



IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGE 1 - DESCRIPTION AND GUIDANCE

THE INTEGRATED APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTATION

URBACT Implementation Networks

This Guidance has been designed as part of a series called 'Learning about Implementation' by the URBACT III Programme. It is relevant for all European cities implementing Integrated Strategies for Urban Development.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1. URBACT principles

The URBACT programme fosters sustainable urban development in cities across Europe. Its mission is to enable cities to work together and develop integrated solutions to common urban challenges, by networking, learning from one another's experiences, drawing lessons and identifying good practices to improve urban policies. The URBACT method embraces several principles:

Integration: An integrated approach to sustainable urban development which promotes a holistic approach that takes into consideration the physical, economic and social dimensions of urban development, from a sustainable perspective.

Participation: A participative approach based on strong partnerships between public bodies, the private sector, knowledge institutions and civil society (including citizens), which is recognised as a cornerstone of local democracy and efficient urban development policies.

Action learning: A structured and facilitated approach to gather knowledge by working with peers and to solve concrete problems by designing tailor-made actions.

The URBACT Method is explained in more detail in this [animation video](#).

Key Terms and Definitions

URBACT = the European Territorial Cooperation programme that supports cities through transnational exchange and learning, with the aim of fostering integrated sustainable urban development across Europe.

Integrated Sustainable Urban Development = an approach to urban development that addresses economic, environmental, and social challenges and objectives (sustainable) based on coherence and complementarity between the various policies, sectors, stakeholders and levels of decision-making (integrated)

URBACT Networks = small thematic networks of cities supported by URBACT. Each participating city works with local stakeholders to develop or implement a local plan of action, while benefitting from a shared process of transnational exchange and learning.

URBACT Local Group (ULG) = the local body that is responsible for developing or delivering the plan, composed of all relevant stakeholders having an interest in the policy challenge addressed by the city

1.2. The URBACT Implementation Challenges

The challenges cities face in delivering sustainable and integrated urban development are well-documented. Between 2016 and 2018 the URBACT programme co-financed 7 city networks to exchange and learn about implementation of integrated action plans. A series of Implementation Challenges (IC) were developed as part of the core design of the networks, providing seven thematic areas to guide cities in exploring the difficulties commonly found during delivery of integrated action plans. The seven Implementation Challenges are:

- > **IC1 - Ensuring the integrated approach in the delivery of strategy and related actions/projects**
- > IC2 - Maintaining involvement of local stakeholders and organising decision-making for delivery
- > IC3 - Setting up efficient indicators and monitoring systems to measure performance
- > IC4 - Moving from strategy to operational action-plan
- > IC5 - Setting up new partnerships for delivery
- > IC6 - Designing smart public procurement frameworks
- > IC7 - Enhancing funding of urban policies by exploring financial innovation

The overarching implementation challenge tackled in this guide is concerned with how the integrated approach can be developed and strengthened during implementation.

In many cases, it is difficult or impossible to successfully tackle these challenges in isolation; there is much cross-over between the challenges in terms of their causes and in terms of the ways of overcoming them. For IC1 there is a particularly strong association between the integrated and participative approaches. The URBACT method promotes participation of stakeholders in part in order to achieve an integrated approach. How local partnerships manage integration during implementation will determine what happens on the ground and ultimately whether an action plan is more than the sum of its parts. Addressing Implementation Challenges 3 and 4 is also key. Many strategies are conceived in very broad terms and need to be refined to move to an operational plan that reinforces integration, with the ability to measure performance and impact.

2. THE NATURE OF THE CHALLENGE

2.1. The policy context for integrated approaches

The principles of sustainability, integration and participation have increased in significance in international and European urban policy over the past decades.

Sustainable Urban Development

The concept of sustainability was popularised after the publication of 'Our Common Future', also known as the Brundtland Report, after the name of the Commission established by the UN, in October 1987. The report defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs".

The United Nations New Urban Agenda

The principles of sustainability, integration, participation and multi-level governance are reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015. The priorities are mapped out in the UN Habitat's Sustainable Development Goals, which frame the New Urban Agenda. This framework provides a global blueprint for cities of all sizes.

"The New Urban Agenda reaffirms our global commitment to sustainable urban development as a critical step for realizing sustainable development in an integrated and coordinated manner at the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels, with the participation of all relevant actors."

The Urban Agenda for the European Union

The [Urban Agenda for the EU](#) adopted under the Dutch Presidency in 2016 represents a new multi-level working method promoting cooperation between Member States, cities, the European Commission and other stakeholders in order to stimulate growth, liveability and innovation in the cities of Europe through a multi- sectoral, integrated approach.

Cohesion Policy

An integrated approach is inherent in EU cohesion policy. It has evolved from a policy aimed at compensating regions for their disadvantages, to a policy designed to improve regional growth and competitiveness, based on the Europe 2020 Strategy of smart, inclusive and green growth.

In the 2014-20 programme period the integrated approach was encouraged in the ERDF regulations through Article 7, under which a minimum of 5% of funds at Member state level were to be dedicated to integrated territorial approaches., and through specific instruments such as Community Led Local Development and Integrated Territorial Investments.

The Leipzig Charter and the role of cities

First signed in 2007, the Leipzig Charter (named after the signing ceremony in the German city) promotes the use of ‘integrated urban development’ policy and set out - for the first time in a single EU document - the key principles behind it. This landmark urban policy document acknowledged the need for cities to play a key active role in Europe’s economic, environmental and social wellbeing. Furthermore, it underlined the need for multilevel governance and a structured approach to urban stakeholder participation. It also argued for a framework to build the capacity of those stakeholders in order to support this new way of working:

“Every level of government - local, regional, national and European - has a responsibility for the future of our cities. To make this multi-level government really effective, we must improve the coordination of the sectoral policy areas and develop a new sense of responsibility for integrated urban development policy. We must also ensure that those working to deliver these policies at all levels acquire the generic and cross- occupational skills and knowledge needed to develop cities as sustainable communities.”

Although the Charter’s purpose and principles remain relevant, the working context for Europe’s cities has been transformed since 2007. The global financial crisis, the digital revolution and the climate emergency are amongst the most pressing developments. Their seismic scale and their implication for cities, have prompted a review of the Charter. With Germany due to hold the EU presidency once more in 2020, it has undertaken an initiative to refresh the Leipzig Charter.

URBACT ‘s approach to integration

For 15 years, the URBACT programme has been the European Territorial Cooperation programme aiming to foster sustainable integrated urban development in cities across Europe. Though its proximity to cities of all sizes, URBACT has a deep understanding of the barriers they face and the efforts they make to adopt more integrated policy and practice approaches.

URBACT City Labs

In order to capture these experiences and feed in to the new Leipzig Charter, URBACT has hosted a series of ‘City Labs’ bringing together city representatives and different levels of governance to discuss specific thematic topics, identify good practices and address challenges that remain. The outcomes of these City labs on key challenges are available on the URBACT website:

Participatory approaches – ([Policy paper](#))

Sustainable urban development – ([Policy paper](#), [Video](#))

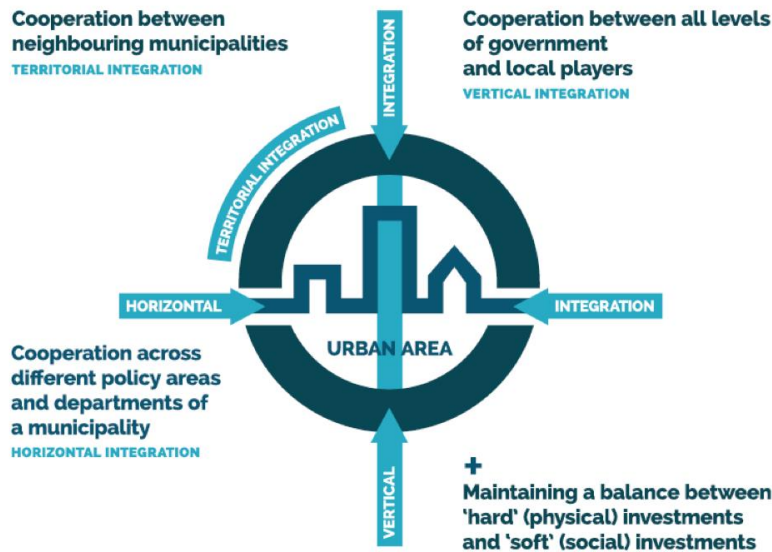
Integrated approaches – ([Policy Paper](#), [Video](#))

2.2. What do we mean by integration?

There is lots of discourse around integration and its definition within the field of urban development. At a basic level URBACT focuses on four broad types of integration set out on the [URBACT website](#)

Integrated Urban Development

MEANS...



- **Vertical integration**, meaning cooperation between all levels of government and local players;
- **Horizontal integration**, meaning cooperation across different policy areas and departments of a municipality;
- **Territorial integration**, meaning cooperation between neighbouring municipalities;
- **Integration** between 'hard' (physical) investments and 'soft' (social) investments.

To develop a better understanding of the integrated approach on the ground, and to inform its approach to supporting future networks, URBACT recently completed a major research project on this issue. The [study](#) was specifically related to the programme's Action Planning networks, which require every participating city to produce an Integrated Action Plan (IAP) and drew upon the 205 such plans produced by cities between 2016 and 2018. It went beyond the existing definition of the four domains (above) to establish 14 elements of integrated urban planning which affect the quality and delivery of action plans. As well as specific elements relating to URBACT (i.e. transnational exchange and learning) they include the need for coherence with other strategies and the importance of complementary types of investment. The principle of stakeholder involvement forms a backbone to the entire approach. The study identifies a variety of city case studies which provide a range of practical examples across policy themes and networks. But it also acknowledges the complexity involved and the need to maintain support to cities to further develop their experience.

The Study showed that the types and level of integration demonstrated depended on several aspects including the theme being addressed, the existing level of thematic knowledge, existing actions and

processes in place, local governance processes, the priorities identified by local stakeholders and so on. Whilst a theoretical perfect plan would show full integration for all aspects, in practice the reality is that for some topics certain forms of integration are less relevant. Some cities will be more advanced than others, but all cities will have areas where they could improve the integration. This may be by incorporating a new form of integration or strengthening one aspect of integration already addressed to some extent.

This checklist in Table 1 explains these variations. The aim is to break down, capture and categorise the complexity that URBACT cities are working with into more manageable ‘bite-size chunks’.

Table 1 – Checklist of the 14 identified elements of integrated action planning

a) What is needed for an integrated planning process?	
i.	Actions are needs-based – actions respond to real needs based on a sound understanding of the local context, challenges and opportunities
ii.	Stakeholder involvement in planning – the full range of stakeholders (considered horizontally and vertically) are engaged in identifying priorities and potential solutions
iii.	Transnational exchange and learning – actions have been demonstrably informed or inspired by practices from other cities
b) What is needed for an integrated urban development?	
i.	Sustainable urban development - - actions address all three pillars of sustainable development in terms of economic, social and environmental objectives
ii.	Sectoral integration – addressing the full range of policies/sectors of activity, including infrastructure, transport, employment, education, green spaces, housing, culture...
iii.	Spatial integration – coherence of actions at different spatial levels from site-specific, through neighbourhoods, city-wide and regional
iv.	Territorial integration – coherence and complementarity of actions and policies implemented by neighbouring municipalities
v.	Multi-level governance – actions are planned coherently at different levels of governance, covering local (district, city), regional and national levels

vi.	Stakeholder involvement in implementation - the full range of relevant stakeholders (horizontally and vertically) are engaged in the implementation of planned actions
c) What is needed for an integrated action plan?	
i.	Internal strategic logic – actions are designed to meet overall and specific objectives defined by the city
ii.	Coherence with existing strategies – actions and objectives are aligned and complementary to existing strategies in place at city, regional, national or European levels
iii.	Complementary types of investment – the plan effectively balances the need for both ‘hard’ (physical/infrastructure) and ‘soft’ (human capital) investments
iv.	Planning over time – planning of relevant actions in the short, medium and longer-terms and consideration of any necessary order in the implementation of actions
v.	Mobilising all available funding - –seeking to use the full range of funds available to support implementation of planned actions, from EU Funds to private local sources.

These elements are all relevant and transferable to the implementation phase of sustainable urban development plans being designed by cities all across the EU.

2.3. What do integrated approaches look like during implementation?

Complex urban problems are multi-faceted and can only be addressed by concerted action from a range of stakeholders deploying different actions and across boundaries. Mono-sectoral approaches have contributed in the past to many of the problems facing cities today. For example, transport strategies which focus too much on the private car, or housing solutions which do not provide affordable apartments.

URBACT experience shows that with a more integrated approach real synergies can be achieved in implementation. Integration in practice can mean:

- **Combining sectoral policies** (e.g. for transport, small and medium enterprises, innovation, land use planning, training) at local level. This is achieved by bringing together a horizontal/vertical partnership that includes those offices and agencies of regional/national departments, which have a stake in the policy field so that policies and their actions on the ground can be joined up. An integrated approach which mixes sectoral policies includes

both hard and soft measures with funding from a range of funds: EU, national regional and local and potentially finance from the private sector and the social economy.

- **Considering the territorial dimension:** Operating the integrated approach at the most relevant and appropriate spatial scale either within the administrative city (e.g. communities, neighbourhoods and districts) or beyond the administrative city (e.g. at the level of functional urban areas, and for combined authorities). Specifically, this involves collaborating with neighbourhood and nearby municipalities to maximise synergies and mitigate downside risks. It also needs to maximise the potential of rural urban linkages and seek to avoid edge effects and negative externalities by working across administrative boundaries.
- **Refining multi-level governance:** Ensuring that synergies are obtained between city level policies and those at higher governance levels operated by regional or national or EU authorities by maximising the influence of cities on national/regional policies and by seeking to ensure that national governments take proper account of local and city-regional levels of government. This includes developing close relationships with Managing Authorities established for the delivery of European Structural Investment Funds.
- **Creating and managing partnerships with vertical horizontal and territorial stakeholders** to ensure that actions are needs based, that all stakeholders are involved in delivery.
- **Developing new administrative structures** involving joint teams across municipal departments, working groups, or some central coordination unit in the mayor's office.

There are many barriers to integration. For example, regarding the vertical dimension, although multi-level governance is acknowledged to be a key component of effective urban policy, tension between different administrative levels is not uncommon. At the heart of this is the question of how cities can have an appropriate say in the resources they get and how these are used. In relation to the horizontal perspective, city authorities often struggle to work across departmental boundaries, or to mobilise citizens. The territorial dimension can underestimate the degree of competition that often exists between neighbouring municipalities. Although there are many – and growing numbers – of effective collaborations, cooperation can be stymied by their competition for resources and, increasingly, talent.

Finally, an integrated approach in implementation draws best on solid foundations and regular reviews of action plans that benefit from a **coherent logical model** in which actions are designed to meet specific objectives defined by local stakeholders. The URBACT method focuses on integrated strategies that:

- Are needs based and focused on helping stakeholder groups to build a sound understanding of the local context, challenges and opportunities.
- Ensure that the plan is coherent with other strategies for the city at all relevant levels e.g. the smart specialisation strategy agreed at regional level

- Use a participative approach to engage all stakeholders in planning
- Benefit from transnational exchange and learning to deploy actions that are recognised as good practice in the field
- Propose a time frame for the implementation which is realistic
- Mobilise public funding from a wide range of sources (city, region, national and EU) and where possible accesses or stimulates private sector investment and new forms of financing (bonds, crowdfunding) which may also involve the social economy.

3 TACKLING THIS CHALLENGE IN PRACTICE

URBACT cities have found various solutions to the implementation challenges, with some examples from the networks described here.

3.1. Integrated strategies in implementation networks

Berlin - Organising the effort by creating dedicated teams

In preparing for an integrated approach many cities have found it necessary to establish a dedicated unit, team or partnership in order to organise the effort.

Berlin has succeeded in developing a new Youth Career Agency (Jugendberufsagentur or JBA for short) made up of 12 individual JBAs one in each district of the city. It was created with the objective of reducing early school leaving and followed the example of Hamburg. Implementation steps took place over a 2-year period which pressurised the partners into moving quickly. The JBA does not introduce major new support services, but instead delivers existing services through a new more integrated model which combines all the services in a one-stop shop. All of the new one-stop-shops have an initial 5-year life, by which time they will need to demonstrate that they are more effective than previous methods of support in reducing early school leaving.

[Case Example 1 – Berlin JBA provides further detail of this good practice.](#)

Aveiro - Making a broad URBACT local group more operational for delivery

Aveiro, also working on reducing early school dropout, originally constituted a very broad URBACT local group. Later, once they got into piloting their implementation in two schools, they found it necessary to reduce the size and create a less unwieldy group that was more operational. The second tighter version of the group consisted of the core project team from the local authority and the delivery partners from the two local schools where the pilots were ongoing as well as the University and social support organisations. With these members they were able to create a virtual team. The group met regularly – usually every three weeks during term time and was able to keep on top of day to day implementation decisions. One of their key challenges was how to persuade teachers to involve themselves with students that are not succeeding academically. Their tighter URBACT local group has enabled closer relations to develop between teachers and a range of professionals to support work with children and parents. The group still has to be facilitated by the municipality's project team and the project is still dependent on time-limited funding but progress is being made on reducing early school leaving.

Loule - developing and managing a new creative quarter

Loule has an altogether different experience. It is part of the creative spirits URBACT network and they have been working on developing a design lab as part of the creative quarter in the historic core of this small Algarve Portuguese city. At the outset there was no structure able to implement an integrated approach to the creative quarter. The municipality set up a working group consisting of five municipal managers from different parts of the administration covering: architecture, environment, social work, spatial planning and culture. Together this team has been supervising and monitoring the implementation of projects in the action plan. They are in turn responsible for organising and facilitating the URBACT local group so as to engage with the private sector, research interests and civil society and develop a quadruple helix approach.

The group itself is an informal structure within the municipality but this has not negatively influenced its performance because of good relationships between the actors. It relates to the political structure through reports to the vice president and municipal director. Through this approach the city has succeeded in developing key flagship projects such as the Loule design lab which in the past two years has become a thriving institution with big ideas for the future. The partnership with the private sector has encompassed both local businesses and has been supported financially by a new IKEA store near to the city.

[Read the Solution Story from Loulé for further details.](#)

Ujbuda - combining business support with providing premises in a cultural quarter

Ujbuda saw itself as being on the wrong side of the tracks in relation to cultural and creative industries, most of which are concentrated in trendy parts of Pest on the other side of the Danube. Ten years ago, they started to exploit the potential of empty commercial properties in their main Bartok Bela thoroughfare and offered rent subsidies to cultural and creative businesses which would relocate or start up. They succeeded in generating critical mass through diverse relocations ranging from high-end art galleries, to artisan potters. The set up of the Architecture centre has given a focus and also provides co-working space to young architects. Links to the technical University which is close by have enabled spin out companies focusing on growing fields such as lighting technology.

They have found it easier to implement the integrated approach on a horizontal level working with local stakeholders such as the University and local businesses. The recent opening of a Demola innovation centre is an example of this cooperation. They also keep in mind the balance between the environmental, and sustainability aspects and the social aspects of the actions. For example, there are artisan craft workshops alongside more high-tech start-ups. However, regarding the vertical aspect they have faced challenges to involve higher levels and are still struggling to find the right solution. As a result of the URBACT project the municipality has broadened the partnership in order to widen activities forming part of the cultural industries quarter and with new actors have brought new perspectives to the table. The area is thriving and all shop fronts are full. The cultural industries bring footfall to the area benefiting other shops and keeping the street alive.

[Case example 2 – Ujbuda Cultural Mapping](#)

Barcelona - Combining hard and soft measures in Bon Pastor

Barcelona has been transforming the Bon Pastor neighbourhood through a redevelopment Plan that involves demolishing the single storey row houses, while constructing new low-cost social housing in medium-rise buildings. By 2018 they were into the fourth out of five phases of demolition and rebuilding. The original physical plans were further developed to include strategic actions on social inclusion and cooperation aimed at reducing socio-economical and territorial disparities. The plan for Bon pastor is guided by the sustainable and integrated urban development strategy of Barcelona (2016-2020), the Neighbourhoods' Plan (2016-2020) and the Social Inclusion Strategy in the Besòs Area. There are four specific objectives of the city's integrated action plan: to strengthen the educational network in the neighbourhood; to promote economic activity; to improve the living conditions of the population; and address urban deficits, the low quality of housing and the lack of facilities.

URBinclusion first phase was dedicated to assessing which actions were already being implemented in the area of Bon Pastor and how each one was connected to the overarching strategic objectives for regeneration. The analysis revealed a good mix of measures targeting poverty reduction by addressing improvements to the built environment and neighbourhood vitality.

The soft measures include the physical infrastructure work there are several projects to address social and economic inclusion. These include *Play Time*, a weekend program for kids that facilitates their access to sports, leisure, healthy food and education on healthy habits and self-responsibility; *Push Yourself*, an annual programme for youth revolving around sports, health and leisure to empower healthy and more civic minded lifestyles; *Endavant!*, a series of workshops for families for healthy cooking and supporting local food banks for people at risk of exclusion; *Trans-form Yourself*, a mix of trainings, community taskforces and tailor-made collaborations with social services for tackling vulnerable cases and promoting cultural diversity coexistence with the active role of Roma community. Finally, the area benefits from *B-MINCOME*, a pilot intervention testing the Guaranteed Minimum Income as a measure for combating poverty, funded by the ERDF under Urban Innovative Actions.

Working with vertical integration: The Transfo site in Zwevegem

The Transfo project illustrates the importance of vertical integration. Zwevegem is a small city with 25 000 inhabitants. The former electricity generating site had a strategic value for the municipality, but at the same time, it was quite clear that a thoughtful and sustainable re-use would be extremely difficult. The municipality owns the site but has been well supported by the intercommunal organisation of Leiedal over a 15 year period during which the site has been able to gain momentum with a growing number of initiatives and activities. Along the vertical chain of governance the local partnership is also supported by the Province of West Flanders and the Flemish Government.

"It is a particularly large project that I think will never be completely finished. There is no 'final result'. The challenge for the future will be to forge a team out of this large group of users; a team that takes ownership and responsibility of the entire site and discuss with us the future direction of the facility"

All functions, activities and facilities contribute to a unique ecosystem. This ecosystem has been well balanced and multifaceted. When there is too much emphasis on one single function or activity, the ecosystem becomes unbalanced. The lesson from Transfo is that small urban municipalities need support from higher levels to manage larger multi-faceted heritage projects.

[More information about the Transfo project can be found in the solution story from Leiedel.](#)

3.1. Tools and Methods

By using simple tools like a checklist it is possible to make a first assessment of your cities plan and the existing knowledge and practice in relations to integrated working. An example of such a [checklist](#) is available in the tools list linked to this guide.

Many other tools exist to help cities understand integration and self-assess levels of integration in existing strategies. One such tool widely used at European level is the **Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities** (RFSC). It is an online toolkit for local authorities around Europe that are involved in or are willing to start a process of integrated and sustainable urban development. The main objective of the toolkit is to enhance the dialogue within a city and with peer cities tackling the same issues.

Based on a checklist of 25 questions and a large database of indicators, the toolkit offers practical support to:

- Develop an urban strategy or project which considers all fields of sustainable urban development;
- Check the ongoing strategies or projects in a given city and inform about the interactions (positive or negative) of the different policy sectors;
- Monitor the progress of a strategy over a certain period.

The toolkit offers access to different forms of exchange and support (training sessions, peer learning with other cities, showcase catalogue). The toolkit was designed by and for cities and can be used at various scales - from the neighbourhood level to the wider metropolitan level. It is free of charge and does not require any specific commitment from the cities. It is now available in 17 languages.

For more information about the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC) visit their [website](#).

Mapping actions in your action plan

To make explicit the integrated approach that you have within your implementation plan we suggest a process of mapping and analysis. A simple cross reference table can be used to map links between each project.

	Project 1	Project2	Project 3	Project 4	Project 5	Project 6	Project 7
Project 1	x						
Project 2	x	x					
Project 3	x	x	x				
Project 4	x	x	x	x			
Project 5	x	x	x	x	x		
Project 6	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Project 7	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Links can be further explored using some of the tools presented in this series of guides such as action tables.

3.2. Conclusion

This guidance document is the first in a series that focuses on implementation of sustainable urban development strategies in cities. Others in the series cover:

- Preparing for Implementation
- Stakeholder Engagement in Implementation
- Measuring results in Implementation
- Public Procurement in Implementation

