



City Centre Doctor Project

Guidance Note: Place Analysis



Rationale

The **Place Analysis** of the city centres in the partner cities participating in the *City Centre Doctor Project* is the 2nd stage of the 5 stage process to develop integrated action plans to revitalise the city centre. The 1st stage was to establish a structure, the URBACT Local Group (ULG), to facilitate this process and that will ensure participation of the key stakeholders in the development of the action plans.

The purpose of this guidance note is to help the ULGs in the partner cities to conduct their place analysis and to prepare a report for circulation to their stakeholders and to their other project partners.

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

Why go through the trouble to do a place analysis?

In an integrated planning process, it is always useful to start with the identification of the problem. The problem is never a single issue to be resolved. Often people (stakeholders) have different perspectives on what the actual issues are and want to push for their preferred solutions.

To ensure a participative process where the problem is not defined from only one or two perspectives, it is useful to facilitate a discussion among stakeholders based on factual or evidence-based inputs. The city profiles in the project's baseline study are very helpful for instance. However, the ULG can also do its own fact finding.

In the case of city centres, many factors influence the functioning of the city centre. It is therefore important to describe the place (city centre) using data and comparisons (both historical and with other places). To do this the ULG can use its resources to find existing data sources and reports as well as initiate new information through surveys and structured observations.

What are the tools that the project agreed to use to gather information about the place?

In the Kick-off meeting in Heerlen the project refined and tested two tools for gathering data namely a place survey questionnaire and a place observation sheet.

Place Survey Questionnaire

The place survey questionnaire aims to gather information about how users of the city centre perceive their city centre. See Appendix A.

The questionnaire can be in a printed or online format and should be translated into the home language/s of each partner city.

The goal is for each partner to administer the survey questionnaire to a minimum of 150 participants who are visiting, shopping, working or living in the city centre.

When you translate the questionnaire, please make sure that the numbering and sequence of questions are in the same order as the original questionnaire in English. This will help when we try to capture data from all the partner cities which can be used in future research projects.

As agreed you can add your own questions at the end of the questionnaire, but please include no more than 3 to 5 questions. Some participants were suggesting to add questions about how the interviewees perceive the municipality. It could be useful to wait with such questions for the Ideas and Community Engagement Stage of the project when there will be more opportunities to engage in constructive community conversations on such topics.

Place observation sheet

The place observation sheet allows a group of observers to assess the uses and users of a specific public space in the city centre. The observation sheet was amended in the Kick-off meeting so that the first task for observers to be the drawing of an explanation map showing key features of the public space. The questions that the observers are trying to answer stays the same. See Appendix B.

It is the decision of the ULG which public spaces in the city centre they choose where they want to make observations. The purpose of the observations will be to identify if the public space is used by people and how the space measures according to the metrics in the place diagram developed by the Project for Public Spaces (http://www.pps.org/pdf/place_diagram_8x11.PDF).

As you may recall from our discussions in the Kick-off meeting, it is not meaningful to conduct a once-only place observation. The exercise should be repeated on different days and at different times of the day/night. If you have been able to do the observation on at least three different days and at three different times, you will be able to make a more informed analysis of the current use and value of the public space.

Please ensure that for each observation session (for which 30 to 45 minutes should be adequate time) an observation sheet is completed. The sheet should also include a record of the date and time and names of the observers. All the observation sheets become the reference material for analysis and should be kept and stored as official project materials.

What other data can be used to analyse the city centre?

This will depend on what data sources are available and will vary for each partner city. Therefore, it is not a requirement to have additional data sources. In fact, the lack of sources may inspire stakeholders to establish more instruments (sensors) to measure data in the city centre.

In some cities data will be available from pedestrian footfall and cycling counters that will give an insight into the volume and spread of people in the city centre at different times of day/night. These counters are for example used in shopping centres and are also sometimes installed by municipalities. Maybe that is the case in your city?

If your municipality is busy with or have completed a transport infrastructure project, it usually also included a count of the vehicles using roads in the area (city centre). Such a report could be a useful reference, especially if a element you wish to focus on in your report is mobility in the city centre.

There are also data from instruments and sensors typically used by retailers (e.g. beacons and Points-of-Sale instruments) which give them accurate information about their customers. It could be

possible through the business sector on your ULG to get some statistics from retailers such as which are the busy shopping days and hours and maybe a profile of shoppers for specific categories of retail. Make sure the data is anonymised to comply with data protection guidelines and laws.

The real estate agents/property brokers in your city will also give valuable information on the prices of property in the various categories such as rent – retail; rent – office; rent – restaurant/bar; rent – apartments; purchase price – commercial; purchase price – apartments. Price is still the best indicator of the ‘economic health’ of a city centre.

Another source is for instance Google Maps which gives live data (real-time) about vehicle traffic in your city centre as well as a map of cycle friendly routes in your city centre. Just find your city centre on Google Maps and use the drop down menu, then click on ‘traffic’ or ‘bicycle’.

Finally, there could be Census data specific to the population areas in your city centre that could be of interest. When you are analysing Census data it is always useful to compare against similar areas or across a historical timeline. For example, if your city has an aging population this will be clear from comparing data from previous censuses as well as against the average for the country.

How will the ULG identify ‘the problem’?

Usually there are a number of problems that will coincide also with the passion of people in the room. These problems are of course valid, but the aim of an integrated planning process is to focus on the problems that require a collaborative approach among local stakeholders and will impact on economic, social and environmental dimensions. The search is not for THE problem, but for the problems that the group can work on.

The purpose of using data and other points of view is to make sure that there is a constructive debate. A discussion of the problems referencing the collected data should therefore be facilitated by the ULG Coordinator.

Breaking into smaller groups is a very good approach to encourage participation. To get good discussions, the ULG Coordinator should prepare good questions that the groups will answer. The ULG Coordinator can either choose to have all the groups deal with the same questions or sometimes if you have to deal with many questions the ULG Coordinator can divide up the questions between the groups.

An important part of the process is for participants to actively listen to each other’s perspectives, without entering in a ‘blame game’. To help set the tone for the meeting it is very good to start with getting participants to agree ground rules. The Values and Vision agreed for the City Centre Doctor Project is a useful guide. The ULG Coordinator can present that to the groups and then ask also for other rules that the groups suggest and agree.

The small groups should share their perspectives in the bigger group (plenary) – and this will present the ULG with a ‘richer picture’ of issues and problems in the city centre. From this plenary discussion the ULG Coordinator will clarify and consolidate issues. A very good practical way is to use *Post-Its* for small groups to write down the issues/problems that they identified and then you could have all the *Post-Its* placed on a wall.

The ULG Coordinator can ask the group to prioritise the problems by voting through using colour dots – maybe Blue for No 1, Green for No 2 and Yellow for No 3 etc. It will be important to focus only on a ‘manageable’ number of problems (in my experience more than 5 or 6 becomes difficult for a ULG to manage).

Once the problem/s are agreed by the ULG a number of tools could be used to analyse the problem/s with the available data.

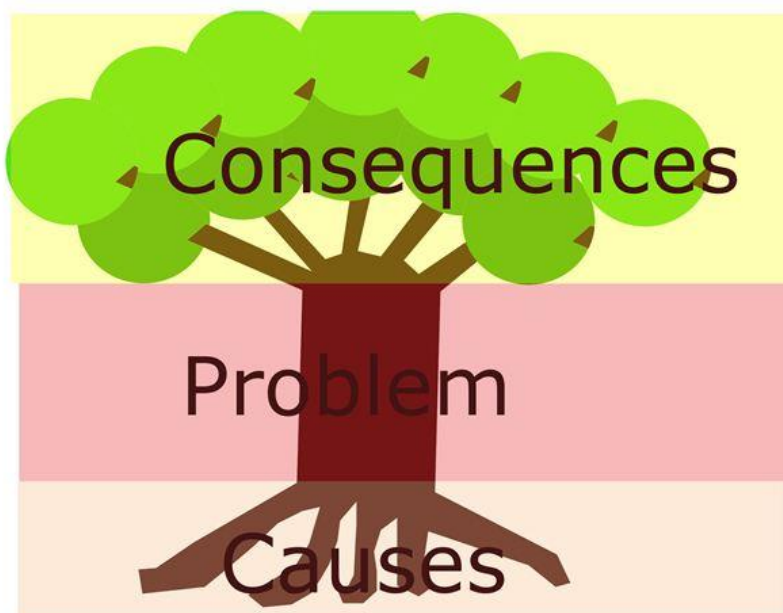
What are useful tools to help the ULG analyse the problem/s?

There are a number of tools that the ULG Coordinator could consider to use. See for instance the [URBACT Toolkit](#).

For the purpose of the City Centre Doctor Project it is proposed to use the problem tree, the place diagram and a traditional SWOT analysis.

Problem tree

The problem tree assists the ULG to conceptualise a problem (or challenge) from the perspective of the consequences (or symptoms) which are observable in the city centre. For example, if the problem is a lack of adequate cycle lanes and pavements/footpaths in the city centre, some of the consequences (the branches) could be traffic congestion and parking spaces taking over public spaces. Some of the causes (the roots) of the problem could be a cultural affinity/preference for using cars and lack of funds for building cycle lanes.



It is useful for the ULG to produce a problem tree for each identified problem. Once the ULG completed a problem tree, please capture the result with a photograph – that can also be included in the Place Analysis Report.

Also note that each problem should be written as a specific objective. This becomes important when the ULG starts developing and considering ideas for possible actions. Sometimes we see or hear a nice idea that we also want to implement. A simple test is to ask if the implementation of such an idea will help with achieving the objective.

Place diagram

The place diagram shown below was developed by the [Project for Public Spaces](#). The quality and use of public spaces in the city centre is a very good indicator of the vibrancy and also the vitality of the city centre. As discussed in the Kick-off meeting in Heerlen, public spaces are more than just parks or other designated 'open spaces'. It is also very much about the pavements and the streets and the way spaces between buildings are used by people.

To do an analysis of the observed spaces, the diagram guides the ULG to consider four themes namely Sociability, Uses & Activities, Comfort & Image, and Access & Linkages. The Place Observation sheet is designed to gather data in terms of these themes. The diagram includes lists of indicators for each theme (e.g. evening use in the Sociability theme and property values in the Uses & Activities theme). Each indicator points to a source of data. The more information the ULG can gather, the more accurate will be the picture of how the public space operates as an attribute of the city centre.



The main value of the place diagram is to give an overall picture how all the elements can be 'viewed together' that make up an evaluation of the quality of public spaces (in other words to get to a bigger picture that goes beyond the anecdotal). The ULG should in the end make its own decision about the public spaces in the city centre. By using the elements in the diagram, the ULG can possibly explain or justify why it makes certain conclusions on the public spaces in the city centre.

SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis is the conclusions arrived by a group about the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that typify their organisation or place. It is developed as a business tool and mainly used to enable an organisation to view how it compares with its competition.

The SWOT analysis is appropriate to use for city centres because city centres compete with other localities whether it is shopping centres in the suburbs or on the periphery, or whether it is the city centres of neighbouring cities in the region.

The diagram below provides good questions for the ULG to conduct a SWOT analysis. Again this is possibly done best by first discussing in small groups and then ‘pulling’ the main conclusions together in a plenary session.



Source: Adapted from templates used at [creately.com](https://www.creately.com)

The tendency is often to look at the negative first. This tool works best when the group ‘disciplines’ itself to first consider the positives. If participants raise negative elements/factors while discussing the positives, park it for discussion at the appropriate time. Also, don’t be too worried about when an element or characteristic should be placed in the external or internal boxes. Remember, it is a tool – and it is fine how the ULG decides to categorise an element in whichever quadrant.

What should be included in the Place Analysis report?

A good way to put a report together is to start with a summary (no more than half a page) and then to discuss all the conclusions in the first few pages. This is so because many people 'scan' reports which means they tend to skip large parts of a report.

In describing the conclusions, reference should be made to data sources.

It is also useful to have a short chapter on the process of the Place Analysis, maybe maximum one page.

Thereafter it is important to add the actual results of your place surveys and observations. The best way to do it is to use each question from the survey or observation sheet as a sub-heading and then to put the relevant data below the sub-heading. The data could also be in the form of a graph or a table or a list of answers. See example below.

The time it takes to walk from your residence (where you live) to the city centre:		
< 10 minutes	78	42.3%
10 – 19 minutes	65	35.3%
20 – 29 minutes	23	12.5%
30+ minutes	18	9.8%
N = 184		

You could order the report by putting the results in Appendices. So for example the Place Analysis Survey Results could be Appendix I; the Place Observation Results for Public Space A could be Appendix II; the Place Observation Results for Public Space B could be Appendix III; etc. This should make it easier to make references in your discussion of the conclusions.

A final page should include a list of participants in the ULG and acknowledgements to all volunteers and other helpers to make the process possible. Please remember to also acknowledge URBACT that is the co-funder of the Project.

What other features could be included in the Place Analysis report?

There are a number of ways that the report can be made more readable, interesting and informative for the reader. Consider for instance the use of maps, photographs and hyperlinks.

City centre map

So often we assume people and readers know what we are talking or writing about. This is often the case when we describe features and landmarks in our city centre. To our surprise people are confused, because either they don't have the same knowledge of the city centre or a different perspective on the city centre.

It is therefore prudent to insert a map of the city centre in the report. It will be useful if there is agreement in the ULG on the defined area that can be earmarked on the map as part of the city

centre. In some cities the boundaries of the city centre are not always so clear cut. This should be mentioned in the report if it is the case of your city centre.

Maps are also not only pathfinders. Maps can be useful ‘displays’ of data. This was demonstrated by the presentation from the WeGovNow project during the Kick-off meeting. If possible it could be very informative if the ULG can develop an interactive map of the city centre using for instance OpenStreetMap technology to indicate key information of the city centre such as retail and service categories. Different layers can be developed for the map for example showing which streets are busy after 7pm or which shops are open after 7pm; where are the empty shops each month; ‘heat’ maps for footfall, congestion, night time activity etc. and other forms of data visualisation.

Other map forms to consider include story maps which are not cartographically accurate, but are indicative of features or elements that the map maker wants to highlight. It can be done by artists who for instance want to point out features of public spaces to illustrate a point.

Photographs

Adding photographs is usually the easy part of putting a report together. There is however a fine balance to get it right. Too many photographs detract the attention of the reader to the key concepts conveyed in the text. Only photographs that illustrate a point made in the text or visualise an issue or event should be selected.

Also pay attention to the quality of the photograph and the byte size. If the byte size is over 500k, please use software to reduce the size. Often the photographs in a report makes it a file that is too big to download because many organisations placing restrictions on the size of files attached to e-mails that can be received in the inboxes of their employees.

It is also good practice to acknowledge who the photographer is just below the photograph. If it is for example from a database such as the municipality’s photographic library, it can be acknowledged as sourced from the organisation’s archive.

Hyperlinks

A good report also allows the reader to click through using hyperlinks to sources and other matters of interest referred to in the text and available online. A hyperlink is when the word is underlined and in blue, for example the word URBACT can be hyperlinked and then take the reader to the website i.e. [URBACT](#).

Final words

The report is one of the first products of the work of the ULG. It should be celebrated!

We agreed that the report will be approximately 20 pages. If it is more, it is not a problem.

The report can be in both languages – English and the home language of choice. The report will be used by URBACT and possibly other European agencies for research purposes and therefore it is important that it is published (pdf) in English (European English is fine; this is not a competition to use the Queen’s English).

The most cost effective way to publish and to distribute the report is probably via pdf format. Please make sure that all the stakeholders in your city and especially the policy decision makers receive a report. Invite comments!

The publication of the report is an opportunity to facilitate a discussion on city centre revitalisation on local media platforms. Expect a standard question namely what will you be doing with the results – this is the opportunity to explain the project and communicate the development of the integrated action plan to be published at the latest in March 2018.

Also, it is useful to remember that the project's process is designed to be an ongoing discussion among stakeholders. You can expect participants to change their mind where what was believed to be the issues or strengths or threats at the time of writing the Place Analysis Report, could be viewed differently in 6 or 12 months' time and might be reviewed and redefined – and that is fine – the most important thing is a learning process where participants gain greater insight into the dynamics of their city centre and possible actions to address challenges to improve and revitalise the centre.

Below in Appendix I and Appendix II, please find the agreed templates of the City Centre Survey and the Place Observation Sheet.

Finally, I hope the Place Analysis Stage will have been a worthwhile exercise for members of the ULG to gain insight into the challenges and opportunities for their city centre AND for members to have learnt more about each other and themselves.

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City Centre Doctor Project

Appendix I



City Centre Doctor Project Survey



Perceptions of the city centre

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

A. Place of residence (where you live):

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

E. Gender:

- 1 Female
- 2 Male
- 3 Transgender/Fluid

F. Age:

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

G. Occupation:

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

H. Education (highest qualification):

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

T. Where is your favourite place for shopping?

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

U. Where is your favourite place for leisure activities?

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

V. Where do you prefer to work?

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

W. Where do you prefer to do business?

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

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

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

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

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



Appendix II



City Centre Doctor Project Survey

Observations of a public space in the city centre

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

Name of public space: _____

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

Date of observation: _____

Times of observation (from and to): _____

Persons involved in the observation:

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

Outline map of the main features of the public space

Make a map of the designated public space

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

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

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

Access & linkages

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

Can people easily walk to the place?

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

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

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

Comfort & Image

Does the place make a good first impression?

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

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

Does the area feel safe?

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

Do vehicles dominate pedestrian use of the space?

Uses & Activities (Animation)

Are people using the space or is it empty?

Is it used by people of different ages?

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

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

Are there choices of things to do?

Is there a management presence, or can you identify anyone who is in charge of the space?

Sociability

Is this a place where you would choose to meet your friends? Are others meeting friends here or running into them?

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

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

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

Do people use the place regularly and by choice?

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