



City Centre Doctor Project Guidance Note: Ideas Generation



Rationale

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

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

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

Why go through the trouble to organise ideas generation activities?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

Then there is some fancy names for intensive idea generation workshops which often also involve prototyping those ideas (these events sometimes go on for whole weekends) such as a [hackathon](#), [boot camp](#), [deep diving](#) and [living labs](#). My suggestion is to maybe consider such activities that are more resource intensive as possible actions in the action plan if the ULG wants to pursue such intensive workshops in the future.

How should the ULG deal with 'unrealistic' ideas?

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

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

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

Which groups should be targeted for ideas generation activities?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

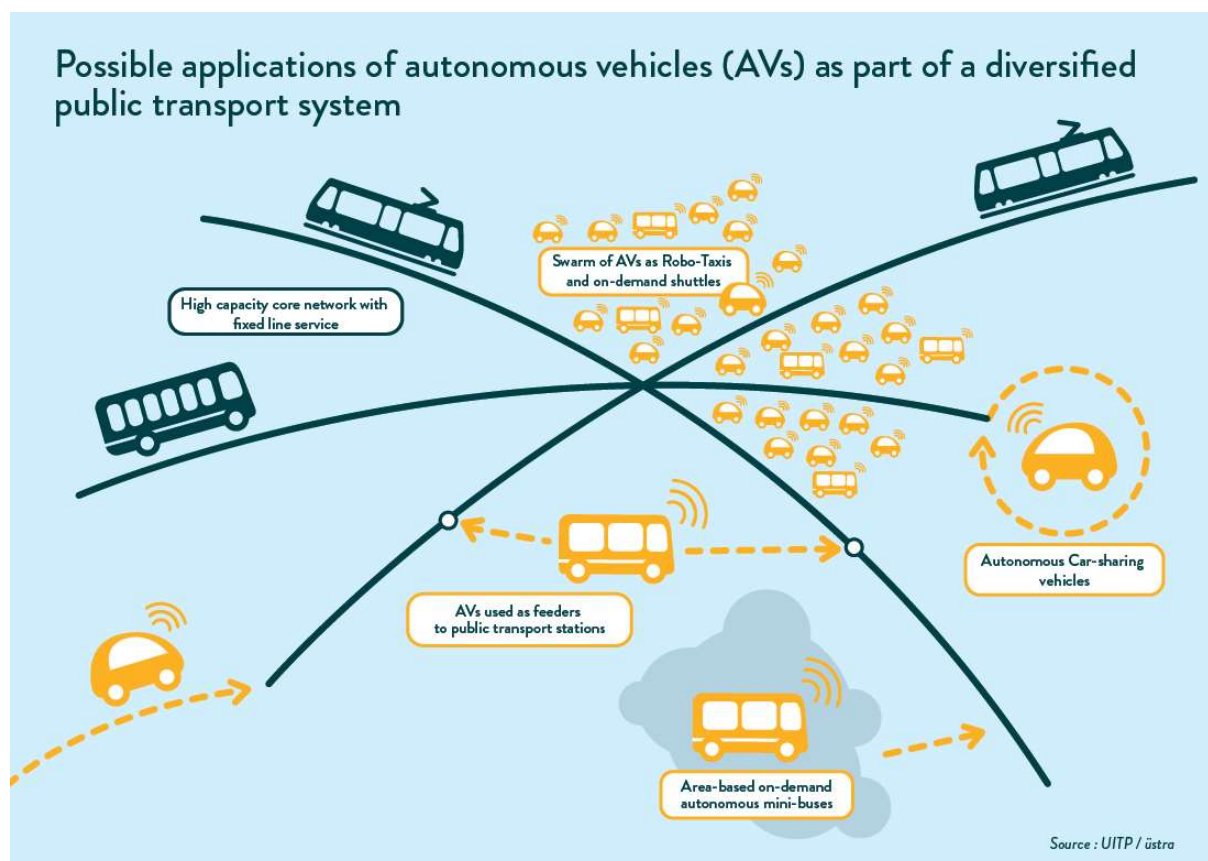
The knowledge and creativity of experts and professionals remain very valuable for our ideas generation events. In fact, the role of experts should be influential in any of the stages of the integrated action planning process.

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

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

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

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



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

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

No	Description of idea	City Centre Issue	Suggested by?

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

Glad you asked!

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

How should the ideas generation stage be documented?

Catalogue

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

Photographs and videos

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

Final words

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

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

Wessel Badenhorst

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3rd February 2017

Appendix I



City Centre Doctor Project Example of an Ideas Cafe



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

Steps:

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



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

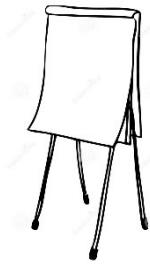


The menu should have one or two items related to the problems and issues identified in the place analysis report. A short description of the items should include some statistics or observations to inform the discussions.

The menu at each table should be different!

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

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



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

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

4. Invite participants to 'mingle'.

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

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

5. Create an ideas wall.

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

Ask participants to vote with colour stickers for the following:

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

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

6. Communicate with participants after the event.

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

Appendix II



City Centre Doctor Project Example of an Ideas Exhibition



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

Steps:

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

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



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

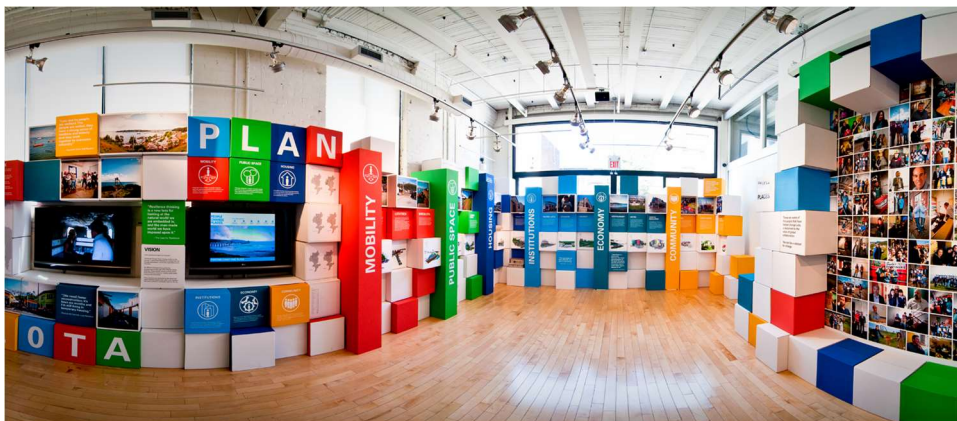
2. Engage artists and designers to create visual presentations of ideas.

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

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

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

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



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

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

3. Create a narrative.

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

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

4. Make an event out of the event!

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

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

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

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

5. Make videos out of the events!

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

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

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