

AGENTS OF CO-EXISTENCE

Quarterly Network Report Q1-2024



URBACT



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INTRODUCTION

In the Agents of Co-Existence (AoCE) network, a total of 9 cities work together. Our Lead Partner (LP) is the City of Genk. The other participating cities are Aarhus –Gdańsk–Çekava – Quart de Poblet – Breda – Budaörs, Banská Bystrica and the Intercommunity Development Association of the Iași Metropolitan Area.

Their main goal is **to foster innovative approaches to societal challenges and strive for inclusive local policies with active community involvement**. This means they aim to improve citizen participation. And for this they not only want to look at different ways and methods to include citizens in decision-making processes. No, they specifically look for ways to improve their own organisation: the city administration and the people working for it. All participants want their civil servants to become true agents of co-existence.

In the activation stage of the URBACT-project period, all cities further defined their learning needs regarding this topic. In this first quarter of 2024, the partners met for a Core Network Meeting at the beginning of March to specifically look at **Theme 2, “Innovators coming into government”**. At the request of all partners, emphasis was put on ways to improve the flow of information within their organisation. For this purpose, also an online academy was organised in January to share good examples from outside the AoCE partnership. The findings of both meetings will be described in this report.

ACTION PLANNING PROCESS

Following the closure of the activation stage, partners have started the action planning journey and have already managed to reach some interim results:

First, the Lead Expert (LE) drafted a template for the **1st section of the Action Plan** to provide a standardised format and guidance for partners to elaborate their Integrated Action Plan (IAP). It was presented to the partners during the 2nd core network meeting in Budaörs. Based on the template, partners have filled this section of the IAP by the end of March 2024 presenting their local context and the vision of their IAP.

To assist partners in continuously capturing the lessons learnt from the transnational meetings, collecting inputs for the further chapters of their IAP, the LE developed two formats: an action table and a testing action form:

The **action table** is a learning grid designed to capture insights, lessons learnt, good practices gained during the transitional meetings. In this table partners try to develop an action based on a good practice of another partner providing information how they would adapt the selected good practice in their own city. Partners are asked to develop at least one action per core network meeting, but they are free to develop more or merge the knowledge from different meetings into one action applying also the knowledge gained from the Online Academies and their local stakeholder meetings. The collection of these action tables will provide the basis for the core section of their Action Plan. During this first quarter of the project, partners have started to fill their action tables, which they will present during the 2nd Online Academy on the 7th of May 2024.

The actions from each partners’ action tables can be transferred to a testing action. It means that at least one action from the many developed in the project will be implemented in the lifetime of the AoCE project on a smaller scale to test an innovative element before the full implementation of the action. The LE prepared a **testing action form** including a list of questions about the owner of the action, stakeholders involved in the implementation of the action, budget and timeframe, expected challenges and the implementation steps of the testing action. In this period, partners have already started to describe their potential testing action(s).

Testing action form																					
Title of the action																					
Summary of the action - What is it about? Please describe in maximum 2000 character																					
Source of inspiration - Which partners' which practices provide the base for the action or from which meeting you gained inspiration for the action																					
Applying the action - How do you imagine the successfully implemented version of the action (an action in the IAP). Briefly summarize in 7 sentences																					
Responsible IAG members - Who will implement the action? List all people and organization who will lead and contribute to the implementation of the action specifying their role																					
Target group - For whom it is implemented? Who will benefit from the implementation of the action and how?																					
Timeline - When do you plan to implement? According to URBACT's journey goals, it is expected that the IAG report of testing actions is implemented by the end of 2024, so you have enough time to draw and embed the lessons learnt into the IAP. Specify from month to month																					
Budget - How much budget is needed? Check the external expertise budget planned for testing action in the detailed budget template (up to around 10.000-20.000 euro and different for each person). Include																					
<p>Why the amount of the external expertise meet your need? If possible, specify for what type of activities how much you need.</p> <p>Challenges - Anticipation - What kind of challenges/obstacles you foresee in the implementation of the action? How do you plan to mitigate them?</p> <p>Action steps - Describe the steps of the implementation of the action? Please be as specific as possible.</p> <table border="1"> <tr><td>1</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>2</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>3</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>4</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>5</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>6</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>7</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>8</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>9</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td></td></tr> </table>		1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10	
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Testing Action Template

On top of working on the Integrated Action Plans through the above mentioned formats, the partnership has also started to develop another important project output: the AoCE **Good Practice Catalogue**. In principle, this Catalogue is prepared by the Lead Expert but with the significant contribution of all partners. In this Catalogue, we collect all partners' good practices and present them in a more detailed way as we did in the Baseline Study.

We include information about each good practice regarding budget, timeline, challenges, evidence of success and explaining the potential of the good practice to transfer to other cities. This document is continuously developed during the project's lifetime. After each core network meeting we ask the host partners to provide Based on the 1st and 2nd core network meeting.

The Good Practice Catalogue will provide the bases for the final network product of the AoCE network.

TRANSNATIONAL AND ULG MEETINGS

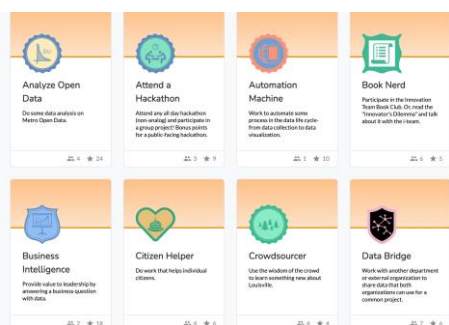
1. Online Academy

To really kick off the action planning stage an Online Academy was organised for all partners in January 2024. The meeting focused on Theme 2 “Innovators coming into government”, with the sub-themes:

- **how to embed the results of citizen participation into the daily work of the administration**
- **how to create transparency in decision-making**

The meeting started with some good practices from outside the partnership, also described in the Baseline Study:

- 1) **Sao Paulo Abierto:** the city Sao Paulo created a platform for peer-to-peer learning, where private individuals with useful skills are given assistance in developing courses for public servants, civil society organisations, and communities in every region of São Paulo.¹
- 2) **The Louisville Badges System:** This program rewards employees for tasks like creating an open dataset, crowdsourcing information from citizens or collaborating with other departments on projects. There’s a tiered reward system for civil servants who participate, with prizes ranging from LinkedIn recommendations to recognition at a city-wide awards ceremony.²



Example of the Louisville Badges System

Next, some examples from within our Network were explored and partners discussed which examples might be useful to further explore during the Core Network Meeting in March. Several ideas were shared among the participants. Suggestions such as creating a toolbox with methods & colleagues that can help or a monthly breakfast meeting to talk about innovations and citizen participation were mentioned to be explored further during the CNM in March.

2. Core Network Meeting

In this period, also the 2nd core network meeting was organised. **The second Core Network Meeting of the Agents of Co-Existence (AoCE) network took place from 4th March 2024 to 7th March 2024.** Due to the close geographical proximity of Budaörs (Hungary) and Banská Bystrica (Slovakia) this was organised as another joint transnational meeting – thus again minimising our ecological footprint .

In the Budaörs part of the meeting, the focus was on the study visits inside the city of Budaörs and visits to different districts of Budapest to learn about good practices in citizen participation. Partners could learn about practices that contribute to **digital transition in citizen participation** and **green transition through citizen participation**. Therefore, in this meeting, efforts were made to investigate participatory actions and tools that are related to the digital and green transition cross-cutting themes of the URBACT Program. On top of these two fields, partners were also inspired by several **small-scale participatory actions** visited during the meeting.

On the first day afternoon of the meeting in Budaörs, a visit was made to the **Animation Base and Creative Space (BABter)** which is a community place financially maintained by the municipality but operated by an association called Primanima. Primanima organizes an animation festival each year in Budaörs and regularly organize animation workshops for children and adults in BABter. Moreover, Primanima contributed to the development of the Sustainable Energy and Climate Adaptation Plan of the City by helping groups of children and youngsters to express their vision regarding the future of Budaörs by creating animation videos. It was concluded from this visit that different animation techniques can be also applied by citizens to express and share their opinion with the City.

¹ <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/action-plan-sao-paulo-brazil-2021-2024/>

² <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/badges-rewarding-data-and-innovation-work/>



Study visit to Primanima, Budaörs

On top of this, partners got familiar with other digital tools which can be used to increase citizens' participation in public issues. Katalin Bunyevác, an URBACT ad-hoc expert explained **how online map-based questionnaires can be applied to reach more citizens**, to reach them in time in a project development process and get such information from them which has spatial location (spatial data). Such data collected from citizens through map-based online questionnaires are called experiential data. Thanks to the digital format of this data and having spatial location, it is possible to be jointly analysed with expert data. Therefore, data collected from citizens on maps and data already available on maps in the city administration's GIS system can be jointly analysed contributing to better decision making as both citizens and experts' knowledge are considered in a planning process.

Both creating map-based questionnaires and especially analysing the data received by such questionnaires require technical skills from some civil servants of the municipality³. It was concluded by the expert, that **besides soft skills such as communication skills, also the technical skills of civil servants need to be improved** to feel confident and have enough practice to apply digital tools for citizen participation such as map-based, GIS-related tools and software.

One of the next study visits was organised in the 12th District of Budapest (Hegyvidék), where a separate department has been created inside the municipality dedicated to the implementation of green actions in the district in cooperation with citizens. This department is called Green Office. Its main tasks are developing green strategies, delivering official tasks, implementing transnational and national projects, and working on many

voluntary tasks including the organisation of events, programs, and several awareness-raising campaigns. The Office is even the funder and operator of a platform of experts who work on green issues in different municipalities of Budapest. Through these activities, **the Green Office's staff is the agent of green transition inside the municipality**, between Budapest district-level municipalities, and towards the residents of the district.

One of the goals of the Green Office is to motivate citizens to contribute to the maintenance of the green spaces of the district. For this purpose, they have established a Stewardship Program where residents become stewards for smaller street green areas in public spaces. The Program received a relatively lively interest, but following the initial enthusiasm, many caretakers disappeared leaving the areas neglected. Thus, the Green Office decided to apply a new solution introducing a slower but more effective community involvement process. More specifically, they have started to organise awareness-raising actions, giving lectures, organising nature walks, and kindergarten programs to educate residents on how to take care of green spaces (how to compost, how to handle waste, how to collect rainwater, how to cut fruit tree, etc). On top of educational actions, the Office also provides free rainwater tanks, shredding, and composting tools and supports the installation of raised beds. All these actions also give opportunity for the City to have personal contact with residents. Following this study visit, it was concluded that indeed, **green issues are a topic that easily opens discussions between the city administration and citizens, and these discussions are usually made through small-scale actions.**

Small scale actions as communication tools towards citizens were also the focus of the **CUP4Creativity Urban Innovative Action project** implemented by the 11th district of Budapest. The AoCE partnership had the opportunity to visit the Adaptér cultural centre developed in the frame of the project. In Adaptér, partners have learned about the several cultural, and creative events programs, actions, and campaigns implemented in the CUP4Creativity project. Through their presentation was concluded that **culture and art are also such fields through which the City can approach citizens and manage to activate them.** For instance, in this project, some residents opened their homes for concerts and theatre performances. Other residents agreed to demolish walls between their gardens to create a bigger green space where communication events can be organised. First, a small group of staff started to work on this project but following some events more and more residents became active and offered their help in

³ An article on this topic was written by the ad-hoc expert Katalin Bunyevac which will be published on the AoCE-webpage

organising additional events. These events motivate even more residents to contribute to building communities in one of the biggest and most diverse districts of Budapest.

Following the visit to the 12th district and the 11th district of Budapest learning about participatory practices related to green spaces and cultural programs, we closed the day with a visit to the 8th district of Budapest. This is an inner-city district, densely populated facing more social challenges compared to the previous districts visited. Still, this is the municipality who have already established **an office inside the city administration especially for public participation**. We had the opportunity to witness the results of their work walking around in the district where different installations were set in public spaces such as parklets, information boards about upcoming developments, and gamified installations in front of kindergartens and playgrounds developed based on deep consultation processes with neighbours.

The study visits in Banská Bystrica took place in the cultural centre Záhrada (“Garden”), which was founded in 2010. It is located in the historical city centre of Banská Bystrica and a great example of a bottom-up initiative where the community of active citizens came together and step by step developed a cultural centre where many concerts, dance performances, discussions, workshops, and festivals take place. Záhrada is also home to many diverse minority groups. However, despite this vibrant community, Záhrada is also an example of unused potential for supporting participatory and dialogue processes between the municipality and active citizens because of politically based polarisation in the city. Although Záhrada has a great community of active citizens who proactively initiate various discussions related to living city topics, these discussions often take place without the representation of municipality officers and city representatives. The lack of skills and attitudes to manage polarisation on both sides – on the side of active citizens as well as on the side of municipality officers and city representatives – contributes to the deepening of the polarised divide and prevents quality dialogue between them.

Polarisation, a natural phenomenon in society, is present in all municipalities across Europe. It can create tension, a breeding ground for the emergence of conspiracy theories, hatred, hoaxes, destructive criticism, cyberbullying, and more. In the context of self-government, polarisation **often impacts the quality of the mutual relations between the city and its citizens**, leading to difficulties in cooperation and negatively affecting participatory processes and the overall development of open governance.

Healthy relations are essential for a collaborative approach to governance, which is why the Agents of Co-Existence network chose to delve deeper into the topic of polarisation.



Attentive listening and open discussion on Polarisation in Banska Bystrica

Following the study visit, a dedicated workshop on polarisation was organised, focusing on the pivotal **roles of experts and leaders within the municipality**. They have the potential to significantly contribute to depolarisation if equipped with the necessary skills and attitudes to strategically address the issue. This initial workshop served as a valuable **source of inspiration for enhancing our capabilities** and learning from best practices in polarisation management. The topic of polarisation, including strategies for strategic intervention and the development of the required skills and attitudes, will be further explored in subsequent meetings and workshops of our project.

As Banská Bystrica is a member of the Initiative for **Open Government Partnership (OGP)**, there was an AoCE@SCHOOL masterclass, linked to the introduction of this international global network by the guest speaker Jose Maria Marin from the OGP office, as well as an introduction to the work of OGP Local Initiative in Banská Bystrica by Soňa Kariková, Head of the Department for participation and innovation in Open governance in Banská Bystrica.

The OGP is an international initiative engaging numerous states, regional and local governments, and civil society entities, advocating for **an open approach to governance based on transparency, collaboration, and participation**. Members are supported and guided on reform initiatives through **action plans at different levels of government, focusing on specific, measurable, and ambitious steps to innovate in open governance**. The OGP also serves as a global network of experts and innovators, facilitating the exchange of experiences and insights in the field of open governance.

Recognising that the work of local governments has a direct impact on citizens' daily lives, the OGP established OGP Local in 2018, enabling local governments to actively participate in promoting inclusive and efficient governance at the local level. **Banská Bystrica joined the OGP Local in 2020**, becoming the first and so far, the only municipality in Slovakia to do so. **Its involvement has greatly accelerated the city's development in open governance innovation, both strategically and systematically, and helped it gain access to various resources and recognition at the international level**. The city currently has its own vision on open government and two action plans aimed at developing open government. Various innovation instruments have been developed, such as Collaboratory, to deepen the quality of co-creation and dialogue processes. In addition, the city carefully and systematically carries out the process of change management of organizational culture, from closed to open culture. Numerous international collaborations and projects have been established, including partnerships with the OECD, the JRC and the World Bank.

The meeting in Banská Bystrica finished with a workshop in which the network generated many interesting ideas on **how to improve the internal flow of information inside the municipality**. The most interesting ideas were:

- To set up and organise (informal) **Weekly breakfast** with the head of the different departments, or even better with all interested employees
- Working with **“internal communities”**, e.g. an Energy community: Weekly, a colleague shares a picture of what he/she does to improve energy efficiency and thus inspires colleagues
- **Gaining ownership of politicians**: Actively involve politicians in e.g. visits and meetings with citizens/citizen groups and show them what moves people

- **Regular cross-departmental meetings**: one department informs other departments about what they are working on, and includes politicians.
- **Monthly meetings with all departments**: one dedicated department informs others; all together they discuss how to improve the flow of information. Involve the mayor (and/or aldermen) on a quarterly basis

These ideas will be further explored and elaborated in upcoming meetings including the questions and struggles that arise with them, such as time to be actively engaged in the breakfast meetings. Or how to find ways to inspire through positive feedback.

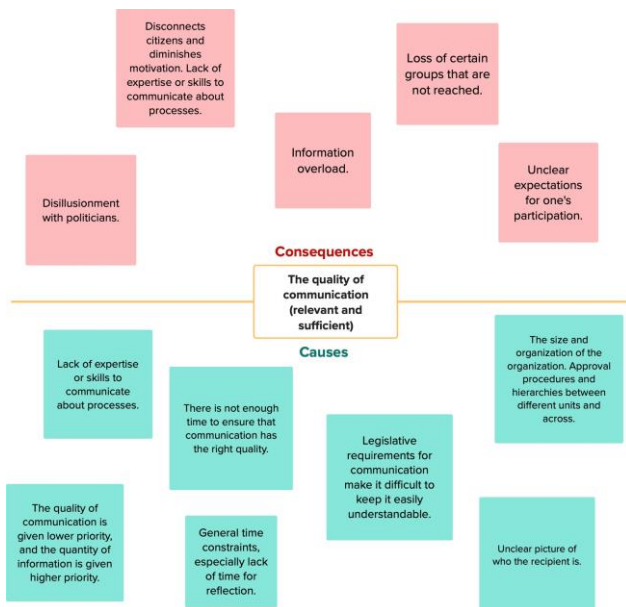


Workshop on improving internal flow of information

3. ULG MEETINGS IN PARTNER CITIES

In addition to the Core Network Meetings and the Online Academy all partners have used the activation stage to set up their own **URBACT Local Groups (ULG)** and in this first part of the action planning stage they have organised their first meetings with these ULG's. Information from the first 2 Core network meetings was shared with them and together with the local stakeholders further steps are being taken to specify the testing actions that will be undertaken in the upcoming months.

As an example of the work done by the local ULG's, it is worthwhile to mention that Aarhus worked with the Problem Tree-methodology to define what is needed and how to move forward.



Example of problem tree developed by ULG-Aarhus

Other partner cities used the SWOT analysis prepared during the city visits by LE and LP to further explore testing actions to help develop citizen participation in their city. One of them was the Intercommunity Development Association of the Iași Metropolitan Area. Their 2nd ULG-meeting was attended by 20 members who helped to identify actions for efficient urban policies in the field depending on the desired results in the future. To do so they applied 2 URBACT tools, the Newspaper of tomorrow and the “stakeholders power/interest Matrix “. Other partners used different methods, but they all by now have established a solid ULG, ready to take the next steps.

The composition of the ULG's are all tailored to the unique context of the project partners. In essence, most of the ULG's are composed of the following stakeholders:

- Cross sectoral groups of civil servants
- “Change-maker” NGOs
- Open democracy or other already established platforms
- Citizen associations and informal groups

Since the focus of AoCE network is on improving the skills and attitudes of civil servants regarding citizen participation, it is important to create support for this mindset shift through the different organisational levels within the municipality. The way partners ensure that there is sufficient support and ideas and information are shared through the different organisational levels of the municipality, is tailored to their unique context. The ULG in Gdansk is for example structured according to the concept of 3-level involvement. The core group consists of municipal staff only. This group meets more frequently and also fulfils the role of steering committee. Two other layers include municipal institutions and external entities. With regards to the focus of the AoCE-Network on further improving the way cities can improve their work on citizen participation this is certainly an option. The only city that did not yet agree on the final set up of their ULG at this stage is the city of Breda. The LP and LE will look at different ways to help Breda with this struggle in the upcoming months.

NEXT STEPS

In the upcoming period (April – June 2024), further knowledge exchange activities will take place in the project which feeds the action planning process:

- 1) Partners will meet online on the 7th of May in the frame of the 3rd Online Academy where they will present 1 or 2 actions, they have developed in the action table based on the lessons learned from the 1st and 2nd core network meetings and the 1st Online Academy.
- 2) During the Online Academy the draft agenda of the 3rd core network meeting will be presented to the partners who can share their learning needs and the host partner (Gdansk) jointly with the LP and LE will consider finalizing the program of the core network meeting.
- 3) The 3rd core network meeting will be organized between 12th and 14th of June in Gdansk, Poland. A key element of its program is a peer review exercise related to the testing actions partners will develop in the testing action form by the end of April.
- 4) Following the 3rd core network meeting in Gdansk, partners will finalise their testing action form and start to implement their testing action(s).
- 5) Partners will fill action tables capturing the lessons learned from the Gdansk meeting and continue to fill the Action Plan template.
- 6) Finally, the Good Practice Catalogue will be completed by the good practices of the city of Gdansk.



The AoCE-Partners during their visit to Budaörs