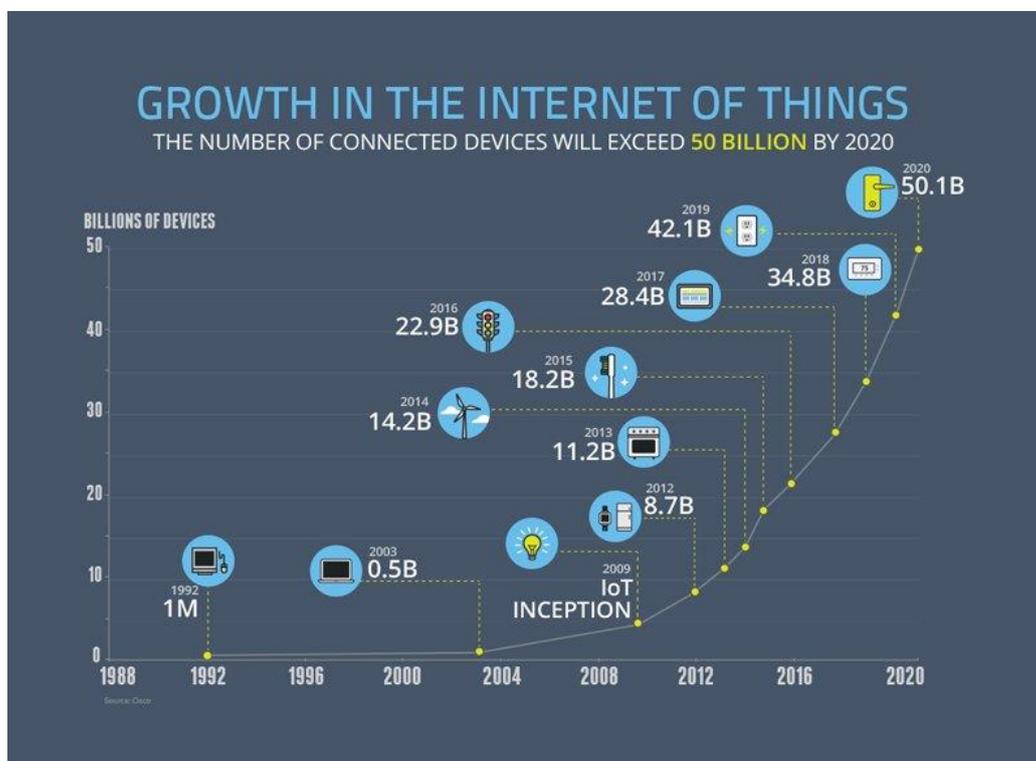
Opportunities to develop specific benefits for fixed features in the city centres include:

- Smart parking
- Smart lighting
- Smart bins
- Real-time traffic apps
- Smart billboards

The above examples are focused on practical improvements of the existing infrastructure in the city centre. These innovations are past pilot phase and it is quite possible that each one will be implemented systematically in the majority of cities over the near to medium term pending resources.

There are however bigger and 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](#)²² together with the increased uptake of automation technology (robotics) and the use of Artificial Intelligence. 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.

The following chart developed by Cisco gives an overview of the exponential growth of the Internet of Things which will see the number of connected devices more than doubled in the next 4 years.



²² 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.

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 a 'drive' from anywhere to wherever you want to go?

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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 project²⁴.

The driverless electric mini-buses used in this project is developed by the Robosoft company and can carry up to 10 people using technologies from GPS to laser to ultrasound for localisation and movement control. New driverless bus systems are also launching in Netherlands and Switzerland.



A new driverless bus system being piloted in the city of Sion, 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 functions²⁵ 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 2023.²⁶

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.

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

²³ 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.

²⁴ 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/>.

²⁵ New cars are equipped with 'driverless' technologies such as Intelligent Park Assist Systems (IPAS) http://atwiki.assistivetech.net/index.php/Intelligent_parking_assist_systems

²⁶ 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>

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 conclusions²⁷:

“If there’s a lesson in street-watching it is that people do like basics — and as environments go, a street that is open to the sky and filled with people and life is a splendid place to be.”

“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.”

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



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

[Quotations](#) from Jane Jacobs²⁸ 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

²⁷ Project for Public Spaces article on William H. Whyte <http://www.pps.org/reference/wwhyte/>

²⁸ Jacobs, J. (1961) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Republished 1991 by Vintage Books, New York

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 early 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 institutions²⁹.

Today the concept of placemaking captures our understanding that through a combination of user-focused design, community participation and the animation of spaces, a great place can evolve depending on the positive responses and reception from people. More importantly, it does not require experts and the authorities to make a public place better. Community-led initiatives are often more successful.

The [Project for Public Spaces](#) concluded that processes of making great places benefit from the following guiding principles³⁰:

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 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.



A tree jersey gifted by a local group in Pori, Finland to the main square of its twin city Eger in Hungary during a study visit of the [URBACT Placemaking4Cities Project](#)

²⁹ 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>

³⁰ Project for Public Spaces, Eleven Principles for creating Great Community Places <http://www.pps.org/reference/11steps>

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 in its current setting responding to the needs of the 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.



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.

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

The development of a great public space will not be 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 will require many experimental improvements and adjustments. The initial actions could include elements such seating (preferably loose chairs), planting, outdoor cafes, public art and murals. It should be an iterative process taking feedback from users, making new observations and improving designs leading to new actions.

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 often also converge and converse with each other in such spaces. For example, if a 'dog run' is designated in the public place and benches are placed nearby together with a space for a food kiosk or an ice-cream cart, people may congregate in this space and not only the dog owners.

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. To get resources

allocated to help with a public place project often requires the persuasion of professionals, departments and even store managers to see value to expand their area of work to include elements of the public 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 however 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.



A re-designed street where two car lanes have been converted to a bike path and a walk way. The accommodation of trees, greening, tables and chairs indicate that in this case form supports function with the improvements to the public 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 behaviour and preferences of people will impact on the uses and value of the public place. Those who invested time and effort in the development of the public place should be open to the possibility of 'taking down' elements to make room for new features in the public place. Such flexibility is a hallmark of great places.

Today the placemaking approach is not only confined to the open space which can be turned into a nice park or playground, but it is an approach to how the spaces between buildings especially in city centres connect and relate to each other. It is also not just 'physical-making' activity, but also 'experience-making' activity that is essential to co-create a great place. In 2015 the Scottish Government published a [Town Centre Toolkit](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/stpfiles/resources/Town-Centre-Action-Plan-Masterplanning-Toolkit.pdf) that for the purposes of placemaking includes the following broad guidelines³¹:

³¹ The Scottish Government Town Centre Toolkit (2015) <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/stpfiles/resources/Town-Centre-Action-Plan-Masterplanning-Toolkit.pdf>

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

The exercise is 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 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.

The key is to plan interventions that will encourage human activity and interaction on the pavement and entering the buildings. Lack of interventions on the other hand could become an 'invitation' for graffiti.

d) 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 tools 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 plan and create displays to improve the look and feel of the shop and therefore attract more customers.

e) Greening public spaces

Parks and playgrounds are not the only 'green spaces' that should be 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.



A pavement park in Paris

The greening of spaces is essential to create a welcoming atmosphere in public places.

f) Organising an events programme

Each city wants to organise well-known large events - especially festivals - that they believe enhance the city's reputation. Besides costs, large events have a downside - it often requires 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 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 [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 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. Often the concern is that the public spaces are not safe. The disappointing 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.

It is evident that the 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.

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 population³². To access the Internet, 74% use 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 Millennials³³.

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

- The Millennials total more than 80 million in the US population 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 company³⁴. Nielsen goes as far to suggest that they are abandoning the 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 and Lyft in ridesharing and Zipcar and DriveNow in renting cars by the hour. These services are all

³² 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>

³³ US Chamber of Commerce Foundation (2013), 'The Millennial Generation Research Review' <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/reports/millennial-generation-research-review>

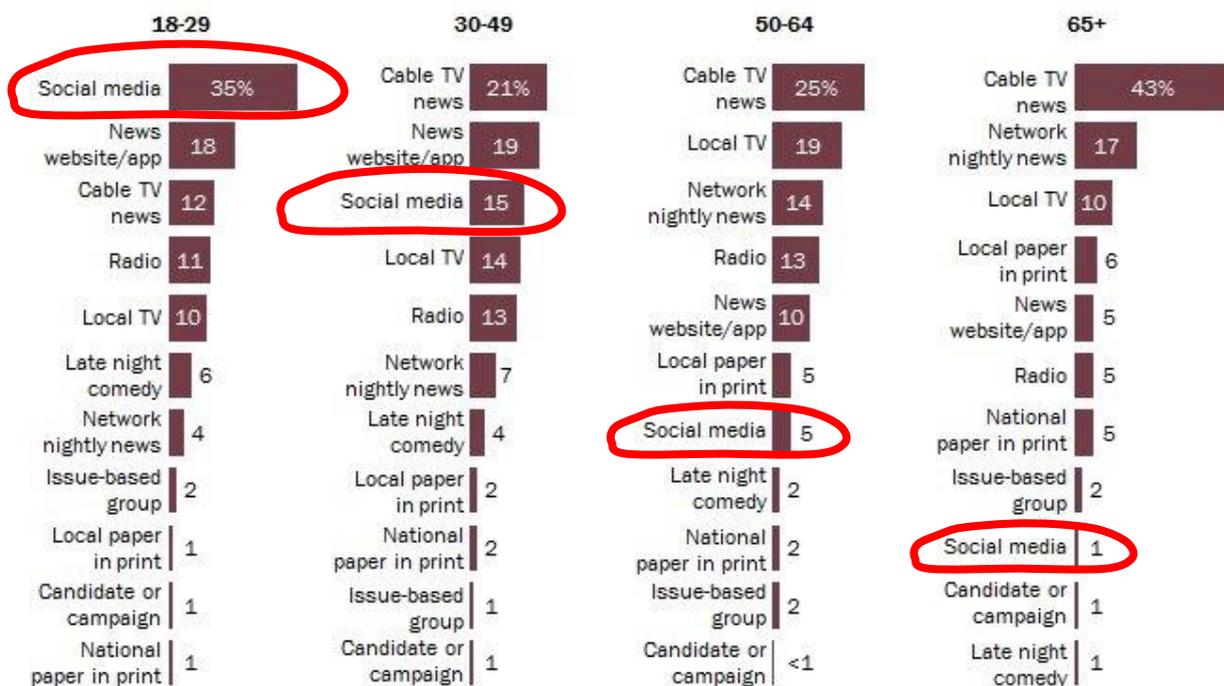
³⁴ Nielsen (2014), 'Millennials prefer cities to suburbs, subways to driveways' <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2014/millennials-prefer-cities-to-suburbs-subways-to-driveways.html>

possible through apps on their mobile phones. More than 50% of Millennials indicated in a Zogby survey that they use rideshare apps³⁵.

Pew Research recently 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 Election³⁶.

About a third of 18 to 29-year-olds name social media as most helpful type of source for learning about the 2016 presidential election

Among those who learned about the 2016 presidential election in the past week, % who say the most helpful type of source is ...



Source: Survey conducted Jan. 18-27, 2016

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

It graphically demonstrates how differently the Millennials are sourcing information compared to other older age cohorts with social media and news apps their main sources. 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 could 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 the young people in these cities would likely be more inclined to believe a tweet shared by an on-line 'friend' from the United States than for instance a statement in the national printed media.

³⁵ The G Brief (2015), 'Millennials help Ridesharing Redefine the Way We Get Around'

<http://thebrief.com/articles/millennials-help-ridesharing-redefine-the-way-we-get-around-546>

³⁶ 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/>

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.

The big 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 consideration 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 re-imagining their city and in particular the re-sized offer of services and changes in land-uses in the city centre. Their thinking is that a city resets for a new era of shrinking and could in future again resume a growth phase³⁷. The city therefore 'moves on', instead of holding out to somehow retain their young people, who after all, want to venture into a wider world.

It is also possibly more productive 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 innovation³⁸. A dialogue and experimentation phase could start involving 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)

³⁷ 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

³⁸ 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

8. The local economy

A vibrant city centre is also 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 the local economy.

The challenge has also been extensively examined in other URBACT projects. In a capitalisation of the work of these projects in URBACT II, Campbell and Partridge (2013) make the following suggestions for cities to consider³⁹:

- Affect the internal demand in the local economy by stimulating local spending through promotion of local produce and services, 'buy local' campaigns and initiating community currencies
- Support local companies to export and access new markets
- Nurture an outward-looking and cosmopolitan local business culture that is open for expansion into new fields
- 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 reputation as business-friendly i.e. removing barriers to entry for new investment and assist with attracting talent and financing
 - ✓ 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 the case if it has the attractions and activities to stimulate business transactions, in particular retail sales.

³⁹ 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

The retail sector is a prominent element of economic activity in city centres. A cluster of well-presented shops is the best indicator of a vibrant location. The ambition of most cities is to be proud of the array and quality of their shops in the city centre. The opposite is also true. There is no clearer sign that a city centre is 'run-down', stale and not doing well than when the shops are not well presented and if there are many vacant shops.

The [Institute of Place Management](#) at Manchester Metropolitan University has done extensive research on the UK 'high streets' which are the areas in the city centres where retail is concentrated. Their research is to determine the factors that lead to a successful high street and conversely the factors leading to a failing high street. 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 centre⁴⁰.

PRIORITY	CONSIDERATIONS
1. ACTIVITY HOURS	Ensuring the centre is open when the catchment needs it. What are the shopping hours? Is there an evening economy? Do the activity hours of the centre match the needs of the catchment?
2. APPEARANCE	Improving the quality of the visual appearance. How clean is the centre?
3. RETAILERS	Offering the right type and quantity of retailers. What retailers are represented?
4. VISION & STRATEGY	Having a common vision and some leadership. Do the High Street stakeholders collaborate? Is the vision incorporated in local plans?
5. EXPERIENCE	Considering the quality of the experience? Measuring levels of service quality and visitor satisfaction. What is the image of the centre?
6. MANAGEMENT	Building capacity to get things done. Is there effective management – of the shopping centre(s) and town centre?
7. MERCHANDISE	Meeting the needs of the catchment. What is the range and quality of goods on offer?
8. NECESSITIES	Ensuring basic facilities are present and maintained. Is there appropriate car-parking; amenities; general facilities, like places to sit down and toilets etc.?
9. ANCHORS	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.
10. NETWORKS & PARTNERSHIPS WITH COUNCIL	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?)
11. DIVERSITY	A multi-functional centre. What attractions are there, apart from retail? What is the tenant mix and tenant variety?
12. WALKING	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?

⁴⁰ 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>

13. ENTERTAINMENT AND LEISURE	An entertainment and leisure offer. What is it? Is it attractive to various segments of the catchment?
14. ATTRACTIVENESS	The 'pulling power' of a centre. Can it attract people from a distance?
15. PLACE ASSURANCE	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?
16. ACCESSIBLE	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.
17. PLACE MARKETING	Communicating the offer. How does the centre market and promote itself? Do all stakeholders communicate a consistent image? How well does the centre orientate visitors and encourage flow – with signage and guides etc.
18. COMPARISON / CONVENIENCE	The amount of comparison shopping opportunities compared to convenience (usually in percentage terms). Is this sustainable?
19. RECREATIONAL SPACE	The amount and quality of recreational areas and public space/open space. Are there places that are uncommodified? Where people can enjoy spending time without spending money?
20. BARRIERS TO ENTRY	Refers to obstacles that make it difficult for interested retailers to enter the centre's/High Street's market. What is the location doing to make it easier for new businesses to come onto the High Street?
21. CHAIN VS INDEPENDENT	Number of multiples stores and independent stores in the retail mix of a centre/High Street. Is this suitably balanced?
22. SAFETY / CRIME	A centre KPI measuring perceptions or actual crime including shoplifting. Perceptions of crime are usually higher than actual crime rates. Does the centre monitor these and how does it communicate results to stakeholders?
23. LIVEABLE	The resident population or potential for residential in the centre. Does the centre offer the services/environment that residents need? Doctors, schools etc.
24. ADAPTABILITY	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.
25. STORE DEVELOPMENT	The willingness for retailers / property owners to develop their stores. Are they willing to coordinate/cooperate in updating activities? Or do they act independently (or not at all!).

Clearly 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 Ireland⁴¹ or [Louvain la Neuve](#) in Belgium⁴², while in many other cities a special company is formed called a Business Improvement District Company (BID) to manage the above factors.

In the case of BIDs there is usually legislation allowing the BID company to put a levy on all the businesses to fund the BID area management programme. The company has to

⁴¹ Waterford City Council (2013), 'Waterford City Centre Management Plan' <http://www.waterfordcouncil.ie/en/media/BUSINESS/Reports/Waterford%20City%20Centre%20Management%20Plan%202013.pdf>

⁴² The Partnership in Town Centre Management <http://www.tocema-europe.com/dbfiles/cahier1En.pdf>

be reinstated by the businesses via a plebiscite every 5 years⁴³. Research shows that in New York with its 56 BID companies, the larger BIDs are more successful in creating an impact where property values increase⁴⁴.

A key consideration for the partner cities in the City Centre Doctor Project will be how these priority factors are managed in their city centre and if the URBACT Local Group can establish a foundation for a future city centre management mechanism.

A specific focus for partner cities will be how they can encourage their 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 Innovation⁴⁵ found that there are four aspects that partner cities in the City Centre Doctor Project will have to take in consideration in their understanding of the possibilities for 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. Examples on the technology side include mobile point-of-sale payment systems and beacon sensors. On the non-technological side retailers are well positioned to learn and understand changing consumer behaviour and preferences and in response, are able to develop new offerings and key messages (in advertising for example).
- 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.

⁴³ 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_Guide.pdf

⁴⁴ Furman Centre, New York University (2007) *The Benefits of Business Improvement Districts: Evidence from New York City* <http://furmancenter.org/files/publications/FurmanCenterBIDsBrief.pdf>

⁴⁵ 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

Possibly the most exciting new development to explore by partner cities is the opportunity to initiate start-up eco-systems in their city centres. If cities want to encourage entrepreneurs to start businesses, in particular young people in their city centres, then creating the following elements in their city centres are important⁴⁶:

- Create an atmosphere for young entrepreneurs to link with each other through shared events, activities, locations and interactions (e.g. meet-ups, seminars, 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 (for example if people want to bring their pets to work, don't stand in their way) and ease of access
- Provide startup 'infrastructure' such as coffee shops, bike lanes and broadband
- Import supports such as mentoring, seed funding and access to accelerator and scaling opportunities
- Connect local entrepreneurs to established businesses and large companies
- Initiate startup competitions for entrepreneurs to pitch ideas and concepts to venture capital firms and angel investors
- Connect the city's startup community to similar communities in other cities
- **Listen to the needs of young entrepreneurs and find ways to innovate and respond.**

The best indicator of the ecosystem taking off in the city 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.



Entrepreneurs grabbing a bite to eat at the Dogpatch Lab, one of the bigger co-working spaces in Dublin

⁴⁶ Startup Commons (2016) 'What is Startup Ecosystem?' <http://www.startupcommons.org/what-is-startup-ecosystem.html>

As Rameet Chawla (2013) points out the value is however not confined to affordable well-designed and well-located work spaces. He asserts that 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 entrepreneurs⁴⁷.

But the unstructured exchanges that take place at the coffee machine are the real amenities. The knowledge and experience of your peers and small, informal interactions around the printer can spark new ideas.

The incentive is there for partner cities to establish mechanisms to develop co-working spaces that meet the above requirements. The URBACT Local Group could be the forum where the initiatives and momentum are started to identify spaces and resources and the learning to create such new work environments in the city centre.

Researchers at Harvard University have found after surveying people working in co-working spaces across the United States that their job satisfaction rates are very high in the following ways⁴⁸:

- They tend to see their work as meaningful
- They have more job control
- They feel part of a community

Hopefully this is one of the healthy initiatives that the partner cities in the City Centre Doctor Project will explore in their action planning process.

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](#)

⁴⁷ Chawla, R. (2013) 'What is the Top Benefit of Co-working Spaces?' <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/230446>

⁴⁸ 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 cannot remain viable if it is dominated by cars. The challenge and opportunity is there to develop new mobility options for residents and visitors and thereby make the centre safer, more walkable and more liveable. Such a centre will have more footfall and hence potential for growth for local businesses.

The city centre should also not just remain the same with a strong emphasis on preservation because then it will be treated as a museum or sculpted gallery. New technologies will enable new smart infrastructure and ways to re-purpose existing elements of the built environment.

The revitalising of the city centre should be focused on the future generations working and living in the city (i.e. sustainable development). This will require an understanding of what is important for the younger generation. It is evident that their world will be much more connected and positive utilising new technologies as well as much less driven by today's and yesterday's status symbols such as car ownership and living in big houses in the suburbs.

The city centre itself has an enhanced role in how residents identify with their city and place. More and more people will not be satisfied to leave the development of the centre to the professionals. There are many examples of more 'bottom-up' community-led processes to improve the city centres and these initiatives are captured in what is loosely categorised as placemaking. The paper covers a range of opportunities where volunteers and lay persons in a city can work with agencies and professionals to effect transformative change.

The single thread running through the whole paper is however that the vitality and vibrancy of the city centre is dependent on the ability to generate and sustain jobs in the city centre and hence how the local economy can be managed and stimulated. For example, the profound changes in the retail sector brought about by the impact of online trading and changes in consumer behaviour is visible in city centres and requires a new approach. Furthermore, the impact of the Great Recession has concentrated the minds at local level and have 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 the municipality is not going to be the problem-solver and neither should it be the bogeyman to 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.

More than fifty years ago when the Internet was not remotely a possibility, Jane Jacobs called such processes to revitalise and sustain a city "organized complexity" i.e. an understanding that it depends on the dynamic inter-relationships of systems, processes and self-organization and that we therefore should apply a "web way of thinking" i.e. move away from our simplifying formulas in our professions and disciplines and rather seek the catalytic changes that networks of dynamic relationships can bring⁴⁹. She believed in "the inherent regenerative force of self-diversification" that occurs when people live together in a city and even at neighbourhood level. Thus expect the unexpected.

The [URBACT Programme](#) and the URBACT method 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 centre⁵⁰.

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

⁴⁹ Mehaffy, M. (2011) 'The Power of Jane Jacobs' "Web Way of Thinking"

<http://www.planetizen.com/node/53128>

⁵⁰ See the European Commission's outline of Integrated Sustainable Urban Development

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2014/integrated-sustainable-urban-development

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