

## BETA ACTIONS

### Testing ideas and preparing for change

Case studies from the partner cities in the City Centre Doctor Project



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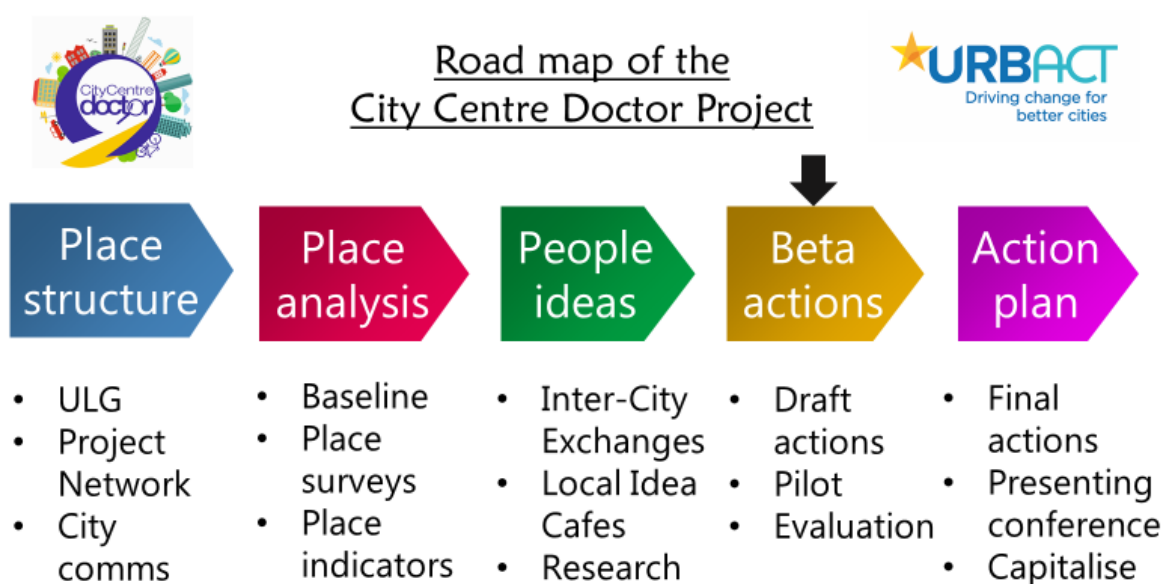
## Introduction

The **City Centre Doctor Project** created the means for ten small cities from across Europe to analyse the challenges to revitalise their city centres as well as to create a platform in each city for local stakeholders to explore ideas and opportunities for new innovative actions.

The partner cities all developed Integrated Action Plans following an intensive process of participatory action planning within a framework provided and co-funded by URBACT III, a Territorial Cohesion Programme of the European Union.

The URBACT method is a tested framework for action planning that requires participating cities to establish a multi-stakeholder steering group (called the URBACT Local Group or ULG) that conducts comprehensive problem analysis and ideas generation by engaging with residents, businesses, civic organisations, institutions and other key stakeholders. As the process unfolds, ideas are further scrutinised and tested, especially with the help of partner cities during study visits. The ULG then selects those ideas with the best possibility to form implementable actions that then are further developed in terms of timeframes, output targets and results indicators. Finally, an Integrated Action Plan is produced with a series of actions that if successful, will achieve the objectives that were originally identified during the problem analysis phase.

A graphic of the road map below gives an overview of the phases in the integrated planning process of the City Centre Doctor Project that each partner city completed.



**Beta Actions** is a term to describe short-term prototype actions or models to demonstrate a proposed action with the intention to evaluate its impact and viability after a period of three to six months.

If the URBACT Local Group (ULG) received positive feedback from residents and stakeholders and decided that the beta action demonstrated potential for the success of a 'fully-fledged' action, then the beta action will form part of the final action plan.

If the ULG received feedback suggesting the beta action is not workable or should be changed, then the proposed action can be adjusted accordingly or closed together with a report on the learning gained in the process.

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

The following case studies from the partner cities in the **City Centre Doctor Project** were all achieved by using own resources, i.e. people, materials and funding. Often the ideas were inspired after visiting other cities in the project.

The case studies are presented in a format to share the basic information. Readers who are interested in exploring more about the processes and tactics to get the beta actions going, can contact the cities directly as per the contact details provided in each case study.

1. Idrija, Slovenia – Playground on the Main Square
2. Valmez (Valašské Meziříčí), Czech Rep. – Connecting the centre with a festival of lights
3. Nort-sur-Erdre, France – Telephone Booth Library
4. Naas, Ireland – Engagers App and Citizens' Platform
5. Amarante, Portugal – Street Shops with History
6. Heerlen, Netherlands – Hotel Urbana
7. Medina del Campo, Spain – Underground Cellars
8. San Dona di Piave, Italy – Architectural impressions for uses of an old Water Tank
9. Radlin, Poland – Urban beach in the centre
10. Petrinja, Croatia – Urban Parkivities

## IDRIJA (SLOVENIA)

### Playground on the Main Square

#### Description of BETA ACTION

Create a 'playground' on the main square of Idrija to test if residents will be more attracted to the city centre when there is more activity on the main square.

#### Why did the ULG decide on this beta action?

Idrija has a wonderful square with high quality urban design, but with no liveliness...

The ULG decided that the town square is the visible centre of Idrija and if more activity and vibrancy can be activated there, it will have a much broader positive impact on the perceptions of residents. It could also inspire more initiatives and have a snowball effect of activities, participation and attendance.

More liveliness also means more footfall and more spending in the town centre. This will thus be a strategic action to make the town centre more sustainable for businesses and ultimately for jobs.

#### How and where did the idea come from for this beta action?

The ULG was inspired by discussions with citizens during an Ideas Café as well as seeing what other partner cities such as Heerlen (NL) were doing with temporary installations in their public spaces.

Initially the ULG wanted to increase the use of the square by moving benches to be placed next to existing big flower pots.

Sketches were made to show how this could improve the square. The municipality however said that the existing urban furniture were too old and damaged and that their plan was to dispose of them.



The ULG then decided to test 'new' benches made from pellets and to also include a few deckchairs to create a temporary playground.

The intention was that the playground was testing potential use of urban furniture but also to create a focal point for hosting small events to show residents what they can do/play in the city centre.

#### What resources were needed to make the beta action possible?

Firstly, the ULG members had to actively plan for the beta action including shaping of ideas, gathering expertise and materials as well as getting the permissions for the proposed activities.

The ULG relied on external expertise and volunteers to organise the beta action and to connect with residents' and business associations to promote the action.

Although there was not a need for significant financial resources, the municipality of Idrija has indicated that it will make further resources available in future budgets to continue with Playground activities on the main square.

#### How was the beta action evaluated?

ULG members made observations of the activity of people on the main square before and after the playground events. The use of urban furniture was also observed. People participating or attending the Playground on the main square were asked their opinions.



The results of the evaluation were important to decide what furniture to use and what small events to continue doing.

#### What were the results of the evaluation?

It was interesting that even before events, children started playing in the main square. After the events the ULG noticed more and more kids and parents coming to a square and using it, even if it was empty (no toys etc.). The ULG concluded that even such a small beta action can do a lot to give a

different perspective to an empty place. People got a feeling that it is ok to use it.



There was a firm opinion that more benches are needed on the square if people wanted to sit down when their kids are playing and to be able to keep an eye on them. People also welcomed the planned activities, because it gave them a place and reason to go and socialise.

ULG members and other people involved were asked by people when there will be something like the beta action again because they liked it very much.

The next event took place in May 2018.

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VALMEZ (CZECH REPUBLIC)

## A Festival of Lights

### Description of BETA ACTION

Create a partnership between the city council, a local global company - the Robe specialist lights manufacturer - and local entrepreneurs to organise a creative festival of lights that will attract people to visit the city centre.

### Why did the ULG decide on this beta action?

The town square in Valašské Meziříčí (also called Valmez) lacks visitors in off-peak times. The town centre is also inactive at night.



The ULG members took this challenge as an opportunity and they discussed the possibility of a new festival to attract visitors. They wanted to also involve local entrepreneurs and local industry to plan and organise the event/s.

They also wanted the event/s to be creative and inspirational for the inhabitants. This could mean that the citizens experience their place from a different and more exciting perspective.

### How and where did the idea come from for this beta action?

The idea of a Connection with Lights Festival was raised by local artists and entrepreneurs in the early stages of the project, but the question for the ULG was always where to find resources and if it will be well received by citizens.

During the City Centre Doctor Project study visit to Medina del Campo in Spain in September 2016, more information was received from the ULG of Medina del Campo on their initiative for a Festival of Lights while working with their local university and using video mapping technology.

The success of Medina's festival gave the ULG inspiration that a festival in Valmez can also be successful.

### What resources were needed to make the beta action possible?

To make the beta action possible required many local actors collaborating and bringing their resources needed for the event/s.

The whole festival was being planned for almost one year with contributions from local artists as well as external experts.

The key element was the participation of Robe, the local lighting manufacturing company, which provided all the needed

support, technical know-how and skills to stage a lights festival where local buildings were 'lit-up' with lights and lasers in different colours in synchronisation with music.

To make all the aspects of the festival happen required many local volunteers.



The financial resources were provided through contributions from the municipality of Valašské Meziříčí and the biggest companies in the region.

#### How was the beta action evaluated?

The final event/s included video mappings, exhibitions and light shows in the town centre, showed to its citizens their place from a completely different perspective at night.



According to the official count, almost 7,000 citizens came into the town centre for the festival in September 2017. This total was four times more than expected.

Comments on the social media, personal interviews and other public responses in the local media showed how excited people were after experiencing the festival. ULG members collected these comments and reports.

#### What were the results of the evaluation?

All the stakeholders involved were pleasantly surprised by the success of the festival.

This festival proved to the inhabitants that the town centre can be vibrant and creative.

It also demonstrated that the temporary prohibition of the traffic is one way how to make the town centre more alive with people.

Within the analysis process of the ULG it was confirmed and approved that the festival must be organized again. There is already a strong response for volunteers. Everyone wants to be a part of the festival.

This beta action confirmed the necessity of being creative and trusting local entrepreneurs and the citizens themselves.

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## NORT-SUR-ERDRE (FRANCE)

### Telephone Booth Library

#### Description of BETA ACTION

Transforming an old phone booth in the town centre into an 'all day library' where anyone can leave a book or pick up one dropped off by another reader.

#### Why did the ULG decide on this beta action?

The ULG conducted a number of idea consultations with the inhabitants of Nort-sur-Erdre over the lifetime of the project.



The idea of having a book swapping facility in the town centre seemed like a good idea to make the town centre more interesting, especially with a new public library being built a lot of books became available for renewal.

Furthermore, France Telecom, the owner of the phone booth, wanted to remove all phone booths in France. The ULG thought it was a good opportunity to use the existing one, repaint it and installing shelves for books.

#### How and where did the idea come from for this beta action?

The idea came as a response to a problem. There is an area next to a car park and along a semi-pedestrian street that the ULG had decided something should be done to make it more interesting.

After deliberations, the ULG narrowed it down to two ideas namely, between a book crossing booth or a shared garden for all. The book crossing booth received the most enthusiasm of the ULG.

The idea was also influenced by two similar initiatives that ULG members experienced in San Dona di Piave (the fridge library) and in Idrija (the post box library).

#### What resources were needed to make the beta action possible?

Once the beta action was agreed and planned, the Municipality was approached for permissions and investment.

The booth was removed by the Municipality. The ULG had it cleaned and painted. A carpenter made the shelves. The budget was



very low as it was all done by the technical services of the Municipality.

#### How was the beta action evaluated?

A note book is in the booth to explain how it works. In the notes, the ULG encourages 'book crossers' to register the books they drop off or pick up for reading.

The ULG noticed that some books come from foreign countries and sometimes go to foreign countries too!



All in all, the population of the town welcomed this action positively as judged by the different comments on social networks.

#### What were the results of the evaluation?

At the time the booth was installed in February 2018, the ULG put in about 50 books from the library. All of them had bar codes. Ten days later the number of books

increased to 150 and the number of bar codes diminished.

Today there are only a few coded books left. The number of books available in the telephone booth library seems to stay consistent with autonomous self-regulation.

This simple intervention gives added value for the town centre by creating an additional use and by making it a more interesting place, also for visitors. There are few costs and it can be continued with minimum maintenance.

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## NAAS (IRELAND)

### Engagers App and Citizen's Platform

#### Description of BETA ACTION

The Naas URBACT Local Group (ULG) contracted a start-up business called Space Engagers to use technology to enhance the engagement with inhabitants and businesses on their ideas for the future of the town.

One of the actions tested was to develop an app and website (Naas Engagers) where inhabitants could map and express their ideas and expectations for the town of Naas.

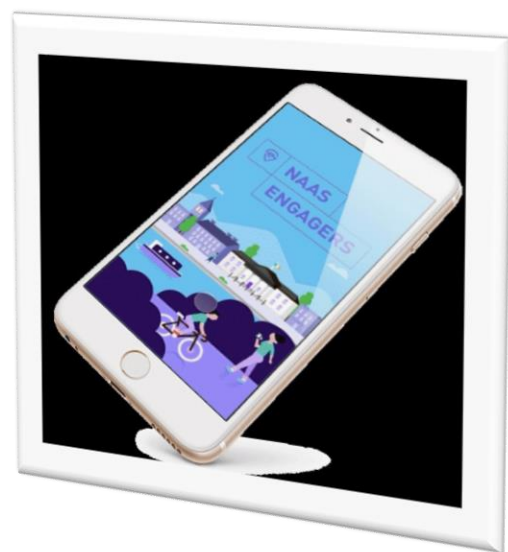
The mobile app and web app (<https://spaceengagers.org/naas-engagers>) allowed Inhabitants to create posts with their individual observations and knowledge of places in Naas (past, present or possible future) and upload them to a shared map. Each post could be 'liked', commented on or shared via social media by any registered user.

#### Why did the ULG decide on this beta action?

One of the challenges that the ULG was facing was how to connect better with young people who can have a role in shaping their town. The ULG decided to explore communications technology ubiquitously used by younger generations.

The reason why Space Engagers (in collaboration with Google Ireland) were contracted was that they had developed a mapping process using mobile phones.

The aim was furthermore to get inhabitants comfortable with the digital medium of communication and to generate ongoing spatially distributed data that could be used in future planning and policy making.



The aim was to engage as many inhabitants as possible, of all ages and from all communities, hence the action included a series of community workshops to promote the app and website.

#### How and where did the idea come from for this beta action?

This beta action resulted from a discussion at the monthly ULG Meeting about how to involve the local people (many of them new inhabitants) in shaping a vision for the town of Naas into the future.

The ULG anticipated the following impacts of a creative beta action using new technology:

- A greater number and distribution of citizens who are actively engaged with their town's past, present and possible future;
- Insights into how citizens view and value their town;
- Spatially distributed data to create a better picture of the town's past and present;
- A ranking and location of the citizens' ideas for the future of Naas;
- Insights the ULG can propose for the Naas Area Plan - the principal policy framework for the future physical development of the town.

The ULG decided that Space Engagers had developed the appropriate technology that could be used for the beta action. A partnership was formed with the company to develop the project (beta action) for Naas.

#### What resources were needed to make the beta action possible?

The Space Engagers were paid for developing and delivering the app and for the technical support required.

Naas ULG members volunteered to help with workshops and public events to promote the app.

The total budget was €7,500.

The outputs achieved using these resources:

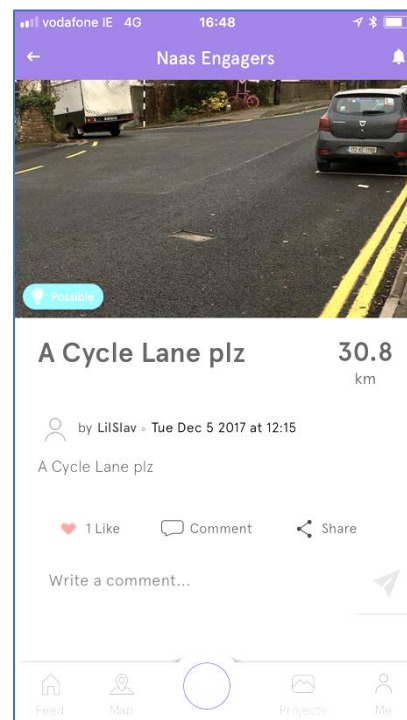
- **Launch Event** - The mobile app was launched on 9 September 2017 at the Wild Food Festival, Naas. The ULG had a stand and engaged directly with the public to promote Naas Engagers.



- **Offline interactive mapping processes** - Seven interactive mapping workshops were carried out in Naas with different community groups.
- **Online awareness of project** - The project was promoted on a number of social media platforms.

#### How was the beta action evaluated?

The project produced data on public engagement that the ULG could evaluate.



More than 400 'Points of Information' were mapped offline during the workshops. More than 200 'Posts with Information' were made online via the mobile app.

The ULG monitored the project on an ongoing basis. Update reports were brought to the ULG meetings. For example, during the ongoing evaluation, the ULG realised from the nature of the posts relating to 'present', that the question posed in the app prompted value judgements from respondents and therefore changed it from "Tell us what you value about this place" to "I have made an observation about this place".



The final analysis and review of the project took place in May 2018. The Space Engagers presented a full report on the project to the Naas Town Team (previously the ULG).

#### What were the results of the evaluation?

The beta action allowed the ULG to get a more refined understanding of the views and ideas of citizens. The ULG was able to view all the data on an online platform through a moderator access function that is password protected.

The main findings from the period of engagement were that there is limited

appreciation and/or awareness of the rich heritage of the town; the out-of-town shopping negatively affects town centre retail; the lack of mobility in the town centre is mainly because of limited cycling and pedestrian infrastructure and a car-based suburban culture; and that the town has huge potential to reinvent itself by restoring heritage buildings, by better use of natural amenity (parks and the canal), by stimulating new ideas for vacant spaces, and by expanding the leisure experiences in the town centre with restaurants, cafés, cinemas and the theatre.

The ULG concluded that while the project has merit in terms of engaging with the younger population, it is clear that the continuation of the project will require improvement of the technology. Also, the questions were too broad in scope and a future project should give attention to specific issues that could bring more tangible results.

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## AMARANTE (PORTUGAL)

### Street Shops with History

#### Description of BETA ACTION

Create a route with images, technology and storytelling that reveals the heritage and identity of the historical shops in Amarante whose importance is that they were part of the evolution and consolidation of the city.

Test the promotional material for its impact on locals and tourists.

#### Why did the ULG decide on this beta action?

Historically the village of Amarante was a link between the coast and the interior of the country and quickly distinguished itself as a location for trade and for its commercial offer. Therefore, Amarante has been strongly associated with traditional trade, crafts and manufacturing throughout its development as it grew into becoming a city.



Amarante has a strong history and heritage that can make a difference in revitalising the city centre and the city as-a-whole.

The inhabitants are proud of their city and want its heritage to feature in its economic transformation.

For this reason, the ULG considered it a priority to identify, map and monitor the shops and stores that signify the city's commercial history, thus making them an integral part of the city's heritage and a tourism experience.

#### How and where did the idea come from for this beta action?

This Beta Action was inspired by the *Shops with History* programme already developed in the city of Lisbon and recognised by URBACT as a good practice - <http://urbact.eu/shops-history>.

The *Shops with History* initiative appeared on the reception programme of the Iberian Cultural Heritage Biennial - ARPA event which was held in the city of Amarante.

This event led to a reflection by the ULG realizing that to manage the heritage of Amarante's city centre, it is necessary to give recognition and further development to shops. As the preservation and enhancement of local identity is one of the key areas of intervention for the ULG, this moment was appropriate to test the concept through the RUA Project (a project initiated by the ULG

and funded by the municipality to drive local urban revitalisation).

Amarante is a city with an urban, economic and social context very different from Lisbon, so the ULG decided to test the concept with a beta action that will provide the ULG information to decide defining modes of intervention and strategic axes to work with the shops identified as of heritage value.



#### What resources were needed to make the beta action possible?

For the Beta Action the ULG developed a poster placed on the shop windows and a flyer (Portuguese version) with the route of seven shops together with a brief introduction of each shop and its history.

A public talk was organised in one of the cafés en route, with all the shop owners telling the history of their business and its connection with the community of Amarante.

The Beta Action was financed by the municipality of Amarante. The action was created and managed by the RUA project.

#### How was the beta action evaluated?

The evaluation was made through a questionnaire to the owners of the distinguished shops.

This evaluation was important to realize the impact of the beta action and the need to test again with a focus on the tourist as a target audience.

The general opinion was that this beta action should evolve into a municipal programme.

#### What were the results of the evaluation?

The results of the beta action evaluation were really positive: Six of the seven shop owners interviewed observed an increase in the public interest in their shops and are now fully committed to the concept of "Street Shops with History".



The RUA Project is already developing a second action with these shops, now upgrading the route into a tourist offer.

The plans for the future are to transform the beta action into a municipal programme that provides support to the traders of the distinguished shops with provision of training and marketing disseminating the information to the whole county.

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## HEERLEN (NETHERLANDS)

### Hotel Park Urbana

#### Description of BETA ACTION

The 'Hotel Park Urbana' is a themed pop-up park in the middle of the city of Heerlen located on the 'Vijf Pleintjes' (Five little squares) and on the connecting streets in between. Each square had its own identity within the concept of the Hotel Park Urbana. It is visualised to have similar activities as in a real hotel such as a restaurant, piano bar, lobby, rooms and a wellness spa, but with everything created and operating outdoors in the open air.



#### Why did the ULG decide on this beta action?

In the city centre of Heerlen the public space is not attractive. There is not enough green and no water features. The centre has a "stony" and "grey" feeling. Also, there are not enough places to sit other than on the terraces of the cafés and restaurants.

Together with the local residents and the entrepreneurs involved, a first assessment was initiated by the ULG to explore the possible locations for a greener design.

A list was compiled with several possibilities. The Vijf Pleintjes turned out as the best place to do this. The challenges faced had mainly to do with getting everybody convinced at first to participate and after that to keep them on board with the project.

The ULG was fortunate that one inhabitant volunteered to be "hotel manager". The ULG put a lot of energy into this process, but as soon as the park was opened everybody was enthusiastic. They had to see for themselves to believe...

#### How and where did the idea come from for this beta action?

At the beginning of the City Centre Doctor Project the ULG executed a 'place analysis' in Heerlen. For this place analysis the ULG conducted a survey among Heerlen's citizens, mapped several 'place observations' and used tools such as the 'problem tree analysis tool' to develop deeper shared understanding of the challenges in the centre.





One of the findings from the survey was, the lack of green, water and nicely designed public space. The ULG sought new ideas to improve the public spaces.

For the inspiration and generation of ideas the ULG visited Rotterdam under the guidance of an urban explorer. The ULG was divided into several smaller groups. Each of the small groups visited different interesting locations and concepts and had to take pictures and report back to the big group at the end of the day.

One of the things that impressed the ULG was a roof garden with flowers, herbs and vegetables. This was an inspiration for the Hotel Park Urbana and herbs and fruits were used in the pop-up park.

For the overall ideas generation, the ULG used the format of the ideas market that ULG delegates experienced during the transnational exchange in Nort-sur-Erdre. This tool helped not only to generate a lot of ideas, but also to strengthen them and adapt them to be appropriate for Heerlen.

What resources were needed to make the beta action possible?

The budget for the Hotel Park Urbana was funded by several parties.

The artists who supported the ULG with the design were funded by IBA Parkstad. IBA is the Internationale Bauausstellung. (The IBA phenomenon originated in Germany and has grown to become a collective creative approach that delivers several actions to economically boost the target areas)

The municipality paid for building the pop-up Hotel Park Urbana. The trees that the municipality bought were after the dismantling adopted by other IBA projects in the Parkstad region.



The ULG together with the entrepreneurs based around the squares dedicated a lot of their time to the Hotel Park Urbana. The restaurants close to the squares offered appetizers on the opening day to everybody present.

The ULG actively took part in the design process of the Hotel Park Urbana but most importantly took responsibility for the "programming" of the Hotel Park Urbana, i.e.

for facilitating a series of community activities.

#### How was the beta action evaluated?

The evaluation was made by the ULG using information from discussions with citizens who used the Hotel Park Urbana, with entrepreneurs and local shops, as well as with officials from the municipality.



The main question was if the beta action demonstrated ways to improve the public space and make the area more alive and green. The feedback was that it was a great success, so much so, that it was decided to form an official foundation to prepare and manage future activation of the public spaces in the centre.

#### What were the results of the evaluation?

At the start of the beta action it was clear that not all the entrepreneurs and residents around the squares knew each other. This beta action resulted in more connection between the local people and also more commitment from them to the design of the public space.

After the Hotel Park Urbana was dismantled they formed an official foundation for 'de Vijf Pleintjes'. Together the residents and local entrepreneurs created an ambition document for 2018 that was handed over to the alderman. Their ambition was made very clear namely a wish to have more permanent green in the squares.

The Alderman with responsibility for the city centre has promised that improvements to the Wilhelminaplein and the Morenhoek will be addressed in the summer of 2018. The design phase has now started. This strategy was greeted with enthusiasm from all stakeholders represented in the ULG.

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## MEDINA DEL CAMPO (SPAIN)

### Underground Cellars

#### Description of BETA ACTION

The city of Medina del Campo has hundreds of metres of underground cellars that are not used anymore. Often, neither the public or the owners of the buildings know about the underground cellars that exist under their houses.

The beta action was based on identifying and developing the underground heritage of Medina del Campo as a local resource.

In particular, the Medina21 structure and the ULG worked in a collaborative and participative manner to analyse and adapt this underground heritage for tourism. The beta action was to test and evaluate two guided touristic visits to the underground cellars.

#### Why did the ULG decide on this beta action?

During the place needs analysis conducted as part of the City Centre Doctor Project, the ULG concluded that for local economic development and the vitality of the city centre, it is a priority to promote and build new initiatives using the rich cultural heritage of the city. For this reason, an innovative experience for tourists was highly desirable and the possibility of an 'underground tour' appeared to generate curiosity and excitement.

Although there was some general knowledge that underground cellars exist in Medina del Campo, nobody knew exactly how many cellars there were and in what condition. The ULG members proposed examining the cellars and to start contacting the owners of some of the underground cellars with the purpose of a future tourism initiative.



Then, with the collaboration of the Municipality of Medina del Campo, one non-profit organization related to tourism and two SVE volunteers (from Erasmus Programme) initiated the beta action.

The strategic importance of this initiative was well understood by the ULG. If successful Medina del Campo will have recovered some of its heritage that was unknown. It will also have kicked-off possibilities for future interventions and initiatives in more underground cellars such as repurposed facilities hosting new enterprises including bars and restaurants.

### How and where did the idea come from for this beta action?

The idea came out of the discussions by all participants in a ULG meeting about what the members have learnt from their study visits to other partner cities. Members were inspired by especially visits to the ruin pubs (Budapest-Hungary during the visit to Sopron) and by the visit to Amarante (Portugal) and how our Portuguese partners manage their wine heritage.

Other cities such as Valmez in the Czech Republic are also exploring underground spaces in their city centre.

But mostly the idea took shape in the regular ULG meetings and the beta action method proved a good means to test the innovative ways to use the cellars.

### What resources were needed to make the beta action possible?

In the beginning the challenge was the governance of the initiative. The local tourism association Astermagonia who manages the Castle of La Mota and is also a member of the ULG, took the lead role for organising the beta action. The Municipality of Medina del Campo facilitated the action planning process.

The collaboration by the owners of some cellars made implementation easier.

The inventory of some of the underground cellars and the work to make them more accessible was done by the European Volunteers (SVE).

It was not necessary to spend much money. The most important cost was for publicity and dissemination of information.

### How was the beta action evaluated?

Using the methodology recommended by the City Centre Doctor project, the ULG members defined a working plan for the beta action. Implementation was evaluated against this plan.

The value of the initiative was discussed with the owners of the underground cellars. Their approval and positive approach will allow for future initiatives. The dissemination of information was also important, and the tourists favourably viewed the materials developed and used during the visits.



The ULG concluded that the beta action was very successful.

### What were the results of the evaluation?

The results were good and Astermagonia is mandated to continue to organise visits for tourists to the recovered and adapted underground cellars in 2018.

The underground cellars are private, but the Municipality will take responsibility for

matters such as public health and safety. It will also assist with the dissemination of information through existing and new channels for tourism communication.

The management of the initiative will be made by Astermagonia in collaboration with the owners of the underground cellars.

For more information and help please contact:

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## SAN DONA DI PIAVE (ITALY)

### Architectural impressions for uses of a former Water Tank

#### Description of BETA ACTION

The beta action consists of the activation of the restoration of a former water tank placed at the main entrance of the city the Ponte della Vittoria.

The main idea is to convert the space into a social hub for entrepreneurial and social ventures launched by, and nurtured by, young talented people of the city. The beta action was to use architectural drawings to visualize the possibilities for stakeholders.

#### Why did the ULG decide on this beta action?

One of the main reasons that brought the municipality to join the City Centre Doctor project is to address the problem of the decayed and empty spaces in the city centre, in order to make a better use of them and to attract new social, cultural and commercial activities in the city centre itself.



Considering the relevant position of the old Water Tank at the entrance to the city centre and the possibilities of value that can be given to this facility, the municipality together with the ULG decided to make it a fundamental point to which start the restoration of this kind of spaces in the city centre.

#### How and where did the idea come from for this beta action?

This idea to re-imagine the Old Water Tank as a cultural asset of the city centre was born at the very beginning of the project. It continued to be a point of interest in the discussions between the ULG and staff of the municipality.



After the initial conceptualisation, the beta action has been developed and evolved deeply throughout the entire project period. During the study visit of partner cities to San Dona in June 2017, the partners 'peer reviewed' ideas for the future uses of the

Old Water Tank based on the architectural drawings (computer-generated impressions) commissioned by the ULG.

### What resources were needed to make the beta action possible?

The beta action was made possible because two architects worked pro bono with the ULG and stakeholders to visualise the concepts for future activity in the Old Water Tank.

The understanding is that if the municipality can get a good rationale for future use and the benefits are clear for the future economic, social and cultural wellbeing of the city, then the architects will be commissioned to prepare a full proposal to the Veneto Region for funding.



### How was the beta action evaluated?

The municipality and the ULG analysed the ideas and the feedback of proposed uses (as per the comments on the drawings) together with the technical feasibility to restore the structure of the former water tank in cooperation with a group of specialists

(architects, engineers, city planning experts etc.).

The core structure (construction) was deemed still safe and therefore suitable for restoration. It also meant that the new uses would be confined to the limitations of the structure, for instance the many pillars inside the water tank.



The strategic location of the old water tank was also deemed valuable as a place where the visitor could be welcomed into the city centre with a landmark iconic feature.

### What were the results of the evaluation?

The ULG has already had a meeting with the regional councillor to lobby for assistance to obtain 1 million euro from Veneto Region to restore the tank.

The ULG also had a meeting in Rome with the ministry to communicate the value of the project at the national and the regional level.

The ideas that were formalised into an action have been concretely inserted into San Donà di Piave's Integrated Action Plan and it will be realized in the next few years.

The post-ULG structure will continue to promote the action with the public dissemination of images and by new beta actions in the public spaces surrounding the old water tank.

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## RADLIN (POLAND)

### Urban beach in the centre

#### Description of BETA ACTION

The idea comes from discussions in the ULG about what to do with unused and empty open spaces in the city centre.

The beta action was to create a temporary installation on the large open space close to the sports and cultural building which will resemble the activities experienced by inhabitants when they are on a beach at the seaside. The main ingredient was to create an area covered with sea sand where activities such as volleyball could take place.

#### Why did the ULG decide on this beta action?

The purpose of the action was to demonstrate to inhabitants the possibilities for the use of open spaces and thereby creating liveliness and attractiveness for the city centre.



The ULG decided for an 'urban beach' because in Radlin there are a lot of young people who are active and also playing volleyball.

Moreover, in the Olympian Square there are large unused spaces, so it was great idea to show citizens other possible functions of the square.

#### How and where did the idea come from for this beta action?

The ULG had two sources for this idea. It was a suggested idea during discussions in ULG meetings and it was further re-enforced during discussions with partner cities while on City Centre Doctor study visits.

The collaboration and support from Radlin's neighbouring partner city in the Czech Republic, Valašské Meziříčí (Valmez), is especially acknowledged. They also made a beta action with an urban beach and exchanged knowledge and information.

#### What resources were needed to make the beta action possible?

The beta action was executed by an NGO member of the ULG financed by a grant made available by the Municipality.

Together with the urban beach facility other activities were also organised such as the Breakfast on the Grass which was aimed to get citizens to meet and discuss their city centre and to generate ideas for the public

space activities. These activities only costed €500.

#### How was the beta action evaluated?

The beta actions were directly evaluated by a number of participants and through the interest of the local media (television, radio). There were 50-60 people participating in TV and radio interviews.



These were not paid for and also provided free public relations for the project. The project coordinator was also invited to explain the reasons for the beta actions and the project in a TV personal interview.

#### What were the results of the evaluation?

After completing the first beta actions in 2017, the Radlin ULG decided to repeat both beta actions in the summer of 2018. The intention is to keep the momentum of citizen participation through small changes that make citizens feel more attached to their city centre such as with the Urban Beach activities and enjoying the Breakfast on the Grass.



It is an example of transforming unused space into lively public space and stimulating more activity.

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## PETRINJA (CROATIA)

### Urban Parktivities

#### Description of BETA ACTION

The city centre has a number of parks and squares that are under-utilised and the idea of the beta action is for all the community groups, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the Municipality to work together to organise free and combined activities in these areas that will attract and engage citizens.

The type of activities were decided by the strength and focus of participating groups/ organisations. Themes for activities included yoga, karate, healthy eating, local produce and eco-lifestyles. All these were animated in the public spaces of the city centre.



#### Why did the ULG decide on this beta action?

One of the three developmental goals set by the ULG is to plan projects that will create inclusive infrastructure and a visually attractive identity for Petrinja's urban centre.

The ULG wanted to create actions that will revitalize the city centre with a series of interventions on the main urban points where more people gathered for urban activity such as on the squares, streets and other urban public spaces.



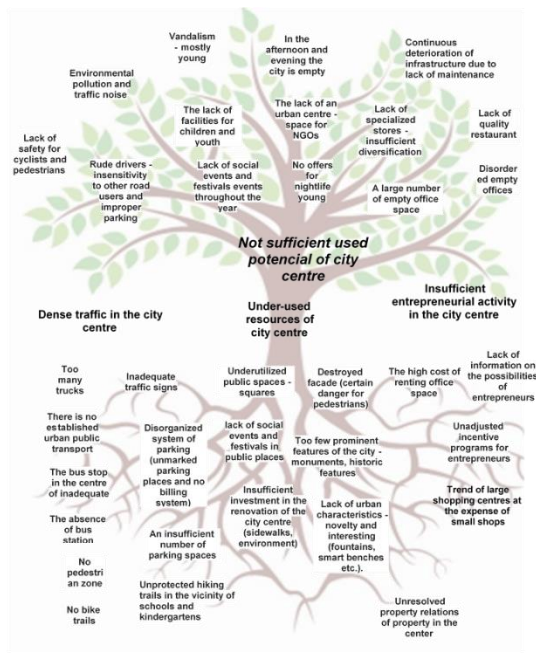
These actions are a priority in the context of the restoration process after the War of Independence in which Petrinja suffered considerable losses, also severe damage to property in the city centre.

The intention is to encourage people to spend more time in the open public spaces and to associate these spaces with healthy, family-oriented activities and socialisation.

#### How and where did the idea come from for this beta action?

A number of ULG members attended the URBACT Summer University in Rotterdam in 2016. One of the tools that members became familiar with was using a 'problem tree' to map the visual appearances of problems (tree branches) and the underlying causes (roots). This tool was used to analyse problems in the city centre of Petrinja. A

significant cause identified was the under-utilisation of existing resources in the city centre such as public spaces.



The Municipality assisted with the preparation for the venue such as making available kiosks and stalls.

The ULG took responsibility for publicity in the local media.

How was the beta action evaluated?

The inhabitants were able to give feedback to the ULG during the parkivity events where information stalls were in place for public interaction.

What were the results of the evaluation?

The information from this and other beta actions informed the ULG in the finalisation of an Integrated Action Plan which now is the basis for further funding for the restoration of the city of Petrinja.

The ULG organised an ideas café in March 2017 to generate ideas for how the public spaces can be animated. Many community groups and NGOs attended. The ideas for activities were collected and organisations committed themselves to work together on a first beta action – a morning with activities in the Strossmayer park – the heart of the city.



What resources were needed to make the beta action possible?

The most important resource was the volunteers from the different organisations.

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## Conclusions and Recommendations

From the variety of diverse examples of beta actions in the City Centre Doctor Project, there are key learnings and conclusions to be drawn.

1. The main purpose of beta actions is to demonstrate the possible.
2. For beta actions to have a strategic impact, i.e. to be catalysts for new thinking and commitments, there should be an intensive collective (multi-stakeholder) process of problem identification, data analysis, ideas generation and goal setting. The URBACT method based on a results framework is an appropriate tested approach for a multi-stakeholder city group to systematically facilitate such processes.
3. Beta actions are products/results of the creativity and effort (i.e. willingness and sweat) of local people and less dependent on acquiring significant funding for proposed initiatives. The advice for any city group will be to focus on processes to engage people from ideas generation to volunteering with implementation of a co-designed beta action and the funding will be forthcoming (sounds evangelical, but it is often the case).
4. Technical expertise (e.g. professional designers and planners) can be very helpful to make beta actions possible, but it is not the critical 'show-stopper' and should never be a pre-requisite for implementation.
5. Beta actions work especially well with objectives to create liveliness in public spaces in the city centre. The principles of community-led creative placemaking should be applied in the co-creation of the beta action and the post-action activities inspired by the beta action.
6. Beta actions could also form part of urban design thinking processes where the initial action give rise to new questions and possibilities making use of a continuous feedback loop with users and local communities (including specific interest groups such as retailers and young people).
7. Creativity is not correlated with the size of a city and its population. The beta actions implemented by the small partner cities of the City Centre Doctor Project would have been very successful in much larger and better-known cities. It is therefore proof that smaller cities can be equally as 'exciting' and 'interesting' as their bigger counterparts if the creativity in those smaller cities are unlocked and harnessed. Therein lies the secret.

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